

A HISTORY OF BRYAN PARKWAY

By Teddy Martin

About forty-five years ago a neighborhood boy and his brother were playing with their bows and arrows in Bryan Park. When the arrow was retrieved, it had landed beside a peculiar rock that looked like an Indian relic. The rock was kept but never really thought of much. Years later, the "rock" was taken to the Virginia State Library where Virginia State Archeologist, Col. Howard MacCord, identified the artifact as approximately five to ten thousand years old. It belonged to native Americans who once lived, farmed and hunted in our neighborhood.

Well, a lot has happened since the Indians roamed the area. The Bryan Parkway area was home to Mosby's Raiders, a group of Confederate guerrilla raiders led by John Singleton Mosby. Mosby's Raiders were one of the most effective weapons in General Lee's army. The Raiders' and other Confederate encampments as well as other civil war trenches are still visible in the area. Our neighborhood was part of the "outer defenses" that once stood watch over Richmond against an invasion from the North. A protected entrenchment is located across from Ukrop's Super Market in the Brook Run Shopping Center and several are located within Bryan Park.

A grist mill once stood near the lower lake in Bryan Park. The old mill stones are still seen in the area. Ice, which formed in Young's Pond during the 1800's, was known as "some of the purest and best ice available in the Richmond area". More recently, around 1925, the properties now known as Bryan Parkway were sold in a deed transfer between Lelia M. Krouse of the City of Richmond and Robert Pollard, Trustee, City of Richmond, for \$9,000 in three equal principle installments of \$3,000 each. The Association was created in 1939. In January, 1945, a By-Laws Committee composed of Mrs. R. T. Swaim (formerly a resident of Essex Road), Mr. W. T. Talley, and Mr. L. G. McClellan submitted the by-laws for general circulation to the residents. During the early days, certificates of stock were issued by the Association. Any person (not necessarily a resident of the neighborhood) desiring to become a stockholder was required to purchase two shares of stock at the par value of \$5 each, which included the assessment for the first year of such membership. Annual meetings were held on the first Monday in July and the Board of Directors was required to meet at least once, on the last Monday in May of each year. Other meetings were called as necessary by the President. Only four Standing Committees were established in the 1945 By-Laws: Membership, Programme, Attendance, and Buildings and Restrictions. In 1945, there were 85 members.

The October, 1952 newsletter indicated that 85% of the homes in the neighborhood had been treated with spore dust for the control of Japanese Beetles. Signs were erected indicating "Children at Play" throughout the neighborhood. More than 50 sugar maples were planted during 1950, and the county began trash and garbage collection. Twenty-four hour police protection was added to the area during 1952. During that year, the standing committees in the Association were Parkways (we know them as "The Triangles"), Buildings and Restrictions, Membership and Attendance, Program, Refreshments, Tree Plantings, Representatives to Interassociational Council, and Census Enumerator. There were 239 memberships.

The original purpose of the Association was "...to serve the residents of the Bryan Parkway subdivision located in Henrico County in the promotion of civic and social activities and programs for community care and improvement". It has never been a political activist group and does not officially take stands in political elections. The Association today is still going about its mission as it was originally established. According to records maintained at Henrico

County, Bryan Parkway Civic Association is one of the oldest, best organized, and most active associations in the county.

Our neighborhood is split between the Brookland and Fairfield districts. (The center line of Westlake Avenue divides these two districts.) This has proven to be most advantageous to our residents. Having representation of two county supervisors and two members of the school board has paid off for our neighborhood on many occasions. The county/city line is the property line of the residents of Bryan Park Avenue. Al Laube, working with our Board of Supervisors, oversaw the replacement of many trees as well as sidewalk and gutter repairs. In the summer of 2002, the BPCA Board worked closely with City of Richmond officials for the placement of a stop sign at the intersection of Westlake and Bryan Park Avenues in order to reduce motorists' speeding in the neighborhood.

The original directors of the Association for incorporation purposes were Cary L. Branch, Ellsworth Owen, Thomas Moncrief, G. Ray Edwards, E. L. Tilley, Henry Lowery, Ben Jarett, Jean Brodie, Joseph Lipscombe and Eddie Eck. (Mr. Eck continues to be an active member of the Association). This group of neighbors officially created the Bryan Parkway Civic Association Incorporated on December 18, 1958. The President during the 1959 year was Thomas Moncrief. The earliest president on record was Mr. William T. Adams in 1950. Others during these early years included Homer White ('51), C.L. Baker ('52), A.L. Keresahl ('53) and C.L. Baker ('53). The Reverend Matt McGowen, former pastor of Overbrook Presbyterian Church, was president in 1966, Bill Puryear (Wedgewood Avenue) in 1975 and D. Johnson Livengood in 1968. Many others have followed in these former presidents' footsteps.

In the years before our neighborhood was a neighborhood, the house located at 2120 Winnwood Avenue was part of an active farm. Also, according to Wayland Rennie, it was originally the carriage and tack house for the Lewis Ginter Estate, which was then located in what is now Ginter Park. It is the oldest house in our neighborhood. The silo foundations are still there. Other houses began to be built during the 1920's and 30's, with the heaviest concentration of home building in the post-war years and through the 1950's. A lot of houses in our neighborhood were originally built for prices below \$10,000, but according to deed restrictions in the original subdivision plat plan, none could be built for less than \$5,000. Original real estate tax assessment cards stored at the Henrico County Government Complex contain photographs of the original houses. Alas, everything improves. Real estate records are now on computer and since these are public records, you can visit the real estate office and research the history of your house. They might even give you the original picture of your house, if you ask nicely.

There used to be a large "Christmas Tree" at the corner of Buckingham and Essex. The owners decorated this huge tree and piped Christmas music through it. Christmas house and door decorating contests in Bryan Parkway carried special meaning because the residents usually went all out decorating their houses. One resident at the corner of New Berne and Stonleigh used to hang a full-sized Santa Sleigh and all the reindeer between his house and the large maple tree at the corner. That was a sight to see! One of our residents dressed as Santa and visited children's houses early on Christmas Eve to make sure all the "good little boys and girls" were in their beds awaiting his arrival later that night. We never found out who this resident was, but there were rumors that it was "Froggie" Morris who lived at 2316 Essex Road. But we were never really sure. One year he visited the Martin household on Essex Road and scared us so badly that my brother pulled his beard off and I stomped his feet. We went to bed that night sure we would never see anything under the tree for the rest of our lives. Christmas also meant the Carol Sing

on the triangle. The aroma of hot apple cider, bonfire smoke and the sounds of Christmas carols filled the air while the house and door decorating contest was being judged. Some of our judges have been our county supervisors, and others have been dignitaries. Janet Peckenpaugh of Channel 12 News was our most famous judge to date.

Annual meetings were a special treat for the members. Dinner meetings were held at such places as the Holiday Inn and Cross Roads (Staples Mill Road), Rodeway Inn and Dobbs House. These meetings were usually a catered dinner/dance with a meeting and entertainment. However, due to increased costs of this type of meeting and declining attendance, recent Boards have opted for covered dish dinners at local establishments such as Overbrook Presbyterian and Hatcher Memorial Baptist Churches. The first covered dish dinner, which was originally established on a "trial basis" when I was the association's first vice president, was attended by over 120 residents. Even more recently, meetings have been held at the Belmont Recreation Center and, thanks to the assistance of our county supervisors, we have been afforded free use of the facility. Belmont Recreation Center, now owned by Henrico County, was once the Hermitage Country Club where such great golfers as Sam Snead played and won a Masters Tournament. Teddy Martin, Sr., when he was a young boy, caddied for Sam Snead at the Hermitage Country Club.

Another special event is the annual picnic. Years ago they were held in Bryan Park and always on the first Friday night in June. Because of many changes in the park, picnics were held for a time at Echo Lake and the triangles at Buckingham and Westlake. At the picnics held in Bryan Park, crowds were always large, not necessarily for the good food and fellowship, but rather in hopes of winning one of the special door prizes. Residents would donate baked goods and homemade crafts. But the price everyone hoped for was a Floyd Hetzer toilet seat or flashlight! The picnic continues to be one of the highlights of the annual events sponsored by the Association. The Association has once again moved its picnics back to Bryan Park as the park has become revitalized in recent years.

Bryan Parkway is special – so special that many of us who grew up here have stayed or have eventually returned. There is a rich history here because for many years there were no FOR SALE signs to be seen. Every house and business was filled with people who knew and depended upon each other. Many years ago, the children waiting for the school bus at Darhanian's grocery store at Hilliard and Lakeside knew they could wait inside, out of the cold, and might even get a snack or two from Mr. Darhanian. Climbing on the rocks of the lower lake, pushing a stroller along tree-shaded streets, or realizing you have waved at the past five cars driving by gives you the feeling that you belong here and that it's a great place to stay.