



# **Arlington on Alert**

**Arlington's Most Endangered Historic Places  
2008**



## **ARLINGTON'S MOST ENDANGERED HISTORIC PLACES – 2008**

**ARLINGTON IS A COUNTY OF CONTRASTS.** Here, you'll find urban high-rises and small-scale neighborhood shopping centers...busy restaurant rows and secluded wooded parks...supersized McMansions and modest Cape Cods. With each passing year, the tension between these contrasts grows, and preservationists face a tougher battle to protect Arlington County's historic resources while allowing for positive growth and change. These challenges are reflected in the Arlington Heritage Alliance's 2008 list of Arlington's most endangered historic places.

Modeled after the National Trust for Historic Preservation's "11 Most Endangered Historic Places" list, this eighth-annual local list includes specific properties and places—such as the **Lee Gardens Shopping Center**, the **Veitch-Thomas House**, and the **Clarendon Commercial District**—as well as the more general categories of **Civil War Earthworks and Trenches** and **Small Arlington Houses**.

In this report, we discuss the threats facing these endangered places and why they are so significant to Arlington County's history. We also have included several places on our annual Watch List—the **Krowne Lustron House**, **Neighborhood Branch Libraries**, the **Tomb of the Unknowns**, the **Wilson School**, **Crystal City Industrial Buildings**, and, last but certainly not least, the **Weenie Beenie**. Although these places may not be threatened at present, the Arlington Heritage Alliance is monitoring future developments to ensure that they are protected or preserved as necessary. Sadly, some battles have been lost; we also chronicle in this report two places that have been demolished: **Parkland Gardens Apartments** and the **Ashton Heights Women's Club**.

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](http://www.arlingtonheritage.org).



## **ENDANGERED:**

### **LEE GARDENS SHOPPING CENTER**

\* A low-scale, mid-20<sup>th</sup>-century commercial building in Lyon Park may be torn down for a new mixed-use development

#### Threat

The Lee Gardens Shopping Center, a mid-20th-century commercial shopping center built after World War II on Pershing Drive as part of the Lee Gardens apartment complex, is threatened with imminent redevelopment. Although the relatively new commercial structure across the street has had a large majority of its commercial spaces unoccupied for several years, Arlington Pershing LLC proposes to raze the current historic Lee Gardens Shopping Center to replace it with approximately 190 apartment units and 33,500 square feet of commercial and retail space, at the corner of Route 50 and Pershing Drive. AHA is concerned that the loss of this premier example of a neighborhood commercial center will set a precedent for the destruction of similar sites.

The Arlington County Planning Commission and the Historic Affairs and Landmark Review Board (HALRB) made recommendations against the proposed project. However, the Arlington County Board approved the controversial redevelopment plans this past January. The County approved a land-use change from a local commercial district to zoning that would allow commercial office buildings, hotels, and apartment districts, which the County believes is



Photo Credit: Caridad de la Vega

**The Lee Gardens Shopping Center, one of Arlington County's few remaining low-scale commercial centers.**



consistent with its General Land Use Plan (GLUP). The developer had not secured funds for the proposed project as of early May.

### History

Many of Arlington's close-in neighborhoods have commercial buildings that have served the needs of changing populations over the years. The Lee Gardens Shopping Center was designed by prominent local architect Mihran Mesrobian, as part of the Lee Gardens community (now Sheffield Court) in November 1941. However, as a result of the attack on Pearl Harbor and the U.S. entry into World War II, the project was temporarily postponed. At this point, a well-known regional architect, Allen Joyner Dickey, slightly modified Mesrobian's design and completed it in 1949, conserving the original footprint of the building. An Arlington resident who also worked in Washington, Dickey is best-known for the Lee Gardens Shopping Center, the Underwood Building in Clarendon (1938), and his work at the Pentagon in the early 1940s.

The Lee Gardens Shopping Center is identified in the National Register of Historic Places as a contributing resource to the Lyon Park Historic District. The shopping center is also designated as "Essential" in the Arlington Historic Resource Inventory (HRI), the highest rank awarded among four possible categories, and is one of only three such commercial complexes identified in the HRI. Because of their small scale, these shopping centers are a rapidly disappearing resource in Arlington. As such, it was the first building type to be evaluated as part of the HRI.

### Solutions

The County needs to do more in providing incentives to persuade commercial business owners of the viability and the long-term ecological, social, and economic value of reinvesting in historic commercial buildings. The Historical Affairs and Landmark Review Board, AHA, the Recent Past Network, and the National Trust for Historic Preservation, have all vociferously opposed the redevelopment of the historic Lee Gardens Shopping Center through letters and attendance at local planning and county meetings, to no avail. The Lee Gardens Shopping Center has also been included on the Association for the Preservation of Virginia Antiquities' (APVA) 2008 most endangered list.

Approval of the site plan by the County has established a terrible precedent for the few remaining examples of mid-20<sup>th</sup>-century commercial architecture in Arlington. With the rapid demolition of these neighborhood-defining structures from the Arlington landscape, it is even more imperative that we preserve the few mid-20<sup>th</sup>-century commercial buildings that do remain.



## **ENDANGERED:**

### **THE VEITCH-THOMAS HOUSE**

\* A late 19<sup>th</sup>-century farmhouse may soon be demolished so that the property can be subdivided and redeveloped

#### Threat

One of Arlington's last remaining large-lot farmhouses, the Veitch-Thomas House in the Bluemont neighborhood, is on the market and may be subdivided for new houses.

The RE/MAX house listing states that the nearly 20,000-square-foot property is "vacant land" (ignoring the existence of the farmhouse) and entreats potential buyers to "call your builders" because the large lot is "perfect for subdivision in a prime location within walking distance to Ballston." If this happens, Arlington will lose an exceptional example of the county's disappearing large-lot, pre-suburban historic house properties.

#### History

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.



Veitch-Thomas Photo Credits: Dan Redmond

**The Veitch-Thomas House may be demolished and the 19-acre grounds subdivided for new houses.**



Although the documentation is sketchy, it suggests that another farmhouse, built sometime after 1865, once stood on the land and that the current house was built between 1894 and 1904 by Judge Harry Randolph Thomas, who inherited the property from Julia Veitch, a descendant of two of the area's earliest landowners, John Thornton Birch and Samuel Shreve.

The Veitch family was so prominent that by the early 1900s the neighborhood was simply known as Veitch or Veitch Summit; by the 1920s, the streetcar trolley had reportedly reached the Veitch area. The Thomas family is associated with Columbia Gardens Cemetery on Route 50. Members of the Shreve-Birch-Veitch-Thomas families are buried in nearby cemeteries. One member of the family, George Washington Veitch, was a Confederate veteran who is laid to rest along with several other Veitch family members at Mt. Olivet Cemetery. Over the years, part of the land was sold to make way for Interstate 66.

### Solutions

AHA encourages County staff to reach out to the real estate agent and to possible developers to determine avenues through which the Veitch-Thomas house could be saved. The County has identified such properties as particularly rare and significant. In fact, Arlington County's planned Historic Resources Inventory, which is part of its recently adopted historic preservation plan, will include a survey of the County's remaining large-lot, pre-suburban residential properties.



**The marker very likely denotes an earlier house that stood on the property, rather than the current house, which was built around the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.**

*Note: AHA thanks Dan Redmond for alerting the Arlington Historical Society, which in turn notified AHA, about the threat facing this house and for providing research.*



## ENDANGERED:

### THE CLARENDON COMMERCIAL DISTRICT

\* Clarendon’s mostly 20th-century commercial buildings and the distinctive businesses that occupy them, located along portions of Wilson Boulevard and Clarendon Boulevard, are disappearing at an alarming rate

\* Buildings in Clarendon and along Columbia Pike have been listed on AHA’s most endangered list since 2002

#### Threat

While Wilson and Clarendon Boulevards in Clarendon form one of the busiest entertainment districts in Arlington, the low-scale buildings there are under constant threat. The rapid increase of high-rise and high-rent commercial development throughout Arlington forces out small businesses and threatens both low-scale commercial structures and their business owners. Unless the county and property owners recognize the value of preserving distinctive, human-scale architecture and individual businesses as a destination point for the public, these commercial districts will disappear and take with them the personality and vitality of the community.

Most recently, all the low-scale buildings across from the Clarendon Metro station, except for the white Rees Building, were demolished. The Rees Building is scheduled to be rehabilitated as a CVS drugstore, and AHA had been given the impression that the developers would work with county staff and local preservationists to ensure that adjacent storefronts would be protected and reused as well. Unfortunately, the buildings were instead torn down, and AHA is concerned that the few remaining low-rise buildings in Clarendon may soon follow suit.



Photo Credit: Shannon Davis

**The Rees Building undergoing rehab to become a new CVS, but the cost was the loss of its neighboring storefronts**

#### History

Once “Arlington’s downtown,” the blocks along Wilson Boulevard still contain an eclectic and often stylish mix of businesses, restaurants, and gathering places, many of which have located there in recent years.

There are some long-time businesses and some remaining Vietnamese shops and restaurants that once gave Clarendon its informal designation as “Little Saigon” in the late 1970s and early ‘80s (and, incidentally, brought renewed life to the nearly deserted commercial sector). Many of these businesses have closed and moved



elsewhere as new owners have acquired the properties.

Despite the rapid change that has occurred throughout the County, Arlington still enjoys a number of distinctive commercial centers. Many businesses have evolved and adapted to keep pace with changing needs and populations, and they continue to offer individual experiences, with an array of shops, restaurants, and service providers. Clarendon still offers stylish gifts, clothing, flowers and plants, shoes and handbags, supplies for pampered pets, and high-end bicycles to Arlington consumers, as well as ethnic groceries and meat markets. Shoppers can find food and drink from North America and Latin America to Vietnam, Thailand, and other parts of Asia. This diversity is threatened by the influx of new “big box” chain stores and restaurants.

### Solutions

The adoption of the Clarendon Sector Plan ([www.planclarendon.com](http://www.planclarendon.com)) offers some encouragement, but the community must win the commitment of property owners to follow its proposed goals. Preserving low-scale commercial development is a concern of residents and families who want to keep the neighborhood scale and ambience that attracted them to Arlington in the first place, rather than the less-distinctive, overdeveloped outer suburbs. Residents of the surrounding neighborhoods enjoy walking to places like Clarendon for shopping, dining, or entertainment. Continued vigilance for preserving such centers and the businesses that occupy them is critical.

We are still hopeful that the new CVS development will preserve the historic Rees Building in a historically accurate and sensitive way, though the new developers have been less than forthcoming with plans. Future restaurant development on the block to the west is encouraging as well, but vigilance is required. AHA will continue to monitor these developments and urge County officials and building owners to respect the Clarendon Sector Plan.



## ENDANGERED:

### CIVIL WAR EARTHWORKS AND TRENCHES

\* Arlington's extant Civil War earthworks and trenches are suffering from a lack of documentation and interpretation, which has led to widespread destruction and neglect

#### Threat

During the Civil War, a highly engineered ring of fortifications protected Washington, D.C., from attack, including Fort Ethan Allen and Fort C.F. Smith in Arlington. Yet the County also contains remnants of Civil War earthworks, trenches, and rifle pits that connected these "circle forts" and served as travel and communication routes as well as fortifications. Without any documentation or interpretation, however, these little-known man-made structures continue to erode and disappear every year.

#### History

As soon as the first shot of the Civil War was fired at Fort Sumter in Charleston harbor, Union troops began the arduous task of building a ring of fortifications around the capital city. They quickly seized the high ground across the Potomac River in Virginia, building Forts Marcy, Ethan Allen, C.F. Smith, and others. By 1865, the defenses of Washington included 68 forts and 93 batteries, with some twenty miles of trenches providing additional protection to the forts and more than 30 miles of military roads that connected the installations.

In Arlington, two of those structures—Fort Ethan Allen and Fort C.F. Smith—have been preserved as local historic districts. Fort Ethan Allen includes not only remnants of the bastion fort but also the forward trenches that flanked the structure. AHA supported the successful effort to remove a canine exercise area from Fort Ethan Allen and received an American



Photo Credit: Eric Dobson

**Is this depression near Spout Run an actual Civil War trench? Civil War experts think so, but careful documentation is needed.**



Battlefield Protection Program grant to commission a cultural landscape inventory at the fort, which was completed in 2006. Fort C. F. Smith, for its part, is known for its well-preserved earthworks.

Yet most Arlingtonians are probably not aware that an extant Civil War trench can still be seen in the wooded hillside between Spout Run and Interstate 66. According to a 1971 *Washington Post* article, a local Arlington man named Harold McCoy blazed trails through the woods and even tacked signs on trees to lead curious visitors to the trench. (The pedestrian bridge from the Custis Trail over I-66 near Rosslyn leads to the general area.)

Beyond this, however, not much is known about Arlington's Civil War trenches, although local preservationists and historians believe they still exist.

### Solutions

In 1976, David V. Miller authored a study of all the defenses of Washington, documenting which structures and earthworks still survived. In the 32 years since, no comprehensive documentation of the state of the County's remaining Civil War defenses has taken place. AHA encourages County staff to place a priority on investigating and documenting all of the County's surviving Civil War resources, including its trenches, earthworks, and rifle pits, and to develop an adequate preservation and interpretation plan. With the sesquicentennial of the Civil War beginning in 2011, there is no better time for such an undertaking.

*Note: AHA thanks member Eric Dobson for nominating Arlington's Civil War trenches to this year's list and providing background information.*



## **ENDANGERED:**

### **SMALL ARLINGTON HOUSES**

\* Arlington has many historic, low-scale residential neighborhoods, with more than a dozen such areas listed in the National Register of Historic Places

\* Residential neighborhoods have been included on AHA's most endangered list in 2001, 2005, 2006, and 2007

#### Threat

As the smallest self-governing county in the nation, and certainly one of the densest, Arlington County has been praised for its leadership on smart growth and bicycle- and pedestrian-friendly neighborhoods. The County's convenient location to Washington, D.C., ample access to Metro, excellent schools, and diverse historic neighborhoods have made Arlington attractive but these advantages have come with some growing pains. As the economy has surged over the last several years, the County's smallest houses have faced immense development pressure.



Small House Photo Credits: MRIS

Increasingly, the character of Arlington's residential neighborhoods is threatened by the demolition of these small houses, which range in age from 50 to 100 years old. In their stead, new, out-of-scale and out-of-character houses are springing up almost overnight. Most of these houses are not located in historic districts or are not considered architecturally significant on their own, even though they contribute to an overall sense of neighborhood character. The high land value places added pressure on developers and many property owners to tear them down rather than preserve and expand on their unique characteristics.

#### History

Arlington has a wide collection of small houses throughout the County. Many of these houses were built for families of modest means and represent a period in Arlington's history when the once-rural community experienced an influx of new residents. The post-World War II era brought significant growth to the County. Many of these houses were built quickly and were reasonably priced.

The architectural style of these small houses include four-squares, colonial revival, Tudors, pueblo revival, cottages, bungalows, Cape Cods, ranches, Sears houses, and Lustron houses. Each of these architectural styles has unique characteristics—its own scale, history, form, and materials—that bring special fabric to the neighborhood. What is so endearing about these small



residences is often not their individual strengths, but the significance of the collection of these small houses within the neighborhood.

Although large homes are popular with some homebuyers, many people still appreciate the charm of Arlington's older, established neighborhoods. This is directly attributable to the scale, placement, and architecture of these smaller houses. During the past decade, small houses on large lots have been particularly vulnerable. They are usually torn down and replaced by much larger ones, or several new houses, that do not fit in with the scale and character of the rest of the surrounding neighborhood or the typical placement of the houses. The teardown and subdivide trend destroys existing historic buildings, valuable old trees, and the quaint streetscapes of the historically scaled neighborhoods, creating jarring and incompatible structures in their place—and thus detracting from a neighborhood's desirability and its value.

### Solutions

In 2005, the County Board approved a lot coverage zoning amendment that will help to manage the size, form, and style of new additions to historic houses. Although AHA supported the zoning amendment as one way to ensure that historic neighborhoods retain the scale and amenities that attracted people here in the first place, this effort alone will not prevent the continued development of out-of-character houses and other structures in Arlington's most treasured neighborhoods.



AHA encourages homeowners to seek out tax-credit programs and other incentives that would help them to sensitively rehabilitate their historic houses. AHA recommends working with architects who are able to meet their clients' needs for increased space and functionality, without compromising the historic character of the house or neighborhood. AHA recently helped produce the Ashton Heights Style Guide, which assists owners in how to sensitively maintain and expand their historic houses. Individual neighborhoods should also pursue historic district designation, which will ensure the long-term conservation of their distinct historic character, while still allowing owners to expand their houses.



## **WATCH LIST:**

### **THE KROWNE LUSTRON**

Built between 1948 and 1950, Lustron houses were inexpensive prefabricated steel-paneled structures designed to address the post-World War II housing crisis. Lustrons are a very rare building type within the county and are threatened because the modest homes are vulnerable to demolition and replacement with large-scale houses. Only four of Arlington's original 11 Lustron houses remain intact.



Arlington also has a nearly unprecedented Lustron preservation opportunity. In May 2006, a nearly mint-condition gray Lustron, called the Krowne Lustron after the man who donated the house to the County, was carefully disassembled in the expectation that it would be reassembled and put to a new use. Although this was an important first step in saving this Lustron, more than two years have passed, and its fate remains unclear. As this report was being finalized, the County was considering whether to send the Lustron to the Museum of Modern Art in New York City to be partially reassembled as part of an exhibition on prefabricated housing. AHA hopes that the loan of the Lustron would highlight this threatened resource and encourage the County to accelerate plans for its reassembly and reuse back in Arlington.

### **NEIGHBORHOOD BRANCH LIBRARIES**

Neighborhood branch libraries fill a special niche even in a community as small as Arlington. While distances between facilities are not great for most users, neighborhood facilities provide an introduction to reading, the community use of libraries as a meeting place, and such small-scale delights as story and craft hours. Built at a time when the car was not required for every destination, libraries provided a neighborhood focus within walking distance to most people. Anyone who doubts their value need only witness the look of joy on the face of a young user who is "checking out" a tote bag full of books, tapes, DVDs, and craft projects.



There is still a strong argument to be made for preserving those small-scale facilities that function as community centers and reading rooms, particularly in those locations far from the County center, as well as the historic purpose-built libraries in Cherrydale and Glencarlynn. School libraries, especially in older buildings, are also important and should not be overlooked during renovation plans. As these facilities age and budgets get tighter, AHA encourages County officials to find ways to preserve these library branches for future generations. AHA encourages the adaptive reuse of the Westover Library branch that will become vacant with the new Westover Library is complete ([www.apsva.us/1540108285711560/site/](http://www.apsva.us/1540108285711560/site/)).



## **WATCH LIST:**

### **TOMB OF THE UNKNOWNNS**

In the past year the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier was threatened with replacement by a replica because of 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 with regard to one of our nation's most revered and recognized military memorials. Additional support for the Tomb's preservation was provided by Senators Daniel Akaka and James Webb who added an amendment on the Tomb to the 2008 Defense Authorization Bill. Approved this past January, the amendment requires ANC and the Army to submit a written report to Congress addressing the current condition of the Tomb and the feasibility of replacing it with a replica, before any more plans regarding replacement can occur.



Shortly thereafter, the Army published an article reporting that for the time being there are no further plans for replacement of the Tomb. The person who was to donate the piece of replacement marble has since rescinded his offer as well. Although this seems to be a preservation success story, AHA will continue to monitor the situation, ensuring that appropriate conservation and maintenance work is undertaken for the Tomb. There is always a possibility that plans for replacement of the Tomb may be resuscitated at a later date.

### **THE WILSON SCHOOL**

Built in 1910, this Beaux Arts building is one of the oldest public school buildings remaining in Arlington County. Originally called the Ft. Myer Heights School, it was built for the residents of one of Arlington's earliest population centers, where several streetcar lines converged—an area that for many years served as the gateway to Arlington from the District of Columbia. The name was changed to the Woodrow Wilson School in 1925 to honor the 28<sup>th</sup> President. Additions in 1926 and 1956 reflect Arlington's population growth. Converted to a facility for adult education in the late 1960s, Wilson School has been in continuous use as an education center longer than any other school in Arlington. Although some of the original ornamentation of the 1910 building has been removed, the building offers a terrific opportunity for renovation and adaptive reuse.



AHA feels strongly that the building can be made functional for a new or similar use with relative ease and would like to see this handsome and solid building reused instead of being torn down. The building's fate is under consideration by Arlington County, although for the next two years it is safe, as it will house the "Children's School" program that was moved from the Reed School facility in Westover while that building is under renovation.



## WATCH LIST:

### CRYSTAL CITY INDUSTRIAL BUILDINGS

One of just two or three remaining areas in the County zoned for commercial/industrial, this small parcel is located at the far north end of Crystal City and is visible from Interstate 395/Shirley Highway heading into the District. The CSX and AMTRAK rails run north and south along its eastern border, with Old Jefferson Davis Highway roughly paralleling the western boundary of the tract.



It currently includes about half a dozen older 1940s-1950s brick and sheet metal exterior two-story office buildings and warehouses. Located in these buildings are the Clark Street Playhouse theater, a relatively new self-storage facility, a former office and telecommunications center for the RF&P railroad, a car-towing facility and impoundment lot, a County Fire Department repair center and garage, artists' studio space, and several empty warehouse and storage buildings. This 10-acre plot of land sits within the perimeter of Civil War-era Fort Runyon.

All of these buildings are scheduled to be demolished in 2008 as part of the development of Long Bridge Park (formerly known as "The North Tract"), which is immediately adjacent to the north, across 6<sup>th</sup> Street. The existing structures will be replaced by residential/retail/office buildings overlooking the new park.

### WEENIE BEENIE

Founded in 1955 by world-renowned pool player and inaugural member of the One Pocket Hall of Fame, William "Weenie Beenie" Staton (1929-2006), the Weenie Beenie is one of the D.C. area's original half-smoke hot dog vendors. In 1950, Staton and his brother started a chain of hot dog stands that soon numbered a half dozen. The stand at the corner of Shirlington Road and S. Four Mile Run Drive was built in 1955 with money that Weenie Beenie won playing in a pool tournament in Little Rock, Arkansas. In turn, revenue from his hot dog stands allowed Staton to open a popular, 24-hour pool hall called Jack and Jill's Cue Club on South Wakefield Street that operated for fourteen years before closing in 1981.



In 1963, Staton leased out the Shirlington Weenie Beenie location to long-time employee, Theo Hackney, who still runs the business today. AHA is concerned that rapid redevelopment in Shirlington will attract development to this site and force out this colorful and venerable Arlington institution.



## LOST!

### PARKLAND GARDENS APARTMENTS

Not long after it was listed on AHA's Endangered List, Parkland Gardens, a 149-unit garden apartment complex built in 1943 at the height of the war workers population boom in Arlington, was demolished in 2007.

Plans have been submitted to the county for redevelopment of the site with townhouses and condominiums. Under current zoning, up to 120 townhouses could be built on the property, replacing what had been committed affordable housing units conveniently located along several bus lines.



### ASHTON HEIGHTS WOMEN'S CLUB

The Ashton Heights Women's Club originally started in 1923 as a sewing circle that met near Clarendon. When membership ballooned, the club consulted with local real estate developer Ashton Jones, who helped the club to purchase a lot on N. Irving Street and build a clubhouse. In 1927, the club joined similar groups to form the Federation of Women's Clubs of Arlington County.

In 2005, after years of dwindling membership, the club disbanded and sold their property, which has now been remodeled as a much larger dwelling.

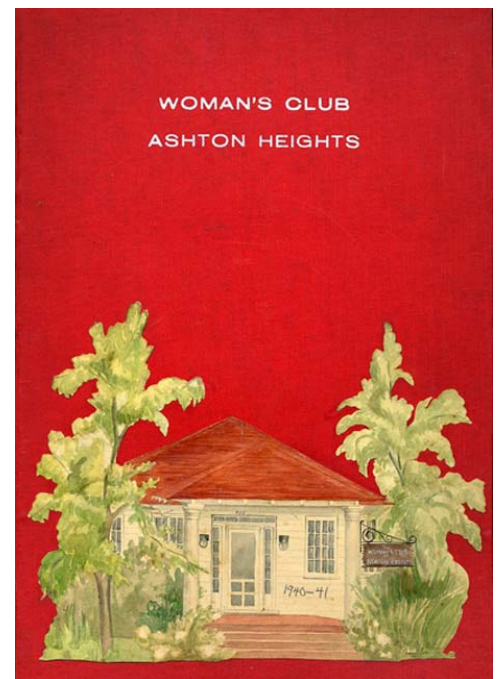


Photo Credits for Watch List and Lost Items:  
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Crystal City – Tom Dickinson  
Weenie Beenie – DCist  
Parkland Gardens – Eric Dobson  
Cherrydale Library, Wilson School, Ashton Heights  
Scrapbook – Courtesy of Arlington County