

Copies of tonight's presentation materials are attached.

Ashton Heights Residential Development , 1931-1942

Presented by Ramsay Fairburn

Ashton Heights: A Description of Residential Changes Since 1940

Presented by Tricia Reneau

Selected Public and Private Institutions Concerning the Ashton Heights Community Schools, Religious Institutions, Clubs/Civic Organizations

Presented by Terry Meyers

November Newsletter Article with small addition

History of Ashton Heights Report Summary

AHCA has a wealth of historical materials, some of which is available on our website, some is not. One of the largest collections of materials we have is the 12 reports written about our area by GWU graduate students in 1994, however, only 1 is available on our website. Only some of these were presented in person to AHCA. We have had volunteers review these reports and prepare summary information about them. At the November meeting we will have short presentation about these and will have some hard copies available. We hope someone can volunteer post these reports to the website so they can be more widely available to the community. Please contact Jim at terpstrajames2@gmail.com for more information and to help us tell our story.

In addition, if anyone is interested we could review the other reports, which cover a range of topics, and plan additional presentations and activities for next year.

A HISTORY OF ASHTON HEIGHTS

Introduction

This study was prepared by the students of George Washington University Professor Richard Longstreth's course "Historic Preservation--Principles and Methods" during spring semester 1994. This study was arranged with the participation of the Ashton Heights Civic Association (AHCA), and the Virginia Room of the Arlington Public Library. This study was presented to the AHCA, as well as the general public on May 4 in the auditorium of the Arlington Public Library. The study comprises: a summary report, supporting reports, survey forms, maps. This report contains selected copies of this material.

Persons interested in obtaining a copy of this report, or any of the other materials identified below, may contact Jim Terpstra AHCA Historian at (703) 908-9231, or Sarah Collins, Librarian of the Virginia Room at (703) 358-5966. The originals of all documents referenced below are available for public inspection in the Virginia Room. Jim Terpstra also has an AHCA copy of all of these materials, with the exception of the survey forms and the maps (which are too voluminous).

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2. Wilson Boulevard: From Country Road to Suburban Artery
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List of Other Reports

1. Visual Analysis of Ashton Heights--Christopher Shaheen
2. Interview with Frederick Westenberger, Builder of Ashton Heights 3/23
3. Arlington Travels: Street and Highway Development--Theresa Burr
4. A Breif History of the Arlington County Street Railway System --Laura Bobeczko
5. History of Utilities in Ashton Heights and Environs--Susan West *Tricia Roney*
- ② 6. Ashton Heights: A Description of Residential Changes Since 1940--Laura Spina *Terry Waters*
- ③ 7. Selected Public and Private Institutions Concerning the Ashton Heights Community--Angela Shearer
8. The contribution of Real Estats Agents & Builders to the Development of Ashton Heights

ASHTON HEIGHTS RESIDENTIAL DEVELOPMENT

1931 - 1942

1931- 1942 Residential Development

The development of residential sites (building houses by speculative developers) in the 1930's (1933-1941) was bracketed by the end of the Great Depressions and the start of US' active involvement in WW2. During this time frame, individual developer/ builders bought lots and primarily built the "new" brick colonial style houses because they were spatially efficient, economical, and popular (easy to sell). The new home buyers were predominantly middle-class workers/ families who wanted efficient houses on affordable lots that still allowed for some outdoor yard space. These new home buyers were both people leaving DC ("the city") and people relocating from within Arlington County. Toward the end of this residential building boom (Arlington County grew from 26,615 residents in 1930 to 42,000 residents in 1937.) the Buckingham Apartment Complex (1938) and the garden apartments along the south side of Wilson Boulevard (1940, near the Virginia Square metro) were built. While these apartments were smaller and more affordable, the Arlington Planning Board (instituted in 1937) saw them as an OK compromise to single family development because they still allowed for "ample landscaping". At this time the Planning Board did not approve the development of row houses; the popular opinion was that this housing type would be too much like the city which was not deemed a good thing at the time.

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Ashton Heights
A Description of the Residential Changes
Since 1940

Laura Spina paper "Ashton Heights: A Description of the Residential Changes Since 1940"

- Building in the 1920's and 1930's created most of the housing stock in Ashton Heights.
- By the late 1930's and 1940's, building was concentrated in the northwest (Oakland, Nelson, and Monroe Streets) with apartment complexes comprising most of the construction.
- By the 1950's most of the 17 houses built in the decade were in the southeast corner (south of 1st Street and east of the cemetery).
- 1960's – Only 5 houses built and were interspersed throughout the area.
- 1970's – Only 4 houses constructed.
- 1980's – A strong economy and creation of the Metro system contributed to new construction. 1985 says townhouses built along the 600 block of Piedmont Street. Hunter Oaks also along Oakland. Six other houses built during the decade.
- At the time of this paper, 21 demolitions had occurred, 11 of them being on Piedmont Street.
- At the time of this paper, 196 of the properties in Ashton Heights were structurally unchanged. Irving, Jackson, Kenmore and Lincoln Streets had high numbers of unchanged houses.
- 39 additions to the houses were shown via permitting (2-story, 1-story, 1-2 room, or non-specific additions).
- Renovations – 32 permits issued for renovations of the bath. 23 permits for new kitchens. Permits for new dormers were popular. Others were for finishing a basement, adding a fireplace, etc. The number of renovations/additions permits rose from 18 in the 1940's to 84 in the 1980's.
- The biggest change in the houses were to the porch, whether to enclose them, enlarge them, or to even add them.
- The largest number of permits went to fencing. 189 houses were demarcated with fences, most in the rear, but some with the entire lot.

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Selected Public and Private Institutions Concerning
the Ashton Heights Community

Schools, Religious Institutions, Clubs/Civic Organizations

Angela Shearer

March 28, 1994

Principles and Methods of Historic Preservation 278

Spring 1994

Professor Richard Longstreth

The George Washington University

A couple of weeks ago, at Ashton Heights 100th year birthday party, AHCA's intrepid Historian, Jim Terpstra, made me an offer I couldn't refuse. He handed me a report on the "Selected Public and Private Institutions Concerning the Ashton Heights Community—Schools, Religious Institutions, Clubs/Civic Organizations." The report, one of 14 submitted in 1994 to Richard Professor Longstreth's class at George Washington U on the Principles and Methods of Historic Preservation 278, held the promise of great revelations about the neighborhood's history. All I had to do was read it and write a synopsis.

The author was an undergraduate writing in March 1994. It was a different time--shortly after Bill Clinton had delivered his first State of the Union calling for welfare reform, better health care and a ban on assault weapons; OJ Simpson was about to take the nation on the long, slow ride chasing his white Bronco; the same year, the US would enforce a no-fly zone over Bosnia, Mandela would become President in South Africa, and Michael Jackson would marry Lisa Marie Presley. Boyz II Men and Whitney Houston supplied the sound track for the year's events.

As you might guess from a smart undergraduate, the report provides a summary of facts, dates, names of schools, churches and community organizations, size of population and number of students, but little analysis or political context. It documents Arlington County's dramatic growth since the turn of the century and the valiant efforts of city fathers (and mothers) to keep up by building new schools and churches. It lists the community groups they founded— the Women's Club, our very own Ashton Heights Civic Association, Boy Scout Troop 104, and a host of county-wide civic groups.

What is most interesting, however, is not the report's recitation of schools built or groups formed, but what it leaves out. Perhaps it was the temper of a different time. The report contains almost nothing on what was happening within the community, the anthropology and sociology of the county. In fact, it contains only one reference to race, when it lists schools open in Arlington in 1922-3: Fort Myer Heights (Wilson), Clarendon (Maury), Balston, Columbia, Barcroft, Glencarly, Aurora heights and Kemper (Negro). This small reference to Kemper, however, gives us an opening to explore what the author didn't.

With Google (something our GWU student author sorely lacked) and thanks to the Green Valley Civic Association (itself well worth looking up: <https://greenvalleyciv.org/about/>), we can discover the history of Kemper, the first school in Green Valley and, for years, Arlington's only school for African Americans. Started in a chapel on what is now Shirlington Road by the African American community in 1875, the school was named after James Lawson Kemper in what seems, at first glance, a counter-intuitive choice. Kemper was, after all, a former Confederate general wounded in Pickett's charge. But on a second reading, the name makes some sense; following the civil war, Kemper became a supporter of African-American education and Virginia Governor, 1874-7 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/James_L._Kemper. Almost a century later, as part of a plan to end segregation in Arlington, an expanded Kemper School was absorbed into a model school named after Charles Drew, a renowned African American surgeon who had established the first blood banks during World War II and trained generations of doctors at Howard University <https://profiles.nlm.nih.gov/spotlight/bg/feature/biographical>.

The GWU undergraduate's reference to Kemper is a clue to a darker history—segregation was rife in Arlington in 1922, the year after Ashton Heights was founded by real estate entrepreneur Ashton Jones. As Peter Dickinson points out in his updated essay, *Ashton Heights: Its Origin and History*, Jones made clear the new neighborhood would be "carefully restricted." His ad for the development says, "Your neighbor...must belong to the Caucasian race. He cannot sell, lease or rent his property, or any part thereof to anyone not of the Caucasian race." A demographic chart buried in the appendices to the GWU report shows the impact of restrictive policies like those of Ashton Heights. While Arlington County's population

grew from 10,231 in 1910 to 135,449 in 1950, the percentage of African Americans dropped from 25.9 percent (2,645) to 4.8 percent (6,517) and “native whites” grew from 68.9 percent (7,054) to 91.9 percent (124,538).

What the GWU report describes is a county scrambling to keep up with dramatic population growth, building schools and churches and creating civic associations, but what it misses is the remarkable divisions within that county. It fails to mention the vibrant African-American communities of Green Valley or Halls Hill: <https://hallshill.com/about-my-halls-hill-family/> or Arlington’s difficulties in unraveling its patterns of segregation. That story is told in fine detail by Center for Local History Researchers as part of the Arlington Public Library’s Project DAPS in its *The Story of Arlington Public School Desegregation*: <https://library.arlingtonva.us/2018/01/11/the-desegregation-of-arlington-public-schools/>.

The Library gives context to the GWU report. While the GWU report talks about population growth and the construction of schools to meet it--Maury (built as the Clarendon School in 1910, renamed in 1925), Clay (1926), Filmore (1953), Washington and Lee (1924), it also hints that all is not well. Despite all the building, the report says “many parents in the surrounding communities, including Ashton Heights, continued to send their children to school in the District of Columbia. This practice was common as late as the 1950s.” The GWU report doesn’t say why. The Library gives at least a partial explanation: “until 1932, public education for people of color in Arlington was limited to elementary school.” There was Hoffman-Boston Junior High School (later Junior-Senior High), but it had inadequate facilities and remained unaccredited until the 1950s. “Nearly three-quarters of Black students in Arlington who were of age to attend junior or senior high were either attending schools in Washington DC or were not attending school at all.”

It took five years after *Brown v. Board of Education*, the 1954 Supreme Court decision that “separate educational facilities are inherently unequal,” for the NAACP and progressive groups in Virginia to defeat opponents to the ruling who hoped to avoid its implications by replacing public schools with private academies. On February 2, 1959, Arlington became the first county in Virginia to desegregate when four African-American students from Hall’s Hill (accompanied by some 100 police officers) appeared for class at Stratford Junior High. Later that year, Washington and Lee desegregated with three Black students joining the school’s 2,700 member student body.

Desegregation in Arlington would go forward, but the pace was painfully slow. The Library study reports that in 1963, “all the movie theaters and drive-ins in Arlington were whites-only; there were no decent sit-down restaurants that allowed Blacks to eat in their dining rooms; the maternity ward at Arlington Hospital would not admit Black mothers.” And it wouldn’t be until 1971 that the School Board developed a plan to desegregate Drew Elementary and Hoffman-Boston High School.

The challenge of building a community in Arlington continues. The recent census (<https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/arlingtoncountyvirginia>) shows Arlington with a population of 236,643 in 2021, a 14 percent increase since 2010. It reflects the county’s growing diversity: White: 75 percent; Hispanic/Latino: 15.6 percent; Asian: 11 percent; Black or African American: 9.7 percent; Two or More Races: 3.6 percent; American Indian and Alaska Native: 0.6 percent, Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander: 0.1 percent. How would a GWU student writing today describe the progress we’re making? And what would a reader, skimming that report some 25 years from now, conclude from that description?