







A Walking Tour of Better Waverly



an urban village in the center of
Baltimore, Maryland

WAVERLY around 1850 (1) Jacob Aull's Cobbler Shop (2) Waverly Town Hall (3) The Blacksmith Shop (4) The Waverly Tollhouse

 *The walking tour of Better Waverly begins at the corner of E. 33rd and Ellerslie at 833 E. 33rd, prepare to walk west* but first look northeast to see something gone forever but still on most maps, Memorial Stadium,  built in 1954. There the World Champion Colts and Orioles played football and baseball before fifty thousand fans. Now see Stadium Place's affordable housing for seniors, the first new YMCA built in the city in over sixty years, Community Built Playground and open green space for all to enjoy. Across the street is Hopkins at Eastern, formerly Eastern High School, built in 1936 during Roosevelt's Work Progress Administration for two thousand female students. Together with Waverly Crossroads Giant, which you will be walking toward, these represent an incredible investment in the neighborhood's redevelopment, which included bringing back the grassy  tree-lined median strip between *Ellerslie to Ednor*, part of the original Olmstead Brothers plan to connect the city with a ribbon of green.


The boulevard of 33rd Street was completed in 1919 and as you  *walk west crossing Avon*, notice red brick row houses with glassed in sun porches. These and the houses along 33rd are newer Waverly ones, less than one hundred years old.





Stop between Avon and Westerwald to admire a sidewalk and sloping front yard "Garden of Eden" at 807 E. 33rd. *On reaching Frisby, turn left and walk*  *to Gorsuch*, where Waverly really began! A colonial settler, Thomas Gorsuch, built the area's first house,  calling it Homestead, in 1736. Merchants of wealth thereafter began discovering Waverly and building great estates in pastures and woodlands far from the port city of Baltimore.



 *Before crossing Gorsuch, look to your left and right*, and see two houses, once identical, built by a father for his twin daughters. By the 1850's a Gorsuch heir sold the family holdings to a syndicate and real estate development began. Cottages were built upon the nearby Tinges estate. And Lizette Woodworth Reese was born in Waverly. She would make her home here, teaching and writing  "Victorian Village" and "York Road". By the 1880's there were wood sidewalks and streets paved with oyster shells. Though still considered a resort with airy cottages with rooms rented to vacationers wanting to get out into the country, the turn of the century's revolutions in transportation forever changed Waverly. In 1901 a trolley rolled back and forth Gorsuch Avenue connecting Greenmount Avenue and Harford Road.


 *Cross Gorsuch and walk a block to Homestead*,  *Turn right and walk up to Old York Road*, but stop first to see Homestead Harvest which was an abandoned lot with a rotting vacant house destroyed by fire until the community planted a productive cooperative, organic garden. Then look up above a recently renovated building and notice the engraving for the old Waverly Branch of the Post Office. 

 Walk left onto Old York Road and  left onto Montpelier, where one side of this block has seven of the same Victorians built for seven children by their father.

 At Frisby, turn right and then go up the cement city steps that take you to the top of a little hill and onto 31st and notice the eclectic mix of single framed and duplex houses, which are a metaphor for Waverly's tradition of diversity.




Upon reaching Old York Road,  go left toward 30th stopping at St. John's where colonists camped in barracks during the American Revolution. St. John's began services in the barracks in 1843, built a church  in 1847 and, when it was lost to fire, built a new one in 1859. Stroll through the graveyard where Lizette Woodworth Reese is buried. Visit www.stjohnsinthevillage.org for more church history.  Step back out onto Old York Road and continue toward 30th. Look northwest toward the corner of 31st and Greenmount where Northside Bar & Grill was once Waverly's Town Hall. Just south of it was a York Road Tollhouse, a center of commerce and communications along the York Pike, which opened in the 1750's to connect southern Pennsylvania farms with Belair Market in Old Town, Baltimore. Looking further back in time,  before there was a Waverly or Plymouth, MA or Jamestown, VA, you are actually standing upon the ancient streambeds that fed Jones Falls and Herring Run to the west and east, emptying into Patapsco River and Chesapeake Bay. The streambeds are now underground storm drains carrying rain water and pollution into our waterways. York Pike was actually a footpath worn down by Piscataway and Susquehannock tribes fishing, hunting and warring in this area long before horse drawn double deck cars came down York Road, followed by an electric passenger rail system and eventually modern mass transit buses and automobiles.

 Take a left onto 30th and note more of Waverly's eclectic housing types on both sides of this street. Then search on your left for a footpath in some grassy open space and follow that north into an unexpected surprisingly large field, which the city owns and has left undeveloped. Stand and imagine what Frisby Woods was like (though they were closer to present day 25th Street) where villagers went to picnic  on holidays and gypsies camped in summer.



Come out of this free, open space onto Montpelier and  turn right. At the corner of Montpelier and Ellerslie are Waverly Family Center and former Chesapeake Habitat For Humanity storefront offices. Waverly Family Center was community built to provide learning space for new parents and is now operated by Goodwill Industries. The Habitat space is now the Better Waverly Community Arts Building.

Continue on Montpelier to Independence,  turn left onto Independence and walk to Homestead.


 *Go left onto Homestead following this great tree-lined lane to Frisby.* On your right will be an open lot where youth are creating a sculpture garden complete with a mosaic pond. Waverly remains graced with beautiful  old trees, residents taking pride in their many little gardens and patches of green open space here, there and everywhere. Walking Homestead it is easy to envision the village Waverly once was and still is in many ways despite its present urban density.

 *Turn right at Frisby, walk to Gorsuch and turn right again.* Notice the long backyards of the Gorsuch properties and the country-quality of that block between Frisby and Ellerslie. *Cross Ellerslie* and you will approach another of the oldest institutions in Waverly, St. Bernard's. Its first church  was built in 1891 and a new one constructed between 1916 and 1930. Its school opened in 1916. May processions became a Gorsuch Avenue tradition. Apostolic Church of Jesus Christ has replaced the Catholic church. The convent is now Marian House, providing homeless women with shelter and a chance to start new lives. Their courtyard is open to the public and contains four beautiful marble statues of women named Patience, Honesty, Integrity and Trust. Old abandoned St. Bernard's School  is being turned into Serenity House so Marian House graduates can move into apartments if they want to stay in the community.

At Independence,  *go left and up onto an alleyway running behind Gorsuch Avenue backyards on the left and the Hopkins at Eastern parking lot on the right.*

As you  *walk west* at this elevation you can look back down on Waverly's church spirals, roofs and the wide tree-lined  green boulevard.

33rd Street is one of the city's most used east west roads as is Greenmount Avenue running north and south between downtown and the beltway. Waverly is conveniently and centrally located within short distances of many cultural and educational institutions, hospitals, libraries, jobs and shopping centers. It is in the city while retaining much of its former country village atmosphere and architecture.

 *As you take city steps down onto Ellerslie below,* on your left is another hill with a green shingle wooden house with white columns considered the oldest still standing home in Waverly, shown on maps from the 1860's. Below it and facing you is a little lane called Belle Terre and to your right the less than a hundred year old daylight brick row homes curving along *Ellerslie to 33rd where you started* your walk through centuries of history in the neighborhood of Better Waverly, annexed into Baltimore City in 1888 but remaining its own unique community still today.