

The Airports in Groveton (Part 2 of 2)

As mentioned in the September issue of the Groveton newsletter, Groveton was involved the growth of the country and military events. That newsletter addressed items pertaining to both World War activities and the establishment of the airports. This issue addresses items after World War II.



Map depicting the Groveton Airports and runways

At the close of World War II, the Hybla Valley Airport (also known as Alexandria Airport) was reopened as a commercial airport. In 1945, Bob Ashburn started Ashburn Flying Service at the Hybla Valley Airport.

Changes were taking place in the Groveton community. The Huntley House (built in 1825 by Thompson Mason, who was the grandson of the illustrious statesman George Mason IV of Gunston Hall and author of the Virginia Declaration of Rights) was sold to Colonel and Mrs. Ranson G. Amlong. The house would be designated as a historic landmark in 1972 by the National Park Service. Families from other states were moving into the Groveton and surrounding communities. One family that lived here inadvertently created a Groveton landmark. It was Benjamin F. and Hellen L. (Bishop) Griffin who came here from North Carolina and decided to open a family restaurant on the corner of Route 1 and Beacon Hill Road. The restaurant was strategically located across from the Beacon Air Field and opened its doors on February 15, 1947 under the name "Dixie Pig Barbecue Restaurant." The Dixie Pig Restaurant featured the area's famous pork or beef barbecue sandwiches; and people throughout the area knew and loved the family atmosphere and food. The restaurant was a friendly gathering-place for the Groveton residents and for families traveling down Route 1 (it was torn down ca 1996 and replaced with a Rite Aid). The restaurant was managed by residents in Groveton and nearby communities. Mrs. Mary (Bishop) Finks (sister of Hellen L. (Bishop) Griffin and wife of Louis Finks, a Fairfax County traffic officer) was the night manager. The Bishop family and the Finks family stayed in the Groveton area and one of the Finks' daughters, Frances (Finks) Buckman was the grandmother of Francis Jean Carper (now Jean Bailes) who is a Groveton resident on Collard St. Frances Buckman was a member of Groveton's Christ

Church (now known as St. Mark's Episcopal Church) as is her granddaughter, Jean Bailes and her family.

By 1949, Route 1 (also known as Snake Hill by Groveton residents) was a 2-lane highway, shopping was in the city of Alexandria, and water still came from wells. There were now 5 small houses on Grove Road; one of the homes was the Abner home (on the corner of Grove Road and Spring Drive). The area was still wooded with a narrow dirt road. At the foot of Spring Drive hill heading west was the Patterson's dairy farm (the farm and stable extended from the end of Spring Drive heading west and the house can still be seen in a wooded lot off of Harrison's Lane). Almost every day, some of the Patterson's cattle would pay the residents of Grove Road and Spring Drive a visit. Mrs. Abner of Grove Road said that Mrs. Patterson and her daughter would ride their horses over to Grove Road and drive the cows back home.

It was in 1950 that Hybla Valley Airport was sold to a developer with a lease for W.F.P. Reid (longtime Groveton resident and aviation enthusiast) to continue to operate the airport until 1955. After 32 years of operation, the Hybla Valley Airport was closed and homes were constructed on its land and the paved runways. To retain memory of the airport, the housing developer named streets after the aircraft manufacturers, e.g., Lockheed Blvd., Piper Lane, Convair Dr., Grumman Place, Fairchild Dr., Stinson Rd., and Northrop Rd.

The 1950s brought new visions to the country, but with those new visions, came both good and bad changes to the Groveton community. Farming was declining, cornfields were disappearing, air traffic was increasing, vehicular traffic was increasing, and private homes were being built on acreage once owned by the early Groveton families. One of the first areas to undergo this progress was Groveton along with Hollin Hall, and Plymouth Haven. The wooded and pastured areas of Groveton were removed and more homes were built on Collard St., Spring Dr., Arundel Ave. (formally known as Hillcrest), Ridge Dr. (formally known as Valley View Drive for its scenic view from the top of the hill looking south and west), and Clayborne St. (formally known as Lee Street). Homeowners began to fence in their yards, plant grass and life became much more comfortable. The land in Mount Vernon was parceled and homes were built in the nearby Groveton communities of Bucknell Manor, Hollin Hills, Collingwood, Waynewood, Stratford, Riverside, and other areas in Mount Vernon.

More and more families were driving on the roads and needed places to "stay over." The use of the automobile changed where people could live and visit. This new style of transportation created the need for motels to be built along Route One. These motels or tourist inns catered to the families visiting Washington D.C., Alexandria, Mount Vernon, Gunston Hall, among other areas. Beside the need for a tourist lodge or a traveler's inn, as they were called, restaurants and gas stations began to populate the Route One Corridor. The last Groveton airport was losing its attraction and most airplanes were flying into other larger airports.

W.F.P. Reid, Sr., the well-known Fairfax County business leader for real estate and construction, an aviation enthusiast (responsible for the Beacon Field Airport), the founder and president of Penn Daw Volunteer Fire Department, and a dedicated member of Groveton's St. Mark's Episcopal Church (formally Groveton Christ Church), died Dec 25, 1952. The Beacon Field Airport closed its hangar doors on September 5, 1959. The Reid family sold the land, which made way for the present Beacon Mall Shopping Center.