

History of a Cow Field

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350 Montevue Avenue

The fields behind 350 Montevue Lane in Frederick, Maryland are part of recent environmental efforts to restore some of the wetlands along Carroll Creek. These fields were part of a 99 year lease to a local farmer, and he used them to graze his cows and also plant different varieties of crops during that time. Current restoration efforts have begun with detailed surveys of the plant, bird, and animal wildlife that frequent these fields, first while the cows still grazed them, and within the last year without the cows. Most of the restoration effort is going to focus on stream bank stabilization, correcting some aspects of stream flow, plugging one of the fields to create a wet meadow, and replanting other portions of the site to encourage the return of wildlife. To date, the planting and restoration have been moved back 3 times, and will probably be moved back a fourth before all is said and done. The history of the restoration efforts is proceeding quite nicely and is, to date, spanning about 2.5 years. However, these fields are actually part of a much larger area with a history that dates back almost two hundred years.

The land at 350 Montevue used to belong to the Brunner Family of Frederick City. The Brunner Family was one of the founding families of the area; the men of the family received their original land grants in 1746. The grants came from both the Dulaney Family and the Tasker Family who between the two of them owned most of the land that was to become Frederick County. The Brunner family was very involved with the Alms and poor houses of Frederick. Upon searching the records, I have found numerous occasions where different members of the Brunner Family gave, in the form of bonds, \$1000 per occasion to various government organizations specifically for the care of the poor. On one of these occasions, a land grant was given instead. I thought that I

found the date, April 7, 1857; but upon further inspection of this deed, now I'm not so sure. It appears to be another money grant, but given in the form of a deed instead of a bond. There is a copy of the deed in the appendix to this paper. What further complicates this is the fact that since the county does not pay taxes, this land does not have a parcel number to track property values; hence using data bases is out of the question. Most property information is stored in data bases by tax records. There are no data bases for the tax records before 1800's; all of that is recorded by hand in large books. The same is true for deeds, bonds, and mortgages. Recovery of the exact deed will take a little more time; however, sometime between 1820 and 1860 the Brunner Family gave Frederick County a 70 acre land grant to use for an Alms house. Currently this land is occupied by the Frederick County Health Department and the Animal Control Center and Shelter.

Frederick has always had some sort of the Alms house for the sick and needy through its entire existence. However, in the 1820's the Alms house on West Patrick Street was becoming over crowded and the decision was made to move the sick into a new facility. In 1831 construction of a new Alms house was completed on some portion of this property. By 1832 most of the sick inhabitants of the Alms house on West Patrick Street were moved to this new facility. However; overcrowding again forced the County Commissioners to meet to consider the building a new home. In 1869 construction of the new Montevue County Hospital was started. It was finished in 1870 and continued to serve the public until its demise in 1987. Initially the hospital housed the insane, homeless, indigent, and ill of Frederick. A picture of the original building is included in the appendix as well; one will notice that in the picture, the front fields seem to be tilled

over as if some crop has been planted, but just not started growing yet. In fact, the hospital did provide most of its own food and water up until the 1960's. A house in the back of the hospital housed transients and over night visitors. These visitors earned their keep by working the fields and crushing stone for the roads around the property. There were also fruit trees to tend and vegetable gardens to take care of as well. The hospital had its own chicken coup, which at one point held about 500 chickens, and its own dairy herd and horses. It was almost completely self sufficient. In fact, most of the expenses were for clothing and shoes and medical supplies instead of food. Except for 2 fires in late 1800's, one burning down one of the barns with the horses in it, and other appearing on the top floor of the building (they may in fact be the same fire; however, the documents show them as two separate instances) the hospital continued in good standing and without other incidents into the 1900's.

Unfortunately in the early 1900's over crowding became a problem again. Between 1913 and 1914 the insane were sent to Springfield State Hospital if they were white, and Crownsville State Hospital if they were black; this was done to make the numbers in Montevue manageable for the physicians there. This was still insufficient to solve some of the problems, so in 1933, the current supervisor of Montevue petitioned the County Commissioners to have the now vacant 'Tramp House' turned into an Emergency Hospital. The request was granted; funds were procured from both the Civil Works Administration and Frederick County. In 1934 the 'Tramp House' was converted into a 50 bed hospital with wards for both blacks and whites, making it the only hospital in the area where a black woman could have her child. In 1954, the maternity section of the hospital was closed and turned into the Frederick County Chronic Hospital, most of its

services then being devoted to patients with in-curable ailments. In 1946, the main building began to show its age; however, plans to repair it were put off. The county commissioners thought that a new plan by Social Services would place all the inhabitants of the home into foster homes. Because they thought Montevue was going to be emptied, they did not set aside funds for the necessary improvements. However, the residents were not placed and in 1958 the first of many renovations began to take place. A new kitchen was constructed in the ruins of the neglected old one to better serve the residents. With the new kitchen came new menus, mail slots, and other amenities for the residents; however, the largest changes were yet to come.

In 1960 Montevue installed its first elevator; it also removed its dumb waiters. A barber shop/ beauty parlor was added along with a new receiving area, Chapel Room, and some arts and crafts rooms equipped with TV's amongst other things. A new heating system, sprinkler system and new plumbing were amongst some of the other improvements made to the home during this time. The fourth floor was removed in 1960 as well, along with the porches and roof. The roof and porches were replaced with materials that required less maintenance. An outdoor pavilion was added, and several of the out buildings were converted into laundry buildings, canning houses, and homes for a few Frederick County Agencies. Along with the additional buildings, the county straightened and widened the spring behind the building. It filled in and seeded the old ice pond (a new one on the south bank of Carroll Creek was being created), and the area to the south west was graded by bulldozer. The Potters field was abandoned around this time as well. On the surrounding roads, housing developments and other government offices began to spring up. Included in the appendix is an aerial photograph of the area

during the 1960's. This photograph was not dated, and shows the construction of the Citizens Nursing Home and County Transportation Department across the street from Montevue. This photograph was probably taken in the late 1960's or early 1970's because Montevue has been renovated in the photograph, there is no fourth floor, but there does appear to be a fair bit of out door landscaping to the rear of the building. This is probably the pavilion and the other county agencies. All in all, the entire area got a face lift in the 1960's.

In 1977, a new Frederick Animal Shelter was built on the site. It sits where it can still be found, on the corner of Rosemont Ave and Montevue Lane. The Animal Shelter, at the time it was built, would have straddled the drive way for the Home. Today, the entrance to the Shelter probably is the same entrance Montevue Home had. Also around 1977 the County Commissioners met to discuss the future of Montevue. The home was, despite the restoration efforts, not going to be inhabitable for long. It was decided that home would be destroyed and a new one built across the street next to the Citizens Nursing Home. The residents were allowed to stay until sufficient fund were saved to accomplish the move. In the appendix is included an article from the Frederick News Post that describes the efforts to save one of the murals that graces the chapel. This mural, painted in 1960 by one of the inhabitants of the home depicts it as he remembers it, before progress caught up to the area. This is probably one of the only historical artifacts taken from the home before its demolition in June. In the beginning of 1987 the county applied for the demolition permit, but still had not received it in June. However, this did not stop them from beginning the demolition around June 8, 1987. A few stories in the Frederick News Post cited the reason for the delayed permit being that the Home

was being considered as a Historical building, which would have prevented its destruction. However, upon learning that the county intended to continue with the demolition regardless of the state of their permit, the city signed one and allowed the demolition to continue. Today, the Frederick County Health Department sits on the site of the old Montevue Home. It is continuing its service to the public to this day. Behind the health department is where the current restoration efforts are going to take place. Some of these efforts may be correcting the land grading and filling of parts of the property in the 1960's. These restorations represent another step by the county to preserve as much of the landscape as possible. During the current land development boom, wildlife fields, like the ones behind the health department, are an oasis of peace. The county is creating places to preserve as much green space as possible during this gluttony of development.

Appendix

All materials used for this history were obtained with the help of the librarians at the MD Room in the C. Bur. Arts Library, the Court House Record Room, and the Historical Society of Frederick County. Originals can be obtained in the above mentioned places; copies of the information are available upon request.