



William Gales Contee (left) and Edward Wilson Parago, Sr.

Contee-Parago Park

Bolton Hill Area Named For Neighbors

BY JANE HOWARD

A wrought-iron plaque hung in the dining room of William Gales Contee's home on Dolphin lane carries the well-known line by Sam Walter Foss: "Let me live in a house by the side of the road, and be a friend of man."

Evidently, Mr. Contee's neighbors on Dolphin lane believe that he lives up to the motto, for they have honored Mr. Contee and Edward Wilson Parago, Sr., his next-door neighbor, by naming a small park in Bolton Hill after the two men. A "park fete," scheduled for Saturday, will dedicate the area and provide day-long entertainment.

Mr. Contee and Mr. Parago, both in their seventies, are considered two of the oldest living homeowners in the Bolton Hill area. They have watched this section of the city change in character and in appearance over the years, and have watched people move in and move out and buildings rise and fall.

For vacant lots and tall, new buildings have taken the place of many houses on Linden avenue and on Dolphin street, causing the old family neighborhood atmosphere to diminish greatly.

Younger people who have moved in—sometimes Maryland Institute students—often do not settle themselves as the older generation did. They come and go, and are nice, according to Mr. Parago, but "they just keep on going."

Other Improvements

For this reason, the 1200 Block Bolton Street Improvement Association has been working toward "trying to bring the neighborhood back," as Mr. Contee explained it. Remodeling of the old buildings has been encouraged, as well as other improvements, of which the park is an important one.

"It will be good for people to come and sit in after work," Mr. Contee continued, speaking of the park. "It is one of the best things they could have done."

Both of the gentlemen felt they had been greatly honored by their neighbors. Mr. Parago was surprised. "They said they were naming the park after someone, but I had no idea it would be me." Mr. Contee modestly suggested that they were honored for being "the oldest property-owners here," adding, "They wanted to confer the honor and I accepted. I like the people and they like me. They give me work. I was able to buy my house and educate my children."

Mr. Contee owns an upholstery shop in the front of his home on Dolphin lane, where he has lived since 1930. His residence in Bolton Hill, however, dates back to 1915. He was born in Montrose, Va., and his early days were spent as a valet and companion to a judge, who died in 1922, leaving Mr. Contee money with which to go into business for himself.

The home of the gentle, easy-going man is filled with pictures of his 5 children, 11 grandchildren and 12 great grandchildren, as well as many books and mementos from their foreign travels.

One son has a doctorate in history and teaches at Columbia University, New York. Two other sons who live in Baltimore are with the probation department and the post office.

"One daughter lives in North Carolina, where she is growing tobacco and corn and won't come back," Mr. Contee added, smiling. Another works with the Welfare Department in Baltimore.

Mr. Contee remembers when Bolton street was lined with houses, all the way down to Biddle street; when Bolton Hill was "midcity" instead of "uptown"; when Enon Baptist Church was torn down to build first townhouses, and then Sutton Place and when the B & O train used to run through the Mount Royal Station, which now houses the Maryland Institute.

"You could hear the horses go thump,

thump . . . down the cobblestone streets," he recalled. "Now office buildings have moved in. Soon there will be more."

"People were more sympathetic to colored people then," Mr. Contee added, his eyes squinting slightly as if to conjure up a picture of the past. "Those people died and left. But people are still nice; it depends on yourself, your own personality—the way you carry yourself and treat other people. Everyone treats me nice. I wouldn't want to live in another neighborhood."

Four generations of Mr. Parago's family have lived in his home on Dolphin lane. He was born on Rutter street, but moved with his family to the house in which he now lives, in 1908. He now lives with his daughter and grandson. Mr. Parago also has two sons, eight grandchildren and one great-grandchild.

"I worked in the post office during World War I," Mr. Parago recalled, "but was pushed out when the veterans came back after the war. I then worked in the Customs House until 1948, and I retired when my health began failing."

He feels that he knows more people since he retired but admitted that people there are different now. He explained, "Many were up and doing things, and some had hired help—some old ones still do—but they've died out."

Mr. Parago, standing in his small backyard, pointed to a large building which once was the home of former Gov. Edwin Warfield, and is now an apartment building. In the rear a smaller building once stabled the governor's horses and carriages.

"Horses were once used to deliver milk door to door," Mr. Parago added. "But you carried a container and dipped it in the milk. Then the Health Department came in and said they would have to use bottles."

Vacant Lot

The Western Maryland Dairy began building around 1914, according to Mr. Parago. As it expanded its facilities, houses were torn down to make room. A vacant lot now reminds long-time Bolton Hill residents where the dairy once stood.

The trackless trolley, which ran on rubber tires via overhead wires, was a vivid memory of Mr. Parago's. "That was 12 to 15 years ago," he said. "It cost 10 or 15 cents, and you could transfer free."

The tall, slim and serious man also remembers the Baltimore fire of 1904 and the reconstruction of the Maryland Institute of Art in 1905.

"The only trouble we have here," he said, speaking of his neighborhood, "is migrators going through. They broke windows in the house next door." The house, badly in need of repair and new windows, is now vacant. "The real estate people didn't put any conveniences in it," he explained. "Urban renewal came through and then it was sold so that the owners wouldn't have to fix it up."

The new owner is trying to get money to have it renovated, as others have done in this section of the Bolton Hill area. And the new Contee-Parago Park, located at the foot of the 1200 block Bolton street, may mirror a trend in increased concern of city dwellers for their neighborhood . . . and their neighbors.

The park will be dedicated at 2 P.M. Saturday. A storyland for children, a cakewalk, movies produced and directed by two Maryland Institute graduates, fortune tellers, body painting, prints, art work, batiks, weaving, lemon peppermint sticks, a health food stand, flea market and open gardens will be available as well as neighborhood information booths, ceramics, jewelry, and refreshments. The rain date for the park fete is May 22.