

*Thanks for the Memories: Former FDA Presidents Recall Highlights of Their Administrations*

## Part Two: The Seventies – Watchdogs and Activists

By Gail Zwirner, FDA Historian

After Part One of this series was released, I dug deeper into the mystery about the location of the proposed swimming club. Like other “pipe dreams,” the project never got off the ground because of insufficient membership commitments. Some recollections for proposed locations were the site of the current Boys & Girls Club on Robinson Street, the garden behind 2325 Monument Avenue, adjacent to 2402 Park Avenue, or the location of the Fan Square Condominiums in the 2100 block of Grove Avenue, formerly a church property. In fact, the proposal was part of the overall parks restoration plan and the intended site was in the center of the block bordered by Floyd Ave., Shields Ave., Strawberry St. (then Addison) and Main St. The neighborhood did not raise enough money to move forward with the swimming pool. The feedback is much appreciated and helpful to fill in gaps.

Now, the seventies. What a decade!

**Drew Carneal (1970-71)**, who has contributed so much to our knowledge about our neighborhood’s history through his book, *Richmond’s Fan District*, and the many articles he wrote in *Fanfare*, acknowledges how “time flies” when he realized he was President forty years ago. After his year as President, he continued as Chair of the Parks Committee.

He recalls his Presidency was a period of nationwide student activism. VCU students closed the 1100 block of Grove Avenue, proclaiming it “the Banana Republic.” The Richmond police weren’t exactly happy about this and appeared with several police dogs. WRVA called Drew to make a public statement, and although he is confident it was very statesmanlike, when he later heard his voice on the radio, he realized he probably didn’t have a future in politics. The “Republic” faded as quickly as it was established.

On a more constructive note, Drew was very much involved over the next few years with the establishment of Scuffletown and Paradise Parks, working with Carlton Abbott, the landscape architect, and the Parks Director, Jessee Reynolds. They had to whip up neighborhood support and eliminate any opposition in light of the fact that the City had to condemn several parcels. On opening day, they had the 192<sup>nd</sup> Army Band march through the Fan from Paradise Park to Scuffletown with many children on bikes and a lot of very curious neighbors.

As a Board, they worked hard on giving the Fan an identity as an up-and-coming neighborhood. They wrote and talked a lot about the benefits of this diverse urban neighborhood and what it could become. They accomplished this by working with City Council, the press and promoting the garden and holiday tours. They all had a great spirit and a lot of fun.

Drew’s “President’s Column” in the May 1970 *Fanfare* noted the first FDA-sponsored “Candidate’s Night” for City Council candidates to speak to FDA members and answer questions. The October issue included an Interim Report on the VCU Master Plan and outlined all Board concerns regarding student housing and parking. The Board approached the issue aggressively from all angles, including correspondence to University planners, to President Brandt, all of the members of the Board of Visitors, the Director of the Division of Engineering and Building for the Commonwealth and then Governor A.

Linwood Holton. That *Fanfare* issue also included the first mention of a committee formed to study the Fan parking problems.

Later, Drew was involved with the creation of the Historic Monument Avenue and Fan District Foundation, the Fan Designer House, and the restoration of the Branch House Gardens. Recently he noticed the benches in the garden and recalled the holes he dug in 1975 to set them up!

**Frederic Cox, Jr. (1971-72)** is another example of the extraordinary resident talent we share with the City. He was the second longest-serving Chair on the Commission of Architectural Review. Earlier in 1967, he participated at the State level on the Wayne Commission, which had a direct impact on the Fan by creating the plan for establishing a state-supported university in the Richmond metro area – what we know today as VCU. He says the relationship with VCU led to a June 1990 agreement when the university agreed not to move west of Harrison Street. That has required “vigilant oversight” through the decades.

During Fred’s term on the FDA Board, the preservationists were noticing a lot of incompatible renovations to Fan buildings, such as demolition of porches and replacement windows. Some wanted to “Georgianize” the Fan. He credits Jack Zehmer with promoting Monument Avenue to become an Old & Historic District. The organizers of the first informational meeting were surprised when no one attended. The eventual designation passed without objection and the preservation success of Monument Avenue led to Fred’s proposal for standards of restoration and a master plan for the Fan District. The plan resulted in park renovations and the creation of pocket parks. Some residents fought any change to Meadow Park, but the current park plan was achieved by that master plan. Fred recalls that then Mayor, Tom Bliley, moved forward to apply for a \$500,000 federal grant to accomplish the improvements.

Newer Fan residents might find it hard to believe, but Fred remembers that his Board found it necessary to meet with local bankers to promote the Fan as a solid investment. Banks thought the Fan was too risky and mortgages were generally unavailable at that time. He, for example, paid \$15,000 for his home in the 1900 block of Stuart Ave. His father advised him it was overpriced!

The successful bike rally, created and organized by Ceci and Bill Amrhein and Jeanne and Deane Hayden, took place in May 1971 of Fred’s term. Also, inspired by a City program, “Operation Clean Sweep,” The Fan Townhouse and Garden Club organized a massive neighborhood-wide clean-up and included special trucks with lifts to rid the Fan of abandoned cars and old appliances deposited in the alleys.

Much later, Fred was also involved as the architect to save a Fan architectural treasure when St. James’s church burned. He worked on the designs of the parking deck and Michaux House as well.

**Eugene L. “Bill” Crump (1972-73)** not only fought City Hall, but also Virginia’s General Assembly to accomplish the most significant zoning change in the Fan –restricted parking. Then City Attorney Conard Maddox Jr. believed the state statutes would not allow parking restrictions on city streets. Bill was forced to move for approval by the General Assembly to allow localities to regulate parking through the issuance of permits. Non-resident owners, who felt the restrictions would impose unfairly on their tenants, opposed the measure and even threatened physical harm to Bill. He remembers one angry landlord calling Dominion (then VEPCO) President, Justin Moore, to tell him that Bill was wasting company time lobbying for the FDA. Mr. Moore’s response was: “Well good for Bill.” The legislation passed and was the first such legislation anywhere in the United States. Cities like Alexandria quickly

followed Richmond's lead. Restricted parking, with some modifications and expansion over the years, has by and large been a success.

**Charles Peters (1973-74)** recalled four "themes" during his time on the Board:

- Ongoing work on the location and design of entrances and exits from the Downtown Expressway to make sure that there was no traffic impact on the Fan;
- Work on the parks and Drew Carneal's successful efforts to get federal money for the work;
- Street lighting, which entailed convincing the City administration and City Council to use Community Development Block Grant money to install lights with "cut-off" so they wouldn't shine in residents' windows. (Those shoebox lights still exist today.); and
- Tackling an ongoing problem of merchants on Strawberry Street – "loud bars and foosball halls" -- that were a constant source of fights and loitering.

**Tom Jones**, who served with Charles Peters on the Board, says a murder in front of the Townhouse Grill, which was located on Strawberry Street (then named Addison) in the site of the current Strawberry Fields, was the "last straw." Tom represented the FDA and neighbors in an ABC challenge and won. The bar had regular complaints about its patrons and they lost their license and closed. That was the positive turning point for Strawberry Street, which has evolved into the pedestrian-friendly environment that exists today.

**Ed Harrell (1974-75)** outlined the objectives of a district-wide lighting plan to: (1) be both uniform and attractive; (2) provide more light on streets and walkways; (3) be a controlled source of light to provide adequate lighting with minimal spill-over onto houses; and (4) be within the realm of feasibility for the city.

Ed also boasted about the "people power" generated to create the first FDA Designer House. Richmond was one of the first cities in the country to have such a project. He said 600 people participated to organize the month-long event at David Peake's Monument Avenue home. More than 3000 people took the tour. The proceeds of \$13,000 were earmarked for the restoration of the Branch House gardens. Whether it was the first tour or the second Designer House event at Anne and Tom Innes' home on Grove Avenue, Polly Jefferson made hundreds of pecan tassies for several days after work to sell at the tour. Two tours wore everyone out. After those successes, the Symphony took over responsibilities for organizing designer houses.

Membership was a priority during **Robert Kirby's** presidency [1975-76]. The March 1976 issue of *Fanfare* posted the results of a membership drive that added 110 members to the roster. Two months later another 50 members joined the FDA. Robert also announced the receipt of a \$10,000 grant from the Cabell Foundation to restore the Branch House gardens.

Like many of the FDA Presidents before her, **Virginia Ritchie (1976-77)** recalls tireless efforts by her board to work with City officials on zoning and code enforcement issues. She shares one funny moment when she and Nancy Scoggins met with City Attorney Conard Maddox. At the close of undoubtedly a persuasive discussion, Mr. Maddox said, "Well ladies, I better let you get back to whatever you do all day." Virginia later ran against Bill Leidinger for the 2<sup>nd</sup> District City Council seat. Bill resided in Ginter Park. Tom Jones was her campaign manager. He says that although she lost, he felt that the election challenge made Mr. Leidinger recognize Fan talent and the effectiveness of the FDA. He began attending the Board meetings regularly.

An article in the May 1977 *Fanfare* entitled “Our New Look,” highlighted the collaboration between the FDA and VCU’s University Graphics class to update the *Fanfare* logo. The program, led by Professor Chuck Scalin, was designed to give students valuable experience working with clients and seeing their ideas result in printed form. The design created by student Don Denny is still used today as our publication’s logo.

**Nancy Scoggins (1977-78)** kept meticulous notes from her term on the Board, which I have quoted heavily. She felt that the FDA Board faced challenges which sound familiar today. In 1978 they devoted hours individually and collectively researching and discussing violations of zoning regulations and special use permits. They enjoyed a fairly good relationship with the city planning department by that time, so their questions and complaints did receive serious attention. Their presence at City Council meetings and zoning hearings was often required. Mary Spain, Hal McVey, Taylor Reveley, and Bruce Tyler were active watchdogs on the FDA’s behalf. They devoted a lot of time at a number of meetings that year to the disposition of the Stonewall Jackson School property at Lombardy and Main, which had been placed on the city’s list of surplus property and put up for sale. Bruce Tyler, who lived across the street from the site, spearheaded FDA efforts to find an appropriate use. Many discussions and long negotiations led to a postponement of the sale, thus buying time to look for a good use and to secure designation as an old and historic site for the property. Without this kind of cooperation, the buildings could have been destroyed and any number of unattractive uses might have been installed.

Parking issues occupied a big chunk of their time too. Permit parking in the lower Fan had been in effect for only a short time and some residents wanted to relax the restrictions during VCU holidays. This turned out to be impossible to work out, but it was a hot topic for awhile. They devoted every possible opportunity to lobbying state legislators for money to build a parking deck for VCU. A note in the minutes that year mentions assurances from then Fan delegate, George Allen (not the former Governor), that “three of four million dollars have been set aside” for the purpose. They kept the pressure on and in a few years the deck at Laurel and Main was built – the first for VCU.

Cleaning the streets in those days was next to impossible because nobody moved cars on the appointed day despite the signs. Articles in *Fanfare* pleading with residents to do everything short of sprouting wings to move the cars were to no avail. They held meetings with Department of Public Works staff who were just as frustrated and ashamed of the muck at the curbs. The board agreed with Mr. Wilkinson, then DPW head, to endorse towing cars which were not moved on street cleaning day. For some reason, perhaps because of all the leaves from the lovely big trees, Floyd Avenue had the greatest accumulation of muck, so it was targeted as the first street for towing and a thorough cleaning. Nancy rode her bike over and watched the tow trucks spend a good part of the morning towing. That was followed by a crew of workers, armed with shovels, who loosened the caked debris and pitched it onto a truck so the street sweepers could do their job. In spite of a few outraged protests, clean streets won the day, and towing continues to be necessary twenty-five years later.

Some of Nancy’s more pleasant Board business produced results that we enjoy today. They were pleased to support the merchants on Strawberry Street (John Wong was a most effective member of her Board) in their request to the City to change the name of Addison Street between Broad and Main to Strawberry Street. It was a nice example of cooperation among residents, businesses, the City and the neighborhood organization.

Another accomplishment was the establishment of the Historic Monument Avenue and Fan District Foundation. They had talked for years about the need for a fundraising and preservation entity to serve

the Fan. Doug Conner did the research, drew up the necessary documents and the Foundation was registered. Many FDA Presidents served on the Foundation Board.

Early in her term, Nancy appointed a committee to study needs and set goals for the neighborhood in preparation for a scheduled update of the City's master plan. She doesn't remember all the people on the committee, but she does recall that Fred Cox, Dan Bond, Bob Stewart and Taylor Reveley were stalwarts. They made many recommendations for improvements to enhance the quality of life and the physical stability of the Fan. Easing traffic on West Grace by returning it to two-way with parking on both sides was one of the major proposals. They thought it would foster rejuvenation of the residential quality of the street. Over objections from city planning staff, they insisted that it be considered for inclusion in the master plan. It took much discussion and measuring of street width, but that goal eventually was achieved.

One nagging problem, mentioned by Fred Cox ten years earlier, was that banks and S&Ls, in general, did not lend money for renovation of Fan houses because they thought the area was too risky. They learned that most lending officers had never been inside a Fan house, so had no idea of the wealth of architectural details available to the smart renovator. One Christmas they invited representatives from all banks and S&Ls they knew to lunch in a renovated Fan house. They provided information about the neighborhood and the FDA, and after a delicious lunch, led the guests on guided tours of all the homes open that year. The owners kindly were ready an hour in advance so they could sell the Fan as the good investment we all know we are.

Nancy's most enduring memory is the gratitude for the many talented neighbors who were willing to use their collectively awesome array of skills and expertise in service to the neighborhood. She said all she had to do to be a good president was to call meetings, organize the agenda and stick to it, and ask the right person to do a job. In addition to the people she already mentioned, she singles out a few others including John Caldwell, who organized all the programs, Ann Repp, Nancy Maupin, Bob Tingle, Edna Kirby, who kept membership records, and Jim McMurray. All contributed countless hours of time.

**B. Daniel Bond (1978-79)** outlined his objectives to integrate as many of the Goals Committee's proposals in the City's Master Plan Update; to complete a "Recreation in the Fan Study" with help from VCU; and increase pedestrianism due to a "safer traffic initiative." Dan was the Manager of Data Processing at the Division of Motor Vehicles and was thoroughly trained in the process of analyzing and solving complicated problems. When he first joined the Board, he was asked to study neighborhood traffic patterns and concerns.

In the September 1978 issue of *Fanfare*, Dan announced that the Foundation had purchased its first property in the 1800 block of West Grace Street.

**W. Taylor Reveley III (1979-80)** describes his term on the board as a continuation of the "frontier era" in the Fan when they "fought to reclaim it bit by bit from the degradation and despair into which much of it had fallen following the Depression and the Second World War. A lot of time and effort was spent on parking, dealing with wayward landlords, fending off unfortunate commercial interests, working for zoning changes to restore and protect single-family homes, dealing with VCU to persuade it to move east, south and north, but not further west, and learning how to make common cause with the Monument Avenue and Grace Street associations." Taylor was also involved in getting the Historic Monument Avenue and Fan District Foundation underway. "It was a marvelous period in the life of the Fan, especially as it became increasingly clear that the revolution would, in fact, be consummated."

Taylor thinks the main issues during his tenure on the Board were setting the wheels in motion, so to speak, for the restoration of two-way traffic on Grace Street to eliminate the “raceway” west from downtown Richmond at rush hour. They reached a reasonable accommodation with the old Stuart Circle Hospital as it sought to expand and add what amounted to an emergency room entrance at the western tip of Franklin Street (close to some lovely homes), and did the same with Grace Covenant Presbyterian Church on its desire to turn its East Building into commercial office space. They discouraged First Baptist’s effort to put up a neon message board on its property. They invested in what became a neighborhood park on the back lawn of the Branch House (which got taken away when the house was sold). Finally, they worked hard to beef up the FDA newsletter and get it reliably delivered.

*Coming in the August/September issue, “The Eighties.”*