

THE WAYCROFT-WOODLAWN NEIGHBORHOOD¹

By

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Waycroft-Woodlawn is a well established neighborhood. It is known for its tree-lined streets and flowering shrubs and azaleas in the spring. Yet its history is recent. Sixty years ago it was an area of farms, fields, and woodlands, undistinguished from the rest of a largely rural Arlington County.

The story actually begins much earlier when Captain John Smith sailed up the Potomac on an exploratory trip in 1608. He landed at a Necostin Indian village on the Virginia shore near the end of the present railroad bridge and was the first white man to set foot in Arlington.² For the next sixty years, however, the Arlington area remained Indian territory with only occasional white hunters and trappers visiting it.

By the latter part of the seventeenth century, grants began to be issued for land in the area that is now Arlington. The first grant was made to Robert Howson in 1669 for 6,000 acres. Initial grants were, of course, for accessible lands along the Potomac River. Waycroft-Woodlawn was included in a 1,246 - acre grant to John Colville in 1739. The Colville land extended approximately from Four Mile Run to Minor's Hill (the intersection of Little Falls Road, Williamsburg Boulevard, and Sycamore Street).³

During the colonial period, the Arlington area underwent a number of jurisdictional changes. It was included in Northumberland County in 1642, in Westmoreland County in 1653, in Stafford County in 1664, in Prince William County in 1730, and , finally, in Fairfax County in 1742. Following the Revolution, Virginia and Maryland jointly ceded a ten-square-mile block of land that straddled both sides of the Potomac for the new United States capital, the District of Columbia. The Virginia portion was taken from Fairfax County and included the town of Alexandria and what is today Arlington. The portion given by Virginia was retroceded to the state in 1846 following a referendum among the inhabitants and was organized into Alexandria County. In 1870, the town of Alexandria became an independent city while the Arlington area continued as Alexandria County. Finally, in 1920, the name of the County was changed to Arlington to avoid confusion with Alexandria City.⁴

Arlington remained sparsely settled throughout the colonial period and in 1800 had a population of only 978, including 297 slaves.⁵ Throughout the nineteenth Century, Arlington was rural and agricultural. Like the County, the area that was to become Waycroft-Woodlawn consisted of farms, scattered houses, and woods during the 1800's. It was bounded to the east by the "road from the Falls" (subsequently renamed Glebe Road), which extended from the town of Alexandria to Chain Bridge. Across this road from Waycroft-Woodlawn lay the lands of the old Fairfax Glebe, a 500-acres farm given to the rector of the parish in colonial days. The original house, just off Glebe Road, was built in 1775, burned in 1808, was rebuilt in 1820, and was enlarged in 1850. The Glebe House remains today one of

Arlington's landmarks.⁶ The Waycroft-Woodlawn area was bisected by Brown's Bend Road (now 16th Street), which ran from Glebe Road westward to Falls Church. To the north was the Georgetown-Fairfax Road (now Lee Highway) and to the south the road (now Wilson Boulevard) that led from the ferry at Rosslyn to Falls Church.⁷

In the 1850's, two Waycroft-Woodlawn residents, William Marcey and John Brown, had a dispute over a parcel of land at the intersection of Glebe and Brown's Bend Roads. To resolve the matter, they both gave up their claims and the land was donated for a church site. Subsequently, Mt. Olivet Methodist Church was built there in the years 1855-1860 (The present church structure built in 1948 is the fourth building on the same site.)⁸

The Civil War saw Union troops marching up and down Glebe Road to and from various of the twenty-two forts of the Arlington Line, part of the defenses built around Washington. Mt. Olivet Church served as a hospital for wounded Union soldiers following the first battle of Manassas in July 1861. Later, the Church was a military commissary and stable and, during the winter of 1861-1863, the wooden structure was completely demolished by soldiers and used for firewood. Also, during the War, a brief skirmish occurred just north of the Waycroft-Woodlawn area at Hall's Hill (Lee Highway and Edison Street) in August 1861 when Union cavalry drove back a band of Confederates.⁹

Following the Civil War, a Union officer, Major R.S. Lacey of Ohio, who had been attracted by Northern Virginia, bought a farm in the southern part of the Waycroft-Woodlawn area and built a house, Broadview. This house survives today at 14th and Evergreen Streets. In the same period, a black community, High View Park-Hall's Hill, grew up to the north of Waycroft-Woodlawn. It was started by former slaves who purchased land from their old master Basil Hall.¹⁰

In the last years of the nineteenth Century and the early years of the twentieth century, the construction of first trolley lines and then railroads brought growth to Arlington, and small commuter villages grew in Clarendon, Ballston, Cherrydale, Bon Air, Glencarlyn, and Barcroft. Ballston lay just to the southeast of the Waycroft-Woodlawn area, and the Washington and Old Dominion Railroad crossed the southeast corner of the area (where I-66 now cuts under Glebe and Washington Boulevard). The Lacey Station (near the present intersection of Glebe Road and Fairfax Drive) was the closest stop to Waycroft-Woodlawn.¹¹

By 1900, Arlington had a population of 6,450¹², but it remained rural. In Waycroft-Woodlawn at the time of World War I, most of the land to the north of Brown's Bend Road belonged to the Marcey and Sealock farms. Mr. Sealock's barn stood approximately where the old portion of Arlington Hospital is today and the Glebe School is now on the Marcey farm site. The Lacey farm occupied most of the land in the area south of Brown's Bend Road, and there were woods along Glebe Road between Mt. Olivet Church and Garrison Road (now Washington Boulevard). Area boys played ball in the Lacey cow pasture just north of Garrison Road and swam in a favorite hole in Lubber Run (a portion of the stream now completely covered over) on the other side of Garrison Road. ¹³

World War I and the advent of the automobile brought great changes in Arlington, and the 1920's and 1930's saw the County transformed from a rural area into

a suburban community. This growth reached Waycroft-Woodlawn in the latter half of the 1930's. State Senator Frank L. Ball, who was born, grew up, and lived all his life in Arlington, described this period of change in the Waycroft-Woodlawn area as follows in his history of Mt. Olivet Church:

The neighborhood near the Church changed face. The Glebe farm east of the Church was completely built up with single family dwellings. The old woods, known as Lacey's woods, changed into the excellent residential community of Clarendon. To the South, North, and West, Keith Brunback [Brumback] erected scores of Cape Cod cottages. No farm land was left and all about us there was a new hustle and bustle. People came from all corners of the world.¹⁴

The Brumback firm, headed by T. J. Brumback, together with his sons Keith, who was the actual builder, and Clyde, built Woodlawn Village in the years 1934-1939. The Brumbacks first constructed houses along Abingdon Street from Washington Boulevard to 16th Street and then in the area bounded by Edison, Abingdon, 16th, and 17th Streets.¹⁵ Between 16th Street and Washington Boulevard and to the west of Abingdon Street, the area named Waycroft, lots were sold and individual houses built rather than the entire development being built by one builder as was the case in Woodlawn Village. The realty office for Waycroft stood at the corner of Washington Boulevard and Buchanan Street.¹⁶

With this growth came the accoutrements of an urban community. Streets and sidewalks were laid out; sewer, telephone, and power lines installed; the Waycroft-Woodlawn Civic Association was formed in the fall of 1937;¹⁷ and the Woodlawn Elementary School was built and opened in 1940.¹⁸ The Sealock farm was purchased for a hospital site in 1935 and the building constructed during World War II with the first patients admitted on March 15, 1944.¹⁹

In the years following World War II, the remaining vacant lots in Waycroft-Woodlawn were built up with individual dwellings. The trees, planted during the 1930's, matured and arched over the streets. In the late 1950's, Interstate Highway 66 was planned through Arlington and its path cut through the southeast corner of Waycroft-Woodlawn. Long-delayed and controversial, the construction was completed in 1982. A new consolidated elementary school, the Glebe School, was built in 1970-1971 on the Marcey farm site to replace several neighborhood schools, and the Woodlawn Elementary School closed. The old Woodlawn building housed the County's alternative high school 1971-1978 and now has been transformed into the Hospice of Northern Virginia. A new wing to Arlington Hospital was completed in 1973. By 1970, a new generation of homeowners had moved into the area, and the Waycroft-Woodlawn Civic Association, which had become moribund during the 1960's, reemerged as a potent force in the area. The civic pride and spirit that typified the beginning of the Waycroft-Woodlawn neighborhood over forty years ago remain alive and active today.

FOOTNOTES

- 1 This piece was prepared as part of a Waycroft-Woodlawn Civic Association Neighborhood conservation plan.
- 2 C. B. Rose, Jr., *Arlington County, Virginia: A History*. Baltimore, Port City Press, 1976, p. 19.
- 3 Donald A. Wise, "Early Land Grants in Arlington County, Virginia," *Arlington Historical Magazine* (1973), p. 23-33. Also see, Map, prepared by Donald A. Wise, Land Ownership [in Arlington County], 1699-1976, Arlington County Library.
- 4 Rose, *Arlington County, Virginia*, p. 5-8.
- 5 *Ibid.*, p. 66.
- 6 Charles O. Paulin, "Virginia's Glebe Near Washington," *Records of the Columbia Historical Society* 42-43 (1940-41), p. 217-242.
- 7 See Defenses of Washington, Extract of Military Map of N.E. Virginia, Engineer Bureau, War Dept., 1865, Arlington County Library.
- 8 Frank L. Ball, *Mt. Olivet Methodist, Arlington's Pioneer Church* Arlington, 1965, p.7-9.
- 9 *Ibid.*, p. 10-11. Rose, *Arlington County, Virginia*, p. 108.
- 10 Eleanor L. Templeman, *Arlington Heritage*. The author, 1959, p. 120.
- 11 Rose, *Arlington County, Virginia*, p. 139-141, 166.
- 12 *Ibid.*, p. 156.
- 13 Frank L. Ball, Jr., "Reminiscences of Growing Up in the Waycroft-Woodlawn Area," A Presentation to the Waycroft-Woodlawn Civic Assoc., January 1975, summary reproduced in WWCA Newsletter, February, 1975.
- 14 Frank L. Ball, *op. cit.*, p. 149.
- 15 Interview, Willard J. Webb with June Brumback Verzi, November 13, 1980. Mrs. Verzi is the daughter and granddaughter, respectively, of Keith and T.J. Brumback.
- 16 Interview, Willard J. Webb with Frank L. Ball, Jr., November 7, 1980.
- 17 Scrapbook of Clippings on the Waycroft-Woodlawn Civic Association, 1937-1939, compiled by Mrs. Garland Morris, in possession of Mr. Ben Bullock, Editor of the WWCA Newsletter.
- 18 Information from the Arlington Department of Education, November 1980.
- 19 Rose, *op. cit.*, p. 183-184.