

A Green Mount Cemetery tour guide keeps history alive

By Elizabeth Doerr
Baltimore City Paper • Last Updated: Feb 24, 2016 at 3:00 am



(Amanda Bowrosen/For City Paper)

"Betsy Patterson had some Kardashian in her," says Wayne Schaumburg as he points to the light gray, well-kept headstone of the daughter of one of Baltimore's historical patriarchs, William Patterson. His past-meets-present analogy—one of many that comes with his explanations on his tour of Green Mount Cemetery—refers to Ms. Patterson's love of spending her father's money on travel and other lavish activities. She might've fallen into the category of famous-for-being-famous during the early 19th century as well.

Schaumburg had just told the tale of how Ms. Patterson married Napoleon Bonaparte's younger brother, Jérôme Bonaparte, after meeting him at a gala for Baltimore's elite

while he was visiting the city on leave. After they were married, though, the French royals protested and recalled Jérôme back to France, forcing him to annul the marriage lest he be financially cut off from the royal family. But, having given birth to Jérôme's son, Betsy spent the rest of her life pining for her royal ex-husband and fighting for his family to acknowledge their son as royalty.

"See that her gravestone," says Schaumburg while framing it with his arms in Vanna White fashion, "still professes her love for Jérôme." The stone reads, "Sacred to the memory of Elizabeth, Daughter of William Patterson, and wife of Jérôme Bonaparte." At the bottom in italics, it states, "After life's fitful fever, she rests well."

"She loved him until the day she died at 94," Schaumburg says, almost wistfully. This story complete, he quickly moves on to the next headstone and the next story.

This is but one of the many stories Wayne Schaumburg tells on his tours. At 69 years old, he's been leading regular tours of the Green Mount Cemetery since 1985 when the now-closed Baltimore City Life Museums got him involved in volunteering. When the museums closed in 1997, he figured he'd see how long he could continue. "And now, merrily we roll along," he says, noting that two decades later, he's still going. As he jumps from story to story, his voice raises like a kid in a candy store. He isn't tired at all.

"Green Mount Cemetery is literally Baltimore's history," Schaumburg says. He doesn't just walk, he jaunts with an eager spring in his step, his thinning gray hair bouncing as we go along. He clearly has a love of the history and the city.

Growing up in Waverly, Schaumburg is Baltimore born and bred. He attended City College and then Towson State Teachers College where he turned his love of history into a career as a teacher. He taught social studies and history for almost four decades, first in Edmonson-Westside High School, then 16 years at Northern High School, and then the last two decades of his teaching career in Home and Hospital Services as a tele-teacher.

"One of the years," Schaumburg says, "I was asked to do an elective course—half a year on Maryland History, half a year on Baltimore history—so, that's how it all got started. I just began to collect information and realized there were no books on this. So, I had to create my own material."

His eyes and ears were always open for material, and when he saw that the Baltimore City Life Museums opened an exhibit on the Baltimore rowhouse, he was there. "It was probably the best exhibit they had done," he says. "I had grown up in a rowhouse, so I went down there to volunteer with them to give rowhouse tours and things went from there."

One Saturday, they asked him to help out on a Green Mount tour while their regular tour guide was away, and they had a substitute filling in. Although Schaumburg had only been to the cemetery itself once before, his knowledge of Baltimore history made an impression on the other guide because afterward he told Schaumburg he ought to lead tours there.

Schaumburg retired from teaching in the city schools in 2007, but he hasn't finished educating those who are interested about Baltimore history. He teaches continuing education classes at Notre Dame, Johns Hopkins, a variety of retirement homes and of course his tours (twice a year and private tours upon request) at the Green Mount Cemetery.

Schaumburg's knowledge and excitement about the history has proved a huge asset to the cemetery.

"It would take me years to come up to the standard of information that Wayne has," says Shawn Ward, superintendent of Green Mount Cemetery. "I'm interested in history, but he just has that wealth of information." Ward says Schaumburg's knowledge is unmatched and it allows them to focus more on keeping the cemetery beautiful while Schaumburg educates visitors.

In his 31 years of leading tours, Schaumburg says he's seen resurgence in interest around the Green Mount Cemetery since Station North's revitalization. "There are more people on Saturdays," he says. "They'll just walk over to check it out." He often leads specially designed tours upon request. One of his specialties is the Civil War tour. "There are over 20 commanders of the Civil War in there," Schaumburg says. He has a philanthropy tour that focuses on three of the "Big Four" as Schaumburg calls the historically important patriarchs of the city—Hopkins, Pratt, and Walters (the fourth, Peabody, is not buried at Green Mount)—among the many other philanthropists who had part in the creation of Baltimore as we know it today. In March, he'll be dedicating an entire tour to the famous women in the cemetery as a part of Women's History Month.

Schaumburg is pleased to see this renewed interest, especially from tourists. Baltimore, particularly recently, has gotten a bad rap and visitors can see firsthand when they come here that it's not all what they see in the media. He thinks Green Mount is a great starting point, not only to learn about Baltimore history, but to understand the treasures he feels Baltimore has: recreation, historical sites, parks, museums, educational institutions.

His way of showing people around Baltimore—through dead people— isn't maybe what most Baltimore residents would do, but Schaumburg sees the charming quirks of the city reflected in the cemetery. It's both a beautiful park and a link to the history.

At one stop, he illustrates this perfectly.

"Now this is really exciting," Schaumburg says as he almost skips toward a fairly new gravestone. "Look at this and tell me what you think it looks like," he says, gesturing at the familiarly arranged alphabet. "It's the Ouija board! It was born in Baltimore." Schaumburg is pointing at Elijah Bond's grave, the Ouija board patentee. The headstone is new because until 2007, Bond's posthumous whereabouts were mostly a mystery. But Robert Murch, a paranormal enthusiast, helped find the grave and mark it appropriately with a Ouija-inspired headstone.

Schaumburg loves pointing out the lesser-known details of the cemetery, and thus of Baltimore history. Details like this are how Schaumburg sees the uniqueness of Baltimore. These historical charms, manifested within a beautifully manicured cemetery, are his way of showing people what Baltimore's about.

"There's so much character here," he says. "People just gotta get to know us."

Originally Published: Feb 23, 2016 at 12:55 pm