Arlington Ridge & Addison Heights

Long before the Hume School was built, this ridge was an important location in Arlington County. During the Civil War, the excellent view of the city of Washington and surrounding areas led to the construction of several forts to protect the capital from possible Confederate attack. Fort Scott was built near the south end of the ridge. Thousands of trees were cut down so Union troops could have a better view of a possible attack.

For many years, only a few large homes sat atop Arlington Ridge overlooking forests to the west and brickyards to the east, near the Potomac River. In 1896, the Mount Vernon electric railway was constructed along today’s Eads Street, which runs parallel to Route I in Pentagon City. It carried tourists from Washington DC to Mount Vernon but soon new subdivisions sprouted near its stations and new suburban residents started commuting to work in Washington.

Electric railways led to suburban development throughout the county and the agricultural way of life slowly disappeared. Explosive population growth during the 1940s to support the war effort in World War II transformed Arlington into the urban area we know today.

The Hume School stands as a reminder of a bygone era when children walked to school along fields and dirt roads.

Directions

From Washington, DC:
Go South on I-395
Take Arlington Ridge Road exit.
Turn right on Arlington Ridge Road.
Museum is one block on left.

From points south:
From South Glebe Road
Turn north on South Arlington Ridge Road.
Proceed past traffic light at South 23rd Street.
The museum is one block on the right.

From points west:
Go East on Route 66 to the Fairfax Drive Exit.
Go right onto Glebe Road going South.
Stay on Glebe Road, passing under I 395
Turn left onto South Arlington Ridge Road.
Proceed past traffic light at South 23rd Street.
The museum is one block on the right.

Arlington Historical Society

The Arlington Historical Society was founded in 1956 and is a nonprofit educational organization incorporated under the laws of the Commonwealth of Virginia.

The goal of the Arlington Historical Society is to conduct research and to preserve and disseminate knowledge relating to the history, archaeology, material culture, and geographical and socio-economic development of Arlington County, Virginia.

Arlington Historical Society

1805 South Arlington Ridge Road
Arlington, Virginia
Architects were hired to design several larger brick schoolhouses. By 1900, the county had eleven public schools—six for white children and five for African Americans. B. Stanley Simmons designed the Hume School in 1891. A young architect who had just graduated from MIT, he would go on to design many other significant buildings in Washington, DC. Simmons’ architectural plan for the Hume School was used to build an almost identical school—which no longer stands—in Arlington’s Ballston neighborhood.

The Hume School, just west of DC and north of the Pentagon is a brick Queen Anne-style schoolhouse designed with two classrooms on the first floor and a classroom and auditorium on the second floor. The school was named for Frank Hume, who donated the land. Generations of students from local farms and early streetcar suburbs attended elementary school here.

Arlington County closed the school in 1956. Today the building houses the Arlington Historical Society and the Arlington Historical Museum, but the outside of the building looks much like it did when it first opened.

When the Hume School was built in 1891, Arlington was primarily a rural, agricultural-based community. The area was mostly farms or large vacation estates for wealthy city dwellers. Many African Americans lived near “Freedman’s Village,” a community for former slaves built by the federal government on the grounds of Arlington National Cemetery. By the 1890s, only about 4,000 people lived in the county, then known as Alexandria County, but it was already outgrowing its first school buildings. Classes had been held in makeshift wooden buildings, rented community halls, or private homes.

Oral history interviews of former students captured memories of attending school here. An outhouse and well pump were in the yard. To ring the bell—which can be more easily rung by visitors today—a boy would climb a ladder into the tower and pull the rope. During recess, children would play in the front yard playground or in the surrounding woods before the houses on the western side of Arlington Ridge were built.

Between 40-50 students could attend the Hume School’s eight grades at any one time. As the neighborhood grew, the local population exceeded the school’s capacity. Nellie Custis Elementary School was built a few blocks away in 1928 and held almost 300 students. In 1956, Arlington’s school board closed the Hume School due to violations of a new fire safety code.

The county donated the building to the newly established Arlington Historical Society in 1956. AHS renovated it and reopened it as the Arlington Historical Museum in 1963.

As the oldest school building in Arlington County, it is on the National Register of Historic Places and has been designated a Virginia State Historical Landmark.

The Arlington Historical Society welcomes you to visit—and ring the school bell. The museum is open free every Saturday and Sunday from 1:00-4:00 pm and Friday from 12:30-3:30 pm.

If you would like a group tour of the museum, please contact the Arlington Historical Society:
email: info@arlingtonhistoricalsociety.org
Phone: 703-892-4204
Learn more at our website: https://arlingtonhistoricalsociety.org