



ARLINGTON COUNTY'S MOST ENDANGERED HISTORIC PLACES 2010



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ARLINGTON COUNTY is known for its thriving arts and cultural scene. From the county's yearly festivals, parades, and neighborhood days, to public art installations at Central Library and world-class programming at the Signature Theatre, to classes and lectures at its community centers, Arlington offers something for every artistic taste.

In the ongoing economic downturn it is particularly crucial that citizens have places for creative expression and admiration that are affordable and close to home—such as theaters, community centers, nature centers, and our very own planetarium. Unfortunately, these are some of the very places that appear on AHA's 2010 list of Arlington's most endangered historic places.

Modeled after the National Trust for Historic Preservation's "11 Most Endangered Historic Places" list, this tenth-annual local list highlights some of the county's most beloved places and building types: **the Lubber Run Amphitheater, Old Schools and Community Centers, the David M. Brown Planetarium, Garden Apartments, and Neighborhood Shopping Centers.**

In this report, we discuss the threats facing these endangered places and why they are so important to all Arlingtonians. We also highlight other important places in our annual Watch List: the **Tomb of the Unknowns, Gulf Branch Nature Center, Branch Libraries, Vintage Signs, and Reevesland.** We hope that as you learn about the places on our Endangered and Watch Lists, you'll join us in our efforts to save these historically significant and widely cherished sites.

Founded in 1989, the Arlington Heritage Alliance is the only private, nonprofit organization in Arlington County, Virginia, devoted to the protection and promotion of Arlington's historic and natural resources. If you'd like to learn more about preservation in Arlington, or to get involved in one of our ongoing projects, visit our web site at www.arlingtonheritage.org.



ENDANGERED:

LUBBER RUN AMPHITHEATER

- This beloved community amphitheater is severely underfunded and at risk of permanent closure and possible demolition.

Threat

Lubber Run Amphitheater has played a long-standing role in Arlington's cultural life. Now celebrating its 40th anniversary, the amphitheater includes bench seating for approximately 750 people, with brick-terraced grassy areas for lawn seating bringing the total seating capacity to about 1,200. The elevated stage is flanked by two towers made of cinderblock and wood, along with a cinderblock building that serves as the back wall. For decades, the amphitheater has hosted professional and amateur performances by a range of artists, children's groups, and religious and cultural organizations. Until the late 1990s, private corporate sponsors helped to underwrite the costs of funding arts programming at the amphitheater.



Image courtesy of Arlington County, Dept. of Parks, Recreation & Cultural Resources.

Lubber Run Amphitheater now lies dark, unused, and in a state of disrepair. The amphitheater, which once drew nightly audiences of up to 1,500 people, has put on fewer and fewer shows in recent years in the face of budget shortfalls. Only \$10,000 was allocated for Lubber Run in the county's fiscal year 2011 budget. The county has stated that an operating budget of approximately \$50,000 would be required to adequately fund a summer program for the amphitheater.

The shortfall has prompted a public outcry for its preservation and reprogramming. In response, Susan Kalish of the Arlington County Parks and Recreation Department stated that the county has hired a consultant to determine the condition of all park facilities. The amphitheater was determined to be in "poor condition" and in need of such things as new lights, a retaining wall, and handicapped accessibility. According to Kalish, the county has selected a firm that will thoroughly assess the theater and its structures and determine a course of future action, whether it be repair, renovation, or rebuilding. This report will be ready in time for next year's budget process. In the interim, the county will be sponsoring weekend movies at the amphitheater this summer.

The Arlington Forest Civic Association has taken the lead in promoting the preservation and continued use of Lubber Run Amphitheater. The association has set-up an online petition that to date has garnered nearly 700 signatures.



Solutions/Opportunities

AHA applauds the county for allocating resources for a study of the amphitheater's needs and for allocating funds from this year's \$10,000 budget to reinstate some programming at the amphitheater—which has hosted many low-cost and even pro-bono performances—while a long-term funding solution is sought, which ought to include private sponsorship as it has in the past.

To sign the petition, visit:

www.thepetitionsite.com/1/save-Lubber-Run-Amphitheater



ENDANGERED:

OLD SCHOOLS AND COMMUNITY CENTERS

- Several county-owned former school buildings that now serve as community centers and other public spaces are at risk due to budget cuts.

Threat

Proposed cutbacks and the closure of programs threaten both the **Madison Center** – a historic 1939 school building in the Old Glebe neighborhood – and the **Lee Center**, the county’s first “fire-proof” school built-burned-and-rebuilt in 1925 at 5722 Lee Highway. The cutbacks would reduce programs and potentially leave these community gathering places vulnerable to permanent closure, possible neglect, and eventually, disposal or demolition. The loss of convenient community gathering places, which provide recreational, educational, and fitness programs within neighborhoods, would seriously diminish the quality of life in the areas served. These facilities have historically, and to this day, serve as neighborhood focal points, places where neighbors gather, interact, and nurture their sense of community.

The fate of the **Wilson School**, another early Arlington school located on Wilson Boulevard in the Fort Myers/Rosslyn neighborhood, hangs in the balance. Last year the Arlington County School Board declined to designate the school as an Arlington Historic Landmark against the recommendation of the Historical Affairs and Landmarks Review Board (HALRB). However, the Board and the Multi-site Study Committee tasked with evaluating the potential redevelopment of the school and surrounding property, did acknowledge the building’s history and architecture. Several plans have been analyzed including the preservation of the core 1910 section of the Wilson School.

Solutions /Opportunities

AHA encourages the county to evaluate its historic school buildings and to commit to the preservation of those that are determined to be eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places. AHA believes that the retention of programs, activities, and services at these locations is essential to preserving not only important neighborhood landmarks, but also to maintaining the quality of life that is so essential to Arlington’s neighborhoods.



Wilson School. Image courtesy of Kathryn Smith.



AHA feels strongly that the Wilson School and adequate surrounding green space can be made functional for a new or similar use with relative ease; their retention will greatly enhance the neighborhood. We would like to see this handsome and solid building reused instead of being thrown away. The building's fate is under consideration by Arlington County, although it is currently being leased to a childcare center that will remain at least through the end of 2010.



Wilson School. Image courtesy of
Arlington County.



ENDANGERED:

DAVID M. BROWN PLANETARIUM

- Arlington's David M. Brown Planetarium, a widely appreciated and unique educational resource, is targeted for closure in the school system's fiscal year 2012 budget if funds needed for its upgrade are not procured in the next year.



Image courtesy of Tom Dickinson.

Threat

Built in 1970, the David M. Brown Planetarium (named for a former Arlington student-turned-astronaut who died in the 2003 Space Shuttle Columbia disaster) has entertained and educated legions of students. Despite its community value and popularity, however, the planetarium's \$230,000 operating budget has been drastically cut in the 2011 fiscal budget. School officials have cited concerns about the probable costs of updating the aging facility and say that the money could be better allocated elsewhere in the school system. School superintendent Patrick K. Murphy, initially proposed converting the site to additional classrooms for adjacent Washington-Lee High School, but has now set forth a fundraising timetable for the Friends of the Planetarium to procure the funds necessary for permanent facility upgrades; \$161,120 by September 30; \$241,680 by December 31; \$322,240 by March 31; and the sum amount by June 30 of 2011.

930 citizens signed a petition to save the planetarium. An interim instructional plan for the planetarium will allow local volunteers time during the 2011 fiscal year to raise the funds. The planetarium will remain open part-time until June 30, 2011, serving grades K-2 two days a week. If the \$402,800 needed to upgrade the facility is not procured, the planetarium may be closed at the end of the 2011 fiscal year.

Solutions/Opportunities

AHA is concerned about the potential loss of this unique resource, especially at a time when interest in the teaching power of planetariums seems to be on the rise. The International Planetarium Society says that the number of fixed-dome planetariums has risen slightly in recent years to about 800 nationwide. AHA supports the interim stay on closing the planetarium and a citizen-driven effort to seek private sponsors to keep the planetarium open. You can support this



effort by making a donation to the Arlington Community Foundation. Make your checks payable to the ACF-Planetarium Fund and mail them to: Friends of the Planetarium, P.O. Box 7029, Arlington, Virginia, 22207. You can also show your support by volunteering your time and skills and/or spreading the words to others about this effort. If you are interested in volunteering, send an e-mail to save.the.planetarium@gmail.com. Updated information on continued effort is available online at the Friends of the Planetarium Facebook page: <http://biy.ly/facebook-planetarium>.



Image courtesy of Tom Dickinson.



ENDANGERED:

GARDEN APARTMENTS

- The county has lost a significant number of these distinctive housing complexes, which have long provided affordable, quality homes for Arlingtonians of moderate means.



Key Boulevard Apartments.
Image courtesy of Kathryn Smith.

Threat

Since 2003, when Arlington's outstanding collection of historic garden apartment complexes was recognized by the National Register of Historic Places, many of these distinctive housing complexes have been demolished. Mainly built during the 1930s through the 1950s, garden apartments were an innovative housing type perfected in Arlington.

Today, garden apartments are being replaced at an alarming rate by higher density housing. In 2008, **Parkland Gardens**, a 149-unit complex built in 1949 near Glebe Road and Lee Highway, was torn down and the vacant six-acre lot still remains empty. The residents were displaced and the high quality construction, well-designed open spaces, and affordable housing in a convenient location, were all lost. Portions of **Buckingham**, one of the nation's most historic and intact garden apartment complexes, were demolished last year and replaced by out-of-scale apartment and townhouse buildings that loom over the historic neighborhood.

A number of smaller complexes are also imminently threatened with redevelopment. Among these are the **Key Boulevard Apartments** at 1555 Key Boulevard and the nearby **Queens Court Apartments**, both in Rosslyn. The Arlington Housing Corporation (AHC) has plans to demolish the Key Boulevard Apartments and replace the three-building complex with a larger, mixed-income development. Built in 1942, the complex is a rare example of an Art Deco-style garden apartment complex in Arlington; it is considered eligible for National Register listing.

Queens Court Apartments, at the corner of North Queen Street and Key Boulevard, are also threatened with redevelopment. The owner, the Arlington Partnership for Affordable Housing (APAH), has agreed to partner with the county to incorporate the 39-unit, circa-1930 brick apartment complex into the redevelopment plan for the former Wilson School property nearby.

While AHA supports the retention and expansion of affordable housing throughout Arlington, we are concerned that the historic significance of the county's outstanding stock of garden apartments of the 1930s, 1940s, and 1950s, is not being considered in redevelopment decisions. AHA recognizes the important work that both AHC and APAH have undertaken in recent years



to rehabilitate some of the county's important historic garden apartment complexes, including those in Westover and Buchanan Gardens in Barcroft.

Solutions /Opportunities

A number of successful garden apartment preservation models are spread throughout the county. Portions of Colonial Village, Buckingham, Woodbury Park (now Sheffield Court), Westover, and Calvert Manor garden apartment complexes, have been rehabilitated and revitalized by their owners using federal and state historic preservation tax credits. These examples show how targeted incentives can result in the retention of these important landmarks of Arlington's distinctive history and affordable housing at the same time.

AHA is encouraged by the Columbia Pike Land Use & Housing Study group's inclusion of historic preservation as a goal for revitalization of that corridor. We urge the committee to carefully identify and assess the significant historic garden apartments that remain along that corridor, such as Fillmore Gardens, and to take into account the preservation of significant open space and the distinct architectural character of these complexes that can make major contributions to the quality of a revitalized Columbia Pike corridor.

We believe that AHC and APAH should undertake a careful assessment of the historic significance of all of their pre-1960 properties and to use the results to tailor long-range plans and goals to accommodate the preservation of historically, architecturally, or culturally significant properties. The Key Boulevard Apartments are already considered eligible for National Register listing and they should be preserved.

AHA would like to see the county implement targeted local economic incentives that would encourage owners and developers of Arlington's historic garden apartments to preserve these historic properties and to maintain their affordability. In combination with state and federal historic preservation tax credits and low incoming housing tax credits, local tax breaks or other economic incentives could save these historically, environmentally, and socially important resources.



Queens Court Apartments.
Image courtesy of Kathryn Smith.



ENDANGERED:

NEIGHBORHOOD SHOPPING CENTERS

- Historic and distinctive neighborhood shopping centers have either been sold or are currently on the market, with no plans to preserve them and the unique local flavor they bring to the county.



Image courtesy of Kim O'Connell.

Threat

In the 1930s and 1940s the landscape of Arlington changed. Residential and commercial construction projects abounded, including myriad apartment complexes and neighborhood shopping centers, a building type modeled after Arthur B. Heaton's 1930 *Park and Shop* on Connecticut Avenue in downtown D.C. These shopping centers clustered several tenants in one place and offered patrons off-street parking. More than ten neighborhood shopping centers of the *Park and Shop* genre were constructed in Arlington, and by 1941, they appeared on almost every major thoroughfare.

One example, the **Lee Gardens Shopping Center**, was slated for redevelopment last year (prompting its appearance on both AHA's and Preservation Virginia's Endangered Lists). The project has stalled, however, due to funding issues, and the property has been sold to the owners of the nearby Sheffield Court Apartments, who have stated their intention to follow through with the original redevelopment plan. These circumstances call into question the market viability of the initial proposal and leave the shopping center vacant and in disrepair. AHA remains concerned that the approval of the site plan by the County Board, and the demolition of the low-scale commercial center, sets a dangerous precedent.

That precedent could in fact imperil a nearby corner in Arlington. The building housing the **Corner Cupboard**, at Pershing and Washington Boulevard, is currently for sale. Without incentives for developers to keep low-scale retail, the character of this intersection and the neighborhood around it could be drastically changed.

(For more information about the kind of shopping center that defined many of Arlington's neighborhoods, see Richard Longstreth, "The Neighborhood Shopping Center in Washington, D.C., 1930-41," *Journal of the Society for Architectural Historians* 51 (March 1992): 5-34.)



Solutions/Opportunities

These anchor buildings at Pershing and Washington Boulevard offer an opportunity to blend preservation of Arlington's historic fabric with profitable, neighborhood-based retail and business services. AHA encourages the perspective buyer of the building housing the **Corner Cupboard** to consider preserving the building while serving the business needs of the community; recent examples of this include the Northside Grill and Lyon Hall.



WATCH LIST:

TOMB OF THE UNKNOWNNS

Within the past two years the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier was threatened with replacement by a replica because of a few superficial cracks that the Department of the Army and the Arlington National Cemetery (ANC) deemed unsightly. The Arlington Heritage Alliance and the National Trust for Historic Preservation joined forces to persuade the army and the ANC that preservation was the only sensible option when concerning one of our nation's most revered and recognized military memorials.



Image courtesy of Kim O'Connell.

The ANC is continuing with the repair and cleaning of the Tomb; the repairs to the cracks started in mid-April. All the repair work, to date, has been completed successfully and on schedule. The work should be completed sometime this spring. AHA will continue to monitor the situation with the Tomb ensuring that the appropriate conservation and maintenance work is undertaken and completed. The ANC web-site states that the re-grouting work being currently undertaken does not "reflect a final decision on whether or not to continue to repair the marble or replace the block in its entirety." There is still a possibility that the ANC will eventually replace the Tomb. You can follow the progress of the Tomb repair work online at www.arlingtoncemetery.org.

WATCH LIST:

GULF BRANCH NATURE CENTER

In 2009, the Arlington County Board included a proposal in its fiscal year 2010 budget to close and demolish the Gulf Branch Nature Center. After widespread objection to the proposal, including public testimony by AHA, the Arlington Historical Society, and the Friends of Gulf Branch group at county budget hearings, the Board rescinded its initial proposal and agreed to fund the nature center on a reduced schedule. The county agreed to keep the center open one additional day per week (5 1/2 days instead of 4 1/2) if the community raised \$10,000 in additional funds.



Image courtesy of Jennifer Sale Crane.



The county's proposed 2011 budget would have further reduced operating days and hours at Gulf Branch by more than 50 percent, leaving Gulf Branch open only 18 hours per week, while also eliminating a park naturalist position. Thankfully, the county agreed to reinstate the naturalist position in the 2011 budget after the Friends of the Gulf Branch Nature Center committed to raising funds for additional part-time/volunteer staffing. Although AHA is pleased that the County Board has—for now—elected to keep the nature center and not demolish the building, we continue to believe that continued cuts in staffing, hours of operation and staffing indicate a lack of long-term commitment to Gulf Branch.

WATCH LIST:

REEVESLAND

Early Arlington houses remain at risk throughout the county, such as the county-owned Reevesland, which still stands vacant. Built in stages between 1878 and 1899 and operated until 1955 as the last of Arlington's dairy farms, Reevesland was owned and farmed by three generations of the same family. The Historic Affairs and Landmark Review Board (HALRB) and the Planning Commission have expressed concern about ongoing deterioration of the buildings caused by their long-term vacancy (8 years). The county has delayed making any decisions about the reuse of Reevesland until a full master plan is completed for Bluemont Park, of which the 2.5-acre Reevesland property is a part. Currently, there is no schedule for the master plan process or any funding.



Image courtesy of Arlington Public Library.

Early this year, the Boulevard Manor Civic Association sent a letter requesting that the county authorize a staff-level study of potential reuse options for Reevesland with a focus on their viability and potential benefits. The association proposed one possible project that would utilize the house as a demonstration “green” rehabilitation of a historic residential property. The HALRB hosted a forum at its May 19, 2010, meeting to “collaboratively compile and weigh a range of re-use scenarios” for Reevesland. They are inviting members of the local historic preservation community along with representatives from various county departments, including Parks & Recreation, affordable housing advocates, and sustainability staff. The outcome will be a report to the County Board recommending a course of action. AHA fully supports Boulevard Manor's proposal and will work to support efforts to find a sustainable and sensitive new use for this vacant Arlington landmark.



WATCH LIST:

VEITCH-THOMAS HOUSE

The Veitch-Thomas House has ties to some of the earliest and most prominent families in Arlington County. According to historical documentation, the original Veitch/Birch/Shreve land upon which the house sits once included a large portion of present-day North Arlington.

The Veitch-Thomas house was purchased last month. The current owner lives in the house and has plans to make improvements to the property.

At present, there are no plans to develop the property or add additional houses to the lot. The owner is aware of the historical value of the Veitch-Thomas House to the Arlington community. AHA encourages the new owner to make sensitive alterations to the house and preserve the historic fabric of this Arlington jewel.



Image courtesy of Tom Dickinson.

WATCH LIST:

BRANCH LIBRARIES

In tough economic times, libraries are frequently among the first services on the chopping block, and once again, the library was in peril of losing major funding this year. AHA urges the County Board to find ways to maintain the branch libraries for future generations even as fiscal prospects darken and capital improvements are needed. Unfortunately, the Westover Library was recently lost to demolition

following the construction of the new library in the Reed School. Despite this recent loss, the libraries were spared any substantial cuts in the 2011 fiscal budget.



Former Westover Branch Library.
Image courtesy of Tom Dickinson.



WATCH LIST:

VINTAGE SIGNS

As popular tastes and technology change, the ubiquitous commercial highway road sign also continues to undergo visible changes in number, scope, and scale. As urban growth expands, resulting in demolition of older building and reconfiguration of neighborhoods, business districts, and interconnecting roadways, many such commercial signs from the 1950s, '60s, and '70s are simply disappearing. Such is the case in Arlington. Large electric signs like that adjoining and advertising the Americana Motel on Route 1, Jefferson Davis Highway, which once illuminated the length of both sides of this busy north-south Arlington thoroughfare linking Washington D.C. to Alexandria and Richmond, are becoming increasingly rare.



Image courtesy of Tom Dickinson.



Image courtesy of Tom Dickinson.