



# THE SHIP CAULKERS' HOUSES



**The Ship Caulkers' Houses tell the story of freedom and advancement for Black people in Baltimore's Fell's Point neighborhood during the pre-Civil War Era – forgotten and ignored for too long.**





## Baltimore, a hub of early maritime activity

A perpetual boomtown from the Revolutionary War through the Civil War, Baltimore was a hotbed of industry and innovations that made it the fastest growing city in the United States. Its shipyards built the fastest ships, known as "Baltimore Clippers," that helped win the War of 1812. These yards were famous the world over and attracted business for ship construction and repairs.

The story of Baltimore's free Black ship caulkers is one of accomplishment in the face of adversity. In the years before the Civil War, before Black people were considered citizens and at a time when systematic racism afforded few (if any) rights, free Black ship caulkers built a community that promoted education and a trade that allowed for steady wages.

An architectural drawing of a building facade, likely a historical sketch. It shows a row of windows and a dormer. The drawing is in a light, sketchy style. On the left, there's a vertical label "Left Elev". On the right, there's a label "Remove dormer" with an arrow pointing to a dormer structure. The drawing is set against a dark background.

## Little Houses Big Story

The two small 18th century wood houses at 612 S. Wolfe Street and 614 S. Wolfe Street have a strong association with the free Black community living in Fell's Point in the decades before the Civil War.

Documentary research uncovered the connection between the houses and the Black ship caulkers. Architecturally, the houses are important as rare surviving examples of working-class housing. Built ca. 1798, they are a window into the past and display once-common construction methods that have all but disappeared. Historically, the houses are important as a tangible connection to Fell's Point's free Black community before the Civil War.

The houses were not built to survive 230 years, yet they have shown incredible resilience, much like the free Black ship caulkers who inhabited these houses long ago. The story of these ship caulkers is not well known but needs to be told.

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## Help us bring this big story to light

We invite you to be a part of advancing and preserving the story of the ship caulkers and these Houses.

Share our Website at [shipcaulkers.org](https://shipcaulkers.org)  
with friends, family and members of your community.  
You can also donate to the preservation of these  
important pieces of Baltimore History by visiting  
[shipcaulkers.org/donate](https://shipcaulkers.org/donate).

Your support is greatly appreciated.

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