

# Reminiscences of Barcroft's History\*

By M. LOUISE PAYNE

Our community was named in honor of Dr. John W. Barcroft, a native of New Jersey and a graduate of the Philadelphia Medical College. He came to Fairfax County in 1849, locating on Columbia Pike near the present site of the Alexandria Water Company's Dam, where he built a residence and a mill. The remains of the old stone mill are still visible from the road.

Dr. Barcroft resided there, operating his mill and ministering to the community when the emergency arose, until the Civil War broke out and the Federal Army, on its retreat from the Second Battle of Bull Run, destroyed or so seriously damaged his property that he was compelled to return to the North until the cessation of hostilities. Shortly after the Battle of Appomattox, he returned to Virginia and located in this vicinity, building a house on top of Barcroft Hill and a water mill. The residence is still standing.

Previously this locality was known as Arlington Heights, and also as Corbett, the latter being the name of the first subdivision laid out, platted, and recorded.

Dr. Barcroft was the grandfather of Milton Barcroft Payne, who still resides in Barcroft.

In 1905 the town boasted of a mill, railroad station or shed, a store, a blacksmith shop, a cattle pen, a stone quarry, a farm implement shop, and about 20 residences.

The mill built by Dr. Barcroft stood on the site of the present ice plant. He also built the dam and mill race which were necessary to power the mill.

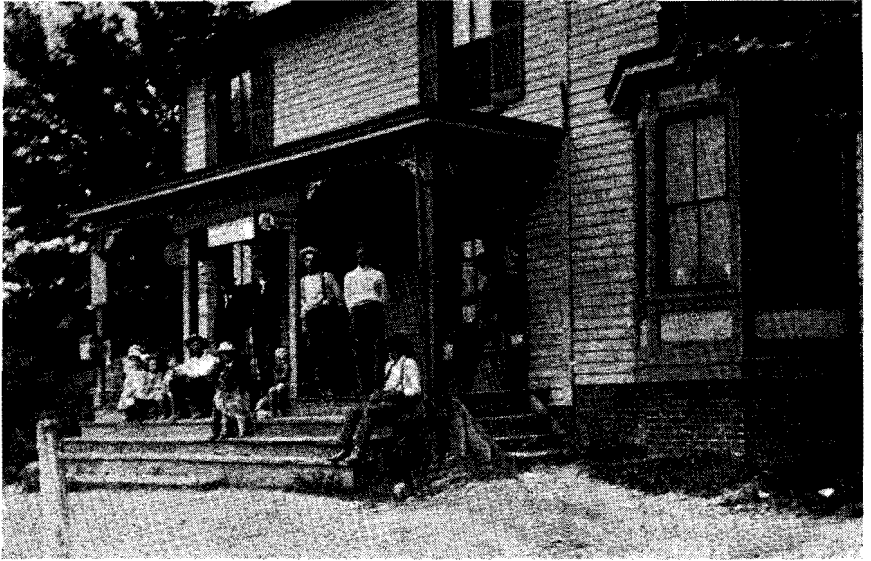
All the grain was water-ground. It was shipped in from upcountry by rail and unloaded from freight cars on the Barcroft siding. Local and nearby grain was hauled in from the farms with horses. Some years later coal was also shipped in and unloaded from this same siding but only for a short time.

Dr. Barcroft ran the mill himself for a number of years but later he rented it to different men. John Newlon was one of the early millers to whom it was rented. He had been head miller for Herr & Cissel of Georgetown, now Wilkins-Rogers. He was a miller at Barcroft in 1885 and after leaving for a few years came back in 1906 as miller.

While Mr. Newlon was here in 1885 he lived in the big old white house back of the present gas station at Buchanan Street and Columbia Pike. There his daughter Bessie was born. She later married Patsy Kenyon who worked in the mill with her father. Bessie Newlon Kenyon is still living in North Arlington.

The railroad station was on the west side of the tracks and south of

\* Reprinted from the *Arlington Daily Sun*, April 15, 1955.



OSCAR HARING'S STORE IN BARCROFT.

Columbia Pike. It was diagonally across the tracks from the present Government storehouse. The people of the community boarded the trains here for Washington, Alexandria, Bluemont, and way stations. If the residents wished to go to Washington by trolley they either drove or walked to what is now Columbia but then called Arlington.

The trolley line ran from Convalescent Camp (Nauck) to the Virginia side of the old Aqueduct Bridge, where one got off the trolley and walked across the bridge to M Street in Georgetown. There you took the streetcar to downtown Washington by way of M Street and Pennsylvania Avenue or walked up some hundred or more steps to 36th and Prospect Street in Georgetown and took the Washington Railway and Electric Trolley to downtown Washington. These two trolley or electric lines, as we say today, are now merged into the Capital Transit Co. Much of the W.R.&E. has been replaced by busses. The old trolley line at Columbia ran along what is today Walter Reed Drive and Fillmore Streets, thence through Hunter, Penrose, Hatfield, Fort Myer, and Signal Corps to Rosslyn.

The general store stood on the east side of the railroad tracks and the north side of Columbia Pike. It was operated by Oscar Haring and his family. His sister-in-law, Miss Virgie Doremus, later Mrs. George Pepper, was postmistress, and the post office was in the store. If Miss Doremus was not there her sister, Mrs. Haring, or Mr. Haring handed out the mail. There were so few people and so little mail then that the Haring family even knew the handwriting of most of the townspeople. Once a letter addressed simply to "Mother," Barcroft, Va., reached its proper destination. If Mr. Haring had



BARCROFT MILL.

to be out, which seldom happened, the two ladies waited on the store in his absence.

Son Eddie, as he was affectionately known, was more or less busy with his own affairs. He was an up and coming young man who edited and printed the first and only Barcroft newspaper, known as the "Barcroft News" in 1903, which was a little four-page affair with the comings, goings, doings, and ailments of the small community. Milton Payne, who was then a small boy, felt very important when he was allowed to help set type. Ed was a very bright, likable fellow and the hero of all the neighborhood belles and the ring leader in all the sports and social events as well.

The store was a typical squash center one, where all the men gathered to discuss crops and topics of the day around an old pot-bellied coal-burning stove. People who commuted to Washington kept warm around this old stove while waiting for the Southern, which was notorious in never being on time. The store boasted of one of the few telephones in the neighborhood. If Central cared to get your number she did; if she didn't care to she didn't and no amount of argument altered the case. She simply cut you off and that was that. There was no higher up or telephone office to contact. In that day the slogan "The customer is always right" had never been heard of.

The blacksmith shop was directly across Columbia Pike from the store under an immense oak tree which has only recently been cut down. It was operated by two bachelor brothers from Germany named August and Otto Hoffman.

The cattle pen was back of the store about a thousand yards up the east side of the tracks.

The Southern brought and unloaded cattle from upcountry in these pens. They were then driven over Columbia Pike to the abattoir, the present site of the Pentagon Annex. Cattle and sheep were also driven over Columbia Pike from above Fairfax to the same abattoir.

Dr. Barcroft opened an old stone quarry on his land just back of the mill where he got the stone for the mill foundations and for the building of the dam and mill race.

S. P. Wright built a farm implement shop between the tracks and the old bridge which he operated a very short time; it later housed B. F. Perrow's carpenters. This building still later became another store and for a time housed the post office and was run by Richard Cleveland.

Between this building and the bridge another blacksmith shop was erected after the Hoffmans had died and their old shop had been torn down. Later this shop was also torn down.

In 1908 B. F. Perrow of Remington, Va., came to Barcroft with a gang of carpenters to build houses for S. P. Wright on his farm. Mr. Perrow built around 30 houses for Mr. Wright using the rock from the old stone quarry in the foundations. Mr. Perrow, who is now 91 and is still active in the real estate business in Remington, writes me that he also built houses for himself in Barcroft and St. Elmo, which was near Alexandria. In all he built 39 houses in Arlington County.

The earliest families that I recall in 1905 were the Tilletts, Klines, Howards, Burkes (Tom Burke was one of Mosby's Rangers), Bridges, Paynes, Decks (in the old Dr. Barcroft home), Stoneburners and Newlons (in the old mill house), Harings and Miss Doremus who lived in the combination store, post office, and residence, Judge Pelham (in the big house, where Newlons first lived in 1885), and the Heads. These families all lived along the north side of Columbia Pike starting at the Fairfax line.

On the south side were the Frank Paynes, Beaches, Hensons, Scanlands (three sisters and two brothers, none of whom ever married), and the Palmers. Billy Palmer was sheriff of Arlington County for a number of years when it was known as Alexandria County.

At the top of the hill on what is now Buchanan Street and facing each other were two families, Maryes and Klemroths. Beyond their two houses there were two farms included in the Barcroft area, the Kolb farm, now the home of the Milton Paynes, and the S. P. Wright farm. The Wright farm extended from what is now Buchanan Street east on Columbia Pike to South Randolph, thence back to the Signal Corps, along South Fourth Street to Wakefield east on South Eighth, and back across Buchanan to the railroad tracks. This is approximately correct.

Along the tracks lived a family of Lovelaces and in the Haring barn lived old Tom Foley who was the town's handy man and also delivery boy for the store.

There were two Negro families living in the woods back of the present

Safeway. One was the Lows who lived in a house given to old Billy Low for his life by Dr. Barcroft. The other was the Lees.

As there were few people here at that time, the social life of the community included young people from Arlington and Glencarlyn. They had a lot of fun dancing at each others' homes, riding horses, skating on the dam, playing tennis in Glencarlyn at the Backus House, on the Wright farm and the Kolb farm, and bobsledding on the Palmer and Barcroft Hills, named for the people whose property they adjoined.

Familiar sights on Columbia Pike in those days were droves of cattle and sheep being driven over the road to the abattoir; big huckster wagons with canvas-covered tops which collected farm products upcountry all during the week and then drove to Washington on Fridays to market; milk wagons daily, drawn by four horses; rigs, wagons, horses of every description, and many people walking.

It was a very quiet community, and the most excitement I can remember as a little girl was the time an elephant got loose from Luna Lark (a resort near Alexandria) and wandered all around Bailey's Cross Roads, scaring horses and people. It was finally caught by some cowboys from its own circus.

Another exciting event to me was the time a salesman was held up on Columbia Pike and the men of the community armed themselves, saddled their horses, and went in search of the robber. He was apprehended at the old Long Bridge. I had a slight part in that, inasmuch as I drove a milk wagon and three horses home for Eppie Oliver of Bailey's Cross Roads when he saddled the fourth horse to join the posse.

In 1906 Sidney T. Marye and his wife were instrumental in starting the first Barcroft school. They had two school-age children, and there were seven more in the community old enough to start to school. The county would not pay for a teacher for less than ten children, and so Mr. Marye persuaded the parents of the seven children to agree to send them, and he persuaded Mrs. Edith Fairfax, who lived in the house adjoining the present Community House on the south, to teach the children and to include her four-year old child in the class to get the required ten. The children attending the first school in Barcroft in Mrs. Fairfax's front room were: Paul and Adalyne Marye, Pauline Palmer, Carol Wright, Beulah and Damon Lovelace, Percy and Charles Tillett, Edith Fairfax, and Dorothy Payne. This house was torn down in 1954.

As mentioned above, in 1908 a number of new houses were built, which brought in more people and more children, thus creating a need for a larger school.

Again Mr. Marye took the lead in requesting contributions of money and labor to build the present Barcroft Community House. He was greatly aided by Reverend William Pierpont, a Methodist minister, the Harings, and Miss Doremus who were interested in having a church in Barcroft. Mr. Pierpont gave his time and with the help of William Gibson Garrett and many of the

townsmen built the Barcroft Community House, which was to serve as a school, church, and community house.

After the erection of the building an organization known as the Barcroft School and Civic League was formed by the townspeople to help pay for the building. This possibly would have been around 1908. The organization gave lawn parties, suppers, plays, etc. to raise money for this purpose.

The building was rented to the School Board which also helped meet expenses. School was held in this building until the completion of the New Barcroft School in 1925.

In 1914, Walter O'Hara arrived on the scene and started building. He built 143 houses which necessitated starting a bus line to get people back and forth from Washington. The same bus line still serves the people of Barcroft.

Barcroft continues to grow, so that the little sleepy town of the past is nearly forgotten.

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## Contributions to a Bibliography of Arlington County

(Continued from page 6)

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