

Stonehurst*news*

a **SPECIAL EDITION** publication of the Stonehurst Homeowners Association

June 2019

STONEHURST 50th ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATION

Saturday, June 1st

(Rain date: Sunday, June 2nd)

1:30 PM

Dedication Ceremony

**New Stonehurst Sign at the
North end of Stonehurst Drive**

1:45 PM

Cake and Ice Cream

at the Park

(Near the picnic tables)

Kids and Dogs Welcome!

In this special edition newsletter, we celebrate Stonehurst's 50th year as a community, and take a look back at some of the events and circumstances that contribute to our neighborhood's enduring appeal:

Before There Was a Stonehurst

At the end of the Second World War, this part of Fairfax County was primarily made up of modestly prosperous dairy farms of 150 to 500 acres. There was also a tobacco farm in the Flint Hill School area, and a sheep farm near the current intersection of Blake Lane and Route 29. And Fairfax Circle was just an unpaved country crossroads! Whatever land wasn't plowed or cleared for pasture was a lush woodland of oaks, maples, and sycamores, with sprinklings of dogwoods and redbuds below the canopy.

The land upon which Stonehurst was built had long been part of a 150-acre farm that belonged to the Walker family, who acquired it before the Civil War. According to the family, the property had been a campsite for Algonquian Indians, who lived on what is now Roosevelt Island in the Potomac River.

When the population of Fairfax County tripled between 1950 and 1960, it became clear that the federal government workforce could no longer be housed in the city and the surrounding inner suburbs. Planning commissions began expanding housing and economic development, as well as the transportation infrastructure to support it.

Fairfax County was fortunate to have officials and developers of great vision who, in only two generations, transformed a sleepy rural southern county into one of the wealthiest, best employed, best educated, most diverse, and safest, urban areas in the country!

Location, Location, Location

Stonehurst is 2 miles from the Capital Beltway, 1 mile from I-66, 1.2 miles from the Vienna Metro station, and 15 miles from both Dulles International and Reagan International airports.

The convergence of plans for the beltway around the city, the metro subway system, I-66, and a new international airport placed the Fairfax Circle and immediate environs in a most advantageous position in terms of future growth.

In the early 1960s, builder Roland Thompson purchased 58 acres of the Walker farm on the north side of Route 50 to build Stonehurst, including 242 homes in SHA (I, II, and III), established in 1969, and 67 homes in SHIV, established as a separate association in 1976. He also purchased 32 acres of the Walker farm on the south side of Route 50 to build the Virginian, established in 1980, as the area's first major, upscale, independent/assisted living facility. In 2015, his heirs sold 16 acres that had been planned for Stonehurst to NVR for a luxury townhome development, Metro Row.

The Capital Beltway

Anticipating a population explosion around Washington, the National Capital Park and Planning Commission proposed a plan in 1952 for the 63.8 mile Capital Beltway to circle Washington. The beltway would connect the suburbs, and facilitate economic development outside of its circumference.

I-66

Interstate-66, the only interstate highway running east to west from Washington, D.C., was first proposed in 1956. The first stretch between Gainesville and Centreville was completed in 1961. Although construction of the eastern end was fraught with dissension over the proposed route through densely populated neighborhoods, work began in 1977, and the final section of I-66 was completed in 1982.

The Metro

The plan for a subway system catering to the metropolitan area was approved in 1968, with construction beginning in 1969. The first portion opened in 1978, and the first Virginia stations were linked to the system in 1977.

As Fairfax grows, so does the Metro system in Virginia. Construction began in 2009 for an extension through Tysons Corner to Dulles Airport, the first section of which opened in 2014.

Dulles Airport

In 1958, it was decided to build the new international airport on the border of Fairfax and Loudon Counties, and architect Eero Saarinen designed a graceful, soaring building suggesting effortless flight. When the first flight lifted off the tarmac in 1962, the airport stood alone, far out in the midst of forest and field. However, the suburbs gradually encroached and surrounded it, to the point where the airport now seems only a short trip away for Stonehurst residents.

The Advent of the Suburban Townhouse

The concept of a townhouse originated in 17th century Paris, when the first townhome community was built between 1605 and 1612. At the time, townhouses served as a city pied-a-terre for the wealthy and noble, whose primary residences were often family manors in the country.

In U.S. cities, townhouses quickly became popular with both the wealthy and the middle class, due to their relatively small footprint and capacity for a large amount of living space, spread upward over three or more stories.

In the 1960s, the suburban townhouse concept was relatively new to Fairfax County, and growing in popularity. Townhouses provided a way for one to have the feel of a single-family home for less money, with the ease of a small back garden, the intimacy of a neighborhood, and the convenience of public and professional services nearby.

Olde Fairfax Mews, Stonehurst, and its sister community Stoneleigh were some of the first townhouse communities designed and built in this part of Fairfax County, and they set the bar high for the townhouse developments that followed. To this day, they are still considered some of the most desirable townhouse communities in the area.

Residents Remember Roland Thompson, Builder of Stonehurst

Roland Thompson, the builder of Stonehurst, was a man of great vision, anticipating both the advent of the suburban townhouse, and the need for assisted living facilities for seniors.

Mr. Thompson appeared to have a particular fondness for Stonehurst, and was on the grounds or in the office almost daily, directing the construction and seeing that everything was done properly. A modest and unassuming man, early resident Eleanor DeVore remembers him regularly cutting the grass in the public areas. He is remembered fondly for his almost paternal attitude toward the community, and by example passed on to the residents a sense of duty to cherish and care for the neighborhood, and treat it like the jewel it is.

He was known to be generous and kind, as well. A longtime resident, Pearl Ramsey, recalls being bitterly disappointed when the unit she could just afford buying was sold before she could purchase it. There were none left at that price, but Mr. Thompson sent her to his lawyer, his banker, and his mortgage broker, and made it possible for her to buy her house.

Despite Mr. Thompson's warmth, he was an extremely private person. Born in 1930, he graduated from Washington and Lee University in Lexington, Virginia, and served on the Board of Visitors of Longwood University. At his death in 2007, the Washington Post obituary was a mere paragraph in length, but requested consideration of donations to the Middleburg Humane Foundation or the Smile Train, illustrating his love for animals and children.

For the People, By the People

Stonehurst is unusual, in that it is the only community in the area of its size that has been self-governed since the beginning. It is clear that the nine Stonehurst residents who serve on the Board of the HOA bring the pride of ownership to their

dedication to conserving the ambiance of this unique community.

Self-governance requires a great deal of volunteer work: reviewing bids for contractor services, planning and executing the budget, managing projects for architectural review, landscaping, trash and recycling, snow removal, parking and security, publication of the newsletter, special events, and the myriad of other services.

The SHA Board accomplishes much of its work through committees, which are headed by a board member, and staffed by resident volunteers. Because committees are made up of residents who truly care about the neighborhood, the personal touch and attention to detail is evident everywhere.

The Unique Beauty of Stonehurst

To appreciate the singular beauty of Stonehurst, one only has to compare it to other townhouse communities in the area, built just a few years later. The solid brick townhouses of Stonehurst are laid out in irregular rows with deep setbacks, and have English-style back garden walls, and paved alleys. The variety of floor plans and façade styles, as well as the differing brick colors, refreshes the eye and avoids cookie-cutter tedium.

The common areas are gracious in size and irregular in shape, which contributes to an overall organic, natural ambiance of space and calm. The large trees, and mature shrubbery lend a lush softness to the landscape. Upon entering the community, residents describe feeling as though they are welcomed into an inclusive, safe, and peaceful place.

The Landscape of Stonehurst

Stonehurst Secretary/Treasurer Jo Eanes recently came across the original construction blueprints for the community. She was surprised to find that the only landscaping initially planned for the community was along the front on Arlington Boulevard. Long-time residents who moved in while the community was still under construction spoke of people being left entirely to their own

devices when it came to landscaping the front and back yards of their homes. There were no guidelines, and no plan for the common areas.

Resident Peggy Miller recalled the forming of an independent garden club early on to beautify the neighborhood. The club raised \$10,000—an astounding amount at the time—through bake sales and the like, to hire a professional landscape architect to design the grounds. Once approved, the garden club members set about acquiring plants, (many of which were paid for out of their own pockets), and installed them according to the plan.

Over time, it became clear that the maintenance of the community landscape required a concerted plan and schedule, and so the HOA Board created a Landscape Chair position to coordinate the work.

Community Garden

Originally, Stonehurst was surrounded by a green belt. Concerned by the loss of the woods to the north, a group of SHA owners and residents formed a committee in 2016 with the support of the Board to plan and implement a multi-year plan to transform the SHA Recreation Site into a Community Garden or Greenspace.

The Recreation Site consisted of 2.2 acres, sold by Roland Thompson to SHA in 1979 when plans for a community pool fell through. Nearly half of the site was floodplain that had to remain undisturbed, per government regulations. The vision was to create a community garden, using mostly low maintenance native trees, shrubs and small perennials that support wildlife, and provide a visual screen between Stonehurst and the new Metrow Row community. The plan identified several garden zones, including the remaining Woods, the Grove, the Bend, and the Swale, and Gully. For more information please refer to the [Landscape Project](#) on the SHA website.

The committee consulted with experts including the Northern Virginia Soil and Water Conservation Service, Virginia Master Naturalists, and Audubon at Home to identify trees, shrubs, and small perennials that would be suitable for the area.

The Board approved the initial plan in 2016, and also hosted a community workday with the Boy Scouts to add donated rock to the swale and remove invasive species. In 2017, Audubon at Home designated the Recreation Site as a Certified Wildlife Sanctuary. Also in 2017, the Board improved the Gully with eight tons of large rock for erosion control. In 2018, the Board improved the path between the Woods and the Grove by thinning the canopy, installing additional native shrubs, and adding topsoil, seed, and straw.

Today, the work continues under the oversight of the SHA Landscaping Chair. New volunteers are always welcome to contact the SHA Landscape Chair at landscapechair@stonehursthoa.com

The Legacy: The Families and Children of Stonehurst

At 50 years of age, Stonehurst has nurtured three generations of families. To this day, you regularly see a mix of seniors taking their morning walks, young mothers pushing little ones in strollers, and teenagers out walking dogs. Parents regularly chat together while waiting for the school bus, and happy sounds echo throughout the community as children play and ride their bikes.

Even before the community was built, families and children have been drawn here. Resident Mary Stenhouse, (who was related to the Walker farm family by marriage), would bring her kids to the farm site every year to cut their Christmas trees and seasonal greens, and to watch the badgers and deer that lived by the creek that runs along the side of what is now Metro View. Years later, she moved into Stonehurst IV with her children, and one of her daughters lives there with her now.

Resident Ingrid Anderson recalls moving into Stonehurst with her young family many years ago, and how the little ones would play at the end of Stonehurst Drive, directly in front of her house. Through the children, she met other young mothers, and about twenty of them formed a “Babysitting Club”, and created a voucher-exchange system for babysitting services. The group became good

friends, and would look out for each other's children as they played in the neighborhood. They held informal happy hours in the park, where parents, kids, and dogs would get together to visit and relax, and they also had a "Breakfast Club" that would meet quarterly. Even though the "Babysitting Club" kids have now grown up, and many of the families have since moved on, some homeowners like Ingrid have stayed in the neighborhood and continue to enjoy its many features and great appeal.

Stonehurst is a dynamic and ever changing community, and families are often moving into and out of neighborhood. However, sometimes homeowners love the neighborhood so much that they want to hold on to their homes, and rent them out while they are living somewhere else. Interestingly, many of those homeowners end up moving back in, recognizing the value of living in this unique gem of a community.

Pam Miller is one such homeowner, whose military career took her in and out of the area. She and her husband kept their home on Lindenwood Lane, and she speaks glowingly of the diversity of the neighborhood, and how much she and her children learned from the other families. She refers to Stonehurst as, "a village in which neighbors taught her children music, another helped with Spanish, while still others helped with math. In return, her sons shoveled snow for elders and did odd jobs to help them out."

As an additional testament to our community's enduring appeal, longevity, and legacy, Stonehurst is fortunate to have a number of adult children of its original owners who have now chosen to live here and continue to rear their own families in this neighborhood. In fact, Roland Thompson's own daughter, Ann, was so fond of the neighborhood that she lived in Stonehurst for a number of years, raising her two daughters. Long-time resident Pearl Ramsey remembers babysitting the girls.

From the very beginning, Stonehurst has been a beloved neighborhood, and has served as home to many different families over the years. The community's features continue to be valued by

residents both young and old, and have been cherished for over three generations.

The Virginian

When Roland Thompson purchased the acreage on either side of Route 50 from the Walker family, he didn't have a firm development plan in mind for the 32-acre portion. Mary Stenhouse's mother-in-law, Edna Walker Stenhouse, told Thompson that what Fairfax needed was a senior living facility. It was a cutting-edge concept in the early 1970s, but she said that if he would build one, she would be the first resident to move in!

Thompson took her up on it, and built the Virginian: an upscale independent/assisted complex of approximately 275 apartment/rooms, and an on-site memory unit and rehabilitation facility. The apartments are large, some with balconies looking out onto acres of woodland. The design is clean, and modern, and has maintained its timeless style. Mrs. Stenhouse was indeed the first resident, followed closely by Thompson's own mother, Evelyn, and during his last illness, by Thompson himself.

It is a comfort to many of Stonehurst's older residents who need to downsize and simplify to know they can move across the street to the Virginian, and remain connected to the community. From there they can continue the long friendships begun on this side of the road, and maintain a keen interest in the affairs of their old neighborhood.

Acknowledgments

This 50th Anniversary Special Edition Newsletter retrospective is the product of the long-time residents who generously contributed their time and memories, as well as of the reference librarians of the Fairfax Regional Library Virginia Room.

Special thanks go out to: Ingrid Anderson, Eleanor DeVore, Barbara Farmer, Pam Miller, Pearl Ramsey, Mary Stenhouse, Diane Waldman — thank you all so much for all of your help and contribution to this 50th Anniversary Special Edition Newsletter!