Historic Arlington County

Abingdon Plantation

A bustling international airport may seem like an unlikely place to find a Revolutionary War era plantation, but there it is, located just a few hundred feet from the North Terminal at Reagan National Airport. On top of a grassy hill with views down the Potomac, a set of brick ruins marks the spot of the historic Abingdon plantation.

Abingdon was built in 1695 by the Alexander family, whose name was later conveyed to the nearby port town that we know today as Alexandria. Years later, George Washington's adopted stepson, John, purchased the house so that he could live closer to the Washingtons' home at Mount Vernon.

The property later reverted to the Alexander descendants, named Hunter, up until the Civil War when the confederate sympathizers fled south. Like the nearby Custis Lee Mansion (today, Arlington National Cemetery), Union troops took the property over and made camp on the lawns. After the war, the Hunters returned and successfully sued the government for rights to Abingdon. The lawyer, incidentally, was James Garfield, the future president of the United States.

Alexander Hunter Jr later recalled the property in his 1904 book *Johnny Reb and Billy Yank:*

"We lived on a splendid estate of 650 acres, lying on the Potomac, between Alexandria and Washington. I doubt whether in the whole Southland there had existed a finer country seat; the house was built solidly, as if to defy time itself, with its beautiful trees, fine orchards, its terraced lawns, graveled walks leading to the river a quarter of a mile away; the splendid barns, the stables with fine horses (for which my father, a retired naval officer, had a special fondness), the servants quarters, where dwelt the old family retainers and their offspring, some fifty or more."

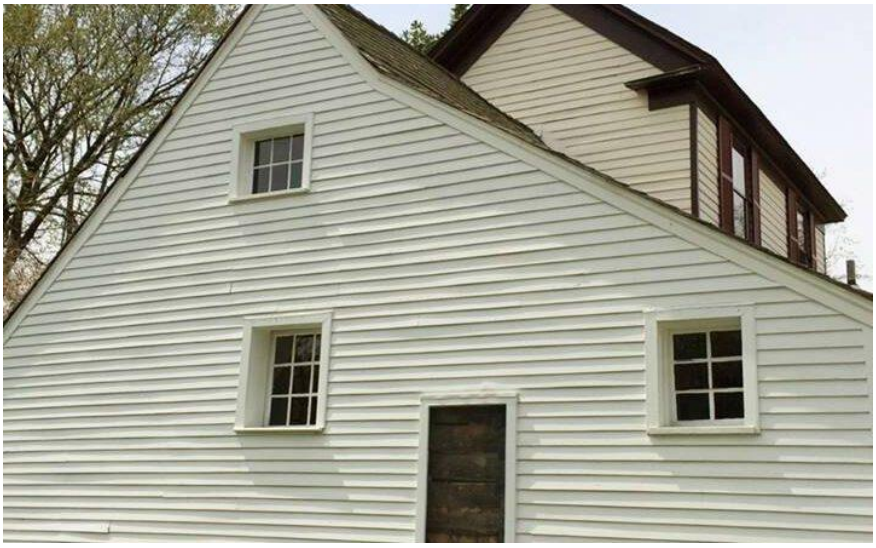
Absent from Hunter's description (and from contemporary historical plaques) is any mention of the enslaved people that surely also lived and worked at Abingdon.

The mansion itself burned down under suspicious circumstances in 1930. It was possibly an act of arson—the RF&P Railroad wanted to build on the site and had previously "invited employees to strip the house" in order to "save demolition costs," according to the *Washington Post*.

The ruins of Abingdon then sat abandoned for 11 years until Washington National Airport was built on landfill just north of the site. The airport's continued expansion over the years again threatened Abingdon. In 1990, the Washington Metropolitan Airports Authority proposed bulldozing the fenced-off site to make way for a new parking garage. A vigorous preservation campaign played out in the city's newspapers, and the ruins of Abingdon reopened in 1998 as a little park.

Source: (https://www.atlasobscura.com/places/abingdon-plantation-ruins)

Ball-Sellers House



The Ball-Sellers House in the Glencarlyn neighborhood is likely Arlington's oldest house, built in 1750. The rare original clapboard roof is visible in the loft of the museum. The house is associated with two of the original families of Arlington.

The property was included in a grant by Lord William Fairfax to John Ball, who received 166 acres of land on Four-Mile Run in 1742. Ball is believed to have built the original log house and its frame lean-to addition. When he died in 1766, he directed that his property be sold and that the proceeds be divided among his wife Elizabeth and his five daughters. In 1772, William Carlin purchased the farm for 100 pounds. However, Elizabeth Ball elected to take her widow's dower rather than accept her husband's will and so may have lived in the house until her death around 1792.

In his will, William Carlin directed that the property be sold in lots small enough for people with little money to purchase them. This proved improbable, and instead, it was divided into three lots and sold to each of Carlin's three sons. James Harvey Carlin bought the 94-acre Mansion House Tract for $874 in 1835. Following James Carlin's death, the property was operated as a dairy farm by his son Andrew and daughter Ann. William W. Curtis and Samuel F. Burdett bought the farm in 1887 and developed it as a subdivision for "all men and women of moderate means or who receive stated salaries." That subdivision was named Glencarlyn in 1896.

Sources: (https://www.arlingtonva.us/Government/Projects/Project-Types/Local-Historic-District/Ball-Sellers, https://arlhist.org/ball-sellers-house/)

Glencarlyn Library

In retelling the history of the County libraries chronologically, one begins with an institution started before the remembrance of all but a few present-day adults. This is the Glencarlyn Library, the building which houses the Washington Survey Oak; its tale is unique among the library histories. Its origins lie before the turn of the century, in a collection of books housed in the Glencarlyn Community's Town Hall, built in 1892. The early library, operated by the Young People's Library Association, was kept in cases at the west end of the hall. These 28 books, all gifts-bound copies of Chatterbox and St. Nicholas, Horatio Alger, Miss Alcott, the Rollo books-were read and read until they wore out.

The history of the present library, however, begins in 1914, when Gen. Samuel S. Burdett, a leading citizen of Glencarlyn, made provision in his will for the building of a public library "at a cost of not more than $3,000." General Burdett, who was born in England in 1836 and held prominent government positions in this country, bequeathed also his own fine personal library as a nucleus.

Dr. W. M. Backus was named trustee of the library funds, but when he died before the library could be built, his son Curtis was appointed in his stead. World War I was on, and materials and labor were hard to come by. Curtis Backus refused to start the building during hostilities, thus arousing considerable controversy in the village. The library was finally begun in January 1922 and was finished by mid-1922. Furniture was installed, the Burdett books were moved from storage in the Backus attic, and new books and magazines were bought. The library opened in the fall of 1923.

In the early days the library was open only three afternoons and three evenings a week. As with the other libraries, volunteers helped to expand the hours of service.

The Burdett Library joined the County library system in 1936, and for a number of years the County operated the library and rented the building from its Board of Trustees. On April 12, 1959, Miss Constance Backus and Mrs. Charles Stetson, the current trustees, presented to the County the deed to the library building, together with a fund of $16,834.49.

Ground was broken in October 1962, for a modified Williamsburg Colonial library. Of the $126,500 allotted to this branch in the 1961 referendum, $116,282 was spent for 4,000 square feet of space. $18,725 was available for added features - a reading terrace, a locked case for General Burdett's book collection, a window seat for story hours, a browsing area for adults, a marble circulation desk, and special furniture and shelving. The library was dedicated June 16, 1963.

Sources: (https://glencarlyn.org/wp-content/uploads/2026/05/Early-History-of-Glencarlyn-Library.pdf, https://arlhist.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/1972-4-Then.pdf)

Fort C.F. Smith Park

Fort C.F. Smith Park was acquired by Arlington County Government in 1994. Originally unspoiled forest along the Potomac Palisades, the 19-acre park has evolved over time to include the buildings, forest, meadow, gardens and earth work ruins seen today.

Earliest Inhabitants

Although archaeological investigations have not revealed the presence of any prehistoric settlements within Fort C.F. Smith Park, recovered artifacts have shown that approximately 3,000 years ago, the people of the Woodland Period did use the park area. During this time, American Indians lived in villages scattered all along the Potomac from Little Falls to the Chesapeake Bay. Undoubtedly, the inhabitants of nearby villages utilized the land of Fort C.F. Smith Park for hunting and gathering.

Historical Period Narrative

After the land was colonized by the English, George Mason III purchased the land as part of a larger 2,000-acre parcel in the 1700's. By 1858 the land supported the Jewell family farmstead, which included a house called the "Red House," a barn, outbuildings, fields, and orchards. Then in 1863, during the Civil War, the Union Army appropriated the property and built Fort C.F. Smith. The fort and support structures, which were part of the Defense of Washington, were located at the northwest end of the Arlington Line protecting the Nation's Capital from Confederate advances. In 1865, the fort was decommissioned and the Jewell family returned and operated a small farm and nursery. Between 1888 and 1994, the land was owned by the Deming, Yates, Lindsay and Hendry families. Each owner made changes to the property, adding an orchard and cottage, building and enlarging the main house and expanding the gardens with trails, a summer house over the well, and many exotic plants and trees. As the site evolved, some elements were removed, including the summer house and orchard.

The Civil War and Fort C.F. Smith

Fort C.F. Smith was constructed by Union Troops in early 1863. The fortification extended the line of Arlington forts to the Potomac River. Along with Forts Strong, Morton, and Woodbury, it functioned as part of the outer perimeter of defenses that protected the Aqueduct Bridge of the Chesapeake and Ohio Canal. The fort was a lunette with a southern and western face and two flanks, and two bastions on the north side to protect it from attack up the ravines from the Potomac. The fort was entered from the east by a road that crossed Spout Run and proceeded up the hill to Fort Strong. To provide clear lines of fire for Fort C.F. Smith and adjacent forts, all the trees for miles around were cut down. Many of the trees were used in construction of the forts and support structures.

Located east of the fort were the support buildings were the troops ate and slept. The structures included the barracks, mess halls, cook houses, officers' quarters, and barn and a headquarters building. When the fort was decommissioned in 1865, the structures were removed and no visible evidence of their existence remains today.

Major General Charles Ferguson Smith

Major General Smith was born in Philadelphia on April 24, 1807, and graduated from the United States Military Academy in 1825. He later served as Commandant of Cadets, and two of his students were Ulysses S. Grant and William T. Sherman.

He fought in the war with Mexico (1846-1848) and led a 1856 survey expedition to the Red River area of northern Idaho. He participated in the federal policing action against the Mormons, 1858.

On February 15, 1862, during Ulysses S. Grant's Army of the Mississippi siege of Fort Donelson, Tennessee, Smith led a charge at the head of his 3d Division that breached the Confederate defenses and was largely responsible for the Confederate surrender. When Confederate forces asked for terms of surrender, Smith counseled Grant to offer no terms except "unconditional and immediate surrender." Grant's famous dispatch made "Unconditional Surrender Grant" a household name throughout the North.

Charles F. Smith was promoted to Major General on March 21, 1862, and was temporarily placed in charge of the Army when Grant was accused of drunkenness.

He died on April 25, 1862, as the result of a minor non-combat injury.

Natural Resources of the Park

There are many factors which contribute to the richness of natural resources encountered at Fort C.F. Smith Park. Because the Park is situated at the juncture between the physiographic provinces of the Piedmont and Coastal Plain, animals and plants characteristic of each may be found there, thereby increasing the diversity of wildlife overall. Also, the Park contains a variety of habitats, including both meadow and woodland, and each habitat supports its own unique communities of plants and animals. In addition to the native plant communities, the Park is also home to several exotic tree species, and several of these have been recognized as Arlington County Notable Trees because of their exceptional size or unusual variety. The proximity of the Park to the Potomac River means that one may encounter animals associated with a riverine environment, and this too, adds to the richness of the wildlife. Finally, because the property was never developed beyond a rural estate into the urban and suburban landscapes which now comprise most of the land in the County, populations of plants and animals have been allowed to thrive relatively undisturbed.

Sources: (https://www.arlingtonva.us/Government/Departments/Parks-Recreation/Locations/Parks/Fort-CF-Smith-Park/History-of-Fort-CF-Smith)

Halls Hill/Segregation Wall

In 1930, Arlington passed a new Zoning and Planning Ordinance, which hurt Arlington's African American communities in several ways. The legislation tried to limit multifamily housing, which existed almost exclusively in black communities at the time. This legislation also required expensive renovations (mostly connections to public sewers), which must be undertaken by professional contractors. Many of the working-class residents of Hall's Hill, who had traditionally built and renovated their homes, could not pay for these improvements.

One element of this ordinance that impacted Hall's Hill was a provision allowing for "the construction of a rear fence or wall to a height not exceeding seven feet." This provision allowed for the continuation of racialized building practices meant to isolate and more firmly segregate Hall's Hill. Residents constructed a seven-foot-tall cinderblock wall along the rear property line of the white homes bordering Hall's Hill, including the neighborhoods of Fostoria and Waycroft.

This wall construction was executed on an individual home-owner level; however, it was planned out enough that by the early 1940s, Hall's Hill was quartered off. Since its founding, Hall's Hill's residents have used isolation strategies to insulate themselves
from hostile white neighbors. Early roads and institutions faced into the community and had few external access points.

However, this new, more pronounced division by local white residents created a physical barrier to punctuate Hall's Hill's segregated status in an area that was otherwise considered the domain of white suburban development. The wall meant the community could not expand and had only one entrance or exit. In places, the wall was six inches thick, generally over six feet high, and often uneven and jagged on top to prevent people from climbing over it.

In 1966, the Langston School PTA, United Churchwomen of Arlington, and several African American groups requested an opening in the wall for children going to Woodlawn Elementary School. “The retention of the wall would have forced several students to walk an extra 14 to 15 blocks to reach their new classroom.” This opening was around Culpeper and Abingdon.

Traces of the wall remain.

Sources: (https://www.stayarlington.com/directory/halls-hill-segregation-wall/; https://arlingtonhistorical.com/items/show/93)

Echoes of Little Saigon

Collecting and Preserving the Cultural History of the Vietnamese Community in Arlington, Virginia

History

New Echoes of Little Saigon Story Map!

The Echoes of Little Saigon project was developed in 2014 in a graduate studio directed by Dr. Elizabeth Morton (http://linkedin.com/in/elizabeth-morton-phd). Building on research and community oral histories collected by fellow students, **Judd Ullom** developed a series of short documentaries tied to a walking tour of Clarendon sites associated with Little Saigon. For more information, please contact Dr. Elizabeth Morton (https://www.linkedin.com/in/elizabeth-morton-phd/).

We are very pleased to announce a new **Echoes of Little Saigon StoryMap** (https://storymaps.arcgis.com/stories/cd4745a012b645d188a08e1f0a787737), with Dr. Morton's and the student team's content reformatted by Rudo Kemper and Liz Nguyen. You can now share your story directly through the website. Thanks so much to Rudo and Liz!

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The original text version of the Echoes of Little Saigon narrative remains below.

Little Saigon (Arlington, VA)

Little Saigon refers to the Vietnamese ethnic enclave in the Clarendon neighborhood of Arlington, Virginia, which served the large refugee population that immigrated after the Fall of Saigon on April 30, 1975. The neighborhood became a vibrant hub of Vietnamese commerce and social activity, and reached its peak during the late 1970s to the mid 1980s. The opening of the WMATA Clarendon Metro station eventually sparked new development, resulting in higher rents, and businesses closed or relocated, notably to the nearby Eden Center. Nam Viet Restaurant is the last remaining original Vietnamese business in Clarendon.

Little Saigon Cultural Preservation Effort

In 2014, master's degree students from Virginia Tech's Urban Affairs and Planning Program (National Capital Region), directed by Dr. Elizabeth Morton (https://elizabethmortonphd.wordpress.com/), collected the stories of the Vietnamese community who immigrated to, shopped at, or owned businesses in Arlington's Clarendon neighborhood when it was known as "Little Saigon." Working with community partners, local scholars and County staff, a student team conducted oral histories and accepted donations of photographs and other memorabilia, which have since been archived at the Arlington County Library's Center for Local History (http://library.arlingtonva.us/center-for-local-history/).

Many members of the Vietnamese-American community participated in this project to share their memories and input on this culturally significant ethnic enclave. The student team recommended the creation of a historical marker or monument to commemorate Little Saigon and recognize the contributions of the Vietnamese refugees to Arlington's heritage and business community. The original student team consisted of Judd Ullom, Carlin Tacey, Jacqueline Canales, Andrea Dono and Aaron Frank, and Ullom went on to develop a supplemental multimedia documentary tour (https://littlesaigonclarendon.com/). Additional oral histories have been conducted and catalogued, and more are welcome.

(https://littlesaigonclarendon.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/10/arllibrary.jpg)

By Dave Bucksbaum, May 1980
Source: Center for Local History, Arlington County Public Library

Vietnamese Immigration to Northern Virginia

Toward the end of the Vietnam War in the 1970s, immigration from Vietnam to the United States increased considerably. Before 1975, only about 15,000 Vietnamese immigrants lived in the United States. By 1980, about 245,000 Vietnamese lived in the U.S., with about 91 percent of that population arriving in the previous five years (Barringer et al. 2006).

Vietnamese immigrants fled their country in two distinct waves. The first large wave of immigration occurred in 1975 and generally included elites and highly educated residents who left with the fall of Saigon (O'Connell 2003, Wood 1997). Many left in fear for their lives or were at risk of imprisonment since they had either worked for the former South Vietnamese government or supported that regime. Many refugees left on short notice with just the

clothes on their backs and very in the way of money or possessions (Bich 2014). For those able to leave with their money, it was often in the form of jewelry and "tael," which were small envelopes of gold that could be sewn into clothing or packed with other belongings (Cook 2014). Many of the Vietnamese who lived through the war and under Communist control mistrusted banks and were wary of the volatility of paper money; keeping money in the form of gold or jewelry was common (Cook 2014, Nguyen 2014, Workman 1993).

In the second wave of immigration, from the mid-1970s to the early 1990s, most refugees left Vietnam by boat. These refugees, commonly referred to as "boat people," were generally less educated and politically connected than the previous wave of immigrants (O'Connell 2003). An estimated 800,000 people fled Vietnam by boat between 1975 and 1995, and according to the United Nations High Commission for Refugees, between 200,000 and 400,000 boat people died at sea (Vo 2006). People took small boats to international waters to find new land, or large boats (such as naval ships or oil tankers) to pick them up (Bich 2014, Nguyen, 2014).

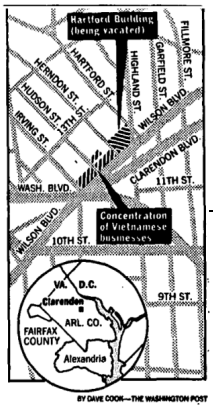
Refugees often stopped in the Philippines and Guam before continuing their journey to refugee camps in the U.S., where they waited for sponsorship by their friends, family, or other contacts (Bich 2014, Cook 2014).

The Washington, D.C. metropolitan area was a desirable place to settle for several reasons. Many of the first-wave Vietnamese immigrants had ties to the U.S. government or the Embassy. Moreover, for many, residing near the capital city was reminiscent of their previous residence near the Vietnamese capital city of Saigon (Do 2014, O'Connell 2003). Northern Virginia emerged as a suitable location for resettlement within the D.C. region. Embassy officials pointed refugees toward Northern Virginia (O'Connell 2003), and Arlington offered the availability of sponsors such as the Catholic Church (Dinh 2014, O'Connell 2003), as well as the relatively affordable housing (Cook 2014, Do 2014). Once the first wave settled in Arlington, existing family and social ties established the network for future immigrants. By the end of the Vietnam War, 15%, or 3,000, of the nation's Vietnamese population lived in the Washington, D.C. area (O'Connell 2009), and many more joined in the subsequent decades. As the population grew, the most densely settled Vietnamese residential areas in Northern Virginia were along Wilson Boulevard and Columbia Pike, extending west towards Falls Church and Annandale.

Development of Little Saigon in Clarendon

Until the mid-1900s, Clarendon was Arlington County's premier downtown shopping area and a bustling streetcar suburb (Ehrenhalt 2012). However, during the 1960s and 70s, competition from regional shopping malls and strip shopping centers caused downtown Clarendon to decline. Many businesses relocated, leaving behind vacant storefronts (O'Connell 2003). The historic building stock suffered from neglect, and by the mid-1970s, construction of the WMATA Clarendon Metro station began to tear up the streets and sidewalks. These conditions resulted in cheap, short-term commercial leases, which the Vietnamese refugees seized as an opportunity to open businesses to support their families. In light of the disruptive Metro construction, rent fell as low as $1.50 to $5 a square foot in some buildings (Arnett 1989, Drummond 1989), making this area relatively affordable for the recent immigrants.

The "Little Saigon" neighborhood was generally considered to consist of the blocks in the immediate vicinity of Wilson Boulevard between Washington Boulevard and Highland Street.



(https://littlesaigonclarendon.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/10/screen-shot-2014-12-09-at-2-05-36-pm.png)
Source: Cook from Arnett 1989

The first Vietnamese business, the Saigon Market grocery store, was established in 1972 by a former employee of the Vietnamese Embassy, and a second grocery store, Vietnam Center, was opened by the Vietnamese wife of a CIA employee (O'Connell 2003, Meyers from O'Connell 2003). Soon more Vietnamese people began to open shops and restaurants in Clarendon, and the area was transformed into the hub of the East Coast Vietnamese community (Wood 1997). Known to the Vietnamese customer base as "Little Saigon," "Wilson Boulevard," or simply "Clarendon," people came from as far away as North Carolina and Tennessee to find staple goods and to connect with others from Vietnam (Bich 2014, Nyugen 2014, Dinh 2014, Cook 2014). Weekends were the busiest shopping days, and the businesses were crowded with customers who made the area a weekly destination (Net and Rose 2014). Refugee assistance groups and churches organized trips that brought immigrants from Alexandria and elsewhere to Clarendon to shop (O'Connell 2003).

(https://littlesaigonclarendon.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/10/nguyen12.jpg)
Mekong Center, Photograph courtesy of the Nguyen Family

Shops opened to sell specialized goods to the Vietnamese community. Major attractions included the Vietnamese grocery stores, which sold ingredients unavailable in American markets, like fish sauce, rice paper, quail eggs, pomelo peel, star anise, canned oyster mushrooms, and egg roll wrappers, as well as delicacies like dried sharks fin (Cook 2014, Davis 1980, Woodruff 2014).

A popular drink served in the cafes was iced coffee made with sweetened condensed milk and crushed ice (Do 2014). Jewelry stores, fabric stores, and department stores soon opened to sell goods popular with Vietnamese shoppers.

The Vietnamese refugees came to Little Saigon for more than just groceries; the neighborhood became the place where they could receive news of Vietnam and of friends and family (Bich 2014). Many people had left Vietnam suddenly without communicating their travel plans to anyone (Bich 2014, Nguyen 2014). Several stores had bulletin boards where messages were posted by refugees who were hopeful they could learn the whereabouts of those they had lost touch with from Vietnam (Bich 2014, Nguyen 2014). Many people also used the boards to make appointments to meet people in Little Saigon (Nguyen 2014). Shipping services in the neighborhood gave immigrants the chance to send packages to Vietnam, which was difficult elsewhere (Dinh 2014). Little Saigon served as a social setting for interacting with other members of the community, with entertainment like live Vietnamese music performed in cafes (Bich 2014, Cook 2014). People would frequently visit Little Saigon for cuisine such as *pho*, a traditional Vietnamese soup, or spring rolls, which couldn't be found elsewhere at the time.

Little Saigon offered a variety of business types and styles. Some businesses developed the ambiance of a flea market or bazaar since it was common for multiple businesses to operate within a single building. The My An Fabric store had multiple businesses within the same building, including a billiards and arcade game room and a small cafe (Priest 1987). Cafe Dalat served only as a restaurant with high ceilings, dark interior with little decor, and symmetrically lined tables, which allowed the waitstaff to serve customers within just minutes of ordering (Woodruff 2014). Some residents recall the over-sized suitcases on display, often pouring out onto the sidewalk, at the Pacific Department Store (Woodruff 2014).

While some Vietnamese residents came to Little Saigon just to shop, many lingered inside the businesses and enjoyed the sense of community (Breyault and Goldschmidt 2014, Bich 2014). Festivals and events were held throughout the year to celebrate holidays, such as the annual Moon Festival (Jordan 1991). For 19 years, successful restaurateur Nguyen Van Thoi hosted an annual Tet dinner at his Nam Viet and My An cafes for American prisoners of war from the Vietnam War (Estrada 2005). The cafes and businesses were appealing to non-Vietnamese customers, too, who have recalled experiencing their first bowl of pho, vermicelli noodle bowls, spring rolls, crepes, and other traditional dishes here (Woodruff 2014).

Notable Businesses of Little Saigon

- Saigon Market grocery store
- Pacific Oriental Department Store and cafe and billiard hall on the upper floor
- My An fabric store, billiards, and cafe
- Dat Hung Jewelry
- Mekong Center grocery store
- Lotus Imports
- Cafe Dalat restaurant
- Nam Viet restaurant
- Kim Long gift shop
- Saigon Souvenir
- Queen Bee restaurant
- Cafe Saigon restaurant
- An outdoor vegetable and fruit stand in a parking lot on Herndon Street across from the Hartford Building
- Ngoc Long jewelry store

Vietnamese families continued to settle in the area, but not without struggles. For some, language barriers were an issue. Children entered behind in classes and enrolled in English as Second Language (ESL) programs in school (Nguyen 2014). Restarting careers and finding work could be difficult, too. Vietnamese professionals with impressive resumes, some of whom had earned advanced degrees at American universities, had to take odd jobs in landscaping, child care, housekeeping, or hourly part-time jobs instead of full-time work in order to get by (Bich 2014).

Various assistance efforts aided some of the Vietnamese immigrants. Refugee assistance programs like the Mutual Assistance Association Consortium represented and helped refugees from all countries in Northern Virginia. Arlington County government created a new multicultural program coordinator position to handle the influx of immigrants (Bich 2014). Buddhist temples and church groups also provided support (Bich 2014). Kim Cook established the Vietnamese Resettlement Association in Falls Church and Khuc Minh Tho founded the Families of Vietnamese Political Prisoners Association (O'Connell 2003, Workman 1993).

Vietnamese entrepreneurs faced many hurdles as they tried to succeed in Clarendon. Little Saigon establishments were typically family-owned and operated, but they also employed immigrants from Vietnam from outside their family and had agreements with area families to sell their homemade items, like food, in their shops (Nguyen 2014). Because many banks wouldn't lend to them, Vietnamese entrepreneurs had to borrow money from friends and family to start their businesses, often at a higher interest rate than the standard commercially available. Some business owners experienced bureaucratic hurdles because they didn't understand the business licensing and regulations, and were fined (Arnett 1989). For many Vietnamese, it was important to have the real and cultural value of *tael* available (Cook 2014); however, to raise capital, some had to sell off much of their family's gold and jewelry (Arnett 1989). Others relied on traditional Vietnamese practice known as "*hoi*," informal lending clubs set up by local entrepreneurs (Workman 1993).

Over time, the Vietnamese-American business community increased its influence. For example, Toa Do, who worked his way up from his first American job as a messenger to a systems analyst and then an independent consultant, became the first Vietnamese person to have a seat on the Arlington Chamber of Commerce (Workman 1993). The Clarendon Vietnamese Retail Business Association was formed by Kham Dinh Do, proprietor of the Dat Hung jewelry store; the association tried to organize the Vietnamese business community and advocate on behalf of their interests as Arlington County government was planning for the development of Clarendon (Hsu 1989).

Decline

Several accounts of Little Saigon from 1975-85 included terms like "run down" and "dirty" (Cook 2014, Dinh 2014). Many building owners did not spend money maintaining or updating their buildings because they were waiting for the Metro station to open and for new economic opportunities to be realized as Clarendon redeveloped (Currier 1990). Development didn't increase significantly in Clarendon for the first few years after Metro opened in 1979. There were multiple small parcels of land held by absentee owners that made it difficult for developers to assemble land suitable for large projects (Priest 1987).

On November 18, 1989, the Arlington County Board unanimously endorsed Clarendon's redevelopment plan, which envisioned high-rise commercial structures, mid-rise residential buildings, parks, and pedestrian walkways (Matthews 1989). The plan also proposed incentives for constructing buildings lower than the zoning code allowed and for carving out smaller-scaled commercial space for smaller-scaled businesses (Matthews 1989).

Eventually, rents began to increase in Clarendon (up to $25-30 a square foot in some commercial buildings), and Vietnamese enterprises were displaced from Arlington (Arnett 1989, Wood 1997, Drummond 1989). The Vietnamese population that had settled in the garden apartments of Arlington moved westward, with many settling around Seven Corners, as well as Falls Church near the intersection of Graham Road and Arlington Boulevard (Wood 1997, Cook 2014). Vietnamese-American residents dispersed along with the Vietnamese-American businesses (Wood 1990). By 1984, 60% of Vietnamese-Americans lived within three miles of Seven Corners (Andrews 1984).

Gradually, the number of Vietnamese businesses in Little Saigon diminished. Some business owners moved on to other opportunities, some relocated, and some, like the more successful restaurants like Queen Bee and Nam Viet that appealed to mainstream customers, remained (Bich 2014, Nguyen 2014, Dinh 2014).

In 1989, the Clarendon Alliance, a business association, noted that of the 76 businesses in Clarendon, between 30 and 35 were Asian-owned, and among those, most were Vietnamese-owned (Arnett 1989). The establishments included food markets, real estate and insurance agencies, law and accounting firms, and restaurants and retailers. That same year, the Mekong Center grocery store, the Pacific Oriental Department Store, the My An 1 restaurant and the Alpha Camera repair shop left the Hartford Building, which was then demolished (Arnett 1989). The owner of the Pacific renamed the enterprise Global Market and moved elsewhere in Northern Virginia; he also opened the Asian Village in Hyattsville, Maryland (O'Connell 2003, Arnett 1989). Other business owners were also able to relocate to shopping centers throughout the suburbs that offered better parking and well-maintained properties (Currier 2014).

Business remained steady for some of the establishments that remained, although the once-large crowds of Vietnamese customers dwindled and the neighborhood's value as a community meeting ground diminished (Drummond 1989). Several Vietnamese owners were bought out of their leases to make way for new developments (Nguyen 2014). Author Alan Ehrenhalt points out that for the economically struggling Clarendon of the 1960s, "it was immigration that brought those old buildings to life…The vacant storefronts brought the Vietnamese in and set the whole process in motion. It may seem a bit ironic that the way to bring in more affluent white newcomers is to lay down a base of poorer people from other countries. But that is exactly what happened in Arlington" (Ehrenhalt 2012).

The decline of Little Saigon was noticeable. A letter to the editor of the *Washington Post* lamented the small business culture that was fading from Clarendon, noting the contributions of the Vietnamese people and the diversity they brought to Arlington (Matthews 1989). As described by a former customer and community activist, it was hard for these refugees to lose their community after just recently losing their country (Cook 2014). County planners noted the inevitability of pressure on the small businesses, explaining that the government had discussed plans for many years to turn Clarendon into a higher-density, mixed-use corridor (Fischer 2006).

Long-time customers and business owners had mixed sentiments about the end of Little Saigon. Some business owners expressed resentment and frustration that they were being pushed out, while others were ready for a change and knew their children didn't want to continue the family business (Arnett 2014, Nguyen, 2014). In the early 80s, some thought that they would go back to Vietnam once the communists were gone (or eliminated) and that Little Saigon served as their "temporary home" (Do 2014). With more Vietnamese businesses located throughout the Washington, D.C., and an increase in the number of Vietnamese-language media, the need for a central meeting place to learn of news from back home wasn't as strong as it once was (Bich 2014).

The Clarendon neighborhood has become a mix of retail, bars and restaurants, increasing residential, and office uses. Most of the new developments have larger footprints that are not as conducive to small, independently owned businesses (Hart 2006). Today, Nam Viet restaurant is the only Vietnamese business remaining from the original Little Saigon community, although the Four Sisters Grill is a Vietnamese restaurant that opened in 2014.

The Eden Center

In 1984, the Eden Center shopping center in the Seven Corners area of the City of Falls Church opened, bringing 20,000 square feet of affordable retail space to the area (Stadtmiller 1997). In the following years, many Little Saigon businesses relocated to Eden Center, which originally had a mix of Latino-, Asian-, and American-owned businesses (Bich 2014). Some business owners opened establishments with their own storefronts, while others rented a stall in the former Grand Union building (Bich 2014).

In 1997, 32,400 square feet was added to the Eden Shopping Center, along with an iconic clock tower; at the time it was the largest Vietnamese shopping district in the U.S. (Stadtmiller 1997, Lan Nguyen 1996). The Eden Center became a hub of Vietnamese commerce and activity. In 2007, "Exit Saigon, Enter Little Saigon," a traveling Smithsonian Asian Pacific American Program exhibit, was temporarily located in Eden Center to tell the story of the Vietnamese American immigration and acclimation experience in America (CNN 2007). The Eden Center is now regarded as the central place for Vietnamese services and goods in Northern Virginia, as well as the entire East Coast (Wood 1997, Meyers 2006*).* In 2014, the Eden Center was home to 120 stores and restaurants, almost all of which were Vietnamese.

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