

Lauraville: Progress and Passion in the City-Suburb

Nestled in the north east corner of Baltimore city lays a lush grid of neighborhoods set off from the buzz and hum of the big city. These six neighborhoods Arcadia, Beverly Hills, Historic Lauraville, Moravia-Walther, Morgan Park, and Waltherson come together to make up The Greater Lauraville Neighborhoods- a collection of unique and diverse communities which bring a sense of suburbia to Baltimore.

Historic Lauraville is at the center of these neighborhoods. The territory dates back to the late 18th century, however the neighborhood itself was built primarily between 1910-1930. The town was established by estate owner John Henry Keene Sr., whose estate had grown rapidly in size during the first decade of the 20th century. At this time, the townspeople decided that it should be considered its own town. In the first town meeting he proposed to name the village after his daughter, Laura, everyone agreed, and Lauraville was born.

Lauraville was fresh to the Baltimore area because it provided more for the city agriculturally, unlike other mill-driven neighborhoods in Baltimore. The land was primarily farms with scattered and sparse settlements. With the decades preceding the civil war Lauraville began to become a village which included the Read Mill on Herring Run Avenue and the Greene Family Cotton Mill located near Lake Montebello. After the Civil War, Lauraville obtained a post office which helped to solidify the territory as a village.

Lauraville soon become a self-sufficient town, with blacksmiths and carpenters, now found along Harford Road and any necessity for house or farm sold in local stores. Truck farms covered the area and a wide variety of locally raised produce, as well as fresh meat, poultry, and dairy products. Lauraville developed local haunts such as Weber's Park, a brewery that become a very influential factor to the economy of Lauraville up until 1889.

Lauraville encompasses three main subdivisions of neighborhoods, Montebello Park, Lauraville Park and Aisla Terrace. Montebello Park is the development that occupies most of current Lauraville. Lauraville historically and currently caters to the community of the solid middle class since most of northeast Baltimore suburbs were financially out of reach for this community. In 1940, the area encompassed 724 houses, today the number is only slightly higher.

Today Historic Lauraville is a thriving part of the Baltimore identity- thanks much in part to the hard work of the neighborhood association, Neighborhoods of Greater Lauraville Improvement Association (NOGLI). In the early 1990s, residents of Lauraville began to notice the erosion of their beautiful suburban community, particularly along the Harford Road corridor. Residents organized themselves and began contacting Safeway in an attempt to persuade them into buying the land which at that time was occupied by an abandoned Baltimore City bus terminal. They finally succeeded and were able to put in one of the first supermarkets in the city. This became the catalyst for Lauraville residents to continue to improve and develop the area (Lorrie Schoettler, personal communication, February 3, 2007).

The best word to describe the community of Lauraville would be diversity; not just in ethnicity or race, but in occupations, class, sexual orientation, and even interests.

An excellent place to see this diversity in motion is a quaint coffee shop on Harford Road called the Red Canoe. Upon entering this coffee shop / book store you are immediately able to see the differing personalities and lifestyles all coming together at this community center (Lorrie Schoettler, personal communication, February 3, 2007).

Aside from providing just a cozy hangout for local residents, the Red Canoe serves as an example of the types of small, independently owned specialty shops which NOGLI hopes to bring into the community in an attempt for economic revitalization. Scheduled to break ground this spring, as a result of the Urban Renewal Ordinance, are the “Shops at Lauraville” which will be located directly across from the Safeway. These “Shops” will include restaurants, stores, yoga studios, and other office space which will help to carry on the idea of the Harford Road corridor as being a commercial and community center (Lorrie Schoettler, personal communication, February 3, 2007). Lauraville is not alone in the improvements going on all along the surrounding neighborhoods. All six communities that fall under the title of Greater Lauraville are active in attempts to continue working together with the other five neighborhoods in serving and improving Northeast Baltimore as a whole. One of the most unique and interesting of these six neighborhoods is Morgan Park, which encompasses Morgan State University.

Founded in 1917 as a home for predominantly African-American Morgan State University professors, Morgan Park quickly flourished into a dynamic suburban style community. Tree lined cul-de-sacs and award winning Azalea gardens set this neighborhood apart from more urban areas of the city- and even from the rest of the Greater Neighborhoods of Lauraville. Residents of Morgan Park take great pride in their gardens- offering Garden Tours every spring and holding festivals on the lawn of the Morgan State President’s house, which runs along the edge of the neighborhood. The other major source of pride for Morgan Park residents is the strength, dedication and sense of community that is embodied by their neighborhood improvement association. The improvement association was created in 1924, shortly after the founding of the neighborhood and has detailed subcommittees which cover nearly every aspect of living in a community from welcoming new residents to obtaining new trash cans to printing neighborhood publications to inform both residents and non-residents about the happenings of the neighborhood. Some major improvements for the community include the building of a new sidewalk along the campus side of Cold Spring Road, the implementation of a consistent trash pick-up system and lowering of speed limits within the neighborhoods, to create a safer, cleaner, healthier environment for the active citizens of Morgan Park.

Perhaps the most delightful example of Morgan Park’s intense spirit towards community development is also the best resource to learn more about the neighborhood. In 1999 former president of the Morgan Park Improvement Association and life-long resident of the neighborhood ,Roland C. McConnell; wrote and published “The History of Morgan Park: A Baltimore Neighborhood, 1917-1999.” This book chronicles the history of the neighborhood from its inception until the turn of the 20th century and includes biographies and profiles of prominent community members as well as maps and photographs of the neighborhood.

Morgan Park, Lauraville and the four other members of the Greater Lauraville Neighborhoods are linked as one under NOGLI. This umbrella association oversees the

development, protection and improvement of all six neighborhoods and provides a link between the diverse and remarkable communities located within Greater Lauraville. With the help of grants and funds it is the hope of NOGLI that all six of Lauraville's neighborhoods will continue to flourish in the 21st century.

Despite their many differences the Neighborhoods of Greater Lauraville and Loyola have more in common than just being home to a college campus. The connections date back to approximately 1876. According to the GM Hopkins Map, a man named John W. Garrett, president of the B&O Railroad, owns a majority of the land in what is today's Lauraville. His country house sat on the largest piece of land, off Hillen near Tiffany's Run, and was known as Montebello. Today where that house sat is now the Northwood Shopping Center.

In 1878 John W. Garrett, a prominent resident of Lauraville purchased the Evergreen House for his son T. Harrison Garrett. T. Harrison Garrett raised his three sons in the Evergreen House, one being Horatio Garrett. In 1895, following his graduation from Princeton University his mother hired architect Lawrence Aspinwall to build Evergreen Jr. as a wedding present, which we now know today as our Humanities Building. Unfortunately, Horatio died of bone cancer in Oct. of 1896, never living in the house. In 1918, the Garrett family leased Evergreen Jr. to the Red Cross to be used as the "Evergreen School for the Blind Soldiers." However, this was not the first time the Garrett family helped the community.

The Garrett family was very influential in Maryland Political and Economic Life. They founded hospitals, service organizations, and donated land to be used for schools. For example, in 1895 the Garrett family gave land for a new schoolhouse at the intersection of Morello and Ailsa Avenues called Garrett Heights School. Today the newer addition to the school is still standing and being used; the older was destroyed in a 1969 fire. In 1910 the Garrett family donated property to Morgan State. In 1952 on behalf of John Work and Alice Warder Garrett's request Evergreen House was given to Johns Hopkins University in hopes that the public might appreciate hospitality and the arts. The Garrett family largely contributed to the growth of the city of Baltimore. Interestingly, Johns Hopkins, Morgan State, and Loyola are all situated on their land.

Today the Lauraville neighborhoods have also stood by these ideals. They have a strong community spirit and place great emphasis on supporting one another as neighbors. NOGLI strives to create a welcoming neighborhood by holding community events such as the Lauraville Fair, similar to our Loyolapaloza. North East Baltimoreans are drivers of policy and progress, they strive for better education in our city, they hope to improve the place they live to make it better and safer for their children, just as Loyola strives to reach out to the Baltimore community and help it become a better place to live.

Perhaps the most significant connection between Lauraville and Loyola is the ways in which they can learn and grow as a result of one another. We see in them the spirit and caring of a passionate community and in turn are invited to visit, explore and support one of the most diverse sections of Baltimore. With our assistance, the aid of NOGLI and the guidance of Baltimore City Government as a whole, the Neighborhoods of Greater Lauraville can continue to flourish, becoming a leading example of community improvement in the 21st Century.

References

“Evergreen House”. Lili Ott, Published by R.L. Ruehrwein in 1998 in Lawrenceburg, IN. Pages, 1, 2, 6, 9, 25

GM Hopkins, C.E. (1876) City Atlas of Baltimore, Maryland And Environs. From Official Records, Private Plans, and Actual Surveys. Based upon plans deposited in the Department of Surveys. *GM Hopkins, C.E.* 98-99.

Holcomb, Eric L. (2005). The City as Suburb, A History of Northeast Baltimore since 1660. *Center for American Places*, 169, 172-75, 63-65, 70, 200-2, 204, 239.

Jacques Kelly (1982). Bygone Baltimore. *Donning Company*, 113-115, 125

Live Baltimore Home Center, Inc. January, 2007 from <http://www.livebaltimore.com/nb/list/laura/history/>

McConnell, Roland C (2000). The History of Morgan Park: a Baltimore Neighborhood, 1917-1999. *Baltimore: Morgan Park Improvement Association.*

“What a Difference a Year Made: John Work Garret Finds a Diplomatic Career”. Faith M. Holland