

## **Social History of Columbia Heights**

### **18th Century Settlement Efforts**

One of the earliest speculators in the Tidewater region was Robert Howson (also referred to as Housing in records) who was granted 6,000 acres in 1669, which he soon sold to the Alexander family.

Columbia Heights is within a tract of 629 acres that James Robertson acquired in 1730. From 1724-1766 Robertson acquired six tracts totaling 3,280 acres in Arlington. Robertson was the original owner of these tracts, and he was, like most of the original owners, an absentee landowner. Settlement was sparse and tenants were working the land and yeomen were farming smaller tracts.

During the 18th century tobacco was the main cash crop, and later corn, cattle, mills and wheat brought income. Communication was by water with the beginnings of some roads by mid-century. Later, large landowners, including Robertson, began living in the area.

The Robertson legacy continues to this day in his Birch, Cleveland, Bowling, Walker, Payne and Minor descendants, in burials in family cemeteries, and in place names. His grandson Caleb Birch's reconstructed log home, Birchwood, can be found at 4572 16th Street North on land that was one of the Robertson tracts.

A more detailed discussion of the early history of Arlington County can be found in Appendix A.

### **The Turnpike - from 1808 through the Civil War**

At the core of our Neighborhood's history is the old turnpike that was responsible for the neighborhood's very existence, and which continues to be the center of community attention. We know this road today as Columbia Pike or "The Pike," but throughout its history it has been known by a number of names, including the Washington Road, the Columbian Road, the Arlington Turnpike, and the Washington Graveled Road.

Its beginnings date to 1808 when Congress chartered the Columbia Turnpike Company to build a road through the newly-formed (1801)

Alexandria County of the District of Columbia. The purpose of this road was to provide access westward from the new Long Bridge that predated the 14th Street or Highway Bridges.

Old maps show clusters of settlement on the eastern part of the Turnpike near the bridge, around the toll gates and at the crossing of the Alexandria Canal, at the crossing of the Georgetown and Alexandria Turnpike, and west of that area near what is now Orme Street and the earlier location the predecessor to Trinity Episcopal Church, later relocated to Wayne Street.

One person who lived in this older community was Jeanette Mudd Allwine, a grand-niece of Dr. Samuel A. Mudd, whose family home was the old tollhouse at Columbia Pike and Jefferson Davis Highway. She helped her mother collect tolls and deliver mail and lunches by barge to the many brickyards along the Alexandria Canal. After she married, she lived at the old Abingdon Plantation and her daughter still lives in the county.

### **G.W.P. Custis and Arlington House**

The name "Arlington" was a natural for this part of the county because of the existence of Arlington House--the most magnificent home in the area. Arlington House was built by Martha Washington's grandson, George Washington Parke Custis between 1802 and 1817 on an 1100-acre tract of land he had inherited from his father, John Custis. The home and park-like grounds were visible from the newly-formed city of Washington, and were visited by dignitaries from this country and abroad.

G.W.P. Custis built the house as a memorial to George Washington, the foster father who had raised him. Custis brought with him from Mount Vernon many of the Washington treasures and displayed them in his mansion for any who visited. Because his home was a museum to George Washington, he at first called it Mount Washington, but later selected the name Arlington House after the Custis family ancestral home on the Eastern Shore, when his sister preempted the use of that name by calling her nearby home Mt. Washington.

Although G.W.P. Custis was our county's most distinguished resident during the first half of the nineteenth century, Arlington House is now a notable memorial to his son-in-law, Robert E. Lee. While never owned by Lee, he considered it home during his military leaves and lived there after Custis died in 1857 to administer the will and make

improvements. The records for the settling of the will by Lee are in our county court records.

Custis would have known the other landowners or farmers in the county and served on various committees with many. The Frasers of Green Valley Manor (the nearby Army Navy Country Club) were friends, as was John Mason (what is now Roosevelt Island). He most certainly would have known the nearby Roach family of Prospect Hill on Arlington Ridge Road; descendants of that family have a picture of Robert E. Lee and James Roach chatting over the fence that divided the two farms.

Custis and other landowners in our county were expected to respond to calls for doing road repairs and he was in charge of gathering tithables for this work, which may have impelled him and others to support the new turnpike movement, where corporations were formed to build and maintain toll roads, or turnpikes, like the one that established Columbia Pike.

G.W.P Custis built his mill at Four Mile Run in 1836 on part of the 1200 acres he inherited from the first President and he encouraged his neighboring farmers in production that would make them and their country less dependent upon imported goods. His travels to Arlington Mill would take him along the local turnpike to the area that is now Barcroft.

**Arlington House Today.** Arlington House remains a local jewel, but its grounds are now occupied by Arlington National Cemetery, Fort Myer (Fort Whipple during the Civil War), Henderson Hall Marine barracks, and the roads and parkway. Previously, the Freedman's Village, Arlington Experimental Farm (now at Beltsville) and the Syphax property were on those sites.

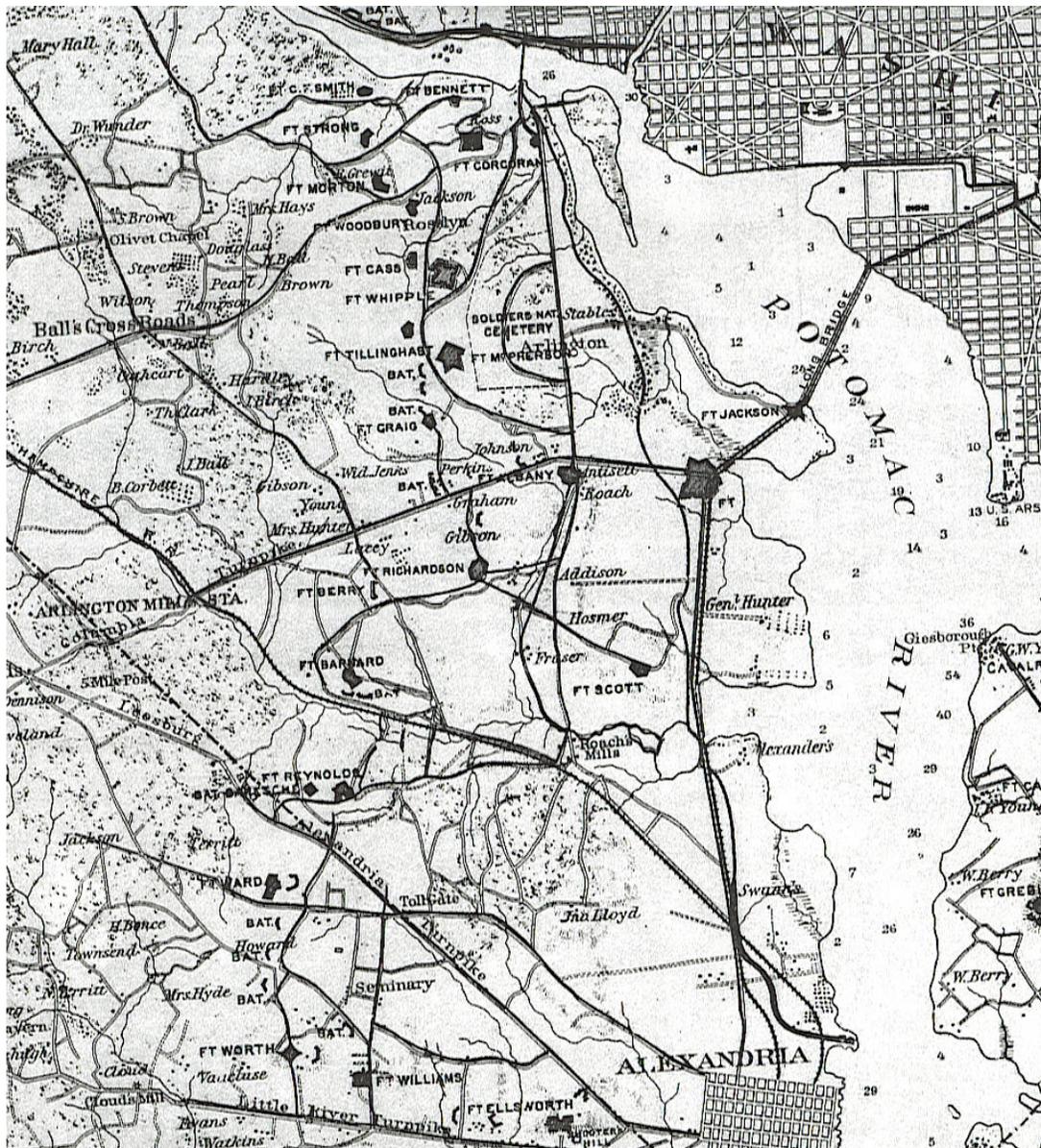
Lee left Arlington House to serve the Confederacy and his family fled just before federal troops occupied our county. The property was seized by the federal government when Mrs. Lee couldn't appear in person to pay the Insurrectionary Taxes imposed on all residents in the county. When finally reclaimed through legal action after the war, the property that was already a burial ground was sold to the government and maintained by the Army until the historic house was turned over to the U.S. Park Service.

### **Arlington and Columbia Heights during the Civil War**

With the onset of the Civil War and the occupation of the county by federal troops, the appearance and geography of our area was

dramatically altered. At that time it was considered "enemy occupied territory," since the county was in Virginia, having been "retroceded" by Congress in 1847. The federal troops established their headquarters at Arlington House. Our turnpike became a route of military importance and Civil War maps show entrenchments along Columbia Pike in the Columbia Heights area along both sides of the road.

Eventually there were 19 forts built in Arlington to protect the Capitol city and the transportation lines into it. The largest of the early forts constructed immediately upon the occupation was Fort Runyon, built a half-mile south of Long Bridge to protect the junction of the Columbia and the Washington-Alexandria (what is now Route #1) Turnpikes.



This map shows the location of civil war forts built in Arlington, in and around the Columbia Heights Neighborhood. Columbia Turnpike is in the center.

Shortly afterward Fort Albany was built in our area, near what is now the Pentagon. Following the First Battle of Bull Run, more fortifications were created, including Fort Craig (just north of Columbia Pike) and Fort Richardson (south of the Pike on the grounds of what is now the Army Navy Country Club. These were built "to command the plateau along which Columbia Pike passed. This turnpike was a major communication route to the heights of Munson's Hill four miles west of Arlington House."

Forts Berry (South Glebe Road at South 17th St. and Walter Reed Drive) and Barnard (South Pollard St. and Walter Reed Drive at the Fort Barnard Recreation Center) were other nearby forts, situated to protect the Four Mile Run and Glebe Road approaches to Alexandria. While the forts were never the scenes of battles, there were a few skirmishes, and they at times were active places with the arrival and restaging of units and a retreat for the weary and wounded returning from the battlefields.

Large landowners near the Columbia Heights area before the war include the Corbett, Young, Alexander and the Fraser families. The military occupation affected and confined the civilian population and destroyed the homes and crops of most of the residents and the nearby churches of Episcopalians and Methodists.

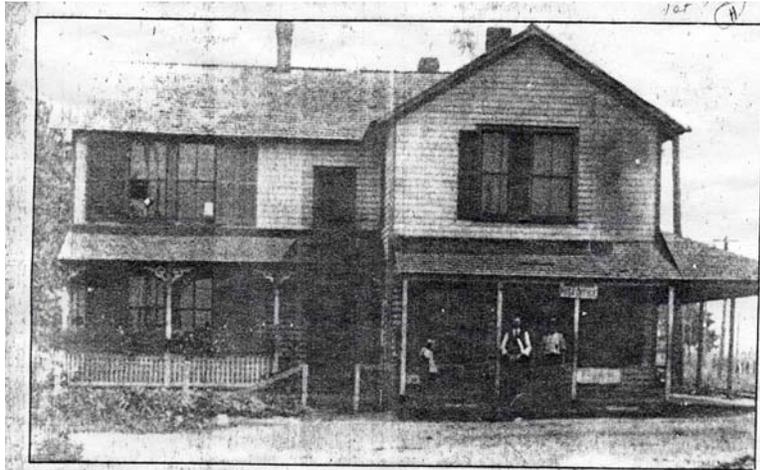
Some residents in our area would have attended the local Hunter's Chapel, then located at the crossroads of the turnpike and Glebe Road. The little church was used as a picket post, block house, commissary, and stable, and then dismantled by federal troops.

After the war, the Civil War Claims Commission held hearings and reimbursed somewhat those residents who could prove loyalty to the Union. Its records picture the devastating impact on the social, family and economic life of Arlington. Recovery would take many years; it wasn't until 1900 that the congregation of Hunter's Chapel received \$3,000 in compensation and rebuilt their church on the Bradbury tract (the northeast corner of the Pike and Walter Reed Drive). The church continues today a short distance away on Glebe Road as Arlington United Methodist Church.

Additional information on taxes and reparations following the Civil War for residents in our area are included in Appendix A. Also included in that section is a history of several pieces of land, their owners and the history of property developments in the Columbia Heights Civic Association area.

## Columbia Heights and the "Toonerville Trolley"

By the late 1890s, our nearby crossroads had become more the center of population on the Turnpike and housed the Post Office. When Alexandria County decided to move its court functions from the town, no longer part of the county, one of the areas contemplated was in our section of Columbia Pike. The final selection was land near where county offices are now located.



Arlington's first post office at Columbia Pike and South Walter Reed Drive, photo taken in August, 1916.

The stimulation for development in this area was the introduction, by the early 1900s, of a trolley line that connected Nauck to Rosslyn and other connections. The Columbia Station was situated where it crossed the Pike.



Originally, the Washington, Arlington and Falls Church Company, it became known as Arlington and Fairfax Railway Company, but seems to have been referred to as the "Nauck line" or the "toonerville trolley" by local residents.

The local stop, Columbia station, was also the ticket office, a post office in some years, and an eatery in an old farm house on the Cora E. McIntosh property (formerly Taylor farm) where **Eckerd's Pharmacy** is now located.

The trolley went through Ft. Myer to Rosslyn and offered commuting access to the city. Dr. Charles B. Munson traveled via trolley to his D.C. dental practice until he obtained one of the first autos in the community. While his home is slightly out of our Columbia Heights area, he was probably the most noted resident of the community before neighborhoods were defined by civic association boundaries. (See more information about Dr. Munson in Appendix A.)



This home at 13th Street and Edgewood is one of the few remaining homes that were built at the turn of the century as part of the "Trolley Village" developed along the trolley route down what is now Walter Reed Drive.

By the 1913 period, the Columbia Heights area had about a dozen homes, and by the mid-twenties there appear to be approximately 24 homes or buildings in Columbia Heights, many still country homes but not necessarily farms, approached by lanes from the main thoroughfare, the Columbia Pike. The Munsons, Reeds, Corbetts, Macmillans, deLashmutts, Bradburys and others were old and interrelated families in our area, which was beginning to develop into a suburb of Washington, in large part due to the trolley system.

The trolley continued until the late 1930s and when it was closed part of its right-of-way became what we know now as Walter Reed Drive.

### The Pike - 1870s to Present Day

An article in the *Alexandria Gazette* of March 17, 1875 reports on the condition of our Pike: "The Arlington Turnpike Co., owing to the terrible condition of its road or perhaps to the ominous muttering of those who are so unfortunate as to have to travel it, have thrown its gate [toll gate] open until the road and the aforesaid mutters dry up." By 1905 cattle were no longer driven from Barcroft Rail Station to the abattoir on the eastern end of the Pike.



Robert Mays' Third Bus Line

The U.S. Department of Agriculture paved the road with concrete in 1928 west to Palmer's Hill in Barcroft as part of its experimental testing program. By 1919, this area had bus transportation when Robert L. May and his wife started a bus company to take residents to D.C. This developed into AB&W Bus Line, with service to Alexandria, Barcroft and Washington. Eventually this was replaced by Metro.

## The War Years

The World War II years brought more changes with the building of The Navy Annex (Federal Office Building No. 2) on the hill known locally as Round Top, and the Pentagon further east. The George Pickett Homes were built on the western part of St. John's Orphanage on the south side of Columbia Pike between South Scott Street and Court House Road. Built on concrete slabs, this was emergency housing during and subsequent to World War II, primarily for military personnel and families. The **Dorchester** and **Arlington Overlook** now occupy that site.



Lenora Faye Huber in the Picket Project on Jan. 3, 1946. The military housing included clothes' lines in each yard.



The Huber children in a photo showing St. John the Baptist Church at Columbia Pike and Scott Street.

An accompanying photograph of the Huber children at the Pickett Homes shows the St. John Baptist Church in the background across Columbia Pike. This church is unrelated to the orphanage that had earlier occupied the Pickett Homes property.

The Columbia Heights and surrounding neighborhoods are well reported in a locally published newspaper oriented to the Columbia Pike Neighborhood, **Columbia News**, started in 1941 at 1504 South Oakland Street and resumed in the years 1944 and 1945. Eugene Beard is listed as publisher for both volumes.

The paper notes that the county is developing toward the south and west. "With the beginning of the development of Arlington Village and the

business interests at Columbia Pike and Fillmore Streets there has continued a steady activity of construction along the Pike and in the residential section adjacent thereto. The new theatre and shopping center at Fillmore, and the recent development of Westmont, including a number of homes and the 'most modern shopping center to be found anywhere' all planned before defense activity began and now utilized to relieve congestion of the City of Washington." Additional details from this publication are included in Appendix A.



Bob & Edith's Diner is an historic business on Columbia Pike.



The Texaco Station was installed during the same era as Bob & Edith's Diner.

Housing needs were critical during periods of rapid growth in the country, and particularly during World War II. Two garden apartments in Columbia Heights have recently been placed on the National Register: Walter Reed Gardens (now the **Commons of Arlington**) and **Arlington Village**. [A detailed history of both Arlington Village and The Commons of Arlington is contained in Appendix A.] The Historic Preservation Coordinator described the reason for their importance in a period and architectural context:

From 1936 through 1952 garden apartment and low-rise apartment complexes were a dominant building type in Arlington County. The garden apartment developments were built for the growing influx of Federal employees who came first to work on the New Deal programs of the 1930s and then the WWII and post war era. These projects offered unusual solid construction and a generous amount of open space never before used for working family housing. These projects were among the first FHA insured developments and became prototypes for similar developments across the country.

Other apartment housing was added to the Columbia Pike area to accommodate a rapidly growing population in the metropolitan area. The Scott Terrace section has **Arlington Overlook Apartments** at 1201 South Scott Street, built in 1960 and managed by the Charles E. Smith Company. **The Dorchester** and **The Dorchester Garden Apartments** were built in 1959 and 1956 and are Reinsch family properties.

The area between Edgewood and Arlington Village is referred to on older maps as **Arlington Hills** and was developed on the old Buckley property. Single family homes here and in other subdivisions in Columbia Heights were built between 1900 and 1972, with most in the mid-thirties. The house at 2810 13th St. appears from photographs and subdivision plans to have been moved there to make room on the Oscar C. Dresser plot for the building of Walter Reed Gardens (now the Commons of Arlington). The subdivision on 16th Street South across from the Walter Reed recreation facility is called Foxhall, developed by Ashton Jones in the mid-thirties. One house there (2804) was built in 1904 and several have been built in recent years.

## **Post War Planning**

Wartime construction of housing, government offices and some businesses stimulated a land use planning study in 1958, which highlighted the traffic congestion, inadequate parking, and the need for more commercial services. Some of us may not have our homes today had the recommended Columbia Pike by-pass been built to route traffic around the business area. Subsequent discussions considered Columbia Pike as a possible route for the Metro subway. While that never materialized, a Metro tunnel junction was built at the Pentagon to accommodate a future subway line.

One of the more recent developments in the Columbia Heights area is the **Barkley Condominium** at 1016 South Wayne Street, opened in 1982 by Barkley Associates of the Richmarr Construction Corporation. This is located what had been the Graham property. **Fairway Village** was developed about 1985 on a portion of Arlington Village property, along with a vacation of a portion of South Barton Street and 16th Street South in 1985.

The Walter Reed Recreation Center was built in the early 1950s after the county bought the parcels of land on which it sits. The Center has served the Columbia Heights community for classes, recreation activity, as a polling place and for meetings. Diane Mason, daughter of Ozella

Hickman, tells us that it hosted a teen club that began in 1957 and which had a football team, was open after school and longer on Fridays and Saturdays for arts and crafts, a band, dances and other activities. The Center also sponsored hayrides, roller skating, bowling and other excursions for young people. On Friday evenings in the summer movies were shown on the baseball field. The club had about 100 members and attracted teens from other places in the county because of the nice place to dance.

The Center is now closed and scheduled for demolition and the Columbia Heights Civic Association has worked with and heard from planners and developers of the green-building replacement.



**The Walter Reed Rec Center being demolished (2004).**

The Columbia Heights community has a long history and one that continues to evolve through planned development on its main thoroughfare, Columbia Pike. Vestiges of its past are with us today in the configuration of land use and its development, the place names of past and present, the services we anticipate from our local commercial areas and the layout of its roads.

The area has seen land change from large farms, to garden market farms, to country estates, to a village-like community, to an urban neighborhood. Its history reflects the frequent change of ownership of land, the compiling and subdivision of tracts, the intermarriage of many area families, and a persistent theme of the residents of our area in improving their neighborhood, whether rural or suburban.

During the 1990s, our area once again saw major changes with an influx in immigrants, coming from Latin America, the Caribbean, Asia, Europe and Africa. Children of Patrick Henry Elementary School celebrate over 50 countries of origin at their annual "International Dinner."

Members of its civic association have been involved in activities that promote and plan for the safety, transportation needs, appearance, local businesses and the quality of life in their neighborhood.

## Appendix A:

### A History of Arlington County And Columbia Heights

#### County Formation

From 1741 to 1801 our county was part of Fairfax County. In 1801, however, the county became part of the federal district, and included the town of Alexandria. In fact, what we now know as Arlington County was then considered a rural part of the new Alexandria County and had less than a thousand residents.

The presence of the federal government seemed to attract only slight speculation and new settlement in the area across the river from the new federal city in these early years, but it would have a major impact on future population, infrastructure and development.



With adoption of a new constitution in 1870, Alexandria County was divided into three magisterial districts: Washington in the North, Arlington

in its mid-section and Jefferson in the South. The communities on Columbia Pike were in the Arlington District and called their neighborhood and post office "Arlington" long before the County adopted that name in 1920. [See discussion of Arlington House in the History Section.]

In 1801 Arlington County was formed out of Fairfax, not long before the turnpike was built, and it was then known as Alexandria County of the District of Columbia. The existing town of Alexandria was part of the new county and stayed so until it gained independence in 1870.

By 1846, the merchants of the town of Alexandria were spearheading a movement to become part of Virginia again, and a referendum made Retrocession possible in 1847, even though the people in the rural part of the county were generally in support of remaining a part of the federal district. G.W.P. Custis and his neighbor Roach were two of the five Commissioners appointed by President Polk to oversee the poll taken at the Court House in the town of Alexandria and the list of voters from the Columbia Pike neighborhoods lists some for and some against Retrocession. In 1847, Alexandria County began a new life as a Virginia county.

The confusion between a county and city having the same name brought about a movement to rename the county from Alexandria to Arlington in 1920. The 1930s brought major changes to Arlington. The old magisterial districts were eliminated to make way for a new form of government, the county manager system, which was inaugurated in 1932.

Soon afterwards a new county board was in place and a committee was appointed to determine an orderly street naming system to correct duplications. For example, there were eleven Washington Streets or Avenues without any relation to each other. Postal and department store deliveries were difficult, and also there was a need for a central post office.

J. Vernon Smith of Glebe Road represented our section of the county, and the committee came up with a grid plan similar to that in Washington, D.C. After much deliberation, debate and public hearings, new names were adopted in 1934. The changes for the few streets in Columbia Heights were as follows:

Edgewood Street replaced Buckley Ave. [Gray on some maps.]

Cleveland Street replaced Ehrhardt Ave.

11th Street replaced Wilson Ave.

12th Street replaced McAdoo Ave.

13th St. replaced Underwood Ave.  
Rolfe Street replaced Hoard

A short road along the trolley tracks beside the McIntosh tract had been called Bingham Road. The name was changed to Fillmore until the road and trolley route were renamed Walter Reed Drive around 1940.

### **Civil War Insurrectionary Taxes and Reparation in Columbia Heights**

The Insurrectionary Taxes imposed upon property owners during the war were paid by residents on Columbia Pike in the Columbia Heights area: C.B. Graham on 40 acres (between Cleveland and Court House Rd.); Joshua Gibson who lived near Graham on a 23-acre tract, which he had purchased from Graham; William P. Taylor, located west of Gibson on his 37 acres; Septimus Brown, "Near Arlington" on 12 acres; S.B. Corbett with almost 262 acres; Cooper Corbett with 253 acres; Cornelia Corbett with 4.5 acres; Henry M. Travers (sometimes spelled Travis on maps), 4 acres at Taylor's Crossroads (sometimes called Hunter's, at Glebe Rd.); and J. W. Travers with 19.75 acres.

Civil War maps show the Graham place, with batteries there and entrenchment and batteries throughout our area, and the scattered homes approachable from the Turnpike via long lanes. Elizabeth Taylor's claim, after William's death, was for timber, corn, vegetables, barn, wagon house, corn house, poultry house, earth and sod used in the erection of the forts. In her testimony, she described the farm as 47 acres, three miles from Long Bridge, bounded on the north by Columbia Pike, east by lands of Joshua Gibson, south by lands of G. Alexander and west by the lands of W.D. Lacey. This would put the farm on land that would be later bisected by the trolley.

Ms. Taylor said they had bought the farm in 1849 for a market garden and that it was in front of Fort Richardson and Fort Berry. The neighbors who testified on her behalf as to her loyalty to the Union and to the extent of her loss, were Sewell Corbett, Robert Dyer and Henry W. Travers.

The Corbetts were among the many New York families who came to Northern Virginia in the 1850s and they eventually owned much land in the area. Travers (whose family cemetery is on Monroe Street) said he saw sod hauled to Camp Distribution and the Invalid Corps Hospital from her place. Older residents still refer to the community in nearby Green Valley where the Convalescent Camp was located as "camp."

The largest landowner next to Mrs. Lee in the county was Southern sympathizer Bushrod Washington Hunter, who along with Louisa Hunter lost nearly 1000 acres of land in our area. Property of those southerners who didn't pay the taxes in person, like the Lees and the Hunters, were seized and sold by the federal government.

### **The Curtis B. Graham Property - A Journalism Treasure**

The Graham property and family story is interesting for its ties to this period and the evolution of property use. This tract is immediately east of what became Arlington Village. We know about Curtis B. Graham from the writer of the *Washington Evening Star's* "Rambler" column. This featured stories of interesting places and people he visited on his walks or hikes around the Washington area.

On one of these, the journalist came upon an old home in an older grove of trees on Columbia Turnpike here in Alexandria County. He wrote about Graham and his home in his column of October 21, 1917 entitled, "Families who lived where Arlington Towers Stand." The radio towers north of the turnpike were distinctive landmarks from 1913 to 1941. The article contains family pictures on this country place, "Montrose," and descriptions of the family, neighbors and area.

Curtis B. Graham was a pioneer lithographic engraver who came from New York for employment with the Navy Department. He bought a house in the city and later, about 1847, purchased a home and grove along the Pike where he summered and then made his permanent residence.

Before he purchased the property, he boarded with a Mrs. Walker, whose house was near where Fort Berry would later be built on the 100-acre farm of C.B. Corbett and where his sons still lived at the time of the column. Graham walked to and from (and sometimes rode horseback) to Washington from Mrs. Walker's and admired the tract of land that he later purchased from an Englishman, Henry Hardy. Hardy was a friend of Mrs. E.D.E.N. Southworth and may have collaborated with her on novels.

The Rambler introduced his readers to the Graham family and provided a description of the Columbia Pike areas, industries and nearby residents, including the Williams, Johnson, Young and Jenks families. He informed his readers that the Episcopal Orphan Asylum mentioned in oral history interviews and owned by the St. John's Episcopal Church in

Washington had been built on Williams' land, along the Pike, at 2100 Columbia Pike.

The Graham story is an example of several continuing themes in Arlington's history. Commuting, for example, is not new: today it is aided by wheels, rails and more bridges, but Graham wouldn't have known about traffic jams. Also, it appears that most of the people whose names appeared on early maps also served official functions in the local Alexandria County government or on committees, as we have seen with G.W.P. Custis of Arlington House. Curtis B. Graham served as Commissioner of Revenue from 1904-1911, and was on the Executive Committee for the Dedication of the Alexandria County Court House when the court relocated from the town of Alexandria to the area then known as Fort Myer Heights in 1898. A Miss Graham was on the Ladies' reception committee. Curtis B. Graham, Jr. served as the Arlington District representative on the County Board of Supervisors in 1884 and 1885.

The 1935 Franklin Survey Co. atlas of the county shows the division to heirs of the tract designated as "Curtis B. Graham est. Plan." While the grove of trees and old homes are gone, the Graham name lives on in the deeds of residents or owners of business property in the area. **Dominion Plaza** apartments on 1200 S. Courthouse Rd. was built in 1956 on one of the partitions of the Graham property. Part of **Dominion Towers** at 1201 S. Courthouse Rd., built in 1958, is on part of the Graham land, along with parts of Fort Richardson and other properties. **The Key Apartments** at 2112 Columbia Pike were built in 1961 by Ben H. Smith Jr. etc. on Lot 2 of Graham's land. **Columbia Pike Apartments** were built in 1972 by Graham Associates (B.M. Smith & Associates) on another part of the Graham tract. The **Texaco** station, **Bob and Edith's Diner** (1959), **Citgo** and **Saah's Unpainted Furniture** are businesses developed by B.M. Smith Associates on the Graham Tract.

### **Williams' Property**

The tract east of Graham's in 1860 was held by Richard Williams and he was taxed for 34.5 acres, with the tax paid by Septimus Brown. Richard inherited this tract in 1855 from Uncle Bazil Williams, whose farm was situated on both sides of the Turnpike. Bazil had acquired this property in 1829 from that old family who owned so much of the county, the Alexanders. Richard Williams sold his property to Sewell B. and Frank G. Corbett in 1864, and it went through subsequent subdivision and ownership.

Part was owned by the Close family, and their parcel was called "Roselawn" by 1878. That area was owned by St. John's Orphanage from 1888-1955. The community that developed was referred to as Closeville, and the popular 1878 Hopkins map of Alexandria County shows settlement near there with the Arlington Post Office, and residents with the names Jas. Stevens, Dr. Smith, Cha. Calbert, S. Wibert, H.B. Austin and R. O'Dowd. The Wiberts were another family who were inveterate office holders and Stephen B. Wibert was Superintendent of Schools before his death in 1882. The part acquired in 1867 by H. Dwight Smith was sold to the **Army Navy Country Club** in 1925 when the club was acquiring the southern portions of these Columbia Pike tracts to add to the Fraser's Green Valley farm for building the club's golf courses. Richard William's tract is bisected now by Scott Street and has **Dorchester Apartments**, **Dominion Towers Apartments**, the **Arlington Overlook** buildings (formerly the Executive) and **Lancaster Condominiums** (formerly Homestead Apartments).

## Emma Buckley

Maps toward the end of the 19th Century continue to show settlement concentrated further east from Columbia Heights on the Turnpike around the Arlington Post Office, Johnston's store and the Episcopal Church, but a gradual moving of the population westward. By 1878 Emma Buckley held a 53-acre tract in our area. She and her husband also bought one of the Alexander tracts south of Columbia Heights in 1867 and sold it to John D. Nauck, Jr. in 1874, the beginnings of the neighboring Nauck community.

Emma was a daughter of Sewell B. and Jane Corbett and had married Rudolph Buckley, a Washington furniture dealer, in 1860. The Corbetts were among a number of New York families who migrated to Virginia in the 1850s and who acquired many farms. Corbett property across Columbia Pike from the Buckley tract eventually was owned by son-in-law Sanford Bradbury. The Corbetts had built their home there when they lost



The home in the background was owned by Sanford Bradbury. Col. John Singleton Mosby wrote his memoirs in this house.

their residence to Fort Berry, and it was on this Columbia Pike property where Col. John Singleton Mosby lived for a few years in the 1910s when it was owned by B.M. Smith.

Like the Graham tract, the Buckley (spelled Buchly in some deeds) property figures in the subdivision and development of the Columbia Heights area. The commercial property on the south side of Columbia Pike near the Edgewood crossing was developed by B.M. Smith on the Buckley property. Local lore tells us that the old Buckley home sat where the parking lot for **Ski Chalet** is located, and that it was eventually hidden from view by the stores surrounding it. Also shown on the 1878 map are C. Graham and H.D. Smith properties. The latter came here from New York in 1867 and is listed as a merchant and farmer who served as a supervisor in the county from 1870 to 1873.

### **Dr. Charles B. Munson**

One of the most noted residents of this area after the turn of the century, Dr. Munson spent his retirement years actively buying land and building houses and commercial structures, including the **Arlington Theater** and **Dorchester Towers**. The land on which the latter was developed was long owned by the family.

His home on 13th and Irving included farm land, barn, cattle, orchards and gardens, and had been a small cottage used by Union troops in the Civil War and added onto many times by him and subsequent owners.

While the original parts of this home predate others that were here in the early 1900s, one can see a few homes built in our area in the early 1900s on both sides of the former trolley line in area that is now known as Walter Reed Drive. These comprise what many refer to as a trolley village, having developed from the trend at the turn of the 20th century to live away from the cities and in the suburbs when transportation was available.

### **History of Business in the Area**

In the 1920s and early 1930s, the area was served by three stores: Sher's had meats, grain feed and groceries and had operated as a country store since early in the 1900s where the **Arlington Theater** was later built. At that point it moved to the South side of Columbia Pike on the old Buckley tract. Sam Eller's was another grocery in the community, and Johansen's Candy Store served as a memorable gathering place.

Older residents in South Arlington continue to refer to the Sher market as "The Jew Store," with no derogatory intent. Mr. Sher was one of the leading and most highly admired citizens of the county. During the Great Depression he allowed residents to keep running tabs at his store. His kindness and generosity is credited for saving many families in the Columbia Heights, Barcroft, Alcova Heights, Penrose and Arlington View neighborhoods from starvation.



**C.F. Burner's Emporium in 1909, later to become M. Sher & Son General Merchandise. Now the site of the Arlington Cinema and Draft House on Columbia Pike.**

An interview with Everett E. Norton tells us that his father opened a restaurant in 1924 at Columbia Pike and Edgewood, where the **Ski Chalet** is now located. At first called Columbia Quick Lunch and later called Norton's Café, it was operated after World War II by Everett and a brother-in-law and was a popular gathering place for almost fifty years, with Tom Jackson's chili a specialty. It was a popular eatery for the Pentagon crowd during the war years. The second floor once housed a beauty parlor operated by Grace Richmond, nee Stoneburner.

That block of the Buckley tract eventually became a thriving commercial area, with stores on Edgewood and with Norton's, Sher and Cohen's grocery, Malone's Hardware, Dominick's Shoe Repair, Dependable Cleaners, Ehrhardt's, and the Animal Hospital on Columbia Pike.

The local bank was Jake White's Peoples Bank on the southwest former of Columbia Pike and Walter Reed Drive. It became Old Dominion Bank and moved a few doors away in 1948. Old Dominion Bank became First Virginia Bank in 1970, whose founder and Chairman of the Board was Edwin T. Holland, father of former State Senator Holland. The bank became First Virginia Bank with Mr. Holland as founder and chairman of the board. It has recently become BB&T (Branch Banking and Trust). Redevelopment by the Georgelas Group of McLean for "The Lofts at Columbia Station" is under consideration at present for that corner, exclusive of the bank building.

## **The Uncommon Market**

From 1976 to 2003 the Arlington Food Cooperative, known as the Uncommon Market, was located at 1041 S. Edgewood Street, in what had once been the local firehouse. It was first incorporated in 1976, and was founded by the Arlington Cooperative Organization.

That group was founded in the 1960s to promote the values of community-building, develop alternative economic systems, create greater health, social and lifestyle diversity, promote environmentalism and engage in consumer education.

Within the first three to four years of its founding, 500 people each purchased \$10 shares of the Arlington Food Cooperative, making them member-owners of equal vote. Membership increased tenfold over the years. Through the years the organization suffered a number of financial crises, only to be saved from the brink of extinction by campaigns launched by members who were dedicated to its survival.

The 2003 demise of the Uncommon Market was due to a number of factors, including the fact that products and services once unique to the local co-op began to be carried by larger food chains (Giant, Safeway) and the introduction of newer, better financed and more efficient natural food outlets (Whole Foods Market, My Organic Market (M.O.M), Fresh Fields and Trader Joe's).

Other problems that plagued the Uncommon Market included chronic under-capitalization via low membership fees, a location on a side street with poor visual prominence, and chronic problems related to its low budget, including temperamental equipment, the inability to attract qualified managers and an excessive reliance on partially-trained volunteers.

Despite these limitations, The Uncommon Market was credited for major achievements in the community, including:

- Launching the County's first recycling program;
- Initiating the first long-lasting farmer's market (which continues to this day);
- Supporting local organic farmers;
- Promoting greater self-awareness of health, diet and agricultural economics through its consumer-education policy and commitment to sustainable agriculture;

- Creating a forum for all ages, lifestyles, races and ethnic groups to experience community interaction, friendships and even marriages;
- Remaining faithful to "one member, one vote;" and
- Supporting independent thinking and grass-roots organizing.

## **A History of Schools in Columbia Heights**

The local school for our area was a one-room schoolhouse that had once been a private school and which became a county-operated public school in 1871. It sat on a half-acre plot at S. Wayne Street.

As needs grew and the population developed westward on the Pike, the county built a new Columbia School on the "Brown" lot (formerly the Taylor farm) slightly west of what is now Walter Reed Drive. Each of the districts of Alexandria County had its own Board of Trustees and Dr. Munson (mentioned above) served on the Arlington District Board, with other local residents.

The new Columbia School House was dedicated on June 14, 1904 with what now sounds like elaborate ceremonies, including prayer offerings, a union presentation of Bible and flag, speech by Hon. A.P. Douglas, Chairman of the Arlington District School Board, and by J.E. Clements, county school superintendent, and several others. The highlight was a surprise presentation of a silver service from the citizens of Columbia to Augustus Davis, Jr. in appreciation for his building the school. The flag was unfurled by Miss Evangeline daughter of Dr. and Mrs. C.B. Munson, and the 5th cavalry band from Ft. Myer played the "Star Spangled Banner."



**The "New" Columbia Pike School opened in 1904 on Columbia Pike near the Southwest corner of what is now Walter Reed Drive.**



**The original Thomas Jefferson Junior High School, now the site of the Columbia Pike Branch Library and Career Center.**

The building was described in a newspaper article as being about 60 feet square, two stories high, surmounted by a tower, the lower floor being divided into two school rooms and the second story to be used as a public hall.

This school was replaced by Patrick Henry School when it was built at Fillmore and 7th Street in 1925 on the old Miles Munson farm across Columbia Pike. The old building continued as a community hall and library until demolished in 1941. A new Patrick Henry Elementary School was rebuilt in 1975 at Highland and Walter Reed Drive, directly behind the old Patrick Henry. The Career Center was built on the site of the original Thomas Jefferson Junior High School.

### **Library Service for Columbia Heights**

Our area had a library as early as 1930 when the Community Library Club rented a double garage next to Patrick Henry School, and later in the abandoned Columbia School near the corner of the Pike and Walter Reed Drive. The building was called "The Community Hall."

When it was torn down in 1941, the collections were moved in 1942 to a new store building at 911 S. Glebe Road. The library had become a branch of the new county library system in 1938. In 1959, it moved again to new quarters at 3239 Columbia Pike and in 1975 from the Westmont Shopping Center to share a building with the Arlington Career Center at 816 S. Walter Reed Drive, the former site of Thomas Jefferson Junior High School.

### **Fire Service for Columbia Heights**

Evidently the first fire truck for the area was housed in a barn on the Snoot's Farm where Westmont Shopping Center is now located. At some point, B.M. Smith donated land in the 3200 block of the Pike and later a structure on Edgewood across from what is now Eckerd's Pharmacy. For many years The Uncommon Market was housed in what was commonly referred to as "The Old Fire Station."

### **The Columbia News**

As noted earlier, ***The Columbia News*** was launched in 1941 and operated sporadically throughout the war years. The early issues of Columbia News heralded the opening of the new **Westmont Shopping Center** and listed the businesses installed there, included ads for

businesses and services on the Pike, expressed concerns about the bus service to the new War Department Building (not yet called The Pentagon) and to the new **Arlington Village** area. It also reported on changes in property ownership and planned construction and stated hopes for a new Post Office. Areas under construction included **Arlington Village** and **Barcroft Apartments**.<sup>1</sup>

Business ads included one for Dependable Cleaners and Tailors, Charles J. Sher, Manager, 3008 Columbia Pike in the Charles Building. This issue mentioned several times the relocation of postal services, and one article stated that there was to be a branch somewhere near Columbia Pike and Glebe Road. "While the exact location is not known, this station will be located in this section about April 1, 1941." [This turned out to be the Post Office on Columbia Pike at Monroe; it would take another 50 plus years for the present Glebe Road site to come to fruition.] Another editorial supported citizen and county government protests to the expansion of Arlington National Cemetery.

The 1944 issues continued to promote the Pike's commercial enterprises and announced what sounds like a precursor to CPRO in that "Plans are being initiated for the forming of an organization of business and professional interests and all citizens who are interested in the general welfare of the Columbia Pike area and to take an active part in postwar efforts to develop and improve this section."

The issues reflected home-front activity, war casualties from local families, postwar planning, development, neighborhood news, clinics and teen dances at the Pickett Homes, church activities and county government actions. William Snoots of the family associated with Fire Hall #1 was one of the war casualties.

One item bemoaned the loss of "Heflin's," a local landmark, the weathered old tavern at Fillmore and the Pike. Business ads included "Home Cooked Foods" at Norton's Café at 2718 Columbia Pike. Another

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<sup>1</sup> Volume II carries the address 1035 S. Edgewood and by March 1945 its address was 3010 Columbia Pike. These newspapers were recently donated to the Virginia Room, Central Library, and will be available for use after they have been preserved. There is only one issue for Volume I, Dec. 18, 1941, and it is not known if there were others or if issues are missing. It may be that wartime paper and manpower shortages intervened. Volume II, #1 is dated Nov. 1, 1944 and that volume contains 25 issues through Oct. 15, 1945. There is a loose copy inserted into the volume and called *The Virginia News*, Vol. 3, #18, dated Aug. 1, 1946. It is the same address as the earlier paper and states that it is "successors to *The Columbia News*." We can only hope more issues turn up as these existing ones give us an interesting account of life along the Pike in these years. There are news items on the businesses as well as the neighborhoods.

ad announced that the Munson Estate planned to develop property at the Pike and South Highland, on property adjoining the A&P. For much of our history, Smith and Munson were the main developers in the area.

Another issue described the McIntosh property, "a pioneer home of the area, has one of the finest old shady yards in the whole Pike area, fenced in with tall hedges, and a half-circle driveway cutting in near the Pike and coming out at the end of the property on the S. Edgewood side." This describes what became the **Eckerd Pharmacy** location. Development is currently planned on the McIntosh property by Capstone behind the drug store.

### **Development of the Walter Reed Park**

In the 1980s, following the County's published General Land Use Plan (GLUP), Columbia Heights Civic Association led a community-wide movement to consolidate three houses and a very large garage on land shown to be parkland on the GLUP map.

One house, facing S. 16<sup>th</sup> Street near Walter Reed Drive, was used by the County's drug and alcohol counseling staff for daytime counseling. Problems arose when the county rented the facility to Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) and Narcotics Anonymous (NA) programs in the evenings. The program managers paid no attention to numbers, parking and noise, so at the community's urgent request, the building was closed and demolished. The programs were moved to a commercial building on Columbia Pike.

The garage next to that house was used for storage of County vehicles and tools. It was discovered that the building had been broken into for drug use. Drug paraphernalia was found in and around the building. The County demolished it and found other storage.

On the east end of the property, there were two private single-family homes located on what the County had planned for the east end of the park. An in-fill developer wanted to build 20 townhouses on the property and CHCA fought that at County Board meetings. Our Neighborhood was already packed with cars and traffic, and the GLUP designated those lots as parkland.

The Board agreed with the CHCA, and the County bought the houses. At the County's request, the community agreed that, until such time as the park was to be redeveloped, one house would be designated

for persons living with AIDS and the other for persons living with Praeder Willy Syndrome. Those usages proved to be beneficial and were well-accepted by the Neighborhood. Partly because of expensive maintenance challenges that these two older homes posed to the County, the programs were discontinued after about 4-5 years. The two buildings were eventually demolished and the land converted to park space.

Ken Fredgren was President of Columbia Heights Civic Association during much of this negotiation. Other active neighborhood members included Peter Jones, who continues to be involved in the development of Walter Reed Community Park, and Ruth Stewart, who developed the Cleveland Park and was also very supportive of the development of the Walter Reed Park. Ken Fredgren was succeeded by Sarah McKinley as President, who continues to be active in the civic association.

### **Development of Arlington Village**

The largest development within this civic association area is **Arlington Village**, a garden apartment area developed after 1939 when Gustave Ring bought the Graham and other tracts (possibly assembled by B.M. Smith) for \$362,500. In 1900 this area was part of the Buckley Estate and consisted of small farms. By the time of Ring's purchase, this area of Columbia Pike reflected more of a village than a rural area.

The organization that Ring put together for designing, building and selling the units in Arlington Village was a model of efficiency. It no doubt benefited from his experience in developing other FHA insured projects, including the Colonial Village in North Arlington. In order to accommodate the potential buyers in an era when people were still wary after the depression and salaries were not large, he needed to build as inexpensively as possible. In planning his concept of a suburban village with housing, streets, a business district, sewage and water systems, electric and heating systems, parks and recreation areas, and using FHA guidelines, he formed his organization of architect, landscape architects, real estate agents, contractors and apartment manager, all specialists.



**Arlington Village under construction. Taken from across Columbia Pike at Barton Street. The building at the left is B.M. Smith's real estate office.**

The architect was the same as the one he had used in Colonial Village, Harvey Warwick of Washington, who designed buildings with changing roof forms, materials, elevations and with a variety of sparse colonial revival details. The 661 apartments were built on 12% of the acreage, which allowed for 47 acres of green space, parks, recreation area, yards, roads, parking spaces and services.

Apartments were built around five super blocks after constructing S. Barton Street and shortening S. Cleveland Street, lengthening 15th Street and Edgewood. Each apartment had a front court and private back court. Through selective use of standardized components, purchasing materials in bulk, and tightly scheduled work, he was able to provide rental units to carefully selected clients at \$11 a room. Ring's building permit was obtained in March 1939 and renters moved into the first completed section by July of the same year.

Local lore is that second floor bedrooms were juxtapositioned or overlapped over other units to avoid Arlington's strong objection to "row houses," but a scholarly study of Arlington Village indicates this was done for the three-bedroom units only, to maintain the economy of rectangular form.

Ring sold the development 11 years later to New England Life Insurance Co. for \$5 million, having increased his original investment 666%. These owners installed the swimming pool, tennis courts and more off-street parking. It was sold again in 1979 to Arlington Village Associates for \$9.7 million, the buyers being Frank S. Phillips, Preston Caruthers, Terry Eaken and Paul Nesetta. Their intention was to convert the units to condominiums. Opposition resulted in their selling 98 units to Holladay Corp. for \$2.5 million. Holladay was a cooperative organization experienced in leasing to elderly and low income individuals. Their plan was to sell some units for less than the condos.

## **Development of The Commons of Arlington**

**The Commons of Arlington** is a small development in this area. These four buildings (eighteen separate addresses) were built in 1948 as a rental garden complex of 134 units, 56 being one-bedroom apartments and 78 as two-bedroom units. Known as **Walter Reed Gardens**, these sit upon 5.33 acres of land of the Dresser and Tinkle subdivisions. It has been said that it was developed and built by the same company as Fillmore Gardens, developed in 1942 by Banks and Lee, Inc., an Alexandria based building

firm. They were part-owners in the original Fillmore Gardens, Inc., along with the Burka family from Arlington. Arthur P. Davis was architect for Fillmore Gardens and designed Walter Reed Gardens to be identical to Rock Creek Gardens in Washington, D.C.

Walter Reed Gardens was developed as The Commons of Arlington by the Investment Group Development Corporation, the agent and nominee of GLM of Arlington, Virginia, Inc., a DC corporation. The Nominee Agreement of 1982, filed in the land records of the county in 1982, presents a proposal for condominium ownership that described planning, renovation program, replacement of roofs and windows, pavement and masonry, new landscaping, new hot water heating system, all new kitchens, renovated bathrooms, upgraded plumbing and electrical systems and individual heating and air-conditioning units. Converted units were offered for sale at \$55,000 - \$59,000 for one-bedroom units and \$62,00 - \$71,000 for two-bedroom units.

