

THE PARK IN LYON PARK

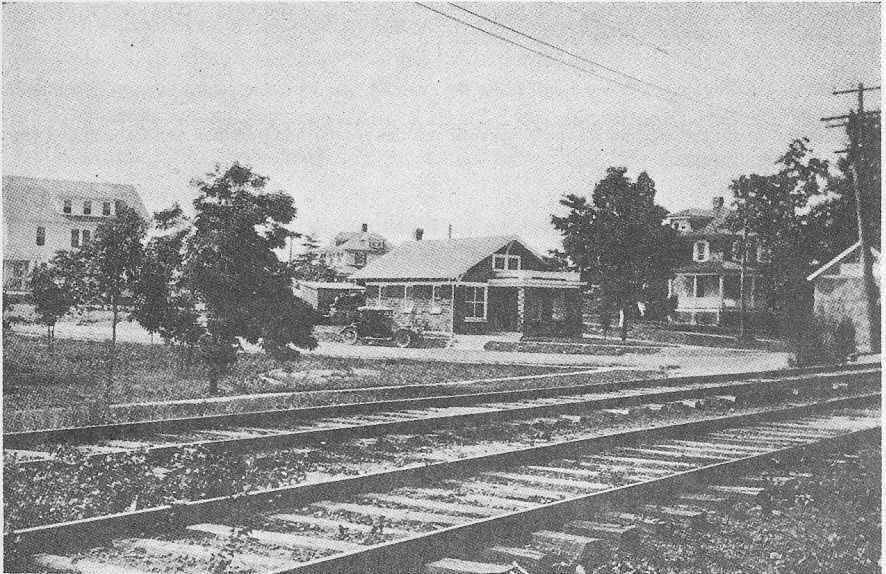
By
Dorothea E. Abbott

The Clarendon real estate business of Frank Lyon, lawyer and C.W. Fitch, civil engineer was incorporated on November 10, 1923. Their Lyon Park office was located at the intersection of Fort Avenue (7th Street), Cathcart Avenue (Pershing Drive) and Washington Avenue (Boulevard), which was across the street from the Lyon Park Washington-Virginia Electric Railway (trolley) Station.

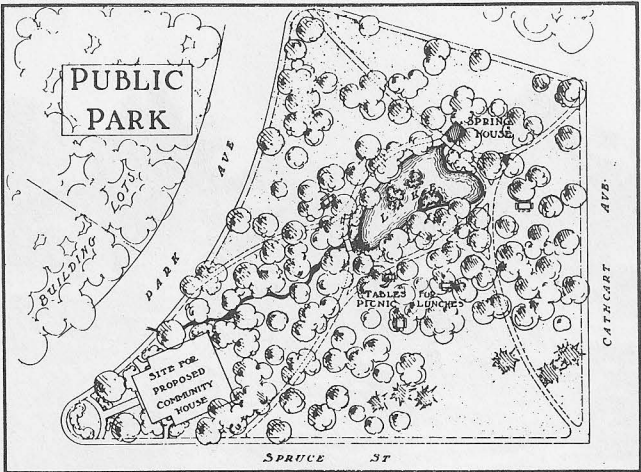
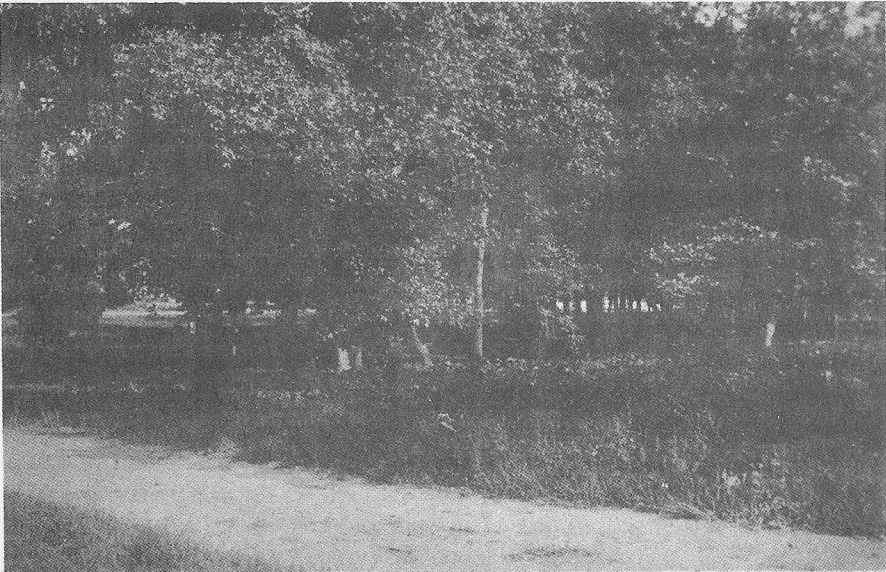
Officers of the corporation were Frank Lyon, President; C.W. Fitch, Vice President and General Manager, and C.W. Smith, Secretary and Treasurer.

"The purpose of Lyon and Fitch, Inc. was to buy, sell, improve, develop, lease and exchange real estate, to borrow money, make and secure same on real estate; to build sewers, and to provide and construct all other betterments and facilities; to contract for the contracting business; to subdivide real estate into lots, *parks*, streets, and alleys, and to sell or dedicate the same to the use of the public ..."

In a sales brochure developed by Lyon and Fitch to acquaint potential buyers with LYON PARK and its excellent amenities there is a descriptive explanation on their interpretation of an anticipated "Public Park."



“The owners of LYON PARK have set aside approximately three acres of land as a public park. This area is a grove of trees consisting of Elms, Maples, Ash, Tulip trees, Pines, etc. It is traversed by a stream of crystal water from the largest spring in the county, having its source in LYON PARK and running perpetually a stream of several thousand gallons per day. This spring was used by soldiers in the Civil War. A spring house for use by the public is to be erected and a lake provided as shown in the plan, bordered by shrubs.



There are tables for picnic parties, swings, playground apparatus, and grass and shade for the children. A community house to be used for public occasions is proposed.”

Early residents of Lyon Park formed a Lyon Park Community Association. They held their meetings in the office of Lyon and Fitch. True to the words of the sales brochure, Frank Lyon, President of Lyon and Fitch, Inc. on March 3, 1925, conveyed a deed to the Trustees of the Association, Harry R. Thomas, James W. Dorsey and Louis C. Carl for the Lyon Park Community Center. The tract of land contained approximately 20,000 square feet. It bordered on Spruce Street (Fillmore), Cathcart Avenue (Pershing Drive) and Park Avenue (Fourth Street).²

Not only did the firm of Lyon and Fitch, Inc. generously make a gift of a site for a Community House, but also provided a portion of the cost of the building built in 1925.³

Lyon and Fitch, Inc. made a second deed on April 10, 1930, with the Trustees of the Lyon Park Community Center. This deed conveyed:

All that block of property bounded on the north by Pershing Drive, on the east by Spruce Street (Fillmore), on the south by Park Avenue (Fourth Street) and on the west by Latterner Avenue (Garfield Street), LESS and EXCEPT the land already heretofore conveyed by deed dated March 3, 1925.

The parties hereto expressly agree upon the following specifications from one (1) to three (3) inclusive, and that the same shall constitute and be construed as covenants running with the land for a period of ninety-nine years from January 1, 1924:

1. No intoxicating liquor shall be brought into, sold or dispensed on this property.

2. The property shall not be used for the conducting of any business that constitutes a nuisance to other lot owners on the subdivision.

3. Neither this land nor any part thereof nor any interest therein shall be loaned, sold or leased to anyone not of the Caucasian race.

The said parcel of land shall be used by said Community Center, or its assignees, only as a community park and no building shall be erected thereon by it except such as shall be incidental to its use as such a park and as a recreational center.

TO HAVE AND TO HOLD the said property for the use and benefit of the members of the Lyon Park Community Center and of the owners of lots in the community known as LYON PARK and designated on the records in the Clerk's Office of the Circuit Court of Arlington County, Virginia.

During this period that title to this property is held by the trustees

of the Lyon Park Community Center, such Community Center shall maintain and administer said parcel of land as a Community Park under such rules and regulations pertaining to its use as shall be applicable alike to all persons herein named as beneficiaries of this deed, and the expenses of such care and maintenance shall be borne by the aforesaid lot owners and member of Lyon Park Community Center.

Whenever the owners of the majority of the lots in Lyon Park shall deem it to the best interest of the Community, they may by a properly executed instrument signed and acknowledged by them, cause the title to the aforesaid parcel of land to be vested in the County of Arlington, or its successors, or any other public body legally authorized to accept title to and maintain public parks in said County or Arlington, or its successors, and in determining such majority the owner of each lot, regardless of size, shall be counted as one, except that in the case of lots having a frontage of less than forty (40) feet, two lots shall be counted as one.

Whenever the said owners of the majority of such lots shall have executed such instrument, it shall then be mandatory upon the trustees to execute a good and sufficient deed therefore.

In the event that said Lyon Park Community Center, or the trustees, or their successors as holders of said parcel of land, should cease to function and no disposition of said park property has been made by a properly executed instrument, then, in that event, the title to said park property shall vest in the County of Arlington, or its successor as a local division of Government, to be held by it and used as a park for the general public under the laws applicable to public parks, either of the State or the ordinances of the County, or its successors.

Provided that, in the event there is no public authority vested with power to take title to the said property as a park, or if it is unwilling to do so, then the title to the said property, shall again vest in Lyon and Fitch, Inc., or its successors, and all the rights of the lot owners thereto shall be deemed to have been forfeited and voided.⁴

Lyon Park is unique because it is the only park in Arlington County that is privately owned, and is maintained entirely by the community.

The Francis Wallis Chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution placed a monument in memory of the Arlington boys killed in World War I on the grounds of the Cherrydale School in 1918. The first name listed on the plaque was John Lyon, son of Frank Lyon. The Veterans of Foreign Wars also used his name for Post 3150, 19th and N. Uhle Streets, Arlington, when it organized. Each Memorial Day since 1934 a formal cere-

mony honoring the names listed on the monument has been held. When the Cherrydale School was to be torn down it was arranged that the monument be moved to Lyon Park. It has been placed near the Community Center, and on Memorial Day a service is conducted on the park grounds.⁵

Looking at the park in the year 1980 one finds the original Community Center with an addition housing a modern kitchen. The lake and spring house envisioned by the developers did not materialize and the stream running through the park has been filled in. A large play area is available for children. There are picnic tables and benches. The trees have been thinned out but there are still a few of the trees described in the Lyon and Fitch write-up alive and well, bringing shade to the park participants.

FOOTNOTES

¹*Charter Book #2*, Arlington County Courthouse.

²*Deed Book 217*, p. 598-599.

³Lyon Park Community Center Constitution.

⁴*Deed Book 314*, p. 446-448.

⁵Report of Barbara Doyle, p. 5, Lyon Park Woman's Club.