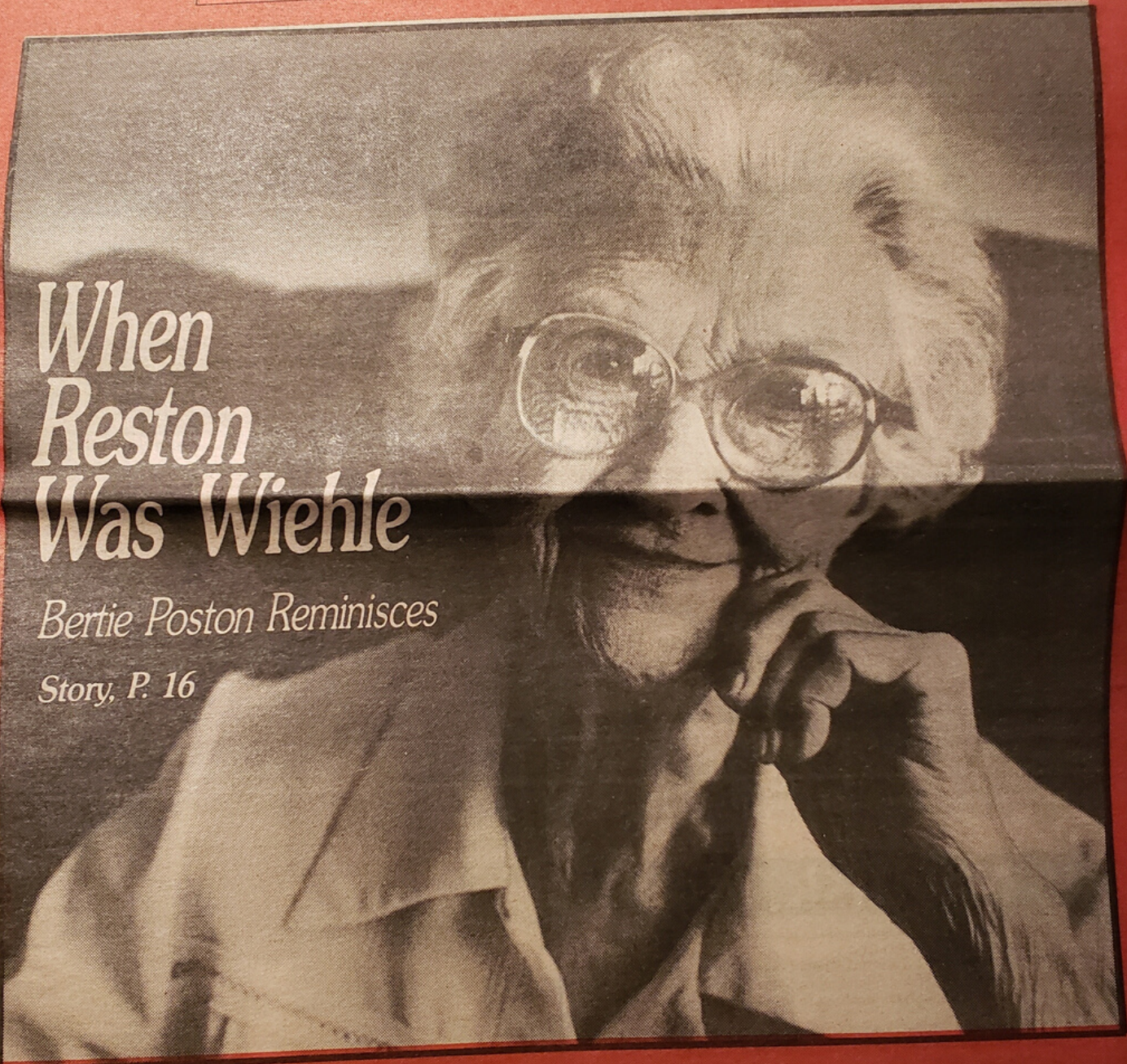


THE CONNECTION

THE NEWSPAPER OF RESTON

SEE
LIVELY
ARTS SECTION
STARTING ON PAGE 46



When Reston Was Wiehle

Bertie Poston Reminisces
Story, P. 16

GROWING PAINS

FAIRFAX COUNTY
SINGING THE
SUBURBAN BLUES



SECOND IN A SERIES

NEWS

Planning System Breaks Down
Mushrooming development overwhelms Fairfax Co., causing congestion, frustration. **12**

INSIDE

9 Reston-Herndon firms among Fortune 500....**19**
Single women joining ranks of homeowners.....**41**
Have you tried N.Y. Times Crossword?.....**45**



Bertie Poston, 92, in her Reston apartment, studied piano while growing up in Wiehle and still plays in church each Sunday.

JACKIE HEITCHUE/THE CONNECTION

When Reston Was Wiehle

Bertie Poston Reminisces

By KEVIN ROE

THE CONNECTION

Bertie Poston, 92, grew up in a town where everybody knew everybody else, children played in nearby fields and woods and the only noise on a still summer night

was the sweet song of the whippoorwill.

Until two years ago, she still lived in the same white, clapboard house where she, her brother and his children were born.

The green-roofed house, now overgrown with brambles and for-

sythia bushes, is still standing. But the little country town of Wiehle where Miss Poston grew up is long gone, its streets, buildings and fields now absorbed into the bustling, high-tech planned community of Reston.

"As a child . . . I used to walk to school, and I walked through fields that are now by Golf Course Island apartments," says Miss Poston, who moved out of her old house at Reston Ave. and Temporary Road in 1985 into a nearby apartment.

"I can remember the two huge chestnut trees. On a frosty morning in October, when I'd be walking to school, you could just simply rake up those big chestnuts. The burrs had bursted open and the chestnuts would fall. There's not a chestnut tree alive, so far as I know, anywhere in the area now."

A lot has changed since Bertie Poston's parents came to recently formed Wiehle in the early 1890s, when Old Reston Ave. was a meandering dirt road and the only industry was a talc and soapstone mill on the site of the present A. Smith Bowman Distillery and a lumber mill, where her father, Jackson Lee Poston, earned the money to pur-

chase the white house off Reston Ave.

"He was born and raised in Bluemont, up at the foot of the mountain," Miss Poston says of her father, "And he moved and came to Wiehle in 1891—maybe 1892, I'm not really sure . . ."

"There was a large lumber mill . . . where they made window frames and spokes for wagons and lumber. They had a number of long buildings where they stored the lumber for seasoning. And his specialty was windowframes."

The Postons were one of about 20 families to settle in Wiehle, the dream community of Dr. Carl Wiehle, a German-born Philadelphia physician who hoped to carve a thriving planned city out of the woods on the north side of the Loudoun and Hampshire (later the Washington and Old Dominion) railroad tracks.

Though he died in 1901 before all his plans could be completed, the energetic Dr. Wiehle laid out several streets; chartered a four-room schoolhouse; built a resort hotel with three man-made lakes, tennis courts and a bowling alley; started work on what is now the Bowman Mansion; and constructed several smaller homes

where the town's workers and their families could live.

It was in one of those homes, in a grove of trees at the crest of a hill, that Bertie Poston was born in 1895.

In the 92 years since, she's enjoyed a 47-year civil service career, been an active member of several local churches, and seen Dr. Wiehle's dream town transformed: first by the bourboun-brewing Bowman family, and later, by New York developer Robert E. Simon, who launched his own vision of a planned community where old Wiehle once stood.

"It's gradual," Miss Poston says, when asked about all the changes she has witnessed. "If it had all happened in a day or two, it would be more of a shock. . ."

"But I do, now and then, remember how much simpler life was then—it's so complicated now."

Wandering through the woods, playing in the Wiehles' peach orchard, watching milk cool in the dairy underneath the gazebo and making the eagerly anticipated shopping trip into Herndon—by foot or wagon—are some of the

Continued on Page 17

Continued From Page 16

simpler pleasures Miss Poston remembers from her childhood. And, of course, watching her older brother, Raymond, get scolded by Dr. Wiehle for throwing rocks at stacks of tiles made in the town's brickyard.

"They [the tiles] made a delightful crash if you threw a stone at them," Miss Poston recalls. After catching Raymond in the act, "Dr. Wiehle took him by the ear and walked him off the property. . . Boys were like they are now—they haven't changed."

Neither have kids' views on compulsory school attendance.

As a 5-year-old pupil at the one-room Wiehle schoolhouse, Miss Poston remembers spending more time avoiding the classroom than doing her lessons.

"They had quite a time to keep me going," she says. "I had to pass the mill—I knew my father worked there—and I wouldn't go any further. He would come up and take me back down and keep me until dinner time, or lunch time. . . And much to my mother's disgust, he'd bring me home."

Even when her attendance became more regular, Miss Poston couldn't sustain much interest in the Wiehle school, despite the slew of spitballs which dotted the classroom ceiling. "There wasn't any cutting out pictures and kindergarten stuff like that," she says. "I had my primer and I went to school all day."

So, when she turned 16, Miss Poston persuaded her mother to



JACKIE HEITCHUE/THE CONNECTION

Miss Poston holds an earlier photo of herself, taken around the 1930s, when Reston was known as Sunset Hills and Old Reston Ave. was an unpaved country road.

send her to the Herndon Seminary for Girls, a private academy on Grace Street where Miss Poston studied piano and polished the musical talent she still displays each Sunday morning at United Christian Parish of Reston's Redeemer Congregation.

"I was so eager to get into my practicing that the teacher who taught other subjects reminded me that one day that there was something else in life besides music," Miss Poston recalls. "She

said, 'Bertie, you seem to think that there's nothing in life but music. But there is.' So she bawled me out."

As a measure of her ability, Miss Poston would occasionally be asked to sit in at piano for dances at Wiehle's stylish Aesculapian Hotel, which stood, before it was torn down in the 1950s, between the Poston house and the Bowman Mansion.

Miss Poston would also, of

course, entertain family and friends from time to time.

"Now, I couldn't carry a tune in a bucket with a tight lid on it, but I don't think I've ever heard anybody who has as nice a touch on the organ or piano as Bertie," says Katie Fleming, 88, who grew up in Dranesville and has been friends with Miss Poston for almost 75 years. "I've never heard anybody who can sit down and make music like she can."

Because she was primarily in-

terested in music, Miss Poston opted not to attend Herndon High School after leaving the Seminary—a decision which, under old county school regulations, prevented her from earning a high school diploma.

But not from getting a job. After teaching herself to type ("You don't always have to go to school"), Miss Poston landed a position with the War Department as a payroll and personnel officer and began commuting to Washington via the railroad in 1918—long before Metro, the Beltway and Dulles Toll Road.

"I used to use that little train," she says, "and then later I had a car. And another girl who lived at Dranesville, we used to drive. Later, when World War II came along, I stayed in the state apartments in Washington during the week and then would come out here. . . I always came home on weekends."

Except for a brief one-year stint studying drawing at the Corcoran School of Art, Miss Poston stayed on with the government, through several promotions, until 1964, when she retired at the age of 69 and moved back into her childhood home—just as Wiehle (or Sunset Hills, as it was renamed in 1923) was about to undergo its most drastic changes.

At first, Miss Poston says, she was uneasy about Reston, especially the futuristic design of the new town's first townhouses.

"I was used to the old type of frame houses," she says

Continued on Page 18

A Wiehle Resident Reminisces

Continued From Page 17

"I wasn't familiar with that type of architecture. And that sort of bowled me over."

But, as Reston has mushroomed and development has altered the landscape she knew as a young girl, Miss Poston has formed new bonds. "I have made a lot of friends I never would have met otherwise," she says. "And I've been active—I was a church organist, the first organist at Redeemer church" when it opened its doors as Redeemer United Methodist—Reston's first church—in 1964.

'I have made a lot of friends I wouldn't have made otherwise.'

Though she no longer plays the organ for services, Miss Poston is at the Redeemer piano every Sunday, playing hymns while the congregation is seated. Two years ago, Redeemer held a special service in honor of her 90th birthday.

It was through Redeemer that Miss Poston befriended Margaret Maier, of Reston. For the past six years Mrs. Maier has taken Miss Poston, who can no longer drive because of her eyes, out to lunch about once a week, helped transport her to doctor appointments and checked in with her once a day by phone.

"She's really a delight to be with," Maier says of Miss Poston. "She'll go back to tell many interesting stories about places we pass driving around in the community."

Besides her involvement with Redeemer, Miss Poston keeps busy with two local senior citizens clubs, the "Herndon Trippers" and the Friendship Club at the Hunters Woods Fellowship House.

And then there are her weekly trips to the grocery store with her childhood friend, Katie Fleming,

who still lives in Dranesville. Emaleen can no longer drive. Emaleen Saville, a neighbor of Mrs. Fleming's, drives the two into Herndoning's, Friday for breakfast and each grocery shopping—an occasion to which they all look forward. "We make almost a day of it," says Mrs. Saville, 55. "We usually go and have breakfast at Friendly's and have our chat, and then go get the groceries."

These friendships have also helped Miss Poston adjust to her new apartment, where she lives with her niece, Agnes, 69. Miss Poston sold the two-story, eight-room home that had been in her family 90 years to Reston attorney Harold O. Miller, who plans to put to tear the house down and put up an office building on the property.

"I stuck by because I just couldn't bear to leave it," Miss Poston says of her old home. "But it was getting very rundown and I was somewhat isolated from neighbors."

Despite all the memories the old house still holds for her, Miss Poston says she doesn't miss the frozen pipes she'd have to contend with every winter because of poor insulation. "It's been quite a relief not to worry," she says. "If I were home, I'd be a nervous wreck."

Besides Miss Poston's house, only a few buildings still remain from the Wiehle of her childhood: the "Bowman" Mansion, now housing Charles Colson's Prison Fellowship; the old Wiehle Town Hall and Methodist Episcopal Church, now a Bowman Distillery Warehouse, eventually to become a GRACE art gallery; several other structures now incorporated into the distillery; and one of the 20 homes built by Dr. Wiehle, now surrounded by the Sycamores apartments.

Despite what has become of old Wiehle, Miss Poston says she's glad she's stayed close to her hometown all her life. "I don't have much of wanderlust," she says. "As a matter of fact, I'm very reluctant to change. I'll put up with a bad situation rather than change to a good one if it involves change."

But, as Miss Poston concedes, her life and surroundings have changed as she and her hometown have grown up together. And it's not all been for the worse.

"Some of the things I've appreciated and sometimes I wish it hadn't occurred," says Miss Poston. Then, thinking about all the new friends she's made over the past 20 years, she adds, "That's one of the advantages—I wouldn't have made all these friends."