

REMINISCENCES OF THE BALLSTON AREA

By

RUTH C. DeBEVOISE

My parents¹ bought lots in old Center Ballston, on Ballston Avenue² in 1898. The ground had been farmland and at that time was being subdivided and a trolley line had just been built out to Lacey, Va.³ which made them settle in the area. My mother was newly married and very frail. Her doctor recommended that she move to the country, away from Georgetown, where there was much typhoid fever and many mosquitos from the Canal. My father worked in Georgetown and had to walk there many times if the trolley did not appear. He also used a handcar with a neighbor, if they found one along the tracks or at the carbarn at the next street over on Clements Avenue⁴ and what is now Fairfax Drive.

It was really pioneer days in some respects. Drinking and other water was a block away until they had their well dug and a pump installed on the open back porch. The three-bedroom, two-story clapboard house which they had built had no heat, no bath, and was not completed when they moved in. My mother awoke one cold morning and found snow on her hair as there was no paneling around the window frames. Also the water in the wash pitcher froze and broke the pitcher when there was a sudden dip in temperature.

My Aunt and Uncle also bought and built at the same time; they all moved in and slept on mattresses on the floor the first night at our home. There was a knock on the door at 4 A.M. which frightened all of them. My Uncle decided to answer the door, but took a hatchet with him! It was the milkman on his rounds delivering milk who wanted to know if he could leave milk at the new home.

My Mother used to speak of buying beefsteak for 10 cents a pound at the corner grocery store. Often when she went there nobody was in the store but someone yelled from the back that "Lum was not there; come back later".

My Mother was asked to christen the first County Court House to be established actually in the County. She used a bottle of wine and in breaking it got wine on her hat. There were many Arlington women who were more prominent but many were pregnant and in those days pregnant women did not go out to public affairs. She was one of the founders of St. George Episcopal Church in Ballston.

¹ Her mother was Cecilia Kidwell, 1870-1953; her father William Kidwell died in 1906.

² Ballston Avenue is now North Stuart St.

³ The Lacey station on the old Washington and Virginia Railway (originally the Arlington and Fairfax Railway) was near what is now North Vernon St. and Glebe Road. The right-of-way for this electric railroad became Fairfax Dr. in the 1930's.

⁴ Now North Taylor St.

My Mother was widowed in 1906 when my Father died. Upon the advice of a neighbor, she opened a grocery store in our living room, as there were few jobs for women and no babysitters in those days. Also there was no Social Security and she had no income from any source. My brother Lloyd was 5½ and I was 3½. I have a very *vivid* memory of the store. It had everything from hair ribbon to kerosene for the oil lamps of the day.

My Father had planted five varieties of grapes and we had a long arbor and many grapes in season. There were also some fruit trees which were beautiful when they blossomed in the spring, quite a few chickens, and three lots or 11,224 sq. feet to keep up. This kept my Mother extremely busy.

My Mother was a fighter and loved the independence of owning her own home. We had many hardships and many happy times through the years. She enjoyed good health as she spent many hours in the yard and always had a full garden of vegetables which she loved to tend.

She had the store for seven years. Then due to not being able to get many food items, "shut up shop" and went to work for Uncle Sam at the beginning of World War I. She did not secure a permanent appointment so only worked a few years. The age limit for a clerk at that time was 35 years!

I, her daughter Ruth, lived in this old home⁵ with her until she died at the age of 83. Two years ago I sold the old home where I had lived for 65 years.

⁵ The present address of this home is 1041 N. Stuart St.