

## The History of Our Community's Jungle

A person can live their whole life in the same place and never know any details about what it was like in the past. They could be living on a famous spot and who would ever know. Wakefield Chapel is not exactly famous but it is our home sweet home. What was it like here a couple hundred years ago? I couldn't get a personal hundred year old neighbor interview for obvious reasons but I could explore some grand stories about my very own community.

What do the Indians and Braddock district have in common?

The Indians were the first to start the amazing recorded history of Wakefield Chapel and the Braddock district. Although Indians used rivers like Accotink for highways, historians believe that the regularly used "Mountain Road" followed the trail of the present "Braddock Road." (Lowry, 4B) Who is Mr. Braddock?

In 1755, General Braddock and his troops fought the Canadians and Indians under Captain Beaujau. This was a hard battle for General Braddock because he knew nothing about fighting in the woods and thought his troops could defeat anyone. Unfortunately, General Braddock and his troops were beaten badly because they couldn't see their opposition, hidden in the trees, while his troops, dressed in bright coats, were easy targets. On July 9, 1755, General Braddock was killed while his assistant, George Washington took the small part of the army that was left and escaped. (Lowry, 4B)

A couple years before this memorable battle, Fairfax County had been established. In 1742, it was named after Lord Thomas Fairfax. Inside this county,

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the Wakefield Chapel area had already begun to develop. Colonel William Fitzhugh had bought 21,996 acres of land in 1694 and named the land Ravensworth. (Sones, 2A) When he died he divided the land between his two eldest sons who built three mansions, Oak Hill, Ossian Hall and Ravensworth. These are all common names in our area today. Oak Hill manor, built in 1779, is still a private home. Ossian Hall, built in 1783, was burnt down but the name still lives on in Annandale High School. A large social area which is used for meetings and awards was named Ossian Hall recently. Lastly, Ravensworth mansion, the most luxurious, built in 1796, was also burnt down. (Lowry, 4A)

One story that I personally enjoy is how "Rolling Road" came upon its name. When General Robert E. Lee's wife was living in the Ravensworth Plantation, casks of tobacco had to be transported to a warehouse in Pohick. Tobacco, a very common profit in 17th century, had to be packed in heavy hogshead barrels and "rolled" to the river which was where the Pohick and Accotink creeks met. (Lowry, 4B)

In 1806, another street, Little River Turnpike, was completed. Little River Turnpike was the third toll road constructed in the United States of America. (Dick, 1A) On Thursday, May 23, 1861, the toll booth where Little River Turnpike intersected with Ravensworth Road was used as the voting place for residents to vote for Virginia's proposal to secede from the Union. Thirty-three votes were cast, which was a large number at that time. (Lowry, 4A) Little River Turnpike

also was the route that the Union troops used in the Civil War to get to the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> battle of Manassas. Little River Turnpike was then named after the beautiful Leesburg River. (Dick, 1A)

Wakefield Chapel is a beautiful area and has many fantastic homes. The area is named after a small white church on Toll House Road built in 1899. (Sones, 2A) After Sergeant Elhanan W. Wakefield's returned to Annandale after the war, he became a founder and an ordained Methodist minister to the mostly pro-southern Virginia congregation at the Wakefield Chapel. In January 1920, he died at his home in Idlywood, in Fairfax County at age 85 years old and was buried alongside his first wife in the churchyard at Annandale Chapel or so it is said by some historians. A Fairfax County Park Authority marker located at Wakefield Chapel says that Elhanan Wakefield, a former Yankee soldier, and his first wife are buried in the cemetery across the street from the chapel. (Hakenson, 2B) Mysteriously, I checked the graves out and neither one of the famous couple's graves are there. (Cemetary, 3A) Before the Chapel's namesake came along, Oliver Besley owned the land that the chapel was built on. Wakefield Chapel is beautiful with arched windows and white outside walls. Today, it's a popular spot for a small wedding of 100. (Wakefield, 3B) The church is now owned by the Fairfax County Park Authority and is used as a community meeting place. The cemetery contains 20 gravestones including Oliver Besley and his wife. (Conley, 2B)

Focusing in on my own neighborhood, I learned a lot from my neighbors that were original owners. They have lived here about 30 years. I live in a suburban area

called Wakefield Chapel West. One main landmark is the little white Wakefield Chapel which I mentioned. (Sones, 2A) The chapel was rebuilt in the 1970's after it was bought by the county for about 100 thousand dollars. Many eyebrows were raised at that price because it seemed too much at the time. In 1973, a Boy Scout group even took on a project of redoing the pews of the church but the county paid and redid everything else such as air conditioning, heating, pipes, etc. (Sones, 2A)

Another landmark of our area is an old school called Chapel Square which was the area's main elementary school until the kids were moved to another nearby elementary school, Wakefield Forest. Since then, the school has been used as school administrative offices and a community center used for things like voting and local TV channels. Recently, Wakefield Forest has been crowded and the community is regretting its decision to move the kids. (Dick, 1A) Another school change that disrupted our area was the borders of the Fairfax county high school lines. When Thomas Jefferson first became a school, the county had to change the borderlines of which kids were going to what school. (Sones, 2A) Wakefield chapel had been resting on the border of Woodson's line before our area pushed over to Annandale High School.

In both of my interviews, the two elder men described how wooded this land used to be. When many people picture their homes 50 years ago, they picture farmhouses with barns and rolling fields. Unlike those images, our neighborhood was a huge forest. Some

remember that there were some farm areas such as Vienna, Tysons, and Shirley Highway. (Dick, 1A) One of the oldest homes in Wakefield Chapel West is now owned by the Beam family but was originally owned by the Monroe family. The Monroe's country or wooded estate, built in 1952, was busy with a nursery, where the Wakefield Chapel Pool is located now, for his landscaping business, Barcroft and Turkey Run, a small parkland and creek running to Private Lake. Private Lake had been built by the CCC in 1930's, the Depression. It had been a Water Control Project that the government had funded to provide citizens jobs. The CCC conducted the building of roads, dams etc. by unemployed citizens. (Sones, 2A) Even though the Monroe's thought that they moved into a quiet wooded country land, it wasn't long until things started to change around the parkland, and surroundings.

In 1969, my street, Epinard Court, had been finished with 29 units of housing by Columbia builders. The Columbia Builders had a difficult but successful time getting the land waiver from the government because the parkland behind the houses was a flood plain for the surrounding area. About the same time the old nursery was changed into a new pool and the parkland became muddier and grosser from the construction and the acid dumping from

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the pool. During the era that the Monroe's lived in the area, the well known busy street, Wakefield Chapel was a small dirt road that only went from Braddock to Holborn Drive but as time went by it turned to a paved road and even extended to Little River Turnpike in 1976-1977, so that they could build new houses and connect streets to the new college,

Northern Virginia Community College. (Sones, 2A) Other streets began to grow and even the beltway began in the 1960's. Michael Dick, a well known friend and neighbor, recalls that the beltway was built in sections and many teens spent countless fun afternoons drag racing up and down the segments. To the youth it was a perfect spot, a long straight road with no traffic. To the dismay of Mr. Dick and his friends, the police stopped the fun too soon for the teens. (Dick, 1A)

Everyone finds a little something different in their own home life and history. Each day people are adding to their own home's stories. As I was speaking to both men about their history, they each wanted to share their favorite recent historic story as well. Mr. Michael Dick remembered that recently the community had found a historic artifact. Holborn Drive caved in and the construction workers ran upon an old well from years ago! Historians explored inside and they eventually had to fill it up but it was a memorable event in the Wakefield Chapel area's story. (Dick, 1A) On the other hand, Mr. Vernon Sones' kids found a silver slate while playing in the parkland's creek bed. It had symbols and pictures pressed into the washed metal. As their family studied the piece,

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they realized that they were looking at pre-historic figures from more than 1 million years ago. It made him remember that even this part of the US was underwater back then. (Sones, 2A) So much can change over time and the important thing is too never forget the memories and stories of the past. Your home is a beautiful place wherever you live. Our home is fantastic Wakefield Chapel, tucked away in amazing Braddock District.