

CARLIN HALL

By

Gail Baker

Constructed in 1892, Carlin Hall (5711 Fourth Street, South, Arlington, Virginia) is a tall one-story, frame, Late Victorian cross-plan community hall. The exterior walls are covered with wooden siding of two designs separated by a wooden belt course: vertical beaded board below the belt course and five-inch German siding above. The belt also serves as a sill for the windows. The wooden cornice, which extends fully around the building, and the four gable pediments are carried on simple wooden brackets. On the principal (south) elevation, twin entrances flank a set of five double-hung sash windows; a later porch shelters the west doorway. The gable roof is covered in standing-seam terne metal. Centered atop the roof is a four-sided wooden cupola with a pyramidal metal roof.

A low, shed-roofed addition in the northwest quadrant of the cross plan contains the kitchen. The meeting hall occupies the center of the building, with a second room (the alcove) to the east, and the entryway, bathrooms, and kitchen to the west. Stairs in the entryway lead to a loft used for storage.

Carlin Hall is in the center of the Glencarlyn neighborhood, the earliest planned suburban subdivision in Arlington County. It fronts on Fourth Street, South, and is set on a flat, grassy fenced lot, with several large red cedar trees. Behind the building are a playground and a small wooden storage shed. To the east is the Ball-Carlin Cemetery, which contains the graves of members of the Ball and Carlin families, early residents of the area. Now owned by Arlington County, Carlin Hall continues to serve as a community meeting hall.

Carlin Hall is historically significant for its association with the development of the Glencarlyn neighborhood. From its construction in 1892 until about 1920, when it became a school, Carlin Hall was the single most important structure in the community, serving as a meeting place for the newly formed civic association and the Episcopal church congregation, as well as providing a place for dances, plays, holiday festivities, and a variety of other community social events. The work of local carpenter Theodore Bailey, Carlin Hall also is architecturally significant for the integrity of its Late Victorian vernacular design, proportions, use of materials, and detailing.

Historical Background

The Glencarlyn neighborhood, called Carlin Springs until 1896, is situated on a plateau formed by Four Mile Run and Long Branch in western Arlington County, near the Fairfax County border. The neighborhood began in April 1887 when William Wallace Curtis and Samuel Swinfin Burdett purchased approximately 134 acres from the heirs of James Harvey Carlin.¹ Two months later, Curtis and Burdett, Washington law partners, announced the subdivision of 60 acres of their property into 360 lots, each 50 by 120 feet, to be sold for \$100 per lot. They also formed The Carlin Springs Co-Operative Association, a joint stock company to be composed of all the lot owners, and conveyed to it the remaining 74 acres not platted, with a portion set aside for a community park.²

Curtis died in September 1888, just as the new venture was getting off the ground.³ Burdett, however, built a home for himself in Glencarlyn, where he lived with his wife until his death in 1914. A man of considerable talent and experience, Burdett played an instrumental role in the new community's development. Born in England, he emigrated to the United States at age twelve, settling in Ohio. He studied law at Oberlin College. In 1861 he joined the First Regiment, Iowa Volunteer Cavalry, and was promoted to the rank of captain. From 1869 to 1873, he served as a Republican Representative to Congress from Missouri. In 1874 President Grant appointed him Commissioner of the General Land Office, a position he held until 1878, when he and Curtis opened a Washington law office. In 1885 and 1886 he was elected commander in chief of the Grand Army of the Republic.⁴

Curtis and Burdett chose the location for their new neighborhood well. The site was near Washington and Alexandria, but still rural, and the Washington, Ohio & Western Railroad ran nearby, allowing easy access to the city. Its site on a level plateau, surrounded by hill slopes, streams, and forest, provided an appealing setting.⁵

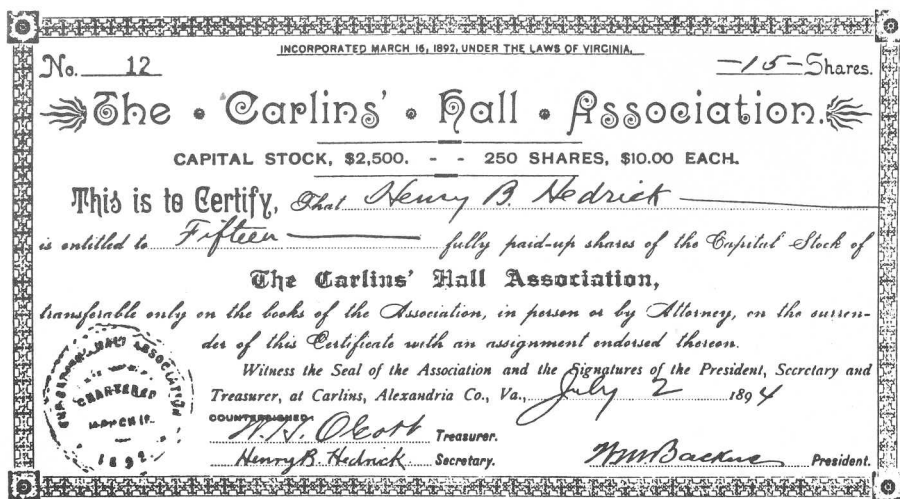
Curtis and Burdett addressed their advertising to "all men and women of moderate means, or who receive stated salaries."⁶ The first deed to a purchaser was recorded in October 1888,⁷ and the subdivision plat was attached and recorded with it. By 1890, fourteen new houses had been erected.⁸

Building the Hall

The residents of the growing village soon felt the need for a place to gather. The county remained rural with only a scattering of crossroads settlements, and travel along the existing roads, none of which had a hard

surface, was chancy at best.⁹ In 1892, the Carlin's Hall Association was chartered as a stock corporation, with lot owners purchasing shares for the purpose of building a community meeting hall.¹⁰ Construction began that spring on two lots located roughly at the village center.

The carpenter chosen was Theodore Bailey (1838-1905) of Bailey's Crossroads. He was the grandson of circus founder Hachaliah Bailey, who purchased land in Fairfax County in 1837 for animal training and winter quarters. Theodore's parents, Mariah and Lewis Bailey, settled at Bailey's Crossroads and raised their ten children there.¹¹ Bailey's bid, dated March 23, 1892, promised to "furnish all material and build Hall, as plans and specifications call for...without shingle roof [as in an earlier proposal] but sheathed for tin roof for \$1379.29."¹² Although little is known about his other work, Bailey did build St. Paul's (Episcopal) Chapel in Fairfax County (now Alexandria) in 1889. For this, he incorporated existing carriage houses into the building's plan to create a traditional cross shape.¹³ Thus, he was already familiar with this form when he began work on Carlin Hall.



One of the certificates issued by the Carlin' Hall Association to its stockholders. (Record Group 8, Virginiana Collection, Arlington County Public Library)

From the time of its completion, the new hall (named Curtis Hall in honor of William W. Curtis) quickly became the focus of village civic life. Early in 1893, the Carlin Springs Village Improvement Association was formed, and held regular meetings at the Hall. Samuel Burdett was elected the group's first president. Minutes for the association during its first five years reflect the range of issues facing the growing community, including

improving the train schedule, establishing a school, planting trees, building sidewalks, setting up telephone lines, seeking road improvements and addressing sanitation concerns.¹⁴ The Hall also was used for Episcopal church services from 1892 until 1910.¹⁵

Community life, too, revolved around the Hall. Hadassah Backus, Curtis's niece, who was born in Glencarlyn in 1888, wrote about those early years: "About once a month there was a sociable at the Hall. Cakes and lemonade were contributed by ladies in the village. There were games for young and old.... When the young began to get sleepy the grown folks would dance." She also told of plays and musicals, with the "stage" set up in the smaller "alcove" room, which also served to store the platform and removable communion rail used in church services. Fireworks displays at the Hall on the Fourth of July were paid for with pooled resources.¹⁶



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Carlin Hall as it appears today.

Use as a School

In 1920, after the Glencarlyn School had been destroyed by fire, the Carlin's Hall Association voted to donate use of the Hall to the School Board, with the provision that it be given back when no longer needed.¹⁷

The Hall served as Glencarlyn School for thirty years, then was returned to the Carlin's Hall Association in 1953.¹⁸ (These transfers were not recorded in the land records.)

The Arlington County School Board Minutes for this period record changes made to the building, including installation of a furnace in 1928 and modern plumbing and a septic tank in 1931.¹⁹ In 1953, in preparation for returning the building to the Glencarlyn community, the School Board ordered the following changes: installation of tile flooring; replacement of light fixtures, doors, and entrance porches; replastering; creation of an outside entrance to the basement and sealing of the inside entrance; and closing in of the balcony (now the loft), which opened into the hall.²⁰

Following a fire in 1961, the original standing seam metal roof and some of the rafters were replaced.²¹ The existing terne metal roof was installed in 1988 as part of an exterior rehabilitation of the building undertaken by Arlington County.²²

Finding it increasingly difficult to care for the Hall, the Carlin's Hall Association in 1962 deeded the property to Arlington County for use as a recreational or cultural center.²³ The Arlington County Board designated Carlin Hall a local historic district in 1978.

Since 1977, the Glencarlyn Citizens Association has managed activities at Carlin Hall on behalf of the County.²⁴ Today the Hall hosts a cooperative preschool, exercise classes, birthday parties, and other events, as well as civic meetings and seasonal gatherings, playing a vital and continuing role in community life.

Notes and References

Gail Baker, a native Arlingtonian, is a member of the Historical Affairs and Landmark Review Board. This article was adapted from a report she prepared supporting the nomination of Carlin Hall for listing on the Virginia Landmarks Register and the National Register of Historic Places. Carlin Hall was listed on the Virginia Register on June 16, 1993; its National Register listing became effective August 12.

¹Arlington County Deed Book H-4, 1; Charles W. Stetson, *Four Mile Run Land Grants* (Washington, DC: Mimeiform Press, 1935), pp. 118-19.

²"Carlin Springs and the Carlin Springs Co-Operative Association, Alexandria County, Virginia" (Washington: Gibson Bros., 1888), pp. 5-8. Record Group 8, Virginiana Collection, Arlington County Public Library.

³"William Wallace Curtis" (death notice), *Washington Post*, 4 Sept. 1888, p. 5.

⁴"Capt. Samuel S. Burdett" (obituary), *New York Times*, 26 Sept. 1914, p. 11; *Biographical Directory of the American Congress, 1774-1927* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1928), p. 760.

⁵Herbert H. Harwood, Jr., *Rails to the Blue Ridge* (Falls Church, VA: Pioneer America Society, 1969), p. 11; Stetson, *Four Mile Run Land Grants*, p. 125.

⁶Prospectus for Carlin Springs, 9 June 1887, p. 1. Record Group 8, Virginiana Collection, Arlington County Public Library.

- ⁷Arlington County Deed Book J-4, p. 63.
- ⁸"The First Addition to Carlin Springs, Alexandria County, Virginia, by the Carlin Springs Co-Operative Association, 1890." Map. Surveyed in 1890 by Howell & Greenough, Washington, DC Record Group 8, Virginiana Collection, Arlington County Public Library.
- ⁹C. B. Rose, Jr., *Arlington County, Virginia: A History* (Arlington: Arlington Historical Society, 1976), pp. 138-41.
- ¹⁰"By-Laws of the Carlin's Hall Association," 1892. Record Group 8, Virginiana Collection, Arlington County Public Library. The group is variously referred to as the Carlin's Hall, Carlins Hall or Carlin Hall Association.
- ¹¹Melvin Lee Steadman, Jr., *Falls Church: By Fence and Fireside* (Falls Church: Falls Church Public Library, 1964), p. 243; "Theodore Bailey" (obituary), *Fairfax Herald*, 29 Sept. 1905, p. 3; Jane Chapman Whitt, *Elephants and Quaker Guns: A History of Civil War and Circus Days* (New York: Vantage Press, 1966), pp. 16-17.
- ¹²"Estimate from T. Bailey for Building Hall," 23 March 1892. Record Group 8, Virginiana Collection, Arlington County Public Library. The earlier estimate (30 Jan 1892) is also in this collection.
- ¹³Don W. Massey, *The Episcopal Churches in the Diocese of Virginia: Alphabetical Listing of Active Churches by Regions and Existing Churches Not Having Regular Services* (Keswick, VA: Diocese Church Histories, 1989), p. 28; Whitt, *Elephants and Quaker Guns*, pp. 87-88.
- ¹⁴*Minutes of the Glencarlyn, Virginia, Village Improvement Association, 1893-1918*, bound volume of handwritten records (photocopy). Virginiana Collection, Arlington County Public Library.
- ¹⁵Keith H. Houlson, "History of St. John's, Glencarlyn," 7 April 1956, unpublished manuscript, p. 12. Virginiana Collection, Arlington County Public Library. Also "Arbor Day and Easter at Carlin Springs," *Evening Star*, 5 April 1893.
- ¹⁶Hadassah Backus, "Recollections of a Native-Born Glencarlynite and a Short History of Glencarlyn," January 1952, unpublished paper, Virginiana Collection, Arlington County Public Library; Houlson, "History of St. John's," p. 12.
- ¹⁷This vote probably occurred on 14 Sept. 1920. Although no minutes for that meeting could be located, a notice dated 4 Sept. 1920 states that "a Stockholders meeting of the Carlin Hall Association will be held in Carlin Hall, Glencarlyn, Va., at 7:30 P.M. Tuesday evening, September 14 to take such action as may be expedient to complete the project of donating the Hall to the Arlington District Board of Education for School purposes...." Record Group 8, Virginiana Collection, Arlington County Public Library. In addition the School Board Minutes of 26 March 1953 report the following: "[Assistant Superintendent] Dr. [E.J.] Braun stated that the School Board minutes for the years 1920-24 were destroyed in a fire, and the record of the proceedings in which the old Glencarlyn School was turned over to the Arlington County School Board was in the lost records. Dr. Braun added that the deed of lots 15 and 16 to the School Board was drawn June 18, 1924, but was never recorded. The deed also stated that in the event the School Board violated the covenant, the property would revert to the trustees." In fact, the earliest School Board Minute Book begins in 1923, and entries clearly indicate that Carlin Hall was used as a school at that time.
- ¹⁸Arlington County School Board Minutes, 11 July 1953; "School Board Returns Structure Spic and Span After 30 Year Loan," *Northern Virginia Sun*, 15 July 1953.
- ¹⁹School Board Minutes, 13 January 1928, 25 March 1931.
- ²⁰School Board Minutes, 11 July 1953.
- ²¹"Old Hall Damaged by Blaze," *Northern Virginia Sun*, 5 July 1961.
- ²²Nathaniel Palmer Neblett, AIA, "Project Booklet and Specifications for Exterior Rehabilitation: Carlin Hall," June 1987. See also Neblett's Notes of Site Visits to Carlin

Hall, Nos. 1-15, 17 March 1988 to 30 Jan. 1989. Files of the Arlington County Department of Parks, Recreation and Community Resources.

²³Arlington County Deed Book 1467, pp. 37 and 39.

²⁴Sue Shuman, "Glencarlyn Tries Civic Experiment," *Arlington Journal*, 18 August 1977.

