

## THE SPIRITUAL FORTITUDE OF LOCAL RESIDENTS SEVENTY-FIVE YEARS AGO

By  
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The Seventy-fifth Anniversary of the World Day of Prayer was commemorated by members of the Arlington Council of United Church Women at two services held on February 17, 1961 — a morning service at St. George's Episcopal Church, and an evening service at Calvary Methodist Church. The World Day of Prayer, first celebrated in 1886, is still traditionally observed on the first Friday of Lent each year. At the 1961 morning service, Mrs. Eleanor Lee Templeman spoke on "The Spiritual Fortitude of Local Residents Seventy-five Years Ago". It seems appropriate in this centennial year to look back on her remarks.

"Today we are faced with many momentous problems. However, if we can evaluate them realistically with clear vision, and attack them with the spiritual fortitude exemplified by Arlingtonians seventy-five years ago, we have nothing to fear. We should view our problems as challenges for greater effort. Many times a work considered completed leads to complacency and in turn to inertia which eventually brings stagnation. Let us always strive forward toward high goals.

"Let us look back seventy-five years and see what problems beset our predecessors and how they conquered them. They, in turn, had the example set for them by the pioneers and trailblazers who laid the foundations of our permanent communities, bringing their faith with them, to light their paths into the unknown. Undoubtedly, the first religious services in Arlington County were family prayers before the hearths of pioneer cabins. To raise a family in the wilderness required courage, fortitude, and a daily renewal of spiritual faith.

"By 1860, at the brink of the Civil War, spiritual growth had achieved the establishment of three churches within our borders. The Episcopalians attended Arlington Chapel, which had been built by George Washington Parke Custis on his Arlington Plantation for the benefit of his neighbors and his "people". The Methodists had just completed two churches on Glebe Road: Mount Olivet at Brown's Bend Road (now 16th Street North), and Hunter's Chapel on Columbia Pike.

"Then came the great American tragedy, the fratricidal conflict. For four long years, the area was ravished by the occupation of 4,000 federal troops in twenty-two fortifications within the county boundaries. They outnumbered the civilian population which lived under the constant tensions of an occupied people. Their churches were used first as hospitals, then as stables, and were finally torn apart as the first winter came. Their lumber was used to floor tents and build bunks and for firewood. Arlington Chapel was burned. Forests were levelled, mills destroyed, farm animals and equipment confiscated, and many homes burned.

"This was the desolation which faced Arlington families at the close of hostilities. Yet, by 1886, when the first World Day of Prayer was observed, these people in twenty-two years had bound up their wounds and had gone forward with great

courage to new achievements. Through dedicated efforts of all, the old congregations had rebuilt their churches and new ones had come into being. Many materials were contributed; those needing to be purchased were financed by the ladies through strawberry festivals and church suppers. The men, including the pastors, actually constructed the edifices with their own labor.

“Not unmindful of the educational needs of the children, by 1886 four schools for white children and two schools for negro children had been established, although there had been but one public school in the county at the outbreak of the war.

“So much had been achieved by 1886; yet there was before these people a great challenge. Following the war, gambling and vice interests had poured into the county along the riverfront. Here they could prey upon the undesirable elements of the nation’s capital while remaining outside the jurisdiction of the Washington authorities.

“Arlington’s courthouse was then in Alexandria where officials took little interest in the upper, more sparsely populated part of the county. Murders took place on an average of one every week. Law enforcement officers either submitted to bribe, or feared to act against the gangsters. Saturday nights were particularly hazardous for the few law-abiding citizens who traversed the area enroute home. These farmers, returning from the Washington markets, organized into armed groups in Georgetown, crossed the Aqueduct Bridge, and continued through Rosslyn in a closely knit cavalcade of horses and carriages.

“This was the challenge to the residents of seventy-five years ago. It took courage, work, and time, but by 1904 the Good Citizens’ League had ousted corrupt politicians and had raided and literally driven the depraved element from the Potomac shores. Let us look to our past heritage with pride and pay homage to those who worked and persevered before us, to make Arlington County a good place to live, to worship, and to raise future generations. Always, the past is prelude to the future. Let us not accept the benefits which those in the past have provided for us without accepting also the responsibilities. Let us not lean back upon our ARLINGTON HERITAGE, but ever strive to live up to it!”