When Reston Was Wiehle
Bertie Poston Reminiscences
Story: P. 16

Planning System Breaks Down
Mushrooming development overwhelms Fairfax Co., causing congestion, frustration.
Bertie Poston, 92, in her Reston apartment, studied piano while growing up in Wiehle and still plays in church each Sunday.
When Reston Was Wiehle

Bertie Poston Reminiscences

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 forsythia 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 tallow 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 purchase 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 spoke 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 bourbon-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

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A Wiehle Resident Reminiscences

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I now live with my granddaughter, Elizabeth, and her husband, John, at 515 Main Street. My sister, Emma, lives in the same house with us. I have been married for 65 years, and I have two children and five grandchildren. I enjoy spending time with my family and friends, and I love to read and write letters.

The Neighbors

Though we no longer play the organ for services, Miss Potto and I always listen to the Redeemer choir. Miss Potto says she has been involved with the choir since she was 17 years old. She adds, “I have met so many wonderful people through the choir, and I have made lifelong friends.”

Miss Potto also talks about the community and the people who live there. She says, “The people of the community are so kind and welcoming. They always make me feel at home.”

Miss Potto reflects on her life and the changes she has seen over the years. She says, “I have lived in Wiehle for so long, and I have seen so many changes. But, I am happy with the way things are now.”

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

Miss Potto also talks about the school and the people who work there. She says, “The teachers and staff are so dedicated to their work. They always go above and beyond to help the students.”

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