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## Jazz-age writer gets his due

Recognition: After 25 years of stalling, the city names a park in Bolton Hill after a famous and infamous resident, writer F. Scott Fitzgerald.

**By Frederick N. Rasmussen**  
**Sun Staff**

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Quietly and without fanfare, the 25-year quest of a Baltimore educator and writer came to fruition this summer, when a small park in Bolton Hill was finally dedicated to the memory of F. Scott Fitzgerald, the Jazz Age chronicler who died 60 years ago this month.

The park, at the southeast corner of Bolton and Wilson streets, is just a few blocks from where Fitzgerald had lived during the 1930s. A neighborhood gathering point for Bolton Hill denizens of all ages, it is not uncommon to see senior citizens busily chatting as children laugh and play games.

But for 25 years, the little park was nameless to most, despite the best efforts of Bolton Hill resident Frank R. Shivers Jr., adjunct professor at [Johns Hopkins University](#) and author of "Maryland Wits and Baltimore Bards" and "Walking in Baltimore: An Intimate Guide to the Old City."

The park stands on the site of the old Har Sinai Synagogue, later the Cornerstone Baptist Church. After a spectacular winter fire in 1969 destroyed the building, the wreckage was plowed under, poured into the church's former basement, and a park built on top of it.

When the city's Park Board was deciding on a name for the new park, Shivers decided to bring the Fitzgerald-Bolton Hill connection to its attention.

He enlisted the help of veteran News American journalist Louis Azrael, who had known Fitzgerald in the 1930s.

In a letter to the board, Shivers wrote: "Fitzgerald was a great distinction to the town and the neighborhood. He was of course one of the outstanding literary figures of the past 50 years. He had roots in Baltimore, and he loved it."

The board unanimously acceded to Shivers' request, but the park, though improved in the past few years, remained unmarked until this summer.

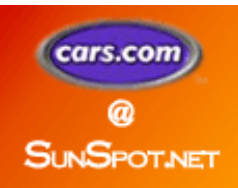
Aided by the Mount Royal Improvement Association and the neighborhood's annual Festival on the Hill, money finally became available to have Fitzgerald's name cut into two stone pillars at its entrance.

"We ought to honor the name and soul of a star writer who lived in Baltimore, and this seemed to be a good way to do that. And we had lots of neighborhood involvement in the process," Shivers said from his Bolton Hill home the other day. All these years, "It was Fitzgerald Park, but no one knew it. And, after all, Baltimore really does have a claim on this writer."

Fitzgerald, scion of an old Maryland family and related to Francis Scott Key, had arrived in Baltimore in 1932 during a particularly dark period of his life. His wife, Zelda, was trying to overcome mental illness in Baltimore hospitals, and he fought alcoholism while finishing "Tender Is the Night."

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The Fitzgeralds first lived in Trimbush, a house at La Paix, the Towson estate of Bayard Turnbull, a Baltimore architect.

Fitzgerald later moved to a townhouse at 1307 Park Ave. in Bolton Hill, with his 11-year-old daughter Scottie, a student at Bryn Mawr School.

"It was in that house that he learned that 'Tender Is the Night' would not be a Book-of-The-Month Club selection," Shivers noted.

"Baltimore is warm, but pleasant - I love it more than I thought," wrote Fitzgerald. "It is so rich with memories. It is nice to look up the street and see the statue of my great-uncle (Francis Scott Key.) And to know Poe is buried here and that many ancestors of mine have walked in the old town by the bay. I belong here, where everything is civilized and gay and rotted and polite. And I wouldn't mind a bit if in a few years Zelda and I could snuggle up together under a stone in some graveyard here. That is a really happy thought and not melancholy at all."

In 1937, he left the city for Hollywood, where he had accepted an offer to be an MGM screenwriter. On Dec. 21, 1940, Fitzgerald collapsed and died from a heart attack. He was 44 years old.

Laid out in the back room of a second-rate Los Angeles funeral home, a friend observed, "His hands were horribly wrinkled and thin, the only proof left after death that for all the props of youth, he actually had suffered and died an old man."

Writer and wit Dorothy Parker, shocked by what she saw, uttered, "The poor son of a bitch."


His body was shipped by train from Los Angeles to the Pumphrey Funeral Home in Rockville. Saying he hadn't lived as a Catholic, the Archdiocese of Baltimore refused burial in the old family plot in St. Mary's Cemetery in Rockville. He was interred instead in the non-denominational Rockville Union Cemetery. Zelda joined him there after her death in a 1948 fire in an Asheville, N.C., mental hospital. In 1975, the Catholic church dropped its opposition, and the couple was reburied in St. Mary's.

Writing of Fitzgerald's death, Stephen Vincent Benet said, "You can take off your hats now, gentleman, and I think perhaps you had better. This is not a legend, this is a reputation - and seen in perspective it may well be the most secure reputation of our time."

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