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# HISTORICAL SOCIETY HISTORY TRAILS • OF BALTIMORE COUNTY •

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## Bay Shore Park Sparked by the Trolley System

John McGrain



*Bay Shore Park Postcard. The inscription on its reverse states, "Maryland's most beautiful, largest, safest beach on Chesapeake Bay. Clean salt water bathing. We specialize in picnics, crab feasts and outings. 50 or 5,000 persons. Special rates. Rides for kiddies and grownups." (Courtesy of John McGrain.)*



*The Historical Society of Baltimore County is funded in part by grants from the Baltimore County Commission on Arts & Sciences.*

Baltimore City's first experimental electric street car system began regular service in August, 1885, operating between the city and Baltimore County's village of Hampden, sometimes by third-rail power and sometimes by small battery-powered cars. The car line was a national "first," as far as fare-paying electric service goes. By 1890, Baltimore had heavier and more reliable vehicles on its streets, the true trolley car being one of them, acquiring its power from overhead wires and traveling as fast as traffic moves today, sometimes faster. By 1893, Towson had trolley car service, and in 1899, various competing transit companies were merged into a well-capitalized system named the United Railways and Electric Company.

As a result of these developments, both city and suburban residents suddenly had a wide selection of destinations to choose from. People of moderate means no longer needed to bemoan their lack of a horse and buggy. Instead, seemingly endless destinations beckoned, provided they were within reach of transit stops or pastures suitable for subdivision and rail expansion.

Transit managers resolved to create new destinations of their own, enterprises that would attract fare-paying riders and generate additional revenue for the company. However, this idea was not a new one; steam railroads were in the business of operating parks and picnic groves for quite some time. The Western Maryland Railroad debuted its Greenwood Park Hotel near present-day Mount Wilson as early as 1875, and their elaborate Pen-Mar Park in Washington County near present-day Fort Ritchie was operating in 1877. Even in the days of the horse-car transit system there was the Catonsville Railway Park, a grove that appeared west of Nunnery Lane and north of Frederick road in the 1876 Baltimore City Atlas by G.M. Hopkins.

The electric transit system served Electric Park (at Belvedere Avenue and Reisterstown Road), and established River View (now Point Breeze), and Gwynn Oak Park. All these locations were designed for family oriented amusements, with rides, picnic grounds, bandstands, and food vendors. And, in addition, trolley cars also provided transit to beer gardens, such as Jack Flood's Park at Curtis Bay and Darley Park (now Harford Road and 20th Street).

While many recent immigrants believed a little

alcohol was a healthy part of daily living, many reform-minded Progressive Era Americans thought the exact opposite, and while some took trains to beer gardens, others rode to temperance camps in Glyndon and Emory Grove.

Influenced by temperance ideology, transit managers resolved to build an alcohol-free park the public could not resist. Their ideas manifest in plans for creating Bay Shore Park, where they intended to provide the added incentive of salt-water bathing - a pleasure that formerly required the use of excursion boats heading east from Baltimore to Tolchester, or south to North Beach.

By the early twentieth-century, transit systems were robust, and their bonds found ready investors. United Railways was particularly well-situated, flush with capital, and dominating the regional market. Bolstering United Railways' position, Baltimore's population was continually expanding, providing a steady source of new fare-paying customers.

In February 1905, the North Point Land Company sold 30 acres on Shallow Creek to the Baltimore, Sparrows Point & Chesapeake Railway Company, land formerly owned (until two days prior) by Franklin Roberts - the land shown in the 1898 Bromley atlas as the property of Mrs. Joseph Roberts.<sup>1</sup> By 1906, the property was in the hands of United Railways by lease. Not far away was the historic Todd House, and at the tip of North Point the developing fortifications of Fort Howard, a modern, concrete bastion designed to deter any foreign fleet daring to penetrate the Chesapeake Bay.

The careful planning that gave birth to Bay Shore Park is best summed up by an extensive report in the *Sun* of August 5, 1906:

**BAY SHORE TO OPEN  
CARS WILL RUN TO NEW RESORT ON  
NORTH POINT WEDNESDAY  
TRACK FOLLOWS WATER FRONT  
Park Covers 80 Acres -- Fine Buildings  
Completed -- Good Bathing Promised**

The Baltimore, Sparrows Point and Chesapeake Railway Company hoped to have the work of construction on its Bay Shore extension from Sparrows Point sufficiently advanced to admit opening the line to Fort Howard and Bay Shore Park by noon yesterday, but was prevented by the heavy rains of the past few days. Unless something occurs to prevent this, the opening will take place on

...become a member, or purchase a copy to read on.

# Historical Society of Baltimore County



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