

“I’m looking at the neighborhood, through the eyes, in other words this is heaven”¹(F. Bond, personal communication, February 23, 2007).

Ashburton, a growing community in what is now considered northwest Baltimore, had a simple beginning when it was founded in 1920 by John Street Gittings. The first home in this new development was built in 1921 by Blanche Van de Castle.²

The community originally comprised of about 300 acres that ran east including what is now Reistertown Road moving south several blocks to below the Western Maryland Railway tracks and northwesterly across Liberty Road. Today, Ashburton is bounded by Wabash Avenue on the south, Sequoia and Dolfield Avenue on the east, Liberty Heights Avenue on the west, and Callaway Avenue on the north. Gittings christened the estate “Ashburton” recognizing his esteem for Alexander Baring, a British representative known as “Lord Ashburton”.³ Today Henlon Park is where the Gittings Plantation once sat. The Gittings farm remained in the Gittings family for more than 100 years while the Gittings house was passed out of the family’s hands and converted into a nursing home. It is positioned on top of a hill on Hilton Road and serves as a reminder of Ashburton’s humble beginnings.

While Ashburton’s origin is modest in size, its sense of pride has always appeared larger than life. Since its inception in the 1920’s, Ashburton has undergone many changes – politically, economically, and very noticeably, demographically. So, what has kept Ashburton alive while other neighborhoods fall apart? The glue of this community is

¹ Frank Bond (2007) Live Interview

² (2007). Live in Baltimore- Ashburton. In *Live Baltimore Home Center*. Retrieved January 15, 2007, from <http://www.livebaltimore.com/nb/list/ashb/>.

³ (February 26, 2001). Baltimore Neighborhoods: Ashburton- Northwest Planning District. In *Baltimore*. Retrieved January 15, 2007, from <http://www.ci.baltimore.md.us/neighborhoods/northwest/ashburton.html>.

its prominent social organizations; most importantly being the administrations of the Ashburton Area Association.

The Ashburton Area Association has grown and developed with the community itself. It has undergone many changes and has been organized by many people. However, it still exists for the same purpose. To continuously improve upon and unite the community of Ashburton. Speaking with Delegate Tarrant, the most recent Association president, it was created "... to assure that we have a high quality of life for those residents that live here, to make sure that we maintain and improve upon our beautiful landscape that we have in our community" (S. Tarrant, personal communication, February 9th, 2007).

Ashburton began with a sense of pride and responsibility among its residence. This is evident by the many organizations that were running in Ashburton. According to Frank Bond, Sr., the original Ashburton Area Association President, there was a different community organization on every corner. He realized that having ten separate organizations was not helping the overall community so he took in upon himself to gather the ten organizations together into one unified association. Moving into the community in the early 1970s with his family, the birth of the Association followed quickly. However, he claims there is no exact date of its beginning because the foundation of the association had been established long before him. Bond offers that he simply worked with what was there and laid a stronger framework to create a sense of investment that brought neighbors together to solve problems and help each other. In effect, Bond provided Ashburton with a vibrant community structure that remains today.

Almost surprisingly, the community possesses strong unbreakable bonds despite the social roller coaster it has experienced. However, before unfolding the demographic changes within Ashburton, it is important to recognize that the community has always been middle to upper class. It has always been a proven struggle for lower class citizens in the community to gain access into a respected neighborhood. It is Ashburton that has been declared a valued community within Baltimore.

The demographic changes in Ashburton through the years have not only been tremendous, but at times outright racist. Until 1920, there was a gentleman's agreement in place which stated Ashburton would be a 'white's only' community. The depression and the stock market crash of 1929 caused this to change almost overnight. Whites started to move out as the community became predominantly Jewish. It was because of these changes, within the community, that both social and economic progress took place.

However, Ashburton remained a strong, proud community. Helped by these newly affluent community members, community organizations began to develop. Then in the late 1950s, African Americans began to move into the area.

The first African American person to move in, an elementary school principal, had taken residence on Wabash Ave in Ashburton.⁴ Almost immediately, whites began to move out. Being the 1950's and on the verge of a massive Civil Rights Movement, the residents and real estate agents of Ashburton had the idea that having African Americans in their community would bring down the status of the community, since African Americans were the demographically poor at the time.

⁴ (February 26, 2001). Baltimore Neighborhoods: Ashburton- Northwest Planning District. In *Baltimore*. Retrieved January 15, 2007, from <http://www.ci.baltimore.md.us/neighborhoods/northwest/ashburton.html>.

However, Ashburton disproved those ideas. As a predominately African American community, today it is obvious that the pride of the community and the social activity of the community is very active. Since the 1950s, Ashburton is an area that is has a recognized solid community where you can ‘make your dreams come true’. In an article published in 1984 in “News American” entitled “The neighborhood of dreams come true” by Jacques Kelly wrote, “For many Baltimore blacks, Ashburton is the neighborhood of dreams, the good life, the \$90,000 home with matching maple trees.”⁵

It is evident that Ashburton is a place for the ‘good life’ because many of the residents that moved in during the 1950’s are still there today. However this aging population is allowing for another change to occur in Ashburton. Talking with Delegate Shawn Tarrant, State Representative and former Ashburton Area Association president, he has identified this change as: “a lot of young people that have moved in and started having children... we have many neighbors that have been here since the 1950’s and unfortunately they are starting to pass away, so you have a changing of the guard” (S. Tarrant, personal communication, February 9, 2007).

A young man with a young family, he is very familiar with this ‘changing of the guard’. Falling in love with this well developed and comfortable community, he immediately took to community leadership and quickly moved up the ranks to president of the Ashburton Area Association. In this position he made many positive changes for the community. One change in particular was a new Ashburton marker. The original marker, hand made and installed by former president Frank Bond, has aged with its 1950’s residents and was replaced by a new shiny marker by the younger residents. This new marker is just one example of the strong sense of community that is still felt in

⁵ Kelly, Jacques. (1984). The neighborhood of dreams come true. *News American*.

Ashburton. The Ashburton marker is actually a sign. It is the sign that indicates the start of the Ashburton community. It is also somewhat unique in Baltimore City where the several neighborhoods flow continuously throughout the outskirts of the city. This marker indicates one's progression into a separate, distinct suburban oasis.

Although the marker has been altered with time and progressive ideas, the principles of Ashburton remain the same. With new generations of leaders establishing their role in the community, the older experienced generation, particularly that of Frank Bond, fears that the sense of leadership and continuity within the community is slowly fading. Nevertheless, fears may be repressed for the reason that the Ashburton organization preserves the original goals and established unity in spite of the changing times. Bond himself recognizes the importance in that, "the organization was put together so cohesively... people remember (that)... it's something like our country (that) was put together so tightly that it's hard for somebody to come through and throw this country away" (F. Bond, personal communication, February 23, 2007). And in saying this, he knows, no one will ever disregard Ashburton.