

I REMEMBER

By

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My family moved to Arlington County (then Alexandria County) from Fairfax County in 1918, and I grew up in Barcroft. In 1920 the population of Arlington County was 16,040. In comparison, the last census shows Arlington County having a population of approximately 170,000. The life-line serving the area was Columbia Pike. This was chartered in 1808 as Columbia Turnpike.

I remember many changes that occurred, which may be of interest to those not fortunate enough to have been raised in Arlington County.

The old Barcroft mill was still standing when I was a boy, and I enjoyed exploring the building and looking at the old wheel which had become quite rusty. Later in the twenties the mill burned and there was nothing anyone could do to put the fire out, as there was no fire department at that time. I was told that some of the local residents sang "Down By the Old Mill Stream" on this occasion.

Skinny dipping in Four Mile Run was a popular pastime. There were several deep holes within walking distance. I can't recall ever seeing a bathing suit worn.

Nothing could match the joy of sledding on Palmer's Hill. Starting near South Taylor Street, we streaked down the hill past South George Mason Drive, stopping near the creek at the bottom. Barcroft Apartments now occupy Palmer's Hill.

Columbia Pike was unpaved when we arrived in the county. A few years later the state of Virginia did make a concrete road of Columbia Pike. One of the interesting side lights to this was the method they used to grade the high banks on either side. They had mules and scoops. One man, one mule, and one scoop made one unit. The mule would be urged up the side of the bank and would go as far as he could until gravity took over and he would have to come down. They eventually completed the grading of the high banks with this equipment.

I remember when the A.B. & W. Bus Company was organized by Robert L. May, who lived about two blocks from our house. The neighbors of Barcroft, who normally drove their automobiles to work in Washington, put up their cars and rode the bus in order to give Bob May a helping hand. The first bus, by the way, was a Reo speed wagon with one seat on either side stretching the length of the bus. It had curtains to keep out the elements, but nothing could keep out the cold. The first itinerary of the bus was from what is now Eighth and Buchanan Streets, formerly Brook Street and Arlington Avenue, down Columbia Pike to Richmond Highway, now U.S. 1, over Highway Bridge to 13½ Street and Pennsylvania Avenue. Later there was an added line which ran from Alexandria to Washington. The terminal of the Barcroft line was later moved to Twelfth and Pennsylvania Avenue, Northwest. The A.B. & W. bus line is now part of the Metro Transportation System.

I remember another event which stirred some interest in the community of

Barcroft. Arlington Hall was founded as a junior college for women, and it was a successful school until it was taken over by the Signal Corps in 1942. It now continues as a military post.

I attended Columbia Pike school, one of the oldest schools in the county at that time. The First Virginia Bank now occupies the site of the former school. This was a grade school, with grades from the first through the eighth. There was no high school in our county at that time, and students going beyond the eighth grade had to go to the District of Columbia. While I was in Columbia school, a change was made, and only grades one through six were held at Columbia school. Washington-Lee High School was then in the planning stage and grades seven and eight were held at old Ballston school at Wilson Boulevard and Quincy Street. By the time I finished the eighth grade at Ballston school, Washington-Lee High School was ready and I entered the ninth grade there. Some may remember that Ballston school was later sold to Hogate's Seafood Restaurant, which operated at this spot for several years.

The electric cars were still in operation when I went to Ballston school and to Washington-Lee High School. I used to walk from Barcroft to Columbia Pike and Walter Reed Drive, where I caught the streetcar and rode to Hatfield Junction. This was adjacent to the laundry at Fort Myer, also close to the intersection of Arlington Boulevard and Washington Boulevard. From Hatfield I transferred to the Washington-Fairfax line and got off at Randolph Street and what is now Fairfax Drive, and from there walked to Washington-Lee. As you would probably guess, we thought it was great fun to put on the brakes while the car was standing still, and it could not move until the brakes were released. On occasion, the trolley would be disconnected from the overhead electric line, and the car would not run until the trolley was again connected. This, too, brought grief to the poor motorman.

Continuing on down Columbia Pike to Courthouse Road, one could see the three steel towers which were a part of the Naval Radio Station. These were landmarks which could be seen from almost any spot in the Washington area. The tallest of the three was higher than the Washington Monument. With the advent of shortwave broadcasting the towers were no longer necessary and they were razed in 1941. At that time I was living at 2012 Sixth Street, South, which was adjacent to the Naval Radio Station property. It was quite a sight to see them demolish these majestic towers, and at the same time it was sad.

Continuing on down Columbia Pike we come to the former site of Johnson's Hill and Arlington Ridge. On the right of the pike was the West Brothers' brick works. Many a home in Arlington was built from bricks made at West Brothers'. Continuing on Columbia Pike we come to the Pentagon. This was built in the thirties on the site of Hell's Bottom.

You may recall the late Senator Frank L. Ball, Sr.'s, talk regarding this area. Crime was rampant and murders were frequent. The area was occupied by squatters who had no title to the land. This area was bisected by Military Road, which ran from Arlington Cemetery to the Fourteenth Street Bridge and the streetcar line which ran from Fairfax to Washington, D.C. On the land generally occupied by the Pentagon, there were Washington Airport and Hoover Airport, which

later merged and became known as Hoover Airport. Whenever airplanes would land or take off, a chain was dragged across Military Road to stop the traffic. This airport encountered other hazards such as high tension wires and smoke stacks. A swimming pool and restaurant were built later on the airport site.

Another matter of interest near the airport was Arlington Beach, an amusement park just south of the Fourteenth Street Bridge.

North of the Pentagon was the Agricultural Experimental Farm. This was discontinued and the Arlington Farm housing for women was constructed on the site during World War II. During its existence, the Arlington Farm was devoted to research of agricultural problems and their cures. Visitors were welcomed. On November 29, 1940, Congress directed the removal of all Department of Agriculture activities from the Arlington tract and its transfer to the War Department for military use in the national defense program. The move was completed January 30, 1942.

The Corinthian Yatch Club was located on the south side of the Fourteenth Street Bridge on the Virginia side of the Potomac. It is now out of the area.

Many things race through one's mind when recalling the past. Life was good and boys found their own entertainment. Perhaps it was not as good as we thought, but you can't convince me of that!