

(Baltimore)
CURTIS BAY AND CREEK

1870 to 1900

D. Fred. Crowley

DO NOT CIRCULATE

This arm of the Chesapeake Bay is closer to Baltimore than any of the other larger branches and poured a wealth of farm produce in the whole-sale markets of Baltimore. Most of the transportation was by sailing craft from 25' to 60' long. A team of horses was not economical, the boats were best for trade and passengers. A team of horses was only good for a fifteen mile haul while the boats could make a round trip in a day. It was a common sight to see hundreds of sailing craft in Long Dock, also at the foot of Calvert Street, and a large percentage would be from Curtis Creek. During this time Baltimore had the flood tide of emigration, cheap labor and a growing city.

The farmers and planters from Curtis Creek sailed all the year round except when the ice in the winter made this impossible. Truck from the farms in the summer and cord wood in the winter. From the pines in this section charcoal was made and hauled to Baltimore. It is recorded that one Philip Pumphrie of this section, who was a charcoal burner, bought the Maltbie house on Pratt Street, between Charles and Light Street, while delivering a load of charcoal to a customer. The auctioneer was deceived by his appearance, but when he pulled a roll of bills large enough to choke a horse, the spectators at the auction were a surprised lot.

In the winter manure had to be hauled from Baltimore for next year's crop. Arthur Thornton, whose farm was on Marley Creek, made nineteen trips from Baltimore to his farm and back from March to April of the year 1887, five weeks in all, with the wind northwest beating up to the city under double reefed mainsail and jib and going back with bare poles. The cord wood brought up was unloaded at Ramstead's Wharf at the head of Spring Gardens. When you consider that the cargo had to be loaded and unloaded, this is quite a record from Marley Creek to Baltimore. It was a common sight in the summer to see eight or ten boats being towed to market. If the tide was right the boats were rowed. The farmers and planters were very proud of their vessels and generally sailed them to Baltimore themselves.

Many of the boats were well-known on the waterfront. Eli J. Henkal, Sloop 44' x 16', owned by F. & B. Chairs. It is said that she was never beaten coming to market. Mamie Clyde, owned by George Watson. Wm. H. Hall, owned by William H. Hall, colored. Fanny, owned by George Solley. Ann Virginia, owned by Arthur Thornton. Virginia, owned by Frank Hodges. Grayhound, owned by James Spencer, colored. Sam Brustard, owned by William Thornton. Wade Hampton, owned by Charles Hodges. Bee, owned by James Benson. Emma P. Cook, owned by Emory Webster. Flying Cloud, owned by Matthew Turner, colored. There were many others, but these were well-known.

Some of these farmers, planters and sailors had land grants from the English Crown and it was in Baltimore that they traded and had their recreation. Baltimore was lively then, when it could support a number of Hotels, Eating Houses, such as the Maltbie House, Lloyds Hotel, Reilly's Hotel, Green House, Mahoney's Hotel, Tom's Exchange, and many other eating houses right near or on the water-front.

Besides the sailing vessels, side-wheeled steamboats brought passengers and freight from the eastern and western shores of Maryland and Virginia.

Front Street Theatre was on Front Street, near Gay Street; Odean Theatre, Frederick Street near Baltimore Street; Kernan's Theatre, Baltimore Street and Fallsway; Holliday Street Theatre on Holliday Street opposite the City Hall. All this was in easy walking distance from the docks.

Curtis Creek section had the first colored settlement in the United States, Freetown, between the head of Marley Creek and Stoney Creek, in 1866.

Where the United States Coast Guard Station is now, William H. Hall, colored, owned two hundred acres of land; Matthew Turner, colored, owned twenty acres on Marley Creek. This section of Maryland had access to Baltimore by sailing craft and also by horse-drawn vehicles across the bridge built by one of the Cromwells.

Some of the descendants of the original Curtis family, for whom the Bay and Creek was named, still live near its shores.

May 28, 1892, the first trolley cars ran to Curtis Creek with a five-cent fare; the terminus was Jack Flood's Park. This famous pleasure resort was well-known for its entertainment and entertainers, as well as for its fish, sandwiches and beer. John T. Flood charged no admission, consequently there were all kinds of people who entered his park on Saturdays and Sundays. This was before the automobile became popular and it was a long ride. This park was popular because if you did not want to stop in the park, you hired rowboats and fishing tackle and fished, or you could be ferried by launches to any place on the Creek.

The Baltimore Yacht Club, which was on the opposite side of the Creek from Jack Flood's, who were Baltimore's society yachting crowd, were ferried from Flood's. Every kind and condition of people used Jack Flood's park.

If the tough boys were looking for a fight, they were entertained by the management, who were on hand to give them all they were looking for. For a few years after the park opened the tough boys came, but after word got around who were doing the bouncing, it was very seldom that force had to be used. Jack Flood had his own police force and they were good.

The ladies who did the entertaining were the ones who fished the flushed moneyed men for high-priced drinks. If they were actresses, they were paid for acting, as well as a percentage on the drinks they caught. Many of the men were sent home as full as a tick while the women were as sober as a judge. How was this done? Ask some of the oldtimers.

One of the best human interest stories coming out of Jack Flood's Park is the one about the newly-elected bishop of Georgia, Frederick F. Reese, and the lady entertainer. The Bishop had been rector of St. Mark's Church in Baltimore and told his cousin Albert D. Dorney that he would like to go fishing before he assumed his bishopric. He was told that the best fishing was in Curtis Creek, would he like to go through Jack Flood's Park? He said, I know all about Flood's. So the party of four got off at the Park

to go fishing. While they were walking to the landing to get in the rowboat, one of the lady entertainers took him for one of the flushed money boys and the following took place:

Entertainer: "What are you doing this fine day?"
Bishop: "I am going fishing."
Entertainer: "Well, can't you buy a drink?"
Bishop: "Why certainly. Come on."
Entertainer: "My, you are enjoyable to talk to. Stay here awhile."
Bishop: "No, I must be going now."
Entertainer: "I will be here tonight. Why not see me after you have done fishing."
Bishop: "No, I am with my friends."

The Bishop was asked why he had drunk and talked to the woman, and his reply was that she was as much God's child as any woman and that it wasn't who you talked or drank with, it was how far you went with them. She was told afterwards to whom she was talking, and her reply was that he was a man and not a Holy Joe.

Typed from Mr. Crowley's(?) copy, lent via Maryland Historical Society
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