

Celebrating a Village in the City

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By Michael Kernan

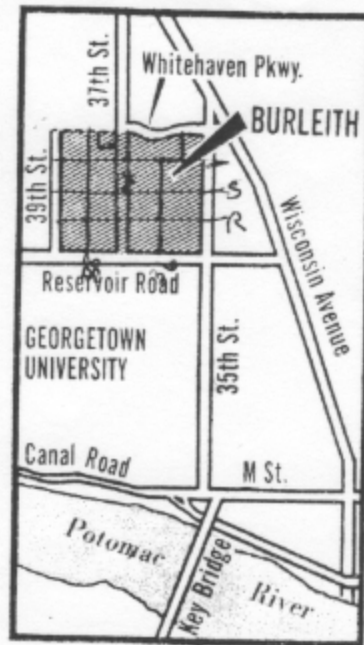
A Frisbee floated eerily across the Green Lot on 37th Street NW where several hundred neighbors were celebrating Burleith's 50th anniversary Saturday.

A youth clad only in shorts caught the missile, barely getting it away from a leaping retriever and almost falling over a small child on a plastic tricycle. Nearby, the regular sunbathers sprawled in their bikinis.

Beside them stood a gaggle of young parents drinking the free beer and keeping half an eye on the crawlers; next to them sat a row of old-timers who have lived in this 16-block area northwest of Georgetown (West of 35th Street and north of Reservoir Road) for the whole 50 years.

Next to them, in the center of the big lot, boiled a great cauldron of kids, dogs, wiffle-ball players, firemen (complete with hook-and-ladder), bike riders, Popsicle eaters, Bingo players and casual dancers who twisted and trucked in the grass to the music of the Fox Grocery Company, a Baltimore rock group, and Danny Denver's impressions of everybody from Chuck Berry to Elvis Presley.

After the fire truck demonstration and the rock music and the shoe-slap-



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ping dances of the Washingtonia Bavarian Dance Club, the picnic settled down to business.

Catherine Smith, 7 weeks old, was

declared the youngest Burleith resident and given a life membership. A handful of people who have lived in the area's row houses since 1923, when Shannon and Luchs started building, was introduced, as were some who lived there earlier.

First subdivided from the West Washington tract in 1887 by F.W. Hudekoper, Burleith dates to 1716, when Henry Threlkeld built a home by that name of the site of the Convent of the Visitation. The place caught the attention of Charles Dickens, who wrote in 1842:

"The heights of this neighborhood, above the Potomac River, are very picturesque and are free, I should conceive, from some of the insalubrities of Washington. The air, at that elevation, was quite cool and refreshing, when in the city it was burning hot."

Today, the houses in Burleith, both the predominant Georgian style and the half-timbered designs of the Cooley brothers on T Street, are so sought-after that most sales never make it to the real estate ads: They are completed in hours. Buyers have been

See PICNIC, B3, Col. 1

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PICNIC, From B1

known to line up, cash in hand, outside a home offered for sale, the price, \$7,700 in 1923, today ranges from \$40,000 to \$60,000 and up.

Fifty years of change were very visible at Saturday's picnic in the lot which had been reserved for the projected Whitehaven Parkway and is now a common green. The old families were there, of course, but so were the young marrieds, the singles groups, the hip students, the young black families gradually integrating Burleith.

They seem to be carrying on Burleith's sense of identity, casual but strong, which makes the area one of those urban neighborhoods city planners are always mooning about. For Burleith is the kind of place where a

dog can be famous for blocks around. It has its Citizens Association (which put on the picnic with \$600 in \$1 membership dues plus lots of donated help); it has its own historian, Edgar Farr Russell, and its own archives.

There are Hanging Gardens of Burleith at 38th and T; and in 1930 there was the Great Fire of Burleith, which wiped out seven houses on 37th. According to Russell, Burleith's history began in the pre-Cambrian era, and he cites a photograph that shows "an interesting unconformity, representing an interval of about 365,000,000 years, on the north side of the alley between 38th and 39th Streets, north of T."

By 5 p.m. the party was nearing its climax. A lot of hot dogs had gone down and a lot of balloons had gone up, 6-year-old Anne Castell had won

the decorated bike contest, architect Waverley Taylor had spoken, as had various city officials including two councilmen, and the telegram from President Nixon had been read (also the telegram from Shannon and Luchs), and now everyone gathered near the stump of a fallen elm for the dedication of its successor, a pink dogwood tree.

While the brief speeches were going on, a young husband teetered across the lot holding a foil-covered dish in mittened hands. In a few minutes the big covered-dish supper would begin, and surely by then, if it hadn't overwhelmed you already, you would realize you were standing on the village green of an American small town that had somehow been conjured up in the middle of a metropolis.

Don't Discard Your

Peabody Room Hours
Mon. & 2nd & 4th Sat.
9:30-5:30
Thursdays 1:00-9:00