

Chapter 4: Mt. Royal Hill (Grasshopper Hill)

John and Catherine Coffay settled on Mount Royal Hill and their children began working and having families of their own:

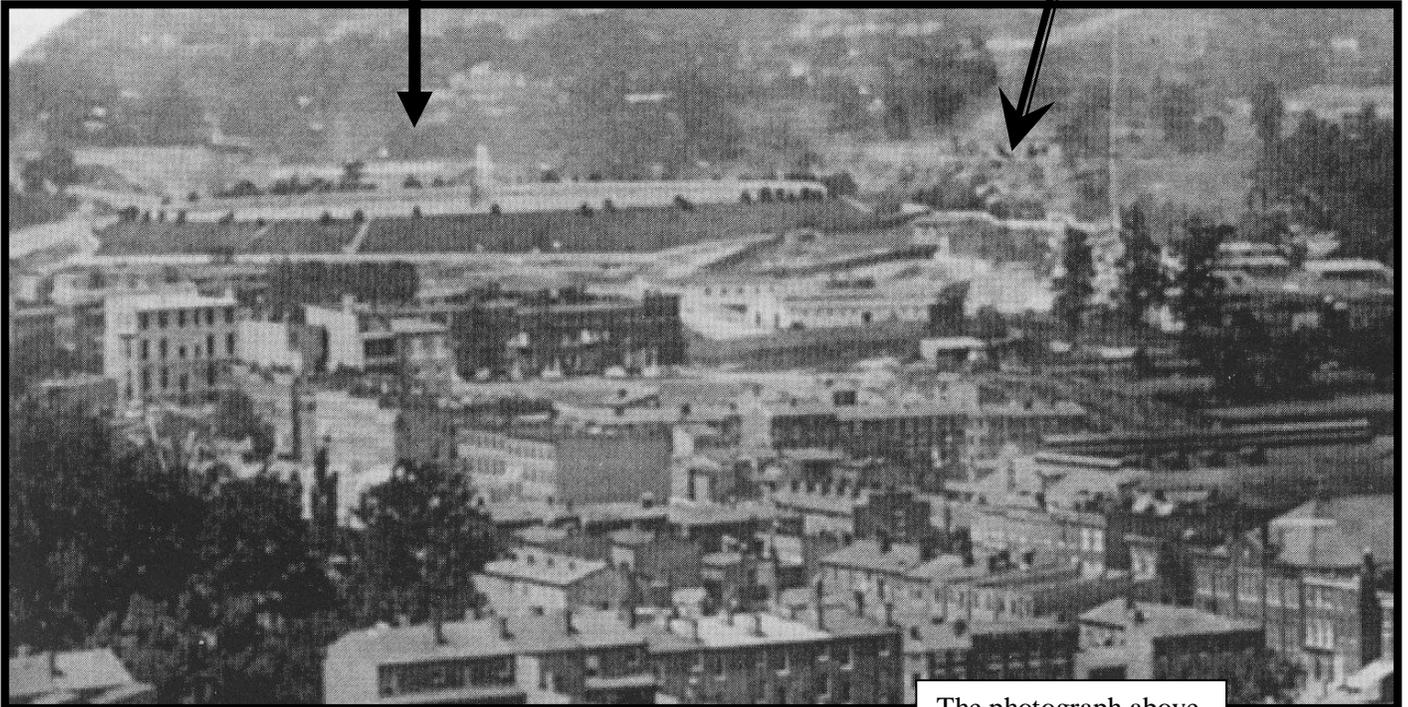
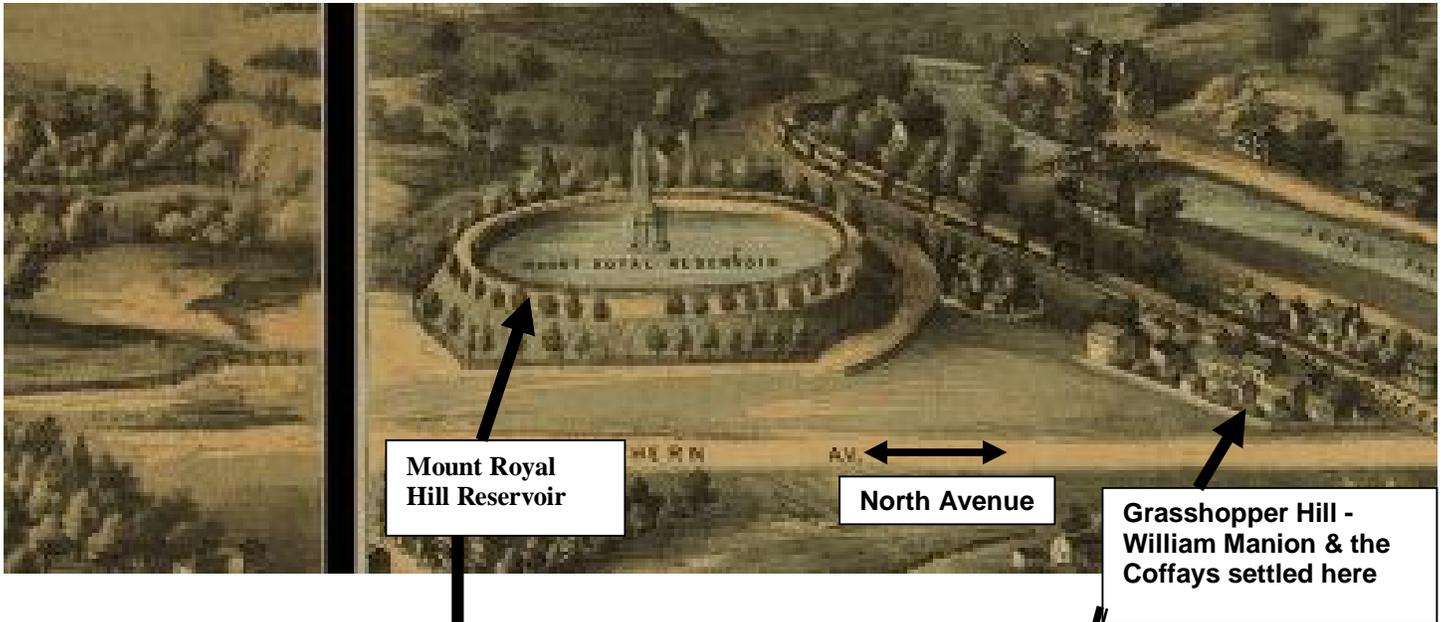
William Manion married, **Mary Coyle**, an immigrant from Roscommon Town, Ireland.

Mary Coffay married **Thomas Lee**, an Irish immigrant stonecutter.

John Coffay Jr. married **Helen Kelly** an immigrant from Cheshire, England.

Catherine Coffay married **Charles Slunt**, a Baltimore City police officer from the area's district.

At first, almost everyone remained on or within the **Mount Royal Hill** (Grasshopper Hill) area.



The photograph above dates to around 1870.
MD Hist. Society

Coffay's Dairy

The Coffays lived in a one story structure that has been described as a "shanty." There was a stable to the rear. The property covered two acres on Mt. Royal Hill. The Coffays leased the land from the Baltimore & Potomac Railroad Co. Here, the Coffays started a small dairy business which served the residents of the Mount Royal Hill area. Mount Royal Hill had a nickname of "Goat Hill," named for the goats seen grazing on the slopes. Some of these goats may have belonged to the Coffays dairy business. **We are very fortunate** that someone from The Baltimore Sun decided that our ancestors' home was such an interesting "eyesore" that it deserved a detailed description in the newspaper. Following is an excerpt from an editorial that appeared in the Baltimore Sun on June 23, 1896: June 23, 1896, Baltimore Sun Paper:

AN UNSIGHTLY LANDMARK

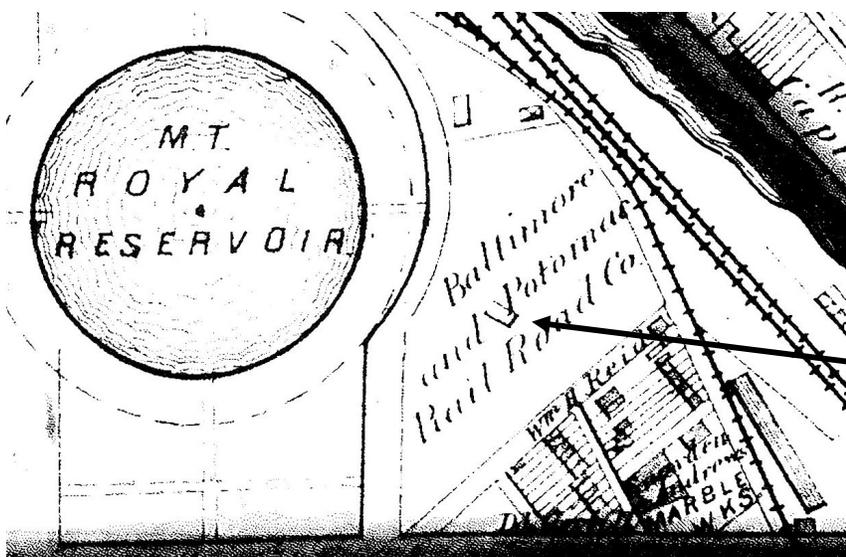
The Old Weather-Beaten Cottage on Mount Royal Hill to Be Removed

"Before the close of the present week, an unsightly old landmark familiar to residents of North and Northwest Baltimore for many years and one that has become a **constant detraction** to the beauties of Druid Hill Park and the immediate neighborhood will probably have been removed. It is the **weather beaten cottage** which has **stood for more than thirty years** on an eminence at the **western extreme of Mount Royal Hill**, close to the Mount Royal avenue entrance to the park.

During all the time of its existence the cottage has been occupied by an aged couple, **John and Catherine Coffay**, who were as well known to residents within many squares of the house as the house itself. They **conducted a dairy farm** until the death of the old man from pneumonia, which occurred last week.

But **Mrs. Coffay** is cooperative with requests made by the Baltimore and Potomac Railroad Company to which the land (a tract of about two acres) belongs, is prepared to move out and the old **house** will be carted away, together with the **stable** in the rear and the **fences**. The company will clean the place up and try as far as possible to give it a more picturesque appearance, and thus relieve the handsome park entrance of one of its **chief detractors**.

The cottage is one of the most singular of edifices and always attracted notice on account of its **isolated ugliness**. It is a high **one-story shanty**, build loosely of plain, **unpainted clapboards**, with **narrow windows** set in like bad-fitting artificial eyes. A struggling, discouraged vine clings disconsolately to the door, which divides the house and reaches with odd giganticness from the ground to the lofty eaves. The top is surmounted by an **immense chimney-pot**, made apparently, of an old disused iron boiler."



Grasshopper Hill was the area on the eastern slope of the reservoir.

From this atlas of the 1880s, you can see the two acre property owned by the Baltimore & Potomac RR with the Coffay home/dairy in the middle

The Manion/Mannion/Manning Home

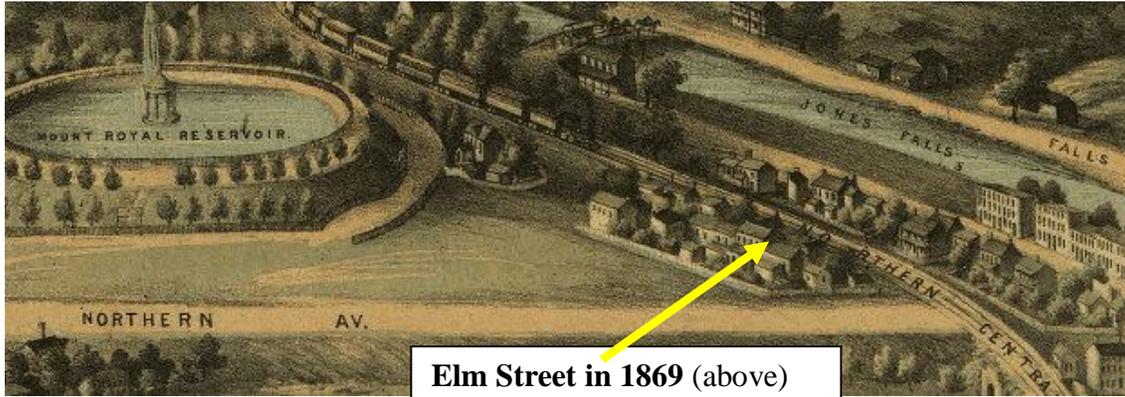
For almost fifty years, **William** and **Mary Manion** leased a two story brick and stone house on Mount Royal (Grasshopper) Hill. Their house was in the middle of a row of nine houses, a short distance from William's parents, John and Catherine Coffay. For a while, William Manion's half-brother, **John Coffay Jr.**, lived two doors away in the same row with his wife Helen and their children.

Eventually the dirt walkway in front of the row was given the name, **Elm Street**. Before the official name, many different names were used to designate the location; Mount Royal, Mount Royal Hill, The Hill, Grasshopper Hill, Goat Hill, Railroad Avenue, Cathedral Extended, North Avenue near Jones Falls, Boundary Avenue, North Avenue near John, and later on it changed to Lord Street.

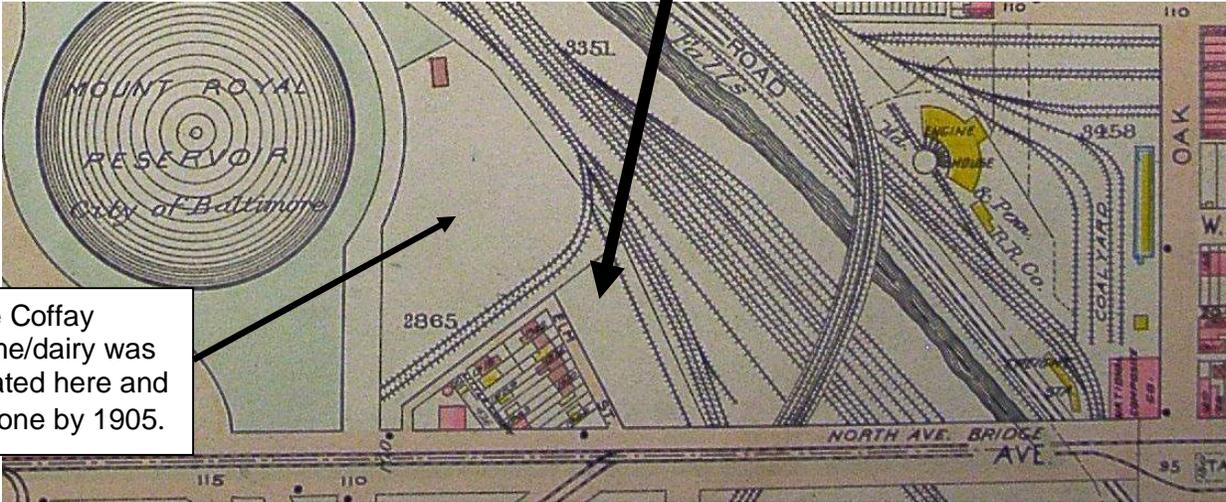
The first official name designated to this location by Baltimore City was: **Elm Street**. The Manions lived at **#1914 Elm Street** for many years. Once again **we are fortunate** that a member of a photography club in the year 1905 thought our ancestors' street was a unique subject to photograph.

The Elm Street photograph is from the Worthington Collection at the MD Historical Society. Mr. Worthington was a member of a photography club in the area of Elm Street. Many of his subjects are not typical, such as this candid view of Elm Street taken around **1905**. Several of our ancestors were living there when he took the picture.



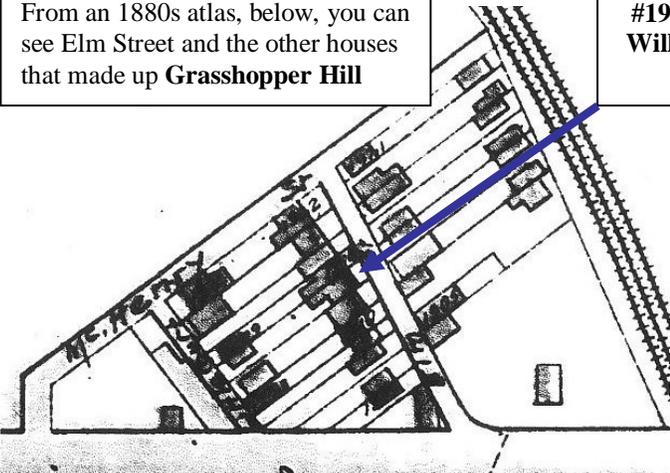


Elm Street in 1869 (above)
Elm Street in 1905 (below)



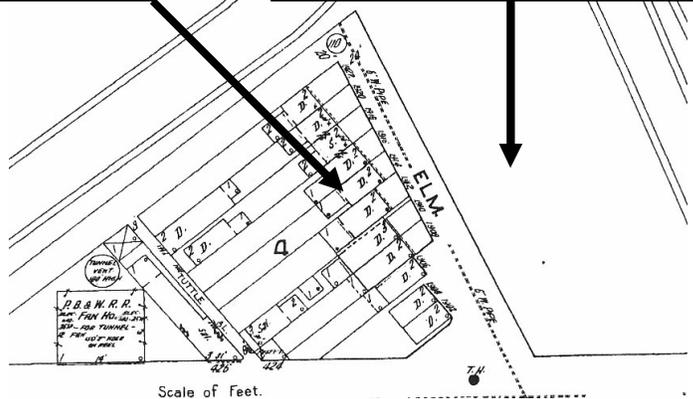
The Coffay home/dairy was located here and is gone by 1905.

From an 1880s atlas, below, you can see Elm Street and the other houses that made up Grasshopper Hill



#1914 Elm Street
William Manion's Home

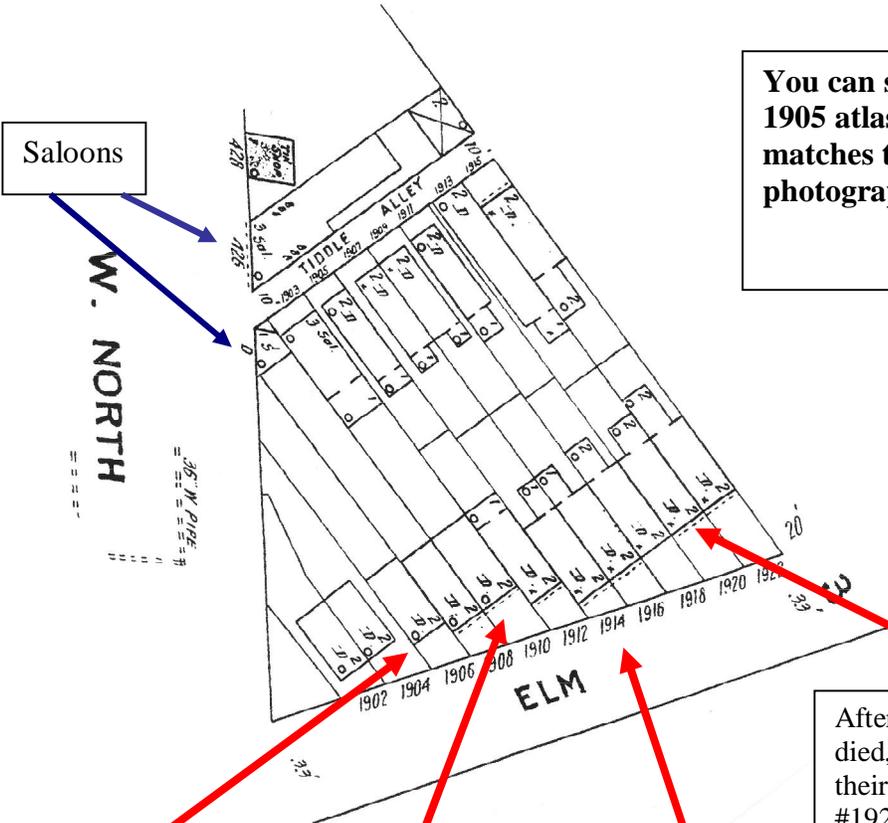
By the year 1907, the houses across from Elm Street had been condemned and torn down.



From The Baltimore Sun, July 7, 1907:

Condemned on Grasshopper Hill: Six dwelling houses on Mount Royal Heights (Grasshopper Hill) were condemned yesterday by the Building Inspector Preston. Occupants of two of the dwellings were notified to vacate immediately. The other houses were vacant. They are old brick structures and are in a very **dilapidated** condition.

You can see how the 1905 atlas of Elm St. matches the 1905 photograph of Elm St.



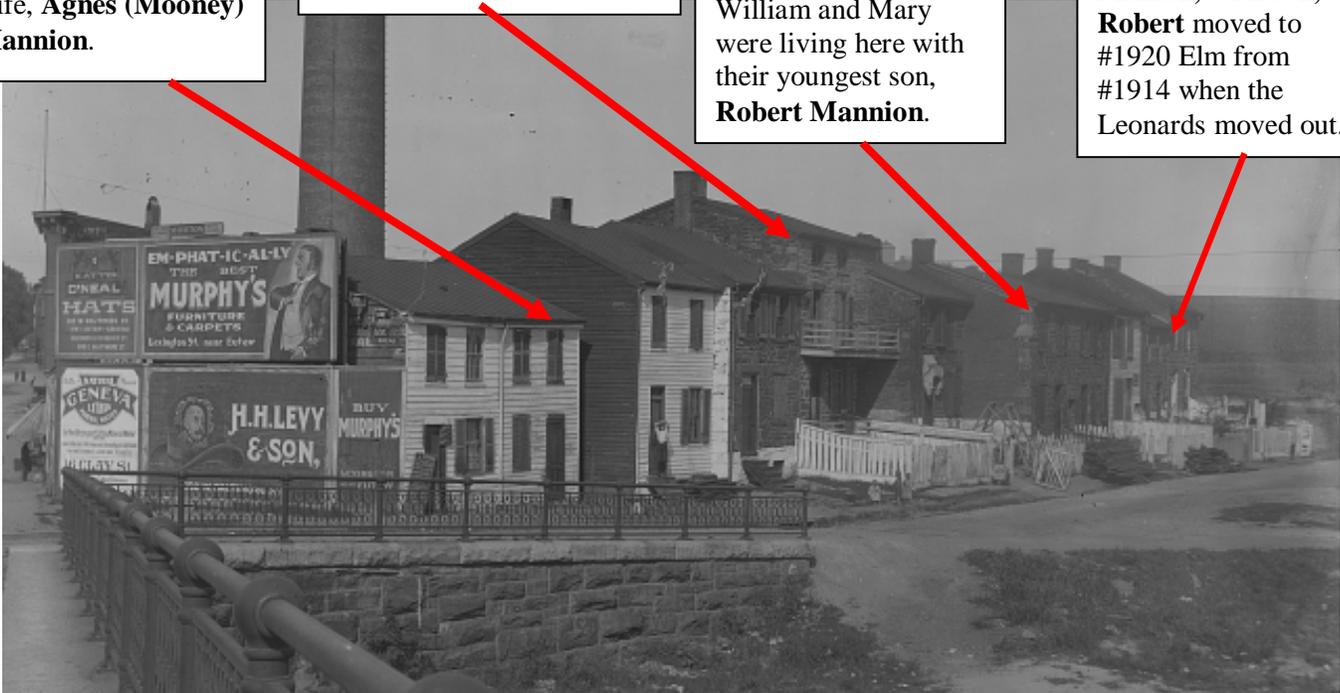
After **William Mannion** died, his wife, **Agnes**, and their children moved to #1920 Elm. Agnes later remarried **Michael Leonard**, who with his own three children, joined Agnes' family at 1920 Elm until the year 1912

William and Mary Manion lived at #1914 Elm and raised their eight children here. They lived in this house for about 50 years. At the time the photo was taken, William and Mary were living here with their youngest son, **Robert Mannion**.

William & Mary Manion, with son, Robert moved to #1920 Elm from #1914 when the Leonards moved out.

William Manion's half-brother, **John Coffay, Jr.**, moved to #1910 Elm with his family after he closed his Maryland Ave. saloon.

William Manion's son, William Mannion, lived at #1904 Elm with his wife, **Agnes (Mooney) Mannion**.



Details on Elm Street

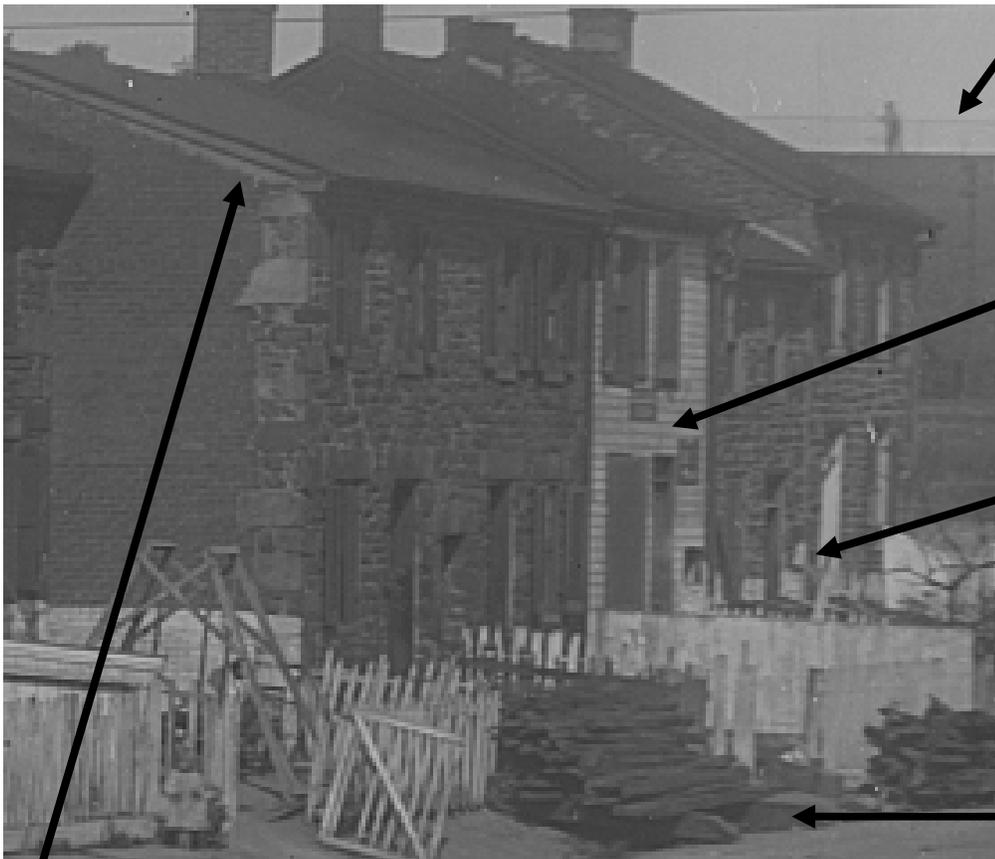
The same Baltimore Sun article that described John and Catherine Coffay's dairy farm also described Elm Street and Grasshopper Hill, where Manions/Mannions and John Coffay Jr.'s family were living at the time, in 1896:

"The demolition of the buildings and fences of the (Coffay's) farm will not wholly destroy the **unsightly environment** of the park at this section. Mount Royal Hill proper extends a hundred or so feet along the north side of North avenue from the western end of the new bridge. About twenty-five houses form the community - houses of all shapes and singularities; houses of **rough stone**, chinked in with **immense slices of white mortar** and **hoary with age**; houses of wood, more **rakish** and modern in appearance and design, though **destitute of their original stoops, blinds and window panes**, and with **roofs** whose **shingles are missing** at intervals or are **sadly out of repair**, and houses of brick, also **sadly out of tune with improvement**. All of the **tumbled houses** are tall, and being set on a hillside, rise in serrated heights over two narrow, crooked little alleys or courts that are **wrapped in perpetual gloom**. A **melancholy, grimy hideousness is the chief physical characteristic** of Mount Royal Hill, the fact of which is emphasized by an acute contrast as formed by the loveliness of the park at this extremity.

Although graced with the euphonious name of "Mount Royal Hill," the **unpleasant looking locality** seldom receives the compliment of the appellation. "Goat Hill" and Grasshopper Hill" are names applied to it with indiscriminate and equal indifference.

It has often been suggested by those who object to the proximity of the buildings to the beautiful Mount Royal entrance that the hill proper should be purchased by the city, improved in a fitting manner and made an addition to the park."

ELM STREET Details ca. 1905



You can see a fence around the Mt. Royal Reservoir and a person walking along it.

People advertised goods for sale from their homes. Rose & Malachi Kelly were grocers & lived at #1918. They were both baptismal sponsors for several of our ancestors

Agnes Mannion had signs out front at #1920. She needed money after her husband's death so she was probably selling something.

When houses on Grasshopper Hill were condemned and torn down, neighbors could take the wood for their stoves. William Manion's wood pile is neatly stacked.

A new roof for William Manion was mentioned in the Baltimore Sun, Dec. 24, 1905: "Minor Privilege granted to John E. Marshall & Son - To erect roof at 1914-1916 Elm street"

A tailor lived and worked in the first house on the block. William Manion's daughter, Stella, was listed as a dressmaker in the Baltimore City Directory near the time this photo was taken. Maybe she worked for him.



Children of Elm Street
There is a swing for the children in one yard.



The children in the photo could possibly be relatives of our ancestors who were living on the street at the time the picture was taken.

Industrial Baltimore

Elm Street was rapidly swallowed up as Baltimore City developed and grew around it.

A - The massive North Avenue Bridge practically engulfed Elm Street which was within a few feet of it. Construction lasted for at least three years, 1893 – 1895, utilizing hundreds of laborers. The bridge is over 100 feet wide, contains 10 million bricks and is faced with marble.

B - A railroad tunnel for a Washington bound line was dug under North Ave. at Elm Street. 1891

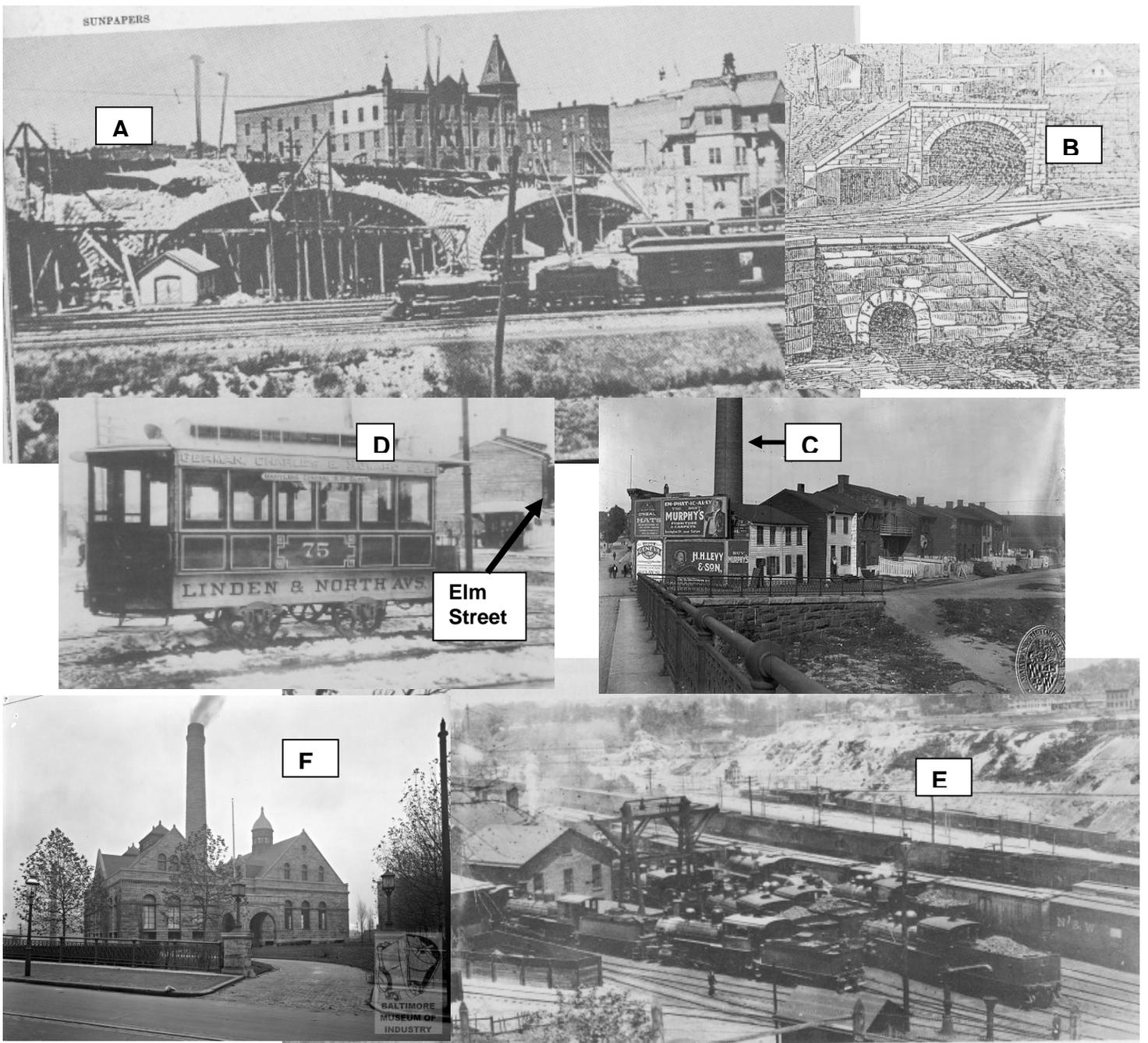
C - To ventilate the tunnel, a 180' brick tower was built adjacent to the Elm Street houses, and it spewed smoke and soot directly onto Elm St..

D - Streetcar lines ran on North Ave. directly past Elm St.

E - The Northern Central RR train yard was built behind Mt. Royal reservoir and Elm St.

F - The Mount Royal Pumping Station was built on North Avenue & McMechen St., directly across from Elm Street.

While these projects caused stress and disruption in their lives, they also provided employment for the community on Grasshopper Hill.



Mannion/Manion/Manning & Coffay Occupations

Development in the northern sections of Baltimore, and the increasing competition for jobs among laborers, gave our ancestors opportunities to move beyond stonecutting and quarry work.

William Manion worked for Baltimore City as a street laborer and lamplighter.

His son, **Robert Mannion**, also worked as a laborer for the City.

Robert, **Michael**, and **Francis Manion** worked as **hostlers** in their teens. A hostler cleaned up after and cared for the horses in a stable. Hostler was a filthy job and in the 1880s & 90s was often taken by a black or Irish boy.

There were two relatives in the extended family that operated livery stables. **Bernard Mannion** was from County Roscommon, Ireland, and his baptism record shows that he was baptized by the same priest who baptized William Manion, so they were possibly related. Bernard Mannion developed a successful livery business in Baltimore. **Thomas Coffay**, from Roscommon, Ireland, (possibly a relative of **John Coffay**) also ran a livery business in Baltimore on Eager Street near Charles St. It was a “cab” service with horses and buggies. The buggy was a “hack” and the drivers were “hackmen.” The Mannion/Manion boys possibly worked in one of the relatives’ stables.

Robert and Michael Manion later worked as drivers (carriages) probably for one of the relatives’ livery stables.

John Mannion/Manning worked as a blacksmith and horseshoer until his death in 1915. He may have learned in trade at one of the relatives’ stables.

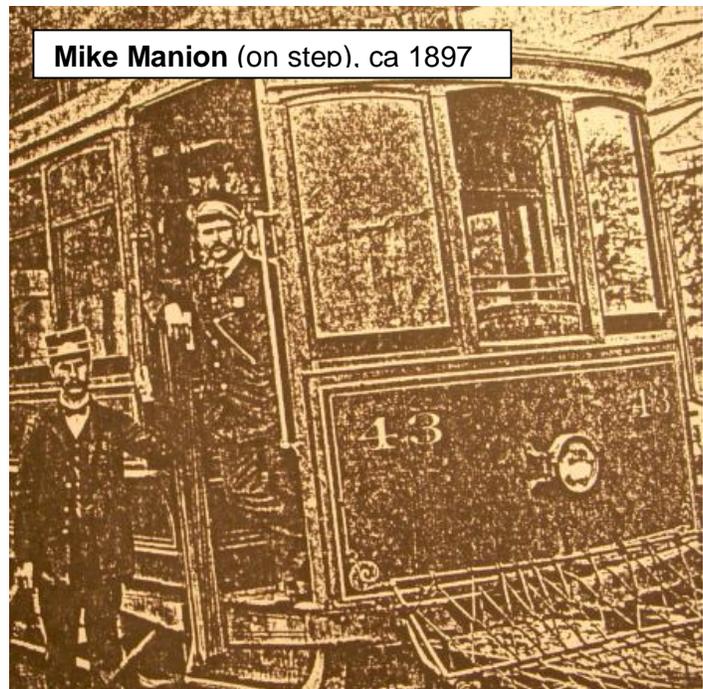
Michael Manion moved on to work for the City (horse drawn) Transit System. His first job for them was as a “hill boy” who helped the horses to climb up steep hills on a route. Mike became a streetcar motorman and worked on the streetcars until his death in 1932.

Francis “Frank” Manion worked as a motorman for the Philadelphia Transit System and was also a pipe fitter with a gas company in Philadelphia until his death in 1920.

William Mannion (oldest son of William Manion), remained a stonecutter until his death in 1901.

John Coffay Jr. was a stonecutter, then ran a saloon for several years, until he went back to work with the family dairy business on Grasshopper Hill

Michael Coffay was a stonecutter and also worked as “milkman” for the family dairy until his death at age 31.



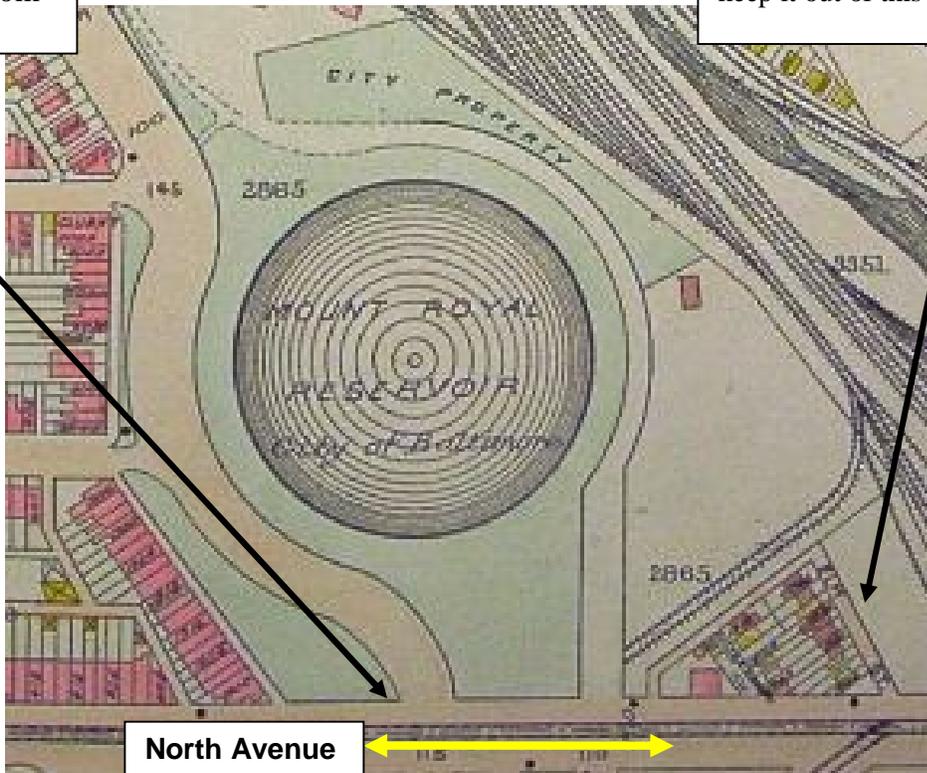
This photograph (ca 1900) depicts the residential development of the Mount Royal Hill area for the merchant class of Baltimore. The Mount Royal Reservoir sits on top of the hill. The photographer has carefully avoided revealing what was to the immediate right of the reservoir; the Irish immigrant community on Grasshopper Hill.



Mount Royal Entrance to Druid Hill Park from North Avenue

North Ave.

Elm Street (Grasshopper Hill) was on this side of the reservoir. The photographer was careful to keep it out of this picture.



North Avenue

By the 1890s, the contrast between Elm Street and the surrounding streets was obvious, as Elm Street was visible from the main thoroughfare called Boundary Avenue (North Avenue). The merchant class had to pass by Elm Street whenever they crossed the North Avenue Bridge on foot, by streetcar or with horse & carriage. Residents urged the City to get rid of Grasshopper Hill.

The Baltimore Sun covered the various attempts to replace Grasshopper Hill with something else.

**THE SUN, May 29, 1899 - FIFTH REGIMENT'S ARMORY Decides Upon A Site
NORTH AVENUE NEAR BRIDGE Just East Of The Mount Royal Entrance To The Park**

"...Upon the lot there have been for years, a number of small houses, owned by individuals. This little settlement of frame dwellings has been known as "Goat Hill" on account of the number of these bearded animals that frequent the neighborhood."

NOTE: The Armory didn't move there. "Goat Hill" was another nickname for Grasshopper Hill. The goats probably belonged to the Coffay family's dairy business.

THE SUN, June 24, 1899 -"GRASSHOPPER HILL" The North Central Will Convert It To Freight Yard

"The **unsightly lot** on North avenue near Mount Royal Reservoir known as "Grasshopper Hill" will be converted into a freight yard for the Northern Central Railway Company. "Grasshopper Hill" extends from near the drive around the reservoir to the Northern Central tracks. The location was one of the suggested sites for a new armory for the Fifth Maryland Regiment."

NOTE: A freight yard was built *behind* Mt. Royal Hill & did not affect Grasshopper Hill.

THE SUN, May 29, 1903 – "The question of the purchase of Grasshopper Hill by the city evoked considerable discussion and resulted in the appointment of a committee of three to confer with the Mayor and City Council relative to securing this plot of ground from the Northern Central Railroad Company in order to improve the entrance to Druid Hill Park."

THE SUN, Feb 6, 1909 - Reservoir As An Ideal Stadium "Will the Public Athletic League get the Mount Royal Reservoir site for a stadium and up-to-date athletic field?" **NOTE:** Answer: No!

**THE SUN, Jan. 9, 1915 - TO BE SWIMMING POOL
Mount Royal Reservoir Will Be Changed By Park Board**

"...became known last night following the arrival in Baltimore of Frederick Olmstead, the landscape architect from Boston...The entrance to the pool will be on the "Grasshopper Hill" side."

NOTE: It didn't happen

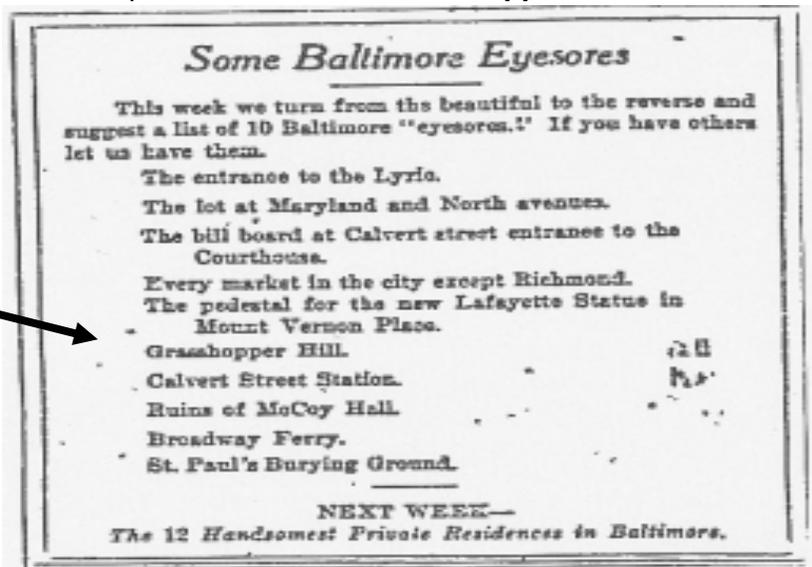
THE SUN 1920 March 7:

NOTE: Grasshopper Hill Made a Top 10 List.

This was the eventual fate of Grasshopper Hill:

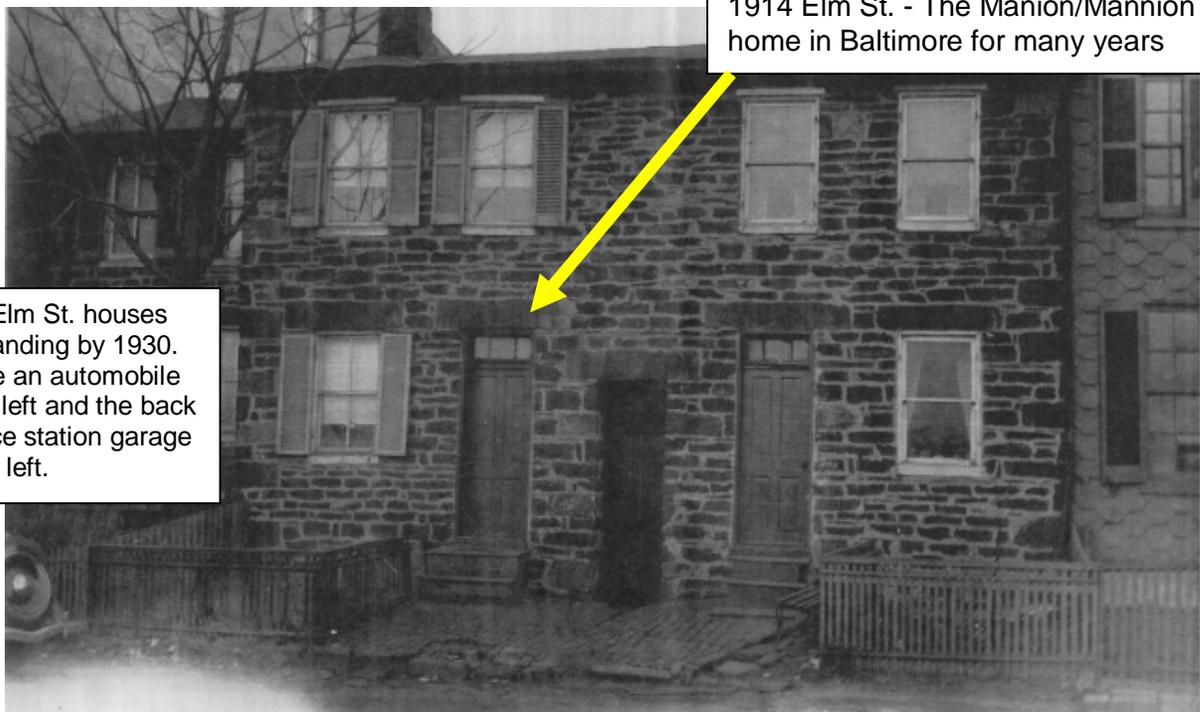
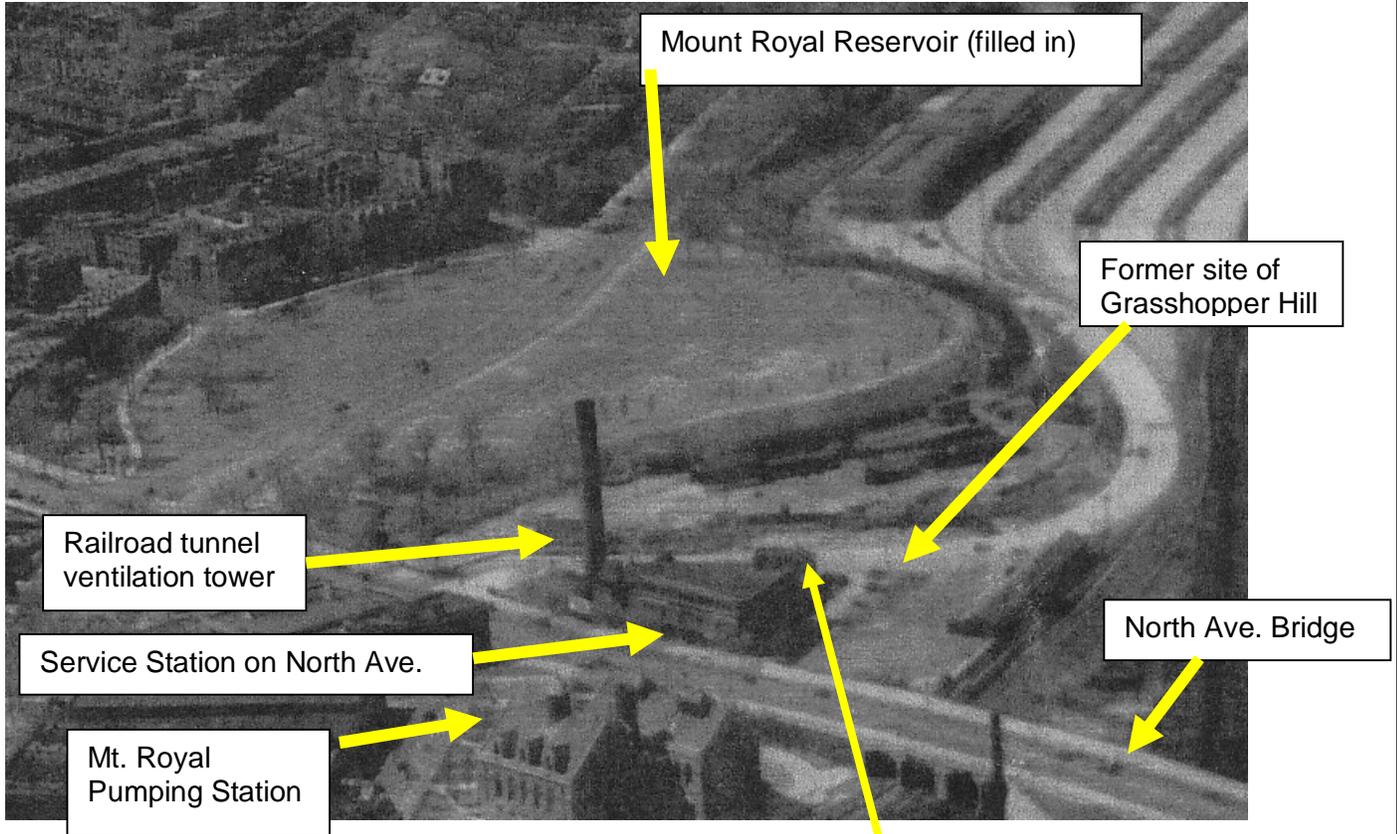
THE SUN, May 25, 1920

"With the exception of a shack or two, but little remains of that portion of **Grasshopper Hill** on North Avenue, near Mount Royal Avenue which has been purchased by the **Federal Motor Company**. As soon as the last building has been razed the motor company will commence erection of a large garage and service station fronting North Avenue." **NOTE:** Several Grasshopper Hill houses were left intact.



Evolution of Elm Street

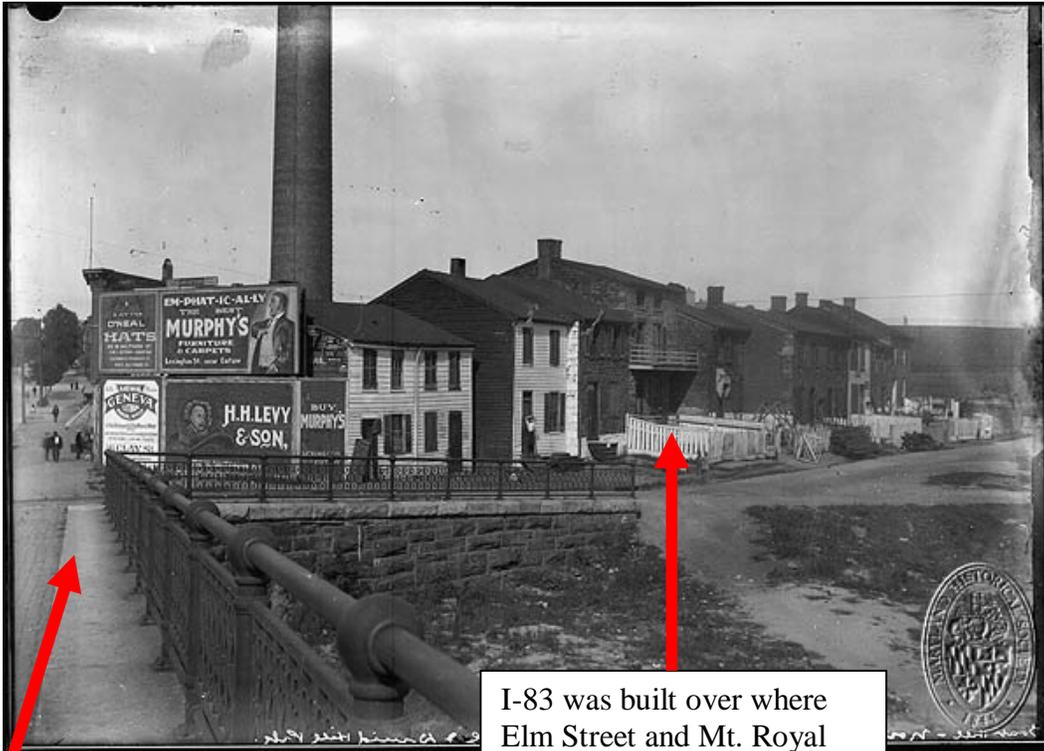
By the 1930s, Mount Royal Hill had changed dramatically. The reservoir was filled in. The Federal Motor Company opened a service station where Elm Street used to be. The Irish community of Grasshopper Hill appears to have disappeared, but not entirely. Several of the Elm Street houses survived when this photo was taken, hidden behind the Motor Company's building. The old Manion home, at number 1914, was one of them.



Five of the Elm St. houses were still standing by 1930. You can see an automobile in the lower left and the back of the service station garage in the upper left.

Then and Now – One Hundred Years Apart

The older photo was taken ca 1905. The modern view of the same area was taken in 2009.



I-83 was built over where Elm Street and Mt. Royal Reservoir once existed

North Avenue
Baltimore, MD,
looking west



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