

Baltimore Evening Sun
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The Pimlico Road

If the Census Bureau, when it comes to publish its preliminary returns, gives Baltimore a population of anything less than 750,000, it will take a lot of argument to convince most Baltimoreans that the enumerators who fared among us in April counted every nose.

New Towns Spring Up

The enormous growth of the city during the past ten years has been visible to all. Whole towns have sprung up in the outskirts—some of them, true enough, across the city line and so beyond the reach of the city enumerators, but just as many well within the borders. In the Northeastern section miles and miles of new streets have been opened, and hundreds, and perhaps even thousands of new dwellings have been built. Further south, in the Patterson Park neighborhood, there has been almost equal development, and in the West End the building boom has been actually greater.

Steuart's Hill ran down to Fulton Avenue 13 or 16 years ago. Today the old hill is invisible and forgotten, and the stockyards of Calverton with it, and solid rows of two-story houses run out to the dog pound and along Baltimore Street nearly to the railroad. In Southwest Baltimore the new houses have crept toward the cat-tails south of Carroll Park and out along the Frederick Road to the Falls and beyond. In the Northwestern section, south of North Avenue, fully 20 miles of new streets have been opened; and north of the park a town of probably 5,000 inhabitants has sprung up along the Pimlico Road.

The official appellation of the Pimlico Road is Park Heights Avenue, but old-timers still give it its ancient and more appropriate and euphonious name. Twenty-five years ago it was a somewhat dark and tortuous country pike. Then came the great bicycle craze of the late '80s, and as if with one voice the devotees of the wheel selected the Pimlico road as their favorite speedway. Upon their demand it was leveled, widened and macadamized. Road houses were opened here and there, and on every fair day it was alive with wheelmen.

The scenery it offered was scarcely attractive—the Green Spring Avenue road, half a mile to the eastward, was and is vastly its superior in that respect—but it was almost level and it led to other level roads farther out, and so the wheelmen were devoted to it. On hot summer nights the lights of the bicycle lamps danced upon it like swarms of fire-flies. Standing at the bend just above the park, one could sometimes see fully a thousand of them along the easy grade leading down from Gordon's.

But no more! The bicycle is extinct. The Pimlico Road is now given over to automobiles. And its old, open-air spaciousness is gone, too, for its sides are lined today by long rows of brick houses, most of them set cheek by jowl, like houses in the city proper. They run all the way out to Halsted's old roadhouse (today a vaudeville theatre), and even beyond. The noble wood that

once stood on the west side of the road, just south of Belvedere Avenue, is now the site of a thriving town, with stores, sewers and back alleys. When the first cottages were built in that wood, along about 1895, it was proposed to turn it into a sort of forest suburb like the western half of Roland Park. But the eager demand for space to build has caused that plan to be abandoned. Part of the grove of ancient trees still stands and a dozen or more detached villas are hidden in it, but the southward end has been given to the ax, and solid blocks of two-story cottages are going up. Even along Belvedere Avenue there are long rows of brick houses.

It is Now In The City

The Pimlico Road, indeed, has become a prosaic city street and before long, no doubt, its dusty macadam will give way to asphalt and it will have its garages and its moving-picture parlors. There is a city engine house out there already, not to mention a public school, and half a dozen drug stores, banana stands and neighborhood department stores give an urban air to the new town. There is even an apartment house!

The most pretentious houses on the new Pimlico Road are on the east side, just south of Fifth Avenue. They are semidetached villas, built two and two, with gardens before and behind and air spaces between. Each has a large front porch and upon the railing of practically every porch in the block there are two or more shiny brass flower pots. In all, there must be fully 100 such pots in the block. They give the row a certain arresting individuality, and they testify incidentally to the residents' love of flowers. There are more flowers in the front yards and side yards, and still more in the back yards. Altogether it is a pretty and home-like block, peopled by folk who seem as they take the air in the evening to be enjoying life.

Where Asphalt Is Needed

But, doubtless, they would be even more content if there were not so much dust in their eyes and in their hair, raiment, upholstery and victuals. The passing automobiles raise great clouds from dawn to midnight. Oil has been spread upon the roadway in the hope of abating the nuisance, but apparently it has brought little relief. At all events, the Pimlico Road is still atrociously dusty on dry days. But that will not be for long. In a few years its rural macadam will be displaced by asphalt or vitrified bricks or bitulithic or wooden blocks or something of that sort, and the nuisance of today will cease to annoy.

Even as it is, the dust is not bad enough to disguise the purity of the air out there. The Pimlico Road at Belvedere Avenue is 500 feet above tidewater, or about twice as high as the top of the Washington Monument in Mount Vernon Square. That means pure air and cool air. The average temperature in fact is probably 15 degrees lower than that of the city, particularly in the evening. If you don't believe it get aboard a Linden Avenue car at Charles and Baltimore streets on some sweltering summer night and note how much cooler you will feel after Druid Hill Park falls behind. The whole Pimlico Plateau, indeed, is distinguished for its salubrity. The nights are always cool out there, even during the worst part of the summer.

The Deck At Electric Park

The very coolest spot within reach of Baltimore is the deck at Electric Park, more than 500 feet above the level of the harbor. Mount Washington, Roland Park and all of the other

suburbs to the eastward are considerably lower, and so are Walbrook and parts of Forest Park. Ten or twelve years ago that deck was crowded to the rails every night. It was the nearest approach to a real German summer garden that Baltimore could boast. Herr Kappelmeister Fisher's men played in a little bandstand, all Baltimore sat at the round tables and there was a lot of eating and drinking, sedate merrymaking, and informal visit from table to table.

But when a new management took over Electric Park the deck was closed and an effort was made to interest its old customers in flying-horses, switchbacks and infantile amusement devices. The effort failed. The old crowd stayed away.

Electric Park itself has given rise to a sizable little town. It is made up cream parlors, pop-corn emporiums, and fruit stands. These establishments line the north side of Belvedere Avenue, opposite the gate of the park, and the overflow of custom from across the road is apparently enough to make them prosperous. At all events, there is nothing poverty stricken about their appearance. One of them, in fact, is a quite elaborate place with huge plate glass windows, an ornate soda fountain and roaring bowling alleys, and it seems to be raking in the shekels with very profitable assiduity.

(Source: Iowa State University, Parks Media Center, Microfilm Collection)