

Chapter 5 – Troubles on Grasshopper Hill & Beyond: Gangs, Police, Jails, Courts, Prison

Grasshopper Hill acquired a reputation for harboring gangs of violent, despicable bullies and drunks. Police, prison, and jail records, along with newspaper articles, show that there was some cause for that reputation. The Baltimore City police records from the 1880s and 1890s contain numerous arrests of our ancestors. Their names also appear in the Baltimore City Jail records and state prison records from the Maryland House of Correction. In addition, the Baltimore Sun and Baltimore American newspapers covered some of the incidents in which our ancestors were involved.

Much of the information in this chapter comes from historical newspaper articles or from original and microfilmed records held at the Maryland State Archives in Annapolis, Maryland. I checked everything that was available for the period that our ancestors lived in Baltimore. However, the records collection at the Archives is incomplete, and some years were not available for research.

It can be somewhat disturbing to read about our ancestors in trouble. On the other hand, these records provide us with some specific details about our ancestors and the events in their lives.

Disturbing The Peace

The **William Mannion** charged in the police record below was likely the son of **William Manion & Mary Coyle Manion**. He was twenty-two at the time, single, living on Grasshopper Hill with his parents, and working as a stonecutter. May 4, 1884, was on a Sunday, so this incident probably occurred after a Saturday night of socializing in the saloons in the area.

Baltimore City Police Record Northwestern District

May 4, 1884, 1.50 a.m.

Offenders: John Ryan, William Conroy, Michael Conroy, William Mannion

Each charged with willfully disturbing a neighborhood in the City of Baltimore by loud and unseemly noises and profanity, cursing, and swearing on the street, each fined \$10, and costs.

Committed (jailed) in default of payment of fine and costs

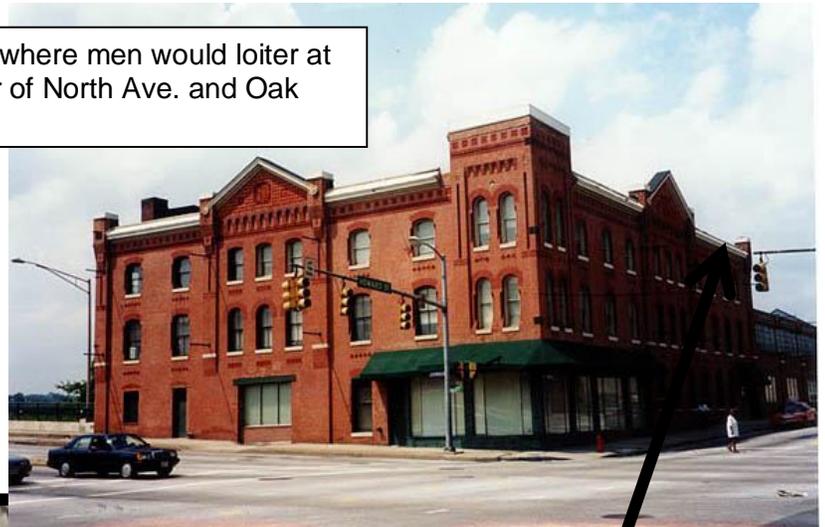
William and Michael Conroy afterwards released on payment. **Mannion** afterwards released.

The article on the following page from the Baltimore Sun describes the same group of men one year later still engaged in the same kind of behavior. Only John Ryan was caught and arrested. The location given (Oak & North) is at the east end of the North Avenue Bridge. Grasshopper Hill (where the Manion/Mannions & Coffays lived) was at the west end of the bridge. The description gives us an idea of the kind of activity that gave Grasshopper Hill a bad reputation:

THE SUN, August 29, 1885 Disorder on the Boundary

Sergeant Barker, of the middle district, with several other officers, made a **raid** last night upon a crowd of **disorderly men** who have been **in the habit of loitering** about Boundary (North) avenue bridge, over Jones's falls. The men are **usually drunk**, and often get into general **fight**s. The disorder, however, is usually upon the county side, near the corner of Oak (Howard) street and Boundary (North) avenues. At an early hour Sunday morning there was a **stone fight** in the locality in question, and people in the neighborhood were awakened from their sleep by the **loud cursing** and **swearing** of the men engaged in the fight. The city police have been complained to, and have determined to break up the disorderly crowd if possible. Last night the officers succeeded in arresting one of the **gang**, who gave his name at the middle station-house as **John Ryan**. He was locked up for thirty days.

This is the area where men would loiter at night; the corner of North Ave. and Oak (Howard St.)



Elm Street on Grasshopper Hill - home to the Manion/Mannion & Coffay families.

