

## BARCROFT, ARLINGTON COUNTY, VIRGINIA A VILLAGE METAMORPHOSIS

By  
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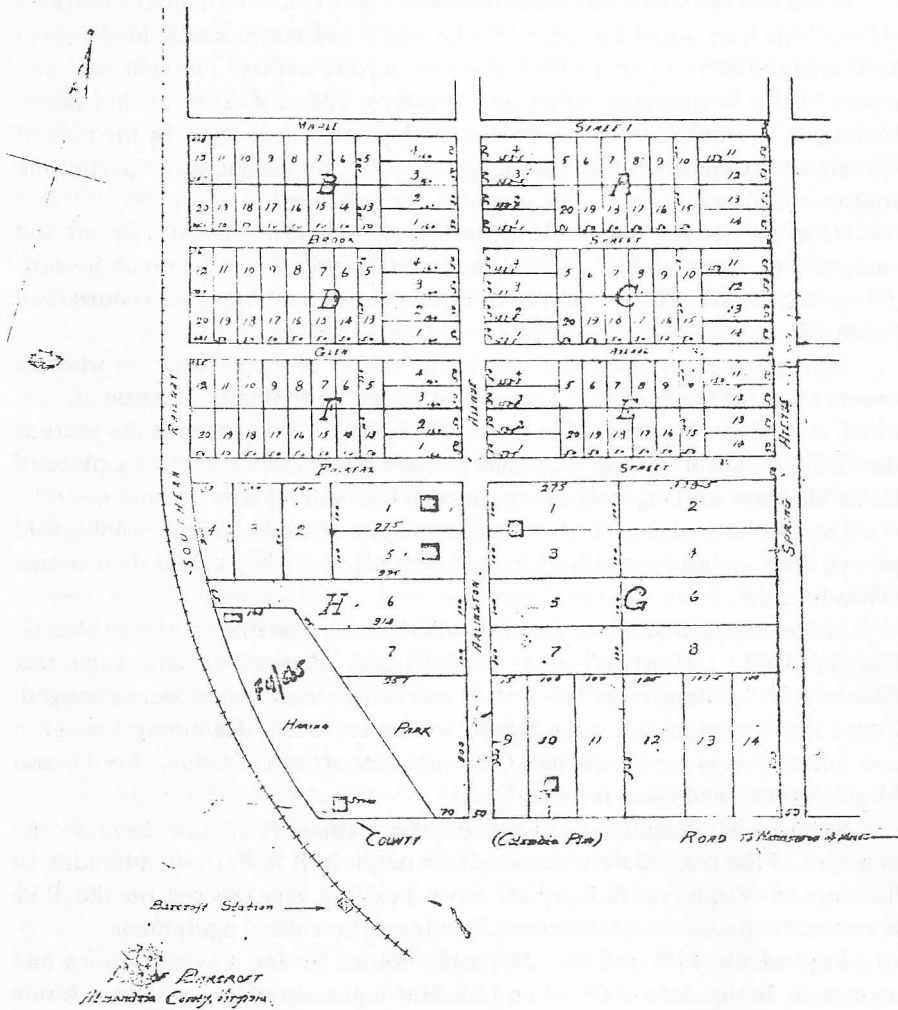
A twenty-year old Water Grist Mill; a Grocery-drygoods store; a twelve foot square yellow Station on a single-track railroad line; a large cattle pen nearby; and, perhaps, six houses scattered about within a half mile of the station on Columbia Turnpike — this was Barcroft in 1903! In an area of small farms, the railraod with a struggling existence since 1850, supplied a sporadic means of transportation for people, produce and cattle between Alexandria and Bluemont at the foot of the Blue Ridge. The line through Alexandria County ran, generally, north, through the valley of four Mile Run, overlooking or within a few yards of the creek.

Columbia Turnpike, running east-west through the Counties of Alexandria and Fairfax, connected the Lower Road from Washington to Alexandria with the Little River Turnpike at Annandale. A large abattoir had been erected on the lower end of the Pike, and to this cattle were brought for processing from all parts of Northern Virginia. Farms along the railroad shipped cattle to Barcroft where they were held at the pens until they could be driven in herds down the Pike to the plant. This practice was discontinued about 1905 when a new spur route was available near the river.

The Pike, as it became known, a major thoroughfare, was a narrow two-lane dirt road — rocky, rough and dusty, and in rainy weather, a quagmire of mud with deep ruts. It was travelled by draymen, drovers, buggies and walkers. The road wound through the sleepy countryside with many twists and turns and over many hills. The first area which became Barcroft was situated between two of these hills on the Pike, each having turns in an "S" shape to reach the top. The village grew to the north of the Pike on higher ground.

The Mill, rebuilt after its destruction during the Civil War on the foundation of an earlier one erected by George Washington Parke Custis (and another by Custis Lee), stood to the west of the railroad and creek, and on the north side of the Pike. An even earlier mill may have been built here by George Washington who owned the Washington Forest lands. To turn the immense mill wheel, said to have been the largest on the Eastern Seaboard, which operated the heavy machinery for grinding, a dam had been constructed on the creek, almost a mile upstream. From this water was diverted by an earthen mill race, almost eight feet wide, flowing down to the mill. From the race to the top of the wheel, the water was led, first by great troughs of wood, later, of metal.

Returning from New Jersey after the War, Dr. John Wolverton Barcroft (who had formerly owned a mill on the Pike some five miles beyond, also



"Subdivision of Barcroft" — 1903, formerly the "Subdivision of Corbett", a part of "Cedar Hill" Farm, Alexandria County, Virginia.

destroyed) bought the site and rebuilt the Mill on Four Mile Run. Above it, on the hill, he built his home. From 1885 the Mill, formerly called Arlington Mill, was referred to as the Barcroft Mill.

Frank Corbett owned the hundred and sixty-two acre farm on the east side of Four Mile Run, which he called "Cedar Hill". In 1892, he subdivided a small portion of the farm, along the Pike near the railroad station. The railroad, then a part of the Washington, Ohio and Western, called its stop at that point, "Arlington". Frank Corbett named his subdivision, "Corbett".<sup>1</sup> By the time of the sale and resubdivision of the village in 1903, the railroad was a part of the Southern Railway System. The stop was then changed to "Barcroft".

"Corbett", on the north side of the Pike, had four north-south streets and one east-west street on high ground and parallel to the Pike. To these, he gave the names, Brooke (for his son), Arlington, Cedar and Spring Avenues, and Fairfax Street.

Spring Street recognized a spot in the center of the subdivision where a sweet, clear spring bubbled, forming the head of a small unnamed stream which flowed south to Four Mile Run. This Spring, known through the years as the "Dolly Madison Spring", was said to have been a favorite resting place of Dolly Madison who enjoyed riding through the countryside.

On the north edge of the Corbett farm, heirs of James T. Ball, in 1893, sold part of the farm estate to Charles and Lisetta Kolb. They called their home, "Woodmeade".

Following his death, the Frank Corbett estate was sold to Mrs. Abbie G. Fox in 1903. "Corbett" was resubdivided, dedicated, and renamed, "Barcroft".<sup>2</sup> In the survey, block sizes and some street names were changed. Cedar and the original Brooke Streets were eliminated. Retaining Arlington and Spring Avenues, it now had four east-west streets, Fairfax, Brooke and Maple Streets, and Glen Avenue.\*

Stephen P. Wright, son-in-law of Mrs. Abbie Fox, now became the manager of the real estate venture. He brought in B.F. Perrow, a builder, of Remington, Virginia. A long one-story building was erected on the Pike between the railroad and the creek for the workmen and equipment.

Beyond the Mill and Dr. Barcroft's house, several modest homes had appeared. In the store of Oscar and Ida Harring, assisted by her sisters, Annie and Virgie Doremus, a Post Office was established. Virgie Doremus was the Postmistress. A large house had been built in 1886, a block east of the store, for the miller, John Newlon, engaged to operate the Mill for Dr. Barcroft. This was later rented to Judge Pelham of Alabama, a lawyer of the Justice Department.

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\*In the renaming of county streets in 1932, Arlington Avenue became South Buchanan Street; Spring Avenue, South Wakefield Street; Fairfax Street, Ninth Street, South; Glen Avenue, Eighth Road, South; the second Brooke Street became Eighth Street, South; and Maple Street, Seventh Street, South.

Up on the hill on Arlington Avenue, about 1895, Annie Doremus built a large home at Fairfax Street. She married Sidney T. Marye and they made this their home. He worked at the Government Printing Office in Washington. Across from them, Edgar Klemroth and his wife, and her mother, Mrs. Schick, built a solid and imposing home in 1899.

On the Pike, to the east, on the high hill across from the Corbett farm, lived Sheriff Billy Palmer and his family. Across from the store, at the railroad track, stood a time-worn blacksmith's shop — not under the proverbial chestnut tree, but under a huge spreading oak that must have been several hundred years old.

In 1904, Stephen Wright advertised in the "Barcroft News" a place where "cottages" would be available in the fresh and healthful country air for those wishing to escape the unbearable heat of Washington's summers. The "cottages" were to be two-story houses of, basically, three designs, with two or three bedrooms.

In 1906, W.W. Wright, an attorney with the Justice Department, and brother of Stephen, purchased John Newlon's home. Stephen built a home for himself earlier beside this home. However, in 1907, he sold it to James W. Head who was employed at the Patent Office. Another large house was built on the hillside, next to the Marye's. At that time, too, on Arlington Avenue, three bedroom houses were begun on the northeast corners of Fairfax and Brooke Streets, and on Glen Avenue. A small house had been erected on the northwest corner of Glen Avenue, which was purchased in the Spring of 1907 by Milton and Amy Fairfax. Mr. Fairfax, employed by the railroad, was a descendant of the Reverend Bryan Fairfax who inherited the Northern Virginia lands of Lord Fairfax. Other small homes were begun at that time at four locations on Glen Avenue and two on Brooke Street.

In May 1908, Frederick C. Handy, an attorney with the Justice Department, with his wife and two small daughters, purchased the house south of the Marye's. A few days later, his father, Major Frederick A.G. Handy, bought the large home at Fairfax Street. By July of that year his second son, Walter Ker Handy and his bride, newly married in April 1908, had purchased the small home next to him, but facing on Glen Avenue. Major Handy had, for many years, been Congressional Correspondent at the Capitol, and was a Charter member of the Gridiron Club. He was later employed at the Treasury Department. His son, Walter, a graduate of Bliss Electrical School, was employed at the Potomac Electric Power Company. His youngest son, Algernon, was a budding young lawyer, and his daughter, Margaret, attended Mount Vernon Seminary for Young Ladies after graduating from old Central High School in Washington, where Walter's wife was her best friend.

Walter's land contained the "Dolly Madison Spring" mentioned earlier. Cedar Street planned in the original subdivision would have run through this property past the Spring.

In 1909 Ray and Zoa Adams and their small daughter moved into the house on Glen Avenue opposite Walter Handy. Families of Ham, Grigg, Martin, and Morgan moved into various homes, and the Rider family later occupied the home behind the School.

The subdivision of East Barcroft was added in June 1909,<sup>3</sup> with the extension of Fairfax and Brooke Streets toward the East. Two new north-south streets were added from Columbia Pike. These were High Terrace (now Taylor Street) and Magnolia Avenue (now, approximately, George Mason Drive).

In 1910, Thomas J. Armstrong moved into a house at Fairfax on Spring Street, and William Froyd erected a house beside him. Richard McMahon purchased the large house on Arlington at Glen Avenue, and over on High Terrace, the Bullen family built a home. Ray Adams, with a growing family, moved into a larger home on Fairfax Street in the new section in 1912, and Gertrude Clarvoe occupied his old home. Julia A. Updike (and later the Mansfields) lived opposite the Adams. On a hilltop between High Terrace and Magnolia, William Houseknecht built his beautiful stone house overlooking Doctor's Run Valley.

Captain L.L. Bridges, a friend of Mr. Marye, occupied a small house beyond Dr. Barcroft on the Pike. In 1907 the family purchased lots on the west side of Arlington Avenue between Fairfax Street and Glen Avenue. A well was dug in the center of the block, but no house was built. It remained overgrown with brush for some years, the property surrounded by a wire fence. In 1914, Mrs. Bridges purchased the acreage of Mr. and Mrs. Kolb, north of the Corbett farm. Her daughter, Louise, married Milton B. Payne, grandson of Dr. Barcroft, and they also made this their home. Mrs. Payne, in her lifetime, wrote a number of articles on her recollections of life in Barcroft's early days.<sup>4</sup>

Along the railroad several houses were built for the families of railroad workers. Here lived the Weeks, Lovelaces and others. In 1914 Walter O'Hara moved into a new home on Brooke Street. The Chrismon family lived in the house on the southeast corner at Brooke. This was later the home of the Roseberry, and then the May families. Along Brooke, opposite O'Hara, were families of Kincheloe, Babcock (later Rhodehouse), Vining (later Walker), and in the next block McDonald, Tapp and Kirshner. The Vincent family occupied a large house on Spring Street, at the end of Glen Avenue, later the home of the Hazel family, and the Gawley family lived in the house north of Brooke Street. The Alberta family were early residents on Glen Avenue, east of the Clarvoe home.

During these early years, Barcroft's residents met daily in the early morning light at the little yellow station to await the steam train to Alexandria. Most of these would detrain at a transfer point near Alexandria called St. Elmo. There they would walk down a long flight of iron steps to a station below on tracks from Alexandria to Washington of an electric trolley line. For some



years the Washington Station was on Pennsylvania Avenue at 12th Street, opposite the Old Post Office Building. The trip from Barcroft took at least an hour — not to speak of long waits for and between trains. Then, the evening train rumbled north bringing weary workers for dinner and milking and gardening chores. There was sometimes a mid-morning or mid-afternoon train. Others on the line were freights.

For those going to Georgetown, a train to Bluemont Junction, above Glen Carlyn, allowed a transfer to another branch. Later, one could walk a mile and a half to Columbia on the Pike to the electric line from Nauck (known as Leaping Lena) to Hatfield, where a transfer would take him to either Georgetown or 12th Street.

Barcroft was in Arlington District, one of the three Districts of Alexandria County, each having three Trustees to supervise education under the Superintendent of Schools. The Board had a stormy and uncertain life in the early days, but had finally managed to build a fine new brick school at Columbia by 1904, the nearest to Barcroft.<sup>5</sup>

By the fall of 1907, Barcroft counted among its residents nine small children who were ready for school, and one who was “almost” old enough. Stephen Wright, then President of “The Citizens Association of Barcroft”, requested that the School Board consider the possibility of a School. The Board, however, considered it inexpedient, “as we have a capable teacher at Glen Carlyn.” Upon being pressed, though, it did consider another possibility presented. By November it had employed Mrs. Amy Fairfax as the teacher. She agreed to rent a room in her home, furnish janitor service and to teach for \$25.00 per month.

A small one room building was erected about this time by the Methodists of the area. Lawn parties and various fund-raising events were held to pay its costs. The small community could not support a regular minister, however, and as time passed, sporadic services by various faiths were held there. The building was erected at Brooke Street.

In October 1908, the School Board approved an offer received from Sidney T. Marye, Secretary of the Methodist Episcopal Church at Barcroft, to rent the building for school purposes at \$10.00 per month. In November 1908, Miss Beulah Adams of Hunter Station in Fairfax was accepted as a substitute teacher at Barcroft. She remained, as the first teacher in the little building, for the 1908-09 term. These events account for the fact that Barcroft’s little “Community House” and “School Building” has windows shaped like those of a church. The little building became the focal gathering place for all community affairs.

Miss Margaret Handy was employed to teach for the school term 1909-10. She married Dr. Philip B. Moss and left to make her home in Alabama.

Miss Annie Beattie, of Alexandria, was the next teacher, remaining for four years, 1910-14. Pupil population grew dramatically in that period and a

new smaller room was added to open in 1913 with the employment of a second teacher. Miss Grace Crosswell taught the first three grades, while Miss Beattie, as Principal, taught the upper grades.

Miss Crosswell also remained for four years, serving the last three as Principal, 1913-1917. She was joined by Miss Mary Eastlack of Washington, who taught the lower grades for four years, 1914-18.



*Miss Mary Eastlack (1893-1979)  
Teacher of first three grades at  
Barcroft School, 1914-1918.*

Miss Eastlack, a dedicated and much-loved teacher, remained in contact with the author until her death in 1979 at age 85. She was deeply interested in the work in progress on the history of Barcroft and its people, giving many sidelights for its story. Her home was in Brookland, in Washington, near the Monastery. She told of rising around 4 AM to take street cars and trains to reach Barcroft by 7:30 AM, returning home about 8 PM. And yet, she said, she thought her four years at Barcroft were the happiest of her long teaching career! She was often prevented by storms from returning home and her pupils vied for the honor of having her as an overnight guest. All who know her loved her!

Miss Elizabeth Hancock, of Hanover County, boarded with the Marye family during her two years, 1917-1919. She was an exacting but excellent teacher. She married William Davis and they remained in the County, raising two daughters.

Miss Minnie Dunavant taught the lower grades for four years, 1918-22. During her teaching years she resided with her sister, Mrs. Yates, on the Pike and later on Spring Street. Now in her 80's, she lives with her son and his family.

Form C, No. 5-39 M

CONTRACT WITH TEACHERS (FOR COUNTIES)

This Article of Agreement, Between the SCHOOL BOARD OF Arlington

District, Arlington County, State of Virginia, of the first part, and Miss Minnie Dunavant of the second part:

WITNESSETH, That the said party of the second part, under the supervision and direction of the said Board, but subject to the lawful authority of the Division Superintendent, agrees to teach in The schools of Arlington County ~~school~~ for the term of 10 school months, or 206 days, commencing on September 19th, 1921, at a compensation of

\$80.00 dollars per school month, for a lawful school; provided that any failure on the part of the said teacher to report correctly to the Superintendent the daily average as required, shall vitiate this contract—the said amount to be paid on the last day of each calendar month for the total value of the services rendered during the said calendar month, or as soon thereafter as a proper voucher can be forwarded to the Clerk of the Board by the Division Superintendent, the Board reserving the right to dismiss the said party of the second part at any time, for cause, paying for services rendered in accordance with this agreement to the date of dismissal. In the event the Board finds it necessary to shorten the school term it may terminate this contract, after giving reasonable notice to the party of the second part. In case schools are closed temporarily on account of epidemic or for other necessary cause, the Board may pay the teacher for the time lost or may extend the school term.

It is also agreed that the said party of the second part shall open school at 9 in the morning and close school at 3 in the afternoon (a school day shall consist of 5 hours and 0 minutes, and a school month of four weeks of five school days each). The said party of the second part shall give daily recess in accordance with the following schedule 15 minutes at 10:30 1 hour at noon.

The party of the second part shall obey all school laws and regulations, and make monthly and term reports to the Division Superintendent according to forms furnished.

It is further agreed that the fires shall be made, or caused to be made, and the floors shall be swept or caused to be swept by the said Board, the Board providing fuel, brooms and brushes therefor; and that the actual possession of the schoolhouse shall be considered by both parties as being and remaining at all times in the said Board or their successors.

It is further agreed that the chairman and clerk of said School Board shall deduct monthly from the salary of the said party of the second part a sum equal to one per centum of the said salary, to be placed to the credit of the Retired Teachers' Fund and to be applied and expended as provided by law.

It is further agreed that the said party of the second part shall exercise due care in the protection of all buildings, furniture and supplies of said school, and promptly report in writing to the party of the first part and the Division Superintendent all needed repairs, furniture or supplies.

The Board reserves the right to change said teacher from one school to another, or from one class or grade to a different class or grade as the efficiency of the system may demand, or the judgment of the Board may determine, and in the event of such change it is understood and agreed that the salary of said teacher shall not be less than the amount named in this contract.

The said teacher hereby swears or affirms allegiance and loyalty to the Government of the United States.

SPECIAL COVENANTS The party of the second part agrees to be in school at 8:45 A.M. The party of the first part agrees to pay to the party of the second part a bonus of \$25.00 at the expiration of the school term.

IN WITNESS WHEREOF, the parties hereunto have set their hands and seals, this 17th day of May, 1921

John Lyons [L. S.]  
Chairman of the Board  
W. C. [unclear] [L. S.]  
Clerk of Board  
Minnie Dunavant [L. S.]  
Teacher

\*Insert "Board" or the name of the teacher according to the terms of the contract

Teacher's Contract — 1921. Barcroft, Alexandria County, Virginia.



Many of those early records are incomplete or unavailable. The following list has been compiled from School Board Books, supplemented by personal knowledge of former pupils and of some of the teachers themselves.

Teacher-Principal	Teacher	School	Year
Mrs. Amy Fairfax		Fairfax Home	1907-1908
Miss Beulah Adams		1 Room	1908-1909
Miss Margaret Handy		1 Room	1909-1910
Miss Annie Beattie		1 Room	1910-1911
Miss Annie Beattie		1 Room	1911-1912
Miss Annie Beattie		1 Room	1912-1913
Miss Annie Beattie	Miss Grace Crosswell	2 Room	1913-1914
Miss Grace Crosswell	Miss Mary Eastlack	2 Room	1914-1915
Miss Grace Crosswell	Miss Mary Eastlack	2 Room	1915-1916
Miss Grace Crosswell	Miss Mary Eastlack	2 Room	1916-1917
Miss Elizabeth Hancock	Miss Mary Eastlack	2 Room	1917-1918
Miss Elizabeth Hancock	Miss Minnie Dunavant	2 Room	1918-1919
Miss Alma Barefoot	Miss Minnie Dunavant	2 Room	1919-1920
Miss Julia Banks	Miss Minnie Dunavant	2 Room	1920-1921
Mrs. Eppa Tracey	Miss Minnie Dunavant	2 Room	1921-1922
Mrs. Eppa Tracey	Miss Alice Snyder	2 Room	1922-1923
Mrs. Susie Hunter	Miss Elizabeth Butts	2 Room	1923-1924
Mrs. Susie Hunter	Miss Elizabeth Butts	2 Room	1924-1925

These dedicated women taught in the period from 1907 to 1925, in a home and in "the Barcroft Community House" from the time a school was first authorized in Barcroft until the opening of the new brick school in 1925.<sup>6</sup>



*The Barcroft School, 1921. Calisthenics for Pupils.*

It is known that five of these teachers, Mrs. Fairfax, Miss Handy, Miss Eastlack, Miss Hancock and Mrs. Hunter, are now deceased. With the exception of Miss Dunavant, nothing has been learned of the remaining teachers after their service at Barcroft.

The Community House at Barcroft was never under county operation, but was rented for use as a school. The School Board contracted for and appointed teachers, prescribing duties and curriculum and supervising educational procedures to be followed.

A large pot-bellied stove supplied warmth for the one big room of the early school. It occupied the center of the room, its long pipe held by wires to reach the chimney at the back. Cut wood, paid for by the County, was supplied by the residents, but it was the teacher's job, in addition to teaching, to build the fire in the morning and keep it going during the day. She was to see that the room was kept clean and that the water-cooler was filled with fresh water from the well of a nearby house. She was also the policeman of the "Chick-Sale" outhouse, a long, narrow, unheated building about 40 feet from the back door. It was divided in half, each side a three-holer, with a high board fence shielding its doors from view. West end was for boys, east end for girls.

In periods of heavy snows, there were times when the teacher could not make it from home, so school did not open. There were stormy times, too, when she could not go home. Then she was always a welcome guest of the family of one of her pupils.

The telephone came to Barcroft in 1917, with six customers on a line. That line was 819 F (2-3-4-5-6-7). The last numbers represent the number assigned to a customer and indicate the number of turns of the crank of the wall-hung phone, or bells to be heard for an individual family. One ring was for "Central" for help in calling other lines. All parties on a line knew each other. If #3 wanted #2 he simply rang twice and the rings would be heard by all parties on the line. Anyone on the line could pick up the receiver and join in the conversation (or be told to get off!).

Fires were the most dreaded scourge of the rural area. The County had no system of control until volunteer groups were begun about 1921. In 1916 the community was most distressed when a large home beyond the Corbett farm was completely destroyed. So quickly did the old house burn that the family lost everything. Clothing for adults and children, furniture and food were assembled and the family remained in a small building beside the ruins. The beautiful stone-faced home of the Jeffersons was erected about 1921 on the site of the ruined home of the Shreve family. It later was known as the Tourist Home of Mrs. Goldie Smith, which was recently demolished for the erection of townhouses on South Pershing Drive at Arlington Boulevard.<sup>7</sup>

Early one morning in 1917 the young son of the new store-keeper, Gemmel, arrived at the Handy home with a delivery, just as the phone rang. It was an urgent alarm! The old steam train had gone down about an hour before

and a bad woods fire was reported. It began in the wooded area east of Glen Carlyn (now Arlington Forest) and, pushed by winds, was racing toward Barcroft. Forests then covered the whole area. Most of the men had left for work, but by phone and word-of-mouth an army of firefighters was quickly mobilized. Women and children manned the well pumps filling buckets and tubs. A line of men, women and boys carried these as far as possible. Billy Gemmel, with the grocery wagon, hauled supplies as close as he could. Much had to be carried on trails and wood-paths, however, to reach the spot along the railroad. It took several hours but the flames were finally extinguished leaving a large area of our beautiful forest blackened and smoldering.

Such fires were a frequent occurrence along the railroad, causing serious damage in dry weather. Hot coals and embers were dropped when the train's boilers were fired, igniting railroad ties, dry leaves and brush.

Homes were heated by wood or coal stoves, and chimney fires were a frequent hazard. Though they were a frightening sight, particularly at night, they seldom did much damage. They were watched carefully, however, because most roofs were covered by wooden shingles and, when dry, were easily ignited.

Another fire in 1919 destroyed the old farm home of Frank Corbett. It had been sold by Stephen Wright's family when they moved away, and was rented for an orphanage for several years. It had stood at the corner of what is now Sixth and South Taylor Streets.

A mile to the east, the town of Columbia, sometimes called Arlington, had been growing since 1850. Frank Hale, the carpenter of Barcroft, was given a contract in 1903 to build a Presbyterian Church on the Pike, "near Whiteheads's Blacksmith Shop", at what is now 3711. Many Barcroft residents attended there over the years, among them, those of the Handy, House and Tapp families. Walter Handy joined the Church in 1908, becoming an elder, and was for over thirty years, the Sunday School Superintendent. William House, a government employee, was a talented musician, playing the violin and piano. He was director of the young people's choir. Julian Tapp was a deacon and treasurer of the Church.

On a cold and rainy February Sunday in 1925, the call came in the early afternoon. The Church was on fire! Families rushed to the scene in model-T's or whatever was available. The building was ablaze from one end to the other, flames leaping high from the roof. Friends had gathered from miles around and men worked frantically, but could rescue only a few of the lovely old oak pews near the door. These were carried across the Pike to the lawn of Dr. H.C. Corbett. Here the children gathered in the rain to watch in awe. Soon a cry went up — the church tower entrance and belfrey were ablaze and everyone was ordered away. Silent and stunned, they watched helplessly as the tower was consumed and the huge bell that had called with such sweet tones fell with a clattering that raised sparks and flames skyward. A dirt basement had housed

the great furnace under the Sunday School Room in the back. It was assumed that the damper chain on the wall had been pulled the wrong way causing the furnace to overheat. That chain fascinated children who were continually warned not to touch. The old red brick Church of the Methodists at Filmore Street was loaned for afternoon services for some time until a new building could be erected on Lincoln Street.

One final blow was delivered to the young community in 1926 when residents were awakened in the early hours of a chilly February morning by the flickering glow of a fire, sparks, and shouts of many voices. Grandmother Handy, living with her son, Walter, since his wife's death, woke her eldest granddaughter. "Come on," she said, "we are going to a fire!" Throwing a robe and coat on over her gown, she was on the way. Running the two blocks to the top of the hill on Arlington Avenue, an awesome sight greeted their eyes! Barcroft's precious Landmark, the old Mill, was a mass of flames, its huge beams outlined like a skeleton, the great wheel glistening in the flickering light. The smell of smoke floated over the area and the shouts of firefighters could be clearly heard. As they watched they heard the thud of the huge grindstones and machinery inside as they fell causing a new glow of flame and sparks. Stunned, they turned to go and found they were not alone! Half of the neighborhood was there — in nightclothes, too!

The old water-wheel stood stark and lonely over the smoldering ruins the next morning. No more would intrepid and happy boys and girls alike crawl down the water shoot to ride the dripping, groaning wheel as it turned to the shimmering, mossy pool below!

Electricity was still a mile and half away in 1912, and oil lamps furnished the evening light. The wish began to grow to try the new-fangled convenience. Mr. Handy obtained an agreement with the Virginia Electric Company to extend poles and a line to Barcroft — if he could obtain twelve customers. He got fourteen signatories, and as an electrician, wired the homes himself in his spare time. He added the school house, and these were connected in 1914.

Barcroft, long separated from the rest of the county by surrounding forests, its only means of access by railroad or east-west on Columbia Pike, began slowly, by 1919, to join sister communities in activities. Competition in sports with other schools was initiated. New county-wide programs and goals for improved education were being formulated by a more unified School Board.

A joyful demonstration was planned when World War I ended to celebrate the return of county men who had served their country. A monument was to be erected in memory of those who had lost their lives. In addition to ceremonies at the Courthouse, all schools were to take part, joining various organizations in a parade on Wilson Boulevard from the Court House to Clarendon Circle. Barcroft pupils drilled feverishly, marching along the dirt road in front of the school to tunes grinding out on the old victrola.



They rehearsed the songs they would sing, "Over There", "Johnny, Get Your Gun", "There's a Long, Long Trail". Mr. Handy, asked to make arrangements for a plane "fly-over", contacted Bolling Air Force Base which readily agreed to the request. They were to fly over the Courthouse exactly at the time of the ceremonies. He carefully repeated the admonition that it was the Alexandria County Courthouse, NOT Alexandria City, and was assured that was understood. Came the great day, and with banners and bunting, speeches, music and parade they celebrated — but no planes! Later, the Officer said they made the fly-over, but nothing was going on — on King Street! They had flown over Alexandria.

That did it! For years the confusion in name had increased since the building of the County Courthouse in 1898.<sup>8</sup> The infant Chamber of Commerce and other organizations joined in urging a change of name. James Head, George Pepper, Thomas Armstrong and Walter Handy of Barcroft, as well as Dr. Henry C. Corbett, Thomas DeLashmutt and W.C. Wibert of Columbia, had become increasingly active in County Affairs. Mr. Handy was one of those selected as a committee to recommend a new name for the county. Many meetings were held and arguments ensued over names suggested. Finally, at a meeting which came to an impasse when it seemed the names favored only duplicated those already in use and would be as confusing as "Alexandria", Mr. Handy said, in exasperation, he thought a name should be chosen honoring something for which the County itself was well known — "like Arlington, for instance, for the Custis home." A motion was made to that effect and the subject was opened for discussion. He had to leave for an appointment about that time. He was amazed and delighted to learn later that when the vote was taken, the new County name would henceforth be "Arlington"!

A great boon to Barcroft was the inauguration in 1919 of a "Bus Line" to Washington by Robert L. May, a former Washington policeman. He had lived for a time on a hillside near the county line, where he sold wood. Then he occupied the house across from the school in the center of town. The first "buses" were trucks, entered by a step in back. They were equipped with two long boards along the sides for seats; a tarpaulin stretched over a frame served as a roof. He drove one, his wife the other. Two new buses were added the next year, having windows and hard roof, protection from the elements. Buses were even added to make the rounds of schools being attended by pupils in Washington by 1922 — at a fare of 5¢! A bus later took pupils to Washington-Lee in 1925 when it was opened. The line became the AB&W, serving also Alexandria and surrounding areas.

Barcroft, more fortunate than most, had not one, but two swimming pools (or "old swimmin' holes"). One was under the bridge at the Mill on Four Mile Run; the other was upstream at the dam. The dam was a favorite spot for many years for young and old. There, huge rocks formed a great sunning and picnic spot. Some rocks, where water gushed through were like steps, worn smooth.



Youngsters found it fun to sit in these crevasses taking the shower, but they soon found themselves covered with leeches that had to be picked off!

When the hard freeze came the flash of ice-skates was seen. At times the ice was thick enough to skate down from half a mile above the dam.

Sleds were brought out with the first good snow and everyone headed for "Palmer's Hill". Sheriff Palmer's cow-field, sloping steeply to Doctor's Run (about where 12th Street, South, runs east through Barcroft Apartments) was a favorite spot. With little or no traffic, it was more fun, however, on the road to navigate the "S" curve. Mr. Handy, using two low-slung old fashioned sleds and a long board, made a sturdy toboggan with a wheel on a pipe to turn the front sled. It held ten or twelve people at a time, and was enjoyed by young and old. His daughter and her friends were allowed to use it, providing only that she was always to be Captain and driver. (Others could pull it uphill!) A warm fire in an oil drum at the top of the hill provided a spot for thawing cold hands, and a place to sing in the moonlight.

A favorite pastime was roaming the many old logging trails through the surrounding forests from Barcroft to Wilson Boulevard, or for a mile or so south of the Pike. Carpets of violets, spring beauties, bloodroot, windflowers and arbutus were to be found in the spring. Laurel, dogwood, fringe trees and wahoo were plentiful. In the fall, with baskets and bags, the hunt was on for chestnuts, chinquapins, hickory and hazel nuts.

Croquet, horse-shoes and baseball were popular. Shouts and the ring of laughter could be heard on summer evenings as children gathered for games of Tag, Hide and Seek, Statues, and Red Rover. A favorite on woods trails during daylight was Fox and Hounds.

Frequent and regular evening home gatherings were held for Whist, Five-Hundred or Bridge. Infants were dressed for bed, wrapped in blankets and carried — to be put to bed at the home visited. Older children played sit-down games. No need for baby-sitters!

Many new bungalow-type homes sprang up like mushrooms during the War years, 1918-1925, when Walter O'Hara added North Barcroft subdivision.

Still to come for Barcroft were macadamized streets to replace dusty roads; sewer lines to replace outhouses and septic tanks; water lines to replace the many pumps. The impetus for this came in 1928 when Walter Handy proposed to the Bureau of Public Roads, then under the Agriculture Department, that Columbia Pike be used for its testing program.<sup>9</sup> As a result, a two-lane concrete road was laid from the lower end of the Pike to the top of Palmer's Hill at High Terrace. The road was laid in sections from which cores would be taken to examine effects of wear and weather.

The little Post Office in the grocery store was replaced by a new rural route in 1918, the Postman in his old Ford car delivering mail to boxes along the road.

Bazaars, musical programs, dances, lectures, plays, all served to bring the

village together at the "Community House". After "The Citizens Association of Barcroft" in 1907 when the School was established, came "The Barcroft School and Civic League" with regular meetings at "The Community House". The families of Marye, Wright, Head, Armstrong and Handy and others were all represented in this. It is probable that Sidney Marye was an early President. It is known, from his shorthand notes, that Major Handy was an early Secretary prior to his death in 1912.

A new building was erected on the foundations of the old Mill and, in 1929, "The Ice House" was being advertised in the "Barcroft Review". The huge wheel stood for many years as an attraction for visitors. When improvements were later made to Columbia Pike, the curve was eliminated and the road was laid out to run behind the Ice House, with a new bridge over Four Mile Run.

No longer is Barcroft the little village where all were known by first names; where time was a precious commodity; where grass was mowed with a scythe; where forest paths and streams were everyone's playground. These are still remembered with nostalgia by those who remain, and by their children. It is now a busy, pleasant suburb of Washington, taking its place in the country.

Of the homes erected in the original subdivision of Barcroft between 1895 and 1910, only eight remain. All others have been demolished for more modern structures. The little building erected in 1907 as a Church, and occupied in 1908 and for seventeen years thereafter, as a School, is still a focal point of activities as the "Barcroft Community House". Kept spotless with fresh paint and loving care, it now has regular Church services as well. Now at three-quarters of a century in age, it may well be the only original little wooden "School House" remaining in Arlington!



*Author's Note:* The earnest and energetic young man who settled in Barcroft in 1908 — and who became my father — never ceased to amaze his family, as well as his many friends. His capacity for overcoming obstacles, his love for people and devotion to God and duty were never-ending. These led him constantly into new fields of endeavor for the betterment of man and of the community around him. This article has been compiled from public records and family records of his activities, and with the assistance of many interested friends. It is a part of a History in preparation. mhr.

## FOOTNOTES

<sup>1</sup>Plat, "Corbett", Alexandria County Deed Book N 4, p. 488.

<sup>2</sup>Plat, "Barcroft", Alexandria County Deed Book 110, p. 53.

<sup>3</sup>Plat, "East Barcroft", Alexandria County Deed Book 123, p. 215.

<sup>4</sup>*The Arlington Historical Magazine*, (1959), p. 55.

<sup>5</sup>*AHM* (1963), p.17.

<sup>6</sup>*AHM* (1979), p. 3.

<sup>7</sup>*The Arlington News*, March 29, 1979.

<sup>8</sup>*AHM* (1979), p. 32.

<sup>9</sup>Bureau of Public Roads, U.S. Department of Agriculture.