



Arlington Ridge

More Than An Historic Cemetery, An Historic Neighborhood

BY F. NEALE SMITH

Perched on the crest of Arlington Ridge, Arlington House, the Custis-Lee Mansion, is the symbol of Arlington County. It is the focal point of Arlington National Cemetery and presents a spectacular view of Washington DC. But there is another historic part of Arlington Ridge that is a community, a neighborhood with its own story.

The long narrow elevation of land called Arlington Ridge extends from Rosslyn southward along the Potomac River through Arlington Cemetery. It is interrupted where Washington Boulevard and Interstate 395 were cut through the ridge at the Pentagon, but then continues as the Arlington Ridge neighborhood along Arlington Ridge Road to Four Mile Run. To the east is the Aurora Highlands neighborhood and Crystal City. The valley on the west side of the ridge is the western boundary of the Arlington Ridge neighborhood and is the route of the earliest known road in Arlington County. Along that route (now Army Navy Drive), aside Long Branch Run, was what early colonists called a "woods path." In the 1700s it was a part of the Alexandria to Georgetown Road, and the area through which it passed was known as Green Valley. At the head of the valley, about two miles north of Four Mile Run, the road crossed eastward over the ridge at "Hoe Hill" and continued through what is now Arlington National Cemetery to a ferry that crossed to Georgetown.¹

Along this route at Four Mile Run was a mill. On March 9, 1765, George Washington wrote from Mount Vernon to Carlyle and Adams, the owners, "As soon as Mr. Lund Washington returns from Fredk. I shall cause my wheat to be delivered to your landing on Four Mile Run, if Flats can get to it conveniently..."²

Prior to the American Revolution, Arlington Ridge was a part of the Gerard Alexander estate. The site of his manor house, Abingdon, has been preserved at Reagan National Airport. Alexander leased a portion of the ridge at Hoe Hill to Benjamin Sebastian, his overseer, collector of rent, and attorney. He built what may have been the first house on the ridge.³

In September 1781 General George Washington and French General Rochambeau, and Continental and French troops, rode through Green Val-

ley enroute to Yorktown VA, where they defeated the British Army in the Revolutionary War.⁴ Later, President George Washington used this road when riding from Mt. Vernon to supervise the laying out of the new Federal City which would bear his name.⁵ For three decades this was the only direct route between the cities of Alexandria and Georgetown and was a part of the national post road, which connected the thirteen original states.⁶ In 1808 Congress chartered the Washington and Alexandria Turnpike Co. to build a new road between the western end of the Long Bridge (now the 14th Street Bridge) and Alexandria to include a toll bridge over Four Mile Run.⁷ With this new turnpike, the route through Green Valley along Long Branch Run became the Old Alexandria and Georgetown Road, or just the Old Georgetown Road.

In 1821 Anthony Fraser purchased a thousand acres of land on both sides of Long Branch Run and the Old Alexandria to Georgetown Road. He built his home, Green Valley Manor, in an oak forest on the east side of the road (just south of present day 23rd Street).⁸

About 1841 a late-Federal brick mansion was built at Hoe Hill, probably near the site of the earlier Sebastian home. The property had been purchased in March 1838 by Philip Roach of Alexandria, who had come from Ireland. He died three months after the purchase, leaving the property to his son James, who built a large brick home for his bride and called it Prospect Hill. The Roaches owned a brick plant and two mills.⁹

About the same time a "new graveled road" was built along the top of the ridge. It ran from near the crossing of the Old Alexandria to Georgetown Road and Columbia Pike (in the vicinity of the Navy Annex), south, past Prospect Hill, along the top of the ridge, and down present day Lang Street to a double-arch stone bridge over Four Mile Run. Most of what was the graveled road is now Arlington Ridge Road.¹⁰

By 1860, Augusta Edward Addison, whose property south of Roach's extended from the top of the ridge east to the river, had built a home on the "graveled road."¹¹ The Addison Heights subdivision takes its name from Augusta Addison.¹² In addition to Fraser, Roach and Addison, an 1862 map shows a fourth property on Arlington Ridge, located down the hill from present day Fort Scott Drive.¹³

The Civil War had a severe impact on Arlington Ridge, particularly two of the property owners.

James Roach and his family suffered the plight of many Virginians who were loyal to the Confederacy. The family home, Prospect Hill, was occupied by Union troops. James Roach and one of his sons were made prisoners. Another son who had left school at Georgetown College to join

the Confederate Army was captured and imprisoned. The house was ravaged, the farm destroyed and the mills burned. Two of the first Union fortifications for the defense of Washington were built on the Roach estate using trees from the property. Fort Albany was located on the ridge near the Prospect Hill mansion, and Fort Runyon was at the Potomac River. James Roach and his wife died during the war. To settle the estate his properties were sold under court order in 1869. The mansion survived, but in 1965, despite the efforts of the Arlington Ridge Civic Association and many other groups to preserve this historical treasure, the property was rezoned and Prospect Hill demolished. A condominium building, The Representative, was built at the site.¹⁴

The Fraser property was similarly affected. The first Union troops to enter Virginia came down the Old Georgetown Road into Green Valley and camped at Four Mile Run. After the First Battle of Manassas a hospital was established on the Fraser property. James Fraser's forest of oak trees was leveled and the lumber used for fortifications and to build a large convalescent camp on both sides of Old Georgetown Road. An 1865 map shows numerous camp buildings clustered on the side of the ridge between present day 22nd Street and Fraser Park. The manor house was destroyed by fire in 1924. The Forest Hills townhouse development is on its site. The Fraser family burial ground is on the golf course at Army Navy Country Club, across I-396 from 23rd Street.¹⁵

Another Civil War fortification, Fort Scott, built on the southern end of Arlington Ridge, "offered a position from which Washington, the Long Bridge (now the 14th Street bridge) and the plateau in front of it could be overlooked and cannonaded." To make an approach to the fort difficult, 200 acres of trees were cut and left where they fell. "The stumps were tall enough to impede cavalry without offering cover to infantry."¹⁶ What is now Ft. Scott Drive was the connecting road to the ridge road and Ft. Albany.

Following the Civil War, the Commonwealth of Virginia adopted a new constitution that provided for division of counties into not less than three magisterial districts. Arlington, then called Alexandria County, was portioned outside the City of Alexandria into the Washington, Arlington and Jefferson Districts. Arlington Ridge was in Jefferson District, which made up that portion of the county south of a line that ran approximately from today's Fairlington, through Army Navy Country Club to Memorial Bridge.¹⁷

The Mount Vernon Avenue Association conceived in 1880 a memorial highway, to be constructed connecting George Washington's home

with the Nation's Capital named for him. Two routes were considered, the Old Georgetown Road through Green Valley along Long Branch Run, and the road along the top of the ridge. Although the concept did not reach fruition until the George Washington Parkway was built in the 1930s, the proposal resulted in the road on top of the ridge being called Mount Vernon Avenue (the extension of the road on the Alexandria side of Four Mile Run has retained that name). Later it became Washington Avenue and in 1934 it was changed to Arlington Ridge Road.¹⁸

In 1895 a school was built for this area. Hume School, named for Frank Hume, a Confederate veteran, civic leader and philanthropist who donated some of the land, still stands at 1801 South Arlington Ridge Road. The first floor of the school was divided into two rooms, one for grades 1-4, the other for grades 5-8. The second floor was one room with a stage. It was in use until 1956 and is now the property of the Arlington Historical Society. It is the oldest school building still standing in Arlington County.¹⁹

At the turn of the century a new electric railroad, the Washington, Alexandria and Mount Vernon line, ran along what is now South Eads St.,²⁰ which had been the site of an old Georgetown to Alexandria canal.²¹ Lots were laid out in the flat lands along the railroad and the area was called Addison Heights.

In 1904 the railroad company constructed an elaborate forty-acre family amusement park at Four Mile Run where the sewage treatment plant is. Known as Luna Park, it operated for about ten years.²²

Alexandria County was renamed Arlington County in 1920 by act of Virginia's General Assembly to avoid confusion of having the county and the City of Alexandria with the same name.²³

There were few homes along the top of the ridge. A 1926 map shows six between Hume School and Addison Avenue (now 20th Street) and one between the school and Prospect House to the north. There was only one home on the west side of the ridge road, and only a handful at the foot of the ridge along Old Georgetown Road (which, after Army Navy Country Club was founded in 1924, was named for the country club to which it gave access). In the lower Addison Heights area (now Aurora Highlands) on the east side of the ridge, roads and homes extended only three blocks from the railroad, to about Hayes Street. Frazier (sic) Avenue, now 23rd Street, was the only road crossing the ridge and on the 1926 map, the west side appears to have been unpaved.²⁴

The first attempt to create multi-family dwellings in Arlington County was in the Jefferson District on Arlington Ridge. In 1934 a proposal was submitted to construct a complex containing 3000 rooms to house up to

Alexandria County was renamed Arlington County in 1920.

1500 people, at a rent of \$9 a room, in the "Oakcrest area of South Arlington, near Arlington Ridge Road." According to the records of the Jefferson Civic League, a citizen's association

strong resident objection stopped the necessary rezoning and thus the development.²⁵

Early in World War II, the site of old Fort Scott once again served a military purpose. One of the many anti-aircraft batteries that were situated around Washington was located there.²⁶ The site is now a county park and historical preserve.

World War II brought thousands of civilian and military personnel to Washington. Housing was critical. The Federal Government subsidized the construction of brick garden type apartments on the southern end of Army Navy Drive at Glebe Road.²⁷ This development, called Arna Valley (named for Army Navy Drive), later became low cost housing, and was demolished in 2000 for the Avalon at Arlington Square development.

Quiet bucolic Green Valley²⁸ changed forever with the construction of Virginia's first limited access highway, the Henry B. Shirley Memorial Highway. Started just before World War II with the construction of the Pentagon, the segment through Green Valley, delayed by the war, was opened in 1949 as State Route 340.²⁹ Shirley Highway was built parallel to Army Navy Drive and cut through Arlington Ridge just north of the Prospect Hill mansion at Hoe Hill.³⁰

In the 1970s Shirley Highway was widened and became a part of the Interstate road system, first as I-95 and then I-395. With the widening of the road, historic Long Branch Run was rechanneled and a portion of the stream placed underground. The state and county planned to widen Army Navy Drive to four lanes, but nearby residents and the Arlington Ridge Civic Association objected to making the road a major thoroughfare through the neighborhood and were successful in retaining Army Navy Drive south of the 1700 block at two lanes.³¹

Most homes on the west side of the ridge, and south of 23rd Street on the east side, were built in the two decades after World War II.³²

The 1987 movie "No Way Out," starring Kevin Costner, opens with an aerial panning scene of Arlington Ridge from the Pentagon, across I-395, and along Arlington Ridge Road to a white frame house that stood for many years at the southeast corner of Arlington Ridge Road and 20th Street South. The house has since been torn down and replaced with a large brick home.

Arlington Ridge is and has been home to many notables: government leaders, historians, writers, numerous Army, Marine Corps and Air Force generals, Navy and Coast Guard admirals, and other national, state and civic leaders. At the beginning of the Clinton-Gore administration, while the Vice President's house at the Naval Observatory was being renovated, the Aitcheson/Gore family home on Arlington Ridge was the residence of the Vice President of the United States.

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References

- ¹ Eleanor Lee Templeman, *Arlington Heritage, Vignettes of a Virginia County* (New York: Avenel Books, 1959), p. 52. Interstate 395 now cuts through Arlington Ridge at Hoe Hill. The Alexandria to Georgetown Road was also called the Road to the Ferry.
- ² Charles W. Stetson, *Washington and his Neighbors* (Richmond: Garrett and Massie, 1956), p. 166.
- ³ Templeman, *Arlington Heritage*, p. 58.
- ⁴ F. Neale Smith, "A Military History of Army Navy Drive," in *The Arlington Historical Society Newsletter* Vol. 44, No. 2 (Nov.-Dec. 1999), pp. 13-15.
- ⁵ Templeman, *Arlington Heritage*, p. 52.
- ⁶ Jean B. Lee, *The Price of Nationhood, The American Revolution in Charles County* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1994), p. 259.
- ⁷ C. B. Rose Jr. *Arlington County, Virginia: A History* (Arlington Historical Society, 1976), p. 75.
- ⁸ Templeman, *Arlington Heritage*, p. 60.
- ⁹ *Ibid.* p. 58.
- ¹⁰ *Ibid.* p. 52.
- ¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 166.
- ¹² *The Washington Post*, 11 March 2000, Section H, p. 1. The Addison Heights subdivision includes sections of both Arlington Ridge and Aurora Highlands neighborhoods.
- ¹³ Map, "Environs of Washington," 1862; Arlington County Library, Virginia Room.
- ¹⁴ Templeman, *Arlington Heritage*, p. 58; Sherman W. Pratt, "Prospect Hill: A Lost Arlington Treasure," *The Arlington Historical Magazine* Vol. 11, No. 3 (October 1999), pp. 15-26.
- ¹⁵ Templeman, *Arlington Heritage*, p. 60.
- ¹⁶ Rose, *Arlington County, Virginia*, p. 102.
- ¹⁷ *Ibid.* pp. 126, 187.
- ¹⁸ *Ibid.* p. 190. C. L. Kinnier, "The Renaming of Arlington Streets," *The Arlington Historical Magazine* Vol. 1, No. 3 (October 1959), p. 49.
- ¹⁹ Templeman, *Arlington Heritage*, p. 170; Arlington Channel 31 Video, "Arlington Reunion - The Ridge and its Neighbors," Sept. 18, 1997, Arlington County Library, Virginia Room.
- ²⁰ Rose, *Arlington County, Virginia*, p. 140.
- ²¹ *The Washington Post*, 11 March 2000, Section H, p. 1.
- ²² Rose, *Arlington County, Virginia*, p. 160.
- ²³ *Ibid.* p. 176.
- ²⁴ Map, Arlington Co. VA, 1926, Arlington County Library, Virginia Room.

²⁵ Rose, *Arlington County Virginia*, p. 198.

²⁶ *Ibid.* p. 214.

²⁷ *Ibid.* p. 206.

²⁸ Not to be confused with an area off Columbia Pike also referred to as Green Valley in Rose, *Arlington County Virginia*, pp. 206-207.

²⁹ *The Richmond Times Dispatch*, June 13, 1999.

³⁰ Sherman Pratt *Arlington County Virginia, A Modern History* (Chelsea, MI: Book Crafters, 1997), p. 498.

³¹ Interview with Sherman W. Pratt, 1 April 2000.

³² *Ibid.*