

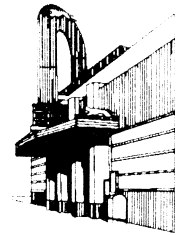
The serious study of the recent past is a relatively new phenomenon; there have been few scholarly books on the subject, and articles in professional journals are few and far between. The papers included in the handbook for the national conference, *Preserving the Recent Past*, Chicago, March 30 through April 1, 1995, have made an important contribution to understanding and addressing these issues. The conference was organized specifically to bring together preservation professionals from North America and Europe to consider the unique challenges of preserving 20th-century

historic resources. Together, the workbook and the conference will greatly expand the body of practical information available to preservation professionals on evaluating and protecting the recent past.

H. Ward Jandl, Deputy Chief, Preservation Assistance Division, National Park Service, Washington, DC, died suddenly of heart failure just two weeks prior to the conference, Preserving the Recent Past. The conference and workbook were his idea and stemmed from his interest and expertise in 20th-century building types and their preservation.

Bruce M. Kriviskey

Saving the Suburban Sixties Historic Preservation Planning in Fairfax County, Virginia



The notion of “historic preservation” in Northern Virginia’s Fairfax County—the most intensely developed jurisdiction in the Washington, DC, metropolitan area—often taxes one’s credulity. Those familiar with the county, but whose perceptions are of only gridlock and sprawl, strain to remember what is left that is old, much less historic. They recall waggish bumper stickers that use Fairfax as a verb describing an act that should not be done to other nearby counties or, for that matter, to the rest of Virginia. Those less familiar with the county may have read what some observers have written about our “Edge Cities,” “Beltway Bandits,” and “McMansions.”

The history of Fairfax County can be captured in three “snapshots.” The first shows a group of earnest Paleo-Indians ambushing a Woolly Mammoth at the crossing of two well-worn paths in the ice-age tundra. The second shows a graph of population change in the county since the first census in the 1790s. The population level was virtually flat until the 1930s; it doubled each decade from 1940 until 1980, and it doubled again over the past 14 years to over 820,000 today—an average increase of 88% per decade since World War II. The third is of Tysons Corner, a gas station and

a general store as late as the 1960s, now the commercial hub of the county and the seventh largest business district in the country, with over 20 million square feet of office and retail space. Archeologists might say that snapshots one and three depict the same spot and simply show the impact of the view shown in snapshot two on the past and present of a traditional crossroads trading center.

Of course, there are venerable sites of historic and architectural significance in the county—Mount Vernon, Woodlawn Plantation, and Gunston Hall, to name a few. There are also hundreds of lesser known 18th- and 19th-century historic sites scattered around the county, as well as more than 2,000 recorded archeological sites including one about 8,000 years old (properly excavated and recorded, of course) now under a parking structure in Tysons Corner. Collectively, these ably represent the heritage of the nation, state, and county.

Needless to say, these invaluable traces of the past—traditional history, if you will—have been the focus of the county’s preservation planning program since the early 1960s. But, this is history to read about, not recall; to look at, not to have lived. About 10 years ago, this dichotomy was recognized by those concerned with under-

Tysons Corner about 1940.



Photos courtesy of Fairfax County Public Library Photographic Archives.

Tysons Corner in the 1980s.



standing and preserving the heritage resources of the county and questions were raised, traditions challenged, and goals debated.

Debate focused on defining the most historically-significant periods in the history of Fairfax County. Prehistoric days that ended with the explorations of Captain John Smith and other Europeans? Days of the Royal Proprietor, Thomas, Sixth Lord Fairfax, when the lands that became the great plantations were granted, assembled, cleared, and cultivated? Patriot days when the county's two Georges, Washington and Mason, fathered a nation and its Bill of Rights? The days when westward expansion meant a scattering of wilderness homesteads 10 or so miles upland from the Potomac? Or the days when Colonel John Singleton Mosby provided many sleepless nights for Union occupying forces? All of these are significant times that affected tens, hundreds, and even thousands of people. But, the era that affected hundreds of thousands came after these.

The Beginnings of the Recent Past

In the late 19th century, economic and social woes affecting the nation and the ease of travel and communication throughout the country reduced the importance of state governments. By the turn of the century, the scale of the federal bureaucracy began to expand with the rise of new regulatory agencies and the expansionist foreign

policy of the times. In the early 20th century, the world view brought on by World War I and the "alphabet soup" response to the woes of the Depression caused Washington to become the hub as well as capital of the nation. Fifty years ago, World War II pushed a moribund military into the forefront of the bureaucracy and, in the heat of the Cold War, the military-industrial complex mushroomed, crossed the Potomac, and grew in the fields of Fairfax County.

In the late-19th and early-20th centuries, Fairfax County was the dairy center of the United States and the breadbasket of the nation's capital. To accommodate these activities, the mud and gravel roads that once were only farm-to-market routes began to be traveled in both directions. Washington residents, particularly the upwardly mobile middle class, sought homes or weekend retreats way out west in the inexpensive, open countryside of McLean, Mount Vernon, Great Falls, and Fairfax City. Houses were added to tiny crossroads villages like Dunn-Loring, Langley, Vienna, and Clifton, while trolley lines grew along with public services and local commerce. This gentle infiltration began as Washington became an employment magnet. It became a great invasion as the city's population exploded from the "War to End All Wars" to the "War on Poverty," as tens and then hundreds of thousands of people made Fairfax County their home. In re-re-re-doubling the population, they made another kind of history, not more or less significant than the past 250 or 10,000 years, but different and more challenging to identify, record, communicate, and, yes, preserve.

Identifying the Recent Past

In 1988, Fairfax County adopted its Heritage Resources Management Plan. This plan identified 10 so-called study units beginning with the prehistoric Paleo-Indian cultures, the time of Hunter-Gatherers, and the beginnings of European contact. It then focused on the historical periods including those of the tobacco plantation society, free black communities, Civil War and Reconstruction, and agrarian culture. The latest of these study units is most relevant to the recent history of Fairfax County— that of suburbanization and urban dominance.

The plan described the cultural context of each study unit as well as the heritage resource types that typify the time or group. For the suburbanization unit, typical resources included horse farms and commercial agriculture, industrial parks and shopping centers, planned communities and crossroad clusters, trolley lines and paved highways, single-family housing and cooperative apartments, government offices and military installations, and schools and parks. A subcate-

gory of the study unit, perhaps unique to northern Virginia, is “colonialization”— the design influence of Mount Vernon and, to a lesser extent, Williamsburg in both new construction and remodeling. Here, columns and cupolas were added to everything from 19th-century vernacular farmhouses to gas stations and high-rise office buildings. Architectural kitsch became architectural history as the visual character of much of the county was formed.

Not surprisingly, studying this part of the past bucks the traditional concerns of archeologists, historians, and preservationists. Because of this, many of the resources identified in this unit had been unsung and unsaved. With the prodding of the Heritage Resources Management Plan, an awareness of the cultural significance of these properties has increased and they are now considered worthy of study and recording. Researchers have found that they are fun, too.

Recording the Recent Past

The Fairfax County Inventory of Historic Sites was begun in the 1960s and now includes nearly 300 properties. At least a fourth of these were built or remodeled in the 20th century and include such niceties as Wright’s Usonian Pope-Leighey House, built in 1940 and relocated in 1964; roadside attractions such as the 1950 Frozen Dairy Bar, now in architectural mothballs; shopping centers such as Seven Corners, opened in 1956, the first in the Washington metropolitan area; and planned communities such as Hollin Hills, 1949-1962, and Reston, begun in 1965.

The inventory is primarily that, a list of properties deemed to be of sufficient interest to be studied and recorded. Inventory properties are not protected, although over 30 are also listed in the National Register or included in local historic districts. They are, however, taken into consideration in the county’s planning and zoning processes. There is also a parallel inventory for archeological sites, now numbering over 2,000, but only a handful of these relate primarily to 20th-century resources.

An example of the type of recording of the recent past that is taking place in Fairfax County is the photographic survey of the planned community of Hollin Hills. Begun in 1949 and completed in the 1960s, this single-family housing project was singled out as a “milestone in the future of American architecture” in the 1957 centennial exhibit of the American Institute of Architects. Its houses designed by the late Charles M. Goodman, came in 14 “basic” types. Buyers could make individual modifications within the context of the architectural design and the park-like landscape, a new concept that bridged the gap between custom and cookie-cutter design. The purpose of this photo-

graphic recording project, undertaken by students of the urban architecture program of Virginia Polytechnic and State University (Alexandria Center), recorded all the basic themes and variations. This has sparked an interest in studying other works by this well-known Washington area architect as well as an interest in contemporary, as opposed to traditional (read “colonialized”), design in the county.

Communicating the Recent Past

In addition to sponsoring the work of others, such as the Hollin Hills survey, Fairfax County has a growing interest in publishing materials relative to recent history. The Fairfax Chronicles, the county’s newsletter devoted to archeology, history, architecture, and historic preservation, has been published for the past 16 years. Within the past four or five years, more and more articles and photographs about the early and mid-20th century have been included. These are extremely popular with the public, particularly school children. An article and twilight color photograph of the neon-lit Frozen Dairy Bar stirred up much nostalgia as did a recent article on the 30th anniversary of the opening of the Capital Beltway, the circumferential highway serving the Washington metropolitan area. In that issue, early aerial and ground photographs were printed side by side with increasingly more cluttered street maps to tell the story of post-World War II development in Fairfax County in a way that both long-time residents and newcomers could understand. It was history they could touch, and laugh at. The cover photograph showed the brand new Beltway bumper-to-bumper with the parked automobiles of those who came to witness its grand opening in 1964. It hasn’t changed much since.

One of the more popular communications devices sponsored by the county, in conjunction with the Virginia Department of Historic Resources, is a highway marker program. These are the roadside markers that you try to read as you drive past (new ones are now placed at intersections or at convenient pull-offs) that tell who lived, fought, or otherwise did something of historical interest at that place. The three latest markers in the county deal with the outer defenses of Washington, but not during the Civil War or War of 1812. Rather, these tell about the three Nike anti-aircraft missile launching sites located in the county during the hot days of the Cold War. These were well-guarded secrets until phased out in the 1960s, except for the fully-equipped one used as a tour site to impress on foreign dignitaries that America did, indeed, carry a big stick. Now they are grassy spots in public parks, but with a history as important as the line of fortifications that ringed Washington on the Virginia side of the Potomac

100 years earlier. Both sets of fortifications were more psychological deterrents than actual ones, and none ever fired a shot in anger.

Preserving the Recent Past

Like the forts and launching sites of past eras, Fairfax County has the latest arsenal of historic preservation tools at its disposal. These include 13 Historic Overlay Districts officially designated by the Board of Supervisors and subject to design review as part of the county's Zoning Ordinance. Because of the architectural traditions and development patterns of the county, none of these include the uniformly old urban neighborhoods that are typical of historic districts throughout the country. Rather, most Fairfax County districts focus on a single primary structure—the Pohick Church of 1769, or the 1794 Sully and 1806 Woodlawn Plantations. An essential part of these districts, if not the key, is the larger landscape context that defines approaches to the primary, or core, properties as well as views to and from them.

A few of the county's historic districts are more traditional building clusters, the least traditional of which is the Lake Anne Village Center of Reston. This residential/commercial complex was built in 1965 and formally designated as a Fairfax County Historic Overlay District in 1983. To my knowledge, this is the only designated historic district in the country subject to local design review where every bit was built in the 1960s.

Fitting right into the theme of suburbanization and urban dominance, Reston occupies the former 7,000-acre Bowman Farm, which by the mid-20th century was the largest single tract of land in the area. The Bowmans had tried to develop a new town themselves, but eventually sold the land to Robert E. Simon. In 1961, he began to plan, build, and market Reston, and to use his initials in the name. Ironically, this had been the site of another planned town in the 1890s with the less catchy name of Wiehle, which never grew to more than a handful of buildings.

Unlike Wiehle, Reston, home now to over 60,000 people, was phenomenally successful. From the beginning, critics hailed Reston's concept of village centers surrounded by greenbelts as a significant planning and architectural achievement. Lake Anne Village Center, designed by the New York firm of Whittlesey and Conklin, was the first of the village centers built and was designed at a pedestrian scale with a mix of residences, offices, and retail stores gathered around lakes and plazas, urban spaces in the suburbs. As a 1981 Washington Post article observed, "No piece of Northern Virginia real estate was more praised and honored in the 1960s than Reston's Lake Anne Center."



Hollin Hills in the 1950s.

Photos courtesy of Fairfax County Public Library Photographic Archives.

Lake Anne Village Center, Reston, 1977.



The center was designed and built as a whole with each element fitting into the entire scheme. Buildings ranging in height from two to four stories line the lake and plaza while one 18-story apartment building stands as a focal point at the end of the plaza. A "J" shaped row of shops topped by apartments encloses the wide plaza and crowns the northern tip of the lake. The buildings share a common vocabulary of design and materials; the modern, straight-edged architecture is executed in medium brown brick with dark brown wood trim, gray concrete, and glass. The buildings are complex compositions of solid and void, with many balconies, sheer brick walls, flat but varied rooflines, and expanses of glass. Concrete sculpture and, today, mature landscaping accent the plaza where moms with strollers enjoy the human scale.

As with the more traditional of Fairfax County's Historic Overlay Districts, the goal is to protect the architectural and environmental fabric of the center and to assure that future development is compatible with its existing architectural character. For the Lake Anne Village Center, this is not as easy as it sounds. These mixed-use buildings were products of the 1960s, and designed to meet contemporary needs with the technologies of the times. As such, they are essentially speculative commercial buildings designed and constructed to last around 30 years. Today, 30 years later, parts

are wearing out, pieces falling off, and buildings built before energy was a problem and big-box stores were the competition present challenges to preservation-minded owners and to the county's Architectural Review Board. Working with Reston's own Design Review Board while projects are still on the drawing boards has smoothed this process significantly.

Challenges to Preserving the Recent Past

Aside from the technical challenges of preserving an architectural fabric that was never intended for anything near posterity, the biggest challenge to preserving the recent past of Fairfax County is overcoming the notion that it just isn't past enough. The "50-year threshold" has not been crossed, and we are dealing with architectural nostalgia, not architectural history. This, however, is a purist, not populist, argument. A browse through any of today's "Antiques and Collectibles" shops where Fiesta Ware, Tonka trucks, and chrome-plated dinette sets command premium prices reflects the growing public fasci-

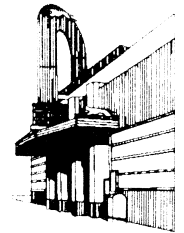
nation with the recent past. But, what of this past is significant enough right now to warrant public respect and scholarly interest?

In Fairfax County, as in any other suburban jurisdiction, the answers fall along a sliding scale. To us, however, all evidence of the recent past is significant because of what it can teach us about where we, not just our parents or grandparents, have come from and how we have coped, for better or for worse, with the opportunities, needs, and constraints of geometric growth. That is why we are sifting through what is left of the resources of the recent past, some to merely note, some to celebrate, some to preserve, and all to respect. Would that our parents and grandparents had done the same.

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Tim Samuelson and Jim Peters

Landmarks of Chicago Blues and Gospel Chess Records and First Church of Deliverance



For most of its first 20 years of existence, the Commission on Chicago Landmarks has been largely concerned with the protection of the city's world-famous collection of late-19th and early-20th century architecture: the skyscrapers and early commercial buildings of the Loop, the mansions of the Gold Coast and the Near South Side, and a variety of Prairie School residences.

On at least two occasions in the last few years, however, the Commission has headed in an entirely new direction, from the well-traveled paths of architects Louis Sullivan and Frank Lloyd Wright to that of such influential musicians as Chuck Berry, Dinah Washington, and Muddy Waters.

In 1989, the Commission designated an otherwise nondescript, two-story building at 2120 South Michigan Avenue as a Chicago Landmark, due to its use between 1957 and 1967 by Chess Records, one of the principal music labels associated with the development of American blues and rock and roll. And, in 1994, a former hat factory building at 4315 South Wabash Avenue was given city landmark status, partly because of the importance of its longtime occupant, the First Church of Deliverance, to the development of American gospel music in the 1930s and 1940s.

The process of landmarking these two buildings, particularly in the case of Chess and its interior design, has proven to be a new and enlightening challenge that has altered the way the