CLARENDON

By

MAGGIE YOUNG

Note: The Cornelia B. Rose Historical Award was established to recognize annually the Arlington High School student who submitted the best essay on any aspect of Arlington history. The committee consisting of Don Wise, June Verzi, Willard Webb, and Warren Clardy had in mind the dual purpose of honoring our late member and continuing her efforts to stimulate interest in our future generation as to the why and wherefore of Arlington.

The first award went to Miss Margaret Young, a 16 year old junior at Woodlawn High School. While a few scholars might quarrel with an assumption here or there, Miss Young, considering her age and the time available, has demonstrated commendable writing skill in compiling an interesting and readable essay from the many and varied bits of information scattered among our reference sources.

Clarendon has been part of many different political subdivisions. In the time of the Indians it was part of the Powhatan Confederacy. Under white men it has been in many counties. In 1648 it was part of Northumberland County. In 1663 it came under Westmoreland’s jurisdiction and in 1664 it became part of Stafford County. In 1731 Prince William County came to include Clarendon. It was included in Fairfax County when it was created in 1742. It became part of Alexandria County when it was created as the Virginia half of the ten mile square of the District of Columbia. In 1847 it was retrocessed to Virginia. In 1870 Alexandria County became separate from the City of Alexandria, under the new Virginia constitution. It was renamed Arlington County in 1920. In that same year Clarendon attempted to incorporate as a town. It may be in the future that Arlington itself will become a city.

None of these political changes have really made a difference to Clarendon. It remained a forested area as it was juggled from county to county in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Clarendon began to grow in response to the growing city of Washington after it was returned to Virginia. Today Clarendon is more a part of Washington than when it was officially a part of the District of Columbia. If Arlington gains city status it will be an acknowledgement rather than a change of status.

The important changes in Clarendon and in Arlington as a whole are the ones that denote economic or social change. The story of Clarendon’s evolution becomes a story of transportation. When the area was inhabited by Indians the place was of little import. The highways of the time were the rivers. The white men came and still for many years the area was just more of the interminable Virginia forest. Then Falls Church and Georgetown were established, a connecting road was developed. More settlers moved into the area and farms grew up in the wilderness of Arlington. Clarendon still wasn’t anywhere in particular, though. Then the electric railway came in the 1890s and all of a sudden, Claren-
Clarendon was a crossroads, a junction, easily accessible. The area grew quickly, subdivisions were put in, and within twenty years Clarendon was the economic center of the county. It was a place to shop, to eat, to be entertained, to meet people. The trolley went out of business though, and this was a watershed for Clarendon. Cars were on the rise and it was easier to get around. The suburbs seeped outward and as the large regional shopping centers developed, Clarendon began to die.

And now again Clarendon promises to be revitalized by an electric railway — of this more later.

To go back to the beginnings of white habitation, settlers were being granted land in the Clarendon area in the early eighteenth century. According to the Land Ownership Map drawn up by Donald Wise, Clarendon is located in the eastern part of five hundred acres granted William Struttfield in 1709 and one must assume that the land was "seated," that is, had a building on it and a certain amount of land cultivated, in order that it could be held.

Then in 1722 the land really became open to the whites, when the Iroquois Indians ceded all lands west of the mountains and south of the Potomac to the State of Virginia. Many settlers moved into the area. In 1729 James Robertson was granted eight hundred acres that included Clarendon in its northern part, but Clarendon was still no more important than the rest of the Virginia forest. The river had to be the highway of the white men as it had been of the Indians. The settlers did have horses but generally the roads were poor to nonexistent.

The fertile lands out toward Leesburg were developed and as tobacco and other farm products had to be moved to market in either Alexandria or George Town (as it was written) the river became a barrier. Magee (or McGee) started a ferry early in the eighteenth century from Rock Creek to the bottom of what is now Theodore Roosevelt Island, then My Lord’s Island, named for Lord Baltimore who at one time owned it. Awbury (or Awbrey) then ran the ferry from behind the island, up the Little River to the mouth of Rock Creek. The ferry was moved from Awbury’s land to Mason’s in 1748. Some time in the eighteenth century, a road, called Awbury’s Road, was built from the ferry to Falls Church and the inland plantations. I don’t have a date on the building of the road, but it seems likely that it was built while Awbury was still running the ferry. On some maps it is identified as the road to Leesburg. It followed the same approximate route as the present day Wilson Boulevard.

The Clarendon area became accessible but it still wasn’t much more than a space between places. Then the ten mile square of Washington was laid out in 1791; it set Arlington apart for the first time (as Alexandria County) and for the first time indicated that Arlington, and so Clarendon, would be more than Virginia countryside. This did not have a real effect on the area for quite a while. Into the nineteenth century the area was still pretty much wilderness.

In 1797, John Ball, ensign in the Sixth Virginia Infantry in the Revolutionary War, patented a twelve and a half acre tract of land just off Awbury’s road, probably obtained as a reward for his distinguished service in the war. There are Balls still in the area on a 1900 map and today the Ball cemetery is just off Washington Boulevard.
The 1800's were a time of growth for the area as it was for the country. The roads were still poor and transportation time slow, so it grew, not as the suburb it was to become, but as a rural farming area. It remained rural up to the twentieth century. In the 1820 census, of 388 people listed as gainfully employed in the "country part" of Alexandria County, that is, Arlington, 306 were engaged in agriculture, and only eighty-two in industry or commercial pursuits. In 1840 an even larger percentage were in agriculture. An 1878 map of the area shows only two or three houses in the Clarendon area and about as many roads.

In a talk Frank Ball gave to the Arlington Historical Society on the electric railways of Arlington he said, "Now if I were to say what were the two greatest things that occurred in Arlington County prior to 1900 ... I would say that reconstruction of the Aqueduct Bridge as a free bridge, and the coming of the electric railroads in 1890."

The electric railroads made Arlington accessible enough to be a suburb and it rapidly became one. Between 1900 and 1910 plats for over seventy new subdivisions were entered in county deed books. The population of Arlington rose in that time from 6,430 to 10,230 and rose in the next ten years nearly six thousand more. The Evening Star commented, "The advent of electric cars in Ballston in 1896 had led our people into the assumption of city airs and ways."

For Clarendon, the coming of the electric railroad was the most important thing that happened to it. Its coming, quite literally, put Clarendon on the map. The map of 1900 indeed looks quite different from that of 1878. Clarendon is for the first time given that name and there is a network of streets and half a dozen more houses. In an interview with Carl Porter he told me that the area of Clarendon had been called Bellair (or Belair) before it took the name Clarendon. There was a Post Office named that but I was unable to ascertain its location. Dorothy Ellis Lee in A History of Arlington Virginia says that the section was built up in 1903 and given a name by the real estate promoter, (she doesn't say what the name was) and that the name was changed to Clarendon by a vote of the people. I could find no other references to this, but there is evidence to the contrary. The Howell and Taylor map of 1900 shows Clarendon and gives it that name.

The first trolley line in Arlington was from Rosslyn to the Arlington Gate at Fort Myer. This line was at first not electric, but was pulled by two horses up the hill. On the way down the horses rode! It was soon electrified and in 1896 was extended to Clarendon. Frank Ball recalled the excitement that this event caused. Another line, built by the Washington, Alexandria and Falls Church Railroad was extended eventually from 12th and Pennsylvania Avenue up to Clarendon (partly along the route of Washington Boulevard now) where it joined the earlier line which went out past Ballston to Falls Church.

Many people described the community's feeling toward the trolley. Frank Ball in his article about the electric railways talked of the whole community getting on the trolley and just riding around singing hymns. He said that there was even a poem written about the trolley. Another man I spoke with described the games the young boys played on the electric cars. He said that they would get on one of the old four wheel trolleys and then about four of them...
would jump up and down on the back of it. Their weight would be enough to lift the front wheels off the ground! In those days 5¢ would get you anywhere you wanted to go. You could ride out to the end of the line and have a picnic.

These lines made Clarendon very accessible to commuters, and developers were quick to capitalize on this. The subdivision that gave Clarendon its name was laid out by the Wood-Harmon Real Estate Co. in 1900 and named and dedicated on March 31, 1900. It was named, for unknown reasons, for the Earl of Clarendon (1609-1674), the English historian and statesman. It included twenty-five acres on the north side of Clarendon Circle where Wilson Boulevard and Washington Boulevard now cross. At that time Wilson was called Georgetown or Ballston-Georgetown Road. Washington Boulevard in that area was known as Grafton Street. In ten years at least five “additions to Clarendon” were laid out by various developers. The developers had a lot of influence in the beginning on Clarendon. It is interesting to note some of the clauses which were put on deeds to land in the subdivisions. A clause on deeds to land sold by Frank Lyon, who had been active in the campaign to clean up Rosslyn, stipulates that, “Liquor shall never be sold or dispensed on the property or from any building erected thereon, nor shall said property be used for the conducting of any business that constitutes a nuisance to other lot owners in the subdivision, such as a soap factory or like industry.”

The deed on property in Moore’s addition to Clarendon in 1919 says in part, “neither said property nor any part there of nor any interest therein shall be sold or leased to anyone not of the Caucasian race, nor shall any house costing less than $2,000 other than an outbuilding, be erected thereon.”

The Clarendon Circle, which most people who have lived in Arlington for more than ten or fifteen years will remember driving around, was created by the county on land donated by Arthur J. Porter about the time of the beginning of World War I. He was the developer of Porter’s Addition to Clarendon, located between Wilson Boulevard, Irving Street and 10th Street. Porter donated the land where it came to a “point” between Wilson Boulevard and Irving Street, which, as his son, Carl Porter, told me in an interview, wasn’t much use.

There was a post in the center of the circle at least as early as 1920. It seems likely that it was put in when the circle was created, but I have not found documentation of that. I interviewed Mr. Sullivan of T. A. Sullivan Monument Company on Highland Street who said that there was no post at all in the circle until the trolley stopped running, but I did find a picture showing the post.

The American Legion built a War Memorial Monument in the middle of the circle. Some “old timers” at the American Legion spoke of the monument being built in 1928 and 1929, but a history of the monument written up in the Visiting Legionnaire in 1969 indicates that it was built in 1931. Because of the quality of the information in the Visiting Legionnaire I consider it a better source. The article indicates that the monument was built from the stones from the old retaining wall on the side of the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier which was torn down as that time. The work was begun on the monument by members of Post 139. The foundations had been poured and two stone mansions from Aldie, Virginia started work. The Virginia State Highway Commission ordered
the work stopped, saying that the foundation extended into the road. Harry F. Byrd, Sr., upon hearing about the monument, told the commission to stop interfering and the work went ahead. The monument was completed with a flat top and an iron fence was put around it and floodlights were installed.

Frank Ball had solicited funds early in 1931 for a war memorial for deceased veterans of World War I. A bronze plaque was purchased by the T. A. Sullivan Co. with these funds and the names of the veterans were engraved on it. Interestingly enough, the names of the “colored” veterans were listed separately.

The War Memorial was dedicated on November 11, 1931 with a parade down Wilson Boulevard in which five different bands participated. The merchants of Clarendon donated funds to provide ground corn meal to be sprinkled on Wilson Boulevard and a dance was held.

In 1940 the monument was moved to the Court House, where it still stands, because it was a hazard in the circle. At that time three tiers and a Ball and Eagle were added by the County to the top of the monument. Another plaque was added with the names of the deceased World War II veterans on it. Both were installed by the T. A. Sullivan Co. The three guns and the ship’s bell were donated by the heirs of Frank Hume.

In 1969 the American Legion posts of Arlington joined in erecting an eternal flame atop the monument in honor of the World Wars’ dead and to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the American Legion. It was dedicated on Memorial Day, May 30, 1969.

A “mini-park” was created in the center of Clarendon Circle with trees and shrubs. The circle itself was taken out fairly recently. I contacted the county about the date that it was taken out and was told that it was about three years ago. I do not believe that that is true. Alicia Sheridan expressed the belief that the circle was taken out in 1966.

Moving to Clarendon in the early days was like moving to the country. As late as 1916 there were cows walking through the circle. A man named Sheilly had a cow barn where St. Charles School is now on Washington Boulevard and he had a pasture down Wilson where Penney’s used to be. The area now occupied by Lyon Village used to be called Walan’s Farm and was a large field. Water and sewerage consisted of wells, pumps and septic tanks. That had been fine in rural Arlington, but with the increased number of inhabitants it just wasn’t sufficient. The citizens knew not to expect much from the county, though, and forged ahead to take care of it themselves. A booklet published by the Clarendon Citizens Association in 1920 lists their achievements in bringing some of the amenities of the city to Clarendon.

“Under the forceful stimulating influence of the Citizens Association, the community has succeeded in purchasing the largest motor-driven chemical fire apparatus now operating in Arlington county . . . in securing house to house delivery of mail . . . and in installing of water and sewer systems.”

Electricity was being supplied by the Alexandria County Lighting Company by 1913. The fire fighting force had been organized in 1909, at which time they had only a hand pulled cart with a large tank of water on it. Several people spoke of the sight of that cart being pulled to a fire. Later they got a Model T truck to carry the water tank and then, “the largest motor-driven chemical fire
The fire house was located for many years in a building on Wilson Boulevard just beyond where Hurt Cleaners is now located. It can be seen to the left of the Station in the picture below.

During the first decade of the 1900's the schools were inadequate. The County rented two rooms in the Ashby house near Clarendon Circle where one teacher taught. Many children in the area rode the trolley into the District and paid tuition to go to the public schools there. That was the situation until the Clarendon Elementary School was built in 1910. That school, now called Matthew Fontaine Maury, is still standing at 3550 Wilson Boulevard. Washington-Lee High School was built in 1925. Before that time there was no public education beyond the eighth grade in Arlington County.

Stores grew up quickly around the crossroads of the car line and Wilson Boulevard. The Post Office and a small store were located in the station itself. An early resident of Clarendon described three different grocery stores around Clarendon Circle about 1910. Another early resident spoke of an oyster place where, he nostalgically recalled, one could get enough oysters and oyster crackers for a meal for 25¢. The group of small stores along Washington Boulevard just above the Circle were built by a man named Thalensby about this time. The Masonic Hall, still standing on the corner of Wilson Boulevard and Irving Street, had a grocery and Boyer's Pharmacy in its first floor. Most people remember when Georges was located there. By 1920 Clarendon was the economic center of Arlington.
There is a story told about the Masonic Hall. It had a flag pole on top of it and on top of the flag pole was a ball. During World War I Billy Moyer took out his plane. It was the type of plane they used in those days, canvas stretched over a wooden frame and with a landing block instead of wheels. He took his plane up over Clarendon Circle and, by looping around under the electrical wires, he managed to knock the ball off the flag pole with his landing block, without, as far as I can ascertain, hurting the rest of the flag pole.45

Clarendon was a meeting place, both formally and informally, because of its easy accessibility. Clarendon Station, located where Hurt Cleaners is now, was itself a meeting place, where friends chatted informally. There were benches around the porch where people would gather, a few boys would try to get up a little harmony or people would wait for the trolley.46 The second floor of the volunteer fire house, as in many fire houses, was used for a meeting room and stage. The Clarendon Citizens Association may have met there as well as other clubs and organizations. Traveling minstrel shows played there and even an occasional hand cranked movie was shown there.47

As the population grew, so did the number of churches. In 1909 the Bishop of Richmond, who had jurisdiction over the area, ordered that a church dedicated to St. Charles Borromeo be founded, “to embrace the village of Clarendon and the surrounding county of Alexandria (as Arlington was still called) for about forty square miles.” St. Charles was built a block west of Clarendon Circle on Washington Boulevard. It was the first established Catholic parish in the Arlington area.48

1909 was also the year a group of Clarendon Baptists began meeting in a private home near the circle. For the next several years they met in a funeral parlor, an uncompleted house, the Masonic Hall, and in a tent at the corner of Highland and Hartford Streets until they raised the money to build a church in that place in 1915. The building was enlarged in 1935 and in 1950 and now covers the entire block formed by Highland, Hartford and 13th Streets.49

The Episcopalians of Clarendon banded together with those in Ballston in 1908 and formed the St. George’s Church. They located it at the dividing line between the two communities at Nelson Street. The first service was held there on Christmas Eve in 1911.50

In 1923 the Presbyterians in Clarendon decided to form their own Church in preference to walking through the mud to First Presbyterian Church in Ballston. They held the first meeting on December 9 and formally organized in April of 1924. They took over a chapel used by the Methodists in Clarendon on Jackson Street. In 1947 a new sanctuary was built and in 1960 a Sunday School wing was added.

In 1920 Arlington County was given that name. It had become separate from the City of Alexandria and so the name was changed for clarity. At that time Clarendon was, as I have said, the center of Arlington. A booklet published by the Clarendon Citizens Association in that year describes it,

It now covers an area of one square mile, contains nearly six hundred homes and boasts of a population of approximately 2,500 . . . Clarendon is indeed a healthy place to live, the birth rate exceeding the death rate by more than double . . .

54
During the past two years the Citizen's Association has become the most aggressively progressive civic organization in the State, with a membership in excess of 350 men who are working together with the one idea of making Clarendon what it should and shall be — one of the most attractive spots within easy reach of the business sections of Washington.\(^{51}\)

The citizens decided that they would benefit by incorporating as a town and accordingly signed a petition to that effect. It resulted in a landmark case for Arlington County. It eventually went to the Virginia Supreme Court of Appeals, who ruled that Arlington was, "a continuous, contiguous, and homogeneous community" that could not be subdivided for the purpose of incorporating a part of it. It confirmed Arlington's identity as a whole.\(^{52}\) It also shows how central Clarendon was to Arlington at that time.

The trolley was a major force in Arlington until the thirties. Then it was threatened by the bus lines, which had more flexibility, and by the rise of the passenger car, which could take you anywhere.\(^{53}\) It was also driven out by the refusal of the Washington transit line to let the cars cross the river.\(^{54}\) The line from 12th and Pennsylvania closed in 1932 and the one from Rosslyn closed in 1938.\(^{55}\) It was the first line in Arlington and the last one to close. For a period of time Autorailers were used. They were vehicles which used the trolley tracks and then worked as buses where there were no tracks; that way they could get into the District. Frank Ball called them puddle jumpers.\(^{56}\) They didn't last long. They ceased running in 1940.\(^{57}\)

The end of the trolley saddened many people, I am sure, particularly those who were here at its inception, but it didn't mean the end of Clarendon. To be sure, it marked the end of an era, but Clarendon was too firmly entrenched as a shopping center for it to have an immediate effect. In Clarendon at that time, you could get nearly anything. There were clothing stores, grocery stores, restaurants, a movie theatre, at least one garage, a hardware store, even a funeral parlor. And the Clarendon Trust Bank was right there. As late as ten years ago Clarendon was a place to shop. There were several big stores, including Penney's, Sears and Kann's in the area. My mother described coming to Clarendon when I was little to buy school clothes. We would go to Penney's, now moved to Parkington, and Sears and then to the shoe stores for school shoes and then to Little Tavern for lunch.

Modern shopping centers finally caused the decline of Clarendon. The acres of parking and so many stores close together became much more convenient. As the suburbs moved outward in response to easier transportation and a larger population, Clarendon became farther away from the shoppers. As it became less profitable to be in Clarendon, more businesses moved out, so fewer people came to Clarendon, and so it became less profitable to be in Clarendon, and so ... in a downward spiral.

One development helping Clarendon's vitality just now is the ethnic businesses that have moved in. In the past several years many oriental, particularly Vietnamese, stores have opened in the area. Unofficial estimates put the number of Vietnamese in the county at about seven thousand and the number of Koreans at nearly six thousand.\(^{58}\)
Ironically, the thing that is really expected to revive Clarendon is what many accuse of giving the town its final downward push. At the time of the Metro construction many businesses left and others that stayed had their business drop off. But now there are a number of businesses locating in Clarendon in anticipation of Metro’s coming. A retail and wholesale business has recently located opposite the future entrance of the station on Highland Street. The building vacated by Kimmel’s furniture store has been renovated and is now partly occupied by the National Graduate University. Kann’s old building in what used to be Clarendon Square, now Virginia Square, now houses the International School of Law.59 Other small businesses are opening in the area.

The future of Clarendon hinges on the Metro, the electric railroad fifty feet underground on a route similar to the original trolley line. In an interview with the Washington Post, the builder Preston Carruthers said, “Metro will have a fantastic impact... With the coming gas crunch people will attempt to live and shop using Metro.”60 The Rosslyn-Ballston Corridor Plan of the Council of Governments designates Clarendon to have medium density development. That means mixed residential and commercial and office buildings of medium height (seven or eight stories). There are several problems with the development of Clarendon. One is that when Clarendon was developed the buildings were smaller and therefore the lots are smaller so that there may be a problem assembling parcels of land that are large enough. Another problem is the surrounding community. The citizens of Clarendon don’t want to have high buildings casting shadows on their houses.61 I am confident of the future of Clarendon but at this point that future is once again in the hands of the developers.62

The subway will open in late 1979. The station will be at the corner of Wilson Boulevard and Highland Street, one block away from the original Clarendon Station.

At this time the Arlington County Board is considering appointing a commission to consider changing the status of the County to that of a city. The subject was considered once before in 1958. Such a change would only be, I think, an acknowledgement of the trend in Clarendon and the whole county. We are becoming a city.

So Clarendon has grown from forest to city. Always it has been a reflection of changing modes of transportation. Clarendon was not accessible by boat in the early days when that was the only transportation. Horses and wagons made Clarendon accessible but transportation time was so slow that it remained rural. The electric railway made Clarendon easy to get to and it became a suburb. Then the day of the car came and everything was accessible and the suburbs grew out away from Clarendon, and the city grew toward it. Now the Metro is coming and will make Clarendon part of the city.
Future site of Clarendon

Alexandria County
District of Columbia at the time of retrocession, 1847
from – 1900 Howell and Taylor Map of Arlington County
Arlington in 1920 showing majesterial districts, towns, communities, subdivisions, railroads and trolley lines. Note the trolley lines converging at Clarendon.
FOOTNOTES


3 Ibid., p. 5.


6 Donald A Wise, "Land Ownership Map: 1669-1796" (Bicentennial brochure, 1976)


8 Montague, *Historic Arlington*, p. 3.


11 Ibid.

12 Ibid.


15 Howell and Taylor map: 1900, from the collection of Arthur True.


20 Ibid., p. 246.

21 Ball, "Electric Railways of Arlington," p. 34.

22 Howell and Taylor Map.


26 Ball, "Electric Railways of Arlington," p. 35.


28 Ibid.

30 Ibid.


33 "American Legion War Memorial Monument," *The Visiting Legionnaire*, vol. 3 no. 10 (May 1969).

34 Ibid.


36 Mr. Sullivan, interview by phone, January 18, 1978.


40 Carl Porter, interview.

41 Ibid.

42 Washburn, lecture.

43 Porter, interview.

44 Washburn, lecture.

45 Ibid.

46 Porter, interview; Sullivan, interview.

47 Washburn, lecture.


49 Ibid., p. 182.

50 Ibid., p. 176.

51 Ibid., p. 98


53 Ibid., p. 193.

54 Washburn, lecture.


56 Ibid.


59 Ibid.

60 Sandra G. Boodman, "The Urbanization of Arlington."

61 Rathbun and Leccese, "The Fall- and Hopeful Rise- of Clarendon."

62 Ibid.