



HOLLIN HILLS BULLETIN

FEBRUARY 2018

A MESSAGE FROM THE CAHH PRESIDENT

OUR COMMUNITY PAST AND PRESENT: WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?

Most of the residents with whom I have spoken in the past twenty years believe that Hollin Hills is a special place. There is ample support for that premise since our community has received many accolades, awards and other recognitions for its unconventional architecture, landscape designs, and street layout.

Hopeful beginnings

In the early days, Hollin Hills attracted a lot of people who were looking forward to an exciting and prosperous future, not backward to the horrors of the war years. They had new jobs, high hopes, and families with little kids eager for a backyard. They didn't have a lot of money, but the proverbial glass was getting fuller every day. Besides, Hollin Hills was cool—all that glass, modern style, not to mention it was affordable. So, a lot of people bought in, raised kids, got a little frustrated with the lack of storage, added additions, lots of additions.

Conflicts and changes

Seventy years went by. Like communities everywhere, there were internal community fights about almost everything: fire hydrants, street lights, swimming pools, street signs, speed bumps. New people moved in, moved out, moved in again. A surprisingly large *(continued on page 2)*

CHASE AWAY THE WINTER BLUES AT OUR ANNUAL POTLUCK PARTY

Join your friends and neighbors at Hollin Hills' twenty-third annual Winter Potluck Party. It's a family affair, and kids are welcome, too. The party will be held on Sunday, February 11, from 5-7pm, in the Mansion building of the Mount Vernon Unitarian Church.

Each household is asked to bring an appetizer to share, which always results in an amazing array of delicious party food to sample and enjoy. The Civic Association will, as usual, provide wine and soft drinks.

If you can come a bit early, or stay a while to lend a hand with set up and clean up, please let Social Chair Susmita Dastidar know, at 703-660-5988 or dustbin114@gmail.com.

THE LATEST WORD ON THE UPCOMING TOUR

The Hollin Hills House + Garden Tour Committee continues to be hard at work making arrangements and organizing for the tour on Saturday, April 28. Things are starting to fall into place as we secure the last few houses for the tour, work on the various pieces of marketing collateral, solidify all the logistics, and drum up interest from the local (and not-so-local) mid-century modern enthusiasts.

Three quick updates about the tour:

- **Tickets** - We plan to start selling tickets in late-February/early-March, so keep an eye on your inbox and the CAHH Facebook page (www.facebook.com/hollinhills/) as we will be sure to notify CAHH members first about the availability of tickets.
- **Volunteers** - In order to have a truly successful home tour, we will need many volunteers—from docents to registration helpers, and more. Please consider giving the community a few hours of your time on April 28. To volunteer, visit the website (www.hollin-hills.org/house-tour) and click on the Volunteer button, or you can email hht2018@gmail.com with the subject line "Volunteer."
- **Sponsors** - We will also be sending out information soon regarding sponsorship opportunities. Please keep an eye out for this information and consider supporting the tour as a sponsor and/or passing the information on to businesses that you think might be interested in becoming sponsors.

Finally, the Tour Committee will be at the CAHH Winter Potluck on Sunday, February 11, where you can sign up to volunteer, to receive email updates, and more. Can't wait? To receive more frequent updates about the tour, please visit the House + Garden Tour website (www.hollin-hills.org/house-tour) and sign up for our email updates and "Like" our Facebook page (www.facebook.com/HHHNGT).

—Heidi Hess, Tour Co-Chair

www.hollin-hills.org is the official Hollin Hills website. Have you checked it out?

CIVIC ASSOCIATION OF HOLLIN HILLS (CAHH)

CAHH OFFICERS

President	Gus Matson	768-3797
Vice-President	Chris McNamara	660-9536
Treasurer	Scott Weidenfeller	725-7894
Secretary	Friederike Ahrens	571-481-4628
Membership	Marinka Tellier	768-8709

DIRECTORS-AT-LARGE

Pool	Laura Kistler	768-4161
MVCCA	Kathy Seikel	768-2350
Social	Susmita Dastidar	660-5938
Parks	Bob Kinzer	768-4048

CAHH COMMITTEES

ARCHIVIST	Judy Riggan	765-3025
Historian	Scott Wilson	765-4471

(Also see Hollin Hills Archives below)

DESIGN REVIEW COMMITTEE (DRC)

Chair	Frank Collins	660-6525
Members	John Burns	660-9763
	John Nolan	231-2229
	Ginny Wallace	765-7116
	Ken Wilson	768-5838

CAHH-DRC Liaison Chris McNamara 660-9536

HOLLIN HILLS POOL COMMITTEE

Chair	Barbara Bogue	571-257-9313
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PARKS COMMITTEE

Chair	Elisabeth Lardner	765-3023
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HOLLIN HILLS BULLETIN

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Editor	Barbara Shear	660-6543
Editorial Assistance	Andrew Keegan	660-1004

Deadline is the 15th of the preceding month.
Articles generally should not exceed 500 words. Send your submission in the body of an email or as an attachment to barbshear@verizon.net. If you cannot produce computerized copy, please find someone to submit it for you. No material will be accepted over the telephone.

Distribution problems:

- If you have not received your digital Bulletin, or to correct/change mail or email address, contact Marinka Tellier, 703-768-8709 or tellim@hotmail.com.
- To replace a missing paper Bulletin, contact Ellen Rydell at 703-768-3442.

HOLLIN HILLS ARCHIVES

The Hollin Hills Archives are part of the Special Collections and Archives of George Mason University. To contact the SC&A staff with research questions, use the following:

- For general description of HH Archives contents, go to http://sca.gmu.edu/finding_aids/hollinhills.html.
- For questions about collections, hours, usage, duplications, or directions go to http://sca.gmu.edu/using_sc&a.html.
- Other contacts: phone 703-993-2220, fax inquiries 703-993-8911, email speccoll@gmu.edu.

www.hollin-hills.org

Calendar of community events and information about our parks, the Design Review Committee, the National Historic Registry, and more.

President's message *from page 1*

number of people moved within the neighborhood, some multiple times. This by itself indicated that something was going on here, something maybe not unique, but not all that common. Over seventy years, the flora, much sparser in the 1950s, grew to turn much of the neighborhood into houses in the woods. Automobiles became much more plentiful, presenting a challenge since garages were scarce, and not in keeping with the inside/out nature of the architecture. The original houses had no gutters, but as time went by, it became apparent that many houses suffered from this oversight. The gutters most appropriate to the clean-line design principle of contemporary architecture are simple square box gutters, but they are uncommon in the market place and are substantially more expensive. Fences are at odds with the original landscape design concepts of Barney Voigt, who envisioned 'borrowed vistas' as the ideal. Today, many people want fences for privacy or dog runs, or to corral little kids, or banish neighbors. Fortunately, the Design Review process is still honored by the vast majority of home owners, and that speaks volumes about how our residents feel about Hollin Hills.

To protect us, our covenants need more clarity

There are several neighborhood issues that need to be addressed. The covenants document that serves as the basis for the DRC guidelines has some language that is not as clear as previously thought, raising questions about who can enforce the covenants. It also allows for the abuse of design guidelines by providing tacit approval of projects that the DRC would not accept as satisfactory, provided the home owner can complete the project before getting sued—a kind of 'beat the clock' for smaller projects. Each of these violation-turned-tacitly-approved projects confuses and muddies the design aesthetic, and renders enforceability more difficult. The covenants should be fixed to provide clarity.

Is a historic overlay district the answer?

In 2013, Hollin Hills was listed in the National Registry of Historic Places and recognized by the Virginia Department of Historic Resources. You may remember that the community invested about \$35,000 in costs to achieve this recognition. But the rub is that this recognition provides no way to ensure the continued existence for these historic and architecturally recognized homes. There is only one way to ensure continuation and that is to become a Fairfax County Historic Overlay District. Mount Vernon Supervisor Dan Stork has advised us that he will support Hollin Hills becoming a Historic Overlay District if a substantial portion of the community supports the idea. Like most thing in life, this change would have benefits and drawbacks. The main benefit would be that the architecture of the community would be preserved. Nobody could tear a house down and build a McMansion. The downside is that the county's Architectural Review Board (ARB) would have to approve projects requiring permits. If we, as a community, were to show our support (to get the ball rolling), we would work with the ARB to create guidelines for the ARB to follow in approving projects. If we could not agree on the guidelines, I believe we could withdraw from consideration. I believe we should pursue this avenue of protection as well.

Community involvement is absolutely essential

I write all this because I need your help. We need volunteers to work on these projects. We currently have a small committee for each project, but we will need a lot more to be effective. If you are interested in volunteering, send me an email at CAHH@hollin-hills.org and provide me your name, address, phone number, and an email address. Please do not mull this over and forget about it (one of my favorite courses of action). Just send me an email. Even if you think both ideas are stupid, send me an email. Having a touchstone is a good check on reality.

—Gus Matson, President
Civic Association of Hollin Hills

Quick Takes

SPEAKER ON NATIVE PLANTS AT GARDEN CLUB

The first 2018 Hollin Hills Garden Club meeting will feature “Plant NOVA Natives” with speaker Renee Grebe, on Thursday, February 22, at 7pm. The meeting will take place at Gretchen Spencer’s home, 2113 Popkins Lane.

Renee is a naturalist, bird watcher, and native plant enthusiast. She credits reading Douglas Tallamy’s book *Bringing Nature Home: How You Can Sustain Wildlife with Native Plants* for her advocacy of using native plants to restore a more balanced ecosystem. She is also an invasive management area (IMA) site leader for Clermont Park through Fairfax County’s IMA program and is a graduate of the Arlington, Virginia Master Naturalist program.

In *Bringing Nature Home*, Tallamy makes a powerful case for more native plants in our landscapes. He describes how native plants and native wildlife, particularly insects, evolved together and created complex ecosystems that, in many cases, have been decimated by aggressive alien plant species and loss of natural habitats. His book also details specific plants and the wildlife species they support. For example, oak trees support 534 species of butterflies and moths.

Please join us in learning more about native plants and particularly those suited to northern Virginia.

—Gretchen Spencer and Kari Larson, Co-Chairs, HH Garden Club

CAC TOPIC: “DIVERSION FIRST”

At the January meeting of the Citizens Advisory Committee of the Mt. Vernon District Police (CAC), the main topic was the program at Merrifield that coordinates sheriff, police, and community services for effective crisis intervention. Called “Diversion First,” it offers alternatives to incarceration for people with mental illness or developmental disabilities who come in contact with the criminal justice system for low-level offenses. A Merrifield clinician can be reached by calling 703-573-5670.

“The State of the Highway” will be the subject of the next CAC meeting on Tuesday, February 13, at 7pm, at the Police Station on Parker’s Lane. The public is invited.

—Laura Wirkkala

Planning & Zoning

Burt Kronstedt has been Hollin Hills’ representative on the Planning and Zoning Committee (P&Z) of the Mount Vernon Council of Citizens Associations (MVCCA) for almost 30 years, a remarkable volunteer record. In the Bulletin, Burt has faithfully reported on P&Z meetings where countless proposed building projects have been presented, discussed, and voted on. Some were controversial, a few were debated for years, many greatly changed the landscape of this area. Burt is resigning from P&Z, and Hollin Hills owes him a very big thank you for his many years of community service, recalled below in his own words. And thanks also to Christine Kelly, who has generously offered to replace Burt at P&Z.

Early in 1981, I received a call from Frank Medico, then the 44th District representative. He needed someone to chair the Budget and Finance Committee of the MVCCA, and I agreed to serve.

An important bonus was my access to documents prepared or held by Phil Dearborn, Deputy Fairfax County Executive for Planning and Budget Analysis. (We, incidentally, had bought our

MARY-CARROLL IS MOVING

Mary-Carroll Potter hardly needs an introduction to most of us in Hollin Hills. She is a familiar figure, binoculars in hand, walking our parks as she listens for warblers and keeps an eye out for other birds.

She is well beloved, a welcoming personage, keen to get to know any newcomers, adept at introducing people with commonalities to each other, and expert at creating a sense of community. Now, after 55 years, she will be moving away, retiring to Broadmead, in Cokeysville, Maryland, at the end of February.

Maryland was where Mary-Carroll was born, and she has a long pedigree associated with its history. One of her ancestors was Charles Carroll of Carrollton, one of the signers of the Declaration of Independence. Mary-Carroll married Sutton Potter at a chapel attached to the magnificent Carroll family home, Doughoregan.

Shortly after her first child was born she moved to 2003 Marthas Road in Hollin Hills and in 1968, after three more children, she and her husband moved to 2003 Bedford Lane. She became a widow in 1976 and thereafter worked for the law firm of Covington and Burling, where she remained for twenty-two years.

Besides raising four children on her own, Mary-Carroll aligned her skills as an organizer with her passions and was involved with many volunteer groups. During one such endeavor she spent a sympathetic day and night among incarcerated women along with the leftist leaning Jessica Mitford, of the famous English Mitford sisters. Closer to home, Mary-Carroll served on the Hollin Hills Board as Parks Chair, was president of the first Garden Club, and a member of the Dyke Marsh Birders. Most recently she spearheaded the development of Mount Vernon at Home, serving as its President for two years and remains involved in supportive activities.

She is a founding member of The Pub, and for many years has hosted bi-annual picnics for the Bedford Lane cul de sac.

Her departure from Hollin Hills will leave us all bereft.

—Addison Ullrich



house from the Dearborns in 1968.) Phil also served in a number of other positions. He died in 2002 when he was again a Hollin Hills resident.

One of my first tasks as Chairman of the Budget and Finance Committee was to notify Jack Herrity, Chairman of the Board of Supervisors, that the MVCCA had adopted the 1982 budget. The following year, it went to Sandy Duckworth and Audrey Moore. (All of these are familiar names from the County’s past.)

When I resigned as Budget and Finance Chairman in 1987, I decided to join the Planning and Zoning Committee. Its monthly meetings were then held in Whitman Middle School and are now held on the first Monday of most months at the Governmental Center. Oftentimes, the announcements by Planning Commissioner Earl Flannagan are the most important part of the meeting.

For me, it is now past the time to retire. I hope someone else can regularly attend the P&Z meetings and notify the community.

—Burt Kronstedt

Design Review

The Design Review Committee (DRC) of the Civic Association of Hollin Hills (CAHH) meets monthly to offer homeowners guidance about potential exterior property renovations and whether those desired renovations are in harmony and conformity with the association's Design Review Guidelines. All DRC-approved projects are subject to and must comply with Fairfax County building regulations, policies and codes. Homeowners should complete appropriate County permit processes prior to the start of any renovations.

The DRC met January 10, 2018, at Sherwood Library. Members present were Frank Collins (Chair), John Burns, John Nolan and Ginnie Wallace. The DRC addressed the following projects :

- **7306 Stafford, Madrid/Obenski residence and 7304 Rebecca, Campanella residence:** The committee discussed two conceptually approved projects for which it requested additional information at the December 2017 meeting. The project at 7306 Stafford involves window/glass door replacements and a flat roof carport. The project at 7304 Rebecca is a two-story addition. The DRC looks forward to working with the homeowners to finalize these projects.
- **1800 Drury, Brady residence:** The DRC also discussed a notional project, a two-story addition facing Rippon Road, and at

7507 Elba Morris/Kropf residence, a proposed back-yard screen porch.

- **2405 Brentwood and 2408 Brentwood:** The committee is following up with homeowners at these addresses about projects they have submitted for review: replacing a front door and constructing a side-yard fence, respectively.

Finally, the DRC heard from Sally Collins, a homeowner at 7307 Rebecca, who expressed deep dismay about the construction of glaringly visible, ponderous barricade fences in Hollin Hills. These fences were constructed without the homeowners consulting the DRC and without its approval, which would not have been granted. In most of these cases, the fences were built quickly (so-called "midnight jobs"). In such instances, the DRC and the Hollin Hills community have no recourse other than bringing the unapproved constructions to the attention of the CAHH for possible action. Mrs. Collins asked how to counter this trend and how to go about notifying homeowners who act unilaterally.

The next DRC meeting will be on Wednesday, February 14, 2018, 7pm, at the Sherwood Regional Library, Conference Room 1, 2501 Sherwood Hall Ln, Alexandria, VA 22306.

—Chris McNamara



in Memoriam

JEAN WACHTER, who passed away December 3, 2017, saw to it that things were done right. She kept her corner of Davenport Street and Sherwood Hall Lane beautiful for nearly 50 years. A landscape architect once told her husband, Bob, "This is the most beautiful yard I have seen in the whole DC area in the last 14 years."

A lifelong artist, she found creative expression in every aspect of her life, and her works grace the walls in her home.

She loved trees and once helped save a large tree on Sherwood Hall Lane by tying herself to it to protest its being cut down.

Jean designed three additions to the Davenport Street house where she and Bob lived since 1969 after Bob returned from a year in Vietnam. The first, around 1977, was a two story addition running the full length of the original rectangular house. She chose modernistic light switches (trendy now, but not ordinary at that time). The exasperated electrician noted that these multiple switches needed so many separate wires they were very difficult to install. Jean simply told him to use different colored wires, which solved the problem.

The last addition included more windows in her art room. With the added light, she was in her element. She put in floor-to-ceiling shelves for sewing and art supplies, orchids, and one night-blooming cactus (its bloom opens once year and is gone in the morning).

During a 24 year Air Force career, the Wachters were one of the first Air Force families to live at Little Rock Air Force Base. There was no formal guide to proper social behavior, so Jean wrote a book of guidelines, appropriately named *At Ease*. It described common sense manners and expected behavior in formal social settings.

Bob directed the Arlington chapter of the Barbershop Harmony Society for eleven years. For eleven annual shows, Jean designed and built the sets. These sets and the scripts she helped originate were loving gifts to her husband and his fellow singers.

One of the Arlington singers, who worked at the White House, admired Jean's work and suggested she volunteer to help decorate the

White House. The chief florist liked her skills and called on her for many special decorating needs for state dinners, holidays, etc. Jean volunteered there for nine years—during the terms of Ford, Carter, Reagan and George H.W. Bush—until heart issues stopped her.

She loved the work but had no interest in associating with presidents, their families, or other dignitaries. That may be why she was often chosen to work where dignitaries might be present. She did meet presidents at their Christmas parties for volunteers, and at rare chance meetings. Once such meeting was with Jimmy Carter, who routinely used stairs instead of elevators. While carrying a huge vase of pussy willows up the stairs, Jean got to a point where she got stuck and could go no higher. When she looked around the vase, there was Jimmy Carter with a pussy willow stuck under his chin. He got loose and had a Secret Service man carry the heavy vase up the remaining stairs. Several days later, while Jean was walking in a seldom used main corridor, double doors opened in front of her, and there was Menachim Begin with Jimmy Carter, who said to Begin, "Believe me, let this lady go first!"

One Christmas, Jean was also asked to decorate Blair House and continued decorating the President's Guest House for 18 years.

Jean's scope of interest seemed limitless. While Bob studied for a graduate degree at Oklahoma State, Jean took a course in Russian for no other reason than that Russia was a major power. Her Russian language skill proved useful when the Wachters were attending a singing event in Tulsa and a Russian agricultural team was staying at the same hotel. As she passed the Russian team in the lobby, they made several comments in Russian, seemingly admiring Jean's great figure. Later that day, passing the same group, Jean said, "Good afternoon!" in Russian, leaving them looking dumfounded.

Bob and Jean knew each other 74 years and were married for 67 of them. Bob calls her, "a special individual, and a participator in anything significant."

LOCAL HISTORY - TRANSPORTATION

AN ELECTRIC TROLLEY RAN THROUGH IT

PART 1

Introduction

Eastern Fairfax County is festooned with one housing development and commercial location after another, and an extensive road network to connect them. Thus it may be difficult for current Hollin Hillers to envision the founding of our community in 1949, when even Fort Hunt Road was rural and unpaved, let alone think back more than a century when the County was undeveloped, and with limited transport.

The first European development in our area was a 1674 fort, on the Potomac south of Great Hunting Creek, built by Virginia's colonial government as a protective buffer between native Susquehannocks and European settlers. Plantations were developed later, including George Washington's 18th century River Farm. River Farm comprised most of the land east and south of our current neighborhood. Up to the turn of the 20th century eastern Fairfax County was still mostly farming country, with large dairying operations and truck gardening.

Dirt roads remained the rule, which often made land travel difficult to impossible. From Colonial days, waterborne transportation was the most developed means, particularly on the Potomac and its tributaries. By the time of the Civil War steam railroads had augmented the waterways, no fewer than five of them bringing products from more distant areas to Alexandria's port. But these rail lines did little to serve local transport needs.

What follows is one small part of the nation's railway history, of a nearly 40-year period begun when the electric-powered trolley line of the Alexandria and Fairfax Passenger Railway Company came into existence and successfully provided an early form of "mass transit" for Alexandria and the eastern Fairfax County region along the Potomac River.

The impetus for the trolley

From its founding in the middle of the 18th century, Alexandria relied

on the Potomac River for its transport needs. Plantations, housing and business ventures arose along riverbanks and up streams, such as Great Hunting Creek, served by freight barges and passenger ferries. But river travel was slow. One "slow boat" route was the tourist ferries from Washington and Alexandria to George and Martha Washington's Mount Vernon Estate. In 1858, the Mount Vernon Ladies' Association of the Union had purchased 200 acres of the estate for \$200,000, a significant amount raised by a subscription from people throughout the United States, to restore the property and make it available as a historical landmark. The "home and tomb" of the nation's first president was a "must-see" venue for anyone visiting the nation's capital.

Once the Mount Vernon Estate opened to the public, tourists could reach it only by all-day Potomac excursion boats from the District and Alexandria. There was sentiment for the creation of a shorter, quicker overland route. Our area's often impassable dirt roads made a 1859 proposal for a horse-car line to the Mount Vernon Estate unrealizable. Beginning in the 1870s some Alexandria residents proposed a grand memorial highway to the Estate, but Congress was unreceptive. And although possible routes were surveyed in 1892, further attempts to create a road connecting Washington, D.C. to Mount Vernon were shelved – for some 40 years, as it turned out, in favor of what was seen as a "faster, cleaner, and generally more efficient" method – an electric railway. And the "Age of the Trolley" was enabled locally.

Among other private and highly entrepreneurial railroad ventures of the last third of the 19th century, constructing and running interurban trolley lines were alluring to people with both vision and capital. At least five investors' groups had secured Virginia authorization to build a street railway within Alexandria and a connection to Mount Vernon, both to speed up tourism and to benefit farmers and other commercial ventures in our part of Fairfax County. Lack of the needed funds stymied all but one of these ventures.

A wealthy group of Philadelphia investors saw potential in linking electric trolley service to what they hoped could become a large manufacturing town on the Potomac, a mile south of Alexandria, to be called "New Alexandria" [but that's another story] and to capture the potential tourist and freight business they envisioned in the area south of Alexandria. And so in February 1892, with support from prominent Alexandrians, the Alexandria and Fairfax Passenger Railway Company was chartered. A parallel construction company was chartered to acquire land and oversee the line's construction, which it began in March 1892.

The proposed route called for connecting several electric railway stations within Alexandria with a southerly line to Mount Vernon. This line followed Royal Street south to the shore of Greater Hunting Creek (now called Cameron Run), which it would cross on a trestle, travel south parallel to the river until around current Collingwood Road where it would turn southwest to Little Hunting Creek and finally climb up to the plateau of the Mount Vernon mansion.

Challenges in building the trolley line

Construction was mandated by a contract with the City of Alexandria to take no more than 120 days. Much of the route was through flat, cleared farmland, but swampy areas needed filling, and other features required grading before the



An original 1892 Philadelphia-built trolley.

roadbed and tracks could be laid. The two trestle bridges were the toughest engineering challenges. The Greater Hunting Creek trestle bridge was 4,000 feet long, was built double-wide to also accommodate horse and wagon travel, and had a draw span to allow shipping up the Creek to the Telegraph Road navigable terminus. The 400-foot Little Hunting Creek trestle bridge also had a draw feature to allow barges to access the large Miller brickyard. There were also two considerable hills to negotiate, a long hill rising south of Dyke Marsh, and a short but sharp hill up to Mount Vernon's plateau. "Helper" engines were needed in the early years to push the low-powered trolley cars up these inclines.

Labor issues had to be managed. Hot and humid weather made the work grueling. The mostly Black labor gangs pushed for a 25 cents a day raise from their \$1.25 pay. But ultimately track was laid at an amazing mile-a-day pace. After the arrival of the two, new Philadelphia-made trolley cars (*shown on page 5*) the final tasks were the stringing of the overhead copper power wires for the single track line and firing up the line's powerhouse, located just south of the mouth of Great Hunting Creek. The entire job took only 122 days to complete, an almost unimaginable accomplishment. The electric trolley line initiated operations on September 18, 1892—one of the earliest such local lines in the country.

Running the trolley line

The trolley line was immediately popular. Some 2,000 people boarded the first day, for the novel experience. Ridership continued to be heavy, as the company worked to resolve "breaking in" issues. The earliest open-ended cars gave way to more high-powered and comfortable models.

The route south of Alexandria would grow by the later 1890s to have 16 stops—even in sparsely-populated Fairfax County—before reaching its southern terminus at the Mount Vernon Station. The trip would take between 20 and 30 minutes to complete, traveling up to 30 miles per hour, all for the sum of 50 cents. Eleven daily trains during the week and seven on weekends made the Virginia stops, some of whose names are still familiar: New Alexandria, Oaks, Dyke, Warwick, Aled, Wellington Villa, Wellington, Arcturus, Herbert Springs, Snowden, Grassmead, North Mount



The Mount Vernon passenger station, with a trolley car to the right.

Vernon, Hunter, Riverside, Miller, Oakwood, and Mount Vernon.

While tourism to Mount Vernon certainly was an initial driving force for the trolley line, other factors added weight to the venture. The several large dairying and farm products operations in the eastern county urged a quicker and more convenient means for moving their agricultural products north, especially milk (some called the eventual two-freight-car trains the "milk train" for the large volume of milk going north in the morning and the empty milk cans going south in the afternoon). The stations at Mount Vernon, Wellington Villa (located in a solid, stone building where the bridge crosses the George Washington Parkway), and Warwick were heavily used for this purpose; Mount Vernon itself had a large freight terminal for this purpose, serving farms to its south and west.

The line served commercial enterprises, as well. The large Miller brick-making operation on Little Hunting Creek created more freight business for the trolley line at the Oakwood stop, with bricks shipped north and coal and straw for making bricks shipped south. Commercial crates of Potomac River fish were loaded at the Dyke station.

In 1897, Fort Hunt was established and manned on Sheridan Point opposite Fort Washington. The Hunter station was built to help transport Fort Hunt's GIs to town. Apparently an enterprising sergeant operated a rowboat ferry service across the Potomac to allow Fort Washington's GIs the same service. A resort named "Andalusia" had been established along the Potomac as early as 1869, and its guests were served by the Aled station. A picnic area and amusement park at the Riverside stop (now Riverside Park) also added more riders.

Residential development was also beginning in this area. First came summer houses for wealthy residents along the Potomac; their owners saw personal value in having a fast, clean and relatively comfortable means of "getting to town." At least three stations were tied to country house developments—Wellington Villa, Arcturus, and Herbert Springs. Mail was delivered to three post offices along the route—at Arcturus, Hunter, and Mount Vernon.

This ends the first part of this article. The second part will trace the trolley line's connection to Washington, DC and its story in the 20th century.

—Scott Wilson, Hollin Hills Historian



As the line grew, later models such as this one replaced the older open trolleys.

part 7. mid-century modern

ARCHITECTURE IN AMERICA

west coast
destinations:
palm springs

As described in the first article in this series, Modern residential architecture initially flourished in the United States in Southern California, even before the term 'International Style' was coined by Philip Johnson in 1932 for an exhibit of this bold new style at the Museum of Modern Art in New York. Three architects were responsible: Irving Gill who moved to San Diego from Chicago in 1893, and Rudolph Schindler and Richard Neutra, who migrated to the US from Austria immediately before and after World War I, respectively, and arrived on the West Coast in the 1920s.

Gill was influenced by Frank Lloyd Wright's Prairie Houses in Chicago, along with his own preferences for a style of architecture that was simple, austere, and reflected local architectural traditions. Schindler and Neutra were inspired by Wright, worked briefly for him, but then embraced the new style developing in Europe.

While Gill confined his work to the coastal area, Schindler and Neutra also did a few early houses in the emerging vacation destination of Palm Springs. They represented the first wave of a group of architects that would enable Palm Springs to boast that it now has the largest collection of Mid-Century Modern houses in the country.

*Top: Kaufmann House (1947, Richard Neutra);
Below, l-r: Frey House II (1963, Albert Frey);
Steel House (1962, Donald Wexler)*



PALM SPRINGS

Palm Springs is 100 miles southeast of Los Angeles in the Coachella Valley. Its location does not suggest that it is an ideal place for a resort destination. The Coachella Valley is in the Sonoran Desert. It averages 5" of rain per year, with daily temperatures averaging more than 100 degrees during the summer. But because the Valley has a huge aquifer beneath its desert surface, the area began developing irrigated agriculture early in the 20th century, which was considerably enhanced in the 1940s by imported water from Hoover Dam.

Two factors played a major role in promoting the Coachella Valley as a resort destination beginning in the 1920s. Automobile ownership proliferated dramatically, and the burgeoning silent film industry in Hollywood decreed that actors could live no further than a two-hour drive from the studios in case scenes needed to be quickly reshot. The Hollywood film colony discovered Palm Springs as an ideal location for a winter vacation hideaway.

The first major new architect to appear on the scene was the Swiss émigré Albert Frey (1903-1998), who had worked in Europe with Le Corbusier. He arrived in 1938, the same year Palm Springs incorporated. In 1940 it had a population of 3400.

Following the War, Palm Springs and the Coachella Valley joined in the population boom that occurred across Southern California. More architects began practice in the area, and the development first of vacation homes and then of year-round, air-conditioned residences began in earnest. The population of Palm Springs rose to 45,000 today.

One of the most famous of the Mid-Century Modern homes is Richard Neutra's Kaufmann House, built in 1946 for Edgar Kaufmann and his family to use

during the month of January. It cost \$348,000. Kaufmann was the Pittsburgh department store owner who had commissioned Frank Lloyd Wright to design the famous Fallingwater in southwestern Pennsylvania. (Wright was quite displeased that he did not get this new commission.)

One of the most simple, austere, and unusual houses was Albert Frey's second home, an 800-square foot structure built on the side of a mountain with an enormous boulder serving as a divider between the living room and bedroom.

But the real boom in Mid-Century Modern design occurred with the arrival of the Alexander Homes development company. The Alexanders, father and son, came to Palm Springs in 1947. For the next 18 years, they worked with several Modern architects to develop 2200 homes, essentially doubling the housing stock of the city.

The Alexanders did not limit themselves to any one house shape or technology, developing entire subdivisions that were distinctive from each other, almost all of which had swimming pools. One of their more unusual projects was a proposed subdivision of prefabricated homes made of steel, cement, and glass, designed by Donald Wexler (1926-2015). These homes could be built in as little as three days, and they cost only \$17,000 in 1962. Unfortunately, only seven ended up being built as the price of steel suddenly escalated.

Another architect who worked with the company was William Krisel (1924-2017). He specialized in designing affordable Modern homes in subdivisions, designing about half of the Alexander homes built, and he is credited with designing more than 30,000 homes in Southern California. Depending on the neighborhood, size, and amenities included, one of his homes could cost between \$30,000 and \$50,000.

The Alexanders and their wives were killed in a small plane crash in 1965, and the company ceased operations. However, Mid-Century Modern architecture continues to be celebrated and built as Palm Springs increasingly becomes a popular retirement destination, symbolized by the fact that there are more than 120 golf courses in the Coachella Valley. Even the infa-



Palm Springs *from page 7*

mous California drought has not had a serious impact, since the city and populated areas have access to the abundant groundwater supply. However, golf courses use 25% of this not unlimited resource.

Every February, Palm Springs celebrates its status as the premier location for Mid-Century Modern architecture with a Modernism Week. Two of the sites frequently exhibited are the home of Frank Sinatra and Rita Hayworth designed by E. Stewart Williams (1909-2005), and the Elrod House by Frank Lloyd Wright disciple John Lautner (1911-1994).

Each of these homes has some notable features. The Sinatra house has a swimming pool shaped like a piano, with a pergola running along what would be the keyboard side. The pergola has openings in its roof that create a shadow pattern mimicking the black and white piano keys. The house also still has a sophisticated stereo record player, amplifier and speakers that Sinatra installed.

The Elrod House was one of many very large, very expensive, concrete structures that Lautner designed late in his career. Built on the side of a mountain, across the valley from the modest Frey II House, it has an enormous living room with a curved outer edge enclosed by a massive wall of window panels installed in a track. The windows slide open and shut with an electric motor. Below the edge of the living room is a pool, part of which extends into the area enclosed by the windows. The living room offers a 120-degree view of the valley below. The house was featured in the James Bond movie, "Diamonds are Forever."

CONCLUSION

None of the most prolific architects who designed Mid-Century Modern homes in Palm Springs studied at Harvard's Graduate School of Design, the US birthplace of teaching and advocacy for the International Style, and the source for many of the architects who designed the residential and resort destinations on the East Coast previously described in this series.

Albert Frey studied architecture in his native Switzerland. E. Stewart Williams and John Lautner did their training during the 1930s, the former at Cornell, and the latter at Frank Lloyd Wright's Taliesin program. William Krisel got his degree in 1949 from the University of Southern California, while Donald Wexler graduated from the University of Minnesota in 1950. But Harvard lit the spark, and many architecture schools modified their programs to emphasize the International Style.

Equally influential, however, were the designs in Southern California by Gill, Schindler, Neutra, and Frank Lloyd Wright. Even after finishing his training at Taliesin, Lautner assisted Wright in completing various projects the latter had designed, and Wexler worked with Neutra in Los Angeles.

As a result, the homes in the Mid-Century Modern mecca of Palm Springs are an amalgam of design influences. They are not exclusively flat-roofed rectangular boxes. Few are elevated above the land. All celebrate their desert environment (even if the

immediate house is surrounded by irrigated lawn), with enormous windows merging inside with outside. Those on hillsides have spectacular views of the valley below.

The next piece in this series will look at Joseph Eichler, a merchant builder based in California who used Modern architects to design and build more Mid-Century Modern homes than any other developer in America.

—Michael S. McGill



From top: Twin Palms Estates, (1956, William Krisel); Sinatra House (1947, E. Stewart Williams); Elrod House (1968, John Lautner)