

Arlington History From the Files

By C. B. ROSE, JR.*

Some years ago when the County government microfilmed its back files, material no longer of official value found its way into the Society's archives. These letters and memos throw interesting sidelights on the County's development. The earliest in this collection is 1929. To put them in perspective a sketch of the County's governmental structure is in order.

From 1870 to 1932, the County was divided into three Magisterial Districts—Jefferson, Washington, and Arlington—with a Supervisor elected for each. The three Supervisors together formed the governing body of the County. As far back as 1911 there was a feeling that the traditional form was not adequate for Arlington, and legislation was secured which gave the Board of Supervisors the powers of the Councils of cities and towns. In 1915, there was a move to have a County Manager installed: in 1921 there was another abortive effort in this direction, when J. W. Cox, Health Officer, was briefly named Executive Manager. In 1928, a Directing Engineer actually was appointed who had authority over most of the purchasing for the County, who drew up the budget, and was in charge of street work in all the Districts. A tabulation of salaries for the period shows just 59 names, including the Supervisors and Constitutional Officers but excluding day laborers, on the payroll!

Separate taxes were levied in each Magisterial District and for each of the various funds: county, schools, roads, fire protection, and bonds. A county-wide water system had been begun in 1927 under its own Board of Water Supply, financed from service charges. It was a long time before the water system actually covered the whole county; in 1936 a postcard to the Manager from a citizen complains about the pitiful sight of women and children lugging water from a hydrant a half mile away. In 1952, to illustrate pre-water system conditions, a picture was taken of a well still in use, where Horizon House now stands.

Various legislative enactments and referenda brought the County Manager plan of government to Arlington County on January 1, 1932. With it came the abolition of the Magisterial Districts, the at-large election of members of the County Board, a unified tax levy for County purposes, and the vesting of all executive and administrative powers (except those related to schools) in the person of the County Manager.

A selection of items from the files, however, shows that Arlington still had a long way to go before becoming a city. "Thank you for action taken to correct conditions referred to in my letter . . . the stream opened to give a better outlet and lime put along it a short distance. This may be adequate

*Synopsis of a talk before the Arlington Historical Society, November 8, 1968.

for cold weather but more must be done before the return of warm weather as the stream is entirely too small to take care of all the sewage from the subdivision." An attempt in 1930 to authorize bonds for the construction of a sewer system had failed despite intensive efforts with mass meetings and statements from County doctors. It was not until 1933 that the Depression and the availability of PWA money made the start of a sewage system possible. Construction played havoc, even with good streets, and as late as 1936, complaints were rife.

In 1932, there were 216 miles of streets in Arlington of which 180 were under County control. Although it was claimed that 130 miles of these were "improved", they were mostly 20 feet wide and generally not up to present day standards. "Could you send a couple of men to that street and have them shoot the stumps out of the road?" "Unless repairs are made [to the street] it may be necessary to discontinue the bus service." Gradually as conditions improved, the requests were for street lights (in the early '30's citizens asked to have the lights kept on until 11 o'clock), sidewalks, storm drainage—and then traffic lights!

Evidence of increased urbanization shows up in other fields. Toward the end of the 30's, there is correspondence about County libraries, then about recreational facilities which was not a community responsibility when the County was mostly farmland. Many areas have not been touched upon such as the gradual development of a paid fire fighting-force, a police department under the Manager, adoption of zoning and sub-division regulation. All these are brought vividly to life by the old pieces of paper. But perhaps this sketchy review will help those of us who think of history as something that happened at least 100 years ago realize that we actually have been living through history—some fugitive records of which are preserved in our own files.

MASS MEETING!

AT

Old Cherrydale School

FRIDAY, MAY 23, 1930

EIGHT O'CLOCK P. M.

SCHOOL and SEWER BONDS

Election to be held June 9, 1930

SPEAKERS

Prof. FLETCHER KEMP

Superintendent of Schools

Mr. C. L. KINNIER

Directing Engineer, Arlington County

This meeting is arranged by your Citizens Association to give the County Authorities an opportunity to present these subjects to the voters.

Cherrydale Citizens Association

ALL ARE WELCOME

THE SCHOOL BOND ISSUE

Published by The Executive Committee of the PARENT-TEACHERS ASSOCIATIONS

And other Civic Bodies including The Arlington County Civic Federation, The Chamber of Commerce, The Organized Women Voters, The Arlington District Advisory Council and Five Members at Large.

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BOND ISSUE OF \$640,000 WILL PROVIDE 68 ROOMS AND PAY FLOATING DEBT

High School Amount

CRICHESTER, M.D. HEALTH OFFICER

Arlington County Health Department CLARENDON, VA.



ARLINGTON Chamber of Commerce of CLARENDON

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BOARD OF WATER SUPPLY ARLINGTON COUNTY VIRGINIA

BOARD: W. J. INGRAM, Chairman; J. C. FERNBURKE, EDWARD DOWAN, AVA S. PHILLIPS, Consulting Engineer

The following is a statement of the essential facts and the general administrative rules for the proposed Water Supply System for Arlington County. This statement has been prepared by the Board of Water Supply, and has been approved by the Board of Supervisors.

SUPPLY MAINS. The main supply lines will be laid as