

THE ROLE OF FRANK LYON AND HIS ASSOCIATES IN THE EARLY DEVELOPMENT OF ARLINGTON COUNTY

By

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When Frank Lyon moved to Alexandria, later Arlington, County near the turn of the century, he moved to a sparsely settled area with the advantages of easy access to the District of Columbia and great potential for land development. Access to Washington was somewhat hampered, however, by the gambling interests in Rosslyn, a less than tranquil community which provided an undesirable atmosphere for teetotalers such as Frank Lyon. Lyon bought the Rosslyn *Monitor*, joined the campaign to clean up Rosslyn, and proceeded to become one of the leading land developers in the County.

The family from which Frank Lyon was descended was established in Virginia in 1730. Frank's grandfather, Daniel Lyon, was a general contractor and builder in Petersburg. His father, John Lyon, was a lawyer, practicing in Petersburg until 1875 when he moved to Richmond. During the Civil War, John was in the office of the Advocate General of the Confederacy. In 1889, he moved to Washington where he was an attorney in the land office until his death in 1897.

John Lyon's wife was Mary Margaret Springs of Charlotte, North Carolina. The couple had four children, Mary, Agnes, LeRoy, and Frank.

Frank Lyon was born in Petersburg, Virginia, on December 30, 1867. He was educated in Richmond public schools, graduating from high school in 1884. After attending Richmond College for eighteen months, Lyon began working as a clerk for the Richmond and Danville Railroad Company in Charlotte, North Carolina. He was later transferred to Richmond, where he became private secretary to one of the railroad officials. In 1886, Southern Railroad was formed and Frank Lyon went to Washington to work in the offices of the new company.

On June 1, 1887, Lyon became private secretary to Walter L. Bragg of Alabama, a commissioner with the newly formed Interstate Commerce Commission. Later, Lyon became official stenographer with the ICC, where he remained until 1899.

While working for the ICC, Lyon attended night sessions of the Georgetown University Law School. During this period, Mrs. Lyon read Blackstone aloud to him whenever possible, allowing him to rest his eyes. A member of the Richmond chapter of Beta Theta Pi, he received a Bachelor of Laws in 1889 and a Master of Laws in 1890. After finishing his legal training, Lyon served for two years, beginning in 1900, as an expert stenographer for the Constitutional Convention of Virginia. Then he began to practice law in Alexandria County.

On August 5, 1890, Frank Lyon married Georgie Hays Wright near Manassas, Virginia. Her father, John V. Wright, was a land office attorney who had been a member of Congress before the Civil War. During the war, Judge Wright was a member of the Confederate Congress as well as a colonel in the Confederate army.¹ In 1870 he became circuit judge over Columbia, Tennessee, and the surrounding area.

Frank and Georgie Lyon had three children who survived childhood. Georgie Hays married Jacob L. Devers, a graduate of West Point. John, a lieutenant in the Twenty-ninth Division of the American Expeditionary Force, was killed in the Argonne offensive in France during World War I. Margaret Springs married Charles W. Smith, a business associate of Frank Lyon. Mr. and Mrs. Smith now live in Washington, D.C. Their daughter, Mary Bittinger, and one of their grandsons, Charles Bittinger, III, are the third and fourth generations of the Lyon family to be involved in property management in Arlington County.

Frank and Georgie Lyon moved to Alexandria County in 1889, building a small house on Lubber Run. There the family had an early experience with the effects of water pollution when one of the Lyon boys died of a fever which he contracted while playing in the stream. The Lubber Run house no longer stands.²

It is difficult to date precisely Frank Lyon's association with the *Monitor* or to determine the role of the paper in the crusade against the liquor and gambling interests which dominated Rosslyn. That Frank Lyon and the paper did play a role in the dissolution of the Rosslyn way of life is apparent. In *A History of Arlington County, Virginia*, Dorothy Ellis Lee states that Frank Lyon bought the paper in 1901.³ Robert Anderson, in his history of printing in the County, states that Frank Lyon began to issue the *Monitor* in 1906, two years after the famous saloon raid in Rosslyn, in which Lyon took part. However, the *Falls Church Monitor* published an edition known as the *Alexandria County Monitor* before 1906.⁴ As early as March 3, 1902, the Circuit Court ordered that land under litigation be sold "after advertising the time, place and terms of sale, for two consecutive weeks in the 'Alexandria County Monitor,' a newspaper published in Alexandria County."⁵

¹ "Virginia Biography," vol. VI of *History of Virginia* (Chicago and New York: The American Historical Society, 1924), pp. 123-25.

² This and other information in this article was graciously contributed by Frank Lyon's daughter, Margaret Lyon Smith, and her husband, Charles Watson Smith, hereinafter referred to as Mr. or Mrs. Smith.

³ Dorothy Ellis Lee, *A History of Arlington County, Virginia* (Richmond: Dietz Press, Inc., 1946), pp. 35-38.

⁴ Robert Nelson Anderson, "A History of Printing in Arlington (Alexandria) County," *Arlington Historical Magazine* (1959), p. 22.

⁵ Alexandria County Circuit Court Chancery Orders D, pp. 246-47.



Frank Lyon, circa 1917

Frank Lyon continued his association with the paper until its sale in 1928. The souvenir program for the Northern Virginia Exposition in Clarendon in 1915 carried an advertisement for the *Monitor*. A subscription to the paper was \$1.00 per year, paid in advance. It claimed to be the best advertising medium in Northern Virginia.

In addition to using his newspaper in the crusade against vice, Frank Lyon joined the legal crusade against liquor. In court, he represented John D. Payne and George W. Hawkhurst, the leaders of the dry forces. Lyon found a legislative clause to the effect that liquor licenses should not be granted without sufficient police protection. The police force of Alexandria County at that time consisted of one sheriff and one deputy. On April 29, 1905, petitions were filed for liquor licenses. Lyon argued against granting the licenses on the basis of incomplete police protection, and Judge Nicol denied all applications.⁶

The *Fairfax Herald* of Friday, May 4, 1905, carried the following account of the court action which ended the era of open saloons in Alexandria County:

The friends of temperance are greatly pleased at the action of Judge Nicol in rejecting all liquor licenses in Alexandria county last week. Being rejected on the ground that the county had no police protection within the meaning of the law is still more gratifying as this precludes the possibility of any licenses being granted hereafter under this law. Messrs. J. D. Payne, William Marcey, Rev. A. W. Graves and G. W. Hawkhurst representing the District Lodge of Good Templars, which includes in its jurisdiction Alexandria county, actively assisted the citizens committee of the county in the contest, which was exceedingly warm. Many ladies in the county attended court, bringing their lunch with them and staying all day until the matter was finally settled. There was much rejoicing when the judge rendered his decision. This is the second contest in the county under the Mann law, the former one being two years ago, before Judge Nicol was on the bench.

Frank Lyon's children attended public schools in Georgetown, riding the electric cars to Rosslyn, the end of the line. From there they walked across the Aqueduct Bridge to their schools. Passengers continuing on into Washington caught the trolley at 35th and M Streets. The Virginia cars ran every hour at that time, so a passenger who missed one trolley back to Virginia had to wait for an hour at Rosslyn Circle for the arrival of the next one. Mrs. Smith believes that her father's interest in cleaning up Rosslyn stemmed from a desire to make the area safe for his children.

Early in the twentieth century the Lyons moved into the "Ohmstead" house on Kirkwood Road, the site of the present YMCA. The old YMCA building, now destroyed, was formerly the Lyon home. The first modern bathroom in Arlington County may have been the one which Frank Lyon built in his Kirkwood Road house.

Becoming a law partner of Robert Walton Moore, Lyon soon became involved in the development of Moore's Addition to Clarendon, an area

⁶ Frank L. Ball, "The Arlington I Have Known," *Arlington Historical Magazine* (1964), pp. 3-16.

which at present lies north of Pershing Drive and southeast of Clarendon Circle. Later, Moore sold his interest in Moore's Addition to Clarendon to Frank Lyon, who then formed his own development firm.⁷

R. W. Moore was a Fairfax native who was Assistant Special Counsel of the Associated Railways and Steamship Companies of the South in matters before the ICC and the courts. In 1918, Mr. Moore became a judge; then, in 1919, he took his seat as Representative from the Eighth Congressional District to the Congress of the United States.⁸

Frank Lyon's next venture into land development was on a tract of land in the Clarendon area which was subject to litigation in chancery, resulting in a court order that the land be sold at public or private sale. Frank Lyon offered \$500 an acre, or a total of \$6,269 for the property. His offer was accepted and, on April 6, 1904, he acquired 12.538 acres of the property while .94 acres went to the W.,A., and F.C. Railway Company. The property was adjacent to that owned by Charlotte L. Drain on the southeast side of the Georgetown Road and north of the Georgetown Road and Ball's Lane intersection.⁹ The property became known as Lyon's Addition to Clarendon.

When Frank Lyon sold a lot in Moore's Addition to Clarendon or in Lyon's Addition to Clarendon, the deed would often bear the stamp of Lyon's attitude toward liquor. The buyer would agree that "liquor shall never be sold or dispensed on the property or from any building erected thereon, nor shall said property be used for the conducting of any business that constitutes a nuisance to other lot owners in the subdivision, such as a soap factory or like industry."¹⁰ The character of the subdivision was often affected by a clause restricting future owners of the property and another clause placing a floor on the cost of the building to be erected. For example, a 1919 deed to property in Moore's Addition to Clarendon reads, in part, "neither said property nor any part thereof nor any interest therein shall be sold or leased to any one not of the Caucasian race, nor shall any house costing less than \$2,000 other than an outbuilding, be erected thereon."¹¹

In 1907, Commissioner Franklin K. Lane of the ICC appointed Frank Lyon to the semi-judicial position of examiner, a position to be held until 1912 when he resigned to begin practice exclusively before the Interstate Commerce Commission, specializing in matters concerning steamship lines and coal companies.¹²

⁷ Mr. Smith.

⁸ *History of Virginia*, VI, p. 395.

⁹ Alexandria County Deed Book 108, p. 563.

¹⁰ Alexandria County Deed Book 110, p. 262.

¹¹ Alexandria County Deed Book 165, p. 20.

¹² *History of Virginia*, VI, p. 123.

During the years prior to 1907, Lyon had bought a number of lots in the area of Carne's Schoolhouse, Wunder's Crossroads and Rixey's tract. On part of the land he built, in 1907, the house which he called Lyonhurst. It was an elegant Spanish-style home on twenty acres of land near the Great Falls and Old Dominion electric car track. The trolley line had an excess of power and the company decided to sell some of the power to landowners along the line. The Lyons were among the first to take advantage of the electricity. During morning and evening rush hours, however, the amount of power was diminished because of the frequency of the trains. The Lyons' electric stove was of little use to them during the breakfast and dinner hours, because those hours coincided with the train's rush hours.

As an examiner for the ICC, Frank Lyon traveled widely by train throughout the United States. The Spanish missions which he saw in the West inspired him to build a Spanish-style house with a rough sand finish. The big porches, built to add coolness, made the house very dark. The porches are now enclosed but much of the rough plaster remains. Near the house is a tower which was erected to be used as a water tower.

The subdivision around the Lyon home bore the name Lyonhurst also. The street leading to the house, now 25th Street, was called Lyonhurst Avenue. Along Lyonhurst Avenue between the railroad and Frank Lyon's home, there were twenty-three lots. Between the railroad and the Alex-



Lyonhurst, circa 1915

andria and Chain Bridge Road, now Glebe Road, there were five larger lots.¹³

Frank Lyon and his family lived at Lyonhurst until 1923. Margaret Lyon was married to Charles Watson Smith on the large brick plaza between the house and the tower. The young couple lived near the gate in a small house which Lyon built for them.

Charles Watson Smith was born in New Castle, Pennsylvania, one of eight children. While in high school, he spent his summers working in local tin mills. After graduation, he took a job with the Carnegie Steel Company in order to earn money for college. He then went to the University of Chicago to study astronomy, but he decided to change to law. Going to Washington, he worked in the reading room of the Library of Congress while attending the law school of George Washington University. After his graduation in 1913, Mr. Smith worked as a lawyer in the Land Office of the Department of the Interior. He became a special agent for the General Land Office at which time his base was first in Colorado and then in New Mexico. In 1917 Mr. Smith resigned as a special agent for the General Land Office to come east and marry Margaret Lyon, whom he had met at Lyonhurst in 1915. He became a law partner of Frank Lyon and was later made secretary-treasurer of Lyon's development firm.

Frank Lyon's development firm originally bore his own name only, later becoming Lyon and Fitch, when C. Walton Fitch became a partner in 1920. The name changed to Lyon and Fitch, Incorporated, with Charles Smith serving as treasurer, and, finally was known as Lyon Properties, Incorporated. Mr. Lyon worked full-time at his law practice in downtown Washington, stopping at the Virginia real estate office on the way to town. Fitch, Smith, and later, Lawrence Michael, spent long hours working at the land development office.

C. Walton Fitch was a member of an old Georgetown family. He was a graduate of Cornell University and had been an army engineer during World War I, attaining the rank of lieutenant colonel. Finding himself without a job at the end of the war, he accepted Frank Lyon's offer with the development firm, taking over land sales. Fitch was married to Frank Lyon's niece, Margaret Lyon Parham. Their daughter, Mrs. Charles Suter, is a resident of Arlington County. Fitch built a house in Lyon Park at the corner of the intersection of what is now Pershing Drive and Edgewood Street. The firm's office was behind the house, on the site of the filling station now found northwest of the intersection of Washington Boulevard and Pershing Drive.

Fitch left Lyon's business early in the depression and went to Chicago to become the Director of Exhibits for the Chicago World Fair. After the fair closed, he remained in Chicago as manager of the Museum of Science and Industry.

¹³ Alexandria County Deed Book 115, p. 202.



Charles W. Smith, circa 1952

Lawrence Michael, who was originally from Berkeley Springs, West Virginia, had served in the American army in France during World War I and had worked at a variety of jobs before joining the Lyon firm early in the 1920s. He started as a salesman in the organization, later becoming president of Lyon Properties, Incorporated.

During his years in Arlington County, Michael was active in community affairs, serving as chairman of the Community Chest, of the YMCA (he built both present YMCA buildings) and, for a time, of the Republican Committee. In 1928 he ran against Wade Ball, brother of Frank Ball, for the post of county treasurer, losing to Ball.¹⁴ In 1944 and in 1948, Michael ran unsuccessfully for the Congress of the United States. He remained in Arlington County until his death in 1975.¹⁵

On September 1, 1919, the *Monitor*¹⁶ of Rosslyn carried an advertisement for Moore's Addition to Clarendon at Vinson Station. Both lots and houses were listed for sale. The site was advertised as being twenty minutes from 12th and Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W. by trolley. C. W. Fitch was said to be on the property. Mrs. Suter recalls that her father was called upon at all hours of the day and night to handle problems associated with the business.

The *Monitor* of September 1, 1919, was a special edition honoring the young men of Alexandria County who were returning home from war. A welcome home celebration was to be held at the Court House on Labor Day. There would be games with cash prizes and the speaker would be Representative Champ Clark. A memorial fund was to be started to erect a monument at the Alexandria Court House in honor of the soldiers at a cost of at least \$10,000. Frank Lyon (who had been fuel administrator for the County during the war)¹⁷ was a member of the committee arranging the homecoming celebration.

On the front page of the Home Coming Edition of the *Monitor* was the following story:

ONLY MAN KILLED

John Lyon was killed in action on October 16, 1918. He was second lieutenant in the 29th Division in the Machine Gun Company of the 116th Infantry.

He was a graduate of Western High School, attended the University of Virginia for two years, editor of the Alexandria County *Monitor* for two years, at the same time attending Georgetown Law School at night, but did not graduate owing to the fact that he went to France in May, just before he had completed his examinations. He served one year with the American Ambulance Corps in France, and was assistant editor of *Forest and Stream* in New York. He served

¹⁴ Ball was later employed by the Lyon firm.

¹⁵ Information concerning Mr. Michael was furnished by his son, Jerry E. Michael, an Arlington County resident.

¹⁶ According to Robert Nelson Anderson, the paper was issued as the *Monitor* from 1916-18.

¹⁷ Mrs. Smith.

six months on the Mexican border. He entered the Army through the Alexandria Light Infantry, in which he volunteered as a common soldier, was promoted from corporal to sergeant and to second lieutenant, and reached France July 1918.¹⁸

The development of Lyon Park was begun in 1919. Engineers laid out the streets and lots and salesmen took care of sales. Walter Sunderman was the engineer for the Lyon firm. Some of the earlier lots were only twenty-five feet wide; later, lots had to be at least fifty feet wide. Cellars were dug with a scoop pulled by a team of horses owned by a Mr. Swenson of Clarendon.

Around 1920, the firm of Lyon and Fitch published a pamphlet describing Lyon Park. It was printed by Byron S. Adams. On the cover was a photograph of the Lyon Park Station and the company office. The population for Arlington County¹⁹ in 1920 was 16,040. Five hundred houses had been constructed in the County during the past year, 150 of them in the area of Lyon Park and Clarendon; twenty houses had been built in Lyon Park during that time.

Lyon Park was described in detail. The development was three miles from the White House, near parks, Fort Myer, Arlington (the cemetery), and the Government's Experimental Farm, "with their fine military highways which are some of the Capital's wonderful drives and points of interest. These highways are direct connections with the property."²⁰ The development was two miles from Georgetown via the "new" Key Bridge scheduled to be finished in 1921.

Lyon Park had building sites with or without trees and a public park of about three acres. The park was a grove of natural elms, maples, ash, tulip trees, pines, etc. A stream of water from the largest spring in the County had its source in Lyon Park. The spring had been used by soldiers during the Civil War and provided a spring house for the public. There was a lake in the park as well as picnic tables and play ground equipment. A community house was proposed.

Lyon Park could be reached in twenty minutes from Mt. Vernon Station at 12th and Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W. Cars ran about five minutes apart during rush hours and fifteen minutes apart through the rest of the day. A proposed Memorial Bridge would place Lyon Park within ten minutes of Washington. Using the military roads through Fort Myer and Arlington Cemetery, one could reach Washington from Lyon Park by auto in about fifteen minutes. Wilson Boulevard could be used to reach Georgetown. A new highway was to be built along the right-of-way of the Washington-Virginia Railway through Hatfield, making it possible to reach the city without going through the cemetery.

¹⁸ There are two errors in John Lyon's biography. He was a first lieutenant, and he attended the Law School of the George Washington University.

¹⁹ The name of the County was changed in 1920.

²⁰ "Pamphlet on Lyon Park," p. 13.

Lyon Park was provided with sewers and cement sidewalks. Gas and electricity were provided by the Rosslyn Gas Company and the Arlington Electric Company. Water was provided by individual wells pumped by electric motors. Fire protection was provided by local Clarendon fire companies.

The pamphlet stated that Clarendon and Lyon Park had excellent schools and churches of every denomination. Dental clinics were provided by the County Health Office.

The cost of building sites depended upon the number of lots purchased. No less than two lots with fifty foot frontage was sold to each buyer. The lots were priced from \$350 to \$500 each on a deferred payment plan of about \$10.00 per month. A reduction was offered for cash.

Some houses were built by Lyon and Fitch, others by the owners. A six-room house with four lots would cost about \$9,000. All plans had to be approved by the firm's architects. Financial connections were Citizens National Bank of Alexandria, the Arlington Trust Company of Rosslyn, and the Federal National Bank of Washington.

In the mid-1920s, Mr. Smith, as a representative of the Lyon firm, paid \$600 for property owned by a ward of the state. The purchase was made in order to provide land for the construction of a road in the Lyon Park area. Mr. Smith relates that Representative Moore arranged for the War Department to build the road. Captain Herbert C. Whitehurst was the captain of the Corps of Engineers for the War Department, and Moore named Smith his representative in negotiating with Captain Whitehurst. The road was later named Washington Boulevard. In "The Renaming of Arlington Streets," C. L. Kinnier reported that before the Arlington County streets were renamed around 1930, Military Road ran from Highway Bridge (14th Street Bridge) through the Washington-Hoover Airfield, across military property around the south wall of the cemetery, through Fort Myer to Hatfield, from there along Washington Avenue parallel to the Washington-Alexandria Railroad to Clarendon and thence to Falls Church.²¹

After the development of Lyon Park was completed, around 1922, Frank Lyon looked for more land to develop. Mr. Smith helped Lyon locate the Cruitt or Mackall tract adjoining Clarendon. Lyon arranged a meeting with Chapin Brown, the attorney handling the property, at the Cosmos Club in Washington. Lyon gave Brown a check for a down payment of \$5,000 on the 162 plus acres for which Smith had made an offer of \$175,000. Lyon then began laying out subdivisions but on June 24, 1922, Judge Samuel G. Brent issued a restraining order blocking further development until a dispute over ownership of the property was settled in court. The

²¹ *Arlington Historical Magazine* (1959), p. 43.



Hickory Hill, 1931

case was heard on June 26, 1923, and Frank Lyon was given title to the property.²² The development of Lyon Village was then begun.

Both sides of Kirkwood Road at Lee Highway were developed as part of Lyon Village. The land on the north side of Lee Highway was developed by another firm. A street ran through Lyon Village to Key Bridge. Mr. Smith gave the street the name Key Boulevard. A square at the head of Highland Street had a flagpole which Mr. Smith gave to Washington-Lee High School.

Costing \$1,600 to \$2,400, lots in Lyon Village sold well until the early years of the depression of the thirties. On November 3, 1927, the County turned on its public water system, celebrating the event with a barbecue and a parade in Clarendon. Mr. Smith was marshall of the parade. Real estate men from Washington were invited to the celebration in order that they might be shown the advantages of Arlington County. The fire department was supposed to turn the water on at 1:30 p.m., but just before that time there was a downpour which spoiled the occasion.

In 1923, Frank Lyon moved from Lyonhurst to Langley, Virginia. There he built the stone house now known as Ballantrae, using stones quarried on Pimmit Run, which ran through part of the 169 acres of land which he owned there. Also on the property was the house known as Hickory Hill, where the Fitches lived. At that time, there were porches

²² Arlington County Circuit Court Chancery Orders 8, pp. 10, 232-34.

and a cupola on the Hickory Hill house and there was a spring house for storing dairy products.

Financial reverses of the depression resulted in dissolution of the firm of Lyon and Fitch. Ballantrae was sold and the Fitches moved away. Frank Lyon moved into Hickory Hill, removing the porches and cupola. The Smiths moved into Washington, D.C. The firm of Lyon Properties, Incorporated, continued into the 1940s, and the Lyon Village shopping center and apartments are still owned by members of the Lyon family. Frank Lyon continued to prosper as a lawyer, but the period of his great contribution to the development of Arlington County had come to an end. He lived the remainder of his life in houses in Fairfax County and Washington, dying in November, 1953.

The Arlington County which Frank Lyon knew when he arrived around the turn of the century was greatly changed by the time of the depression when his land development came to a halt. Much of the character of the County by 1930, especially in the areas of Clarendon and Rosslyn, was due to the interests of Frank Lyon and his associates. Today, the lovely communities of Lyon Park and Lyon Village reflect the way of life which Frank Lyon must have envisioned when he started developing those communities many years ago.