

A Brief History of Burleith

By Edgar F. Russell Historian for Burleith

In writing a history of a community, even a short one (and the same is true for a nation) it is impossible to dissociate its architecture from its history. To a great extent, Burleith is fortunate in possessing a typical style of house and not a hodge-podge – i.e. nearly all of the houses are of the same period. Much of Burleith's style of architecture is basically American Colonial and is an adaptation of Georgian. Credit for the good design of Shannon and Luch's houses goes largely to Waverly Taylor. The development and the houses themselves received national recognition when they were built, 1923-1928; their influence upon contemporary architecture was so strong that similar developments were made in Detroit, Baltimore and Philadelphia.

Later, another smaller group of houses was built in Burleith by the Cooley Brothers. These are on the north side of T Street between 38th and 39th, and are an adaptation of Elizabethan English.

The first modern houses in Burleith were started in 1923; the last row on Reservoir Road was finished in 1928. Where the Reservoir Road houses now stand, was once a series of tennis courts. It is hard to believe that at one time there was a lake or large pond bounded roughly by 37th and 38th Streets, and T Street and Whitehaven Parkway. At the beginning of the century, a little group of houses around 35th and T, Streets was known as "Bryan Town". This name has not been used in modern times – only the name Burleith.

Just to the north of Burleith, in the Nineties, north of the end of 38th Street, was "Horse Heaven"; this is where dead horses were buried. At nearly the spot today, more cheerful, is the modern "Hanging Gardens of Burleith" located in the alley, running parallel to, and between 38th and 39th Streets. Here, on a steep and high, cliff-like side are to be found flowers and shrubs for all the seasons. For many years, Burleith has had a Garden Club. Mrs. Ida Gibson is its president.

The four boundaries of Burleith are easy to remember. They are imaginary lines running in the middle of 35th Street, 39th Street, Reservoir Road, and Whitehaven Parkway. A map printed before the Civil War shows Whitehaven Parkway as "Madison Street." Later, Madison Street was renamed "U Street" being the next street above T Street. Now it is Whitehaven Parkway.

The coat-of-arms of Burleith is divided vertically into two halves. The right half, as the shield is carried, depicts the arms of George Washington and the District of Columbia. The left half shows the arms of Maryland, because the present District of Columbia was formed from Maryland's territory. The lions head, as the crest of the helmet, represents Great Britain, which at one time owned all of Maryland.

Burleith is unique in that it has no businesses or stores within its boundaries. This, in itself, eliminates many of the problems confronting other citizens associations. Until recently there was one grocery store, the Burleith Market, which

at one time was operated by the Schiffmans and later by Sam and Rose Holtzman. Near this former store is a street just one block long; it is 35th place. On both sides of this one-way street are quaint and interesting houses, pre-dating the development of Burleith from 1923-1928. About a quarter of a century ago, 35th Place was often referred to as "Incubator Row", for there were so many small children living there.

Who were the "early settlers" of Burleith and who have been its prominent citizens? It will be possible however, to mention but a few. General William Covell was one of the founders of the Burleith Citizens Association. Its first president who served for six years was John S. Gorrell, an official of the Chesapeake and Potomac Telephone Company. Other "early settlers" include: James Morrison, who became president of the C&P Telephone Co., Norman W. Fields, John K. Christmas who became a major-general, General and Mrs. Sylvester, the Frank H. Rowes, Alec R. Bowling another major general, the George Wolcotts, Professor and Mrs. Tibor Kerekes, Ben M. McKelway who became Editor of The Evening Star, Mr. and Mrs. Leo Subluskey, the Lamasures, Dr. and Mrs. R.L. DeSaussure, and a score of others. Miss L. Marie Van Hise is the present president of Burleith.

This short account of Burleith concludes with the words of Shakespeare's Henry Bolingbroke, later Henry IV of England"

"I count myself in nothing else so happy as in a soul remembering my good friends." King Richard II, Act II, Scene 3.

Don't forget the Burleith picnic on Sat. June 19, from 2-7 p.m. at the "Green Lot", 37th and Whitehaven Parkway. Rain date, June 26.