

## **BAILEY'S CROSSROADS**

**(A History by Susan Flinner)**

The area known as Bailey's Crossroads has a history which stretches back to the days of buffalo and Indians. What is now Leesburg Pike (Route 7) began as a buffalo trail and later adapted as an Indian trail because it was already there and it ran across a ridge that went from the Potomac River in present day Old Town Alexandria to the foot of the Blue Ridge Mountains at Leesburg. It was called the Great Eastern Ridge Road by the Necostin Indians until they abandoned it in the late 1670's to traders, colonists and early postal carriers.

In Colonial times, the land was part of Lord Fairfax's original royal grant. Later he sold off pieces of it. One early owner was George Washington who possessed the land which now houses the Skyline complex. He called it his "upper tract," his lower tract being his Mt. Vernon land on the Potomac River. He surveyed the land in 1799, as well as land for some of the District of Columbia boundary stones including stone #6 (in the middle of S. Jefferson Street past the Giant Grocery), the second of 40 stones laid.

The 330 acres of the immediate crossroads area and Glen Forest Fairfax were sold to Captain Simon Pearson in 1729. By 1773 the land was bought by John Luke Sr. as a wedding gift for John Jr. and his bride Elizabeth. They built a brick colonial style mansion house at the present site of Durbin Place. They also leased a house on Leesburg Pike to Jacob Bontz who turned it into Bontz's Tavern Hotel in 1797. (The windmill is there now.)

Meanwhile the current crossroads was not a crossroads but a "fork in the road to Cameron" (now Seminary Road) and runs along another ridge. Not until 1809 did the area become a true crossroads with the construction of the Washington Graveled Turnpike (Columbia Pike). In 1817 William Beverly Randolph who had bought the old mansion house, named it "Maury" and added some wooden wings to the brick structure.

The little carriage lane which had always connected the mansion house with the crossroads area became known as "Maury Lane."

In 1837 Hachaliah Bailey of Westport, NY, who had a small circus (featuring America's first elephant), bought the entire Pearson patent and gave Bailey's Crossroads his name and identity as the winter headquarters for his circus. He lived at Maury and just across the way (where Glen Forest School stands now) he used the barn and farm building to house the animals. A tent was erected on the barnyard grounds also for circus shows before the troupe went on tour in warmer weather. In 1843 Bailey deeded the land to Mariah Bailey, his daughter-in-law, who upgraded the former Bontz's Tavern (which had over the years expanded into a long rambling building) into the Crossroads Inn with barns and carriage houses nearby, and she fed and housed travelers, circus personnel and cattle drovers until the Civil War in 1861 put an end to the circus.

The war wrote a new chapter to the area's history. Maury was used to quarter officers alternately by Confederate and Union troops. A confederate fort was built atop Munson Mill (Apex Circle now) and was prized for its prime view all the way into Washington where Union troops could be seen drilling on the Mall. J.E.B. Stuart commanded Fort Munson for a time and made general while there. Union troops, who occupied everything for miles on three sides of the fort (Alexandria, Bailey's Crossroads, Arlington, Seven Corners and Falls Church) never tried to overrun the fort because they thought it was so heavily barricaded by

cannons. Even the hot air balloon they sent up nearby (the first warfare use of balloons in history) reported the presence of many cannons. Only after the Confederate troops slipped away one night and retreated to the safety of Fairfax City did the Union troops discover that those fearsome cannons were really just tree trunks, blackened with bootblack and charcoal and propped up with carriage wheels. They called them "Quaker guns" because the pacifist Quakers don't fight and these "guns" don't shoot. That was a trick the Confederates and the Federals would use on each other many more times during the war, after its inauguration at Munson Mill. Following the First Battle of Manassas, President Lincoln called for a huge massing of the troops to build flagging troop morale, and the parade route stretched along Leesburg Pike from Skyline to Munson Hill on November 20, 1861. Hundreds of soldiers bivouacked on the skyline grounds, called then Camp Bailey's Crossroads. Lincoln and his entire cabinet came out from Washington to review the parade of 60,000 troops (and their horses, carts, wagons, and cannons) then world's largest troop gathering ever. It took all day and into the evening. The president and his party had dinner at the Crossroads Inn and Bailey family lore says the president spent the night at Morey rather than travel back to the White House so late at night.

Among the throng of 60,000 visitors on hand to view the parade was a young poet, Julia Ward Howe. On her carriage ride back to the Willard Hotel that night with returning troops marching alongside and singing over and over a favorite Union tune ("John Brown's body lies a "mouldering in the grave...") she was challenged by a companion to write new words to that tune. Back in her hotel room, so excited about the day's events she could not sleep, she penned the words we know as the "Battle Hymn of the Republic." Her words ("Mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord..", set to the old tune, have become an American classic. When the war ended, Mariah Bailey turned the old circus ring into a riding ring, and dismantled the Crossroad Inn and moved its parts to become wings for Maury. Known as the "House of a Hundred Rooms," Morey became a fashionable boarding house and summer retreat for Washington visitors seeking country air relief from the city's sweltering heat. The farm produced vegetables and dairy products for Washington hotels (including the Willard) and markets. She also gave land (at the crossroads where the Malibu Grill is now) for the first Bailey's School in 1870. Luther Payne purchased 70 acres at the crossroads and built three stone houses for his family; the windmill in the cloverleaf is the sole survivor of the Payne estate. Payne donated the land for Glen Forest School in the 1950's. Meanwhile Maury had been sold to a wealthy Washingtonian for his summer house as the century closed; it fell into disrepair in the 1930's and burned down in 1943. Only an outbuilding remained and it was moved a few blocks to become part of the building which what now houses Fairfax-Brewster School.

The 20th Century saw this area grow from a sleepy Washington bedroom community into a bustling multi-cultural community. Glen Forest subdivision was built in the mid 50's; Irene Shuman bought the first house. Lake Barcroft community was built in the 50's around the lake formed in 1913 by the Alexandria Water Company which dammed up Holmes Run. The Skyline complex was built in the early 70's, replacing a small craft airport; Hechinger's replaced a drive-in movie theater. In 1993-94 the old Payne property was swallowed up by the new Crossroads Center, and the bulk of Maury Lane, a carriage lane for almost three centuries, was obliterated by the complex's parking lot. Older retail properties along Route 7 began refurbishing. Almost nothing remains of Bailey's Crossroads history except the stories, but as long as a few copies remain of Jane Chapman Whitt's little book, "Elephants and Quaker Guns", future generations at least will know of their proud heritage, even if there's nothing left to see or touch.