

Life on the North Side: The African American Community in Sparrows Point

Sparrows Point, Maryland was located in Baltimore County, approximately fourteen miles southeast of Baltimore City. It was almost surrounded by water, bounded on the north by the community of Dundalk, on the south by the Chesapeake Bay, by the Old Road Bay on the east and by Bear Creek on the west. Sparrows Point, currently the site of the Bethlehem Steel Company, was formerly the site of a thriving community as well. In reality there were two separate but unequal communities--one white and one black.

Thirty-two years after the first settlers arrived in Maryland, Thomas Sparrow of Anne Arundel County received a grant from the Lord Proprietor of Maryland. He willed the portion of his land between "Sparrow's Nest" and "Sparrow's Point" to his son, Solomon. The area remained in the Sparrow family until the early eighteenth century and developed into a modest agricultural community.

In 1886 the Pennsylvania Steel Company, seeking a location where land was inexpensive and in proximity to water, railroads, and an abundant supply of labor, purchased from William Fitzell, the area which had become known as Sparrows Point. By 1887 the company had erected blast furnaces, drained the surrounding land and filled it with slag. Within a half mile of the furnaces, housing for the managerial and worker staff was built. The company was incorporated in 1891 and sold to Bethlehem Steel Company in 1916.

The community of Sparrows Point owed much of its development to Rufus K. Wood, general agent of the Maryland Steel Company from 1891 until his death in 1909, and brother of the company's president, Frederick Wood.¹ As general agent, Wood was responsible for the

¹Neal A. Brooks and Eric G. Rockel, *A History of Baltimore County*, (Towson: Friends of the Towson Library, 1979), 318.

operation and management of the town of Sparrows Point. He spent most of his childhood in Lowell, Massachusetts, one of the nation's earliest planned communities, and he attempted to recreate his home town in Sparrows Point. Wood envisioned and developed a community conducive to family life with good schools, a variety of churches and wholesome recreational activities and in which the sale and use of alcohol were prohibited.

The town consisted of ten streets named alphabetically, running east to west and ten streets named numerically, running north to south. The residential streets contained housing that was segregated according to status and race. The spacious home of the plant manager, an eighteen room three story colonial with a screened veranda overlooking private gardens, was located on A Street. Erected at a cost of \$5,035.61 around 1890, it was according to Wood's personal records, used by his family rent free for the first year.² Other high level personnel also lived on A Street. Supervisors and professionals such as the school principal, the company physician and the Justice of the Peace lived on B and C Streets. These homes were detached, contained twelve to thirteen rooms and included indoor plumbing, electricity and steam heating. They cost, on the average, \$3,233.00 to build and rented for \$22.00-25.00 monthly in 1890. Lower level white supervisors and workers were confined to D through H Streets. Some of their homes were two story frame houses. The better homes were six room brick row houses with covered porches and fenced back yards; they rented for \$5.50-12.00 monthly. Built at an average cost of \$967.00, these homes were heated by coal and illuminated by kerosene lamps.³ Rental fees in Sparrows Point were higher than those in Baltimore City. Unlike Baltimore City, Sparrows Point consistently provided sturdy, well built homes. Humphrey's Creek separated the

²Mark Reutter, *Sparrows Point*, (New York: Summit Books, 1988), 61.

³Ibid. p. 62.

homes of the white employees from the smaller homes of the blacks, who lived on I and J Streets. The numbered streets, 1st through 10th, served as dividers only; no businesses or homes fronted on numbered streets.

The major retail area of the community was concentrated around 4th and D Streets. Here were located the drug store, the bank and post office, the company store, the bakery, the blacksmith shop and the company real estate office, all serving the entire Sparrows Point community. Nearby were the bowling alley and the Lyceum Theatre, both of which served only the white population.

The Maryland Steel Company/Bethlehem Steel Corporation related to the Sparrows Point community in a variety of ways. Primarily, it was the employer of the entire town. All of the men worked at the mill or for businesses owned by the company. Even those who were self-employed---barbers, restaurateurs, tailors and others, leased the company's facilities in order to provide services to the community.

The Point was an isolated community with the nearest major retail outlets located in Baltimore City. To meet the needs of the residents, the company operated two stores. The larger, at 4th and C Streets, contained tobacco, furniture and clothing departments. There was also a grocery with meat, bakery, dairy and vegetable departments. Until 1945 a smaller version of the company store existed in the black neighborhood at 9th and I Streets. The only currency accepted at the company store was "script". Manufactured by the company, script was issued to employees as advances against future wages. The company strictly enforced its policy of never granting employees more than they could afford to have deducted from the next pay envelope.⁴

⁴McAllister Tyler, interview by author, 3 February 1990.

The company also maintained a fleet of horse drawn wagons used to deliver coal, wood, milk, bread and ice to residents on a daily basis.

The company, which owned all of the residential property on The Point, required those of its employees who wanted housing to file applications at the company real estate office. All applicants were carefully screened as to their moral character and stability as employees; written recommendations from supervisors were mandatory in order to obtain housing. Houses, for which there was a waiting list, were available contingent on the employment by the company of the male head of household. An employee who was terminated or who participated in a strike was required to relinquish his home. Widows with adult sons employed by the company could retain their homes as long as their sons resided with them. Widows without adult resident sons were required to vacate the company's property.

The company was a strict landlord, enforcing rules regarding licensing of pets, building of back yard storage sheds and the cultivation of gardens. Residents who wanted their homes painted or papered had only to make a request at the real estate office. The company was responsible for all repairs and maintenance and employed carpenters, plumbers, roofers, painters and other workers to provide services to tenants as needed. Residents were not charged for these services.

Police and fire departments were established, staffed and maintained by the company. There was no hospital on The Point; injured employees were treated at the company dispensary and ambulance service to Baltimore City Hospitals was provided when necessary. These services were provided for both African American and white employee/residents. There were white physicians who made house calls to the white residents. Two African American physicians visited sick members of the black community in their homes: Baltimorean Theodore

Phifer and Sparrows Point native Joseph Thomas. (In 1956, Thomas was appointed Haitian Consul for Baltimore by President Eisenhower.)

The relationship between the company and the residents, which was characterized by some as paternalistic, was mutually beneficial. The company benefited because a satisfied, loyal work force lived close to the mill and was available for work at a moment's notice. Additionally, the company consistently made a profit from the rental of houses and the sale of goods at the company store; rental fees and script advances were payroll deducted. Because of the quality of the homes, the reasonable rental fees, the services provided by the company and the wholesome atmosphere and stability of the community, a home on Sparrows Point was much desired. During the Depression, the company provided plots of land and vegetable seeds so that residents could grow food. No residents were evicted during this period for inability to pay rent.

The last decade of the nineteenth century was the beginning of a period of migration of African Americans to urban areas. They left the rural south for a variety of reasons and many moved to northern cities. Violence was a major cause of migration. Between 1890-1900 there were, on the average, one hundred and ten lynchings annually. A desire for educational opportunity also prompted African Americans to desert the south. Sixty percent of the nation's African Americans were illiterate in 1890; by 1900 the figure had declined to forty-four and five tenths percent. The hope of improved economic conditions was also a catalyst. Farm laborers in Virginia, for example, earned approximately \$10.00 a month in 1890.⁵ Unskilled workers in Baltimore City earned approximately \$30.00 a month between 1885-1990.⁶

⁵Peter Bergman, *The Chronological History of the Negro*, (New York: Harper and Row, 1969), 304.

⁶Suzanne Chappelle et al., *Maryland, a History of its People*, (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986), 183.

The first African Americans arrived in Sparrows Point in July, 1887 from Pennsylvania, their transportation paid for by the company.⁷ The company met its increasing need for laborers by capitalizing on the desire of southern blacks for an improved quality of life. Advertisements touting the benefits of employment at the mills were regularly placed in newspapers such as *The Norfolk Journal and Guide* and *The Virginia Star*. Of the one hundred and five African American heads of household in the 1900 census for Sparrows Point, fifty-seven were Virginia born.⁸

The first African American migrants to Sparrows Point found a community that combined rural and urban living conditions. The community was small and centered around church and family. There was no electricity or indoor plumbing; residents obtained water from hydrants in the middle of each block. Homes were heated by coal and lighted by oil lamps. The company leased land to churches at a nominal rate of \$1.00 per year and as a result, both Baptist and Methodist churches were established before 1900. Rufus Wood, the visionary General Agent of the company, prodded the county government to establish schools in the new town. The first school for whites opened in 1888 while the building for African Americans was erected in 1890. The black neighborhood, referred to by the company as "The North Side" because of its geographic location, was home to seven white families in 1900 and eight white families in 1910, according to census records. In 1900 the census listed one hundred and five African American families. By 1910 one hundred and forty-five were listed. North Side residents were separated from the majority of the white population by Humphrey's Creek. A bridge and a ferry were used to go to "the other side."

⁷Reutter, *Op. cit.* p. 65.

⁸Baltimore County Census of 1900, Enumeration District 61, Sheet 1.

Charlie Parrish, a native of Goochland County, Virginia, who in 1943 became the company's first African American millwright, described life in the mills. "I came to the Point in 1926 because of hard times in Virginia. They paid me thirty-seven cents an hour and I worked ten hours a day, seven days a week. I never had a vacation until the union came in." Segregation was pervasive according to Parrish; the two races could not eat together or use the same restrooms and African Americans could never aspire to have a "white man's job", i.e. anything other than menial labor. White people who performed the same tasks as African Americans received higher salaries. There were no African American supervisors and whites had the "power of life and death" over blacks. "They could fire you on the spot," said Parrish. While Parrish used "they" to refer to white supervisors, he also indicated that in any dispute involving workers of different races, the white man's view prevailed. Thus, even whites who were not supervisors could cause African Americans to lose their jobs.

Parrish worked under these conditions for sixteen years. Efforts to organize a union began in 1940. To protect the jobs of those involved, clandestine meetings were held, often in the Turners Station home of Parrish. On September 25, 1941 an election was held in which 68.7 percent of the employees voted for union representation.⁹ "We never would have had a union if black and white hadn't come together," Parrish stated.

The north side contained a variety of houses. On the 600-800 blocks of I Street and the 600-700 blocks of J Street, the houses, some detached and some semi-detached, were wooden and covered with shingles. They were built at an average cost of \$753.00 and contained three rooms on the first floor, two on the second floor and an attic. In 1916 homes were built in the

⁹Reutter, Op. cit. p. 298.

900-1000 blocks of I and J Streets.¹⁰ These homes, with screened porches, were made of brick. In addition to the three rooms on the first floor, they contained three bedrooms and were the first homes on the north side to have indoor plumbing. Heat was supplied by stoves in the middle room with vents sending heat to the upper levels. Most residents planted vegetable gardens in their back yards and beautified the fronts of their homes with flowers grown from seeds supplied by the company. The homes on the north side rented for \$5.00-6.00 monthly. By the mid 1940's the brick homes rented for \$19.00-25.00 monthly.¹¹

The company operated two boarding houses in the 900-1000 blocks of J Street for single African American men. These facilities contained eight rooms on the upper floor, each of which contained two beds. Downstairs was a communal dining room and the living quarters of the family who were paid by the company to operate the boarding house.¹² In addition to the boarding houses, the company provided barracks or "shanties" for single men. The shanties had been hastily erected as temporary shelters and were located in an area between J Street and the mill. These roach and rat infested shacks were a block and a half away from running water. Residents, segregated racially, sweltered in summer and shivered in winter.¹³ In 1900, according to the census records, there were two hundred and seventy-five single African American men living in the shanties. Because the number of single migrants far exceeded the number of available rooms, the shanties were viewed by the company as a necessary evil. Shanty residents were encouraged by the company to seek shelter in homes on I and J Streets,

¹⁰Dundalk-Patapsco Neck Historical Society, *Reflections: Sparrows Point, Md., 1887-1975*, (Dundalk, 1976) p. 26.

¹¹Dorothy Torrence Ferguson, interview by the author, 7 March 1990.

¹²Gwendolyn Coleman Melvin, interview by the author, 7 March 1990.

¹³Charles Parrish, interview by the author, 12 February 1990.

thus providing additional income for those residents who rented houses. Of the one hundred and five black households in the 1900 census, twenty-six contained boarders and twenty-nine contained lodgers. North Side residents defined boarders as those who paid for meals only and lodgers as those who paid for meals and sleeping quarters. In some instances, lodgers who worked different shifts slept alternately in the same bed.

Realizing the value of an educated work force, the company built and was responsible for the maintenance of two schools, one for each of the races. Wood, named trustee by the county school board, was intimately involved in curriculum development and fostered many innovative programs. Sparrows Point was the site of the first kindergarten south of the Mason-Dixon Line.¹⁴ Wood was also responsible for the fact that schools in Sparrows Point were open ten months of the year, four months longer than in other areas of the county.

The school for African Americans, a wooden building, was erected in 1890 at the corner of 6th and J Streets near the banks of Humphrey's Creek. The two room frame building, referred to in the company records as "The Colored School", housed seven grades, one teacher and twenty-four students in 1890, the year it opened. Expenditures for the year were \$23.64 for fuel, \$6.00 for incidentals, \$9.25 for furniture and \$31.83 for books.¹⁵ The teacher, John Haywood Camper, was paid \$345.00 annually; with this amount he supported his wife, five children and his widowed father-in-law in a house at 607 J Street. By 1900, Camper's salary had been increased to \$640.00 and enrollment had increased to forty-one students.¹⁶

¹⁴Reutter, Op. cit. p. 56.

¹⁵Report of the Baltimore County Board of Education, 1 January 1890.

¹⁶Report of the Baltimore County Board of Education, 1 January 1900.

By 1920 there were five teachers and in 1928, an eight room brick building with an auditorium was erected at 10th and J Streets. This new facility was named for the Reverend George Bragg, author, journalist and rector of Baltimore's St. James Episcopal Church. The basic curriculum was supplemented by domestic science for girls and woodworking and chair caning for boys. In addition, grammar school students were taught physiology, geometry, algebra and bookkeeping. The county provided library facilities for white students only; to compensate for this deficit, black teachers and residents of The Point purchased books which were kept in their homes for the use of the community's children.

Education for most African American children ended at the eighth grade since the county provided high schools only for white children. At the end of every school year, the superintendent of the county schools, accompanied by an assistant, visited The Point and administered a rigorous test to black students. This test was also given to blacks in other sections of the county. For those who passed, the county government paid tuition and transportation to Baltimore City's Paul Lawrence Dunbar Junior High, Booker T. Washington Junior High and Frederick Douglass Senior High Schools. Residents believed that the test was deliberately made difficult in order to limit the number of students for whom funds must be expended. In 1932, fifty-two of one hundred applicants passed the test. By 1934, two years after the passing grade was raised from sixty to seventy, thirty-one of one hundred applicants passed.¹⁷ Some students who did not pass attended high school because their families paid the non-resident tuition of \$180.00 annually.¹⁸ Others used addresses of friends or relatives living in the city.

¹⁷*Minutes of the Baltimore County Board of Education*, p.243.

¹⁸James Alston et al., *The Point.....to Remember*, Sparrows Point: 1973.

Sparrows Point natives Landon Godsey, Elizabeth Williams and Dorothy Torrence Ferguson, who lived most of her life on the Point, were commuting students. Godsey remembered the sense of anxiety experienced every July by students awaiting test results and the tears of disappointment and shame shed by those who did not pass. Williams remembered feeling that, because she had come from such a caring and nurturing environment, she had received an education superior to that of the students in Baltimore City. Ferguson recalled not being able to participate in after school activities because the bus tokens issued by the county were not usable after 4:30 P.M. and she feared being stranded in the city.

In 1935 a group of concerned African American parents from the Baltimore County communities of Towson, Catonsville and Sparrows Point began to request that the county establish high schools for black children. On 8 October 1935, future Supreme Court Justice, Thurgood Marshall, attorney for the NAACP and the representative of the parents, formally presented a petition to the county school board.¹⁹ The petition was rejected. Elizabeth Williams, retired Baltimore County school administrator and third generation North Side resident, recalled that her father, Phillip Williams along with the Reverend Andrew Jones, Eugene Schyler and George White were Sparrows Point residents active in the effort to obtain high schools for African Americans. Their effort lasted for four years and, after the NAACP threatened a lawsuit, the county finally acceded to the demands of its African American citizens.

In 1939 ninth grade classes began at George Bragg High School and an additional grade was added each year. The first graduation, from the eleventh grade, was held at Union Baptist Church in 1943. (It was not until 1951 that any Baltimore County high school added a twelfth grade.) In 1948 North Side residents began attending the newly constructed Sollers Point Junior-

¹⁹*Minutes of the Baltimore County Board of Education*, p. 235.

Senior High School in the neighboring community of Turners Station. County schools began to desegregate in 1955 and by 1964, the African American students of Sparrows Point had all been transferred to formerly all white schools. The George Bragg School was being used as an office building by the company.

The African American community supported two churches in Sparrows Point: Union Baptist at 8th and J Streets, which was established in 1893, and Ebenezer Methodist Church at 10th and I Streets, which was established around 1895. There was one African American Catholic family on the Point, the McKinneys, who lived on I Street. They attended St. Luke's on "the other side". Protestant residents of the North Side recall that the McKinneys were required to sit in the last pew of St. Luke's because they were African American. Joseph McKinney, who was sixty-three at the time of the interview, does not remember being restricted to the last pew but does recall that no whites would sit in the same pew with his family.

The Baptist and Methodist churches were the center of the North Side's religious, cultural and social activities. Baptists George White, born on The Point in 1891, and McAllister Tyler, who lived on the Point from 1926-1941, both described a typical Sunday: Sunday School at 9:00 A.M. followed by morning worship at 11:00 and dinner at home at 1:00. Afternoon service began at 3:00. The B.Y.P.U. (Baptist Young Peoples' Union) met at 6:00 and evening worship began at 8:00. A similar schedule was adhered to at the Methodist Church where the young people's organization was called The Epworth League. Both of the churches sponsored programs, concerts, hay rides and festivals that were attended by the entire community regardless of denomination.

The churches were also used for political discussions and speeches and as polling places. Because the Lyceum Theatre would not admit African Americans, the Methodist church hall was

regularly used as a movie theatre. Kieffer Jackson, whose wife and daughter (Lillie Carroll Jackson and Juanita Jackson Mitchell) would both later head the Baltimore chapter of the NAACP, was one of those who visited Sparrows Point to show movies. While the reels were being changed, the Jackson girls, Marian, Virginia and Juanita entertained the audience by singing, piano playing and reciting poetry.

Since all of the property in Sparrows Point belonged to the company, no African Americans actually owned businesses. There were, however, several businesses operated by African Americans who paid rent to the company. Around 1920, a group of residents formed an organization called The People's Company. They leased a building on the North Side from which they operated a restaurant, an ice cream parlor, a barber shop and, on the upper level, a boarding house for single employees of the mill. In the building's basement, The People's Company established a savings bank in which residents could deposit as few as five cents a week.²⁰

There were several other businesses managed by African Americans. From 1945-1949 James Alston operated Jack's Snack Shop which had previously been managed by his father, Willie. The customers were mostly boarding house residents who ate breakfast at the shop; the waitresses prepared lunches that the men carried to the mill. Alston extended credit to his customers and settled accounts on payday. John Stokes and Herbert Roberts were barbers in the North Side Barber Shop while Laura Thomas and Lottie Cager were beauticians operating from their homes. "Smitty" managed the pool room and the North Side bowling alley and Howard Fitzhugh was in charge of the restaurant.

²⁰ James Alston, *interview by author, 3 April 1990.*

The businessman with the most tenure was Charles Hezekiah Lewis, who for thirty-six years managed the tailor shop. Known as "Kye", this child of former Virginians was born on The Point in 1899. His mother, Sarah, was a seamstress and his father, Charles, worked as a laborer in the mill and earned extra money as a prize fighter. Charles, Sr. died in 1910. Maryland had no mandatory school attendance law until 1916.²¹ At the age of fifteen, Kye's older brother, Joseph, obtained employment in the mill. This was necessary not only to earn money but to insure that the family could remain in the company house at 807 I Street. Kye also stopped school and worked at a variety of jobs to help support his mother and younger sister. He earned money by shining shoes for shanty residents and by working as a carpenter's helper. He also worked as a janitor at the Lyceum Theatre and as a delivery boy for the company store. In his early teens, he was employed briefly as a riveter at the mill earning \$5.52 weekly, \$5.00 of which was given to his mother for household expenses. In his spare time, he was a catcher for the Baltimore Black Socks, an all black semi-professional baseball team.

Finally Kye obtained employment in the tailor shop operated by Julius Lakin, one of the town's few Jewish entrepreneurs.²² When Lakin retired, the business was operated briefly by a black man. When he failed to pay the rent and was evicted, the business was offered to Kye. In 1936, in addition to cleaning, pressing and altering clothing, Kye became an agent for the Hopkins and Haas Tailoring Companies, which were based in Baltimore. In this capacity he took measurements and placed orders for custom made suits. Business flourished and because about a third of the customers were white, the company offered to build a new shop for Kye on

²¹Reutter, Op. cit., p.56.

²²Charles H. Lewis, interview by author, 24 March 1990.

"the other side". He declined and remained in business on the North Side until 1970. Said the then ninety year old Lewis, "And if they hadn't torn the town down, I'd still be in the shop."

In addition to the aforementioned businesses, there were activities that were not legal. Several residents played the illegal lottery. Winners received \$5.00 for a penny wager and \$25.00 for a nickel wager. Residents who were "number writers" were visited by members of the "syndicate" from Baltimore who came to collect and disburse funds.²³ At least one resident was rumored to have been evicted from his home because he manufactured and sold alcoholic beverages. The company strictly enforced regulations prohibiting the possession, sale and consumption of alcohol within the town.²⁴

Another enterprise, while not quite illegal, involved the purchase, at a discount, of books of script. The system worked in the following manner: an employee, in need of cash before payday, would request a \$5.00 book of script from the payroll office. He would then sell the \$5.00 book to a co-worker or resident of The Point for \$3.00. The seller would thus obtain \$3.00 in cash and was happy in spite of the fact that his next pay would be reduced by \$5.00. The buyer was happy because for an investment of only \$3.00, he could purchase \$5.00 in goods from the company store.²⁵

Musical activities were a major source of entertainment on the North Side. Almost every home contained a piano and some contained the ultimate status symbol of the day---the player piano and a variety of piano rolls. At the Statham household on I Street, the entire family and most of the neighbors regularly gathered around the piano to sing gospel songs popularized by

²³Alston, Op.cit.

²⁴Lewis, Op.cit.

²⁵Alston, Op.cit.

the nationally known Clara Ward Singers. Two music teachers from Baltimore, Professor Johnson and Professor Harris visited residents' homes and taught piano for \$.50 per lesson.

There were frequent house parties with music provided by a "Victrola" or by talented residents such as Leroy Magruder and Viola Moore. Harry Torrence led a jazz band which included Gene and Barney Hebron and Leroy Stream. Gene Hebron is remembered for his ability to play any tune that the requesting party could hum. When Torrence's band rehearsed at his home, neighbors would crowd the living room to listen to the music and dance. Those who could not find room in the house listened to the music and danced on the front lawn. Saturday night dances were held at The Central Hall located at 9th and H Streets.

Athletics were another popular leisure activity for North Side residents. Humphrey's Creek served as a swimming pool in summer and an ice skating rink in winter. Periodically, the company dumped slag into the creek and by the 1930's the creek had been filled and was being used as an athletic field. Hockey, baseball and football served to eliminate temporarily, racial barriers as the children from both sides of the town met on the neutral athletic field for friendly competition.

Baseball was the town's passion. Each block had its own team--- those in the 600 block of I Street called themselves the Giants while the Pee Wee Moons lived in the 800 block. Competition between the blocks was fierce but residents chose the best players from each block to unite as one team playing against teams from Turners Station. Residents traveled to East Baltimore on summer afternoons to watch the Baltimore Black Socks and the Elite Giants, of the all black semi-professional league.

Nearby Bay Shore Park was an amusement area available to whites only. North Side residents traveled to Baltimore where they boarded the Avalon and cruised to Brown's Grove

Amusement Park in Anne Arundel County. The park and the boat were both owned by a black man who sometimes docked at The Point to pick up and discharge passengers. Residents journeyed to Baltimore to picnic in Druid Hill Park and to have ice cream sundaes at Arundel's Ice Cream Store on Pennsylvania Avenue. The "Avenue" was also the site of the "Two Fer Joint" where two hot dogs and a soda sold for a quarter in the mid-1930's.

More sophisticated forms of entertainment were also available on Pennsylvania Avenue. At the Royal Theatre, in addition to movies, newsreels and cartoons, residents saw stage shows featuring popular entertainers such as Duke Ellington, Count Basie, Ella Fitzgerald, Louis Jordan and Lionel Hampton. After the show, residents could mingle with the stars at the restaurants and nightclubs along the Avenue. The Strand Ballroom was the place to observe and learn the newest dance steps.

The neighboring community of Edgemere was where North Side residents went to purchase alcoholic beverages. It was also the site of the cemetery used by black residents of eastern Baltimore County. There was frequent interaction between residents of The Point and residents of Turners Station, particularly with regard to church sponsored activities. In addition, some residents of The Point, because they were unable to purchase land in their own area, purchased land and built homes in Turners Station.

The residential community of Sparrows Point, created to meet the needs of the Maryland Steel Company, was destroyed when it became an economic liability for the Bethlehem Steel Corporation. Transportation services between the city and the county had improved to the point that it was no longer necessary to have a work force living near the plant. The decline of the American steel industry resulted in a loss of revenue that forced the company to adopt cost

reducing and revenue producing measures wherever possible. The company began in the mid-1950's to eliminate incrementally the residential sections of the town.

In 1955, one hundred and eighty-seven residents of the 200-400 blocks of D, E and F Streets were given sixty days to move. Their homes were destroyed in order to expand the plant. As other whites voluntarily moved, black North Side residents seeking larger quarters were moved to the "other side". The Bartee family, long time North Side residents, were the first black family to live in a previously all white area.²⁶ As homes on both sides of the community became vacant, they were destroyed until, by the early 1970's, the town was practically deserted. The Martin family of 811 I Street, were the last residents of the North Side. The entire town of Sparrows Point was razed in 1974.²⁷

Sparrows Point, Maryland, unique in that it was a community owned, developed and governed by a corporation, was typical of small communities throughout the nation. Its residents received the benefits of living in a company town: maintenance free homes with low rental fees, quality merchandise reasonably priced at the company store, adequate police, fire and ambulance service, good schools, all without property taxes, and in an atmosphere designed to promote family stability. In addition, residents received the benefits of small town life: a relatively non-competitive and stress free environment, positive interaction with neighbors, an almost crime free environment and shared moral and behavioral standards.

These benefits were enhanced for North Side residents. Their community, which was racially, economically and socially homogeneous, developed into an extended family. The community/family members acted in concert for the protection, education and socialization of

²⁶Landon Godsey, interview by author, 20 March 1990.

²⁷Theodore Patterson, "Growing Up Black in the Community of Sparrows Point", Dundalk Eagle, 16 March 1989, p. 18.

the young. Any adult felt free to correct a misbehaving child. All adults felt a responsibility to encourage, motivate and most importantly, set positive examples for the young. Children were taught respect for the elderly, for authority, for the rights and property of others, and for themselves. North Side residents, nurtured, educated and strengthened by a community which functioned as a family, acquired a sense of self-worth, pride and capability that enabled the majority to achieve upward mobility. Some continued to work for the company until changes in the economy caused much unemployment. Others have become educators, administrators, physicians, social workers, businessmen, labor leaders, musicians and clergymen.

Baltimore City contains a large population of former North Side residents as does eastern Baltimore County. A large number are home owners. While they are active members of their current neighborhoods, they mourn the loss of their former community and maintain relationships formed many years, and in some instances, generations ago. Many retain membership in Union Baptist and Ebenezer Methodist Churches, which are now located in Turners Station.

Periodically Sparrows Point sponsors community/family reunions. Many of the organizers are now seventy and older. They honor their community and their ancestors and proudly pass their heritage on to generations to come. While many of the reunion attendees are young, and never had the privilege of living in the community, they proudly consider themselves Pointers.

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