

Little Clifton Is In Two Worlds

By **Kenneth Bredemeier**

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CLIFTON'S PATH TO MODERNITY has been like the country roads leading into the quarter-square-mile community in southwestern Fairfax County—full of bumps and sharp depressions.

But in recent months the town—a tiny dot in a hilly, forested area—has seemed to be moving toward a full 20th century life, while retaining a foothold in the last century.

Walking through Clifton is akin to walking through a Hollywood version of small-town America. There are two-story clapboard houses, a general store named the Clifton Gro., a railroad, a handful of churches and even a cornfield or two within a few steps of curbless Main Street.

If the original settlers—said possibly to be from Clifton, N.J.—could see the Virginia town now they would undoubtedly recognize it. Many of the original houses, now dirty gray and dilapidated, still stand.

But there is an important difference. In recent months several young couples, mostly in their early thirties, have bought Clifton houses, and with substantial refurbishing and the addition of electricity and indoor plumbing,

tectural showpieces. Signs telling who the original owners were, along with their occupations and the date of construction, are placed in front of the houses.

The young couples, however, are not the only ones who revere the past. A revised town plan, adopted last May, is designed to keep "the historic and architectural values bequeathed to the town by its nineteenth century origins." Most of the town's area is set aside for residential development, provided that the lots are at least 10,000 square feet.

In short, Clifton residents want to maintain the rural charm, but they would like to do it with a few of the things that most people long ago took for granted, such as a fully operating sewage system and a public water supply.

Despite the apparent singleness of purpose in restoration of the past along with an eye on the present and future, all is not entirely peaceful in serene-looking Clifton.

The protagonist in the Clifton story is James H. Symons, the town's non-salaried, 58-year-old mayor, about

The white-haired Symons, who moved to Virginia eight years ago from New Jersey to accept a job as a statistical analyst for the Joint Congressional Committee on Internal Revenue Taxation, has viewed Clifton during part of his two years as mayor, quite literally, with some detachment. Although he owns a house in the northeast section of Clifton, overlooking Popes Head Run creek, he has lived the last year in Arlington.

"A small town mayor doesn't really require so much personal contact with the people," Symons maintains.

Symons says that he moved out of his Clifton home after his wife Marie suffered a stroke and needed special therapy treatment at a Washington hospital. He said living in Arlington made it more convenient to take her for three-weekly treatment.

Symons says that he will resign as mayor if his wife's health doesn't permit his return to Clifton by December.

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James H. Symons



Fannie Hart, 89, and sister Mrs. Enos Taylor, both formerly of Clifton and now of Leesburg. Mrs. Burke gave them a jar of pear preserves.

The Town of Clifton Moves . . .

CLIFTON, From KI

His critics in the town and there are many say that he should live in Clifton if he wants to be its mayor. Virginia's law relating to town officials is somewhat unclear on whether officials must live in their town.

The code says that town officials, including mayors, are required to live there or in the county in which the town is located. What the code doesn't define is what constitutes living in a certain place. Does the law require spending the night regularly in the town or is property ownership enough?

Fairfax County Attorney Donald Stevens says that "as a general rule a town official must live within the town." He added that moving from the town vacates the office, although again it is not certain what constitutes moving from the town.

"I have no idea what the mayor is for or against," says Earl Lee, chairman of the Clifton Betterment Association, a group which says it's for improving Clif-

ton, but often has acted more as a critical watchdog of Symons.

The mayor says that he is available for telephone calls from Clifton residents at his Newman Road home each weeknight from 9 to 10 p.m.

He says he is puzzled about criticism of his not being in Clifton more often. "Any matters that people called me about you can count on one hand. I hardly ever get one," he says.

"They could have put a different light on this by saying that I cared so much about Clifton that I didn't rent out my house," Symons said, only half jokingly of his critics.

Controversy also has surrounded Symons in the town's struggle to obtain a functional sewage system.

Fairfax County installed a modern \$140,000 sewage system three years ago. But only 14 buildings in Clifton have been permitted to tap into it because of the lack of a sewage treatment plant.

Arguments over the sewer system are typical of the

frequent squabbles among Clifton townships. In 1952 Randolph Buckley, a lifelong resident of Clifton and a sometimes dabbler in local politics, decided the town eight acres of land southwest of town with the provision that it be developed into a park. The land was never used.

When the sewage system was installed, Buckley decided he would reclaim the would-be parkland and give it to the county for the sewage treatment plant since his land was not used for a park.

Symons and the Town Council balked. The deed for a park and, by golly, it was not going back to Buckley, a write-in candidate for mayor in last year's election.

A circuit court decision gave the land back to Buckley last May. Now it finally appears that the sewage treatment plant will be built. Buckley has decided the land to the county for the treatment plant with the provision that he, along with

the local Masonic Lodge to which he belongs, be allowed to tap into the sewer system without the usual \$700 fee. The county has agreed.

The treatment plant might be completed within a year. It would eliminate sending a county truck each day to haul away sewage from the 14 current users of the system. The remainder of the town's buildings have septic tanks and pit privies.

According to Symons, town attorneys are currently negotiating to lease two small parcels of land—both owned by Clifton residents—for use as town parks. Although Symons thought the Buckley tract should have been used for a park, he said the two parcels would give Clifton the park space it has been seeking.

Symons has also been criticized for spending too much money on legal suits affecting the town. More than \$1,000 of the town's expenses of \$1,700 last fiscal year went for legal

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Little Clifton hosted a "day" recently and drew about 7,000 persons to a combination barbecue, bazaar and general all-around good time. The town of 170 has plenty of open space, however, as shown at the above site of just about everything.

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Ahead While Looking Back

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services. Most of the \$1,000 went for the suit over the Buckley property, although another suit had been filed against the town's 1956 zoning ordinance by developer A. Frank Krause Jr.

Symons, in a July letter to Clifton residents, said that the town had to be defended against the suits, even though he and the current council were not responsible for either the inclusion on the development of the Buckley parkland or the alleged inadequacies of the zoning ordinance.

Another improvement Symons and other Cliftonians would like to see is a public water supply. As with the sewer system, however, the town will probably have to depend on the benevolence of the county for funding a water system.

Right: now a public water supply is just a dream. Most Clifton homes have individual wells, although some homeowners share a well with neighboring families. But more than a public

to work during the week in Fairfax County or Washington. On Sundays many attend church. Most of them are Baptists and Presbyterians, although there are a few Catholics as well.

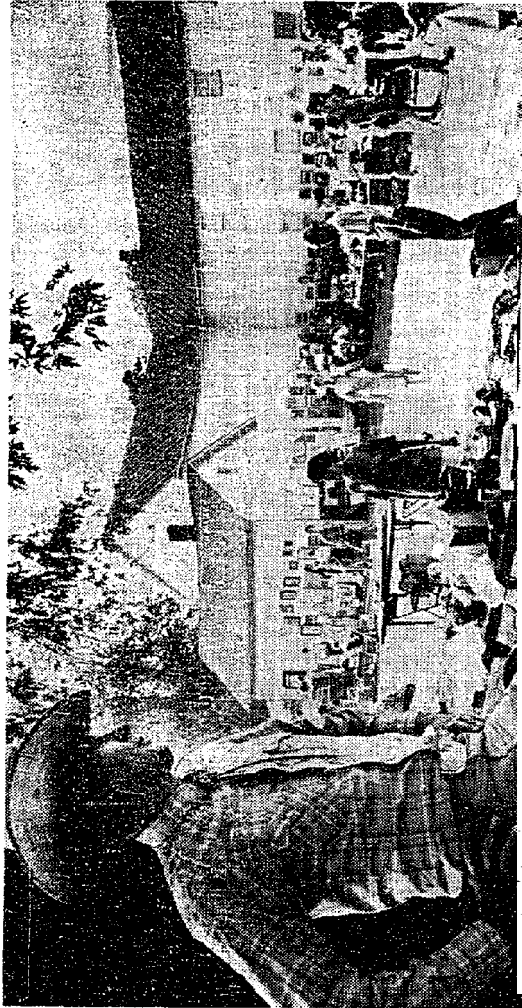
Until the late Depression years, postmarks on letters listed the tiny community as Clifton Station, probably referring to the railroad stop, even though the town was incorporated simply as Clifton in 1902. As if the mapmakers in Richmond haven't heard of the change, or are trying to help recall the past, even the latest official state maps still list the town as Clifton Sta. The name is said to come either

Jersey settlers or because of the high, cliff-like hill on the town's north border.

But even if Krause didn't succeed himself in turning back the clock in restoring Clifton, the goal is gradually coming to fruition with the restoration of homes by the young couples.

"I gather that the people want to keep the town very much like it is," says Ellen Barrett, a town councilwoman. "I like it here because it is peaceful, where you're not that far from civilization."

So it is with Clifton, not that far from modern civilization, but far enough that its revered past will not be forgotten.



Carson Harmet takes a breather at the busy Clifton "day."

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