

*Walking Baltimore: An Insider's Guide to 33 Historic Neighborhoods, Waterfront Districts, and Hidden Treasures in Charm City* (guidebook covering 33 distinct walks in the city, taking in disparate neighborhoods) excerpt: Entry #10, Little Italy & Jonestown

## Little Italy & Jonestown / Old Town: Where it All Began

**BOUNDARIES:** E. Fayette St., Aisquith St., Lloyd St., S. Exeter St., Fawn St., N. Front St.

**DISTANCE:** 1.3 miles

**DIFFICULTY:** Moderate

**PARKING:** Street parking along route and public garages in Little Italy (S. Exeter St. & Bank St. and E. Pratt St. before Albemarle St.).

**PUBLIC TRANSIT:** MTA bus #11 stops at Fawn St. and President St.; MTA buses # 7, 10, and 30 run east-west along Pratt St.; the Charm City Circulator Orange runs throughout Old Town and the Green runs through Little Italy; the Shot Tower Metro stop is between President St. and S. Front St.

Jonestown is in some respects the place where Baltimore began. The Englishman David Jones built his house on the banks of a stream that would later take his name, the Jones Falls, in 1661. Jones's house rested on the east side of the Falls. By 1729, the surrounding area was bustling and local inhabitants lobbied the colonial legislature for a charter. The wealthy Carrolls donated sixty acres and Baltimore City received its charter in 1729, naming the city for Cecil Calvert, the 2nd Lord Baltimore and the founder of the Colony of Maryland. The earliest city planners began laying out Baltimore on the west side of Jones's waterway. By 1732, they began laying out the streets in Jonestown, on the east side. A bridge along Gay Street linked the two and Jonestown then became known as "Old Town." Though certainly quite different in appearance today, Jonestown still exists and the neighborhood still hosts some of Baltimore's oldest manmade structures. This walk contains plenty of historical riches, with no fewer than eight separate sites listed on the National Register of Historic Places. But before all that history, take a walk around the gustatory and olfactory enchantment of adjacent Little Italy, long home to one of the best collections of culinary delights anywhere on the East Coast.

*Note: the small section of this walk that takes in the McKim School and the Friends Meeting House sits in a somewhat neglected edge of town; some people might be a bit uncomfortable strolling here. That said, I have never had any troubles in the area.*

- Begin on S. Exeter St. and Bank St. There is plenty of parking – both garage and on-street – here. You'll see the 1866 Canal Street Malthouse down Bank St., a mid-19th century malt warehouse for what was once a collection of nearby breweries, today converted to upscale condos. Continue north on S. Exeter St., passing the tidy brick and Formstone rowhomes of Little Italy. The neighborhood got its ethnic flavor from a wave of Genoese immigrants in the 1850s. Many people know this neighborhood as a premiere destination for terrific food – you'll have your choice of almost thirty restaurants – but some folks tend to forget that this is a residential neighborhood, too. There's a terrific website for Little Italy, [littleitalymd.com](http://littleitalymd.com), where you can find tons of info on restaurants, a walking map, an explanation of *bocce*, and anecdotal reminiscences from people who grew up in the neighborhood.
- At the next block, take a left, onto Fawn St. The street was named to commemorate the cartel ship *Fawn*, which saw action in the War of 1812. As you head toward the harbor on Fawn St., you'll begin to pass the ubiquitous Italian restaurants. Many of these have been here for generations and have earned reputations as wonderful eateries. With so many choices so close together (many of them literally sharing walls), if a restaurant fails to deliver, it won't be around for long. The result is consistently high quality dining year after year after year. Restaurants in Little Italy rarely fail to please. Everybody has his or her favorite, and it's beyond the capacity of this author to say which is the best. (That said, my wife could eat Ciao Bella's Shrimp Ricardo every day of the week). If you want a little political footnote with your pasta, go to Sabatino's, at 901 Fawn St. Richard Nixon's

Vice President, the Baltimorean Spiro Agnew, was friends with the owner and ate here regularly. In fact, he stopped in for a last meal (and is said to have quipped, "Can I get a job here?") just before resigning his post as Vice President at a nearby courthouse.

- The business end of Little Italy is fairly compact, so take time to check out the menus at the establishments on all the intersecting streets. But to continue this walk, stay on Fawn St., passing High St., and take a right onto Albemarle St. The street probably got its name from George Monck, the Duke of Albermarle, who was the English general primarily responsible for elevating Charles II to the British throne in the 17th century. But the street has a little hometown aristocracy attached to it as well: just as you turned onto Albemarle St., on the right at #245, is the house where Baltimore Mayor Thomas J. D'Alesandro Jr. was born and lived his whole life. The son of Italian immigrants, D'Alesandro served in Congress from 1939 to 1947 and served as Charm City's mayor from 1947 to 1959. His son Thomas J. D'Alesandro III followed him as mayor, serving from 1967 to 1971. But it was D'Alesandro III's little sister whose name rings the most bells; she's Nancy Pelosi, the country's first female Speaker of the House. She, too, grew up at 425 Albemarle St. Many of the neighborhood old-timers still remember "Little Nancy" from when she was just a kid running the streets. She's honored with a street sign declaring this portion of Albemarle St., "Via Nancy D'Alesandro Pelosi."
- You'll notice an antique brick tower looming ahead; you'll be there on your return route. For now, take the next right, onto Stiles St., named for Captain George Stiles, a War of 1812 veteran and later Baltimore mayor. This first block, at High St. and Stiles St., is where you can catch open air movies every Friday evening in July and August, including everyone's favorite, the classic *Cinema Paradiso*. You'll pass a bocce court to the left and if you're lucky a game will be in full swing. If so, you'll swear you're in the Old Country. Bocce has been played in Italy for thousands of years. The object is to land your ball (the *bocce*) as close as possible to the *pallino*, a smaller ball rolled first. Two bocce leagues flourish in Little Italy; the Little Italy Bocce League plays on Tuesday and Wednesday nights and the Italian American Bocce League rolls on Thursday nights.
- Continue on Stiles St., passing S. Exeter St., and you'll see the neighborhood's holy linchpin on the right, St. Leo's Roman Catholic Church. The church began in 1881 and is listed as a National Historic Shrine. The church used to run the St. Leo School, but it closed in 1980 after almost one hundred years. Pass St. Leo's and continue to the next block, Lloyd St., and take a left. You're now leaving Little Italy and skirting the edge of historic Old Town, home to some of Baltimore's earliest structures. Continue on Lloyd St., passing E. Pratt St. Baltimoreans familiar with the area will remember when this part of town was an eyesore. But new housing in these blocks has really spruced up the area. Continue on Lloyd St. to E. Lombard St. (If for some reason, you didn't fill up in Little Italy, the famous Atman's Deli is on the left, at 1019 E. Lombard. An institution for almost one hundred years, Atman's has earned a reputation as the best of the best along Baltimore's famed Corned Beef Row. The corned beef is, simply, terrific, as good as anything you'd get on the Lower East Side in New York). Just a couple of blocks west, on Lombard St., somewhere near High St., Edgar Allan Poe was discovered in October 1849, fevered and delirious. He would die soon after being transported to nearby Church Hospital.

This entire area was once home to a thriving Jewish population; many of these immigrants – primarily from Germany and Russia – filled ubiquitous sweatshops that churned out more clothing than was produced in any other city except New York. For a sense of this life, check out Baltimorean Barry Levinson's 1990 film, *Avalon*. The novelist Leon Uris and the poet Karl Shapiro were also products of this wave of immigrants to Baltimore.

- Staying on Lloyd St., but crossing E. Lombard St., you'll see on the right three important and historic buildings in succession. First is the red brick Moorish Revival B'nai Israel Synagogue, built in 1876 by the Orthodox German-Jewish congregation Chizuk Amuno. The congregation sold the building in 1895 to the B'nai Israel congregation, made up primarily of Russian immigrants. It still

functions today, making it the state's oldest continual use Orthodox synagogue.

You'll notice arches to the left connecting it to another brick building, this one more modern: this is the Jewish Museum of Maryland. The museum boasts the country's largest collection of regional Jewish Americana, focusing on centuries of Jewish life in Baltimore, Maryland, and the United States. The museum has been in operation for fifty years, but perhaps its greatest historical function is as the overseer of the Lloyd Street Synagogue, just a few feet away across Watson St.

The Lloyd Street Synagogue was built in 1845 by the Baltimore Hebrew Congregation. It was Maryland's first synagogue and is the nation's third oldest after synagogues in Newport, Rhode Island and Charleston, South Carolina. The Baltimore architect Robert Cary Long, Jr. designed the synagogue in the Greek Revival style. The Baltimore Hebrew Congregation occupied the building until 1889, when it became St. John the Baptist Roman Catholic Church. This arrangement lasted until 1905, when the Orthodox Lithuanian Shomrei Mishmeres HaKodesh used the building until 1963. The country's first ordained rabbi, Abraham Rice, lived on Lloyd St. and led his congregation in the 1840s. His traditional ways led some in his congregation to form Har Sinai Verein, the country's first reform congregation, which still operates today in Owings Mills, in Baltimore County. Today, the Jewish Museum offers tours of both the Lloyd Street Synagogue and the B'nai Israel Synagogue, every Sunday, Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday at 1:00 and 2:30 p.m.

- When you've checked out the synagogues and museum, follow Lloyd St. a few more feet to where it dead-ends at E. Baltimore St. and take a right. A hundred yards or so on the left is McKim Park, anchored on Aisquith St. by the McKim Center. This striking building looks like it would be more at home in Athens, and there's a reason for that: its design was inspired by both the Propylaea, which was the monumental gateway to the Acropolis, and the Temple of Hephaestus, a Doric temple still standing in the Agora of Athens. This building was the original home of the McKim Free School, begun in 1821 (the building you see here was erected in 1833). It was Baltimore's first free school, and one of the first in the country as well. The building was designed by Baltimore architects William Howard and William Small, and according to the [mckimcenter.org](http://mckimcenter.org) website, the building has been called "the most perfect example of Doric architecture in the U.S." The school served primarily immigrant children and remained in use almost until the 20th century, when its purpose was subsumed by the city's free public education system.
- Walk behind the McKim Center down Aisquith St. The street is one of the older ones in the city, named in the first years of the 1800s, probably for William Aisquith, the father of Ned Aisquith, assassin of a British general at the battle of North Point in 1814. To the right, just before you hit the major thoroughfare of E. Fayette St., you'll see a building even older than the McKim Center: this humble brick structure is the Quaker Friends Meeting House. It remains the city's oldest religious-use structure. Its construction dates to 1781. The great city patron Johns Hopkins worshipped here, as did the B & O's first president, Philip E. Thomas.
- This section of Old Town used to be the setting for many houses and several streets which no longer exist. In the 1830s, the famous Booth family of actors used to spend their winters here. Junius Brutus Booth and his son Edwin were known as America's premier Shakespearean actors. Of course, it was another son, John Wilkes, who would gain more notoriety. Today, the Lincoln assassin is buried across town, in Greenmount Cemetery (See Walk #21: Station North). Just north of where you are next headed used to stand Forrest St., where the great African-American composer Eubie Blake was born. The span of his life was extraordinary. Born in the 1880s to parents who had been slaves, he lived for almost a century (there is some discrepancy about his actual birth year). His most famous composition was "I'm Just Wild About Harry" and a young Josephine Baker got her start in one of his shows (for more on Eubie Blake, see Walk #16: Mount Vernon).
- Take a left onto E. Fayette St. On the first block to the right, across the median, is the Carmelo

Anthony Youth Development Center. Baltimore native and National Basketball Association all-star Carmelo Anthony donated \$1.5 million for its creation; it serves the disadvantaged youth of East Baltimore. Continue west on E. Fayette St. for four blocks to the can't-miss Phoenix Shot Tower. This building is truly a national treasure. Its existence is a rare thing; indeed, it's one of only three buildings like it in the country. It stands 234 feet and is made up of more than a million bricks. When it was built in 1828, it was the country's tallest building. Its function was to create drop shot for smaller firearms and molded shot for larger weapons, such as cannons. Workers dropped molten lead from the top of the building through a long sieve and into a vat of cold water, creating the shape needed for the weaponry as it spun and cooled. The tower produced some 2.5 million pounds of shot annually. Charles Carroll, signer of the Declaration of Independence, laid the cornerstone. It remained in use until 1892. Tours of the tower are given every Saturday and Sunday at 4 p.m., leaving from the Carroll Mansion (see below).

Across E. Fayette St., you can see the whitewashed façade and Palladian bell tower of St. Vincent de Paul Catholic Church, the city's oldest continuous-use parish church, built in 1840.

- With the Shot Tower on your left, walk south along N. Front St. through Shot Tower Park. Cross E. Baltimore St. (N. Front St. becomes S. Front St. here). On the left, at 29 S. Front St., is the gorgeous red iron façade of the building that used to house the City Life Museums, now sadly defunct. It's a private building now, rented out for wedding ceremonies. But its 1840s cobblestone plaza is still a wonderful place to stroll. One museum that is still open, fortunately, is the Carroll Museum, just up to the left, at 800 E. Lombard St.
- This building was the winter home of Charles Carroll, who would wind up as the country's last living (and only Catholic) signer of the Declaration of Independence. (For Carroll's biography, see "Backstory" below). The great French chronicler of America, Alexis de Tocqueville, was an admirer of Charles Carroll, writing in 1831 that by signing the Declaration of Independence, Carroll "risked, together with his life, the most considerable fortune that there was in America." Indeed, he very well may have been the richest man in America at the time. The first house on this site was constructed between 1804 and 1808. Richard Caton, Charles Carroll's son-in-law, purchased it in 1820 after many additions to the original structure. Carroll himself spent many of his winters there, leaving his primary residence in Annapolis. After Carroll's and then the Catons' deaths in the mid-1800s, the house became a saloon and then a tenement apartment. For a decade in the early 1900s, the mansion functioned as a vocational school and ultimately became a recreation center in 1935. Today, the Carroll Museums, Inc. oversees the mansion and continues work on its restoration.
- Continue west on E. Lombard St. for another half block and take the first right onto Albemarle St. Go two blocks to E. Pratt St. and take a right. On your right is the Star Spangled Banner Flag House. This unique museum concentrates on the story of the flag that inspired our national anthem. The house shines a light on Mary Pickersgill, the seamstress responsible for that star-spangled banner. The house was built in 1793. Pickersgill's mother, Rebecca Young, had been in the flag-making business in Philadelphia since the Revolutionary War; she had sewn the 1775 Grand Union flag for George Washington. She moved to this house with Mary and Mary's daughter Caroline in 1806, where the three generations continued with the family business. And it was here where Pickersgill sewed what is perhaps the world's most famous standard. Major George Armistead, commander at Fort McHenry, was anticipating a British attack and wished for a massive flag, one "the British will have no difficulty in seeing . . . from a distance." Mary Pickersgill's flag measured forty-two by thirty feet and contained fifteen stripes and stars, each two feet wide. Armistead got his wish.

As you pass through the museum, you'll see what life was like in early 19th century Baltimore, with many of the family's original objects on display. It's a terrific children's museum; on Saturdays, re-enactors enliven the scene with period dress and amazing stories of life in the run up to the War of 1812. Although the original Star Spangled Banner is at the Smithsonian in Washington, D.C., there

is a fragment on display here.

- The point where you started is two blocks west on E. Pratt St. and three blocks south on S. Exeter St. Any southwestern route through Little Italy will get you there.

## Points of Interest (start to finish)

**The Jewish Museum of Maryland** 15 Lloyd St., Baltimore, MD 21202, 410-732-6400, [jhsm.org](http://jhsm.org)

**The McKim School** 1120 E. Baltimore St. Baltimore, MD 21202

**Old Town Friends' Meeting House** 1201 E. Fayette St. Baltimore, MD 21202

**Phoenix Shot Tower** 801 E. Fayette St., Baltimore, Maryland 21201, 410-837-5424

**Carroll Mansion** 800 E. Lombard St., Baltimore, MD 21202, 410-605-2964, [carrollmuseums.org](http://carrollmuseums.org)

**Star Spangled Banner Flag House** 844 E. Pratt St., Baltimore, MD 21202, 410-837-1793, [flaghouse.org](http://flaghouse.org)

## Route Summary

1. Start at S. Exeter St. and Bank St.
2. Go north on S. Exeter St.
3. Turn left onto Fawn St.
4. Turn right onto Albemarle St.
5. Turn right onto Stiles St.
6. Turn left onto Lloyd St.
7. Turn right onto E. Baltimore St.
8. Turn left onto Aisquith St.
9. Turn left onto E. Fayette St.
10. Turn left onto N. Front St.
11. Turn left onto E. Pratt St.

## Connecting the Walks

Harbor East (Walk #5) begins just southeast of the starting point to this walk, at S. Caroline St. and Lancaster St. The Harbor East walk takes in the Reginald Lewis Museum of Maryland African American History and Culture, which shares the block of E. Pratt and Granby Street with the Star Spangled Banner Flag House.

## Back Story

Charles Carroll lends his name to many Maryland places: Carroll County, Carrollton, New Carrollton, etc. But he doesn't enjoy a great national reputation, which is a shame. He was a fascinating man whose influence on early America can't be overstated. Born in Annapolis in 1737, he publicly sparred with the Governor who had usurped the Maryland General Assembly in 1772. His popularity for this act led to his election as Maryland's representative at the Continental Congress. He then helped to draft the constitution of Maryland and became the country's first elected Catholic senator, serving until 1792. All of this would have been enough to fill the life of any early American. But Carroll lived for another forty years – serving as a director of the B & O Railroad, helping to establish the C & O Canal, the First and Second National Banks, Georgetown University in Washington, and many other civic and public projects. When he died in 1832, he was ninety-five years old, a long veteran of the American Revolution

and the possessor of a simply extraordinary life. Even in his last year of life, de Tocqueville reported that Carroll “holds himself erect [and] has no infirmity,” though, not unreasonably, “his memory is rather uncertain.”

*Secret Baltimore: A Guide to the Weird, Wonderful, and Obscure* (guidebook covering 84 little known and surprising sights in Baltimore), excerpts “Maryland School for the Blind,” “Al Capone’s Cherry Trees,” and “Pool No. 2”:

## **#52 MARYLAND SCHOOL FOR THE BLIND**

### **Where can you see a completely unique soccer game?**

Finding a soccer game in full swing is no difficult task in the Baltimore area. Rec leagues, travel and club contests, pick-up games, middle and high school teams, and adult leagues (I play in one myself)—the opportunities to take in games are myriad. Baltimore has been something of a soccer hotbed for decades; tiny University of Baltimore won a national championship in 1975; the Baltimore Bays were a mainstay of the old North American Soccer league; and when well-known international clubs come to play exhibitions at M&T Bank Stadium, a sellout is guaranteed.

But if you want to take in one of the more incredible and uplifting matches you’re ever likely to see, head to the Maryland School for the Blind (MSB). In 2016, the school became the first in the nation to form a blind team and a few years later became the location of the country’s first youth blind soccer game, pitting the Maryland School for the Blind Bees against the Virginia School for the Blind Chiefs (for the record, the home squad pulled out a 2-1 victory). The ball emits a jingle sound for location. The field is lined with boards to keep the ball in play. Other specific rules differentiate blind soccer from sighted soccer, but the sense of competition and camaraderie is precisely the same, if not heightened.

Several other soccer programs for the blind have been formed in the country, but MSB remains the epicenter for the sport, hosting the very first North American Blind Soccer Training Camp for both coaches and players in 2018. The goal is to create a national team that can then ultimately compete in the Paralympics. So, take in a game and—most likely—watch future Paralympians in the making.

Sidebar: MSB traces its roots to 1853, when it was in downtown Baltimore and was known as the Maryland Institution for the Instruction of the Blind.

#### Information Box:

Blind soccer

What: Soccer matches with specific rules and gear to accommodate blindness

Where: Maryland School for the Blind, 3501 Taylor Avenue, Parkville/Overlea

Cost: None

Pro Tip: MSB has a beautiful campus that includes the imposing Newcomer Hall. The athletic fields are to the left of Newcomer, along Taylor Avenue.

## **#2: AL CAPONE’S CHERRY TREES**

### **Where will you find cherry trees planted by Al Capone?**

America's most famous gangster, Al Capone, lived his final years in the most unpleasant of circumstances: long stints in prison and fighting dementia caused by syphilis. In 1939, recently released from Alcatraz, Capone made his way to Baltimore for medical treatment, intending to go to Johns Hopkins. But officials there, fully aware of Capone's reputation, denied his admittance. So he ended up at Union Memorial, about four miles north, where Hopkins doctors with admitting privileges could attend him there.

Hopkins officials made the right call; once installed at Union Memorial, Capone took over an entire floor and installed bodyguards and, terrified of being poisoned, food tasters. He stayed for five weeks and then recuperated in a private home in Pimlico. But as a show of appreciation to Union Memorial, the only hospital that would take him, Capone donated two weeping cherry trees. One was removed during a hospital expansion in the 1950s. But the other remains to this day, albeit split in half by a 2010 snowstorm. The felled wood was turned into a series of new objects, such as bowls and wine stoppers and sold at auction as part of a hospital fundraiser.

But in the spirit of a gift that keeps on giving, multiple cherry trees—dubbed “Caponettes” and each a descendant of the original two—are showcased around the hospital campus.

Sidebar: Capone had been to Baltimore before, working as a bookkeeper in the 1920s for the Aiello family in the rowhouse that is today the wonderful Dipasquale's Market in Highlandtown.

Information Box:

Union Memorial Cherry Trees

What: Cherry trees donated by Al Capone

Where: Hospital: 201 East University Parkway, Oakenshawe

Cost: None

Pro Tip: The location of the original cherry tree is near the hospital's East 33rd Street entrance. (Other city locations to see cherry blossoms in clusters: at Morgan State University; the neighborhood of Guilford; Druid Hill Park, near the Latrobe Pagoda; and on the 1600 block of Appleton Street, in West Baltimore).

## #70 POOL NO. 2

### Why do those ladders lead to dirt?

Baltimore has a tortured history with segregation and integration. While the city officially began integration years before *Brown vs. the Board of Education* and saw civil rights protests much earlier than many other major cities, in some very real and visible respects segregation continues in much of the city, a legacy of redlining and other historical initiatives designed to keep the races separate and wealth concentrated in the hands of whites at the expense of non-whites.

For the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, city parks were still segregated, so Druid Hill Park had a separated “Negro Section,” an area with tennis courts, a playground, and “Pool No. 2.” While six city-run pools, including nearby Pool No. 1, catered to whites, Pool No. 2 was the only one for the city's hundreds of thousands of African-American residents. The pool, 105 feet by 100 feet—with a paltry deep end of only seven-and-a-half feet—saw between 600 and 1,200 visitors a day during the summer. Originally constructed more than a hundred



years ago, the pool still stands today, but in the form of public, haunting, and little-known, art. The pool itself is filled with dirt and covered in grass, while the pool's apparatuses—lifeguard chairs, ladders, diving board scaffolding—remain, painted in bright blue. Ringing the site are artworks in paint and tile, executed in the 1990s by local artist Joyce J. Scott. The bathhouses are also still standing.

Sidebar: Writing about a 1948 integrated tennis match at Druid Hill, where blacks and whites played together in protest and subsequently got roughed up by the cops, the great H. L. Mencken wrote: “The public parks are supported by the taxpayer, including the colored taxpayer, for the health and pleasure of the whole people. Why should cops be sent into them to separate those people against their will into separate herds? Why should the law set up distinctions and discriminations which the persons directly affected themselves reject?” By 1956, all of the city parks, including Druid Hill and its pools, were fully integrated.

Information Box:

Druid Hill old pool

What: a once-segregated pool, now powerful open-air art

Where: Shop and Commissary Roads, Druid Hill Park

Cost: None

Pro Tip: The Druid Hill Park pool still operates today, with a standard summer season. It's a bargain at \$2 per-person admission. It's located just north of the northeastern side of the lake, off East Drive.