

Thanks for the Memories: Former FDA Presidents Recall Highlights of Their Administrations
Part One: The Sixties
By Gail Zwirner, FDA Historian

City officials regularly comment that the Fan District Association is the most effective civic association in Richmond and many FDA initiatives become City standards. Dozens of us have served in appointed positions on City boards and commissions. As FDA historian, I want to capture some recollections of former FDA Presidents to identify their most memorable experiences. From Los Angeles to the “rivah,” from D.C. to Florida, and all the folks who have stayed in the Fan or Richmond area, by this deadline, 24 former FDA Presidents responded. Family members, other Board members, such as Polly Jefferson, and old *Fanfares* helped me fill in gaps for those Presidents unable to contribute.

Some themes resurface through many administrations. On the positive side, everyone recalls wonderful House Tours and dedicated neighbors. Challenges from the beginning of the association to today include code enforcement, VCU communications, traffic, and parking. Part of the fun of this project has been the enthusiasm of recalling so many FDA accomplishments. Of course, many issues evolved over multiple administrations, so many of the respondents admitted to “blurred lines” and fuzzy memories about specific years. This article is the first of five parts.

The Sixties

Former historians, Kitty Winkler and Any Piretti, interviewed the first President, **Charles P. (Jed) Wilson (1962-64)** in 2004. He recalled two predecessor organizations. The Neighborhood Improvement Association, formed by Robert Sharpe and McLain T. O’Ferrall, worked from the mid-1950’s trying to get Fan residents to improve their homes. In 1958, the 20th Precinct Literary, Political, Forensic and Inside Straight Society was formed by James J. (Jack) Kilpatrick. They held political rallies in the parks.

In 1960, a group centered on Hanover Avenue, and led by Carl Lingamfelter and Wirt Marks, began meeting regularly in Carl’s garage at 2112 Hanover. From that, an association was formed and Jed was named President. Others involved were Bill Carlton, Hudnall Ware, Neville Johnson, who is credited with naming our neighborhood the Fan District, Fred Bauder, Henry Oppenheimer, Jean Dabney, Monty Ferrar, Madison Macon and Penn Montague. The first members’ meeting was in October 1961 after Adella Watlington, the first secretary of the group, hand wrote over 400 notes inviting people to join the association. Bob Forsyth was the first Treasurer and served for five years.

One Fan tradition launched in 1978 in the 2100 block of Hanover Avenue by Jed’s wife, Betty Wilson, and Carol Imajo is the Halloween “block party.” Today the annual event brings thousands of city children to the Fan.

The current FDA Lighting Committee might be surprised to know that during the late **Fred Bauder’s** term from **1964-66**, the City’s Department of Public Utilities offered two gas lamp styles for purchase and sidewalk installation at either \$98.75 for the “round” style or \$51.00 for the “square with eagle” style. A few of these lamps still exist throughout the Fan. The 2500 block of Kensington coordinated efforts to install the round style on the entire block.

Page Bauder was six when her father was President. She recently found some files that included blueprints of a swimming complex intended to be built somewhere in the Fan. That discovery now makes sense of the article in the April 1964 *Fan Fair*, “A Swimming Pool Club?” Interested parties were asked to attend a meeting and “bring any ideas. . . , including suggestions of specific locations for such a

pool. “ There was a second article in the following issue, but it is an idea that must have died due to a lack of a good location.

Page remembers the comradeship of the children growing up in the Fan, with whom she continues to communicate today – Herbert Jones, Robert, Clark and Richard Mitchell, Paul and Betty Wilson and Jane Oppenheimer. There were many activities planned for the children. She speaks fondly about the anticipation and her participation in the bike race event planned by the Amrheins in 1971. Living near Meadow Park, she remembered it for many years as a “mound” with a sandbox before the current landscaping plan moved forward in 1971.

One decision her family faced was whether to send Page to Fox or to her mother’s alma mater, Collegiate, which was located at the time in the 1600 block of Monument Avenue between First English Lutheran Church and Grace Covenant Presbyterian Church. Fred liked the idea of Page being able to walk to school, so either would work. Collegiate “won” but her short walk ended when the school eventually relocated to its current location in the West End.

The neighborhood “safe house” was the former Chiocca’s restaurant at the corner of Meadow and Park (now Garnett’s Café). The children were told that Frank Chiocca kept everyone’s keys in case they got locked out.

Charles Weaver (1966-67) created a “Garden Questions and Answers” column beginning in the second volume of what was then called “Fan Fair.” He had a committee to assist the urban gardener. He also promoted changing Park Avenue back to the original name, Scuffle Towne Road.

Charles established the first official relationship with the Police Department by inviting then Lt. W.W. Costin to speak at the Midwinter Fan District Meeting on “The Problem and How You Can Cure It,” where he outlined safety “dos & don’ts” and encouraged citizens to be watchdogs for the neighborhood.

Charles’ Annual Meeting highlighted area trafficways, including the proposed expressway south of Idlewood Avenue, that is now the Downtown Expressway. The Planning Commission’s “Community Renewal Program (CRP),” which included a recommendation for widening Meadow and several other streets running through the Fan, met strong opposition at the meeting, and as one opponent stated, would “bisect and destroy” the Fan.

Area schools were being evaluated by the CRP and included a proposal to replace Binford Middle School with a new structure, selling Stonewall Jackson Elementary School, and moving the students William Fox School. We know now that only half of that happened.

City Council approved an FDA request to acquire the remaining land in the block where Fox School is located for development as the school’s recreation area. \$225,000 was included in the 1966-67 capital budget to accomplish that project.

During **John McDonald’s** term (1967-68), 280 people attended the spring meeting to hear about a house-to-house survey of the Fan to be done by the City as a basis for the revisions to the 1964 Master Plan. Once the current conditions were documented, the plan would establish objectives and programs to achieve established priorities. The FDA would then be in a position to seek funds as the City

developed its annual capital budget. Fred Cox was appointed to head the FDA steering committee for the Master Plan.

Mayor Crowe attended that meeting and commented that the good attendance indicated the vitality of the organization. In the spirit of acknowledging neighborhood challenges, he apologized for complicating the traffic problems in the Fan by commuting to and from work daily through the Fan.

The Master Plan Committee was busy during John McDonald's term. At the midwinter FDA meeting in March of 1968, Committee Chair Fred Cox, Jim Glave, Robert Hill, consultant to the FDA for the preparation of the plan and John McDonald, said they appeared before the City Planning Commission to present the FDA's requests for the 1968-69 capital budget. Seven projects were proposed to be implemented or studied, in addition to the improvement of Meadow Street Park: (1) Fox School Playground – design and implementation; (2) Harrison Street -- widening from Broad to Cary; (3) West Avenue – closing at Harrison; (4) new access to the 2000 block bounded by Stuart, Rowland, Park and Meadow going west; (5) "Heart-of-the-Fan" pedestrian way – design and implementation; (6) Street furniture design project; and (7) Street lighting – implementation for east-west streets between park and Floyd, and north-south streets between Harrison and the Boulevard, and Grace from Harrison to the Boulevard. Some proposals moved forward and others we continue to lobby for today.

A November meeting focused again on Master Plan issues, including amendments to the language regarding traffic ways. The revised plan would include a policy statement to the effect that, "for the protection of the Fan District and other residential neighborhoods, through traffic be discouraged." It was at this time that the dialogue began to consider reverting West Grace Street to two-way use.

The Garden Committee focused on alley improvements to accomplish a communications structure with the city for many different issues. They worked with the Chief of the Division of Street Sanitation to implement a call-in service for special trash pick-up, with the goal to eliminate bulk trash in the alleys. The Superintendent of Environmental Services addressed the problems of insufficient trash cans, overgrown weeds, street and sidewalk repairs, and abandoned cars.

Henry "Hal" McVey, III (1969-70) deserves some credit for living in four different homes in the Fan. He grew up in the 2000 block of Stuart, moved to Granby and Hanover before ending up on Monument Avenue. Hal's wife chaired the Holiday House Tour the year Hal was President and they opened their home on Hanover in 1971 and Monument in 1977 to the crowds.

A comprehensive rezoning of the entire city was under consideration during Hal's term. Members of the Board met with city officials to discuss zoning laws applicable to the Fan and how any changes to the then R-6, "Multiple Family Dwelling District" could better reflect a move to single-family use.

He remembers, now with good humor, the time he was called a Communist and a Fascist in the same breath during discussions about preservation districts.

Coming in the June/July issue. . .The Seventies. The author also welcomes any additions or corrections to this article. If you have any issues of Fanfare or any other documents reflecting the history of the Fan District Association, please contact Gail Zwirner at gzwirner@richmond.edu.