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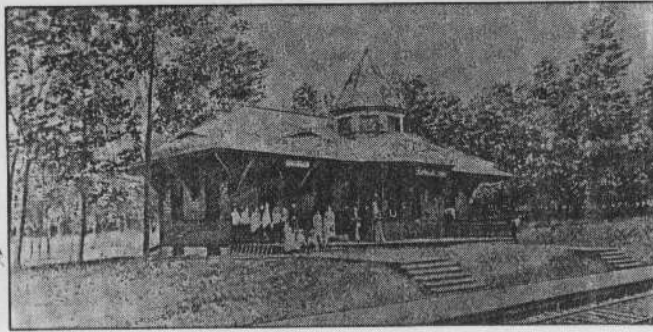
Thursday, October 26, 1989



SUDBROOK PARK

100 years of gracious living

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Western Maryland Railway's Sudbrook Station was used by residents of Sudbrook Park to get into Baltimore in 1900.

SUDBROOK PARK

100 years of gracious living

Story by Carol Ukens

The real estate advertising come-on hypes the low property taxes, easy terms and investment potential in a new subdivision that make this the time to jump on the development bandwagon rolling through Baltimore County's northwest suburban corridor.

The blurb reads as if it's right out of today's newspaper, until it mentions the cost of the lots — "\$375 and up." Definitely not today's prices. The ad actually wooed Baltimoreans of the "better sort" to Sudbrook Park, an old summer resort struggling to become a suburb near the turn of the century.

Present-day Sudbrook Park residents, isolated from their Pikesville neighbors by a quaint, one-lane bridge, recently threw a birthday bash for Maryland's first planned community. An old-fashioned ice cream social and ceremony with the usual complement of dignitaries marked the centennial of a quiet oasis of curving roads, green spaces and porches wrapped around large Victorians and Dutch Colonials nestled under a canopy of towering oak, tulip and hickory trees.

The Park, as residents call their community, was the brainchild of James Howard McHenry, a gentleman farmer who owned nearly 1,000 acres west of Pikesville. He contacted Frederick Law Olmsted, America's first and foremost landscape architect, to design a new community on his Sudbrook estate. After he was bitten by his favorite Saint Bernard, McHenry died of blood poisoning in 1888 before his dream was realized.

Officials of the B&O Railroad organized the Sudbrook Co., purchased 204 acres from McHenry's widow and hired Olmsted in 1889 to lay out a summer resort. Riding the crest of his fame as the design genius behind New York City's Central Park, Olmsted turned the land company's plan on its head by designing a year-round suburb.

Olmsted set about incorporating his then-revolutionary ideas into the Park. Breaking the rule that streets be laid out in grid fashion, he designed curving roads that blended into the landscape, inviting the passerby to see what lay beyond the next bend. He strove to offer relief from the "cramped, confused and controlling circumstances" of the city by carving out common green spaces and large home sites to harmonize with nature.

To preserve the integrity of his "rural village," one of only four he designed, Olmsted proposed a long list of deed restrictions, another Maryland first. Always a nitpicker, he even specified that each lot could have no more than four horses or two cows. No pigs allowed.

Ironically, Olmsted's namesake son had an unwitting hand in fulfilling his father's vision of the Park as a true suburb, not a summer resort. After Olmsted Jr. designed Roland Park in the 1890s, those better sorts began to catch on to the advantages of year-round living in a suburb nearer to city jobs and amenities.

With prominent Baltimoreans detouring up Roland Avenue, the Park's large, unheated houses became white elephants. The



James Howard McHenry, builder of Sudbrook.

Photo opposite: Sudbrook Park residents, dressed for the neighborhood's centennial celebration, gather on the porch of the home of Newell and Jackie Cox. From left, Myra Lewis, Pat Leith-Tetrault, Katharine Horsman and Richard Bauman. Children, from left, Phillip Leith-Tetrault and Andre Leith-Tetrault.



Cottage No. 1, one of the very first homes built in Sudbrook Park.

Historic photos courtesy of Baltimore County Public Library

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The Sudbrook Hotel was the social hub of life in Sudbrook Park.



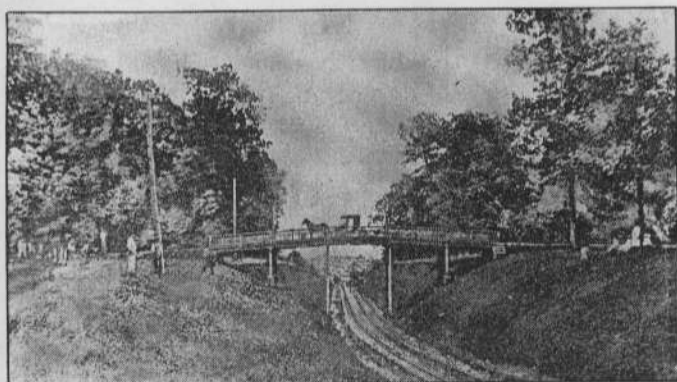
SUDBROOK PARK

100 years of gracious living

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Sudbrook Co. went bust. But young families, lured by owners unloading at bargain-basement prices after the turn of the century, signed on the dotted line and set about winterizing their new homes and fulfilling Olmsted's plan.

In the past decade, a new generation of young families has arrived in the Park, said Jackie Cox, who has lived in the community since 1946. While Sudbrook Park "really hasn't changed much, and mostly for the better," she welcomes the latest infusion of new blood. "These old



The original one-lane wooden bridge that connected Sudbrook Park to the rest of Pikesville. A metal bridge now stands in the same location.

houses are being bought by young people who take such an interest in restoring and keeping them." Olmsted's careful attention to the environment and landscaping still pays aesthetic dividends in the Park. Every season showcases a different aspect of Mother Nature. "In the spring the dogwoods and azaleas bloom, and in the fall we get the colors," said Cox. "In the winter after a little snow or ice, it's like a fairyland. We live in a little oasis, another world."

When Melanie Anson moved to the Park 18 years ago, she was fooled at first by the effect of the leafy summer canopy, which lowers the temperature by at least 10 degrees: "I'd dress my kids for the temperature in the Park and then find out they were dressed too warmly when I took them somewhere," she laughed.

While Park residents still share special events, in bygone days its social heart was the Sudbrook Hotel, which offered tennis courts, a swimming

pool, a nine-hole golf course and secluded bridle paths safe from vehicular traffic. Saturday night was a traditional time to dine at the hotel and dance to the Louis Fisher Orchestra or enjoy a performance by the Paint and Powder Club. Some early homes didn't even have kitchens. There was no need to heat up the house on a summer day with the hotel's restaurant only a short stroll away.

A highlight of every summer season was the bang-up Fourth of July celebration, when people came from miles around to watch the festivities. A band from the city led the parade of gaily decorated carriages, children riding beribboned ponies and marchers carrying flags and noisemakers. The day was climaxed by a grand fireworks display and a dance at the hotel.

When the neighborhood demographics swung away from the summer resort crowd, the hotel fell on hard times. A succession of owners tried to make a go of it until one cold, blustery night in March 1926, a fire reduced the hotel to a pile of charred rubble. The blaze marked the end of a gracious era of starched white dresses, candle-lit Japanese lanterns on the porch and waltz music floating on the evening breezes.

If the hotel was the social hub of the Park, the little Western Maryland Railway depot with the dunce-cap dome was the economic lifeline. Children, with their mothers in tow, trooped down to the station to meet their daddies coming home from jobs in the city. By 1930, the station was just a memory, but as late as the 1940s, people still went down to the tracks to wave to the engineers and conductors who returned the salutes.

The station, which was a stop for nine trains daily each way, was originally built on the east side of the single track. A few years later the depot was moved across the track. It took 10 days of horsepower and manpower using skids and rollers to complete the relocation assisted by neighborhood sidewalk superintendents.

For decades the Park remained a sleepy, secluded suburb, sheltered by Olmsted's grand design. It wasn't until the 1950s that storm clouds began to form on the horizon. The State Highway Administration began making

noises about building the Northwest Expressway through the Park and later opted to run a rapid-transit line down its median strip.

Threatened by a double dose of high-speed transportation lines that would shatter the Park's tranquility, residents fought back. Community leaders hastily applied to place 80 acres in the heart of Sudbrook Park on the National Register of Historic Places. The listing, granted in 1973, meant the state could not use federal funds without cutting through Uncle Sam's red tape designed to protect historical areas. Lead by Anson, an attorney, the community also mounted a pressure campaign to twist official arms into scrapping the plan.

By 1978, SHA officials had caved in on building the expressway through the Park, but the rapid-transit line remained on the agenda. Through extensive, time-consuming negotiations, the community won some concessions from the state, said Anson, who was then the civic chairman of the Sudbrook Club. Instead of running the Metro trains along the open trench of the railroad line, the SHA agreed to put the tracks in a 1,500-foot tunnel and to preserve as many old trees as possible.

"We ended up with only 500 feet of tunnel when the state changed its plans, so we can see and hear the trains," said Anson. "They planted new trees, but the first summer we had a drought and 70% of them died or were stolen. They did come back and spend another \$250,000 on replanting the trees."

So silver Metro cars have replaced the old maroon Western Maryland coaches pulled by smoke-belching locomotives. And there are still occasional bureaucratic rumblings that could impact the Park. There is vague talk about someday reviving the Northwest Expressway plan in the guise of extending Wabash Avenue north. And the county periodically mounts forays against the one-lane bridge guarding the Park's eastern flank. But the residents, mindful of hard-fought battles, keep a wary eye peeled for Big Brother.

"We have to remain vigilant," said Anson. "We definitely want to keep the bridge, and we're trying to get the historic district enlarged to include all 204 acres. We'll continue the fight to protect what we have."