

Reflections on Villa Nova

By Carl Jewell, May 1996 (Aged 91)

In 1933, I had been married just one year and was looking for a house to buy. When I first saw 3900 Buckingham Road it was a wreck! It had corn growing in the front lawn. There was just a little bit of lawn and lots of weeds. I cut all the woods out myself. I used to go out every Saturday and Sunday and chop down trees.

We moved in on Saint Patrick's Day 1933 in a blinding snowstorm. All our furniture was getting wet. We lived at 15 Hillendale Street and we couldn't get anyone to take us up to Bell Avenue on account of we had 2 dogs. So I gave 2 dollars to the horse drivers and we went up to Garrison Blvd and then they pooped out at Duvall Avenue. So we let them rest. All our furniture had to be dried off before putting it in the house.

On the second floor of the house, there was a still. (Matter a fact, there were 2 stills.) The windows were painted green so nobody could see what they were doing inside. Chickens were wandering in and out of the house and there was a big "2 holer" in the backyard. Of course, we never used it.

There was a stream running through the front yard. They didn't have water in the house at all. They had to go out in the backyard with a pail to get water. When we moved in, we started digging the cellar out right away and got a plumber to lay out water and sewer pipes and put in a water pressure tank.

There was a well right out here where Kitty's little garden is right near the back steps. At the well was a little summerhouse with nice little seats around all 4 sides and wooden shingles on the roof. One Sunday morning Kitty said, "This water smells funny. It smells sort of rotten." I said, "Oh its fall, I guess a few leaves fell down into the well." I didn't do anything for a week until I began noticing it myself...

I got my hammer and pinch bar and knocked the summer house down to get into the well. I took up the old boards and looked down in the well and there I saw 4 feet sticking up. I got out my rake and pulled up the remains of an old rabbit...Then I stirred again and found another one. Needless to say, we didn't drink any more water from that well. After that, I'd stop every night at the service station on my way home from work and fill up two 5-gallon cans of water for drinking and cooking.

After discovering dead animals in our well, I decided to build a top for it. I used oak to make a 3x3 trap door and then began painting it gray. As I stood over the well painting the under side of the heavy door, it suddenly started to slip out of my hand. The door must have weighed 30 lbs. or so, and as I shifted my weight, I kicked the gallon of gray paint into the well.

The water was coming in fast so; I called the neighbors to come over and help me bail. We all bailed until someone yelled, "Call the fire department!" The fire truck came and pulled up right next to the well. They pumped it dry in no time. Then the driver said, "One of you fellows should go down and wipe the excess paint off the bottom." They all looked at me and then the fireman said... "It's your well. You go down. We don't want to take away the honor."

So down I went, on the fireman's ladder, 20 feet to the bottom of the well. The reason it wasn't deeper was, there was a rock the size of a dining room table sitting at the bottom. Once I got down there, the fireman pulled the ladder out so I had more room to work. I looked up and saw nothing but sky.

In the summer of 1934, we had a drought in Baltimore and the well went dry. Someone told me about a man who would dynamite it so we could get water. I asked him what he would charge me. "\$25.00 plus the cost of dynamite", he said. So I told him to, "Come on over and do it." So he went down in the well and laid the dynamite... It had a long fuse... He put mud all over the top of the well and told us to open all the windows and doors in our house. Then he set it off. As soon as the big rock at the bottom of the well cracked, the water came up. It was amazing! After that the water was fine and we used the well for several years until they put in city water.

When we came here in 1933, Bedford Road wasn't even Bedford Road. It was a trail. It had 100's of trees and no houses...

We didn't have any trash collection, no garbage collection, no streetlights, no nothin! You fed all your leftovers to your chickens... Of course, by 1950 we had 4 pigs, 25 ducks and so forth...so we didn't have any trouble getting rid of our stuff... Most of the neighbors would bring their excess over here and dump it for my pigs.

We used to go raccoon hunting in Gwynns Falls. One night, in the icy winds of January, we were hunting down there and a fellow fell in the septic tank. We pulled him out and took off all his clothes. Then we went down to the stream and found an old rusty bucket and half way cleaned him off. We built 2 fires and put him in between them. He never even caught cold...

The septic tank was right down in front of Bill Tyler's house in the 7200 block of Prince George Road... Course my friend didn't know the septic tank was there. We were following the dogs and all of a sudden he disappeared into the ground. What a mess!

When Kitty and I moved to Villa Nova in 1933, there were only a few neighbors... Mr. Fitzpatrick, on Rockridge Road, was our closest neighbor and Carl Joy, in the next block of Buckingham Road, also lived close by. The Parents who lived in the 4000 block of Buckingham Road came here real early... George Parent always said they came in 1925.

The Dubels were also here before we were... not Bob, but his father and mother. Before the Dubels, a man by the name of Compton lived in their house and worked for the developer. He kept 2 horses in the backyard to grade these roads. The roads were all just rough country roads. Most of them weren't paved. They were just stone and mud. I don't know what happened to him but when he moved out, Bob Dubel's father and mother moved in.... Bob and his brother David were raised there.

Bob used to come down here and I taught him to shoot... I would take my 22 and some candles down to the stream... There were no houses down by the stream then... I would set up the candles in the water and light them. Then we would try to shoot close to the lighted wick and put the candle out. We weren't allowed to hit the candles. That was against the rules. I taught Bob how to do it.

The gypsies camped for one month every spring on Scotts Level Road. They always traveled with a stud horse. This was in the days when there were a lot of horses. (Matter a fact; there was a big water trough right in front of our house, where our mailbox is. Two big horses could drink from it at the same time. The water came from my well.) The gypsies would camp with their women and children and so forth. At nighttime they would yodel. We were scared of them but we liked to hear them yodel, so we'd sneak up and lay in the woods real quiet so they wouldn't find us.

By the 1950's, I had 4 horses, Kathy had a pony and Doug had a donkey. Both of them had this big white goat named "Santa" and he'd pull a small wagon just like a horse. We used to put him in parades...

The beautiful stream running through our front lawn was put underground by the county. Four-foot concrete sewer pipes were laid in its place. Doug and his pals used to crawl through these pipes... One August while our next door neighbors were having a party in the backyard, Doug sneaked down to the stream and found the entrance to the sewer pipe... He crept underground through the pipe till he reached our neighbor's backyard and then started making strange noises from below...

First thing you know... the neighbors got so scared...they all jumped up and ran in the house. We had all kinds of things going on here...

Carl W. Jewell (91 years old)
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