

LYON VILLAGE

By

Carolyn V. Boaz

Lyon Village has been featured twice in recent years in the "Where We Live" column of the *Washington Post*.¹ The cover story in the March 1993 issue of *Washingtonian* described fifteen great Washington neighborhoods.² Lyon Village was one of them. Lyon Village has survived the intense development of the Rosslyn-Ballston corridor and retained a quiet, neighborly atmosphere. Its location is between two busy thoroughfares, Wilson Boulevard and Lee Highway, and is easily accessible from Interstate 66, Exit 72 and the Clarendon Metro stop. But once you enter the village with its tree-lined streets and spacious lawns the big city seems miles away.

Lyon Village is seventy years old in 1993. To mark that occasion, this article traces some of what has happened leading up to and during those seventy years.

The Land

The land that Lyon Village occupies has been in many jurisdictions. When Virginia counties were first formed it was in Northumberland County (1646), then Westmoreland (1653), Stafford (1664), Prince William (1731) and Fairfax County (1742).³ In 1801 a section of Fairfax County was ceded to the federal government, with land from Maryland, to create a capital city. The Virginia portion of the capital was called Alexandria County of the District of Columbia. The Lyon Village area was in the ceded section so it was in the District of Columbia until 1846, when Alexandria County was retroceded to Virginia. The county kept the name of Alexandria and did not again become a part of Fairfax. In 1870 the City of Alexandria became independent of the county. In 1920 the name of the county was changed to Arlington.⁴

And who owned this Lyon Village land? There is no evidence of Indian settlements on it but there were some nearby along the river.⁵ After the European settlers arrived the property was a part of various holdings. In the early 1700s Lord Fairfax was the owner. Eventually George Mason of Gunston Hall held the land. His son, John Mason, inherited it when his father died in October 1792. Business failures and heavy debts forced John Mason to give up his property in 1833. The Bank of the United States

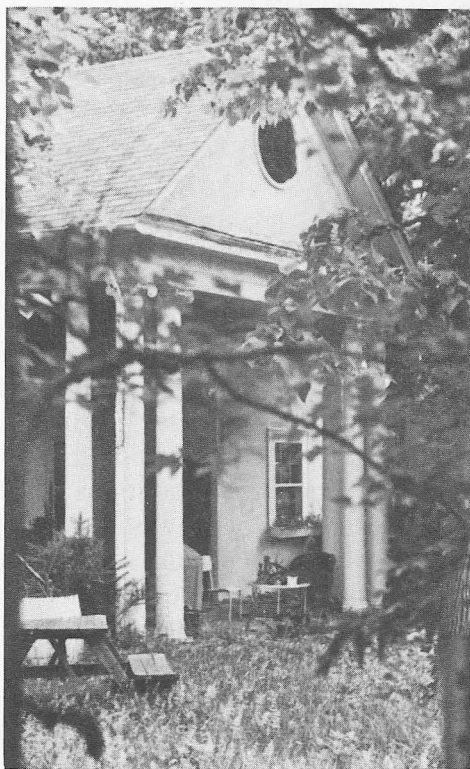
foreclosed when he could not pay his notes.⁶ All of his Arlington property was subdivided by a survey of Lewis Carberry in 1835.⁷

The Cruit Farm

In July 1846, when the Lyon Village property was still a part of the District of Columbia, Robert Cruit of Washington City purchased 56 acres of the land surveyed by Lewis Carberry.⁸ He purchased 12 more acres in February 1847⁹ and finally 129 acres in October 1847.¹⁰ By this time Alexandria County had been retroceded so the Cruit tract was then in Virginia.

Mr. Cruit lived in Washington in a house on F Street between 14th and 15th Streets. He never lived on his Virginia property but used it for vacations. He had a tenant caretaker on his farm where he raised horses and cattle and ran a dairy. The house he owned on his property still stands on North Highland Street.

During the Civil War the Cruit farm was occupied by the 3rd and 8th Pennsylvania Cavalry Regiments. The house was used as a hospital. Mr. Cruit died in November 1861 when he was thrown from his carriage while riding over his farm.¹¹ He was 65 when he died, and left a widow and four daughters. In his will, written September 1, 1858, he left his estate in trust for his wife. On her death it would go, in trust, to his daughters and then, in trust, to their children.¹² In 1912 the heirs of Robert Cruit, his granddaughters Jessie Owen Cugle, Kate Dean Owen and Evania F. Mackall, sold 31 acres to a realty company. This acreage is now a part of the Maywood community of Arlington.¹³



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This farm house, built about 1847 by Robert Cruit, still stands at 1614 North Highland Street.

The Development

Frank Lyon, the developer of Lyon Village and Lyon Park, was born in Petersburg, Virginia in December 1867. He and his wife moved to Alexandria County in 1889. He was a lawyer, a newspaper publisher, a builder and a land developer. Mr. Lyon built himself a beautiful home in 1907 called Lyonhurst. It is at 4651 25th Street, North, and is now called Missionhurst. He left Lyonhurst in 1923 for a house he built on property he owned in McLean. He called it Ballantrae. He had to sell that house during the depression and move into another house on his property in McLean named Hickory Hill. Eventually he moved to Washington where he died in November 1953.¹⁴

Back in the early 1900s developers interested in attracting buyers to Arlington knew that the saloons, gambling houses, brothels and frequent violence along the river had to be eliminated. Frank Lyon and his paper the *Monitor* played a role in cleaning up the gateways to Arlington.

Mr. Lyon began developing Lyon Park in 1919. By 1922 he was looking for more land to develop. The three Cruit heirs mentioned above signed a contract with Mr. Lyon on May 26, 1922 to sell him 163 acres of the Cruit tract. Before the contract became effective they repudiated it and attempted to negotiate a second sale. Mr. Lyon took his case to court. After lengthy proceedings, during which one of the heirs died, the court decreed that the original contract was valid. By a deed dated July 26, 1923 Frank Lyon became owner of the Cruit tract. A survey made by Joseph Berry in 1915, after the sale of the 31 acres in 1912, is attached to the deed.¹⁵

William F. Sunderman prepared a plat for Frank Lyon of the Cruit tract which divided Lyon Village into nine sections.¹⁶ Two of those sections are not in Lyon Village's current boundaries: Section Two, north of Lee Highway where the Cardinal House is located, and Section Four, west of Interstate 66.

Section One, east of Highland Street, which was then named Virginia Avenue, developed first. An aerial photograph of the area, probably taken in 1927, shows about eighty to ninety homes.¹⁷ There were already homes in Aurora Heights, east of the Cruit farm, and in Clarendon, to the southwest, before Mr. Lyon began his development. These areas are now considered within the boundaries of Lyon Village.

Mary Lynch Serra, who moved to Lyon Village in 1927, recalls that early houses were built mostly by the individual owners rather than a developer. A few were ordered from Sears, Roebuck and Company. Designs varied and the material was primarily wood, stucco, and stone. Brick is more prevalent west of Highland Street where development

started in the late 1920s and surged in the 1930s and 1940s. Several developers were involved, one of the most prominent being Frederick E. Westenberger. He built twenty three homes including the one in which he still lives at 1842 North Hartford Street.¹⁸

Another developer was Brumback Realty Company. They built the Spanish style houses on Hancock Street and many other styles in various locations.¹⁹ It was not uncommon for someone to buy one or two lots in order to provide more open space around his house. Those lots are disappearing and only a few remain.



North Highland Street in 1923, looking toward the Clarendon Baptist Church. (Photo courtesy Virginia Room, Arlington Public Library)

The Citizens Association

The pioneer home owners in Lyon Village formed a citizens association in February 1926. Their first meeting was held in the offices of Lyon and Fitch, as were many subsequent meetings in the years to come. The president of Lyon Park's association, Arthur Orr, and the president of the Arlington Civic Federation, Robert E. Plymale, were present to welcome the newest civic organization into the Arlington community.²⁰ At the second meeting of the association in March 1926, officers were elected and Monroe Stockett of 1722 North Danville Street (then called Russell Avenue) was chosen president.²¹ No list of members was recorded in the

minutes of those two meetings, but in most minutes thereafter it was the practice to list new members and usually their addresses. Using this information, some of the earlier settlers in Lyon Village can be identified. Unfortunately, after 1931, the association was not as meticulous in record keeping as it was in the beginning. Many years of minutes are missing altogether or are not complete.

The very extensive activity of the association in its early days, before a strong county government existed, can be seen from the number of standing committees. These were listed in the minutes of an executive committee meeting of April 1928 as follows: census, city planning, constitution and by-laws, education, entertainment, law and legislation, membership, police and fire protection, public health, public utilities, publicity, recreation, streets and sidewalks, visiting, and water.

As county services expanded, the need for so many committees diminished. Today the only standing committee is one on conservation chaired by Victor Stotland. This committee prepared the Lyon Village conservation plan, published in 1978,²² and continues to study ways to improve life in the village.

The woman's department committee, as it was called, separated from the association in 1927 and formed the Woman's Club of Lyon Village. In 1928 it joined the Greater Federation of Women's Clubs.²³ One of the club's early accomplishments was a joint effort with other women's groups to bring library services to the county. Hannah Livingston (Mrs. Robert W.), who was the founder of the Woman's Club of Lyon Village and later one of the original trustees of the Lyon Village Community House, was president and guiding spirit of the Arlington County Library Association. The work of this association of volunteer women and one hired librarian, Eleanor C. Leonard, eventually led to the present Arlington County Department of Libraries.²⁴

Community Involvement

Zoning was an issue that concerned Lyon Village association members from the beginning. In 1929 the Board of Supervisors asked the citizens of Arlington to help bear the expense of zoning the county. The first civic organization to respond was the Lyon Village Citizens Association, which made a \$200 contribution.²⁵ Since then the association has kept a watchful eye on development and zoning issues. It has participated in the formulation of master zoning plans and kept track of how they have been observed. Overall its record has been good in preserving the residential character of Lyon Village.

One of the most significant issues in which Lyon Village was involved was changing the form of county government. The Arlington County Civic Federation provided the impetus by requesting its committee on legislation and legal action to make a thorough study of various forms of county government. Robert Anderson, president of the Lyon Village Citizens Association from 1928 to 1930, was the chairman of that committee. Later the Arlington Chamber of Commerce offered to cooperate. On July 28, 1930, the first meeting of the combined committee met at Robert Anderson's home at 2732 18th Street, North (then called Morton Street). The joint committee, referred to as the "Better Government Committee," proposed the county manager form of government and an at-large election of board members. The committee continued its work by organizing a petition to get the issue on the ballot on November 3, 1931, publicizing the need for the change in government and endorsing candidates for the board. The new form of government took effect January 1, 1932.²⁶

Another county problem in which Lyon Village citizens took the lead was that of establishing a uniform system for street names. As the county developed, each community named its own streets. By 1932 there were nine streets or avenues named Virginia without any relationship to each other, to cite only one example of the confusion that existed. The United States Post Office Department refused to build a central post office in Arlington until a coherent street name system was adopted.²⁷ Shortly after it took office the new county board appointed a committee to study the problem and propose a uniform system. The chairman of that committee was Lyon Village's Monroe Stockett. The committee's plan was adopted by the board and became effective on July 1, 1935.²⁸ The Post Office Department kept its promise and the Clarendon Post Office was built in 1937.

The Community House

The citizens association held its first meeting in the offices of Lyon and Fitch. By the end of the 1930s they began to meet in other locations, such as Clarendon Citizens Hall, Chamber of Commerce rooms, James Monroe School (now Key School), Community Methodist Church and Lyon Village residents' homes. At their April 1927 meeting the citizens association appointed a committee to locate or build a community house. At one time a joint community house was considered with the Clarendon Citizens Association, but that idea was soon dropped.²⁹

There were many events sponsored by the citizens association to raise money for a community house. Fund raisers included such things as fairs,

field days and strawberry festivals. One of the biggest events was a three day carnival in July 1928 at which \$1,172.35 was raised. One of the features of the carnival was a beauty contest. Only single women were eligible for the contest according to rules laid down by the Arlington County Post of the American Legion, sponsor of that particular part of the carnival. On a county wide basis these rules may have been all right. Lyon Village, however, was a young community made up principally of young married couples. Not to be outdone, the young matrons organized a rolling pin throwing contest. The men in charge of the carnival reluctantly agreed to stage this event on opening day. The winner of the contest was Mrs. Robert Freer who scored a 56 foot throw. This event received extensive press coverage.³⁰ No record has been found of what happened at the beauty contest.

It became apparent that fund raising alone would not secure a community house. In 1940 Stanley Collins, who was president of the citizens association, wrote to Lyon Inc. (formerly Lyon & Fitch) concerning a clause contained in some of the very early sales contracts. This clause stated that there would be a trust fund set aside of 10% of the purchase price of each lot. The fund was to benefit the home owners by providing a community house, a park and other amenities. When 75% of the lots were sold the fund was to be turned over to three trustees chosen by the home owners. No satisfactory response was received to Mr. Collins' letter about the fund. Mary Smith Bittinger, Frank Lyon's granddaughter, told the author that when her grandfather heard about the request he responded "Let them sue!" Her father, Charles W. Smith, a partner in the company, advised his father-in-law to settle but his advice was ignored. Mr. Collins and three other lot owners did bring suit on behalf of all lot owners on the Cruik tract, but they lost the case in the Arlington Circuit Court. They appealed and the Superior Court of Appeals for the State of Virginia reversed the decree of the trial court and sent the case back for settlement. The opinion written by the court contained this poetic description of the case:

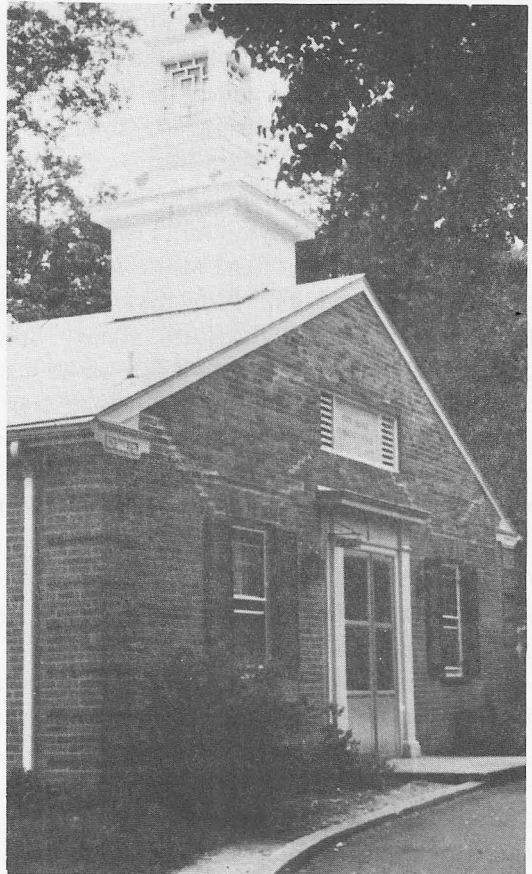
It is our considered conviction that the defendants, when they publicized the alluring features of becoming a lot owner and an inhabitant of that charming vicinage, Lyon Village, with parks and playgrounds, and springs and trysting places, and went even further and described an existing and growing fund of stately proportions to guarantee the future actuality of all these enticements, did not intend to paint a picture such as dreams are made of, but rather intended to set up a legal structure. They

never intended to erect a house of cards to be knocked down but to present one founded upon a rock...³¹

An agreement between the parties was reached on October 26, 1944, giving two lots to trustees to be elected by the lot owners, or appointed by the court. The terms of the agreement included payment of \$20,000 in cash to the trustees, to be used for erection of a community house on the two lots. The lot owners requested the court to appoint the trustees, which it did. They were William Watt, Alden Towberman and Hannah Livingston.³² Eventually, in November 1949, the lot owners did elect trustees to serve three year terms. They elected the same court-appointed trustees. A board of governors, to advise and counsel the trustees on the use and management of the community house, was also established.³³

At the same time the case was settled, Lyon Inc. agreed to sell to Arlington County six lots adjacent to the two given to the lot owners.³⁴ These lots were to be used for a park and playground. So the lot owners of Lyon Village got a park and playground without the responsibility of maintaining them.

It was not possible in 1944 to build a community house with World War II still going on. Construction did not begin until June 1949. Building costs exceeded \$20,000, so \$4,000 was contributed by the home owners and \$8,000 was borrowed.³⁵ The architect for the building was Eimer Cappelmann who lived at 2715 18th Street North.³⁶



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Lyon Village Community House, at 1920 North Highland Street.

The building was finished in December 1949. The mortgage was paid off in 1964. On December 6, 1964 a mortgage burning party was held at the community house. A picture appeared in several newspapers showing the three trustees of the community house and two former presidents of the citizens association holding a tray, on which the mortgage is burning.³⁷

The community house not only serves Lyon Village residents but has become a community resource. It is a polling place, a church and a place for political parties, artists and clubs to hold their meetings.

Lyon Village Now

Today Lyon Village has 750 homes and its boundaries extend beyond the Cruitt tract that Frank Lyon purchased in 1923. It extends east to North Veitch Street, encompassing Aurora Heights, south to Wilson Boulevard, taking in the residential sections of Clarendon, and west to Kirkwood Road, bringing in Kirkwood Terrace, and the Baldwin, Butler, Culler, LaPorte, and Mitchell additions to Lyon Village and a section of the Hayes estate. Because of a strong citizens association and a county government dedicated to preserving its residential neighborhoods, it is expected that Lyon Village will continue to be what the *Washingtonian* described as one of the area's "great neighborhoods."

Notes and References

Carolyn V. Boaz is the historian of the Lyon Village Citizens Association and a trustee of the Lyon Village Community House. She retired from the National Security Agency in 1981 where she had worked since 1944 as an information specialist. Special thanks to Sara Collins, Virginia Room, Arlington Library. The photographs on pages 18 and 24 were taken by Darline Hannabass.

¹Leah Y. Latimer, "Where We Live," *The Washington Post*, December 20, 1986, pp. E1, E8; Stephanie Griffith, "Where We Live," *The Washington Post*, May 9, 1992, pp. E1, E10.

²Diane Grant, "Great Neighborhoods," *Washingtonian*, Vol. 28, No. 6, March 1993, p. 73.

³C. B. Rose, Jr., *Arlington County Virginia: A History* (Arlington Historical Society, 1976), p. 6.

⁴*Ibid.*, pp. 79-82.

⁵C. B. Rose, Jr., *The Indians of Arlington* (Arlington Historical Society, 1966), p. 4.

⁶Willard J. Webb, "John Mason of Analostan Island," *The Arlington Historical Magazine*, Vol. 5, No. 4, October 1976, pp. 21-35.

⁷Lewis Carberry, *Survey of Mason Land* (Washington, DC, 1835-36).

⁸*Arlington County Deed Book 5* (D3-K3), pp. 286-288.

⁹*Arlington County Deed Book 5* (D3-K3), pp. 319, 320.

¹⁰*Arlington County Deed Book 5* (D3-K3), pp. 398-399.

¹¹Petition of Susan L. Cruitt, executrix, April 23-24, 1871, (File of Susan L. Cruitt, Claim 372), Alexandria, VA. Settled case file for claims approved by the Southern Claims Commission. Records of the accounting office of the Department of the Treasury, Record Group 217, National Archives and Records Administration, Washington, DC.

¹²*Arlington County Will Book 8*, p. 103.

- ¹³*Arlington County Deed Book* 131, pp. 558-560.
- ¹⁴Ruth P. Rose, "The Role of Frank Lyon and His Associates in the Early Development of Arlington County," *Arlington Historical Magazine*, Vol. 5, No. 4, October 1976, pp. 46-58.
- ¹⁵*Arlington County Deed Book* 195, pp. 515-522.
- ¹⁶W. F. Sunderman, Plat of Lyon Village, Arlington, VA, undated.
- ¹⁷A copy is in the author's possession
- ¹⁸Frederick E. Westenberger, in September 1992, gave the author a list of the houses he built in Lyon Village.
- ¹⁹Brumback Realty Co. Inc., "Brumback Built Homes of Character in Country Club Hills, Devonshire Gardens and the Lyon Village Development," undated brochure.
- ²⁰Lyon Village Citizens Association (LVCA) Minutes of Meeting, February 24, 1926.
- ²¹LVCA Minutes, March 10, 1926.
- ²²Arlington County Department of Community Affairs, *Lyon Village Neighborhood Conservation Plan*, March 4, 1978.
- ²³Grace Welborn, "History of the Woman's Club of Lyon Village" presented April 6, 1988 at sixtieth anniversary celebration.
- ²⁴Jessie Fant Evans, "Arlington Library System Built Up by Women," *The Sunday Star*, Washington, DC, November 20, 1938, p. E4.
- ²⁵LVCA Minutes, March 28, 1929.
- ²⁶Robert Nelson Anderson, "Arlington Adopts the County Manager Form of Government," *Arlington Historical Magazine*, Vol. 1, No. 2, October 1958., pp. 52-67
- ²⁷Rose, *Arlington County Virginia: A History*, p. 202.
- ²⁸C. L. Kinnier, "The Renaming of Arlington Streets," *Arlington Historical Magazine*, Vol. 1, No. 3, October 1959, pp. 41-51.
- ²⁹LVCA Minutes, April 13, 1927; Executive Committee Minutes, April 16, 1929 and November 19, 1929.
- ³⁰Robert Nelson Anderson Papers, Arlington Historical Museum, Arlington, VA.
- ³¹*Collins v. Lyon*, 181 Va. 230, March 8, 1943.
- ³²Circuit Court of Arlington County, Decree, Book No. 24, 509, November 20, 1944.
- ³³Lyon Village Community House, Minutes of Special Meeting of Lot Owners, November 15, 1949.
- ³⁴*Arlington County Deed Book* 659, pp. 53-54.
- ³⁵Carolyn V. Boaz, "Lyon Village Community House," May 5, 1985, unpublished paper.
- ³⁶Fund raising brochure for the Lyon Village Community House titled "As a Homeowner in Lyon Village You Will Own a Part of This Beautiful Community House," undated.
- ³⁷Robert Nelson Anderson Papers.