

ARLINGTON: CAPITAL REMNANT

By

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Arlington County's interest in preserving its historic landmarks came almost too late to save the few relics of its early life as a part of the ten-mile-square district set aside in 1791 to be the capital of the new nation. Its ten unique boundary marker stones, its twenty-two Civil War forts, and many of its notable houses were allowed to disappear or were bulldozed almost unnoticed as the rampant growth of the national government during and after two world wars spilled across the Potomac River and filled the tiny county's area with suburban homes.

The Search for Identity.

Not until well into the Twentieth Century did Arlington approach any degree of mastery of its own fate.

Cession. As late as 1742, when Fairfax County was created, including the present-day Arlington County, the area was sparsely inhabited, isolated and forgotten on the banks of the Potomac River.

Within thirty years it would be catapulted to center stage—but briefly. The decision to create a District of Columbia, straddling the river, brought the cession of the area, along with the City of Alexandria, to the national government. When the government was moved to the District in 1800, the former Virginia territory comprised about 6000 persons, most of them living in urban Alexandria, a thriving seaport. No more than a thousand people lived north of Four Mile Run, the present Arlington County boundary, making their livings from farms and mills.

Retrocession. The sophisticated City of Alexandria expected an immediate boom from its inclusion in the new capital, but was disappointed, for one of the first actions of the national government when it met in Washington was to restrict federal buildings to the north side of the Potomac River. Having been denied the benefits of being part of the District of Columbia, the city then found itself suffering the penalties. In competition with Georgetown to be the terminus of canal routes to the West, Alexandria applied to Virginia for funds for linking the Alexandria Canal to the Chesapeake and Ohio Canal. It was denied the subsidy because it was no longer a part of the Commonwealth.

So Alexandria lobbied for retrocession, and in 1846 it was successful; that part of the District originally part of Virginia was returned to it. What is now Arlington was not receded to Fairfax County, but remained part of a new County of Alexandria.

Separation. Nevertheless, the two parts of the County of Alexandria had little in common. Alexandria city was urban, the territory to the north

was rural. The latter 25-square-mile area was closer to Washington than to Alexandria, and it became more and more closely linked to the new capital. Bridges were built, commuter traffic grew, and the national government began acquiring real estate along the Virginia side of the river. Transportation links to the City of Alexandria were less well developed than those to Washington. Eventually, the lack of community interest was recognized, and Alexandria and Arlington separated in 1870.

But the county still bore the name of its sister city, retaining the name of County of Alexandria, one of the three smallest in area in the United States. In 1898, the county built its second courthouse on Ft. Myer Heights, the site of the present Arlington County Courthouse.

Finally, in 1920, the county gained its separate identity. It took a new name, borrowed from the Arlington Plantation, once the home of George Washington Parke Custis, whose daughter married Robert E. Lee in 1831. That 1817 mansion, started in 1802 and overlooking the Potomac River, remains the county's most impressive landmark even with the changing modern skyscraper silhouettes along the shore.

The Federal Spillover.

Historically, Arlington shared the glory of national events, and its character was shaped by happenings in Washington. It also shared its land with the Federal Government, yielding approximately five square miles—or 20 percent—of it to Federal jurisdiction.

During the Civil War, the government seized the Arlington Plantation through auction for taxes from General Lee's wife, then owner. Twenty years later, following a suit by her son Custis Lee, the Federal Government settled with the heirs for \$150,000. The land then was part of the Arlington National Cemetery.

Over subsequent years, the government purchased the river bottom land between the cemetery and the present Fourteenth Street Bridge, using part of it to expand the cemetery and devoting the rest to a succession of uses: to Freedmen's Village, a Department of Agriculture experimental farm, the Hoover airport, and now the Pentagon. Behind the cemetery, land was acquired for Fort Myer and Navy installations. During the Second World War, Arlington Hall, then a fashionable girls' school on a 25-acre site, became a military intelligence and communications center.

Arlington's national monuments make it a tourist center for the millions who visit the nation's capital every year. Arlington Memorial Bridge was built on a direct line from the Lincoln Memorial to Arlington House, the Robert E. Lee Memorial, which was opened to the public in 1925. Bus tours take visitors through the cemetery to the mansion and to the Tomb of the Unknowns, where services are held each Memorial Day, usually featuring an address by the President and attended by government officials. On the hillside below the mansion, an eternal flame marks the burial place of John F. Kennedy. To the north are the Marine Corps Memorial erected after World War II, depicting the capture of Iwo Jima, and the Netherlands Carillon, dedicated in 1960.

Arlington is also the air gateway to Washington. Washington National Airport, superseding the earlier one upstream and built largely on landfill, was dedicated in 1940 and now counts fifteen million arrivals per year.

Meanwhile, those earlier military relics—the twenty-two forts that dotted the hillsides during the Civil War—have all but vanished. Fragments of remaining earthworks can be identified on only three—Fort Ethan Allen, Fort C. F. Smith and Fort Scott. A number of the forts were still in existence until the turn of the century. The face of Arlington changed drastically during the five years of the construction of the defense system, as hundred of acres of trees were cleared for the forts and access roads. Arlington, hostile Virginia territory, was the defense line to deter attack on the capital from the south.

Arlington was one of Washington's main suppliers of farm produce, and throughout most of the Nineteenth Century wagons crossed the bridges to the Saturday farmers' markets in the growing city.

From Rural Area to Suburb.

As transportation across the river improved, Arlington was gradually transformed from an agricultural hinterland into a residential suburb. The days of crossing the river by boat, pontoon or ferry ended in 1797 when the Falls Bridge was built at the head of tidewater. Washed out by a flood in 1808, it was replaced by a chain link bridge—the name retained by the more conventional bridges constructed in 1853 and in 1938 at the same Chain Bridge site. In the same year, 1808, what has ever since been the principal corridor to the south was opened with the construction of a bridge at Fourteenth Street. Its replacement in 1834 was known as the Long Bridge. Today, automotive traffic is carried by two one-way bridges—George Mason Memorial Bridge and Rochambeau Memorial Bridge—and a railway bridge providing a major north-south link across the Potomac River. A portion of the metropolitan transportation system—METRO—now has a tunnel under the Potomac River.

Still another bridge, connecting Arlington to Georgetown in 1843, had a profound impact upon the county's growth. The Aqueduct Bridge was a truly multi-purpose structure, carrying wagon and carriage traffic, and later a trolley line on the upper level as well as a flume to link the Chesapeake and Ohio Canal with the Alexandria Canal. Rosslyn was the terminal for three trolley lines and two railroads. The trolley line—forerunner of the Capital Transit Company and the Old Dominion Railroad—had its terminus in Georgetown and served Arlington, western Fairfax and Loudoun counties. The canal was abandoned after a short time, but the bridge continued to carry a pipeline bringing domestic water to Arlington.

After the bridge's replacement by the Francis Scott Key Memorial Bridge in 1923 (Key's home in Georgetown near the bridge has been destroyed), the span still carried street cars until the City of Washington abandoned them in favor of buses. Rosslyn was dominated from 1896 to 1958 by the tall chimney of the Consumer Brewery.

The most recent span—the Theodore Roosevelt Memorial Bridge, touching Roosevelt Island—is designed to carry the traffic of the about-to-be

completed Interstate Route 66.

Arlington's commercial and residential centers grew along the transportation corridors leading to the bridges. Most important were Lee Highway running from Aqueduct Bridge to Falls Church; Wilson Boulevard leading from that same bridge to Ballston—originally called Ball's Crossroads—through Clarendon, Arlington's first commercial center; and Columbia Pike, running from Long Bridge to Annandale and connecting there with the Little River Turnpike. Glebe Road was the major cross-country road from the Falls Bridge to Alexandria. Little Falls Road in the north end of the county connected Falls Bridge with Falls Church. Military Road was just that, cut through in a matter of a few days when the Federal army was building the forts and line of forts across Arlington.

The forerunner of Arlington's many planned subdivisions was Glencarlyn, a cooperative of 360 houses centered on the site of a once popular resort—Carlin Springs—when it closed in 1888. The Washington and Ohio Railroad line along Four Mile Run, which had served the recreation area, made it possible for the new suburban dwellers to get to jobs in the District with ease. A model for other developments that followed, Glencarlyn had its own parks, school and community center. The latter, a small frame structure, survives today as one of Arlington's historic sites.

As electric rail lines were extended down the corridors from the Potomac bridges, other small self-sufficient neighborhoods appeared. Responding to the growing need for housing for federal employees, enterprising private developers built Lyon Park, Clarendon and Lyon Village early in this century, and later Bon Air, Barcroft, Cherrydale and Alcova, to name a few.

Four of the major lines were the Washington, Virginia Railway; the Washington and Old Dominion; the Great Falls and Bluemont; and the Alexandria, Barcroft and Washington. These lines prospered until the 1930's when the increased use of the automobile brought demands for improved highways, which in turn spelled the eventual abandonment of rail transportation, supplanted by bus lines. By 1941, only the Washington and Old Dominion (the roadbed is now Old Dominion Drive) still hauled freight and passengers from its Rosslyn station at the end of Key Bridge. It too ceased carrying people in 1951 and terminated all operations in 1968. The Great Falls and Bluemont right of way was sold for power lines. Portions of it are now used for an inter-county recreation trail.

Just over the brow of a hillside facing the Potomac, between Lee Highway and Wilson Boulevard, developers in 1935 laid out Colonial Village, the first garden apartment community insured by the new Federal Housing Administration. Buckingham on Glebe Road soon followed, and during the war an even larger garden apartment complex—Fairlington—was established along the new Shirley Highway, a superhighway that created a corridor south from the Fourteenth Street Bridge toward the state capital in Richmond.

Meanwhile, distinct black communities developed in Arlington, not following commuter patterns as with the white settlements, but created to ab-

sorb the families previously located in Freedmen's Village, a refugee camp established on the southern edge of Arlington Plantation for the overflow of former slaves who flooded into the District of Columbia when slavery was abolished there in 1862. Starting with a hundred houses, two churches and a school in 1863, the Village was soon overcrowded, and by 1875 was regarded with embarrassment as a government-created slum. The surrounding landowners offered building lots, and the villagers were gradually absorbed into areas now known as Arlington View, East Arlington, Queen City and Green Valley-Nauck nearby, as well as the existing Hall's Hill several miles away to the north. These communities remain black today, with a proud heritage.

In the censuses from 1970 through 1900, blacks outnumbered whites in all of the three magisterial districts making up the county. Many blacks served in public office, with John Syphax of a prominent black family elected to serve one term as a delegate to the Virginia General Assembly in the early 1870's.

From Dispersion to Community.

A county built along corridors radiating from a metropolis outside its boundaries necessarily lacked a center of its own. South Arlingtonians living along Columbia Pike had little in common with North Arlingtonians who commuted to Washington along Lee Highway or Wilson Boulevard.

But Arlington's experience and history tended to discourage development of a geographical community center even after it became an independent county in 1870. Administratively the county was divided into three magisterial districts—Washington, Arlington and Jefferson. Each selected a supervisor and other district officials, but the county board of supervisors—operating under state laws designed for rural counties—had little power to deal with growing urban needs as the population doubled during the following thirty years.

The 1898 courthouse in the county centralized administrative functions, but not until 1912 did the county board of supervisors gain statutory power to provide urban services such as water, sewers, roads, police, etc., on a county-wide basis. In 1932 the county manager form of government was adopted.

Public school systems were made mandatory in Virginia in 1869, and by 1871 the county could claim at least one school in each magisterial district. The state appointed a superintendent of schools for the county, but the districts were obliged to provide buildings, teachers and part of the funding. By the end of the century the county had eleven schools—six for whites and five for blacks. The dual school system continued in Arlington until the Supreme Court struck down school segregation laws in 1954 and Virginia ended its period of "massive resistance" to that decision.

Traditionally, the many neighborhoods—those that developed along the corridors—had strong identities, expressed in civic associations. Out of the local groups grew the Arlington County Civic Federation, which assumed the role of community watchdog and promoter of civic pride, particularly during the decades of rapid growth between 1940 and 1970, when the population expanded from 57,000 to 175,000. Federation committees developed policy posi-

tions which, when approved by the whole body, were presented to the Arlington County Board and carried considerable influence.

Along with the civic federation, an important unifying force in the postwar decades was a powerful reform movement that began with the objective of modernizing and improving the school system but almost immediately extended its interest to the county government as a whole.

Dissatisfied parents, initially organized in local Parent-Teacher Associations and in the County Council of P-T A's, formed in 1946 an action organization known as the Citizens Committee for School Improvement. Its first successful campaign was for state legislation to create an elected school board to replace the existing indirect system of appointment. (School board members were selected by a school board electoral commission which was named by the district judges, who themselves were elected by the state legislature). Campaigns for school board gave rise to political organization on a county-wide basis, transcending the traditional local and isolated perspectives.

Meanwhile, reformers organized to nominate and support progressive candidates for the County Board, first through the Better Government League then through a broadly-based non-partisan movement that nominated its candidates in well-attended "town meetings", involving people from all parts of the county. By 1949, the new movement had a majority on both the county government and the school board. The school reform movement won Arlington national recognition through "The People Act" radio series and a "March of Time" documentary film.

The successes of the newcomers' reform movement—largely made up of those who worked for the federal government or other employers in Washington—provoked counter-organization by the county's conservative elements lead by longtime Arlington residents, particularly landowners and developers.

Political control alternated, and during the struggles over school integration the state legislature took away Arlington's elected school board—but vested appointive powers in the county board rather than returning to the old indirect system of selection.

But the hotly contested elections for the county board (elected at-large), which were still held annually, served at least to develop a high degree of community consciousness. Arlington, if deeply divided ideologically, was for the first time united geographically as a single community. Citizens from every corner of the county were in communication with one another.

In the wake of the Korean and Vietnam wars, other centrifugal forces were, however, developing. The homogeneity of a community of homeowners or garden apartment dwellers, made up mostly of families with children, was broken by an increasing number of high-rise apartment buildings occupied temporarily by childless tenants whose interest in Arlington was minimal. In order to protect the residential character of established neighborhoods, high-rise apartments, hotels and office buildings such as those of Rosslyn and

Crystal City, were purposely isolated in specifically zoned areas. Shirley Highway sliced the county apart. Now in the 1980's, another superhighway—Interstate 66—is forming another barrier in its six-mile swath across the county.

The county's homogeneity was also being affected by new population groups not yet assimilated—Vietnamese, Koreans, Hispanics and others. Foreign-born students now account for more than 20 percent of the county's school population, and bilingual instruction has been introduced.

County planning—invigorated as one of the principal contributions of the postwar reform movement—is now concerned primarily with influencing and controlling the effects of METRO, which now has ten stations in Arlington.

Leaders.

Over the years a number of outstanding men and women have been identified with Arlington, beginning with the Custis and the Lee families. Many government officials have lived here, for example, Caleb Cushing, first Minister to China and later Ambassador to Spain. He lived in Arlington's historic Glebe House and decorated the octagon wing with a spread eagle given him by the Spanish government.

A man whose life work affected all humanity, Charles Richard Drew, lived at 2505 First Street South. He was the first black to receive a doctorate in surgery and originated a process for preserving blood plasma that changed medical history.

In the early 1900's, Crandal Mackey and other leading citizens led the triumphant crusade against gambling and crime that had dominated Rosslyn and "Jackson City", forcing travelers to form convoys for safe passage.

Historical Preservation.

During its period of hectic growth, Arlington unfortunately paid little heed to the loss of its early landmarks. Not until 1956 was the Arlington Historical Society founded. It opened the old Hume School as its museum on Arlington Ridge Road. The Ball-Sellers House, one of the oldest houses in the county, was restored by the historical society. The county established the Arlington Historical Commission in 1968 and an Architectural Board of Review in 1977. The Arlington Historical Commission completed an inventory of over a hundred sites and buildings. Following the Bicentennial Celebration it placed historical markers on 53 sites. Arlington has three houses listed on the National Register of Historic Places: Drew House, Glebe House and the Ball-Sellers House.

A few examples of Arlington houses of outstanding architectural and historic interest are the Lothrop Estate, an 1870 cottage-style shingle house on Wilson Boulevard; the Rixey Mansion on North Glebe Road, built in 1920; the Spanish-style Missionhurst, built by Frank Lyon in 1897 near Old Dominion Drive; the 1851 Dawson-Bailey farmhouse in Rosslyn (now a community center) and the privately-owned "Alcova", built in 1836 in south Arlington; the Febrey House of 1851 on North Powhatan Street; and the 1898 Doubleday Mansion on North Uhle Street.

It is too late, of course, to save a Greek revival mansion, Altha Hall, built in 1889, near Lee Highway; the nearby Fort Strong Villa built in 1888, a three-story frame with cupola and green shutters; and what was the county's finest example of federal-style architecture—Prospect Hill—built in 1842 on Arlington Ridge Road. All of these were lost to development, while fire claimed two other important houses—Abingdon, on the edge of Washington National Airport, and Green Valley Mansion built in 1821 near Four Mile Run.

After nearly two centuries of growth in the shadow of the nation's capital, Arlington is still a remnant of—and a dependency of—the capital, only tenuously tied to the rest of Virginia and struggling to preserve such independent identity as it has been able to develop inside its crumbling Boundary Stones.

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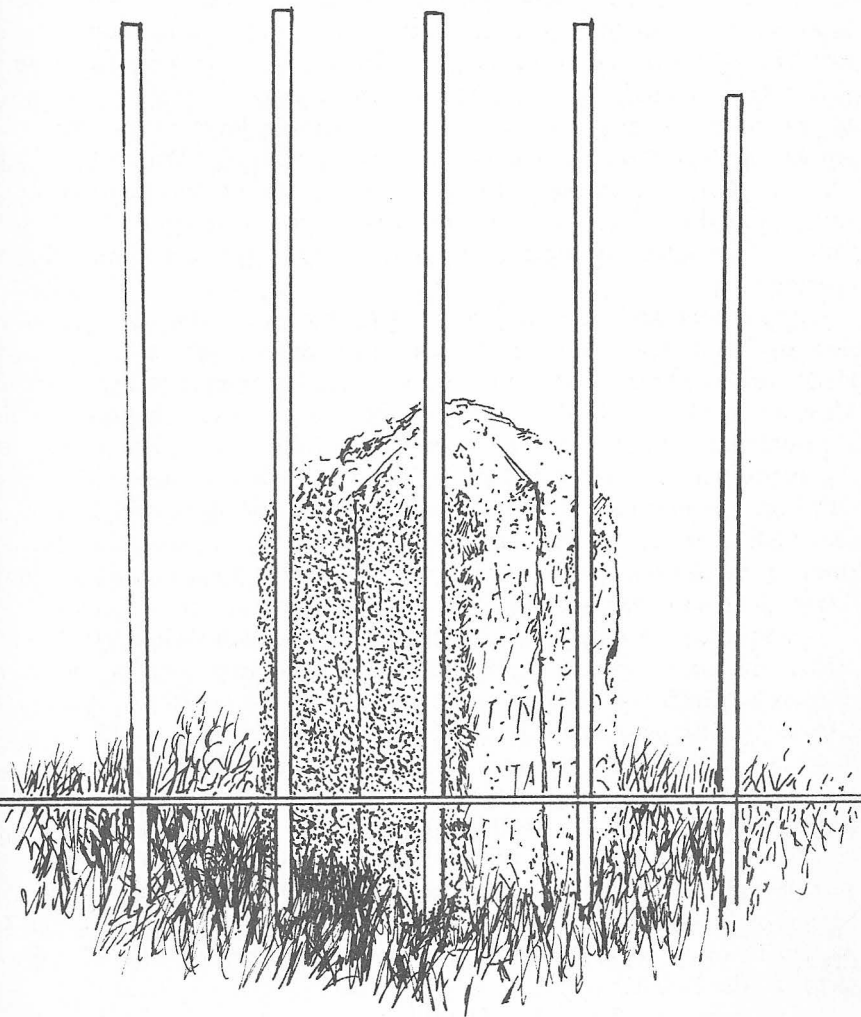
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Arlington County Boundary Stone
James K. Sundquist