

Arlington Centennial Celebration September 3-7, 1946

By Paul A. Hill

In the history of nations, states and communities (as in the lives of individuals), there are certain important and significant events which people like to remember and commemorate. These events are usually commemorated with celebrations and festivals of fifty or a hundred years, or multiples thereof. The year 1946, therefore, presented to the people of Arlington County a magnificent opportunity to celebrate a great and significant event in its history.

Even though there was considerable interest in an Arlington County Centennial to commemorate the one hundredth anniversary of retrocession from the District of Columbia to Virginia, the first record of action in regard to the matter starts with December 8, 1945, when a proposal, prepared by the author of this article who was then Secretary-Business Manager of the Arlington Chamber of Commerce, was presented to the Arlington County Board. This proposal was in the form of a resolution, adopted the day before by the Board of Directors of the Chamber of Commerce, that reviewed briefly the steps through which the territory of what is now Arlington had passed from the time it became a part of the District of Columbia at the turn of the Nineteenth Century and its return in 1846 to the Commonwealth of Virginia. The resolution concluded with a recommendation "to the County Board, to the business, professional, fraternal, religious, veteran and civic organizations and to the citizens generally of Arlington County that an appropriate Centennial Celebration be planned and effectuated to commemorate the Act of Retrocession enacted by the Congress of the United States on July 9, 1846."

The second step taken by the Arlington Chamber of Commerce was the presentation to the County Board (by letter of March 22, 1946) of suggestions for a celebration that were prefaced with "another reason why such a celebration should be planned and put into effect by the citizens of the community"—namely, the boundary line between the Commonwealth and the District of Columbia recently (1946) had been definitely settled by an Act of Congress and ratified by the General Assembly of Virginia.

The third step looking toward a Centennial Celebration was action of the Arlington County Board, April 13, 1946, designating "September 7, 1946, (100th anniversary of the day on which President James K. Polk by Proclamation declared the Act of Retrocession to be in full force and effect) as the appropriate day for commemorating the occasion." In accordance with this resolution of the County Board which also created a Centennial Celebration Committee along the lines that had been suggested by the Arlington Chamber of Commerce, the Board's chairman, Edmund D. Campbell, called a meeting at the Arlington County Court House May 13, 1946, "for the purpose of organizing."

This meeting was attended by more than two dozen persons practically all of whom were county-wide organization executives. Following a statement of the purpose of the meeting by Mr. Campbell and an explanation of the great possibilities of the celebration by Mr. F. Freeland Chew, another member of the County Board, the group proceeded to elect a General Chairman, officers and other members of the Executive Committee, and empowered this committee to create other committees and to employ all personnel considered necessary. The final Arlington County Centennial Celebration Committee organization was as follows: Executive Committee—Charles R. Fenwick, Chairman; Frank L. Ball, Sr., Vice Chairman; Paul A. Hill, Secretary; Alan B. Prosis, Treasurer; Neil Foss, Lena M. Wolfe, Mrs. Eva G. Miner, Hugh J. McGrath, William G. Watt, E. L. Kirkpatrick, Executive Director. Committee Chairmen—Harry Anger, Director of Pageant; Joseph L. Arnold, Tours; Mrs. Louis C. Carl, Housing; George C. Dalby, Parade; Mark Gates, Ticket Sales; Mrs. Eva G. Miner, Exhibits; E. W. Paulette, Brochure; Wade Pearson, Publicity; Alan B. Prosis, Finance; A. C. Scheffel, Fire Chief; Harry L. Woodyard, Chief of Police. Honorary Advisory Council—William H. Tuck, Governor of Virginia; Harry F. Byrd, U. S. Senator from Virginia; Howard W. Smith, U. S. Congressman, 8th District of Virginia; Walter T. McCarthy, Judge of the Circuit Court; Hugh Reid, Judge of County Court; George Damm, Delegate to General Assembly; William D. Medley, Delegate to General Assembly; J. Maynard Magruder, Delegate to General Assembly; Edmund D. Campbell, Member of County Board; F. Freeland Chew, Member of County Board; Basil DeLashmutt, Member of County Board; Leo C. Lloyd, Member of County Board; Mrs. Elizabeth B. Magruder, Mem-

ber of County Board; Frank C. Hanrahan, County Manager; H. Bruce Green, County Clerk; John Locke Green, County Treasurer; Homer G. Bauserman, County Sheriff; Harry K. Green, Commissioner of the Revenue; Fletcher Kemp, Superintendent of Schools; Lawrence W. Douglas, Commonwealth's Attorney.

Hundreds of other people, both young and old, served on the various committees and participated in the numerous activities and projects of the Celebration. It would require many pages of this volume on which to list all of their names and to enumerate the valuable services they performed. Some of them made brilliant and outstanding contributions in the services which they rendered; however, it required the active interest and assistance of everyone who participated to make the celebration a success. All of the committees performed their specific tasks well—even though certain mistakes and blunders were made—and their final reports are filed away with the records of the Centennial Celebration Committee.

The Centennial Celebration was financed by a contribution of ten thousand (\$10,000) dollars appropriated by the Arlington County Board, by contributions from business concerns and individuals amounting to twelve-thousand and fifty-five (\$12,055) dollars and \$3,519.47 from the sale of booklets, tickets, et cetera—or a total of \$25,574.47. The names of the contributors and the amount contributed are also listed in the final report and records of the Centennial Celebration Committee.

The theme of the Centennial Celebration was "ARLINGTON'S CAVALCADE OF PROGRESS." The story of this progress was told far and wide by various media of publicity: by radio, by articles and pictures in newspapers and magazines (some state-wide and national in scope), by thirty specially built pylons strategically located throughout the county, by banners, flags, window cards and bus placards, by historical exhibits in various parts of the county, by distributing 25,000 copies of the Centennial program, by selling and distributing 10,000 copies of the official brochure, "*Arlington's 100 Years of Progress: 1846-1946*," by the Arlington Chamber of Commerce distributing 1,000 copies of a special pamphlet, "*Arlington, Virginia, Centennial Celebration: September 3-7, 1946*," to Chambers of Commerce throughout the United States, and by a parade with more than one hundred beautifully decorated motorized floats, representing civic and fraternal organizations and business con-

cerns, which was witnessed by an estimated 15,000 persons. The opening public event of the celebration was a fireworks display and band concert, held north of Memorial Bridge on the Virginia side and seen by an estimated 8,000 to 10,000 persons from both shores of the Potomac River.

The most important Centennial Celebration activity was a pageant, "Cavalcade of Progress," which was presented each night of the five-day celebration on a specially constructed stage in the Washington-Lee High School stadium and having a cast of one hundred local actors. The pageant was witnessed by thousands of people each night. A band concert preceded each performance of the pageant program.

The Centennial Celebration ended on September 7, 1946, with a program at the "Reviewing Stand" which was located at North Court House Road and Wilson Boulevard. Many government officials and community leaders were present and introduced at this time. Mr. William G. Watt was Master of Ceremonies. Tributes were paid to more than a dozen "old-timers," persons who had resided in the County for more than seventy years. Among them were Mrs. Ella Boldin, Dr. H. C. Corbett, Mrs. Martha Hatch, Mrs. Flora Hiett, Miss Ida Marcey, George Marcey, John Marcey, Phillip Marcey, William Marcey, and Mrs. Annie Morris. Isaac C. Hines made a few remarks in which he referred to other old Negro residents and the parts they and he had played in the "early history" of Arlington.

Another feature of the final program was the presentation by Chairman Charles R. Fenwick of a scroll to Arlington County by the Centennial Celebration Committee which noted the County's having passed the milestone of one hundred years of "independence" from the District of Columbia. This was accepted by County Manager Frank C. Hanrahan on behalf of the County. The scroll, which was prepared by Frank L. Ball, Sr., included the following striking paragraph:

"ARLINGTON - one hundred years a county - from open farm lands and swamps to city streets, modern homes and extensive business establishments - from a loose-knit political unit to outstanding leadership in government administration, public education, health and recreation, transportation and general welfare - from a few scattered homes to a vigorous community of one hundred twenty thousand - today marks the end of a

century of triumphant progress and the beginning of a new era of golden promise.”

The Centennial Celebration brought to light much factual information and many interesting stories on Arlington's history, beginning with pre-Colonial days. It called attention to the County's steady growth and development during the past thirty or forty years particularly, and gave some sort of a glimpse into the immediate if not the more distant future. The Celebration also proved that Arlingtonians will show loyalty to a common cause, turn their faces forward and work faithfully for a better and bigger community. All that is needed is a realization that the cause for which they work is a common one. As this is made clear, leaders will come from within the community to carry the torch of progress in and through the next one hundred years of Arlington's development.