

HISTORY OF BURLEITH

By Ann Lange

Beginning in this issue, and continuing in the next two issues, is a brief history of the Burleith area. The information in this installment was obtained from *A Short History of Burleith*, prepared in 1955 by Edgar Farr Russell, historian for the Burleith Citizens Association, and a paper prepared in 1978 by Karen Hansen Shook, as well as a number of newspaper clippings from the *Washington Post* and the *Washington Star*.

Burleith as we know it is a pleasant tree-lined, residential community which lies just north of Georgetown. It is a small, four-block square area of over 500 homes, bounded on the east by 35th Street, the south by Reservoir Road, the west by 39th Street, and the north by Whitehaven Parkway.

Early History,

Washington - City and Capital (American Guide Series of the Federal Writers Project of the Works Progress Administration, 1937), in one paragraph, gives us this background:

"The convent (Visitation) stands on the site of Berlieth, the home of Henry Threlkeld built about 1716. The pecan trees in the convent garden were a gift from Thomas Jefferson to Threlkeld's son, John, when he married Elizabeth Ridgely. The original Berlieth was burned shortly after the Revolution, but another house was built."

Henry Threlkeld (1716-1781) was an early settler who bought "Alliance," an estate of 1,000 acres bordering on the Potomac River. This tract, part of which came to be known as Berlieth (the spelling has changed over the years), extended north from the river to include the grounds of what is now Georgetown University, the Convent of the Visitation, and farther north to the Duke Ellington School of the Arts (formerly Western High School) and the present-day Burleith. The only remaining visible link with the past is the Threlkeld cabin which is re-

stored and stands on the Visitation grounds.

Henry Threlkeld's son, John, was mayor of Georgetown in 1793. In 1822 he conveyed an 11½-acre parcel of land to his son-in-law, John Cox, in trust for Cox's wife, Jane (John Threlkeld's daughter), for life. Cox's land holdings increased when his mother-in-law, Elizabeth Threlkeld, died (her husband, John, had predeceased her). She left no will and Cox's wife, Jane, shared equally in the estate with her sisters, Mary Grayson and Elizabeth Threlkeld.

Cox, like his father-in-law, also served as mayor of Georgetown, from 1823 to 1845 (a longer term than any other person), succeeding Mayor Henry Foxhall, for whom the neighboring community of Foxhall Village was named. In order for Cox to accept the nomination for mayor, the city limits of Georgetown were expanded to include his estate.

Cox erected a magnificent manor home called "The Cedars" on the site of what is now Duke Ellington School. Prior to the Civil War, there was only farm land west of Fayette Street (now 35th Street) and north of 7th Street (now Reservoir Road), and the Cox homestead seems to have been the last outpost beyond which there were only pastures, creeks, and ponds "good for skating in winter."

The home was destroyed by fire in January 1847 but was subsequently rebuilt by Richard Cox (son of John Cox and Jane Threlkeld Cox). Richard Cox's sympathies were apparently with the South, because the home was confiscated by the government during the Civil War and was used by the Home for Destitute Colored Women and Children. In 1866 it was restored to its owner and the Home for the Destitute was relocated to a building erected for its use on the 8th Street side of what is now Banneker Recreational Center.

Later, the Cox manor house was converted into the Misses Earles' Seminary, an academy for girls. In 1892, Western High School (now Duke Ellington) was built on the site of the seminary. The area where the school and

parts of present-day Burleith are located was known as "Cox's Woods." Where the school's stadium is now was once a thicket, where in a clearing, boys played baseball in the 1890s on a field named "Redlands Ball Diamond."

Prime for Development

Burleith was built on comparatively high ground and enjoys a cooler climate and stronger breezes than most other parts of the city during the summer. Charles Dickens, following a visit, described Georgetown's heights in 1842:

"The heights of this neighborhood, above the Potomac River, are very picturesque; and are free, I should conceive, from some of the insalubrities of Washington. The air, at that elevation, was quite cool and refreshing, when in the city it was burning hot."

In the 1870s, Alexander Shepherd changed the face of Washington, particularly the Northwest section, through massive projects such as tree planting, sewer construction, filling of the Washington City Canal, and laying of streets. Despite the huge municipal debt caused by these projects, the new physical appearance and the resulting social and cultural revival sparked a strong sense of confidence in the city.

Consequently, the 1880s saw much speculation in Washington real estate, not only by small-scale speculators who were building three or four row-houses at a time, but also big-time syndicate-type operations. Properties of Kalorama and Chevy Chase, for example, were bought at this time to be turned into expensive developments. Frederick W. Huidekoper purchased the Burleith tract in 1886 and apparently planned to develop more comfortable and larger houses there than the ones later built in the 1920s. Contrary to popular belief, no old mansion house was standing in Burleith back in the days when the Huidekopers owned it.

Development of Burleith was near at hand. By 1910, there were already some houses along the northeast

border of the tract (known as Bryantown), along S and T Streets and Whitehaven Parkway, between 35th and 36th Streets. Other pre-Shannon & Luchs buildings included a one-block row of townhouses on 35th Place, which became known as "Incubator Row" due to the number of small children there, and the Bourke residence at 3611 R Street, still owned by the Bourkes. The House of the Good Shepherd, operated by a cloistered order of nuns who follow the rule of St. Augustine, dates back to 1890 at its location at 36th and Reservoir Road (then known as "New Cut" Road). North of Whitehaven Park, in what is now Glover Park, was Connelly's Dairy Farm.

Much of the remaining tract consisted of fields and wooded areas, with scattered shanties and a trash dump at what was to become 37th and T Streets. The Q Street bridge had been assured, but the nearness to Georgetown was considered no asset, since rejuvenation of that area had not yet occurred.

Huidekoper poured 3,200,000 cubic yards of dirt into the hole or "lake" then at the intersection of what is now 37th and S Streets. Water ten feet deep poured down the ravine near T Street when it rained. "We had a terrific time getting the place fixed for streets," Col. Frederick Louis Huidekoper recalled, "but the ground work was done and the streets opened through before the sale [to Shannon & Luchs] was made."

Coming in next month's installment:
The Neighborhood Takes Shape!

(The author is an editor for the Bureau of National Affairs and has been a resident of Burleith since April 1984.)



A HISTORY OF BURLEITH

by Anne Lange

This is the second of three articles concerning the history of the Burleith area. The information for this installment was obtained from *A Short History of Burleith*, prepared in 1955 by Edgar Farr Russell, historian for the Burleith Citizens Association, numerous files prepared by Jane Winer in the early 1970s, a paper prepared in 1978 by Karen Hansen Shook, as well as newspaper clippings on file at the Georgetown Library, and the minutes of the Burleith Citizens Association and other papers kept by Sarah Revis, archivist for Burleith.

The Neighborhood Takes Shape

Based on a hunch and a survey for guidance, the real estate firm of Shannon & Luchs decided in 1923 to take a chance on property purchased from the Huidekoper family to develop housing for "the buyer of moderate means, but of more than ordinary good taste," according to a Burleith sales brochure. The survey had convinced Herbert T. Shannon that Washingtonians did not mind living in rowhouses if they liked the neighborhood.

The promotional brochure prepared by Shannon & Luchs in 1926 touted the "ideal location" of Burleith as "adjacent to historic old Georgetown," with the southern boundary "formed by the holdings of two great educational institutions: Georgetown University and the Convent of the Visitation." The western border, the brochure continued, "is the magnificent estate of the Archbold family," which, "it has been intimated," will be "given to the city to form a part of Glover-Archbold Parkway," and to the north are "tracts recently purchased by the U.S. Government for purposes of forming a connecting link between Glover-Archbold Parkway and the Rock Creek Park system." (Whitehaven Parkway, the three-block northern boundary of Burleith, was never built through, although sections of Whitehaven may be found between MacArthur Blvd. and Foxhall Road, and again near the British Embassy on Massachusetts Ave.)

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Architectural attractiveness, soundness of construction, and planning are other essentials for making a house appealing, according to the brochure. Shannon & Luchs, in building some 450 homes in Burleith between 1923 and 1928, departed from the traditional rowhouse style, adding architectural distinction and variation to relieve the monotony. Much of the architecture is basically American Colonial and is an adaptation of Georgian. Many of the houses have slate mansard roofs and dormer windows. Brick, in different colors, is the basic building material, with stone, wood, and plaster used to vary the appearance of each house. Trims, moldings, and other details were machine-produced and could be ordered from a catalog. These streamlined building techniques allowed an almost unlimited range of possible facade treatments while keeping costs and labor within reasonable limits.

Shannon & Luchs insisted that the Burleith homes, which cost between \$8,950 and \$13,500, include features usually reserved for higher priced housing, such as hot water heat, real floors and real plaster. The development, which consisted mostly of six-room homes, received national acclaim. Based on the Burleith example, similar developments were constructed in Detroit, Baltimore, and Philadelphia.

Much of the credit belongs to Arthur Heaton, a local architect, Herbert T. Shannon, who drew the floor plans, and Waverly Taylor, vice president and general manager of Shannon & Luchs' construction company. (Following the Burleith development, Taylor formed his own company and completed the English-style Foxhall Village after Boss & Phelps developed the first portion.)

An additional block of houses was added to Burleith when, shortly after the completion of the Shannon & Luchs construction in 1928, another construction company, Cooley Brothers, built Tudor-style rowhouses on the north side of T Street between 38th and 39th. That company continued the Shannon & Luchs tradition of varying rooflines and facades.

During the early stages of the development, when only a few homes were occupied, "the Great Burleith Fire" destroyed seven houses on 37th Street, largely because fire equipment was unable to get through construction on S and T Streets. Luckily, no one was hurt.

Convenience, Bus Service, Schools

Other important features of Burleith, according to the promotional brochure, were its convenience to the business and shopping centers of the city, service by the Burleith bus line of the Washington Railway and Electric Company, and school facilities including a graded elementary school, a soon-to-be constructed junior high, and Western High School, "the outstanding college preparatory school of the city." Other nearby schools included the parochial school of the Trinity Church, the Convent of the Visitation, and the Devitt School, a school preparing students for West Point and Annapolis.

Fillmore Elementary School, at 35th and S Streets, was built in 1892 and named after President Millard Fillmore, while Gordon Junior High, constructed in 1929 at 35th and T Streets, was named after John Holdsworth Gordon, a member of the Washington Board of Education.

Western High (now Duke Ellington School of the Arts) opened in 1890 in the Curtis School at 32nd and O Streets. In 1898, it moved into its new building at 35th and Reservoir Road, on the site of the manor home of John Threlkeld, one of the early mayors of Georgetown. The new school building was the only one in the city with a gymnasium and the first to have a lunchroom, complete with hot food, linen, silver, china, napkins, and fingerbowls. Despite a temporary setback in 1914, when a fire destroyed most of the third floor and closed the building for a year, the school was overcrowded and operated with split sessions by 1920.

A major addition, larger than the original building, was built in 1925, adding 28 classrooms, 2 gymnasiums, and

an auditorium. A three-acre parcel of land at 38th and Reservoir Road, originally designed for construction of homes, was purchased in 1927 from Shannon & Luchs by the District of Columbia Government for use as Western's athletic field. Enrollment at the school continued to swell, with the introduction of a free textbook system and the influx of students from private schools caused by the stock market crash of 1929.

Those factors, together with the rapid development of the Burleith, Foxhall Village, Glover Park, Wesley Heights, Colony Hill, and Spring Valley communities and the migration of a large number of students across the Key and Memorial Bridges, caused Western High School to reach its peak enrollment of 2,079 in 1934. Western was highly regarded academically and won a number of awards for its competitive drill team and for its student publications. Many of its distinguished alumni went on to the military academies or to respected colleges and universities.

The Convent of the Visitation, founded in 1799, was the first Catholic boarding school in the 13 original colonies. During the Civil War, the convent and school were the only buildings in the area not conscripted as military hospitals.

Two other institutions worthy of note, although not mentioned in the promotional brochure, are the House of the Good Shepherd, at 36th and Reservoir Road, and the Industrial Home School, which used to be located at Wisconsin and Calvert Street.

The House of the Good Shepherd, built in 1890, is a home for women and girls. The home's operation, under the supervision of the Sisters of the Good Shepherd, of a laundry service and bakery (for making the wafers used for Holy Communion for most of the Catholic churches in the area) caused some controversy. Residents of Burleith opposed the home's efforts to expand in the late 1930s and again in the early 1950s, arguing that the proposed addition would exceed the zoning height restrictions, that the laundry service was approaching "commercial

proportions" and was the source of odious black smoke, and that such an institution, with "inmates" restrained behind a wire fence, was not appropriate for a residential family community.

The Industrial Home School was founded Thanksgiving Day 1867 as "a reform school for delinquent white children." Located on the current site of the Guy Mason Recreation Center, the home school had a 14-acre tract, complete with football fields, tennis courts, baseball diamonds, and a swimming pool. The home school came into prominence during the 1920s and '30s as an experimental social service laboratory for behavior problem children sent there by the D.C. Juvenile Court.

Although the Shannon & Luchs pamphlet indicated that the company planned to leave land for stores, none was built. Two stores did exist along the eastern border, however. A corner store at 35th and Reservoir, reputed to have been built about the time of the Civil War, was occupied by a number of businesses, including Benjamin F. Baker's grocery store, O'Donnell's Drug Store, Meadowbrook Dairy, Clover Dairy, and High's Ice Cream Shop. The Western Pharmacy, opened in the same location by Dr. Harold M. Elwyn in 1947, served as the site of the annual children's Halloween party for a number of years. The Burleith Market, a grocery store at 35th and T, was operated at one time by the Schiffmans and later by Sam and Rose Holtzman. The market apparently closed some time in the 1960s.

Burleith Citizens Association

Even before all the first inhabitants had moved into their homes, a number of residents formed the Burleith Citizens Association and adopted its constitution in January 1925. In the early years, the association was instrumental in getting superior streets, street lights, sidewalks, and improved bus service. Later, it fought for and obtained playgrounds for its children, a community center at Gordon Junior High, night classes at Western High, and the Georgetown branch of the D.C. Public Library built in 1935 at Wisconsin Avenue and

R Street, on the site of the old reservoir, from which Reservoir Road derives its name.

Meetings of the association, since the beginning, have been held at Gordon Junior High, with a slight break in routine during 1933-34, when meetings were held at Mt. Tabor Church (now the Divine Science Church, at Wisconsin Avenue and 35th Street).

Burleith has been and remains a fairly stable community. Even the Depression did not change that. According to a newspaper interview with Herbert Shannon, an investor at that time wished to buy 100 Burleith homes for rental purposes, but could find only six for sale.

Minutes of the citizens association meetings over the years reveal the community's concerns, many of which were specific to the times, many of which are the same today. For example, during the Depression, the association was active in preparing Christmas baskets for the needy and permitted the unemployed to use vacant lots to grow their own food. However, the association was also concerned about those ever-present problems of speeding and truck traffic on 37th Street, noise from low flying airplanes, lack of playgrounds, inadequate bus service, sidewalk and street repair, increases in utility and transit rates, and student rentals.

According to a 1939 *Washington Post* article on Burleith, the three bedrooms "rent like hotcakes," to Georgetown University students, particularly those in the medical and dental schools. Army and Navy families formed the largest single block of homeowners, holding onto their deeds through assignments to all points of the world, and renting through their absences, usually to friends or acquaintances also in the service.

The article noted that the major problem facing the Burleith Citizens Association was one that would mature in 1942, when the 20-year covenant protection clauses in the original deeds expired. The covenants provided

that the Shannon & Luchs houses could not be "sold, rented, or leased to those of Negro blood," could not be used "for the sale of spiritous or malt liquors," could not be used "for livery or car stables," could not "be extended beyond the present building line," could not be used "for manufacturing or mechanical purposes." Another covenant provided that "no house could be erected on any lot at a cost of less than \$3,000."

A concerted effort, starting in 1938, was made by the association to reach agreement of the owners to renew the covenants for another 20 years. A "signing bee" was held in January 1941 to gather signatures. However, this issue was put on the back burner as a result of World War II.

The War Years

During the early 1940s, the concerns of the association centered upon the war and its ramifications. Air raid wardens were appointed and a community casualty station was set up at Fillmore School, complete with operating equipment and 16 beds. The area's civil defense chairman pleaded that air raid wardens "not relax into post-Pearl Harbor complacency." Movies shown at association meetings included the bombing of London and Navy and Marine landings in the Pacific. Proposals that bus service be extended from 35th and Reservoir to 37th and T Street were nixed by the Office of Defense Transportation, on the basis that such service would require additional fuel. A suggestion for a swimming pool at 37th and Whitehaven was rejected because the War Production Board banned construction projects for amusement purposes. There were blackouts, salvage drives, victory gardens, purchases of war bonds, and discussions of nursery care for children under five in order to free mothers for war work. Seventy temporary housing units, designed to remain for one year, were built in 1942 on the golf course at 35th and Reservoir Road.

By 1945, defense activities had ceased and the defense fund was transferred to the citizens associa-

tion general fund. Films shown at meetings concerned such mundane topics as forest fires, the development of radio and radar, and rodent control. Topics for discussion included slum clearance, use of school playgrounds, home rule for the District, low-cost housing, Potomac River pollution, and requests for modernization of Western High and Fillmore School.

In the ensuing cold war years of the early 1950s, the association discussed what to do in the event of an atomic bomb attack. On a more optimistic note, the Burleith garden club was very active at this time. It won an award for its exhibit at the D.C. Armory Garden Show and sponsored a 100-person dinner at the Fairfax Hotel.

To this day, Burleith is noted for its trees, gardens, and flowers. A noted site is the terraced gardens, the "Hanging Gardens of Burleith," behind the homes on 38th and 39th, above T Street.

1954 was a pivotal year for Burleith. The winds of change, epitomized by the buffeting from Hurricane Hazel, blew through the area. That year saw the desegregation of the public schools, the relocation of the Industrial Home School to Laurel, Md., the construction, despite opposition, of a new building by the House of the Good Shepherd, the evacuation and destruction of the temporary war housing at 35th and Reservoir, and the opening of the Safeway grocery store on Wisconsin Avenue.

Coming in next month's installment:
The Next 30 Years.

(The author is an editor for the Bureau of National Affairs and has been a resident of Burleith since April 1984.)



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This is the last of three articles concerning the history of the Burleith area. The information for this installment was obtained from interviews with Colonel Robert B. Curtiss and Agnes Robertson, long-time Burleith residents, Pat Mitchell of Fillmore School, Maurice Eldridge of Duke Ellington School of the Arts, Sr. Ivy and Sr. Mary Beth of the Convent of the Good Shepherd, Leonard Sanders of the Rose School, and many others. Information was also obtained from the minutes of meetings of the Burleith Citizens Association and other papers kept by Sara Revis, archivist for Burleith, and from numerous newspaper clippings, many of which are on file at the Georgetown Library's Peabody Room.

The Next 30 Years (1955-1985)

One of the most dramatic changes in Burleith during these years was the transformation of the schools. Declining enrollments were attributed to the natural aging of the surrounding communities, as well as to "white flight" to the suburbs and to private schools following the U.S. Supreme Court's 1954 desegregation order in *Brown v. Board of Education*.

Back in the early 1950s, Western High School was operating at only 60 percent capacity, and there was a suggestion that Wilson Teachers College be shifted to the high school. That transfer never took place, nor did the proposed transfer of a large group of students from Cardoza High School. The community expressed its opposition to any expansion at Western, claiming that the physical plant, which was run down and lacking modern facilities, was not adequate.

By 1961, according to one report, "tradition-steeped Western, which once had a heavy emphasis on preparing students for college, was doing its utmost to hold on to its reputation for academic excellence during a period of change and upheaval in

the city's public school system, involving new boundary lines and student patterns." The school was facing competition for students from private schools and vibrant new suburban schools.

One memorable incident during this period involved the appearance of Senator Robert F. Kennedy (D-NY) at Western in 1966. He posed some questions to the students who, by a show of hands, indicated that they favored the U.S. staying in Vietnam, favored the bombing of North Vietnamese cities, and thought Red China should be recognized by the U.S., but should not be admitted to the United Nations.

In a momentous 1967 decision, Judge Skelly Wright of the U.S. Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia Circuit shook the D.C. public school system to its roots when, to resolve a racial discrimination suit, he ordered abandonment of the existing ability track system as discriminatory against blacks and the poor, ordered the open enrollment plan struck down, and instead called for the establishment of rigid school zone boundaries. The new zone for Western extended almost eight miles, from the Anacostia River to Spring Valley. As a result of that court order, Western abandoned most of its ability groupings and became the most racially and economically mixed high school in the city, with classes made up of students of wide ranging achievement levels.

Racial tensions increased, and reached a peak in 1970 when a student group called the Student Coalition Against Racism (SCAR) convened an unscheduled assembly, calling for a week-long boycott of classes and demanding the creation of an Afro-American Department, courses on black studies, an end to police patrolling the school, and the resignation of the principal. The principal, who had been criticized both for being too liberal on discipline and for being racist when he refused to recognize black-only organizations, said he drew the line at separatism

and violence. He resigned and was replaced by Western's first black principal, at a time when the student body was 68 percent black.

In 1974 the School of the Arts, an outgrowth of Workshops for Careers in the Arts, opened at Western and shared the building with the last class of regular non-arts students who graduated in June 1976. The school, now known as the Duke Ellington School of the Arts, offers specialized training in the visual and performing arts, vocal and instrumental music, dance, acting, and graphic arts.

The change of name and focus did not save the school from controversy, however. Disagreements arose between the faculty, who felt that school officials did not understand the special needs of an arts school, and the officials, who argued that the arts school staff was ignoring administrative procedures and not giving the students a sound academic background.

The director of the arts school was fired in 1976 when the conflict came to a head ostensibly over an art display in the school's entry of three 9-foot modernistic statues made of automobile bumpers and graphically depicting nude Egyptian goddesses. The arts school was ordered to share its facilities with another innovative high school, the School Without Walls. That merger, however, never took place.

Plagued with administrative problems, changes in leadership, and severe budget cuts, the school faced the future in an elegant old white-columned building with a leaking roof, peeling paint, falling plaster, and broken lockers. It has survived, just completing its tenth year, thanks to vigorous fund-raising efforts needed to keep its unique programs going, including a Lena Horne benefit concert for the school held at the Kennedy Center in 1980.

The school, which is free to D.C. residents and charges non-residents

a tuition of \$2,330, currently has approximately 470 students and is in the midst of a \$2.1 million renovation project to transform the auditorium into a theater and to add an art gallery. Its relationship with the board of education is much better, but it still depends on private grants and donations for a great deal of its funding.

Gordon Junior High
(35th and T Streets)

Some of the same factors that helped to shape the transformation of Western were at work at Gordon Junior High as well. During the early and mid-1960s, Gordon was held up as a model of successful integration, with an enrollment of 800 fluctuating between 60 percent white and 60 percent black for almost ten years. In 1966 there was a proposal to make both Gordon Junior High and Western High model schools.

However, again as the result of Judge Wright's 1967 order to abandon the existing ability track system and to establish rigid school zone boundaries, the character of the school changed. Almost all ability grouping stopped and students of third grade level ability were in the same classes as students of 12th grade level ability. Discipline became a problem. During the mid-1970s the school's stage curtains were set ablaze and were never replaced. A tear gas grenade was set off, and the cafeteria furniture was burned. When several teachers were assaulted, the teachers staged a one-day sick-out demanding tighter discipline. In 1976, in reaction to Western's conversion to the School of the Arts, a proposal was made, but rejected, to make Gordon into an academic high school for grades nine through 12.

By 1978, one report said, enrollment had dropped to 261 students, of which only 13 were white, and "the school which lost its neighborhood children and became a troubled center for inner city problems, closed after 50 years." But the school rebounded that same year and reopened as the

Gordon Center, the product of a merger by the Americanization School and the Program of English Instruction for Latin Americans, which had been located in the heart of the Hispanic community. It is D.C.'s only public school that teaches English and job skills to the city's growing adult immigrant population. Gordon currently has approximately 1,600 students, who come from 90 countries and speak 50 languages, and has another 400 prospective students on a waiting list.

Fillmore School
(35th and S Streets)

There had been talk of closing Fillmore School as early as 1957. The solution at that time, however, was simply to combine the three elementary schools -- Fillmore, Hyde, and Jackson -- under the supervision of one principal. In 1967, as a result of Judge Wright's order, black students were bused from Anacostia to ease overcrowding in that part of the city. However, by 1974, declining enrollments, dwindling teaching staffs, and the gradual phase-out of busing, due to an ambitious school building program in Anacostia, left Fillmore with only 39 students. Fillmore was not alone, however. Five other nearby elementary schools (Hardy School at Foxhall and Q St., Hyde at O between 32nd and 33rd, Key at Dana Place and Hurst Terrace, Mann at Newark and 45th, and Stodert at 40th and Calvert) were also small, old, and underutilized.

Hardy and Fillmore were scheduled to close in order to become office buildings for the school system administration. However, parents, teachers, and administrators banded together to save the schools in 1974 by forming the Six School Complex. Under this plan, Hardy became a middle school for grades five through eight; Hyde, Key, Mann, and Stodert remained elementary schools, each with its own specialty, and Fillmore became an arts center, lacking a student body of its own and dedicated to serving the other five schools.

Following the formation of the complex, enrollment jumped from about 500 for six schools in 1974 to more than 900 in five schools by 1979. Enrollment remains about the same today, with children from the five schools bused to the Fillmore Arts Center one day each week for classes in writing, visual arts, dance, drama, and music. Fillmore was voted one of the 10 best art programs in the nation in 1982, and, under the Reagan Administration, has been named the adopted school of the National Endowment of the Arts.

The House of the Good Shepherd
(36th and Reservoir Road)

The schools were not the only institutions undergoing change. Sisters from the House of the Good Shepherd moved into their newly constructed convent on Reservoir Road in the mid-1950s, leaving the original 36th Street building (which had been built in 1890) entirely for use as a school for the re-education of delinquent girls. Ten years later, the provincial seat of the order of the Sisters of the Cross moved to the convent from Philadelphia. The school for wayward girls was closed, and the girls were transferred to Baltimore. Major renovations were begun in 1968 to convert the original building to a house of studies for young sisters. At that time, the top floor of the building was torn down, as was an adjoining laundry building, the smoke from which had prompted many complaints from Burleith residents over the years.

By 1972, however, there was less demand for housing for the nuns, as the order stopped renting space to sisters of other orders. All of the nuns moved into the convent building, and the original building was once again renovated and leased to the D.C. government for use as the Rose School, a community mental health program for learning-disabled and troubled children. That program continued until 1981 when, due to budgetary constraints, the Rose School was forced to relocate.

The building remained essentially vacant for two years, until 1983, when the sisters rented two floors of the building to Duke Ellington School of the Arts during the renovation of the old Western High building. A year later the two remaining floors were rented to the Levine School of Music, which has some 400 students of voice, orchestral instruments, percussion, and piano. When Duke Ellington vacates its two floors, the music school will take over the entire building.

The character of the convent building has also changed over the years. In the mid-1970s, the order's provincial seat moved from the convent to Silver Spring, Md., and 35 nuns from a contemplative branch of the order moved in from Germantown, Pa. Although the laundry service was shut down years ago, to this day the nuns continue to bake altar bread for the churches and sew church vestments.

Mt. Tabor Church (35th and Wisconsin Ave.)

Mt. Tabor Church also changed character in the mid-1950s. Built in 1874, the church was known in its early years as the Butcher's Chapel, because it served the butchers and cattle drovers who herded their cattle down High Street (now Wisconsin Avenue). During the 1940s, the D.C. Chief of Police taught bible classes to police officers and the congregation delighted in the fact that it was probably the best protected church in the city. In 1946, the congregations of three churches -- Mt. Tabor, Congress Street, and Aldersgate Methodist -- merged to form St. Luke's congregation, but they continued to use the church building until 1954, when they moved to St. Luke's current location at Wisconsin and Calvert Street. It is unclear whether that move was prompted simply by the need for more space or by the threat of a highway to be built at Whitehaven Parkway. In any case, the present day Divine Science Church, a Christian metaphysical denomination, moved into the building in 1956 and

continues to lease the space from the National Park Service.

Burleith Citizens Association

Although there have been ups and downs during its history, the Burleith Citizens Association has continued its active role in the community, holding regular meetings, sponsoring special events, and representing the residents' interests to city officials. Over the years, the association has sponsored annual dinners at Jelleff's Boys Club, newcomers and oldtimers nights, Halloween parties, house and garden tours, spring clean-up campaigns, art shows, Christmas caroling and decoration contests, Easter egg hunts, rummage sales, and picnics. In fact, the Association has won city-wide recognition for its work. It was awarded the Washington Star Trophy by the D.C. Federation of Civic Associations in 1976, 1978, and 1980 for outstanding public service.

Every era had its special concerns, some of which were specific to the neighborhood, some of which reflected what was going on nationally. For example, during the late 1950s, the association minutes reveal that members were bothered by aircraft noise, oversized buses, and the possibility of highway construction that would affect the neighborhood. During those same years, the association unanimously approved a resolution deploring and condemning the opening of any merchandising establishment or the conduct of sales on Sundays, with the exception of establishments supplying emergency needs. Meetings were devoted to topics such as the Attorney General's list of subversives and the problem of juvenile delinquency. One incident of particular concern involved a dynamite explosion that occurred late one Saturday night in October 1956. Despite association outrage, the police never did discover who was responsible for the blast, which blew out the windows of a number of houses on 35th Place and on T Street.

What little evidence there was seemed to point to a carload of four or five teenagers who were observed parked on T Street, playing loud music.

The early 1960s brought to Burleith a number of new issues and controversies. The February 1960 Burleith newsletter went beyond its usual encouragement of residents to paint and clean up their houses and yards, and warned that "Burleith will proceed along the normal course of an in-town neighborhood toward blight, dilapidation, and eventual slum conditions, if you continue to be self-satisfied and apathetic." That year, Burleith Historian Edgar Farr Russell conducted an extensive survey of Burleith to locate missing trees, broken sidewalks, needed street lights, dilapidated or overcrowded houses, and unsanitary environmental conditions, and presented his report to city officials for repairs. In addition, the association launched an anti-litter campaign, as part of the larger Keep America Beautiful program.

Despite concern with the issue of suffrage, by 1960, D.C. residents still were not permitted to vote in presidential and vice-presidential elections. Consequently, the association conducted a straw poll, the result being Nixon 92, Kennedy 42. It was not until 1964 that D.C. residents were permitted to vote in a presidential election.

Other discussions of the period involved the pros and cons of flouride in the drinking water, the problem of untreated sewage being dumped into the Potomac and the need to separate the sanitary and storm sewers, the possibility of a two-lane park road through Glover-Archbold Park in connection with proposed Three Sisters Bridge construction, and the need for a stop light on Wisconsin Avenue in front of the Safeway store. Despite a number of concerted campaigns to have such a light installed, it didn't happen until 1966, when Mrs. West, a woman in her eighties, pounded on some city desks for action.

Surprisingly, the Burleith Citizens Association was almost terminated in 1962. With meetings held only every other month and paid membership down to 149, a motion was made to disband the association for lack of interest. However, the members voted to continue, and one year later, after a vigorous membership drive, paid membership reached an all-time high of 351 of a possible 535 households.

National Airport

For many years the Burleith residents were bothered by low flying aircraft. However, the situation grew worse in 1966 when National Airport was opened for the first time to commercial jets. By 1967, there were calls to close National completely by 1970 and to develop transit to Dulles International Airport, and one citizens association meeting was held on a chartered bus headed for Arena Stage for a rally sponsored by the Committee Against National (CAN).

During the late 1960s the association discussed the new organization of the D.C. government, the reorganization of the police department, the problems of the sewer separation project, and the need for better police protection during athletic events held at Western's stadium.

While the neighborhood schools were going through some traumatic changes and the nation was faced with the problems of the Vietnam War and Watergate, the early 1970s in Burleith saw the first annual picnic in 1971 and the big 50th anniversary of Burleith in 1973. That celebration was marked by congratulatory telegrams from President Nixon and Shannon and Luchs (the original builders of most of the Burleith homes), and by a proclamation by D.C. Mayor Walter Washington, naming June 2, 1973, "Burleith Golden Anniversary Day."

(More)

Development Challenges

One of the citizens association's traditional roles is to protect the interests of the community from outside forces. The mid- to late 1970s provided plenty of challenge in that area. Anne Archbold, owner of the Archbold estate, died in 1968, and by 1975, major development projects were brewing. The French Embassy purchased an eight-acre parcel on Reservoir Road across from Georgetown Hospital for use as its chancery. The association heard discussion on the proposal, fearing increased traffic and parking problems on the one hand, but fearing even worse alternatives on the other, as the D.C. tax burden on estates necessitated subdivision and development. It decided to remain neutral in the matter.

Safeway jumped on the development bandwagon in 1976 when it sought a zoning variance to expand the store by constructing a \$1.5 million, 89,000 square-foot building behind its existing store on Wisconsin Avenue, and upon its completion, knocking down the original store to create a large parking lot. The association opposed the store's expansion plan, arguing that it would only attract more customers and cause traffic problems. It also argued that four other projects in the area -- the expansion of Georgetown Hospital, the construction of the French chancery on Reservoir Road, the construction of the Holiday Inn just a block north of the Safeway, and the building at the Russian embassy at Wisconsin and Davis Street -- were already causing too much congestion, pollution, and parking problems. Nevertheless, the plan was approved by the D.C. zoning board and the new store, affectionately known as the "Social Safeway," opened in 1980.

Hillandale

In 1978 the Hillandale Development Corporation purchased the remaining 42 acres of the Archbold estate

across from Georgetown Hospital for development as a complex of luxury, cluster-style townhouses. After months of negotiation with the Burleith Citizens Association, the developers agreed to relocate the proposed entrance to the development to minimize traffic on neighborhood streets by limiting access to an entrance on 39th Street between S Street and Reservoir Road. They also agreed to terminate any further expansion of 39th Street through the park to Glover Park, to create a buffer zone between the complex and the neighborhood, and to require construction vehicles to be parked on Hillandale property during construction.

In exchange, the citizens association agreed to testify in support of Hillandale's rezoning request for the construction of 268 dwellings. Without such approval, the corporation, under then-existing zoning, might have divided the property into 285 lots for 285 detached houses, with attendant heavy bulldozing and loss of trees.

The local Advisory Neighborhood Commission (ANC), however, testified against the project, claiming that the development would be an upper income enclave where the projected price of a rowhouse would be \$275,000 and non-residents would be denied access by guards and fences. There also was fear that the project would drive up assessments and force fixed-income residents from their homes.

Once construction was underway, it became clear that Hillandale was reneging on its agreement. The developers were shortening the setback, reducing the buffer zone, cutting undesignated trees, moving the location of the entrance, and working after hours. The association was ready to file suit, but entered a new round of negotiations that granted it the right to monitor the development for further violations and to work out covenants to be included in deeds. However, an

economic recession slowed building, and by 1984 the developers sought to declare bankruptcy.

During the same time frame another townhouse development, the Cloisters, was begun on Reservoir Road and 35th Street, on land sold by the Convent of the Visitation.

Other Concerns

The association's concerns during the late 1970s were not restricted to new construction. One long-standing problem, parking, apparently reached intolerable proportions. Between the overflow parking from Georgetown University and the influx of suburban commuters who would drive into Burleith and walk or bus the remainder of the way to their offices, Burleith residents had a difficult time finding parking near their homes. The association pushed for a residential parking sticker program, but encountered strong opposition by Georgetown merchants who feared such a program's effect upon their businesses. Court challenges to the program were not resolved until 1977, and a meter maid system of enforcement was not established until 1978.

Another issue was where to locate a "tot lot" or playground for children under age six. Proposals to install playground equipment at the Green Lot (Whitehaven and 37th Street) ran into resistance from residents who feared that would be only the first step in building up the park, as more demands were made for toilet facilities, drinking fountains, and benches. Playground equipment was purchased in 1976 but not installed until 1977 when a decision was reached to locate the tot lot at Fillmore School.

The association also expressed its opposition to the extension of Rt. I-66 from Virginia into the city. Members were concerned that pressure would be exerted to build a connecting highway from Observatory Circle across Whitehaven Park and the Green Lot.

Since 1980 the association has encountered a variety of new problems. Raccoons began to make a nuisance of themselves, so much so that the association in 1981 invested \$33 to purchase a humane trap to catch them. The problem reappeared in 1983 when a number of rabid animals were found, and free inoculations were offered for pet dogs and cats.

Other developments included the coming of the supercans, the start of the Kennedy Center minibus, and the proposed sale of Jelleff Boys and Girls Club. Sale of the club has been a recurring possibility over the years, as the value of the land appreciates. Potential purchasers have included commercial tennis and racketball clubs and a developer of a rowhouse complex. Aircraft noise continues to be an annoyance. A curfew banning noisy planes at National between the hours of 10 p.m. and 7 a.m. was established in 1981, and an experimental "scatter plan" designed to spread airport noise more evenly, away from the river communities, was temporarily implemented in 1983.

A human head was found on 37th Street in 1980, and although police said it belonged to one of the medical schools, none of the schools claimed ownership. Another macabre event involved Georgetown University's announcement that, effective Jan. 1, 1985, it planned to close Holy Rood Cemetery because it was too expensive to maintain. That action has raised fears that the cemetery will fall into a state of disrepair, and that the university will declare it abandoned within a few years and will build dormitories there. One older gentleman in his 70s who owns a plot has exclaimed that he wanted to be buried there but would "be damned" if he'd comply with the time limit in order to do so. The Community To Save Holy Rood Cemetery obtained a court-granted consent order to allow burials for those who hold burial rights until the case is heard in court during the summer of 1985.

Western Stadium

A perplexing problem facing the community is the use of the old Western stadium at 38th and R Streets. Duke Ellington School of the Arts does not use it regularly, but some of the groups that have, including a Spanish-speaking soccer team and the University of the District of Columbia football team, have caused parking, litter, noise, and sanitation problems at the field. These teams have been banned.

Perhaps the most emotional issue to surface in recent years involved a January 1985 decision by the D.C. School Board to permit the use of two small, unused locker rooms at the stadium as a shelter for up to 30 homeless people. The School Board decided to permit Rev. William Wegener, chairman of the Georgetown Clergy Association, to use the shelter on an emergency basis for about two and one-half months. But the shelter was closed down more than a month early as the result of complaints that the shelter was inadequately supervised, causing noise and other problems in the neighborhood. Residents near the shelter complained that homeless persons were throwing litter into yards, fighting among themselves, threatening neighbors, creating loud disturbances, and causing a health hazard because the shelter lacked sufficient toilet and washing facilities.

Although Burleith has confronted a laundry list of problems, it has weathered the storm and continues to be one of the more pleasant, livable communities in D.C., and truly earns the name "the village in the city." In fact, in the March 1985 issue of *Washingtonian Magazine*, Burleith is listed as one of "Ten Underrated Neighborhoods" in the D.C. area. According to the article, a good test for determining whether a community is on the rise is the strength of its community association. Prospective buyers should not be put off by controversy because, the article advises, the more intense the debate in the association, the

greater the interest among residents in improving the neighborhood.

(The author is an editor for the Bureau of National Affairs and has been a resident of Burleith since April 1984.)

