

The **MONTABELLO** Voice

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Photos on this page and the cover by Don Savage



The **MONTEBELLO** **Voice**
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an independent gazette
Alexandria, Virginia

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Visitor

By Donna Fowler

Tiny creature on my balcony.
I see you seeing me.
I see your fear – and your curiosity.
You're welcome here.
Gentle moves, all brittle bones and feathers,
But what feats you master!
Building a new home every year.
Falling straight for eight stories,
Dropping, wings furled, a dark oval aimed at the earth.
Just in time, a stretch – and flight.
You have places to go, children to feed.
I do not.
Please stay awhile, I whispered.



Eeny, meeny, miny, moe – catch an “Indie” by the toe

Publishing today and my journey as an independent author

By Rebecca Long Hayden

You’re watching a popular TV show, the kind with lots of intrigue among people who don’t own telephones, as demonstrated by how frequently they “drop by” the homes of other characters.

There’s a pretty young thing called Smith or Grayson, just divorced or widowed, with/without a child, and she laments her lack of direction/vocation/paycheck. Her mother/sister/boyfriend reads a letter she wrote to the editor of her community newspaper. “Wow. This is good! You should be a writer!” says one-of-the-above.

Smith writes a novel, sends it into the mist of fame and fortune, and a week later she has an agent. Another week, and she has a publisher and a \$20,000 advance. *Voilà*, a best-selling author is born.

Except that never happens.

What? You saw an author interviewed on the Today Show, being congratulated for her whopping big advance on her first novel? Right. I saw that. The person in question was the daughter-in-law of a famous politician (that wasn’t mentioned in the interview). It doesn’t make the book unworthy, but it does guarantee an agent or publisher will read the manuscript placed in their hands by the famous father-in-law.

The truth is, many, even most, fiction manuscripts by new writers will be rejected without being read. Agents reject unread manuscripts for numerous reasons, the most common being they already have five novels by first-time writers which they can’t sell to a publisher.

I don’t claim to have done serious research, but I consulted more than one

source regarding the odds of a fiction writer getting published. Here’s the statistics.

✍️ Non-fiction dominates the charts with 88 percent of the yearly published titles. Only 11 percent goes to fiction, and one percent goes to poetry. Further, a healthy slice of that 11 percent goes to established writers and even celebrities trying their hand at novel-writing.

✍️ There were 789 million print

Thankfully, that’s passé, but what’s the next big thing? Who knows.

Note, the quality of the writing isn’t mentioned in that three-point list, and all three points are beyond the writer’s control. Still, I’m thrilled every time a new author beats the odds. A writer is defined as “one who writes.” I’ll cheer because we’re in the same club.

Here’s a summary of my journey as a writer.

✍️ I started writing in first grade. As

soon as I learned to put letters on paper, I penned a love poem to my neighbor’s poodle. I began writing as an avocation in my mid-40s by setting myself a test. I wrote two short stories and submitted them to literary magazines, knowing that of hundreds of submissions, between 85 and 95 per cent are rejected. Both my stories were accepted and published. I proved two points to myself. I was good enough to get published, and I don’t like writing short stories.

✍️ I read about writing techniques, structure and plot, character development and setting. I read about query letters, summaries, agent searches, and publishers.

✍️ I took classes in creative writing.

✍️ I found a mentor, a professor of literature at a major university, senior editor at a respected local publisher, and a published writer herself. She invited me to join her invitation-only creative writing class. It would take the rest of my life to tell you how much I learned from her, but the truest thing was this: Write because you love it.

As I wrote my first book, I considered the four alternatives:



books sold in 2022 in the U.S. in all categories combined, both fiction and nonfiction (*Publishers Weekly*, January 9, 2023). The average book sells less than 300 copies over its lifetime.

✍️ The driving force in publishing today is marketability. Will it sell? That means the book must be on-trend, which becomes ever harder to predict. A few years ago, it was vampires.

Plan 1 (Eeny)

Don't write it. This would have been the front runner, except if you're a writer, you're a writer. You can't help it. I'm a writer. I can't help it.

Plan 2 (Meeny) Dedicate one to three years to write the book, six months to a year (usually more) to find an agent, then another year (again, optimistic) in hopes your agent will find a publisher, then another year or two for the book to finally make that year's publication list. This kind of data is hard to pin down—for instance, it took J.D. Salinger 10 years to write *The Catcher in the Rye*. I had my last book, *The Murder of Maggie May Slipper*, a thriller, in my head for 30 years. I wrote two other books while mulling over *Maggie*.

The point is, that's four to six years. At my age, I could be dead by then. So should you ignore the odds and go for it? I would enthusiastically encourage any writer to do so. Lightning does strike, but know the odds.

Plan 3 (Miny)

A combination. Write it, while trying to find an agent, with self-publishing as the backup. This requires more effort than you might imagine. Every agent wants something different, but all want a cover letter containing something new, fresh, and different, followed by a summary and/or a synopsis. If you get that far, they request some or part of your novel (only if it's complete). That's called a "request for a full." I got several such requests, sent the "full," and in six to eight months, got a rejection. The reasons had nothing to do with quality, and I found the process harder than writing the book!

Plan 4 (Moe)

Become an independent author, or Indie, as we prefer. Sue Crafton (the *M is for Murder* series) started with a major publishing house, but later became an Indie. She died in 2017 with a net worth of \$75 million. So far, my next worth from writing is less than that.



Way less.

I chose Plan 4 (Moe). Here's why:

👉 If you have the stamina and follow-through to write it, your book can be published within weeks of completion. It will be read by the people you care about, friends, relatives, and neighbors. Given the low sales numbers of books published traditionally, there's a chance you will sell as many books as traditionally published authors (I have).

👉 You can spend very little money if you can manage the mechanics. I'm no whiz, but I did my first book on my own, *Tuesday in Texas*, a memoir with photographs. Photos made it harder; straight text is pretty easy. However, for the next two books, I paid for cover design, manuscript formatting, and uploading.

👉 No money goes to an agent or publisher. Whatever you make is shared by you, a printing firm, and Jeff Bezos (by far the biggest share). Because of the dominance of Amazon, a writer can't ignore KDP (Kindle Direct Publishing), the publishing arm of Amazon. If I sell a book for \$19, I receive between \$3 and \$10, depending on the format (paperback or Kindle). And be prepared. Relatives will hint that you should graciously give them a free copy. Remind them. You don't have any free copies. If you want to stock your book, you will have to buy copies.

I hope I've debunked two prevailing myths about publishing.

👉 "If the book is good, you'll find an agent who will sell it to a big publishing house and you will make big money, write another book, make even more money." I've told you why that's not necessarily true.

👉 "Anyone can self-publish a book." Anyone? Even Amazon KDP won't

accept gibberish, and they have pages of guidelines about what they will/won't accept. The biggest obstacle to writing a book is this: you have to actually write it. If you think

that's easy, take my word for it. It isn't.

So please, dear readers, don't dismiss books by independent authors. Evaluate the book exactly as you would in a bookstore. You look at the cover, then the name, then the genre. You pick it up and read the back cover, and perhaps a few pages. If you like it, you buy it.

When you're in the electronic bookstore, do the same.

👉 If the cover catches your eye, click on the book

👉 Read the blurb, but be cautious. This is limited by space.

👉 It's best to read a few pages. You'll know if the writing is good.

👉 Read the reviews. Reviews offer insight into the nature of the work.

Am I happy with my choice to be an Indie? More than I ever imagined. A member of my Montebello Writers Group, also an Indie, put it something like this:

To paraphrase: *I was at an event with other writers, and the conversation, the vibe in the room, the sense of camaraderie and fellowship – I realized this was what it's about. I'm an author among other authors, and the satisfaction in that was over-whelming. I felt happy.*

That's exactly how I feel about being an Indie. I feel happy. 📖

Rebecca Long Hayden, a member of the Montebello Writers Group, is the author of three books, all available on Amazon

Tuesday in Texas – memoir

The Second Life of Brencie Jessup – historical fiction

The Murder of Maggie May Slipper – mystery/thriller

IN THE REALM OF MEMORIES

14 LINES

By *Mikhailina Shrifteilik Karina*

My father used to tell me about his revolutionary aunt who spent time in Siberian prisons. Like all family stories, information about her was devoid of facts or details. Except for the story of the shawl. According to family lore, she was in a frigid prison cell wrapped in her Orenburg shawl when the guards started to fire at her. The thickness of the shawl stopped the bullets and saved her life. Allegedly, the shawl with the bullet holes is on display at a museum.

Like many family stories, this one is full of holes – similar to the purported shawl. World-famous Orenburg shawls, knitted from the yarn made of down from a special breed of goats native to the area, are as airy and transparent as most delicate spider webs. Even the thicker ones are not bullet-proof. The truth may be as thin as the shawl, but each thread leads to new discoveries about the Russian Empire in the early 1900s and the fascinating cast of ideal-



Police photos from the 1902 arrest in Kyiv

istic young revolutionaries who wanted what is still lacking in today's Russian Federation: human rights, personal freedom, democracy, impartial criminal justice system, and non-authoritarian government. Immersing myself into their liberal ideals, reading their speeches, and following their life journeys from prison to congress to exile to whatever Soviet fate they encountered filled me with enormous awe and respect for young men and women who zealously believed in a better future for Russia. I learned about Bundists, social democrats, ESers, and other flavors of revolutionaries who were eventually annihilated by the Bolsheviks and their communist sycophants.

The revolutionary aunt's name was Pesya Bentsionovna Shrifteilik. She was my father's great-aunt who later

changed her name to Nesya and sometimes went by Polina, Polosataya, or Prokudinskaya. My search for her story began with a single paragraph, full of abbreviations, in a 1924 book published by the Society of Political Prisoners and Exiles that listed Tsarist-era revolutionaries. On yellowing paper, her entry reads in Russian:

Shrifteilik, Nesya Bentsianovna – Jewish, seamstress; born in 1881 in Starokonstantinov, Volyn gubernia; educated at home. In 1896 member of the Russian Social Democrat Labor Party (RSDRP) under the name “Pesya,” worked in the library of illegal literature. Arrested in January 1897 and sent home. In 1897-98 worked in Kishinev with RSDRP. From 1898-1900 worked in Odessa in the Southern-Russian workers group of RSDRP. Arrested in early 1900 in Odessa, spent 1 ½ in administrative detention, sent for 3 years to Kishinev. In Kishinev arrested during a demonstration and sent for five years to Yakutsk oblast. In Yakutsk arrested in 1904 for participating in the “Romanov protest” and sentenced to 12 years of hard labor in August 1904 for violating articles 263 and 268 of the criminal code. Imprisoned in the

Шрифтелики, Неся Бенциановна; еврейка; род. в 1881 г. в Старо-Константиновке, Волыньск. губ.; образов. домашнее. В 1896 г. была чл Одесск. группы СД, под кличкой «Песя» работала в библиотеке нелегальн. литературы. Арест. в янв. 1897 г. и была выслана на родину. В 1897—98 г. работала в Кишиневск. группе СД. В 1898—1900 г. работала в Одесск. организ. РСДРП, в Южно-Русск. раб. группе. Арест. в начале 1900 г. в Одессе, сидела 1½ г. и была админ. сослана на 3 г. в Кишинев. В Кишиневе была арест. за демонстрацию и сослана админ. на 5 лет в Якутск. обл. Арест. в Якутске в 1904 г. как участница «Романовского протеста» и осуждена в авг. 1904 г. Якутск. О. С. п 263 и 268 ст. УН на 12 лет каторги. Сидела в Александровск. центре и освобождена амнистией в окт. 1905 г. Беспарт. Чл. бил. № 1116.

Entry in the Society of Political Prisoners and Exiles directory



Группа „романовцев“ и защитники в Якутской тюрьме.

Aleksander centrale and released with an October 1905 amnesty. No party affiliation. Society member number 1116.

This blurb of mere 14 lines was a starting point with dates, city names, and historical events that sent me on a thrilling historical quest to piece together the details about each nugget of information. I read several books about the Romanovka protest – she’s mentioned in a couple of them – that led me to compile a who’s who list of her comrades. Because she left just one written document about her life, I had to infer what she believed and accomplished by reading her comrades’ narratives and the revolutionary literature published during her time.

Pesya’s life mirrored the tumultuous end of 19th and beginning of 20th century in the Russian Empire. She often found herself in the thick of historical events, affiliated with prominent revolutionaries, audaciously supporting their righteous causes. I read about her activities in Odessa and Kishinev, more accounts replete with names and facts. Kyiv archives sent me a single page with Pesya’s elegant arrest photos taken in a photography studio. And finally, my biggest coup was receiving three dozen pages from the St. Petersburg archives

that include her brief hand-written autobiography and an official document with a roster of her crimes and punishments, followed by more pages from the Moscow archives with detailed reports during her “public supervision.” The latter described a pre-1917 punishment for individuals “harmful for public peace,” which was a repressive measure for people belonging to revolutionary organizations whose residency and employment were severely restricted. One of the documents is a detailed report of her being followed around downtown



Cover of the 1911 police file that includes the details of her physical appearance and clothing

The Romanovtsy protesters and defenders in Yakutsk prison in 1904. Pesya, in white, is on the left in the middle row.

Petersburg as she went about her day and met with people.

The title of this narrative comes from her own words in a typed 1926 addendum to the application for membership in the Society for Former Political Prisoners and Exiles in Leningrad (Soviet-era name of St. Petersburg).

“In my autobiography, I did not write about my life after 1905 because I don’t consider it has any relevance to my case. I served my hard labor sentence until 1905, which gives me the right to be a member of the association. After 1905, I was not imprisoned, which is why I consider my revolutionary work before and after prison to be in the realm of memories. I’ve been working on my memoir for a long time, but unfortunately, it’s moving slowly due to the lack of time and talent to write.”

It’s interesting that she considered her life after 1905, when she was only 24, to be irrelevant and uneventful. By this time in 1926, she’d lived through imprisonment in Western Siberia, receiving a medal for her medical services at a hospital during World War I, the violent upheavals of the 1917 Revolution and its subsequent Civil War (she was spared horrific years of pogroms and famine in Ukraine), and Stalin’s takeover as the head of state. The worst was yet to come with the Great Terror and World War II, when she’d perish, at 62, from hunger during the blockade of Leningrad. Pesya’s elegant phrase about the realm of memories inspired me not to let her memories vanish in the immense dust heap of history. While I may not have the talent to do her story justice, I certainly have the time to honor her memory. 📖

Mikhailina Karina is a member of the Montebello Writers Group

Project 2025 and public education:

What you need to know

By Kristen Amundson

At the Heritage Foundation dinner in 2022, Donald Trump [said](#), “This is a great group & they’re going to lay the groundwork & detail plans for exactly what our movement will do ... when the American people give us a colossal mandate to save America.”

You have been hearing more about Project 2025 as the election draws closer. This 920-page document was developed by the Heritage Foundation as a Mandate for Leadership for the next “conservative” administration. You can read it all [Project 2025](#).

Since it was released, however, the Trump campaign has tried to distance itself from the report. That’s been a challenge, because at least 140 former Trump administration officials worked on developing Project 2025.

The far-reaching document includes four major sections:

- ✓ A policy guide for the next presidential administration
- ✓ A database of personnel who could serve in the next administration (think LinkedIn)
- ✓ An online training academy for those candidates known as the Presidential Administration Academy
- ✓ A playbook of actions to be taken within the first 180 days in office.

Project 2025 covers every area of federal policy, but as a former member of the Fairfax County School Board, including two years as its chair, the

focus of this article will be on the proposed changes to education policy. The first sentence in Project 2025 calls for eliminating the U.S. Department of Education. But that doesn’t begin to describe the real goal, which is to underfund and undermine public schools and dismantle them. Specifically:

Eliminate Title 1

On pages 325-6, Project 2025 proposes to “*Transfer Title I, Part A, which provides federal funding for lower-income school districts, to the Department of Health and Human Services, specifically the Administration for Children and Families. It should be administered as a no-strings-attached formula block grant. Restore revenue responsibility for Title I funding to the states over a 10-year period.*”

Since its passage in 1965, Title I has been the primary way the federal government provides additional support to low-income children. Today, roughly 21 million children receive extra educational services – smaller class sizes, extra math or reading – through Title I. For our neighboring schools in the Route One area, Title I funding has been critical to meeting the needs of our diverse students.

Eliminate Head Start

Page 482. “*Eliminate the Head Start program.*”

Since 1965, Head Start has provided early learning opportunities for children of low-income families before they enter kindergarten. Since that time, researchers have followed Head Start children and have found that even 25 years later, Head Start makes a difference.

The participants in this preschool program:

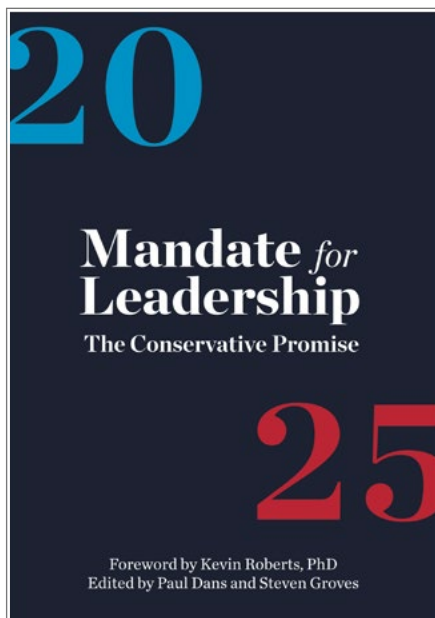
- ✓ Were more likely to graduate from high school on time
- ✓ Had higher rates of college attendance
- ✓ Worked in higher-paying jobs
- ✓ Were less likely ever to have been arrested
- ✓ Had lower rates of substance abuse.

Head Start children whose parents had not graduated from high school have even larger advantages from participating in this program.

Cut school meal programs and eliminate summer food programs

Page 303. “*Reject efforts to create universal free school meals.*”

Federal meal programs are administered through the U.S. Department of Agriculture. Any student whose family income falls below 185 percent of the federal poverty level is eligible to receive meals either free or at a reduced rate.



Household Size	Maximum Household Income For Free Meals	Household Income For Reduced-Price Meals
1	\$18,954	\$18,954.01 - \$26,973
2	\$25,636	\$25,636.01 - \$36,482
3	\$32,318	\$32,318.01 - \$45,991
4	\$39,000	\$39,000.01 - \$55,500
5	\$45,682	\$45,682.01 - \$65,009

Here's a chart showing the income requirements to receive free or reduced-price meals:

However, in recent years school districts have been given an option. If at least 40 percent of their students qualify, districts can declare "community eligibility" and provide free meals to all students. This has reduced the stigma and paperwork many students and families have faced in the past.

In our area, the following schools provide free meals to all students:

- Bucknell Elementary
- Cameron Elementary
- Groveton Elementary
- Hollin Meadows Elementary
- Hybla Valley Elementary
- Mount Eagle Elementary
- Mount Vernon Woods Elementary
- Riverside Elementary
- Washington Mill Elementary
- Woodlawn Elementary
- Woodley Hills Elementary

Project 2025 wants to return to the old standard.

Eliminate Funding to Public Schools

The Project 2025 philosophy is outlined on page 319:

Elementary and secondary education policy should follow the path outlined by Milton Friedman in 1955, wherein education is publicly funded but education decisions are made by families. Ultimately, every parent should have the option to direct his or her child's share of education funding through an education savings account (ESA), funded overwhelming-

ly by state and local taxpayers, which would empower parents to choose a set of education options that meet their child's unique needs.

We know what will happen if ESAs replace the use of general fund dollars for public schools. Consider the example of Arizona. In 2022-23, the Arizona legislature allowed any family to apply for an ESA voucher. Here is what has happened:

- ✓ ESA vouchers are on track to cost Arizona over \$900 million in their second year (2023-24). **This cost is nearly 1400% higher than projected.**
- ✓ Costs for 2023-24 are on track to exceed their budget by \$300 million (nearly 50%); Arizona lacks a revenue surplus to cover these costs and faces a separate \$400 million deficit.

✓ Universal ESA vouchers are primarily being used by families who had already chosen private schooling options and were already able to afford these options; these vouchers represent an entirely new cost to the state.

✓ Perhaps most insidious, parents who receive an ESA voucher must sign away federal protections, including rights under the federal statute that guarantees children with disabilities a Free and Appropriate Public Education (FAPE).

Recently, candidate Trump has been saying, "I know nothing about Project 2025." Perhaps he is truly unaware of what's included in this blueprint.

But the rest of us do not have that luxury. The Heritage Foundation is already recruiting and vetting activists to put the policies into action starting on the first day of a new administration. As voters, we owe it to ourselves to know what is being proposed for a new administration before we head to the polls. 🗳️

Kris Amundson, a member of the Montebello Writers Group, served on the Fairfax County School Board for nearly a decade, including two years as its chair. She served in the Virginia General Assembly for 10 years and was the CEO of the National Association of State Boards of Education. She is currently working on her third book about families and education.



Visitors to pollinator garden

Photos by Marcy Shaffer
September 2024

La Madonna della Pietà

By Joe de Angelis



The theme that we know today as a Pietà first appeared in Germany circa 1300, where such images were referred to as *Vesperbild* (Images for Vesper or evening prayers). Such renderings emphasized Christ's bleeding wounds before, during and after his crucifixion. Christ's body lying across his mourning mother's knees is not mentioned anywhere in the Bible; however, during the Middle Ages, this scene was cited as one of the Seven Sorrows of the Blessed Virgin Mary. These images quickly became popular and spread across northern Europe and into France and became known by their German nomenclature as *Andachtsbilder* (Devotional Images).

In France, these images enjoyed great popularity through the 14th and 15th centuries. Depictions of the Virgin Mary's lamentation over the dead body of her son Jesus Christ reached Italy in the 1400s and eventually be-

came known as a Pietà.

The La Madonna della Pietà or Nostra Signora della Pietà, commonly known as La Pietà, is a marble sculpture of Jesus and Mary at Mount Golgotha after Jesus's death on the cross. The sculpture captures the moment when Jesus, having been taken down from the cross, is given to his mother, Mary.

Pietà, meaning "pity" in Italian, is the name given to this world-famous sculpture created by Michelangelo di Lodovico Buonarroti Simoni, known mononymously as Michelangelo (1475-1564). He was only 23 years old when he received a commission from French Cardinal Jean Bilhères de Lagrulas, the French king's envoy to the Vatican, to create "the most beautiful work of marble in Rome." The sculpture, a life-size statue of the Virgin Mary holding the dead body of her son in her arms, was to be for the Cardinal's funeral monument in his burial chapel in the

Chapel of the French Kings in Old St. Peter's Basilica in Rome.

Looking at the larger, historical, and political picture, one must wonder what was the connection between a French Cardinal, an Italian sculptor, and the Pietà? The answer is to be found in the historical relationship between France and the Holy See.

Going back to the first or third century, depending on your source, we find that a virgin martyr named Petronilla is the linchpin connecting France and the Holy See. Petronilla was the legendary daughter of St. Peter and of France, and is traditionally referred to as the "eldest daughter of Holy Mother Church." She was martyred for refusing to sacrifice her virginity by marrying Flaccus, a pagan king. In 757 AD her remains were transferred to what later became the Chapel of the Kings of France, in Old St. Peter's Basilica, where Pepin and Charlemagne were buried.

Petronilla's association with the French crown, at least after the year 800, appears to have its genesis in the fact that Charlemagne and Carloman were considered St. Peter's adopted sons. St. Petronilla, as the supposed daughter of St. Peter, became their patroness, as well as the patroness of the treaties concluded between the Holy See and the Frankish emperors.

The relics of Saint Petronilla are now beneath the altar in the chapel Pope Paul V built in 1623 in St. Peter's Basilica. Circa 1690, Pope Alexander VIII officially acknowledged the chapel as *Capella del Re di Francia* (Chapel of the French Kings). Henceforth, the chapel stood as a symbol for the privileged filiation of the French monarchy and Church and for their allegiance to the papacy. Today, the chapel Pope Paul V built is the French National Chapel and mass is celebrated there every year on Saint Petronilla's feast day, 31 May. The mass is attended by the

French community in Rome to include the French ambassador.

As for the Pietà, it is noteworthy and unique in that the scene focuses on the Virgin Mary holding her dead son, Jesus. This image originated in Germany and migrated to France during the Middle Ages. Paintings of the Virgin Mary holding Jesus became especially popular in France, apparently since devotion to the Virgin Mary was extremely intense at that time.



Michelangelo, insisting on the highest quality marble, spent November and December 1497 personally looking for the perfect block of Carrara marble from in the Polvaccio quarry. He then personally oversaw the transport of the 6x6x3-foot block of marble to Rome where he transformed it into the world's greatest sculpture. Michelangelo's finished Pietà stood 5.9 feet high and 6.4 feet wide.

From a political prospective, it should be noted that King Charles VIII of France married Anne of Brittany on 6 December 1491 and in 1495 he tasked Cardinal Jean Bilhères de Lagraulas, his envoy to the Vatican, "to enlist papal support for the king's marriage to Anne of Brittany, heiress to the kingdom of Naples." However, Cardinal de Bilhères was unsuccessful in his effort to gain papal support and Charles VIII, acting out of frustration, invaded Naples. This was the beginning of the Italian Wars that exacerbated the political climate between France and the Holy See.

In 1498 France's new King, Louis XII, was intent on amending France's relationship with the Holy See. To this end he orchestrated the marriage of Charlotte d'Albret, a wealthy French noblewoman, and the son of Pope Alexander VI, Cesare Borgia. Louis XII succeeded in this endeavor and Charlotte d'Albret and Cesare Borgia were married on 10 May 1499.

The political nature of Cardinal de Bilhères is critical to understand the commission of the Vatican Pietà. Michelangelo's commission to sculpt a Pietà was the culmination of a political reconnection to the Vatican by France. To wit, there was a sculpture of a typically French theme of a Pietà, carved from Italian marble, commissioned by a French cardinal, to an Italian artist, to be placed in a French space within an Italian basilica. This mingling of French and Italian influence made

Michelangelo's Pietà a symbolic reaffirmation of France's presence in Rome. Additionally, the Pietà was to be displayed during the jubilee year of 1500 when thousands of Christians from across Europe would flock to St. Peter's Basilica in Rome. For French pilgrims especially, the Pietà would be a very familiar and recognizable theme. The most critical element of the sculpture's Frenchness was its location in the Chapel of Santa Petronilla in the Chapel of the French Kings in Old St. Peter's Basilica.

Jacopo Galli, a banker, interceded on Michelangelo's behalf acting as an intermediary in negotiating the contract for the statue, which was signed on 26 May 1498. According to Michelangelo, he received 450 ducats for the Pietà, which is approximately \$75,000 in U.S. dollars today. Such an amount was a sizable sum for the time, especially considering that Michelangelo was a very young and unknown artist.

Michelangelo wanted to express a particular emotion through his sculpture. His aesthetic interpretation and approach to his Pietà was unprecedented in Italian sculpture. First of all it balanced the Renaissance ideals of classical beauty with naturalism. Second, it was a composition comprised of two intermingled figures. Michelangelo also departed from the traditional display of violence and suffering by depicting both figures as serene and accepting of their fate. This is most evident by the smooth and polished body of Jesus and the wounds from the nails that are barely visible.

In less than two years Michelangelo carved one of the most magnificent sculptures ever created. A composition composed of two figures, one holding the body of the other, presented the difficult proposition of creating a realistic and balanced structure that would allow Mary to support the body of an adult man. Michelangelo's solution was to use draped cloth or robes around the lower half of the sculpture, thereby creating a structure that would support Jesus' body in his mother's lap. The two figures were carved as a unified composition forming the shape of a triangle or pyramid from Mary's head to the base of the statue. More noteworthy is the fact that Michelangelo, instead of depicting Mary as an old woman, made her young, beautiful, and serene.

In addition to personally picking out the perfect piece of marble, Michelangelo also made hundreds of sketches of his proposed Pietà before settling on the final design. Because it was a complex piece of two human figures entwined with one another, he had to figure out how they could best be supported and posed so as to render them compatible with the marble and real life. To aid in this effort he consulted a local carpenter and asked him to design a bench that would support the two figures as he had sketched them. When the bench was completed, Michelangelo made wax figures and experimented with their placement on the bench and with each other.

Wanting his work to be as real and as authentic as possible,

Michelangelo went to Rome's Jewish quarter and talked to the head Rabbi about sketching Jewish men for his statue. The Rabbi was reluctant at first, but when Michelangelo explained what the statue was and for whom it was being made and why, the Rabbi acquiesced and granted permission for young men to model for Michelangelo. Not long after, young Jewish men began showing up at Michelangelo's studio to pose for the Pietà. Michelangelo wanted his Christ to look as authentically Jewish as possible. The Jewish men, like the Rabbi, were very reluctant at first, but when they saw the results and purpose of Michelangelo's endeavor, they gladly consented. Jewish women, on the other hand, were not approved by the Rabbi and Michelangelo turned to his friend Jacopo Galli who introduced him to prominent Roman families. Many of their daughters consented to being sketched and Michelangelo's meticulous sketching resulted in the composite features of the faces of Mary and Jesus as well as the body of Jesus.

With the figures of Mary and Jesus positioned on the bench to his satisfaction, Michelangelo proceeded to conceal the bench under cloth, thereby lending more stability to the statue while main-

ture while adjusting the natural folds to his satisfaction. Michelangelo was very meticulous in rendering the drapery of Mary's dress. Likewise, Jesus's body is extremely detailed and smooth while the rock portion is rough and opaque.

Cardinal de Bilhères died on 6 August 1499 and was buried in the Chapel of the French Kings. Michelangelo finished his Pietà not long after the cardinal's death, however, he was concerned that his contract with Cardinal de Bilhères did not mention placing the statue in St. Peter's. Fearful that Pope Alexander VI would refuse its placement there, Michelangelo conferred with his friend Jacopo Galli. Working on the premise that it is easier to ask for forgiveness than to ask for permission, Galli recommended that they move the statue into St. Peter's under cover of night, speculating that once it was in place in the church, no one would bother to remove it.

arrive, but also several cousins, eight in all. Not allowing Michelangelo to touch the statue, the Guffattis wrapped the 10,000-pound sculpture in blankets and loaded it onto a wagon. Once the statue was secured they wheeled the cart through the streets of Rome under cover of darkness to Old St. Peter's. Upon arriving at the church they unloaded the statue and then carried it up the church steps to the Chapel of the Kings and placed it in the Chapel of St. Michael Archangel and St. Petronilla



taining its natural authenticity. To this end he bought some cheap cloth and draped it over the lower portion of the statue covering the bench and the lower half of Mary's body. Then he covered the cloth with mud to retain its struc-

politics. At Galli's suggestion, Michelangelo enlisted the help of his friend Guffatti from the stone yard to move the Pietà. Upon appraising the situation Guffatti simply said, "I bring the family." Not only did Guffatti's sons

Michelangelo was not very happy with this solution, but saw no other way if he did not want his statue to disappear in the abyss of Roman

where Cardinal de Bilhères was buried.

Unlike the statue of David that Michelangelo would eventually sculpt, the figures of his Pietà were of normal life-size proportions. Mary is depicted fully clothed while the dead body of her son, Jesus Christ, lying across her lap, is completely naked, except for a loincloth. The figure of Mary is vertical while the figure of Christ lies almost horizontally, suggesting the form of the cross. However, the structure of the Pietà is quite pyramidal: moving downward from the head of Mary, the figure progressively widens as it approaches the rock beneath the figures, which is the base of the sculpture. The gentle softness of the folds of the cloth is both a framework and a support for the entire sculpture. Jesus's face does not show any signs of his suffering. Mary's face is

serene with downcast eyes projecting a quiet stillness and an air of acceptance, while at the same time, her upturned left hand seems to be questioning why. The entire piece evokes a sense of sadness and compassion: in a word, pity.

The sculpture was so realistic that the completed statue, especially the draped cloth, looked more like actual cloth than marble mainly because of its multiplicity of natural looking folds, curves and deep recesses. As beautiful and magnificent as his Pietà was, Michelangelo was criticized by his detractors for having portrayed the Virgin Mary too young, arguing that she would have been around 50 years old because Jesus, her son, was 33 years old when he died and Mary's appearance should have reflect that relationship. Michelangelo responded that he deliberately portrayed her with a youthful face because the effects of time could not mar the virginal features of this, the most blessed of women. He added that a mother's face is also a symbol of eternal youth, and that he was also thinking of his own mother who died when he was only five years old.

In his later years Michelangelo explained Mary's youthful appearance to a biographer: "Do you not know that chaste women stay fresh much more than those who are not chaste? How much more in the case of the Virgin, who had never experienced the least lascivious desire that might change her body?" The fact that Mary was a virgin kept her young and beautiful was the exact sentiment Michelangelo wished to convey. Many art historians believe Michelangelo was also inspired by a passage from Dante Alighieri's *Divine Comedy*. "O virgin mother, daughter of your Son ... your merit so ennobled human nature that its divine Creator did not hesitate to become your creature." (*Paradiso*, Canto XXXIII).

One of the salient features of the Pietà is the ribbon across Mary's bosom, which is inscribed with Michelangelo's name. The inscription was not part of the original sculpture but was added later after another sculptor, Cristoforo

Solari, also known as *il Gobbo* (the hunchbacked), a contemporary and rival of Michelangelo, was given credit for the work.

The sixteenth century art historian Giorgi Vasari tells this tale in his book *Lives of the Most Excellent Painters, Sculptors, and Architects* and identifies the Pietà as the only sculpture that Michelangelo ever signed:

"Such were Michelangelo's love and zeal together in this work, that he left his name a thing that he never did again in any other work written across a girdle that encircles the bosom of Our Lady. And the reason was that one day Michelagnolo, entering the place where it was set up, found there a great



number of strangers from Lombardy, who were praising it highly, and one of them asked one of the others who had done it, and he answered, 'Our Gobbo from Milan.' Michelagnolo stood silent, but thought it something strange that his labors should be attributed to another; and one night he shut himself in there, and, having brought a little light and his chisels, carved his name upon it."

Michelangelo not only carved his name, but also the fact that he sculpted the Pietà. His inscription, which is plainly visible on the sash running across Mary's bosom, reads MICHAELANGELVS BONAROTVS FLOREN FACIEBAT (Michelangelo Buonarroti, Florentine, made this). Apparently, Michelangelo's Latin was not that good because FACIEBAT translates to "was making this." The correct Latin word for "made this" is

FECIT. Initially, he also forgot to spell MICHAELANGLVS with an "e," but corrected it by striking the letter "e" inside the letter "g." On the other hand, maybe he was rushing to finish quickly before he got caught by one of the Vatican guards.

But the fact of the matter was that this was risky business for Michelangelo to inscribe his name on his statue. At that time sculptors and painters were not considered artists, per se, but rather simple craftsmen, and they were forbidden to sign any work they produced for the Church. When Michelangelo's name was discovered on the Pietà his only hope was to be forgiven by the Pope. Michelangelo's Pietà, apparently, was too much of a masterpiece for anyone to make a major issue of his name prominently displayed across the Virgin Mary's bosom and Pope Alexander VI forgave Michelangelo his transgression of hubris. Pope Alexander VI, who was still mourning the death of his son, the Duke of Gandia, was greatly touched by the realism of the figure of the dead Christ in his mother's arms that he took the opportunity to immediately, and permanently, appropriated the sculpture for the Vatican, where it has remained ever since. According to Vasari, Michelangelo regretted his passionate outburst of pride and "swore never again to sign another work of his hand."

Pope Julius II commissioned Donato Bramante to build a new basilica. The old basilica was demolished in 1505 and the Chapel of the King of France along with it. Because Old St. Peter's had to be demolished, the Pietà had to be moved. Bramante, overseeing a 2,500-man workforce, immediately began tearing down the south wall of the basilica to make room for new piers. Michelangelo's friend, Accursio, the papal Chamberlain, immediately went to the Sistine Chapel, where Michelangelo was working on the chapel ceiling, and told him that the Pietà was being moved out of St. Peter's. Michelangelo immediately ran to the basilica

and upon arrival he found that his Pietà had already been moved to the Chapel of the Fever. But he was overcome with a great feeling of relief after examining the statue and finding it to be undamaged.

The Pietà was then temporarily placed in the Chapel of the Holy Choir, above its altar. While waiting to be set in the new Chapel of the Holy Choir the Pietà was again temporarily located in a room to the left side transept, over the altar of St. Simon and St. Jude (Currently the altar of St. Joseph). Although construction of the new basilica began on 18 April 1506, it was not until the later part of 1615 that the sculpture was moved again to the sacristy of the basilica, one of the places where the Pope donned his vestments when celebrating mass in St. Peter's. In 1568 the Pietà was moved once more and set over the altar of the Chapel of the Holy Choir, which was dedicated to the Immaculate Conception.

For the Holy Year of 1575, Ludovico Bianchetti, a Vatican Canon adorned the Virgin Mary's neck with a marble ornament and put her on a base, however, this made the work even more obscure and it was removed forthwith. When Pope Paul V approved the building of the new aisle in 1609, the Pietà was moved again.

In 1623 Pope Urban VIII issued a Canonical Coronation regarding the Pietà through the Papal Bull *Domina Coronatum Est*, signed and notarized on 14 August 1637 with the official rite of Canonical Coronation being executed on 31 August 1637. (A Canonical Coronation is a formal act by the pope, as the Supreme Pontiff, to add a crown or halo, to an image of Christ, the Blessed Virgin Mary, or St. Joseph.) This meant that a diadem or halo could be added to the Pietà to show that it was worthy of veneration. A levitating crown was designed to appear to float above the Virgin Mary's head and placed above the statue. In 1713 two levitating cherubs were added and made to appear as though they were holding the crown.

There was also a halo placed on the head of Christ. Sometime in 1749 it was decided that the halo, crown and cherubs were a major distraction from the beauty of the Pietà and all were removed. The cherubs were relocated to the Chapel of the Holy Choir.

In 1626 Francesco Borromini crafted an elaborate base for the statue measuring 68.5 x 76.8 x 27.2 inches, on which the Pietà was placed and has been resting ever since.

The Pietà sustained some damage during a move in 1736. Four fingers on Mary's left hand were broken, but were professionally restored by Giuseppe Lirioni (1690-1746). There are art scholars today who believe that Lirioni may have taken some artistic liberties to make the hand gestures more noticeable and impressive.

When the decision was made to adorn the altar of the Chapel of the Holy Choir with a large mosaic representing the Immaculate Conception, it was decided that the presence of two Madonnas in one chapel was not appropriate, and on 3 December 1749, Pope Benedict XIV ordered the Pietà moved to its current location, the first chapel to the right of the nave immediately inside of the entrance of St. Peter's Basilica. The name of this Baroque chapel at that time was the Chapel of the Crucifix, which contained a very large crucifix. The name of the chapel was then changed to the Chapel of the Pietà when Michelangelo's masterpiece was placed there and the crucifix removed. A large cross on the wall behind the Pietà is the only remaining sign of the old chapel.

At the behest of former Archbishop of New York, Cardinal Francis Spellman, Pope John XXIII approved the lending of the Pietà to be exhibited in the Vatican pavilion at the 1964-1965 New York World's Fair (The Universal Exposition of New York). The Pietà was shipped to New York on 6 April 1964. The statue, insured for \$6 million was shipped in a steel case lined with asbestos encased in a wooden crate

made of wood planks two-and-a-half inches thick with an eight-inch thick wooden base. The crate and statue, including the base weighed approximately six tons. The crate was transported by truck from Rome to Naples, where it was loaded and secured to the deck of the ocean liner SS *Cristoforo Colombo*. The crate contained cushioning so thick that it would allow the crate to float in water in case of an accident. Additionally, the crate was equipped with an emergency locator beacon and a marker buoy. The Pietà was returned to Rome on 14 November 1965.

On Pentecost Sunday, 21 May 1972, Laszlo Toth, a 34-year-old Hungarian-born Australian attacked the Pietà, striking it repeatedly with a hammer. Apparently he tried to knock off the head of the Virgin by striking it from behind. Failing at that, he continued striking the statue, damaging parts of Mary's nose and eyelids, and knocked off her left arm at the elbow. In total, over a hundred small chips of marble were broken off making restoration a long and tedious process. Today the restored Pietà is protected by bulletproof glass to prevent any further damage to Michelangelo's masterpiece.

The horrific attack on the Pietà resulted in a discovery of the letter M on the palm of Mary's left hand during restoration. It was presumed that Michelangelo had inscribed it, however it could not be determined whether it was intentionally carved as the letter M or were they just creases in the palm of Mary's left hand. In either case, neither could it be determined whether the M was for Michaelangelo or for Mary.

Michelangelo's *La Madonna della Pietà* is now located in Saint Peter's Basilica, Vatican City, its permanent home. It is situated in the first side chapel, now named the Chapel of the Pietà, just past the door on the right as you walk into the Basilica. Michelangelo's Pietà is a key work of Italian Renaissance sculpture and is often considered as the starting point of the Italian High Renaissance. 🏛️



I Am

Judy Cox

I am the horse
Black, shining
Shaking its mane
Loosing its ropes
Rearing up, hooves high
Seen against the mountain
Whetstone, new snow.

This horse's prayer
Is not supplication
But exclamation!
Times to come,
Pounding hooves
Over all impediments.

Rising like Pegasus
To the stars
And beyond
FREE.

Project 2025, also known as the [Presidential Transition Project](#), is a plan to reshape the federal government and consolidate all executive power under Donald Trump if he is elected President in 2024. Trump was aware of the plan in 2022.¹ There are 900 pages of policy issues produced by the Heritage Foundation that will destroy our government as we know it. Because Project 2025 was so detailed, some in the Republican Party wanted a more limited plan with vague proposals to avoid criticism. This past June before their convention, Project 47 was announced as the new official plan. It is a “paste over” of Project 2025 and neither Trump nor his campaign regularly bring up the plan. Both plans are closely aligned, but Project 2025 is the most detailed look at what a Trump administration would look like. There are reports of a secret plan, the “180-day Transition Playbook,” to implement Project 2025 within the first 180 days of the Trump administration.² Here are some of the more concerning impacts that I forecast will affect us at Montebello and all Americans.

Project 2025 calls for 50,000 of the current top U.S. civil servants to be purged from their jobs and replaced by MAGA political hacks. Cronyism and nepotism will follow. Essentially, it weakens the merit-based civil service system and replaces it with a spoils system.

- ✓ It will be a less trained, experienced, professional federal work force.
- ✓ Career paths and job security will be destroyed.
- ✓ Recruiting qualified people will be difficult.
- ✓ Acquisition and service contracts will be corrupted.

✓ Honest contractors who submit bids based on merit will be upended by ones submitted based on their political affiliation.

Trump, who calls himself the Tariff Man, wants more tariffs: 60% on all Chinese goods and 100% on cars made outside the United States. Project 2025 calls for expanding tariffs to all Chinese products to the point it could block all

sumers and are in effect a regressive tax.

- ✓ Social Security and Medicare benefits will be reduced or replaced.
- ✓ Our strong economy will weaken. We will have recession-inflation (stagflation) where the inflation rate remains high, economic growth slows, and unemployment rises.

Your savings and IRAs will be less safe. Project 2025 calls for “free banking” that will abolish the Federal Reserve and thus its ability to control price stability and maximum employment through stable interest rate policy. It also calls for Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation to be merged with other federal banking agencies. It is unclear what the intent of this action means, but it appears to be a phasing out of deposit insurance that the Heritage Foundation has previously advocated. Banks are fundamental to our economic system. Like in the movie *It’s a Wonderful Life*, without deposit insurance, any rumor that a bank is in difficulty would trigger a panic run on the bank.

If you have investments in the “appears too good to be true” crypto market, watch them. Trump, now calling himself the “crypto president” after Republicans received millions in political contributions from now-bankrupt FTX and other cryptocurrency exchanges, says he will deregulate that industry despite its exposed fraud (Ponzi schemes) and misconduct that left millions of investors losing money.³ Tax evaders, drug lords, and computer scammers will relish no oversight. Recall FTX founder Sam Bankman-Fried was convicted of seven counts of fraud, conspiracy, and money laundering and sentenced to 25 years in prison and ordered to forfeit \$11 billion.

There will be a nationwide ban on

2025 Land

By Chester Taylor

Project 2025
PRESIDENTIAL TRANSITION PROJECT

- End no fault divorce
- Complete ban on abortions without exceptions **pg 449-503**
- Ban contraceptives **pg 449**
- Additional tax breaks for corporations and the 1% **pg 691**
- Higher taxes for the working class
- Elimination of unions and worker protections **pg 581**
- Raise the retirement age
- Cut Social Security **pg 691**
- Cut Medicare **pg 449**
- End the Affordable Care Act **pg 449**
- Raise prescription drug prices
- Eliminate the Department of Education **pg 319**
- Use public, taxpayer money for private religious schools **pg 319**
- Teach Christian religious beliefs in public schools **pg 319**
- End free and discounted school lunch programs
- End civil rights & DEI protections in government **pg 545-581**
- Ban African American and gender studies in all levels of education **pg 319**
- Ban books and curriculum about slavery
- Ending climate protections **pg 417**
- Increase Arctic drilling **pg 363**
- Deregulate big business and the oil industry **pg 363**
- Promote and expedite capital punishment **didn't find a reference**
- End marriage equality **545-581**
- Condemn single mothers while promoting only “traditional families”
- Defund the FBI and Homeland Security **pg 133**
- Use the military to break up domestic protests **pg 133**
- Mass deportation of immigrants and incarceration in “camps” **pg 133**
- End birth right citizenship **pg 133**
- Ban Muslims from entering the country **inferred from speeches**
- Eliminates federal agencies like the FDA, EPA, NOAA and more **363-417**
- Continue to pack the Supreme Court, and lower courts with right-wing judges **literally happening rn**

Made in China products from being imported into the United States.

- ✓ China will retaliate against United States by raising tariffs on U.S. goods.
- ✓ China could retaliate against U.S. tariffs by taking over Taiwan and Taiwan’s world dominance in producing microchips that would crush most U.S. manufacturing capability.
- ✓ Trump in an interview with *Bloomberg* implied he would not defend Taiwan from a Chinese attack.
- ✓ Big corporations and the rich will skip out on paying their taxes, while the middle class and poor will pay more. Tariff costs will be pushed to the con-

John Gartner, Ph.D., psychologist, John Hopkins Medical School, and author of *Rocket Man: Nuclear Madness and the Mind of Donald Trump*, wrote:

“Trump suffers from malignant narcissism, a diagnosis far more toxic and dangerous than mere narcissistic personality disorder because it combines narcissism with three other severely pathological components: paranoia, sociopathy, and sadism. When combined, this perfect storm of psychopathology defines the ‘quintessence of evil,’ the closest thing psychiatry has to describing a true human monster.”

abortions, more women will die. The maternal mortality rate in the United States is 33 deaths per 100,000 live births. That’s the highest maternal death rate of the top 11 most-developed countries. With a nationwide ban the overall number of maternal deaths would rise by 24 percent. The increase for Black women would be 39 percent. Trump brags, “I was able to kill *Roe v. Wade*.” *In vitro* fertilization (IVF) will be severely restricted or outlawed as currently supported by The Heritage Foundation.

We will be less safe. More guns and assault rifles will be on the streets. There will be more murders of school children and police. Mass shootings will be routine. With firearm injuries the leading cause of death of our children, Trump used to say we will just, “have to get over it.”

Hate and discrimination will intensify for minorities to include Blacks, Jews, Hispanics, Asians, Muslims, and native Americans because “they are poisoning the blood of our country.” Extreme positions will be taken against the LGBTQ community. Project 2025 seeks to eliminate federal protections for “queer people” and pursue research into conversion therapies to sexual conformity.

The oil and gas industry has donated \$7.36 million to Donald Trump’s campaign. As we “drill baby, drill,” and continue our dependency on fossil fuels and invest less in alternative energies, there will be more pollution, extreme

weather, droughts, and flooding.

✓ Irreversible climate change due to global warming will occur as soon as 2027. Melting glaciers will decimate the American coasts. Insurance costs on housing and cars will skyrocket.

✓ Migration will accelerate world-wide to escape hunger because of droughts.

✓ Climate change will result in a farming and ranching crisis. Food prices will soar.

✓ Extreme weather will cause more and longer power outages. Houston, with 2.7 million people, took over a month to completely restore power after Hurricane Beryl. Worldwide transformers, because of extreme weather, are in short supply, require a lead time of up to two years, and their prices are rising substantially.

Trump intends to bring back Paul Manafort⁴ (convicted for tax and bank fraud) and General Mike Flynn (convicted for lying to the FBI). Both were pardoned by Trump. They collaborated with Russia and accepted large sums of money from Putin’s cabal. Russia, also poured millions of dollars into Trump properties and political action committees. In return, Trump has told Putin that Russia can “do whatever the hell they want” in NATO countries.

✓ Russia will take land from Ukraine and other neighboring countries.

✓ The United States will have fewer allies and not be trusted.

✓ After 72 years, the 32 countries of NATO will be in disunity.

Trump has suggested “... termination of all rules, regulations, and articles, even those found in the Constitution.” His telling Christians “You won’t have to vote anymore” if he’s elected is further evidence of establishing an authoritarian government. He will have no qualms in using the military in dictatorial ways to intervene in elections and quash domestic protest. Recall that

in 2020 Trump asked former Defense Secretary Mark Esper if the military could shoot the racial injustice protesters at Lafayette Square. Trump asked, “Can’t you just shoot them? Just shoot them in the legs or something?”

The United States will be less committed to the rule of law. Trump will pardon his followers and himself of all crimes. Trump has said, “they’ve been treated terribly and very unfairly, and you know that, and everybody knows that...and we’re going to be working on that as soon as the first day we get into office.” He will pack our courts with more inept and politically corrupt justices. To further his agenda, he will rely on executive orders and significantly expanded authoritarian power.

The United States has many challenges and needs leadership with a vision to reunite us. Americans want to take the politics out of law. We do not need a plan that undermines the rule of law, the separation of powers, the separation of church and state, and civil liberties. We do not need a leader like Trump, a malignant narcissist, who proclaims, “Hitler did a lot of great things, I imagine myself being a guy like him.” What kind of country do you want to live in: a democratic country that values freedom, compassion and rule of law or 2025 Land that exudes “chaos, fear and hate?” It’s your vote. 🗳

¹ [Video of Trump praising Heritage Foundation for developing Project 2025.](#)

² The “180-Day Transition Playbook,” is being developed by Russell Vought, a key architect of Project 2025 to expedite the implementation of the project’s policies to avoid the chaotic start that marked former President Trump’s first term.

³ Washington D.C., March 14, 2024 The Securities and Exchange Commission today charged 17 individuals for their roles in a \$300 million Ponzi scheme that involved Houston, Texas-based CryptoFX LLC.

⁴ Paul Manafort worked on a secret plot with pro-Russian, former Ukrainian President Victor Yanukovich, to create an autonomous republic in Ukraine’s east, giving Putin effective control of Ukraine’s industrial heartland.

Chester Taylor is a member of the Montebello Writers Group

Our neighbor Mexico

By Chester Taylor

Alexandra Roncal, who was born in Mexico, worked at the World Bank in D.C., is now retired and living at Montebello. When asked about Mexico and its relationship with the United States, she stated, “the United States and Mexico have a love-hate relationship. They need each other for economic, security, and other interests; but at the same time these can be competing interests. We should work harder together so both nations can better compete in the global economy.”

Mexico has a population of 130 million and the most Spanish speakers in the world. It has a large land mass, 13th in world, and its climate ranges from tropical jungle to desert. Mexico’s steady economic growth and democratization make it a world’s emerging power. Mexico’s history consists of winning its independence from Spain (1810) and then France (1862). In its war with the United States (1846-1848) Mexico lost 55% of its territory (California, Texas, Nevada, Utah, New Mexico, Arizona and parts of Oklahoma, Kansas and Wyoming). It has had a succession of presidents, often former generals, until the emergence of the Institutional Revolution Party (PRI) in 1929. Over the next 70 years of PRI rule, Mexico experienced significant economic growth, but also faced issues of repression and electoral fraud.

In the late twentieth century, there was a shift in Mexico towards neoliberal policies, exemplified by the signing of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) in 1994. Under NAFTA, tariffs on many goods passing between Mexico, Canada, and the United States were phased out. In 2000,

the PRI lost the presidency for the first time to the conservative National Action Party (PAN). In 2020, NAFTA was replaced by the US-Mexico-Canada Agreement (USMCA) that further refined the terms in NAFTA to create more balanced and equitable trade.

Today, Mexico is considered an economic powerhouse, having the 15th largest economy in the world and is the United States’ second largest trading partner. Mexico’s main exports are manufactured products and petroleum. About four-fifths of its petroleum is exported to the United States. América Móvil, headquartered in Mexico City, is one of the largest telecommunica-



tions corporations in the world. Mexico produces the most automobiles of any North American nation. General Motors, Ford, and Chrysler have been operating in Mexico since the 1930s, while Volkswagen and Nissan built plants in the 1960s. Currently there are 26 car manufacturers operating in Mexico. Despite Mexico’s economic progress, those who earn 60% or less of the national median income (poverty) represent about 19% of the population. In the United States, 12.4% of Americans live in poverty. Mexico’s bond credit rating is BBB/stable and the United States’ rating is AA+/stable.



Mexico ranks fourth in the world in biodiversity. It has 65,637 square miles of Protected Natural Areas. Some of its native foods include: maize, tomatoes, beans, squash, chocolate, vanilla, avocados, guava, and a great variety of chili peppers, such as the habanero and the jalapeño. Tequila, the distilled alcoholic drink made from cultivated agave cacti, is a major industry. Unfortunately, Mexico, like Uruguay, Brazil, Honduras, and Ecuador, suffers from rapid deforestation.

Scarce water is a problem for Mexico and the United States. In Mexico, water sources in the north are scarce and polluted. In the central and southwestern regions, water is generally inaccessible and of poor quality. Agricultural land in the Valley of Mexico now faces groundwater depletion. Untreated sewage and industrial pollution are also major problems. Two major water sharing programs, the Yuma Reclamation Project on the Colorado River and the 1944 Water Treaty on Rio Grande River, have or will soon not meet demand and treaty compliance. Droughts, increased evaporation from hotter temperatures, and increased populations have decreased the amount of water available from the rivers. One project under consideration involves building a large desalination plant in Mexico’s Sea of Cortez to supply water for Mexico and the United States. Water and deforestation are national security concerns for Mexico.

Illegal immigration into the United States from Mexico is a major issue. In 2003, illegal crossings were 2.05 million. More than half were returned to

Mexico or their native countries. This year so far, the number is 46,200, a four-year low. There are several key factors for the crossings. First, external factors: climate change, violence, overpopulation, and failed states. Then internal factors: United States' lack of resources to control enforcement and lack of major immigration reform. The U.S. immigration laws need to be updated, but congressional Republicans instructed by Donald Trump are sitting on a bi-partisan bill that would improve the situation providing funding to increase the number of Border Patrol agents and hiring additional immigration judges and increasing the capacity of the immigration courts to expeditiously adjudicate cases. Mexico is playing a more active role now, policing up migrants and returning them to Guatemala. Also, the United States has tightened asylum rules and nearly half of illegal immigrants are quickly returned to Mexico or their native countries. Both countries want efficient, orderly, and fair immigration processes.

Tied closely to illegal immigration are the drugs crossings the border from Mexico to the United States. These drugs consist of fentanyl, fentanyl-laced counterfeit pills, other synthetic opioids,



cocaine, heroin, marijuana, and methamphetamine. Plus, chemicals to make drugs from China, India, and other countries are routed through Mexico to go to the United States. Since 2007, Mexico's powerful cartels have become incredibly wealthy smuggling these drugs across the border. Well-armed and equipped, the cartels bribe or kill anyone who tries to stop them, to include members of rival cartels. Part of the blame belongs on the United States,



who has 20 million addicts who buy the drugs. Also, the United States sells more than 200,000 firearms every year to Mexico, over 2 million guns in the past 10 years. Most of these are bought by the cartels who have carried out the murder of thousands. The United States shares the results of extensive intelligence with Mexico to identify, disrupt, and dismantle drug cartels. ATF is actively working to disrupt firearms trafficking while the DEA working with their Mexican counterparts are taking offensive actions against Mexico-based cartels and dismantling their U.S.-based cells. DEA arrested two drug lords this July, Ismael "El Mayo" Zambada Garcia of the Sinaloa Cartel and Joaquin Guzman Lopez, son of cartel co-founder El Chapo. While putting a dent into their cartels' operations, the cartels will unfortunately survive. Kamala Harris supports investing in new technologies to detect and prevent fentanyl from entering the United States and spending more money to stop human traffickers. The government of Mexico must decide how directly they want their drug enforcement and those of the United States to go after the cartels.

In 2024, Claudia Sheinbaum Pardo, a member of the left-wing National Regeneration Movement, became the first woman to be elected President of Mexico. She is also the first Jewish President of Mexico. Her educational background included studying physics at the National Autonomous University of Mexico, earning her undergraduate degree in 1989 and master's degree in 1994. In 1994, she completed her work for her Ph.D. thesis on the use of

energy in the Mexican transportation sector at Lawrence Berkely National Laboratory in California. Prior to being elected President, she had served as Mayor of Tlalpan in 2017 and then the Head of Government of Mexico City from 2018-2023. She was tough on crime and was an able manager of the COVID-19 pandemic.

President-elect Claudia Sheinbaum Pardo will take office October 1. Alexandra remains uncertain how Sheinbaum will govern Mexico but believes she will maintain a social democratic government and continue with much of the work started by her predecessor President Lopez Obrador and the populist nationalist government. For example, Sheinbaum agrees with Obrador on the need to build three high-speed (190 mph) passenger train lines that will serve the south and north of Mexico. In an important difference from Obrador, she is contemplating the use of private funding to modernize and expand Mexico's electrical networks. She is proposing to business leaders, a \$13.6 billion investment in renewable energy and gas plants, alongside the addition of 2,392 miles of electrical transmission lines. She has a two-strategy energy approach; while advancing a clean energy she will continue to support Mexican state-owned petroleum company PEMEX, which is in deep debt.

Alexandra hopes that the United States and Mexico can work together to promote each other's economies and solve cross border problems together. Both countries have scarce and clean water issues that can be better managed together by collaboration and using techniques liked the ones developed by Israeli desalination specialists from IDE Technology. Both countries will benefit by working together on environmental technologies to achieve solutions. It would be a win-win policy. An America First policy would be a huge lose-lose policy. A stronger neighbor enhances both countries' national security interests. 🇲🇽

Chester Taylor is a member of the Montebello Writers Group

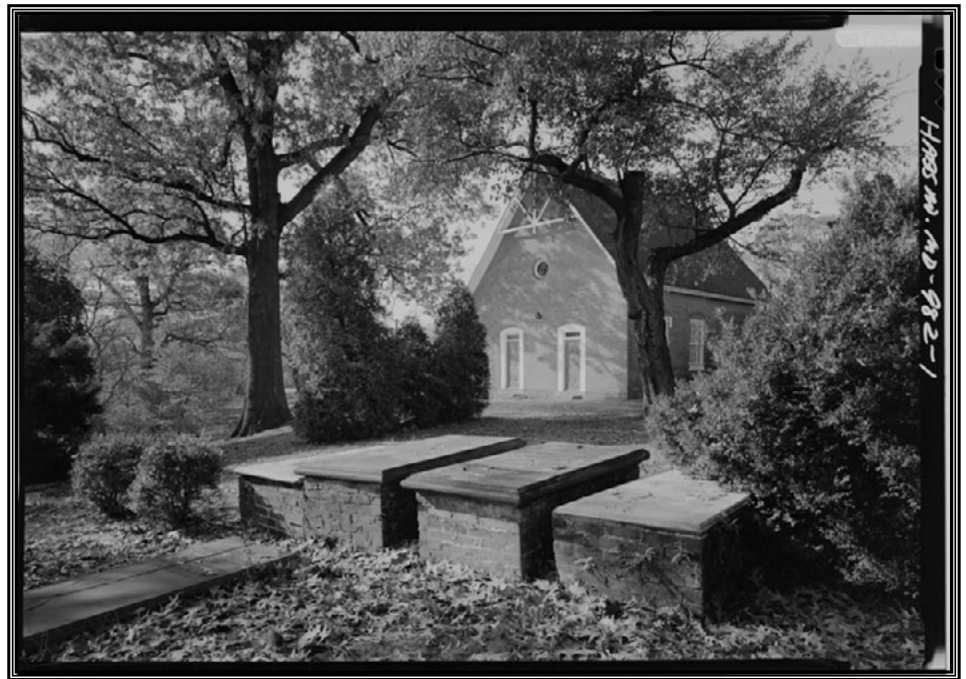
The rich history of St. Matthew's Church in Seat Pleasant

By Joanne Conte

Amidst a few ancient oaks on a hill in Seat Pleasant, Maryland, stands an old Anglican Episcopal Chapel that predates our nation's Capital by more than a century. St. Matthew's Church is small but grand, and rich in the history of the county, state, and country.

I grew up in Seat Pleasant, Maryland, a tiny town in the northeast corner of D.C. In 1939, it was a charming place where everyone knew each other. My paternal grandfather bought a piece of land on a hill and built the second house there. My father was born there in 1910. Actually, most of my family was born and died in the area. My great-grandparents, grandparents, and two aunts are buried in tiny cemetery at St. Mathew's Church.

It has been a few years since we were able to visit, but when I close my eyes, I can still see that little chapel and the choir loft where I sang. Though they are all gone now, I can still see so many members of my family sitting there. And I can still feel the cold winds on my cheeks in the winter. More importantly, I can still feel the peace and tranquil-



ity of the cemetery in the spring and summer.

St. Mathew's history starts with Colonel John Addison of Oxon Hill, who emigrated to America in 1667 and became a pioneer in church building. He is credited with being the chief organizer of St. John's Episcopal Church in Broad Creek, Maryland. Recognizing the shifting population inland from the rivers, he gave an acre of land adjoining sprawling Seat Pleasant Grant for the erection of a chapel. He deeded the land in 1694 and two years later, he log chapel was built. The locality of the chapel was called New Scotland Hundred, because of the number of Scotch settlers in the neighborhood.

The church was founded in 1692 upstream and east of the Potomac River. In 1696 local residents, through private subscriptions, erected a log church.

Colonel Addison's name must have been a formidable one. The little church he sponsored became known almost at once as Addison Chapel and the road leading to the chapel front door became Addison Road, still its name today.

In 1731, William Scott deeded a second acre to Addison Chapel, known at the time as "William Scott's Gift," to build a new chapel. There are no records that this was done at the time, nor could I find that a second chapel

was ever built. In 1916 an additional 3,107 acres were purchased and now the grave yard consists of 5,467 acres.

In 1744, the Maryland General Assembly passed an Act making the little chapel a Chapel of Ease (a Chapel of Ease is a church building other than the parish church, built within the bounds of a parish for the attendance of those who cannot reach the parish church conveniently, generally due to distance.) It also granted permission to erect a new chapel.

In 1801, the Rev. Walter Delaney Addison became the vicar. He was the great-great grandson of John Addison and has been described as one of early saints of the Episcopal Church in the country. It has been said that he was one of the clergy who officiated at the funeral of George Washington. Rev. Addison had as his lay reader Francis Scott Key, lawyer, poet, and author of The Star Spangled Banner. It is believed that Mr. Key also attended the little chapel when in the area.

In 1812, St. Matthew's Church served as a temporary headquarters for the British Army during the advance on Bladensburg, Maryland. William Pinkney (1810-1883), the Protestant Episcopal Bishop of Maryland, instrumental in having a separate church for "colored" people established in Washington, is buried in the church cemetery.

Standing in the one of the doorways are the graves of Benjamin and Rebecca Stoddert. The grave yard of St. Matthew's Church is the final resting place of Benjamin Stoddert (1751-1813), who was born in Charles County, Maryland and became the first Secretary of the United States Navy.

The church is a small rectangular building, approximately 28x 40 feet is built of brick laid in Flemish bond with occasional glazed headers on a stone foundation and a three course brick water table. The church is two bays by four bays; the south side has four windows with splayed brick lintels (flat arches). Two of the opposite windows have been obscured by new addition. All glazed windows have recent iron gates. The gable roof, running east-west, was sharply pitched in 1902.

Chapel rumor says there is a cannon ball lodged in the wall near the roof edge. Don't know for sure, but it is fun to think about it and try to visualize the era when it might have landed there.

The records of St. Matthew's, although erratic, indicate that the church enticed the prominent people of Prince George's County to attend. The association of the Addison family helped. Names such as Lowndes and Calvert can be found along the communicants as well as that of Christopher Clark Hyatt, founder of Hyattsville, Maryland, and "Joshua - a colored man."

In the early 1900s much of the antique property of the chapel was stolen, but the altar and pastor's chair still remain.

For those who know the cemetery and the chapel well, there is tranquility, from spring to fall, that brings peace to one who is willing to linger. The gentle breezes that blow offer a fresh repose and the world comes to a standstill for a short while, and the noise and problems seem to be in some far-off place.

Many of the tombstones are missing and many have fallen in disrepair and are still there. My family took a great interest in St. Matthew's over the years. My Aunt Doris was responsible for getting the historical society to take over the responsibility of the chapel after it no longer held services. My Uncle James would bring his farming equipment and employees up to the graveyard to cut the grass, trim around the stones, and remove the leaves and branches several times during the year. My Uncle Billy rebuilt the brick columns at the entrance after they were damaged.

St. Matthew's still sits on this little hill in Seat Pleasant, Maryland. Few go there these days. There are no longer Sunday services, Sunday school, weddings, christenings, or funerals.

For those who know the cemetery and the chapel well, there is tranquility, from spring to fall, that brings peace to one who is willing to linger. The gentle breezes that blow offer a fresh repose and the world comes

to a standstill for a short while, and the noise and problems of the day seem to be in some far-off place.

But in the winter there is a cold wind that blows and does not seem colder than anywhere else. One is reminded of struggles in life and ponders for a brief moment: how does this little sanctuary survive?

But upon entering the chapel, one immediately knows that this is truly a house of worship that has been loved throughout the ages. ■



In 1969 the Maryland Historical Trust received a request to become custodian of a trust fund, from the Vestry of Addison Parish, for the perpetual care of interior and exterior of St. Matthew's Church and cemetery. In 1970 the Vestry gave the Trust a historical easement of the church and five acres of adjacent land for the perpetual preservation of the historical and architectural character of the structure and its immediate environment.

For lack of funds, the ravages of time have taken its toll on the little cemetery.

A sentimental journey down Richmond Highway

By Carol Jameson

Montebello is surrounded by history, much of which is alive today. Some of it is hidden behind the apartments and commercial areas along Route 1. And it's all too easy to forget the surrounding area when we turn off Route 1 and into Montebello's calm and leafy grounds.

Let's explore some of this history on a short trip down the Rt. 1/Richmond Highway corridor, taking in the eight miles from the City of Alexandria boundary south to Fort Belvoir and Jeff Todd Way.

As we begin our drive, we'll encounter signs indicating specific neighborhoods. For example, just south of Montebello is the Penn-Daw community, originally home to three indigenous tribes, the Assaomeck, Namassingakent, and Tauxenent, who hunted and fished along what is now known as Hunting Creek. Subsequently the land was settled by colonists, among them Col. John West, who owned significant tracts, including what is now Belle Haven Country Club. Col. West served as Fairfax Burgess to the Virginia House of Burgesses.

Fast forward into the 20th

century and the Rt. 1 corridor, the major north-south road for East Coast travelers, began to grow with many small motels and shops. Penn-Daw Motel, named after its builders, Samuel Cooper Dawson, Sr., and Edward Monroe Pennell,

Aviation hub

sat where Applebee's and Wells Fargo are now located. Penn-Daw was also home to the first Fairfax County Police Sub Station, located where the Shelby Apartments and Aldi now sit.

Farther south, we come to Beacon/Groveton and Hybla Valley, both named after local connections. Hybla Valley takes its name from what was known as Mount Hybla, in the area that is now Fort Belvoir; Hybla comes from the name of a mountain and city in Sicily known for their natural beauty. In the mid-1920s, the Mount Vernon School of Aeronautics was established, providing flight instruction and sightseeing trips. Mount Vernon Airport, established initially as the George Washington Air Junction, became known locally as the [Hybla Valley Airport](#).

Both Beacon/Groveton and Hybla Valley were home to airfields established in the early 1920s to take advantage of the new enthusiasm for flight and especially for watching others fly the machines and do aerial acrobatics. The Alexandria Airport offered sightseeing opportunities and jaw-dropping air shows. In 1929, it became the first airport granted a permit in the Commonwealth of Virginia. At the same time, it faced increased competition from other airfields, such as the one just up the road at Beacon Field. These airports also sought to be designated the official DC Metro airport. By the 1930s, there was widespread support for such an airport to serve the DC-Virginia area, and these airports all hoped to be chosen.

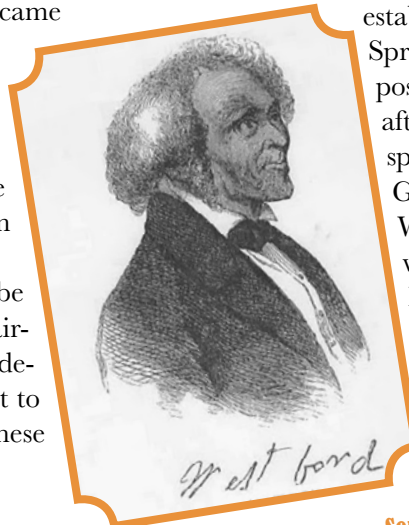
The Hybla Valley Airport became a training ground for pilots in World War II and, after the war, resumed its role as a small airport, growing to encompass 179 acres, including a flight school. As the post-war population boomed, along with the need for housing, the airport was sold to a developer in 1956. This exciting time is reflected in the street names of Lockheed Boulevard, Piper Lane, and Northrup Road.



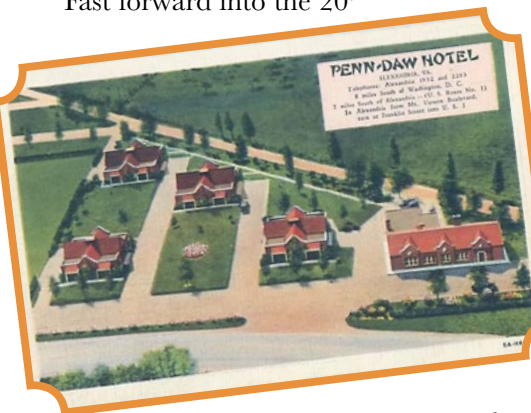
Beacon Airfield had a similar story. It took its name from an unlit tower, called a "beacon tower," used in the early days of aviation to guide postal delivery flights. It was also a training site for pilots during WW II, and housed part of the Civil Aeronautics Administration after the War. The airport closed in 1959.

Gum Springs

Our Rt. 1 journey takes us past the oldest African American community in Fairfax County. Gum Springs was founded by [West Ford](#), a man formerly enslaved at Mount Vernon. After obtaining his freedom, he was given 160 acres of land adjacent to Mount Vernon. Ford later sold this land and with the proceeds bought land next to it to establish Gum Springs, supposedly named after a tree and spring where George Washington watered his horses.



[Gum Springs](#) soon became a safe ha-



century and the Rt. 1 corridor, the major north-south road for East Coast travelers, began to grow with many small motels and shops. Penn-Daw Motel, named after its builders, Samuel Cooper Dawson, Sr., and Edward Monroe Pennell,

ven for freed slaves and runaways to build a life of their own. During the Civil War, Gum Springs was a stop on the Underground Railroad. With the assistance of Quakers from nearby Woodlawn Estate, the residents of Gum Springs used the skills they brought from their countries of origin and trades learned while enslaved to establish independence. The community became a place for new-



ly emancipated people to settle and reunite with their families and for African Americans to grow. The establishment, in 1890, of the Joint Stock Club allowed individuals to pool their funds and to buy and sell land to other African Americans, supporting the growth of housing and the community.

Gum Springs, however, was not without adversity. In the 1950s and 1960s, residents banded together to fight civil rights injustices affecting their community, such as the segregation of Fairfax County Public Schools and the lack of storm water drainage for housing. Today, the community continues to thrive with over 2,500 residents, up to 500 of them direct descendants of the original Gum Springs families.

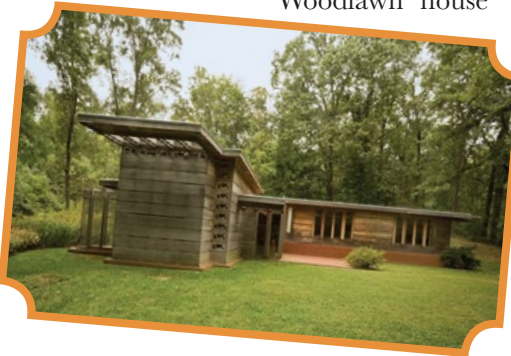
Gum Springs is also the site of the historic Pride of Fairfax/Mount Vernon Enterprise Lodge & County Lodge, which was the center of social life in the Gum Springs community between the 1940s and 1980s. The Lodge also housed the headquarters of the Saunders & Moon Community Action Association, an agency founded in 1965 to combat poverty in Gum Springs. The association was one of the first local agencies to receive federal funding under President Johnson's Great Society initiative.

To learn more about the fascinating history of the Gum Springs community, visit the [Gum Springs Museum](#).

Woodlawn Plantation

Woodlawn is located on lands first inhabited by the indigenous Tauxenent people. During the 1700s, it was part of George Washington's Mount Vernon Plantation. [Woodlawn](#) was constructed after Washington gave 2,000 acres to his nephew and step-granddaughter Lawrence and Eleanor "Nelly" Lewis.

In 1846, Woodlawn was sold to a group of anti-slavery Quakers from New Jersey; subsequently more Quaker families established homes nearby. Working with the local free African American community, the Quaker community of Woodlawn successfully demonstrated that farming and agriculture could succeed without the use of enslaved persons. In 1853, the Quakers sold the Woodlawn house



and some land to John Mason, a Baptist who likewise refused to use slave labor. His family would go on to establish a Baptist church and burial ground across from the Quaker meetinghouse.

Woodlawn was the first acquisition by the National Trust for Historic Preservation. In 2009, the Quaker meetinghouse that was part of the original Woodlawn settlement was added to the Historic Register.

In 1941, Frank Lloyd Wright designed a home in Falls Church, subsequently known as the Pope-Leighey House. In 1965, to aid the construction of Rt. 66, the home was condemned. After a campaign to re-route

Rt. 66 failed, the home was donated to the National Trust and moved to the grounds of Woodlawn, where it is open to the public. This fascinating home showcases Wright's commitment to the design of an affordable small home for the middle class, which he called Usonian design, and demonstrates an interesting contrast with Woodlawn's architectural style.

Today, the Arcadia Center for Sustainable Food & Agriculture, a nonprofit organization dedicated to creating a more equitable and sustainable local food system in the Washington, D.C. area, is based on the Woodlawn estate.

Fort Hunt Park

Our last stop is [Fort Hunt Park](#), a favorite site to walk, cycle, picnic, and enjoy nature. The still-existing batteries at the park were constructed around the turn of the last century to serve as one of the five key defenses for the District of Columbia. After World War I, it became an Army finance school and home to the Civilian Conservation Corps, which helped construct the George Washington Parkway.

In 1941, the United States Army reclaimed the fort and named it a "defense" camp. A classified interrogation center was established there, and between 1942-1945, some 150 buildings were constructed on the site. Several thousand mostly German prisoners of war passed through the camp before the end of the war, and in 1947, the Fort was turned over to the Department of the Interior. 🏠





Burghausen, Germany

Summer 2024

By Allan Abramson





We flew to Munich and cabbled to Burghausen. But why? Burghausen is a small town in the southeast corner of Germany, a little over an hour from Munich, and less than an hour from Salzburg. It's our daughter-in-law's home town, and they plan to retire to a condo there.

Burghausen is known for its castle, claimed to be the longest in the world at just over one kilometer end to end. It's a narrow castle on top of a hill with one court yard after another. Quite dramatic, and a great walk. Note the date on the gate.

It also is famous for its International Jazz Festival in March each year. Nothing like a stroll along the Jazz Walk of Fame. It has a charming Old Town below the Castle.

Quite walkable to reach the Old Town but it's a long way down, meaning it's also a

long way up to get home. Nonetheless worth the walk. Below, one could continue along the banks of the Salzach River with Austria on one side and Germany on the other. Hotel Post is the place for outstanding Bavarian food, probably the best in Burghausen. Saponi d'Italia is great, and Genesha Indian is outstanding. Guess we are foodies!

Several days after we arrived, Burghausen held its annual Burg fest. It was a weekend of medieval costumes, music, food and entertainment.

Burghausen has a number of fine bakeries, cafes, and restaurants. Our favorite bakery was the Schoenstetter, claiming to be the best in Germany, of course. Just half a mile from our place. Long ago, we had adopted the German custom of having tea and cake nearly every afternoon at home. Naturally, we did the same here: not good for the waistline but wonderful for the feeling of luxury. Not to mention the bread!

Another advantage of a small town like Burghausen is that it's very easy to engage in conversation with passers-by or with people at the next table. For example, we were walking one day by a park. Two ladies were discussing problems with their legs and noticed Helga's bandages. The ensuing conversation lasted at least 10 minutes with smiles all around.

Another example: dinner at one of the two Chinese restaurants in town. After dinner, almost half an hour exchanging life stories with the owner, who said it took her 10 years to adapt. Not to mention similar life-story talks with our taxi drivers. Such a nice small-town custom. Long walks, pastries, and conversations with strangers. A wonderful laid-back lifestyle! 🍞



Wild, wonderful

