

FAMILY GRAVEYARDS OF ARLINGTON COUNTY*

By
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Among the least known but most interesting remnants of Arlington's history are the small family graveyards which have survived the onrush of development. Except for several relatively large plantations and a few smaller scattered holdings, Arlington was completely undeveloped farmland until about 1800. The total population in 1810, including slaves, was 7,227 in the Town of Alexandria, and 1,325 in the rest of the county.¹

The newly established federal government brought people to the City of Washington. It was not long before these new residents discovered the pleasant climate of the hills across the river, and established summer homes or permanent homes among the Virginia hills. Others gradually moved into the area from the lower Potomac, settling on small farms. Still largely a rural community in 1900, Arlington today has a population of approximately 154,000.

As people lived and worked in the area, they also died and were buried, usually in small graveyards on the family property. There were many of these small burial grounds scattered across Arlington, but as development increased, it was inevitable that some vestiges of history would be lost. This has been all too true of many of our family cemeteries. In some cases, descendants have had graves moved to other, more protected locations. Unfortunately, in too many instances, a graveyard has simply disappeared as development progressed.

Graveyards Still in Existence

In the latter part of the nineteenth century, the Phillips and Tucker families had extensive landholdings in the far western section of the county. On one part of the farm lay the burial ground where many of the family were laid to rest. Today, there is one large stone remaining, at the rear of 2829 North Tacoma Street. It is well-maintained by the family in whose backyard it stands. The inscription tells us that this is the burial place of James B. Phillips (died 1876) and his wife, Mary (died 1894). The monument, we read, was erected by their daughter, L. Annette Phillips (died 1896). The occupant of the house told us that there are other graves nearby, but no other markers. There is one Phillips farmhouse still standing, across Williamsburg Boulevard, on North Tacoma Street. A second house, which stood on North Rochester Street, has disappeared during the writing of this article, to make way for townhouses.

Overlooking Route I-66 at Fairfax Drive and North Harrison Street is a small graveyard dating back to 1832 when John Redin, veteran of the American Revolution, was buried here. Five generations of the Southern, Shreve, and related families rest here. The Shreve family in Arlington dates from the arrival of Samuel Shreve about 1780 and his purchase of a tract of land near Ballston in 1791. The graveyard is near the site of the home of Richard and Frances (Redin) Southern, built before 1832. Their daughter, Mary Southern, married William Henry Shreve in 1838. The

graveyard is in fairly good condition, enclosed by a chain link fence. It stands behind the playground of St. Ann's Catholic Church School and includes members of the Shreve, Southern, and Donaldson families. Of Richard Southern Shreve and his wife, Frances, who were killed by lightning in 1874 at the ages of 34 and 32, the inscription says: "Struck by a thunderbolt from Heaven, They both lay down and died. They left three lambs whom God had given; May He for them provide." ³

A small overgrown burial ground, remnant of a much larger cemetery, can be seen close to the street in the 1300 block of South Monroe Street, under a huge holly tree. Only a few of the stones are upright and legible, showing dates ranging from a death in 1827 to a death in 1887. The names that can be read include Travis (or Travers), Dyer, and Whitehead. ⁴

Standing at 4572-26th Street North is Birchwood, the restored log house built originally in 1836 by Caleb Birch on land which he inherited from his grandfather, James Robertson. James Robertson's daughter, Janet, married Joseph Birch. The family cemetery is located in a small wooded area just north of the elementary school on the 26th Street side of the Marymount College campus. It appears to have had no care for a number of years and is sadly neglected and overgrown. The stones show the names of Campbell, Evans, and Birch family members. ⁵

At Sycamore and 28th Streets North, is the Samuel Birch family cemetery. One large stone marks the graves of nineteen people. Previously, there were several upright stones, but only five foundations and one flat stone remain. Samuel Birch was born 30 January 1790, one of eleven children of Joseph and Janet (Robertson) Birch, who owned extensive tracts of land in the Fairfax-Alexandria area. It was Joseph Birch who established the Birch family in Arlington, where he built a large log house on what is now North Powhatan Street. Upon the death of Samuel, his daughter, Sarah, inherited that part of the land containing the cemetery. Her will provides that the one acre burial ground be preserved, ⁶ but part of it seems to have been taken when 28th Street was cut through.

Located near the 26th green of the Army-Navy Country Club, and beautifully cared for by the grounds crew of that club, is the burial plot of the Fraser family. This land was part of the estate of the Fraser family who originated in Scotland and who first came to the Arlington area in 1758, when William Fraser signed a lease as a tenant of the Alexanders. The graves are enclosed by a wrought iron fence and clearly demonstrate that it is not necessary to destroy a cemetery to make way for progress. William Fraser (died 1824) and his wife Mary are both buried here, along with other family members. ⁷

In 1742 John Ball was granted 166 acres of land in the Glencarlyn area. His brother, Moses Ball, received land nearby in 1748. John and Moses were sons of John Ball, Sr., who died during the 1720s. After the death of John, Jr. in 1766, his estate was sold to William Carlin, who was one of George Washington's tailors. The cemetery of this Ball estate is located at South Kensington and Third Streets, adjacent to the library, originally the garden area of the family estate. The stones tell us that John Ball, Jr. is buried here, in addition to William Carlin (died 1820) and members of his family. ⁸

About 1773, John Ball, son of the pioneer, Moses Ball, built a log house on the south side of what is now Washington Boulevard just west of its intersection with

Wilson Boulevard (Clarendon Circle). Across the road is the Ball family burial ground. Clustered together in a back corner is a group of old gravestones, some upright and some lying down, which seem to have been moved here from other parts of the cemetery. A large monument lists the names of fifty-five family members who are buried here.

In addition to Ensign John Ball (1746-1814), veteran of the American Revolution, many of his direct and collateral descendants including members of the Marcey, Boldin, Stricker, Donaldson, and Mills families rest here. Among them are John Wesley Boldin, a Civil War soldier, and Rev. John Ball of the Baltimore Annual Conference, Methodist Episcopal Church, who died in 1846.⁹

The home of Robert Ball, Sr. was near the present-day intersection of North Stafford Street and Fairfax Drive, where the Central United Methodist Church now stands. Beside the east wall of the church are five gravestones marking the resting place of members of this family, including Robert Ball, Jr. (1776-1861) and his wife Ann Ball (1781-1864).¹⁰

On the grounds of Arlington House, the Robert E. Lee Memorial, are two small burial sites. In a brick enclosure about 100 yards north of the flagstaff in front of the mansion rests the grave of Mrs. Mary Randolph, who died in 1828. This is said to be the first burial on the Arlington estate. Her youngest son, Burwell Randolph, fell from a mast while attending the Naval Academy and her devoted care of him is said to have hastened her death.¹¹

Also on the grounds of Arlington House is the Custis family graveyard, in the oak park southwest of the mansion. Mrs. Custis, born Mary Lee Fitzhugh, died suddenly in 1853. Her husband, George Washington Parke Custis, grandson of Martha Washington and adopted by George Washington, died in 1857. These are the only two monuments here. The only surviving child of Parke and Mary Custis was Mary Ann Randolph Custis, who married Lieutenant Robert E. Lee in 1831 at Arlington House.¹²

Located at the rear of 2641 North Richmond Street are the unmarked graves of the pioneer couple, Mr. and Mrs. James Marcey. Also buried here are the remains of six Civil War soldiers which were found while excavating at the site of the old Van Dorn house at the southeast corner of Military Road and Lorcom Lane in 1953 (where Cherrydale Baptist Church now stands).¹³

Graves Moved to Other Locations

In June, 1959, suit was brought in Arlington County to condemn the land of Theodore Hicks, et als., for a State Highway Commission project to widen Lee Highway west of Glebe Road. The suit was successful and land was taken after "just compensation" had been decided upon by the court.

Before this, and before the beautification project at Cameron Street on the south side of Lee Highway, the Hicks family graveyard rested between 22nd Street North and Lee Highway at that site. We were told by a descendant that shortly after 1965 she had the family graves moved to the Mt. Pleasant Baptist Church Cemetery in Herndon.¹⁴

Lt. Col. Samuel Shreve died in 1815 owning land in Arlington County known as

“The Shreve Cemetery”. This area is located between the houses now at 829 and 839 North Abingdon Street. The gravesite is the remains of a division of Samuel Shreve’s farm of some 259 acres purchased in 1791, as mentioned earlier. In 1970, Samuel Shreve’s great-great-grandson, Eugene Shreve, received permission from the court to move the four bodies that were buried there to Oakwood Cemetery in Falls Church, where a number of Shreve relatives are buried. Family members who were moved are Samuel Shreve (1750-1815), Julia Shreve Birch (died 1866), her husband William R. Birch (died 1916) and their daughter, Julia F. Donaldson (died 1875). Lt. Col. Samuel Shreve served in the First Battalion, New Jersey Militia, Continental Line, Revolutionary War.¹⁵

A small burial ground behind the present 2901 North Lexington Street was the resting place of members of the Whiting, Winslow, and Wilson families, prominent black families. These graves were moved in 1960 to the Maryland National Cemetery in Laurel, Maryland. Family members who were moved include Robert Whiting (died 1889), his widow, Roberta Whiting Winslow (died 1924), Helen E. Whiting (died 1920), widow of Orion, and Zenobia Edna Wilson (1909-1931). Several older graves were moved about 1978, but we have not been able to determine the names or present locations of these family members.¹⁶

In 1821, when Maria Carter was eighteen years old, she married Charles Syphax, a slave of George Washington Parke Custis. Charles and Maria had ten children. When Maria was manumitted by Custis, about 1826, she was granted by him a tract of land, part of the Arlington Estate. At the beginning of World War II, the U.S. Government condemned all of the Syphax estate with the exception of the area where the Abbey Mausoleum stands. It is said that the family graveyard was in the vicinity of the swimming pool on the grounds of Henderson Hall. In 1944, eight members of the Syphax family were reinterred at Lincoln Memorial Cemetery in Suitland, Maryland. Later, in 1959, twenty-one family members were reinterred at Harmony Cemetery in Landover, Maryland, but we have not been able to learn exactly where these latter family members had been buried originally.¹⁷

Bazil Hall was a prominent landowner in Arlington County, from 1850 when he purchased a 327 acre farm until his death in 1888. The area of his estate is remembered today as Hall’s Hill. Near the southern boundary of his land was the family graveyard of one and three-eighths acres, which was adjacent to Mt. Olivet Road (now Sixteenth Street North) on the grounds of present-day Arlington Hospital. Here were buried Bazil Hall, his wife Elizabeth (1829-1857), his wife Frances (1835-1888), his ten children, five grandchildren, one nephew, and two servants.¹⁸

“ . . . on September 18, 1939, the disinterment and removal of all of the bodies or remains together with the caskets, coffins, monuments, stones and other markers, were completed by Edward C. Hall and others in his employ, and . . . said bodies and remains have been suitably reinterred in Oakwood Cemetery, Falls Church, Virginia, and . . . such disinterment and reinterment were done in an appropriate manner by O.C. Pearson, a licensed undertaker whose establishment is located at Falls Church, Virginia, so that the said tract of one and three-eighths (1 3/8) acres . . . and the larger tract surrounding the same in so far as is known by the defendants, are now free of all bodies and remains buried in said graveyard formerly established by the late Basil Hall.”¹⁹

Several members of the Donaldson family originally rested in a small graveyard near the end of Marcey Road. Among this group were Ann M. Donalson [sic] (died 1861), R.H. Donaldson (died 1871), Anna M. Donaldson, (died 1864), and Theodore F. Donaldson (1862). When this site was purchased by the Northern Virginia Regional Park Authority, the graves and stones were removed (about 1962) to Columbia Gardens Cemetery.²⁰

Until 1966 a small burial ground of the Deuterman family was located at South Randolph and Nineteenth Streets. These graves were removed to Columbia Gardens Cemetery.²¹

John Alexander and his wife, Susanna Pearson, owned a large estate known as "Preston", facing Four Mile Run near the present Water Pollution Control Plant. Across the run lived Nathaniel Chapman and his wife, Constantia Pearson, on their estate known as "Summer Hill". The burial grounds of these families remained in possession of the families until 1940, when the graves were moved to Pohick Church graveyard in Fairfax County. Included in this move were members of the Alexander, Calvert, Chapman, Swann, Hunter, Brown, and Sinclair families. Among these were General Alexander Hunter, veteran of the War of 1812 and for eighteen years U.S. Marshall for the District of Columbia; Surgeon General William Brown (died 1792); and George Hunter (died 1776), surgeon in the U.S. Navy during the American Revolution. The earliest noted burial is that of Dr. John Hunter "of Scotland" who died in 1753.²²

Destroyed Cemeteries

The foregoing descriptions include only about two-thirds of the family graveyards known to have existed in Arlington. These are sites that have been preserved as burial grounds, or they are graves where the remains have been removed to safer locations.

Following are descriptions of cemeteries that have been totally destroyed over the years. "This destruction has been largely due to violation of a state statute prohibiting destruction of any cemetery site; violators include the federal government, the State Highway Commission, and contractors engaged by churches and private developers."²³

On the south side of North Glebe Road opposite Carlin Springs Road, in a grove of trees, rested the graveyard of the John Mills family. This was bulldozed during construction of the Parkington Shopping Center about 1950.²⁴

Until about 1970 there were two stones and a number of unmarked graves of the Donaldson family on the south side of 1012 North Quincy Street, beneath a lone tree. The stones marked the resting place of H.F. Thompson (died 1864) and Robert R. Skinner (died 1872).²⁵

For many years there was a Harrison family graveyard on the north side of Lee Highway between North Taylor and North Thomas Streets.²⁶

In the 2200 block of North Wakefield Street was the burial ground of Dr. Wunder's family. This was bulldozed by a prominent realtor about 1935.²⁷

Tombstones of the Shelley family were bulldozed about 1938 for the building of St. Thomas More Catholic Church at 101 North Thomas Street.²⁸

Until 1958 the graveyard of the Berry-Whitehead families could be seen at the

southwest corner of Randolph and 17th Streets South.²⁹

A small graveyard of the Corbett family was located between South Quincy and Randolph, 16th and 17th Streets. A nearby resident is said to have destroyed the tombstones about 1957 and used the lot to pasture his horses.³⁰

Marked by three giant oak trees, the Billy Birch family graveyard was a familiar sight at the corner of North Abingdon and 37th Streets. Family members buried here were Billy Birch (died 1870); Mary Birch Langton, his daughter; Thomas Langton, her husband; and Samuel Langton, son of Mary and Thomas.³¹

Graves of the Pelham family, a highly respected black family, rested near the site of Missionhurst, 4651-25th Street North.³²

John Minor and two wives are buried at the rear of 5600-35th Road North. The stone which marked the graves disappeared when the farmland was turned into a residential neighborhood.³³

Although so many burial grounds have disappeared, it is hoped that those which remain will be given the love and respect that is due them. They are important reminders of our heritage.

Notes and References

*Grateful acknowledgement is made for the use of *Graveyards of Arlington County, Virginia*, (1985) published by the National Genealogical Society, 4527 Seventeenth Street North, Arlington, Virginia 22207. For a more comprehensive history of these cemeteries and a complete listing of inscriptions, the reader is referred to this book.

¹C.B. Rose, Jr., *Arlington County, Virginia: A History* (Arlington: Arlington Historical Society, 1976), p. 67.

²Eleanor Lee Templeman, *Arlington Heritage, Vignettes of a Virginia County* (Arlington: The Author, 1959), pp. 152,153.

³Ibid. pp. 92,93,94.

⁴Ibid. pp. 82,83.

⁵Ibid. p. 156.

⁶Ibid. pp. 90,146,148,150,156.

⁷Ibid. p. 60.

⁸Ibid. pp. 62,63.

⁹Ibid. p. 90.

¹⁰Ibid.

¹¹Ibid. p. 44.

¹²Ibid. pp. 18,19.

¹³Ibid. pp. 108,154.

¹⁴Chancery #10726, #10727, #10728, Arlington Courthouse; Mrs. Lucy Belle (Hicks) Coates, Arlington.

¹⁵*Arlington Heritage*, p. 90; Chancery #20399 Arlington Courthouse.

¹⁶Mrs. Harold Johnson, Arlington; Records of Maryland National Cemetery, Laurel, Maryland.

¹⁷Records of Harmony Cemetery, Landover, Maryland; Records of Lincoln Memorial Cemetery, Suitland, Maryland; Dorothea E. Abbott, "The Land of Maria Syphax and The Abbey Mausoleum" *The Arlington Historical Magazine*, Vol. 7, No. 4(1984) pp. 64-79.

- ¹⁸Donald A. Wise, "Bazil Hall of Hall's Hill", *The Arlington Historical Magazine*, Vol. 6, No. 3(1979) pp. 20-29.
- ¹⁹Chancery #598, Arlington Courthouse.
- ²⁰List and map of Arlington County cemeteries compiled by Eleanor Lee Templeman in 1973, #8.
- ²¹*Ibid.* #28.
- ²²Dorothea E. Abbott, "Arlington's Summer Hill Plantation" *The Arlington Historical Magazine*, Vol. 7, No. 3(1983) pp. 25-36; Sigismunda Mary Frances Chapman, *A History of Chapman and Alexander Families* (Richmond: Dietz Printing Co., 1946); *Arlington Heritage*, p. 56.
- ²³Eleanor Lee Templeman, letter dated Sept. 1, 1973, Arlington County Library Collection.
- ²⁴*Arlington Heritage*, p. 90.
- ²⁵*Ibid.*
- ²⁶Templeman, List and map, #18.
- ²⁷*Ibid.* #19.
- ²⁸*Ibid.* #21.
- ²⁹*Ibid.* #26.
- ³⁰*Arlington Heritage*, p.82.
- ³¹Templeman, List and map, #36.
- ³²*Ibid.* #39.
- ³³*Arlington Heritage*, p. 146.