



Virginia Room, Arlington Central Library

In 1958, Arlington County purchased this farm, located in the 1000 block of North Quincy Street between Washington Boulevard and Fairfax Drive, as the site for the proposed central library. The county paid \$62,500 for 2.41 acres to Libbie Burrows and Sarah E. Brown.

Arlington 50 Years Ago: Continuity And Change

BY DEAN C. ALLARD

The files of the Northern Virginia Sun for 1956 reveal continuities but also discontinuities in the Arlington experience over the last 50 years.

As is true today politics dominated local news in 1956. In that year representatives of the Arlington Independent Movement (AIM) and the Arlingtonians for a Better County (ABC) each held two county board seats, with the fifth chair held by a moderately conservative Democrat. Wags claimed that the conservative AIM really meant "Arlington Is Mine," while the more liberal ABC stood for "Agitators by Choice." Whatever slogans applied, the days of the independents seemed to be numbered, despite the narrow victory scored in November 1956 by the AIM county board candidates. The GOP executive committee, characterizing AIM and ABC as little more than local splinter groups, announced plans to field its own local candidates in 1957, a move that was likely to be imitated eventually by the county's Democrats.

Unlike the situation in 2006, Arlington's school population showed rapid growth 50 years ago. In fact, due to a shortage of classrooms, about a thousand children attended classes on a double shift basis. The educational community was deeply concerned when a school bond issue was defeated early in 1956. But in the summer a similar referendum won approval.

The educational issue that was of overwhelming importance to Arlington in 1956 resulted from the Supreme Court's school integration decision of 1954. In July 1956 a federal court issued a specific order requiring that Arlington desegregate its schools by 1957, a deadline later extended to 1959. At the same time, the Commonwealth of Virginia pursued a massive resistance policy promising to close any formerly white public schools that admitted Afro-American students. It was only in 1959, when the Commonwealth relaxed its position to some extent and Arlington became a pioneer in integrating Virginia's schools, that a historic crisis in federal-state authority was resolved.

1956 also saw other developments laying the foundations for today's Arlington. It is of special interest to members of the Historical Society that this was the year of a landmark report prepared by a committee, headed by Joseph L. Wheeler, that defined Arlington's modern library system. Arlington's road system also was nearing completion at this time. Crews were widening Columbia Pike west of Glebe Road and Glebe Road north of Washington Boulevard

to four lanes. Work also began on extending the George Washington Parkway from Spout Run to Chain Bridge.

Advertisements in the Northern Virginia Sun by a number of firms, including the Arlington Funeral Home and the Robert Shreve Fuel Company, are reminders of continuities in the County's business community. But business has come a long way in 50 years. Hence, the opening in May of the new Sears store in Clarendon was described by an awed Northern Virginia Sun reporter as a "spectacularly modern experience." No fewer than 20,000 excited shoppers visited this emporium on its opening day. As you know, this store no longer exists.

The last big, local story of 1956 had nothing to do with politics, education, libraries, roads, or business. Instead it was a spectacular sports event involving a longstanding football rivalry between Arlington's Washington-Lee and Alexandria's George Washington High Schools. In addition to local honor, the state title was at stake in this contest. Remarkably, W-L won the game by a score of 3-0, with only two seconds showing on the clock, when a young hero named Wayne Ballard kicked a 32-yard field goal that bounced over the cross-bars to assure an immortal victory for Arlington's team. That triumph lives today in the memories of many W-L graduates. It is another continuity in Arlington's history.

Dean C. Allard is a long time member of the Arlington Historical Society, and served as its president during the 1973-74 term. He has previously contributed several items to the Magazine. This article was specially prepared for the 50th anniversary celebration of the founding of the Society, and is reprinted here by permission.
