

Franklin Park

By Sue Neal

(April 2007, revised May 2009)

Franklin Park is located in McLean in Fairfax County, Virginia off Old Dominion Drive close to the Arlington-Fairfax County line. The Franklin Area Citizen Association (FACA) covers the area bounded by the Arlington-Fairfax County line to the south, Powhatan Street to the west, Kirby Road to the north, and to the east at a point on Franklin Park Road midway between Old Dominion and Chesterbrook Roads. However, the name of the area derives from the Franklin Park subdivision that was platted in 1909, perhaps the oldest platted subdivision in McLean. The neighborhood is an eclectic mix of house styles, sizes, and ages, having been built up over a one-hundred year period.

The original Franklin Park Subdivision plat includes all the land owned in 1860 by Colonel George Minor, Jr., plus a small additional parcel that provided access to the new Great Falls and Old Dominion Railroad, which opened in 1906. There are a number of discrepancies in published accounts regarding George Minor, his father, and the history of the land they owned, but the following narrative synthesizes these accounts to the extent that they are consistent with documented time frames.

In 1730, Simon Pearson and James Going acquired 652 acres from a grant from the Proprietors of the Northern Neck. Although the bulk of this land is in what is now Arlington County, the small portion that is in Franklin Park contains the site of the first house in the area. A log structure was built at what is now the corner of Virginia Avenue and North Nottingham Street. George Minor Sr. bought this land from Pearson's descendants and added a back wing in the early 1770s (Templeman, 1959). This original structure underwent many modifications and expansions over the centuries and still stands.

However, the bulk of Franklin Park lies on land that was a portion of the 708 acres granted to Simon Pearson and Gabriel Adams in 1731. (Mitchell, 1977) This parcel extended from the Chesterbrook area into what is now Arlington County. Gabriel Adams' granddaughter, Ann Adams Minor (1752-1786), and her husband, George Minor Sr. (1753-1808), ended up with a portion of this land, likely by inheritance. Finally, George Minor Jr.'s land holdings in 1860 included an additional parcel that was originally granted to Colonel John Colvill in 1752. It is not clear whether George Minor Sr. or Jr. acquired this land. The Minor property became known as Minor's Hill after the hill that sat on the Southern end of the property, and which was the highest point in Arlington County.

Ann Adams Minor was one of eight siblings who lived in the greater Chesterbrook area. Ann's mother, Ann Lawyer Adams, was quite the feminist for her time and had converted from the Anglican Church to the Methodist church in 1773. This was considered a political move at the time, and the Methodists, as well as the Quakers, supported education for slaves and even emancipation. The whole family converted, and five of the sons or sons-in-law became ministers. George Minor, Sr. also converted and

donated land at Seven Corners for the Methodist Fairfax Chapel. This land is now Oakwood Cemetery. George Minor Sr. served as a Colonel in the Fairfax Militia and was a Justice of Fairfax County in 1784. (Wise, 1978)

George and Ann Minor had seven children, the oldest of whom was George Minor, Jr, born in 1777. After Ann's death in 1786, George Sr. married Mildred Heale in 1788, and had two or possibly three additional children.

George Minor, Jr. and his home had roles in both the War of 1812 and the Civil War. In the summer of 1814, James Madison became increasingly concerned about a possible attack on Washington by the British. His cabinet could not be convinced of the threat, and the Secretary of War, John Armstrong, particularly resisted preparations for the defense of the Capital. However, as the situation became more dire in August, Madison convinced Armstrong to summon Lieutenant Colonel Minor and his Virginia Militia 60th Regiment from Falls Church to help protect Washington. On August 24, Dolley and James Madison fled the city separately, with the plan to meet at Salona, then the residence of Reverend William Maffit. (Salona still stands near Dolley Madison Boulevard in McLean, and is owned by the family of the late Virginia State Senator Clive Duvall). Dolley crossed the Potomac by the Little Falls (Chain) Bridge, and stopped one mile short of Salona at Rokeby, since it was approaching nightfall. With the crush of people fleeing the city, it became impractical for James Madison to take the same route, and so he took the ferry to Mason Island (Andalusian, now Roosevelt Island), and then the causeway that was connected to Virginia. After making his way to Wren's Tavern in Falls Church, he made a late night stop at Mrs. Minor's home. It is not clear whether Mrs. Minor was Mildred Heale Minor, the widow of George Minor, Sr. The house was already full of others seeking shelter, and Madison continued on to Salona, the planned meeting point. Not finding Dolley at Salona, James retraced his steps to Wren's Tavern the next day. He then returned to Salona, finding that Dolley had been there briefly and then continued on to Wiley's Tavern on the Alexandria and Leesburg Road. Both apparently stayed at Wiley's Tavern until Friday morning, August 26, when James set across the Potomac to link up with the advancing army. Dolley, on the other hand, traveled down the Alexandria and Leesburg Road back to Wren's Tavern in Falls Church and then to Minor Hill where she stayed two nights before returning to Washington. (Brant, 1970; Herrick, 2005)

According to a witness in a court proceeding in 1835, George Minor Jr. was "not a man to contend with, that he had broken a man's arm and that I ought to be cautious of him." (Sprouse, 1996, p. 1383) He voted for secession and his penchant for violence may be what landed him in prison in 1861 at the age of 84, where it was described that he "would totter on his cane up to the window and upon sight of a Federal Cavalry man would declare, with expletives, that he would whip a squadron of them himself." (Sprouse, 1996, pp. 1383-1384) In the meanwhile, Minor Hill became an important strategic position for the Union Army where over 2,000 troops were encamped. An observatory tower and many other wooden structures were built and a parade ground prepared. (Gernand, 2002) An 1864 map shows extensive clear cutting around the Minor Hill homestead. Within what is now Franklin Park, the Franklin Park subdivision largely

escaped clear cutting, since the rolling terrain was less desirable for encampment and the peak of Minor Hill to the south offered the greatest strategic value. The portion of the neighborhood that is now the Franklin Forest Subdivision was clear-cut, however.

When George Minor died in Fredericksburg in 1866 at the age of 89, his will left his land solely to his daughter, Mary Minor Anderson, though she was not his only child. Since Mary also died in 1866, the land devolved to her six children, who leased the land to Eugene Crimmins in about 1867. (Templeman, 1959)

Franklin Park Becomes a Suburb

Franklin Park has almost uniformly been described as originating as a summer colony to escape the D.C. summer heat. However, the real story is more complex and fascinating. In 1906, a single track of the Great Falls and Old Dominion Railroad opened on the route that is now Old Dominion Drive, and a second track was laid by 1908. While the railroad was immediately popular for excursions to Great Falls, it also provided a connection along this corridor to D.C. that had not previously existed, sparking an interest in the adjacent land. In November 1908, William Duvall of D.C. bought two parcels of land: the 327-acre George Minor parcel which included land in both Fairfax and Arlington (then, Alexandria) Counties, and an additional 25 acres adjacent to the railroad line, then owned by Myron R. Horton. The new railroad had cut off a trapezoidal piece from the bulk of Horton's land holdings that was extremely valuable for the new subdivision because it provided frontage to the railroad right of way. The subdivision plat for Franklin Park was recorded in both the Fairfax and Alexandria County deed records in April 1909. The lots ranged from 10 foot wide parcels to 5 acre "Villa Sites," though ads in the *Washington Post* at the time mentioned 50 feet as the narrowest lot, suggesting that there was no intention to sell a single 10-foot lot.

Certainly, the physical attributes of the location were important in the early advertising:

Nature has been truly lavish in her devotions to Franklin Park, and any one with artistic sense and an eye for the beautiful would appreciate the marvelous advantages offered here. (Moore & Hill Inc., 1909a)

Franklin Park is the most picturesque portion of the far-famed Virginia hills, the land of "Dixie," and has received the blessings of nature most abundantly. The physical characteristics are so varied that we can suit any requirements of judgment and discrimination. We can give you a wooded plot or one that is treeless; a plot at the station or one farther away; a cozy plot in a restful valley or one with a magnificent view on a high hill; a small plot or a country estate of several acres; in fact, anything that is good and superior in the line of real estate. Those who establish their homes here will live where the ideal is as nearly reached as it can be in human life. This is one of the most healthful and refined sections of the United States. (Moore & Hill Inc., 1909b)

The “Park” part of the name was derived from the fact that additional trees were planted and densely forested areas were thinned to give the neighborhood a park-like appearance. The origins of the Franklin part of the name are unclear.

However, the neighborhood was really billed more as a streetcar suburb than a rural retreat (“same distance from Washington as Chevy Chase”, “thirty minutes from Treasury Department”) with urban-type amenities (“wide cement sidewalks and wider streets than Cleveland Park”, “Telephone service. Two mail deliveries daily. Department store deliveries.”) In fact, the ads went so far as to say “Franklin Park is and will be the Cleveland Park of the Virginia Hills.” (Moore & Hill Inc., 1909a) The analogies to Cleveland Park make more sense when one learns that the realty agent, Moore & Hill, Inc. had also been very active and successful in marketing Cleveland Park since 1904. However, an important difference from Cleveland Park is that while the Cleveland Park developer hired a number of architects and was involved in the home construction, the Franklin Park developer merely sold the land. The buyer was responsible for arranging construction of the house.

It is unclear whether this vision of the neighborhood came from the property owner, William Duvall, or from the realty agent, Moore & Hill, but the early ads, as well as newspaper articles, included much hype that never came to fruition. At the time of these ads, the streets were unpaved, and wooden boardwalks were installed as precursors to the future concrete sidewalks. A June 20, 1909 newspaper article, three months after the first *Washington Post* ad, listed 16 completed purchases; however, most of those named never showed up in the Fairfax County land records, and many of those who did buy land failed to build houses. In fact, in the early years, Eugene Horton sold more land on the north side of the railroad (now Old Dominion Drive) and more houses were built there than within the new Franklin Park subdivision. Fairfax County records show that only 8 houses were built in 1910 in the Franklin Park subdivision, another two were built in 1912, and one in 1915. The earliest deeds had covenants requiring houses to be set back 25 feet from the street. Several of the streets were designated for grander houses: those constructed on Massachusetts, Washington (now Vermont) and Maryland (now Rockingham) Avenues were to be worth at least \$2,500; while houses on other streets could be more modest, valued at least \$1,500. The quality of these early houses explains why all but two are still standing. The two houses at 1868 and 1876 were both built by Henry S. Merrill in 1910. The style and placement of these houses relative to the street are evocative of the Cleveland Park style neighborhood described in the early advertisements. However, after the initial flush of activity in 1910, the lack of promised neighborhood infrastructure impeded additional sales.

In 1912, the unsold land, by then held by the Franklin Park Corporation, was sold to R.M. Conway. He began advertising Franklin Park again, focusing on its elite qualities, physical beauty, and accessibility:

“the select suburban colony known as Franklin Park. Every lot covered with magnificent shade trees and well drained ... This beautiful rolling

tract of land, covered with fine shade trees; the clear health-giving artesian water, that 'difference' in the air peculiar to a high elevation make this the most ideal place for the rearing of robust, healthy, happy children." (R.M. Conway Inc., 1912a)

"You are not off in the wilderness at Franklin Park – you are in the very center of refinement, culture, and wealth. You are only 40 squares from Washington – 30 minutes by electric cars to the Treasury...THE MOST BEAUTIFUL SUBURB IN THE MOST BEAUTIFUL CITY IN THE WORLD! FRANKLIN PARK is a series of gentle hills, grassy slopes, margined by native shrubs, and everywhere the tall stately trees form surroundings most enchanting. The land is high and rolling, with charming views in every direction" (R.M. Conway Inc., 1912b)

There was apparently little market interest because within three weeks the sales pitch became strictly economic:

No matter how little you may earn, if you save a part each week and make an investment you have started on the right road to wealth. Buy a lot in Franklin Park now, pay a small amount down and \$10 a month and you will soon have your investment paid for: \$150 to \$350 per lot."(R. M. Conway, 1912)

When Franklin Park was first advertised in March 1909, the lot prices started at \$300, but the price was dropped to \$200 in May of 1909. In May 1910, prices were higher, starting at \$250, but by 1912, prices had dropped to \$150. When sales still failed to materialize, 50 acres of the Fairfax County land that was furthest from the train line was vacated from the subdivision and then sold off.

In December 1916, 154 acres of unsold Franklin Park Corporation land were listed as delinquent on 1915 Fairfax County property taxes, and the land was transferred back to George Minor's grandchildren. It is likely that World War I had a depressing effect on the real estate market during this period, since the volume of real estate ads in *The Washington Post* was minimal relative to that when Franklin Park was first advertised in 1909. The Arlington County portion of Franklin Park was vacated and sold off in two pieces in 1919 and 1920.

The realities of living in Franklin Park during that early period are vividly documented in the meticulous minutes recorded by Anson R. Tracy, the secretary of the Franklin Park Civic Improvement League from its creation in 1914 until 1927, and in the neighborhood history he inserted into the minutes book when he stepped down from the position. Mr. Tracy was very much an activist, first circulating a petition in 1911 to have Fairfax County take over the (Franklin Park) road between the Arlington County line and the railroad. However, since only seven people would sign and the road went nowhere but to the train station, the County could not be persuaded. In 1912 with 27 signatures and six trips to the County seat, Mr. Tracy did succeed in having the county take over the

road. The County spent \$30 to realign the road, while the residents raised \$40 for dynamite to reduce the 40 percent grade at the bridge over Little Pimmit Run. Mr. Tracy also succeeded in bringing electricity into the area in 1914 by writing to the electric company once a month until they agreed to send a representative out to meet with the residents. Eight people signed on and electric lines were run down the railroad right of way. Shortly afterwards, the electric company began imposing a \$2,000 per mile fee for installation of new lines. (Tracy, 1927)

The junction that is now Old Dominion Drive and Franklin Park Road to the north and Valley Wood Road to the South had a train station on each side of the train track, the only point on the Great Falls line with a pair of stations. Mr. Horton built a simple structure on the north side, while a more elaborate version sat on the Franklin Park subdivision (southern) side. The telephone service promised in the Franklin Park advertisements existed only in the southern train station, and was available for emergency use.

The Franklin Park Civic Improvement League was the earliest such organization in this part of Fairfax County. It was formed in 1914 to deal with the issues, largely revolved around the roads, which were not being addressed by either the developer or the county. At the time Franklin Park was subdivided, Fairfax County was a rural county with a population around 20,000 and 70 percent of the land area was in farms. This character did not change in a significant way until the 1930s when population grew from around 25,000 to nearly 40,000. Therefore, the early Franklin Park residents were left to their own resources to handle their unpaved roads. This involved both actual labor on road maintenance as well as fund raising to buy gravel and cinders. On Thanksgiving Day 1915, the neighbors had a "Road Bee" in which they used picks and shovels to reduce the grade near the bridge over Little Pimmit Run on what is now Franklin Park Road. Then they had a picnic. Civic Association minutes mention complaints about some residents who failed to either participate in the road labor or provide a paid substitute.

Initially operating on voluntary subscription payments, the League later evolved to using fundraisers. One method used for fund raising was an annual Lawn Fete with a raffle. In 1919, the raffle prizes included 2 tons of coal, a half-barrel of flour, a box of canned corn, and a box of canned tomatoes. The 1920 raffle included one ton of coal, a case of canned tomatoes, a bushel of potatoes, and a bushel of apples. In 1925, the raffle consisted of a 3-tube radio receiver, one automobile tire, and a \$5 gold piece. In 1929, the raffle included 3 new watches, and a new tires and tubes, among other items. In 1927 a (second) fundraising dance was held at a house owned by the Wanderlusters (a Washington-based hiking club) located at 1920 Rhode Island Avenue (built in 1926, sold by the Wanderlusters in 1940, and demolished in about 2001), judged very successful with a net of \$50. (Franklin Park, 1927) The railroad even ran a special late train to accommodate guests returning to their homes in Washington.

By 1920, there were a number of complaints about the train service involving unreliable schedules and repeated rate increases. The train station was in decay. In 1921, the persisting rural context of the area was reflected in complaints about cattle roaming

the roads. The poor condition of the roads limited the quality of fire protection, and in 1923, a house burned to the ground on Massachusetts Avenue because of the difficulty of the Cherrydale Fire Department in reaching the house. They arrived only in time to prevent the spread of the fire to adjacent houses. In addition, the residents felt lucky to have any mail delivery at all, let alone the twice-daily mail delivery touted in early advertisements. The Civic Association “presented a ten dollar gold piece to the postman for his faithful delivery of mail throughout the winter. When the roads were too bad for a horse, he covered his route on foot from the street car line.” (Franklin Park Citizen Assn, 1923)

In 1924, Fairfax County agreed to a cost sharing arrangement for stone and cinders for the roads. Finally in 1929, the first paved road came to the neighborhood. The residents raised about \$4,000 for their share. The paving included Franklin Park Road from the Arlington County line to the railroad, and then followed what was considered the main road within Franklin Park. This road followed Connecticut (now called Valley Wood) to Maryland Avenue continuing to the Arlington County line. The first portion of the old Maryland Avenue is still shown on maps connecting Valley Wood to Rockingham, but it is now a pipestem driveway between 1916 and 1922 Valley Wood. Rockingham was originally called Maryland Avenue as well. (To Pave Road Citizens Raised About \$4,000, 1929) The newly paved road improved the quality of access to Arlington County; however, the link to Fairfax County via what is now Park Road remained very poor

The railroad ceased operations completely in 1934 due to poor management and mounting competition from the increasingly popular automobile. The rails were removed and the right of way began to be used informally as a road but as late as 1936, the state had not taken over maintenance. The continued poor quality of what is now Park Road led many children to attend school in Arlington, D.C., or Falls Church. When Arlington announced in 1936 that it would begin charging tuition to non-residents, Fairfax County agreed to pay for school bus service once the road was paved. Park Road was finally paved in the next few months so that the new bus service could be provided.

The Civic Association first developed a house number system in 1938, with the idea that the numbers should follow those of the adjacent Arlington County streets. Conditions had improved enough by 1936, that the Civic Association reduced the frequency of its meetings to quarterly, and the minutes recorded in the original ledger book ceased in 1939.

It was during this period of the 1920s and 1930s that Franklin Park became a summer retreat. Although there were a number of permanent residents who struggled with the problems of access to work and school, additional property owners used their Franklin Park homes only in the summer. Many of the homes that were built during this period were very small cottages, and these homes were among the first to go as houses began to be torn down and replaced beginning in the 1980s.

In the early 1940s, Lonnie Mutersbaugh began developing a second subdivision, Franklin Forest, which is directly west of Franklin Park. This subdivision includes land that was vacated from the Franklin Park subdivision in 1912, plus additional land that was reassembled from various Mutersbaugh heirs. This land had all been clear-cut during the Civil War, and evidently was useless for farming, because it was uniform—growth forest at the time it was developed in the 1940s.

Like Franklin Park, Franklin Forest had a bit of a slow start. The subdivision plat was recorded in three phases. The oldest part in 1941, and then a hiatus for World War II, with the second phase recorded in 1947 and the third in 1948. Only 15 houses were built before 1950. However, the subdivision was largely built up during the 1950s, making the architectural character of this subdivision more uniform than that of Franklin Park. Franklin Park also experienced more home construction during the 1950s than at any other point in its 100-year history.

In 1952, the Franklin Forest residents put on a musical performance to raise funds for the McLean Volunteer Fire Department, calling themselves the Franklin Forest Frolickers. They had so much fun, that they wrote bylaws to form a social organization, which continues meeting to this day holding regular potluck dinners in neighborhood homes.

The Civic Association was largely inactive in the 1950s. In the 1960s as the routing for I-66 and its connection to the Beltway and the Dulles Access Road was being discussed, VDOT held a meeting in Franklin Park to discuss the fact that one of the three proposed routes cut through the neighborhood. Officials assured the residents that this route was not under serious consideration. However, when Franklin Park residents attended a meeting in a neighborhood in the path of another of the alternative routes and heard the same assurances given, they began to worry and organized to fight this threat. Denver Graham, a lawyer who lived in the neighborhood at the time, is said to have been instrumental in getting the road routed elsewhere.

FACA (Franklin Area Citizen Association) continued to work on land use issues and other matters of community concern, but its largest effort to date is probably the private organization of gypsy moth spraying on Mothers Day, 1989. Franklin Park, with its dense tree canopy, was one of the neighborhoods targeted for gypsy moth spraying by Fairfax County in the 1980s. However, the County did not judge the infestation to be severe enough in 1989 to be included in the spray program, given more severe infestations in other areas. FACA polled homeowner interest in the project and with an estimated cost of \$12,000 to have a private helicopter perform the spraying, asked each household for a contribution of \$50. The total raised was \$19,000. About 350 acres were sprayed, including Franklin Park, Franklin Forest, and some surrounding areas as well as the Chesterbrook School grounds (which the County never did reimburse the association for spraying). The helicopter used the empty field next to Vinson Hall as a landing zone. A few residents opted out, and their properties were marked with balloons. It was quite a weekend with many residents coordinating around the neighborhood and much concern

about the possibility of wind or rain, which might have shut down the effort. The leader of the effort was Herb Becker a former association president and local civic activist.

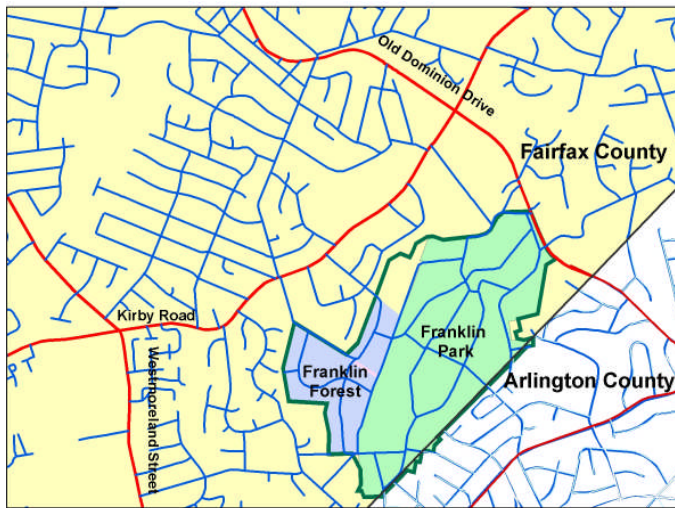
Although some amount of home construction continued in the 1960s and 1970s, the late 1970s marked a turning point in the development of the neighborhood. At first, larger parcels were targeted for subdivision. Very old houses were removed on such parcels, but sometimes the existing houses were preserved, and additional houses constructed around them. In the 1990s, the process of teardowns and replacement with much larger homes began to accelerate. Almost all the smaller cottages of the 1920s and 1930s are gone, and most of those that remain have been enlarged beyond recognition.

While many of the newly constructed homes hark back to the craftsman style construction with which the neighborhood began, the rural feel which the area has been able to hold onto as more typical subdivisions sprouted up all around is ebbing away with the loss of trees and small houses that nestled into the landscape under the mature tree canopy. The eclectic mosaic of houses built over one hundred years is being diminished as the new larger homes increase their dominance

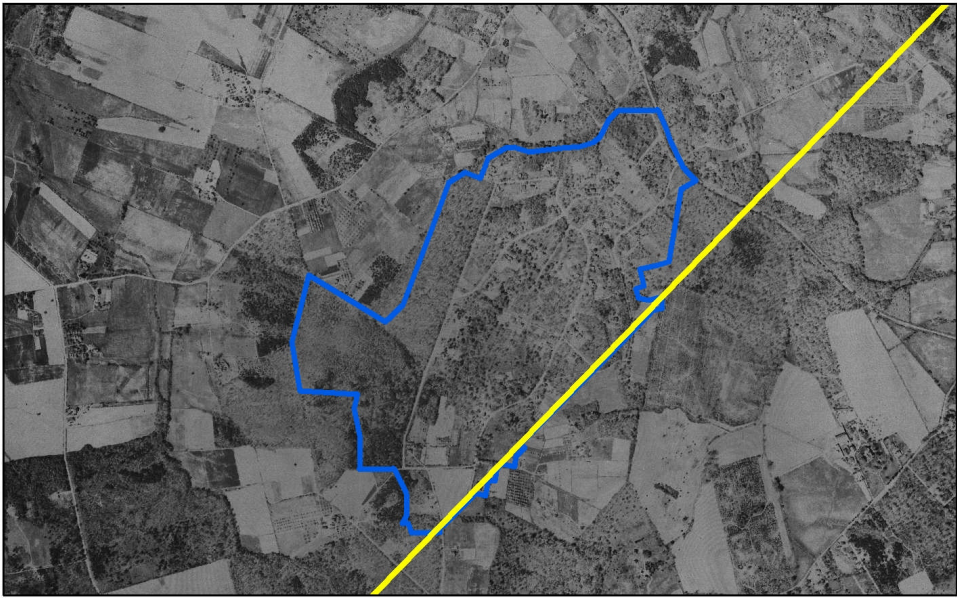
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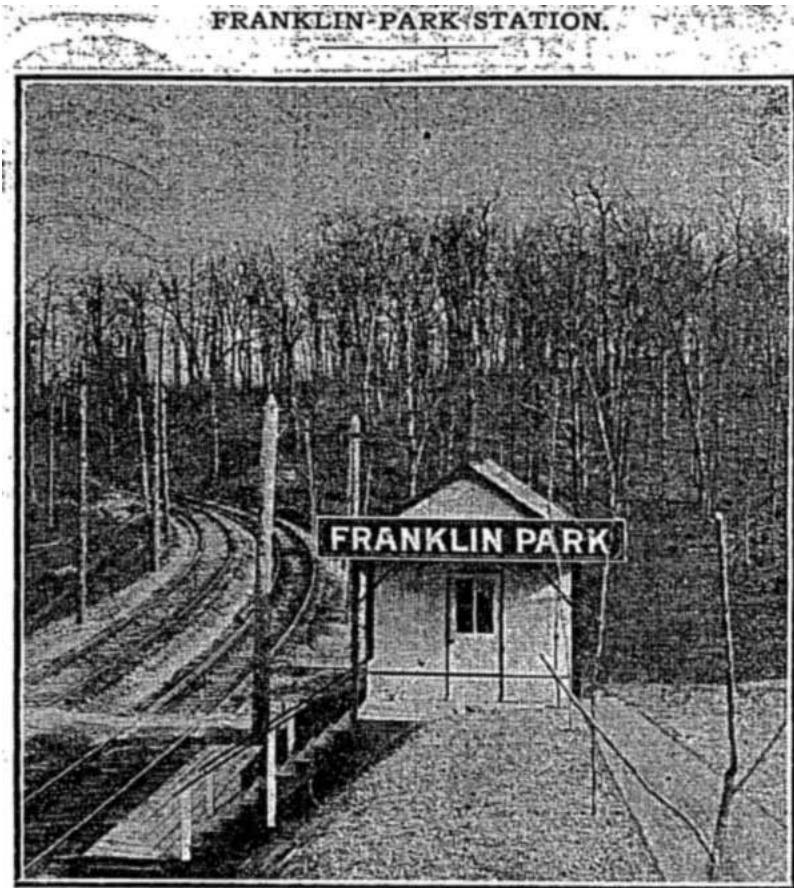
Franklin Park and Franklin Forest Location Map



 Fairfax-Arlington County Line  Franklin Park Area



Franklin Park Station on North Side of the Great Falls and Old Dominion Railroad.
Photo by John Burns



Station at new subdivision recently opened by Moore & Hill.

Franklin Park Station on the South Side of the Great Falls and Old Dominion Railroad.
The Washington Post, May 16, 1909, p. CA6.

COME OUT TODAY

Franklin Park

The Suburb That Appeals to the Best Washington People.
Salesmen on Ground.
We Are Making Sales of Lots Every Day.

What You Want Offered Here

Franklin Park is the most picturesque portion of the far-famed Virginia hills, the land of "Dixie," and has received the blessings of nature most abundantly. The physical characteristics are so varied that we can suit any requirements of judgment and discrimination. We can give you a wooded plot or one that is treeless; a plot at the station or one farther away; a cozy plot in a restful valley or one with a magnificent view on a high hill; a small plot or a country estate of several acres; in fact, anything that is good and superior in the line of real estate. Those who establish their homes here will live where the ideal is as nearly reached as it can be in human life. This is one of the most healthful and refined sections of the United States.

Great Falls and Old Dominion double-track railway system. Free transfers from any Capital Traction cars (7th st., 14th st., Navy Yard, Chevy Chase, or Pa. ave. cars). Get free transfers and change at 36th and M sts. (Pa. ave. cars). Get off at Franklin Park Station. All car fares will be refunded.

Any size lot you want, from 50 feet frontage to 5 acres.

The queen suburb on the hills.

500 feet elevation, overlooking the National Capital.

Take any Capital Traction car, get off at 36th and M sts. nw. (Pa. ave. cars), with free transfer to Great Falls and Old Dominion cars. Get off at Franklin Park Station.

Large Lots and Charming Villa Sites Amid Beautiful
Forest Trees.

40 Squares From City.

60 Squares From White House.

30 Minutes From Treasury Department.

Improvements and Conveniences.

Concrete sidewalks, first-class streets.
Telephone service. Two daily deliveries of mail.
Car fare averages 11 cents per day.
Free transfers.

Prices and Terms.

Lots 50x200 at \$250; lots 50x300 at \$300.

Acreage lots, \$700 to \$1,000 per acre.

Cash payment, \$5 to \$25 per lot; monthly payment, \$5 to \$20. No interest and no taxes.

Suburban Department

MOORE & HILL (Inc.),

1333 G Street N. W.