

# Snake Hill to Spring Bank



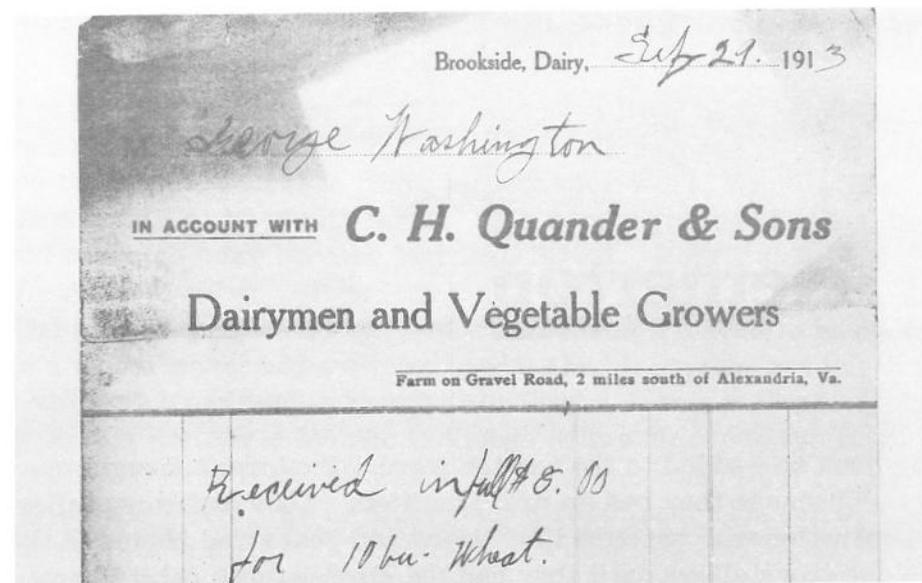
*The tree at Mt. Vernon Square reputedly mentioned in George Washington's journal*

# The Groveton Community

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A bill from C.H. Quander & Sons Dairy found in the files of the M.C. Keck family, Franklin St.

## Introduction

As the new Groveton steadily moved toward completion at its site on Quander Road, a class of English students of the old Groveton set out to write an account of the Groveton community. We made a list of people we thought could contribute. We interviewed and tape-recorded some of the community's most knowledgeable members. Our narrators answered questions we asked and always told us much more than we had thought to ask.

*Snake Hill to Spring Bank* is an edited version of the oral history tapes that will be available at the Groveton library. In editing these words we tried to be true to the character of the narrator even though we couldn't print every word. We have not indicated deletions of words. We have tried to reproduce accurately the spoken language of the narrators.

Certain themes and events reoccur in various interviews throughout the book. We have learned much about our community and the people who live here. We wish to thank the narrators. Without them this book would not have been possible.

# Nan Netherton

*is the director of historical  
research for the County of Fairfax*

We've been so wedded to the written word. Explorers thought the Indians dumb because they had an oral tradition. They had story tellers in every generation who practised for years and years and reviewed the stories with the older storytellers until they had the stories down pat. I know a descendent of the Sesquehanah Indians who lives in the southern part of Virginia now. He says that there are still a few storytellers left and if we get their stories we will have thousands of years of history of the Indians in this country because the stories were so accurate. It's important to get this recorded before anything happens to the storytellers and their stories.

There are various ways of preserving these things. If you want people to be candid sometimes they won't be candid if they know that it's going to be transcribed or read right away. There is an arrangement that you can legally put an embargo on releasing it until a certain year to suit the subject. After you interview people for a while you find out they tell some pretty basic things and they are controversial. If it were untrue it would be slander or gab. If it's true they couldn't be gotten legally for it. It makes people think twice if they think it's going to be transcribed and circulated to the public. This is one of the reasons for freezing some of these things for a few years, because if people feel they can be free to talk and say the things they really think or have experienced, then you're going to get a better record. In fairness you should try to get the other side, to get difference in opinions, because the opposite may give you the true picture but each separate one won't.

Your narrator may be telling you quite accurately what he saw, as Walter Ford explained when describing his interview with survivors of the Titanic. "Every lady I interviewed had left the sinking ship in the last lifeboat. As I later found out from studying the placement of the lifeboats no group of lifeboats was in view of another and each lady probably was in the last lifeboat she could see leaving the ship."

# Kent Crowther

I came here December 7, 1940, and have lived here since that time. My dad came here to open up the Torpedo plant. He was one of the four men picked to open the Torpedo plant to make torpedos for World War II. We bought a portion of the B. M. Smith farm. Nine people got together and bought lots to build on which later became Marshall Street. Now it's called Schooley Drive.

The airport was owned by Reid. There was a big white house on it sort of like a mansion. It had a big sun porch, and from that sun porch you could see the river because you were so high. It was built about where the filling station portion of Memco is though it was closer to the road. The Reids had lived there at least two generations and Reid remembered clearly before World War I. They built a road from Alexandria to Ft. Humphrey, which is now Ft. Belvoir. It was a dirt road about the equivalent of three lanes wide but just mud, and went past Mr. Reid's place where #1 highway is now. Just before World War II, his son became interested in aviation.

He was interested in aviation and so he built him an airport. It was a hill top and it was cleared. During World War II the Navy rented out the airport for pilot trainings, and also the area down in Hybla Valley.

Reid's son came back from the war and started a flying school there. He had hangars and fueling facilities, gasoline, and a small tower that had a beacon light. That's why it's called Beacon Hill. The beacon was on the nautical charts for the ships going up and down the Potomac River. The beacon was timed. They had it timed how long it was white and how long it would show red, so it could be distinguished from others along the river.

Reid leased the airport for a commercial airport after the war. It was approved as a school for the veterans. He had instructed flying for a long time. He flew an awful lot himself.

After Reid died his son closed this airfield and opened up an airfield on the other side of the river. Each morning he would take off and fly to the airport on the other side, and each night he would come back. No landing lights or anything, so he would use Marshall street as a guide.

During the time they were using the airport for pilot training they had a lot of accidents because the people who were learning to fly were not familiar with the airport. When they crossed #1 highway the cement and temperature would create air currents. Very often the planes would misjudge, hit the high power electric lines next to the airport, and flip over. We had one fellow that had just gotten himself a new plane -- he ran out of gas

just before he reached the airport and he tried to coast on in. He crashed into the bank and drove the nose back into the cockpit. I don't think the occupants were killed, but it certainly tore the plane to pieces. We had quite a few accidents like that.

They had two runways. One running parallel with #1 highway, the other perpendicular to #1, back where the cemetery is. There was a small plane coming in for a landing parallel to #1 highway. Using this runway they would have to fly right over the school (Groveton Elementary) or right next to the school. The house on the west side was hit by a plane which flew into the second floor and ended up inside the building. Nothing caught fire and luckily no one was up in the bedrooms. There was a lot of commotion about what might've happened because school was in session. But generally speaking, Beacon Hill was a safe airport.

The airport was never torn down. They just stopped using it and started building on to it. First thing that was built was the Giant. While the Giant was there Reid was still landing on the strip directly behind the Giant. Giant was built somewhere around the early 60's.

The B. M. Smith subdivision was on this side of the highway. When Grandma Almarine Crowther was on the school board she bought sites for 27 schools. But the Groveton Elementary School was here in 1940, and the old Mt. Vernon was just finished, and the only other school in the area was the old Lee-Jackson. They temporarily made a high school out of it until they could finish Mt. Vernon. Lee-Jackson is the school on Duke Street about where Quaker Lane comes in. Dean Crowther, my brother, went to Lee-Jackson. I went to Mt. Vernon and my graduating class was the first to go through all 4 years.

The Fire Department was started in the late 30's. I drove the new ambulance when we got here around 1941. That was more like a recreation center, they held dances and stuff in the top of the fire hall.

From the creek at the end of Memorial Street there were only about 3 houses on Viar's Hill, and from there to the river one or two old mansions were back there, but it was all wooded and a few meadows -- and I used to squirrel hunt. Back then it was permissible to hunt. I saw fox and used to hunt rabbits and squirrels in the area where we live. The Thorpe estate was one of those mansions. Then there was one white house and it had an apple and prune orchard -- raised plums -- 50 plum trees and 100 apple trees.

The area now Bucknell Manor was nothing but woods, and it had been willed to Bucknell University, and Bucknell University owned 1,000

acres. They sold the property. On that property was 2 springs, and where the church is, if you go down Bellevue Blvd. behind the church, was a natural spring, a pool of water about 12 ft. in diameter with rather huge trees around. The other is just off of Ft. Hunt Rd., back behind the library. That spring had a stone trough. We were told by the old-timers here that that was the way you had to go to get to Mt. Vernon. The people passing would stop to water their horses at the trough. That was still there when they were developing Bucknell.

There was a street car that came out here from Washington into Rosslyn and along Arlington Ridge Road. Then the line would go down the hill through Alexandria and then where Ft. Hunt forks, take to the left to Gum Springs on Sherwood Hall Lane. Where there aren't any roads, it went through the woods. The tracks are still here today on #1 highway between King Street and Duke Street. Then they had a station called Snowden's station. It was directly west of Ft. Hunt's fire station. There was a two-story country store there and in the bottom of it was the street car station. The last stop before Mt. Vernon Those tracks are probably still there, back in the woods.

We have a whole series of forts surrounding Washington, particularly along the river. At most of the high spots there was a Fort on top. The most accessible way into Washington was up the river. Right across from Ft. Washington was Ft. Hunt, and during World War II supplies were brought there by ships. They had a big pier out there. You can see some of the pilings now. Ft. Hunt was also used as a prisoner-of-war camp. I had to go in there during the war because I delivered newspapers and had a pass to deliver to all the forts.

Another less known fort was Fort Willard. If you go to Belle Haven there is a circle, and if you walk through the circle you'll find ditches and long trenches preserved the way the trenches were when it was used as a fort during the Civil War.

Ft. Lyon is at the crest of the hill, just at the north side of Penn Daw. A road went smack through the middle of it. They've now built a doctor's office on the right hand side. Immediately behind it you can find some trenches. We used to go down there and play cops and robbers, and they were good for that because you could run and dive over the ditches and roll into the trenches.

In 1812, when the British burned the capitol, a portion of the capitol steps were removed and brought to the mansion that was in the middle of the parking lot of K-Mart, before it was Spring Bank trailer camp.

They had what they called equal but separate, and the only High School

that blacks could go to was on in Manassas. They ran school buses from here. In fact, I drove the school bus part time to Manassas. It was a good trade school but not academically acceptable for college, but most blacks didn't go on to college anyway. The trade school was very valuable to them. The elementary school was at the end of Quander Road next to #1, but it was torn down about 1957. It was a one-room black school.

I can remember at Mt. Vernon High School, a black that tried to apply there was thrown out. So he and some lawyers went to Fairfax County and proved that he was not a black, in the sense that the state law had identified a black. He was Puerto Rican, and that technical difference allowed him to go to school.

Where the name Groveton came from I don't really know, but probably Mr. Reid had something to do with it. The people that settled out here came mostly because of the war effort. I would say nearly everybody that lived in this area moved there because they were working at the torpedo plant or Fort Belvoir. World War II was what built this place up. It was really a typical middle class area. There were very few people who had large salaries or any wealth at all, including old man Reid. He might have had a lot of land but that didn't mean he was wealthy. But old man Reid was on the board of supervisors and I can remember him having a difficult time paying his taxes, and most of the airport land was zoned farmland because of his being on the board of supervisors. He had it arranged that way.

Most of the people out here were the type that wanted some independence. They bought a small lot and constructed their own homes. Or else a community group would get together to assist in that construction and would build something tailored to what they could afford and materials that they could get hold of. That's probably why you don't find structured streets, curbs, guttering, sidewalks. My dad happened to help start a citizen association called Groveton Citizens' Association. They got together to get a lot of things accomplished.

The area where Belle View was built was all one big swamp except for a small part that was called New Alexandria. There must have been 50 houses in New Alexandria, most of which were built during the War. That was the only point that was probably high enough and dry enough to build on; from New Alexandria south was all swamp land. Landrith bought the land and he cut big ditches to carry the water from Belle View around Ft. Hunt clear out to the river. Now the Belle Haven area was built up during World War I. It was on a hill, and I guess the people came from Alexandria the ones who were more wealthy were buying hill top property that had a view. The

army built big sewage lines along the edge of Cameron Station and then straight into the river. People in Belle Haven petitioned the federal government to permit them to connect onto that sewer. Belle Haven was the first area in Fairfax County to have sewage established.

In 1942 we had a flood. I rode a bicycle down toward the bridge that goes over Little Hunting Creek. I rode the bicycle until the water got up above the handlebars, then got off of it and waded as far as Huntington Avenue. Before I reached Blunt's Lane the water was up over my bike and you could see nothing. Both the bridge from Mt. Vernon Blvd. and #1 highway were under water.

Mt. Vernon Parkway was owned by the National Park Service. I believe it was probably built about 1930 and 1933 because they had difficulty putting in that bridge there. It was nothing but mud. They would fill it in and then in about a year it would start sinking so they would drill holes in the concrete, and I can remember -- for years they would go in there with a truck and put a hose-like nozzle down into the hole and pump mud into it. Then they got wise and started pumping cement.

I can remember one of the guys that lived down near Woodlawn. That property had been in his family for several generations, and he owned most of the property in back of Woodlawn - probably about 3,000 acres. Some of his kinfolk kept diaries, and he used to come to our place occasionally and he would bring the diaries with him and read to us. George Washington would canoe over to about where the old grist mill is now and through that creek. He could follow that creek across #1 highway and back over toward Telegraph, and then North almost to Hybla Valley by canoe to check on his land and cattle. This was one of the stories he told out of his diary.

From Collard Street down to Hybla Valley, that hill was known as "Snake Hill". It wasn't straight like it is today, and when we came here it was a winding, snake-like hill. It was a very difficult road for trucks. That is the only road that trucks could come up from the South to New York and the trucks were not of very big horse power and didn't have the gear ratios they have today. They would overload them, especially during the war. So the trucks would try to come up that hill and they would creep. They could hardly make it.

It was a common thing for us to go back behind St. Louis Church and sit there on Sunday watching the accidents. It was also a favorite past time of the Groveton kids when the truck loads of watermelons came up from the South. The trucks would move so slowly that they would catch one that only had one person in the cab, and would get one boy up on the truck tossing watermelons to 5 or 6 boys below. You could practically unload the truck while he was trying to make it up Snake Hill.

# Mildred Tibbs

*Home Economics teacher, Groveton*

We were transferred here in 1961. The fifth day we were here we bought a house on Muddy Hole Farm. My daughter became very interested in this historical area. As a project in her world history class, she wrote a history of Gum Springs. Not knowing anybody in Gum Springs, I called the Methodist minister. He gave her a list of names to contact. He showed me that the Woodlawn Baptist Church was the earliest freedman's church in Gum Springs. The Methodist church was one of the earliest ones, too.

The first name the minister gave Margaret to visit was a Mrs. Holland who lived in the gray house next door to the Methodist parsonage. We called Mrs. Holland and made an appointment to visit her. I drove over there and it was a real bad rainy day. Muddy Hole Farm, where we live, is right across the creek from Gum Springs. It's always been a wooded area since the Civil War. It has springs and very compact soil. You can dig a deep hole and it'll fill up with water; the drainage problems are terrific.

So I said, "Margaret, this is the place, and I'll sit here and wait for you." She went into Mrs. Holland's house and she stayed and stayed. I got out, but here was this mud everywhere. I called her. It was getting dark and nothing happened. The paper boy came sloshing along in boots. I said, "Will you go to the back door of this lady's house and see if Margaret Tibbs is there and tell her her mother is waiting on her?" He went to the back door, he knocked, and then he walked away. He never did come back to my car. A lady came out of another house and I said, "Is Margaret Tibbs over there?" and she said, "No, ma'am, we don't even know her." In a minute here came Margaret out of Mrs. Holland's house. She got in the car with me. She was so excited, she was just brimming over. Mrs. Holland had given her a long list of names to look up, places to go and other historical points about Gum Springs. She said, "Mother, I heard you every time you called, but I was so interested in what she was saying I just kept sitting there."

Mrs. Holland had told Margaret that all of the area in Gum Springs was deeded to her grandfather. I believe his last name was Ford (West Ford). Her grandfather had been Bushrod Washington's overseer. Mrs. Holland told Margaret that the original area of Gum Springs was a watering place

for horses between Woodlawn Plantation and Alexandria. The old road came up that hill and right at the bottom of the hill, by Route 1 about where that old filling station was before they tore it down, was a huge springs. They stopped there. It was a wooded area with gum trees. She said that lots of those old cedar trees lined the old road. The old cedar trees that they cut down to build Sherwood Hall Lane were roots of the original property line that outlined Gum Springs. They could've put the road on each side of them and left those cedar trees in the middle.

When we went to the curator (at Mt. Vernon) two or three days after, he met her at the gate. He explained to her that Mrs. Holland's husband was a guard at the tomb (George Washington's). Some of the relatives of the original overseer were still working at Mt. Vernon. He got out the will and he read it to her. One of the things it said was that all of his slaves on the mansion farm should be released when and if they were able to support themselves.

Bushrod Washington was the only nephew that carried the Washington name, so he inherited the Mansion House farm. But all the other land went in every direction and he had all of the slaves to feed. They were skilled, but he had to feed them, take care of them, and house them until they were able to make it on their own. That just about broke Bushrod Washington. The farm never did pay for itself. He was a sick old man and he didn't have a whole lot of money. This was way before the Civil War.

The story went that he made a deal with his overseer, who was black, that he knew he was going to die and if this overseer would manage the mansion house farm, take care of all these people, and take care of Mrs. Bushrod Washington until she died, he would deed this portion of Gum Springs to him. When Bushrod Washington died that was in his will. Mrs. Bushrod Washington lived two days longer, and the overseer got the land. He was among the first black men who owned land in Virginia. Bushrod Washington the fifth lives here on Popkins Lane. His daughters have graduated from Groveton High School.

I know one man who paid for his house in our sub-division. That was a big thing, no one had ever walked in and paid cash for the whole house, but he did. He hung his deed on the wall and it does go back all the way to Augustus Washington. He had sold his house in California and he walked in and wrote a check for this house, so he's got a clear title. His title serves all the way back, and it says Muddy Hole Farm.

# Edith Sprouse

*is an area historian and vice-chairman  
of the Fairfax County Historical Commission.*

The name Groveton seems to have come from Groveton Farm. The name goes back to about 1870, I believe, and I think it included the land where the high school is now built. It also included the area on the west side of Route I. It was owned by a family named Collard. That's where Collard Street got its name and just off of Collard Street, there is a little graveyard in the yard of one of the houses, with, I think, two Collard tombstones. Collard may also have had a dairy farm. Groveton had a citizens organization back in the 1920's, one woman told me, but then it died away; and that was long before most citizen's associations came to be in this neighborhood.

When we moved into Hollin Hills we were the last house on the street and the people who lived behind us never spoke to us because, we were told, we spoiled the view. I must confess that when someone built a house below us we were slightly the same way. The first families moved in about 1950. For a long time I wrote the (Hollin Hills) Bulletin. The editor of the Bulletin gets a box full of old copies. I took out excerpts of what was happening when they built the community, how bitter the architect was because he had designed all these beautiful contemporary houses and people were putting up clotheslines and hanging up their laundry and spoiling the beautiful design!

In the 1930's, the idea was to make a George Washington National Airport at Hybla Valley and it was to be an international terminal for dirigibles. A survey was made all along the East Coast of the air currents. The topography there was found to be the most suitable spot. They had a very fancy dedication and they got some surveying spikes that belonged to George Washington. They were all ready to set up business at the time of the Hindenburg disaster. That put the quietus to talk of lighter-than-air-craft.

About 10 years ago, for some reason I got fascinated by ghosts, and so I went to the files of the Washington Post and I read any information they had printed on ghosts, and I talked to people. The newest ghost I could find had appeared on Telegraph Road in 1961. You know where the Coast Guard Station is? There's a gravel pit across from it, and there was a marvelous clipping in the newspaper that the police had been called in to investigate this ghost who'd been seen in the gravel pit. He was six feet tall and he had a black stovepipe hat, a black cape, black pants and black boots. His face was very cut and scratched. They interviewed the man at the Groveton Substation. He took a very dim view of the whole thing, but said, "We're

here for law enforcement, and if the ghost is here we've got to check it out."

Most ghosts were quite a bit older than that. The closest one is at Stoneybrooke on Telegraph Road. The man who was the resident caretaker there has said that they hear doors that won't stay closed or open and they've heard lots of strange noises. Before Stoneybrooke was turned into a community center, the people who lived there said that they saw a coach and a team of white horses going around the driveway when it was foggy. (I've found there are certain conditions that have to be met before you see them, because more than once people have said, "Well, you only see them when it's foggy.") The man who lived at Stoneybrooke was Commodore Walter Brooke, in the Virginia Navy during the Revolution. I don't know whether he was the man in the coach and white horse who was going around the driveway or not, but the park employees still say there are some kind of strange, ghostly noises going on at night at Stoneybrooke.

A little farther down the road, down toward Hayfield there is supposed to be seen, also in the fog, a horseman with a beautiful young girl riding behind him - only the horseman has no head. He was eloping with this girl, and in his great haste, he careened right into the fork of a tree. That decapitated him. I was told that Mrs. Frances Nevitt, who lives down on Telegraph Road, might know some more about this ghost story, but I've never asked her. She has taught in the Fairfax County Schools for many years, and her house goes back to 1830-1840.

Of course George Washington is a natural for ghosts, but I've only heard two stories about him. Most of my ghosts, are along Telegraph Road for some reason, I guess because it's a very old road that the ghosts just kinda congregated along. They called it 'the back road', but it was the major thoroughfare in the 18th century. There weren't any front roads. You know how it got its name?

Evidently from the telegraph line - the second telegraph line in the country?

Yes, 1846 - a telegraph line to Georgia and New Orleans.

There's another house on Telegraph Road, called Belvale, and I went to talk to those people because I had heard they had had a ghost. They had not one but two. When they first moved in the fuses kept blowing and they blamed that on a ghost, and then they had a housewarming party, and the man who owned the house decided he would scare everybody. He dressed as a ghost and went outside waving his sheet, only he was somebody else over there waving their sheet, and it wasn't anybody at the party, so he was a little worried.

But their daughter, so they told me, had seen George Washington sitting

on the sofa reading a book. Her mother said "Well, I really think that she did see something because she's not very imaginative and she didn't tell me about this for a long time, and finally she said "Yes, I've seen George Washington - he was sitting there on the sofa reading a book!" Well, I thought this was fascinating and her mother said the daughter would be home in a minute. This is the closest I got to somebody who'd actually seen a ghost, let alone George Washington.

I heard a noise in the driveway, and into the house came a young woman with a very ashamed face, saying "Somebody's car is in the driveway and I ran into it," and it was my car. That put the end to the story about the ghost. I was too bothered about the car to ask her whether she'd seen the ghost.

Mt. Eagle was torn down about 1968 and that was very old - built around 1790 by Bryan Fairfax, son of William Fairfax of Belvoir, and who became the ninth Lord Fairfax; he was also a minister at Christ Church in Alexandria. I think his family had it until about 1830, and then there was a man named Courtland Johnson who came down from New York before the Civil War and lived there. It was a country club about 1920 or 1930. It was supposed to be very exclusive - that only first families of Virginia belonged to. I guess first families of Virginia didn't want to make it go, because it folded up. The story was that when the club went out of business, the members cast lots to see who would buy it, and a Dr. Fifer was the man who purchased it. They lived there for 20 years or more. They moved away, and it was empty for a number of years and badly vandalized. Finally, it was just torn down. I talked to Mrs. Fifer a couple of times on the phone and she said she was not interested in any publicity about her house. All I got from her was that there had been a lot of trenches on the property, Civil War trenches, and that her husband had filled them in because the horses were falling into them, and they didn't want the horses to break their legs. I also heard that Mrs. Fifer was a great one for redecorating and that she'd made many changes in the house.

I brought you a picture of one of the early residents (of Gum Springs) which appeared in this book in 1870, and there are still descendants from the Ford family. This is West Ford, a rather well-known gentleman. He came to Mt. Vernon about 1802, and was a body servant to Judge Bushrod Washington, although the members of the family that I've spoken to tell me that it was George Washington that he was a servant of, so I'm not sure. But anyway, he came there very early, and he was freed by Judge Bushrod Washington, who had inherited Mt. Vernon from George. About 1829 when Judge Washington died he left some land in his will, and West Ford also bought some at Gum

Springs. I think Ford bought some 112 acres down at Gum Springs, which he sold. Then he purchased from Mr. Samuel Collard another tract in the same area, and that was about 200 acres. Ford stayed at Mt. Vernon after Judge Washington died. Then about 1840 he moved over to live on his own acreage and then he came back to Mt. Vernon during the Civil War.

Speaking of West Ford, there is a ghost story in connection with him. He had been over to a party on the other side of the river and he came back after having a little more to drink than he should. He went near the deer park at Mt. Vernon, and he saw a lady dressed in sparkling white with a red necklace. At this point a deer came thundering along, moaned, fell to the ground and attacked West Ford. West said that he saw the ghost had leaned down and drunk the blood from the deer and the next morning West had teeth marks all over him.

The Ford family lived in the Gum Springs neighborhood ever since then, and Mrs. Saunders, who I talked to about five years ago, her husband was the great-great-grandson of West Ford. Mr. Saunders and another man named Shriver built the apartments that are down there. The Ford family gave the land for the Baptist Church, and in 1888 John Ford gave the land for the first school down there. Mrs. Saunders told me it was right at the corner of U. S. 1 and Sherwood Hall Lane. They've had a building there that's been a lot of things - it was a meat market for a while, then it was a crab house.

Mrs. Saunders said that the story in their family was that West Ford was a descendent of George Washington. She said she wasn't bragging about this, but that everybody in their family had always had kind of a quick temper. They all have the same shape nose and they all have a passionate interest in education. When her daughter gets mad, she looks just like George Washington. She doesn't seem especially anxious to claim George as an ancestor; she was just telling me the story that had come down through her family. I've heard this story several times, that George Washington was Ford's father, and I've even heard that that's where he got his fatal illness, that he went over in the snow to see one of the slaves in the Gum Springs area, and caught pneumonia.

When we moved here - down hill from our house, there was just woods, a very nice grove of pine trees and a fairly clean creek that little boys could look for frogs in. Most of that has now disappeared, even in the short time that we've been here.

# Martin Morgan

*has been involved in the Hybla Valley Citizens Association*

We were concerned with the real estate development and the problems that were created as the surrounding area was developed. We had just a few houses up and down Route 1 till about 15 years ago. In '52, they planned the Hybla Valley Development. Banks and Lee did the developing. In the sixties they built the apartment nearby, and of course, more development on Route 1.

The valley didn't have any substantial development up until 15 years ago. They started and they overdeveloped it in some ways. I mean, there's some question whether you need a gas station every 50 feet. We have a lot of little stores but we haven't anything equivalent to say Garfinckels or Hecht. That is the weakness now.

The Hybla Valley airport was supposed to go in around the 40's or so, when the Zeppelins were around. That was to go in just below where the plaza is now and where the old airport was. All of the shopping center down there was an airport. The cement runway is still there I believe and that was used in World War II.

There is no good highway in this immediate area between Telegraph Road up to the Betlway. There is a definite need for a crossroad. Everything's going North and South, and we need something to shunt off the people going East and West.

The government, you know, owns 1200 acres, or did own 1200 acres. They had a lot of buried antennae in part of it. It all belonged to Ft. Belvoir, and now it's become a park (Huntley Meadows). It's being developed. I understand there's even a herd of deer in there. The main entrance would be from King's Highway, but we will have an entrance for Hybla Valley and the people in the apartments. (A road) can't go straight up through the park, now that it's a park.

There are several problems. The land is slightly swampy there. We can't straighten out up through the present Harrison Lane because the Huntley place has become a national monument, so I don't know what's gonna happen.

I always feel this part of the county was neglected. We have to chase too far to get things. While it may not be practical, it would be ideal to split the county and have a whole set of county activities down here.

The first white man, I imagine to see it was Captain John Smith. After they founded Jamestown he started to explore the Potomac River, and I suppose he was the first to ever get up into this country. Fairfax County used to be Prince William, and Hybla Valley farm was the biggest farm

anywhere in the state of Virginia at one time, I believe.

Very quickly you lose information about an area, you see. Fifty, seventy-five years -- you've lost probably all information back of that. Say you have some knowledge of what your grandfather knew, but not much back of that. I've been working on a genealogy, that's how I get into so much of this.

# Ethel Wilkinson

*would like to refer readers to a history of Sherwood Farm written by her husband, Charles Kirk Wilkinson in the Journal of the Historical Society of Fairfax County, 1964-65.*

The Dairy started before I ever came here, it was called Sherwood Farm Dairy. They retailed milk in Alexandria. They even took milk to the hospital until the city passed the regulation that it had to be pasteurized.

After World War II came, and the help was scarce, they gave up the retail milk business. They took it in 10-gallon cans to the Alexandria Dairy.

When my husband's grandmother and grandfather built this house in 1859 they named it Sherwood. All the Sherwood names have come from that. I always said they must have been reading Robin Hood. My husband's grandmother was the daughter of the man that lived in Hollin Hall. They bought this acreage from the original Hollin Hall that George Mason had. Thompson Mason, the son of George Mason, lived in Spring Bank.

In the beginning, Sherwood Hall Lane was just a gravel road called Accotink Turnpike. It was said that Washington went to Alexandria on it.

One interesting thing about this house is, there was not but one child in each generation -- and nobody ever moved out. Everybody stayed in the same house, and kept the farm.

In those days, when an animal died, there were woods off to the west and sometimes they'd just drag them off to the woods. I often wonder who found cow bones in their basement.

When we started to build on the hill at one time George Mason's property, they started to dig down to make a basement and they found bones of people. They even found one with every bone in it. Somebody called the Smithsonian, and they sent a woman down. They took the whole skeleton back to the Smithsonian from off top of that hill.

As long as it was a farm they had wheat, rye, and oats. They thrashed the wheat with a big old thrashing machine. The land had very good soil because they had cows, and they enriched the land.

We had three tenant houses on this farm for the families that worked there.

There was a Sherwood Hall. My husband's mother, Mrs. Frank Wilkinson, was a member of the King's Daughters, and that hall was built on the property. The Wilkinson's gave the land to the King's Daughters for as long as it remained a King's Daughters hall. When it ceased to be a King's Daughters Hall, the land would revert to the farm. That was in 1946.



*Popkins Farm*

*photo by David Brenner*

## Katherine Popkins

My father-in-law bought the land, and then when he died it was divided among the seven children. My husband Earl Popkins had to borrow money from the bank to pay off the heirs, and we finally had to pay off the bank. The land was 365 acres all together. Not a thing, then, on that side of the hill. We could go from here to Alexandria 'cause when they were fixing #1, we used to go that way with our milk from the dairy, and we'd go through our land to Mr. Simpson's, and then on over to Fort Hunt Road, then into Alexandria, and there was just one house over there. This is Clifton Farm, and I understand that it was part of George Mason's place.

My husband was three years old when he came here and the house was already built then. We used to could see the Potomac River from our porch, but the trees have grown so much we can't see nothing, even out on the hill. Out on the lawn, I should say -- we always called it the hill. We used to could see a part of Mount Vernon, and of course, when the boat went down the river we could see that all lit up going to Marshall Hall. We can't see a scratch of the river now, cause of all the trees.

We had a pond down there for the cows to drink out of. That used to be where people used to ice skate. It's a wreck down there now. You hate to go out there, it's just terrible.

We used to fish in the pond, we had water lilies down there too. And we used to have ducks there, but they didn't stay. I don't know whether people had duck dinner or if they flew away. At that time we raised turkeys, ducks and pigs. But we're not allowed to raise pigs now, cause of all the buildings around here.

We ran the dairy until 1961, and then Mr. Popkins sold all of his cows. We board horses -- that's our living, boarding horses. I have 22 horses here. I feed them hay, grain and straw. The girls take care of them, curry 'em, ride 'em.

The other evenin' we had to call the fire department. Some kids -- I shouldn't say kids -- were using motorcycles, and you could hear them.

# John Stevens

*is grounds superintendent at  
Mt. Vernon Unitarian Church.*

How long have you been working here at the church?

Forty-nine years.

What farms were nearby?

Well, you had Sherwood Hall, which was Kirk Wilkinson, and you had Earl Popkins. That's what surrounded this place. Burt Ayres was between here and #1 highway. The rest of the property between here and Alexandria was Bucknell, which wasn't farmland at all.

How have you gotten along all these years with the kids that roam the church ground?

Sometimes fine. There are too many of them to complain too much about them.

What is your favorite job here at the church?

All of it.

Can you tell us any important history about the church?

As I understand it was a land grant to George Mason, and then it came to possibly the Thompson family, and then Wilson in 1911. Thorpe came in 1941 and the church in '59.

Is it true there was once a pretty bad drug problem here on the church grounds?

There could've been. Ask the police.

What do you think of the new houses closing in on the church?

I don't think anybody can afford to have vacant property in Fairfax County, not for long. But I'd rather see it open.

# John Wells

*lawyer and minister of the Unitarian church at Reston,  
previously served at the Mount Vernon Unitarian church.*

The land was part of a grant that was originally owned by George Mason. As you know, George Mason was one of the significant persons in Virginia History. He was the father of the Bill of Rights in Virginia, and subsequently the Bill of Rights in the United States Constitution. He lived at Gunston Hall, down below Mt. Vernon. But he also owned land north of the Mt. Vernon properties.

He had intended to build a house for his son on the highest point along the Potomac -- where the Mt. Vernon Unitarian church is now located. The name of the plantation would have been Hollin Hall. You notice that many of the areas around here come from that name George Mason was going to give to this property. They built Little Hollin Hall, which is located just off of what is now Sherwood Hall Lane. George Mason's son died and they never completed Hollin Hall.

The property was in various hands. But during World War I there was a very interesting person named Mr. Wilson. He bought the property, a mile square. It was called a section. That is, it was a mile in each section. The center of that is where the Mt. Vernon Unitarian is now located. He looked up in the Archives and determined what he thought would've been the type of house George Mason would have built. He brought in modern plumbing and electricity. . . it's a very interesting house.

If you go there and look, you'll see the two big chimneys on the Big House. They're H's, and it was called Hollin Hall, as it would have been had George Mason built it. The house was built in 1919.

Wilson was a very interesting person. He was head of American Mfg. Co.. He also owned electric companies. . . that subsequently split and became PEPCO and VEPCO. He was the owner of the electric street car company that was involved in running out the tracks that came out to Mt. Vernon. They were going to sell property way out from Washington to retired people from his companies. There're a lot of those little hunks of land that still tie up the land development.

Now this property came together where Gum Springs is. George Washington, as you know, owned that land, and West Ford, who was George Washington's son by a slave, inherited a lot of that property. Fordson Road which runs through there now used to be U.S. 1, and it came on the back end of the Wilson property.

Wilson traded all over the world and he had a knack for giving things to his wife. He would bring her back perfumes and trees from all over the world. That's the reason for the many varied kinds of trees that grow around the church property. Wilson brought those back from Japan, the Orient or from Europe.

The Wilsons decided they wanted to be as authentic as possible so they went all over Virginia getting brick. The brick there is all pre-Colonial, wider than bricks now. He also was a real nut about boxwood. The boxwood is the slow-growing English Boxwood, gathered from various parts of Virginia. There's no way to replace it, it's very, very old.

Wilson was known as the man in the green hat. He was also a lobbyist, had lots of friends. President Hoover came out and spent the night out there. He was a good friend of Wilson's. Also the Vice-President under Roosevelt, they called him Black Jack Garner. He was a good friend of Wilson and he used to come out frequently. Wilson died in 1934. His wife died the same year. They had no children. The property went to their nephews. It was quite a wild place from 1934 to 1941. Some of the older police officers in Fairfax County will tell you that they had some wild parties.

In 1941 President Roosevelt came out (to look at) the property, and determined that it should be purchased for the Norwegian Royal family in exile. Remember during World War II the Germans had taken over Norway? There'd been a big blitzkrieg of Oslo? Well, the property is in the flight pattern of National Airport. (The royal family) had been in the blitz and were terrified of the planes going overhead, so they asked not to live there.

There was a man by the name of Thorpe who had just bought a piece of property in Maryland called Poke's Hills, still owned by the government. Thorpe was convinced that it would be appropriate for him to buy this property, and sell to the government Poke's Hill. He moved to (Wilson) property in 1941, lived there until his death in 1954.

Thorpe's widow sold the property to the Mt. Vernon Unitarian Church in 1959. During the time the nephews were there, between 1934 and 1941, they sold a lot of property -- that's the way they more or less supported themselves. It had been reduced to 80 acres from the original 1 mile.

Although Hollin Hills and Hollin Hall used to belong to the same estate, it was all sold off. The church never owned all of that. They could only afford to buy 10 acres, which included the buildings that were there.

The big house, or what they call the mansion, has quite a lot of rooms in it. On the second floor alone there were five bedrooms. Next to that is what they call a carriage house. Now it was not old enough that you really had horses there but it was built in the style of a carriage house. They kept trucks in there that they used for work on the farm.

When they first dug the well there they had a windmill that pumped the water. That's why the street coming in is called Windmill Lane. The windmill isn't there now.

They did a lot of farming, and you know the big-breasted turkey, the one you buy now, was developed there on that property by Mr. Thorpe. He felt that one of his contributions to the war effort would be that type of work.

In between the Mansion and the guest house are a series of formal gardens, with brick making a circle at the end. These are used now at the

church for various functions outside.

It's fascinating in that there were never any children that lived there. The Wilsons had no children, the Thorpes did not have children that ever lived there. The church has made great use of the property for children as well as for adults and everybody.

The church grounds did become quite a distribution point for illegal drugs -- primarily marijuana, though there were some cocaine busts, and some LSD. There never was any heroin up there to anyone's knowledge. I have defended a lot of kids that have been involved up there so I know a lot about the drug situation. It started back in 1967 -- you couldn't convince anybody those days that marijuana was anything other than the worst thing ever was. Anyhow, the kids used this place as a distribution corner -- even to the point where there was a notice in underground newspapers in California that the place to get your drugs, when going through this area, was the church property. This put the church in a very, very difficult position. How are you going to reach kids? How are you going to help them with these problems and at the same time call the police? It reached a point where it got totally out of hand. The church had to become very strict. . . to call the police all the time. It reached a point where it was no longer kids in the neighborhood who were using the place to smoke pot. There were distributors coming from Philadelphia and New York and Baltimore. That were coming in selling the drugs and a shipment of cocaine would come in and this would be one of the places that it was distributed.

You hear a lot of people in the community who talk about the fact that the church was involved in this. It never, in fact it was doing everything in its power to work with the kids, work with the police, to cooperate with everyone in a helpful sort of way. Every kid going had his own separate getaway with all the bamboo and all the woods.

There have been some interesting developments there. CORE, which was one of the early civil rights organizations, needed a place to train Freedom Riders. So the church did it. They were investigated by the FBI, by the Fairfax Board of Supervisors and everything else, but they went ahead and did it.

Various places around on church property have been used for drama productions. The bowl was used first, then out in front of the church, the circular boxwood -- a stage was set up there. The church had some really big name entertainment up there to make money. They didn't make nearly as much money as they thought because of the rain and cancellations. But the idea was that a theatre should be there. Allen Stevens was really the

sparkplug behind the Boxwood Theatre.

The Ft. Hunt Co-operative Preschool was established in '61 or '62. And was begun as a co-operative preschool. . . the mothers come in and helped the teachers on a scheduled basis. So you have had graduating classes from Groveton who graduated from the Ft. Hunt preschool.

During the winter time you could see the Potomac right over to Maryland. You could see all the way across Hybla Valley, all the way out. Now if you go out on the road you can see all the way into the District. . . the Washington Monument, anything from up there.

Lots of kids come out and climb the big pine trees out in front. The oak trees are harder to climb. The trees I enjoyed the most were the Indian cigar trees which most people don't know. . . I came into a board meeting of the church one time, got the Indian cigars, and cut 'em off just right and asked everybody to light up.

## Nellie Quander

*is principal at the Hybla Valley Elementary school, and daughter-in-law of the late James Quander who was one of the original owners of the Spring Bank land, site of Bryant Intermediate and the new Groveton.*

We found the family is originally from Upper Marlboro area of Maryland. Another Quander in the family found court records near upper Marlboro of Quanders -- that's supposed to be the line. Records on black people at that time would have been very poorly kept. In the 1800 census a John Quander in Maryland was, at that time in his 60's listed in 1800 as a free black. But any black who would have been free after 1860 -- census takers may or may not have gone to get information about them. 1860 you have them, and 1870 you don't. As you trace back you get these spotty periods because there was this (maybe) disinterest or feeling that "It doesn't matter if they're on it or not." It seems to me that everybody came from that Susan Quander Marlboro family. But one of the Quanders goes back to 1700's.

The boundaries now would be the land from #1 highway to Beacon Hill Road, running along Quander Road as the northern boundary, and probably along Oak Drive would be the southern boundary. There are a number of Quanders along there, and to know specifically how much is in

each land area is very hard.

I do feel if eminent domain proceedings had not been started against them for the property, I don't think my husband's father would have ever considered getting rid of it.

Well, basically (eminent domain) is a proceeding saying that "this land is needed for public welfare," and you know, they'll go to court to actually take the land if you can't come to an out-of-court settlement. For instance, if a highway is coming through and someone doesn't want to sell for the highway, then the state may feel that it's necessary to take it, and pay them what would be considered an adequate price. But my father-in-law -- he loved farming, and it was his life.

How did the Quanders feel about the proposed change in the use of Quander Road School? There was a lot of hassle.

Lots of times people who have interest in given situations manage to talk to people who really have no interest to make them feel they do. Now, there was no proposal to get rid of Quander Road School. The proposal was to change the use of Quander Road School from its present kind of facility as a regular public school into a use as a special education center. As a Quander, or anyone else, I felt that was a worthy use.

I think, in that particular case, that many of the Quanders who did speak were not very well informed. Many of them who did appear at that school board meeting didn't have any children in that school, and did not really understand what the issue was. It couldn't have been that great a concern over busing children from Quander to Belle View -- when those Quanders had their children bused from where they lived past schools down to Drew Smith or up to Manassas to high school. Nobody who now is so interested came across that highway then to say "This is an unfair thing for you to have to bus your children to Manassas." And yet, if their children were going to be bused from Quander to Belle View, then this was a great travesty of justice.

I would have called Spring Bank the areas on both sides, or maybe for a half-mile or so on both sides of Quander Road. When I first knew it there were the homes of about 4 or 5 Quanders along there. As you come down Quander from Route 1 there is a house that is sitting up on the hill there, behind the bowling alley. The next one would have been as you crossed the little bridge and started up and you'd get just to the crest of the hill if you were going toward Beacon Hill. Now there's another large white one there -- she's recently cleared off a lot of the shrubs and trees. There's a large white house that was there, my husband's home place would have been there.

There was a spring down there, a very large spring, very clear. People came from around with containers to get the spring water. We would occasionally walk out from Alexandria, some times like Easter Monday, just to walk up to the spring through the woods.

I'd say 25 years ago, certainly thirty years ago, it wasn't considered a necessarily desirable thing. You had transportation problems, the closest grocery stores and all might've been down at King and Washington, and so to live in the suburbs thirty years ago was not necessarily a desirable thing.

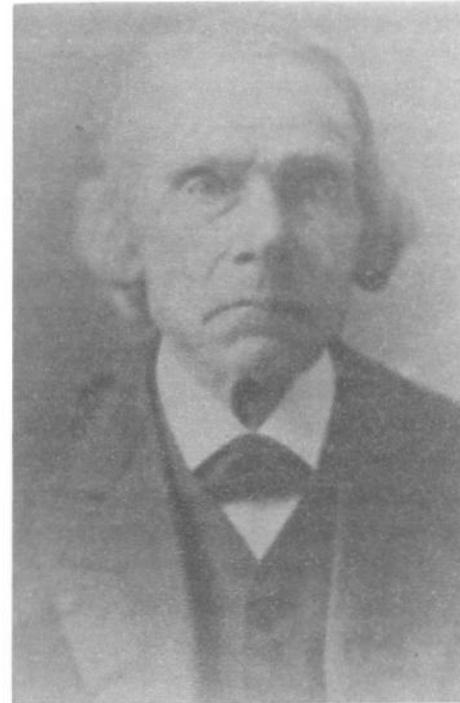
My husband and I wouldn't have had much opportunity to buy a home some place else at that time, so we just put the house there, and you know I think it was just a matter of a family being in an area. The Quanders moved into that area. The children, then, got a parcel of land and built on it. It was just a large piece of land. It was not considered of any great value when it was acquired.

## Helen Reid

My husband's family moved out here in 1848. This was Benjamin Barton's summer home at first. It consisted of 44 acres and was bordered by Fairview on the North. He married Elisa Kennedy. They moved out from Alexandria about 10 years after they bought the property, and they stayed on it permanently, and they owned this area.

Benjamin Barton was kind of an interesting gentlemen. His silver was on display at the Corcoran Gallery. He was a clockmaker and worked with silver. He must have been an engineer at heart with no actual training - all smarts. When he got older he decided that he didn't want to come to town every day so he invented a shutter system that worked with the sun. When the sun would come up in the morning those shutters would open up as if the shop was open. When it would go down in the evening, the shutters would close. He was a bank president and member of the Friendship Fire Company and he went to the old Presbyterian Meeting House. He lived way up into his 80's.

Cracker Hall belonged to Benjamin Barton's brother. It was across Route 1 closer to the high school. The Union troops came out of Alexandria and took over Cracker Hall because it was a large brick house and used it for a hospital. We've never been quite clear as to whether they burned it or it burned by accident. The bricks from Cracker Hall were used to build fortifications around here. There's one at Bellehaven and one down at Ft. Lyon.



*Benjamin Barton,  
the clock and watch maker  
and silversmith*

A neighboring farm on the top of the hill belonged to a Mr. Reid and as the family generations went on, one of the Bartons married a Reid. Benjamin Barton's daughter Lily married Franklin Pierce Reid who owned Fairview, and so eventually all the property was joined together. The old house City View, was torn down when they built the shopping center.

At one time it was a dairy farm from Penn-Daw up to Collard Street. This was dairy farm area in the 20's. There were just 9 or 10 families in the immediate Groveton area. Then it became an airport in about 1926. You can stand at Memco and see the Capitol and the Washington Monument - a long, long way. It's sort of startling because we have so few clear days. This is supposed to be the highest point in Fairfax County.

The airport really started when the government installed the beacon out there. A gentleman arrived and said "I have a plane. Would you mind if I used your cornfield?" That's about how it started. The government gave them the commission about the early 20's when the army pilots flew the air mail and flew the old Pitcairn biplanes. They'd fly at night and these beacons spotted all over the county were their guides, the only things they had. Flashing great distances, each beacon sent out its own particular code of

lights so that they'd know just where they were and they'd use that airway. That beacon stood until 1959. Hundreds of airline pilots were trained right out here at the beacon and a lot of the celebrities. Arthur Godfrey soloed here. He kept the plane here for years when he was the radio announcer at WJSV.

There have been several different people who have operated the airport through the years of 1926 - 1959. My husband ran the airport for a long time after W. W. II. I understand it is the second oldest airport in the whole area and that College Park is the oldest. That seems pretty much the birth of aviation as we know it today. I would just like to inject a thought that the next time you go flying on an airline, who knows, you might be flying with someone that learned right here.

## William Randall

*whose dairy farm became Randall Estates*

Gum Springs School only had one room. I went to school for only up to 4th grade. We had to go only about 8 months out of the year.

### What church do you go to?

Woodlawn Baptist Church, Gum Springs. I have been a deacon over 10 years or more. But I've been going to that church for about 40 or 50 years. I'm honorary deacon now. That's the best thing in the world, to have your hand in God's hand. Let him lead you, don't try to lead him. Let him lead you; take you into wherever he'll have you go. Sometime it would be a long time thing. I've gotten so now I just ask him to help me.

When I first came to this land I married the Johnson man's daughter. They died and left it to her and I own this place. I was here 20 or 25 years, but we was married 43 years, me and his daughter. We lived right here in the old house. It's torn down now. The old house was a part of this land. We would raise a garden. We done a little of everything.

Johnson worked for Mason. He used to go into town to get the doctor or something, and he told him one day when he went to get the doctor, "Stick with me and I'll leave you something." The doctor heard him and said, "Johnson, you get that piece of paper he talking about giving you." He said, "If you don't get that paper, when he dies his son isn't going to let you have it. So he got it and the doctor said he would take it to the court house and have it redeemed. So he did."

I stayed five years running the place for him (Johnson) after his father passed. I stuck to it though, and it was left to me. I stayed till I made a sub-division out of it.



*Peake Family Cemetery, now a historical landmark near the Martin Luther King, Jr. Park in Gum Springs.*

## Kay Holland

Other communities have sprung up in the past 20 years; Gum Springs has been here for over 200 years or more. It was called Muddy Hole Farms. It was part of the George Washington Plantation that was given to West Ford after George Washington's death. His (Ford's) descendents are still around. His great-great grandson lives on Fordson Road here - Mr. Saunders. I was born and raised here. I remember when Fordson Road was Route 1. The bus used to come down old King's Highway on down to what is Fordson Road.

Mr. Moon (Saunders B. Moon) was the first principal of our school here. We used to have a two-room classroom school on the upper part of Fordson Road, and in 1950 Drew Smith was built. Mr. Moon was the principal of Drew

Smith. He was also working to get the community action program at the time of his death, so that's why it was named in his honor, Saunders B. Moon Community Action Center.

The elementary school went up to the 7th grade. We were bused to Manassas after completing the seventh grade in the two-room classroom. I happened to have kin people in Washington so I was sent there to live and to go to school rather than to be bused to Manassas. But the majority of the community kids were bused to Manassas till the late fifties when Luther Jackson was built. It was a black high school in Falls Church.

You can imagine what it was when we went to Manassas. You left at dark and got back at dark. We had the worst bus in the County system. I remember my cousins telling me they had to take a bucket on the bus and build a fire because the bus didn't have any heat.

It was in the 60's when integration came about in Fairfax county, and that meant all black schools were closed. You were still broken down into little groups and bused to five or six other elementary schools and two or three high schools. Drew Smith school was closed because of integration.

In this community we have accomplished getting our streets paved, getting sidewalks, getting drainage, getting small things like street signs up. We were able to get the County to dedicate some land and make a park which is Martin Luther King, Jr.'s park. We also got them to put in a swimming pool. They wanted to give us nature trails, and we figured we had had nature trails all our lives. We had had nothing but woods and mud. So then we went and fought for the swimming pool. We are now working to get the park improved, get tennis courts put in.

We have been able to work with some landowners to build 28 single family homes. We've worked with other people helping them seek financing. Banks would not lend to other blacks in this community a few years ago.

The people in Gum Springs are seeing they have just as much a voice in Fairfax County as anyone else.

The most exciting thing was getting our community action program, and the second thing was getting a light out there at Sherwood Hall Lane and Route 1. So many people have been killed crossing Route 1.

They were putting red lights up everywhere but down there in the midst of Gum Springs where Sherwood Hall Lane and U.S. 1 meet. Usually the bus stopped at the open-air theater. Kids had to come across the street, adults had to and quite a few people got killed. What we did was protest. We wanted a red light put up there, so we hooked up a school bus one day and stopped traffic on both sides of Route 1. When we stopped the traffic, we rolled out two

caskets, and all the people went out into the street. Due to that we were able to get a red light put there.

All of Sherwood Hall Lane was only two farmhouses when I was a little girl. The majority of the people worked at Ft. Belvoir and then Alexandria and D.C. Labor work and domestic work were the prime jobs. It was the system. You dug ditches, did the dirty work, labor and domestic work. I remember, I was a very young girl in the 40's during World War II-- the soldiers that were stationed at Ft. Belvoir and had their families with them could not find living quarters anywhere in Fairfax County, and my grandfather, who owned quite a bit of property, just threw up cabins. You wonder why they became shacks now, but that was the only way that the black soldiers' families could be near them. They didn't even live with white soldiers. You had separate barracks then. You had the all black building and you had the all white building. The army didn't start integrating till 1950 and Ft. Belvoir was an example of the system.

It was called Woodlawn, and that's where the Hollands originated. You go down there to Ft. Belvoir right now. You'll see the Woodlawn cemetery. All our ancestors, people who died that are Hollands and belonged to the Methodist Church, are buried there at Woodlawn. The Hollands owned quite a bit of land down there. Most of them were farmers.

I remember my husband's great grandfather had the meat wagon. He roped hogs and things. He'd cut it up and go from community to community sellin' the meat. Most of them worked a farm. Uncle Gabriel worked on a farm for years until he retired and he said when he started out his wages were \$4.00 a week for 60 hours of work. You wonder how he kept his property, fed his family and everything on that. Uncle Gabriel would enjoy remembering but he's rather old now. Sometimes he just rambles and everything, but he could tell you stories about his parents.

Slaves were not permitted to marry and his parents were slaves. The slaves would go through a marriage ceremony of stepping over a broomstick. That was the only way they could say that they were married. So they had a ceremony and a broom which the groom and the bride would step over, and they were married. They didn't have a minister or anything.

# Marion Klein and Ellen Brown

*Mrs. Klein is secretary at St. Louis church. Mrs. Brown is a long-time resident of the area. St. Louis parish was established in 1949.*

**M. KLEIN:** This particular ridge that runs west to east on which Popkins Lane is now located used to be called Snake Hill. And many a time you'll hear it announced on the weather programs that an area is very icy -- they would say, "The Snake Hill area is very icy." I heard that last year but I didn't bring it up because I didn't think anybody was familiar with that name anymore.

The land here did not come from Popkins' Farm but from the Ayre's farm, and it was purchased from them. Where Beacon Mall now stands was the Reid farm. And there was Burgundy farm and Rose Hill farm. It was all farmland country. In the late teens there were only 16,000 people in all of Fairfax County.

**E. BROWN:** Ah! I can remember when the property on which the High School now stands was an old gravel pit on this little Popkins Lane, and they used to have turkey shoots down there. My husband used to take me to them all the time.

The little white building on the corner of Route 1 and Popkins Lane used to be called the Sacred Heart Chapel, a mission of St. Mary's in Alexandria. They had one Mass a month, and then when we came here, we had one Mass a week. When it was established a parish we had more Masses each Sunday.

Our original little white building is now a community center for Fairfax County for retarded adults, and for people who are coming back into the world. They call it a Social Center.

The Groveton area is considered the highest point between Washington and Richmond. And the reason it was called Snake Hill was because of the road which wound around so much to a deep incline. There was a point on King's Highway where the Telegraph apartments are now, from which you could see the whole city of Washington and on the Fourth of July, families used to take their children and sit on their blankets and watch the fireworks display at the Monument grounds.

The way the Penn-Daw area got its name was -- Cooper Dawson and Mr. Penn joined forces and built the Penn-Daw Motel, and so that whole area became the Penn-Daw area. My husband and I used to live in that area. We started our printing business and called it Penn-Daw Mimeo.

I live on Pole Road and I've lived there for the past 27 years. The property that we live on was originally part of the Mt. Vernon estate. It

was surveyed by George Washington as Dogue Creek Farm. The reason the road was called Pole Road was because there were several low places in it. In the days of the Mount Vernon estate they would cut trees down and make poles and put them in the low places, and so it was called the old Pole Road.

# Elsie Phipps and Grace Huffman

**E. PHIPPS:** We came here December, '49. We've been here ever since. Mother came here the same time. There's a lot of changes up and down the road. When we came here there was one bank. Now we have them at every corner practically. You couldn't just dart out and get a hamburger like you can today. We had to go to Alexandria to the grocery store.

There was a dirt race track over behind Hybla Valley where the Hybla Valley houses are now. I used to take my nephew over there and teach him to drive on the race track - I figured that was the safest place.

**G. HUFFMAN:** There was an airport up on top of the hill about where Memco is now. They used to go up and have the shooting matches in the field. My husband and son would go up there every Saturday night and win turkeys and hams. Now you can't shoot a gun in Fairfax county, but they banged away up there.

The Penn-Daw motel was the nicest motel around here. We had one other little one across the road here. All this was just woods, swamps, nothing was built here. In fact, we could have bought that land for a song almost. I begged my husband to do it. And today we could have been well off. But, "No", he said, "Who'd want that swamp land. Nobody'd ever want it." Now look. Everything's built on it.

**E. PHIPPS:** Over where those two service stations are, didn't they call it the green leaf motel or something? It was where the drunks would lay out in the woods.

The greatest excitement was every Saturday night us going down to see the great wrecks down here on the road (Route 1). As many as 3 before we'd go to bed some Saturday nights.

It was four lanes then, or course. All the traffic went up and down this highway. They really had some large wrecks down there because of all the trucks on the highway.

We came here in '49 and there was only 30 some trailers here then. Now there are approximately 350, I guess. Several people owned it at different times. Each of them added a little bit to it. It was just woods and honeysuckles.

G. HUFFMAN: One time we had a lot of nice people in here. We had all classes of people. We had service men, rated service men and we had all types of government workers. We had nurses and some young doctors, ministers that were going to school and would come to stay for a year. It was very nice, but it isn't anymore.

E. PHIPPS: Fairfax County definitely frowns on mobile homes. I don't know why because they get plenty taxes out of us. Mr. Beard that used to own the trailer park here, has a gravel pit out in the Franconia area. That is quite a bit of land and it would make an ideal trailer park. He begged them for it for a number of years up until he died. Now his son is working on it, to put in a nice modern trailer park out there, and they never would pass it. They're just against trailers.

G. HUFFMAN: I believe the real estate people are behind it as much as anything. They want to force you to either go into these apartments or these cheap houses they throw up. I'd just soon be in jail than be penned up in them apartments. As old as I am, I like to run out, have some grass and flowers and get a breath of fresh air. I don't like to be penned up behind a door all the time. Everywhere you travel you see nice trailer courts. I think it's a shame we're this near the Nation's capital and can't have a decent looking trailer park, and people can't live in them with respect.

E. PHIPPS: It never was a pretty park. But some of the owners that used to own it, they would have contests each spring as to who had made the greatest improvement in their lot and who had the prettiest lot and such as that. Even though there were cash awards for them and even though you knew you didn't stand a chance of winning an award you would still get ashamed at yourself when you would see your neighbor cleaning up and you would clean up.

But now they don't encourage cleaning up. They have recently formed a civic association. I attempted to form one years ago when Mr. Beard had the trailer park and he was working with me on it. But this time, from what I can hear the office is working against the civic association. I have been told by some of the tenants that anyone putting their name on a piece of paper to join it would receive moving orders. There was a rumor that the park was in the process of being sold and the civic association was trying to throw a block in the way of keeping it from being sold. Now I don't know if this is true or not, but I haven't been active. I did attend one or two of the meetings.

I hesitate to make any improvements that take too much time and money because there's always a rumor. You just hesitate to put much effort into it, and I think that's the way with a lot of people. It definitely is not too far off before

they do close the park. Just Sunday I heard, more or less from the horses mouth, that there was nothing working right now, but it will be before long I'm sure. I feel like it's such an eyesore that now the county will go along with the rezoning. Well, I think we have enough shopping centers.

My father managed the park for 12 years. My husband worked in the park as assistant manager for 11-11 1/2 years and then I have worked in the park a great part of the time since I've been here.

G. HUFFMAN: There was secret service, FBI and police and you name it knocking at our door at all hours of the night.

So many of the people instead of taking their problems to the main office, you know, they'd come to our place because we had to have a sign out there saying "Manager." The people would come to us in the evenings after dinner, you know, domestic affairs between man and wife. They always expected me to keep medicine for everyone in here. I have a large medicine cabinet clear across the bathroom wall. The would come "Oh, go to Mrs. Huffman, go to Mom Huffman. She's got the medicine. You can get it there, whatever you want." And they come to me for it and I'd have to keep a supply because I knew they were coming.

E. PHIPPS: When we first moved in here the mobile homes were pretty and every bit of the space was utilized much better than it is now. The newer mobile homes are pretty but they don't have quality and they don't utilize the space. But of course, at that time they didn't have bathrooms in them. You had to take your chamber bucket and go up to this house. In the basement was the laundry room and the men's and the ladies' showers and the toilets. In the mornings the women would all meet up there with their chamber bucket and have their gab session. In the evenings that was recreation. You would take your towel and your wash cloth and sling it across your shoulder. If you got your husband back in two hours you were lucky because he would meet up with all the rest of the guys and they would stand up there and shoot the breeze. The little tykes that were too small to go under the shower, why the mothers would take turns putting them in the laundry tubs, giving them a bath.

I'm sure the men could hear the women but what the men didn't know, I think, was that the women could hear them as plain as they could. We would go in the showers and listen to the men over in the men's showers and they would be talking about things that sometimes, well, we really got a bang out of! They were the good old days; it was like a family. It was only 35 trailers in here and it was like a family. We really did enjoy it living like that. Now you don't know what's going on with your next door neighbor but then it was like a family. Everybody was concerned about everybody else.

G. HUFFMAN: The mail would come at a certain time of day and the women

would gang up and sit around on the rock wall waiting for the mail to come in. One day a terrible tragedy happened. A mother was sitting there waiting for the mail and the oil truck came in and filled up oil for the supply for the laundry room. When the oil truck pulled away, why this one little girl (4 years old wasn't she?) she ran after the truck and those big chains you see hanging down from the wheel sometimes, she ran after the truck and caught a hold of one of the chains and it pulled her right under and just smashed her flat as a pancake. That was terrible. I'll never forget that. Her mother was sitting right there waiting for the mail. My husband had kinda shooed her and her little 2 year old brother away from the truck. He told him "Now son, you get away from that truck and go on to your mother cause the truck's going to pull out." He thought she went on around to her mother. Instead she followed the truck, grabbed on to the chain, pulled it, and killed her instantly.

## Eva Hook

How long have you lived in the area?

Oh, since about '37. . .yeah. My husband was working in Washington and I moved down here from Gore, Virginia and I've been in this house since then.

Well, Popkins, they owned the area where Groveton High School is now. There wasn't a lot of houses over there then. They're built up there now quite a bit. Up there on the hill is where the Viar's eventually put a horse stable. All that was back in here was farm land and blackberry fields. . . . yeah. Where Bucknell is now was farmland and blackberry fields. Bucknell Heights didn't exist.

I was busy here with a house full of kids and besides I had roomers. When the war started, you know, I had four boys in the service and two son-in-laws . . .yeah. . .and when Eugene came back, he and Kent Crowther went to college together. Eugene graduated the seventh in his class and then he went back and got his master's degree.

I remember when everything was rationed. I had a heck of a time getting things in here for my family. We didn't have as large a garden as I do now, but that's because we kept buying land. We had cows and chickens.

Oh boy! I had a chicken house on the side by Eastside Drive, with young chickens in it, almost fryers. I looked out there and boy, we were having a terrible storm. I waded out through that water and it was just a 'rollin down through there and I carried all them chickens and threw them in the barn. That was in 1945, I think, because Eugene's new Studebaker was in the garage and it got ruined.

## John Parrish

We moved up in Groveton the summer of 1936. We lived up there on Collard St. There was only one house there. One of the Kirbys was the sheriff of Fairfax County, and I remember in the early 30's going to a campaign speech he made. He got up and says, "Well, hain't been too many chicken houses robbed this year, and not too much has gone wrong with the farms. So I think you should re-elect me because I'm keeping the chicken thieves down." He only had about four helpers.

We moved off Collard St. to Arundel Ave. in the summer. At that time there were five families living in a house that my mother now lives in. Old white frame house, it's up in the trees. They had a big barn behind there. We couldn't move in right away -- it was summer time, so we had to wait till the families moved out. They didn't have anywhere to move because times were bad then. You know people didn't have jobs. If they did have a job they only worked part time.

I can tell you about my sister, Nancy. She went to Groveton Elementary, and she and her girl friend they would not go to school. They would go out to the farmhouses, get horses, and ride around all day. And then one day a lady called up mother and told her, "Your daughter has been leaving horses around." She didn't bring them back where she got them. My sister liked animals. They would follow her home. We went out in the barn one time, saw a turkey tied up. We asked Nancy where did the turkey come from. "It followed me home," she said.

Just so happened that Dr. Conley about a block away had turkeys. Used to raise them and have a turkey shoot down there. I used to work for him hanging up the targets. You know, for the people to shoot at. Now you can't use any guns around here.

There was a graveyard behind our house. Those graves go back to early 1800's, maybe earlier.

It was all country when we moved out here. This place had about forty, maybe fifty houses in the whole area.

The Nightingale was built in the early 40's. It was a night club. From time to time they would have all the big name bands, Tommy Dorsey, Jimmy Dorsey. They did pretty good business down there.

The people worked either in Washington or with the railroad. The railroad in Alexandria was a big place back then. One thing that was probably the biggest source of income in the Groveton area in the 30's was the

tourist home. A lot of people who lived on Route 1 had an extra room, and that's where the people who were touring would stay. It was the only road to Richmond.

Have you ever heard of a donkey baseball game? That's where you had to ride a donkey when you play ball. You would hit the ball, get on a donkey and ride to first base. I don't know if you had to be on the donkey to catch the ball or not. I think you had to be on to throw it to base.

What else can we tell you about Groveton? Just that it was a country place.

## James Griffin

Well, the restaurant started with my grandmother starting the Dixie Pig in Alexandria in 1927. There have been a series of Dixie Pigs in Alexandria at various locations. This one was established in January of 1947 by my mother and father. My father died about 6 years ago, and my brother and I have continued to run the restaurant. I've been around the Alexandria area (what?) about 47 years, something like that.

I guess he was a very visionary kind of individual. I think, at the time he saw that eventually the city had to grow. . . and thought he'd grow with it. As it turns out that's just what happened.

This place used to be a wooden building. It was only about half as big as it is now. As the business started to grow, why, he added on. . . it's just sort of grown over the years.

Back in the days when it started this was considered the country. Really, from Alexandria there was nothin' out here. None of these shopping centers. I'd say business has picked up rather drastically in the last 15 years, since the county's begun to develop. Nowadays, we don't get as many of the truck drivers, but we get more tourists.

Route 1 used to be a two lane road out here in front. They came along and condemned some of the property for widening. . . Now the road comes up pretty close to the front of the building.

We've got a problem, too. If they ever decide to put in a service road we would have to tear this building down. There is no way we could do anything. . . We hope they don't do it, but, I'm sure, knowing the county and the state, it won't be long before they'll decide to. . . Somebody like us has to do some building, then we gotta donate the (service) road and put it in for them. But if they decide they're gonna do it, then they have to condemn the property that's left and pay for it. If we can sit here and do nothing until they decide to put it in, then they. . . pay for the condemnation of the property. So, ah, it's a matter of when they get around to doing that.



*Chauncey's Market on Route # 1*

## Jason Hoffman and Sue Alexander

*are both long-time residents of Franklin St.*

J. HOFFMAN: This street (Franklin) ended here at the top of the hill. It was finally opened up to the bottom, to King's Highway. Behind the house was open field and an airport. One of the runways came right over our house. I guess it would be north to south. It was called Beacon Hill Airport.

The Fire Department was here. All the way up and down the side of the street was vacant.

This cement tank was put up and then we had water. Then later sewer came up the middle of the road. We eventually got off septic tanks onto the sewer system which is a good thing. This tank was put up here as an ordinary storage tank. People complained about it, but I didn't. We were making progress in this part of the county. Then much later the Water Authority bought up all these places.

We had our mail system and the mailman came up here on a route like the country routes. The same man came around everyday except when he was sick. It didn't alternate then; it was a six day week.

It was actually a farm where the shopping mall is now. It was in an airport when we came here, but it originally had been a farm.

We had to go to Alexandria to do our main shopping. Across the street

from the Penn-Daw Fire Department was Fairview Market. It was run by a various amount of people but the last people I remember was Mr. and Mrs. Faust and daughter. When the motel went in, they tore it down, and moved it across to the shopping center. I think Chauncey's market was up here on the hill, I don't know the exact location of that now.

You raise six kids, garden, and work and you don't have a lot of time to just fool around. I didn't belong to the Fire department but all my boys did at one time or another. When there was a fire there was a clamoration of them going out of the house, going down the stairs. You would hear this bang, bang, bang, you know. The last one come out would make a jump and then my wife would say, "There goes Connie."

S. ALEXANDER: The old bell would ring and wake everyone in the community up.

HOFFMAN: That siren down there was loud. You knew what was going on, I tell you.

Remember when that plane fell over here in Mrs. Johnson's yard? The engine failed or something.

S. ALEXANDER: My son came after me and said, "Mommy, you better come on home. An airplane done fell in Mrs. Johnson's yard."

HOFFMAN: Yeah, I came home from work and my wife said, "An airplane fell in Mrs. Johnson's yard." I went over to see the thing. It was all beat up, and of course they got the people out and took them to the hospital.

Right across out behind the house was a wire to let 'em know where the boundary line of the field was. It'd be nothing to get up next morning or sometimes come in during the night and find a wire knocked down.

I like it as it is, but I like the good old days too. The lights shine in from back here and make it much better. You're not so liable to have anybody breaking in. It's light when these lights come on over here behind this Memco.

One of the worst fires they had since I moved here was an old chicken house that had been converted into apartments. Before the Fire Department could get the men and stuff in there the thing must have been a mess. No fire escapes and no other exits to get out. Some woman went to throw her baby out to save it and it hit on the roof and burned up. Everybody just thought it so bad. It burned the woman, it didn't kill her I don't think. But it burned her real bad. When the Fire Department arrived the thing was in such bad condition they did every thing they could, but. . . That wasn't right on this street; that was across the highway. It was some kind of a chicken house that they built first to raise chickens. This man made apartments out of this thing. It was a two story building. Anyway, the

people were trapped in it. Everbody thought that was really bad and it was. To see that woman see her baby laying out on the roof, the heat so great and the fire coming up all around it, and they couldn't do nothing about it. (This fire was in 1949 and involved the Adams family. Three babies died. The chicken coop-apartment was on Memorial and Eastside streets.) I don't know anything out of the ordinary, no legends or ghost stories. Do you Sue?

ALEXANDER: Sometimes I'm here by myself I think I hear ghosts! I remember one night when I heard this awful racket and I said, "Oh my, they got me now. Whoever it is, Lord, might as well lay here. I got up the next morning and the ironing board had fell down the steps where I had it propped up!

HOFFMAN: The electric wires come through the trees out there and every time the wind would blow, it would sound like the downspout was about to come off the house. She got me to go up there and I did everything but drive a nail right through the middle of the gutter. Finally the wire pulled out from the house, the man came out, cut a few limbs off that tree, put the wire back up and that eliminated the ghost!

ALEXANDER: There haven't been many children on this street.

HOFFMAN: There was a family from Strasburg where we came from living down here in the Nightingale Trailer Court. Next thing you know a little boy came along. Well, we were neighbors. This boy's mother called my wife and wondered if she would keep him during the day while she went back to work. So she did. In a couple years another one come along so we wound up with two of them. They sold their trailer and moved in with us. Those kids, they didn't know what my wife and I weren't their grandparents.

One day that little boy said to his mother, "Mama, how come we got three grandmas and three granddaddys?" She had to tell him what the story was on it. We practically raised those kids. I think a lot of them and they think of me. Everytime they come by they got to grab hold of me. I see them up here once in a while.

Which Railroad did you work for?

HOFFMAN: Southern. I went from Alexandria to Monroe, Virginia. That was the end of our division. The Danville division went from there to Spencer. We run to Washington quite a bit from here, too. This was a terminal here in Alexandria for the Southern. That was back in the good old days when we had steam engines and had a lot of smoke and cinders and what-not flying in the air and a lot of long good whistles. Today the railroad isn't like it used to be. Of course, railroads, a lot of them, have gone down hill, but the Southern is one of the best financed railroads in these parts.