



History of Walnut Hill Farm at a Glance

Lawson Turner Thompson owned 169 acres in 1860 that encompass today many of the townhouses, single-family houses, and apartments that stretch from Accotink Creek parkland on the south, Lee Highway to the north, and roughly Nutley Street to the west. The eastern border later changed; a Thompson acquired the land that is now the remaining piece of Walnut Hill Farm. This area was part of land grants owned by several people in the 18th century.

Thompson was born in Fairfax County in 1812 and died Aug. 11, 1886, at age 74. His father and grandfather had been in Fairfax County since about 1755. The family came from Scotland. Lawson married Frances Allen, who died around 1850 at about age 40.

Thompson's son Armistead Thompson, a schoolteacher, enlisted in the Confederate Army at Dranesville in 1861. He served in Company C, 5th Regiment Virginia Volunteers. In July 1863 he was captured during the Battle at Gettysburg. He died on Nov. 23, 1864, at Point Lookout in Saint Mary's County, Maryland, 17 months after imprisonment, at age 26. His family brought him home.

Fairfax County's Armistead Park, which runs along Bear Branch from Lee Highway to Route 50, is named for him.

A family cemetery on the site of the Pan Am Shopping Center includes marked and unmarked graves. Armistead is buried there. Alfred Thompson defied the developer's wrecking of the cemetery in 1979 and went to court to keep the burials there. He won.

The land was divided years ago among children, and developers bought parcels from them. Names such as Covington (the street and the large townhouse area) reflect some Thompson family spouse names.

The Thompsons were farmers back in the 19th century and 20th. Guessing from the timeframe and what was grown on farms nearby, it could have been wheat or corn. Possibly a dairy farm.

Walnut Hill Farm had one large walnut tree that didn't look healthy a few years ago. It was near the burned building. The stone-foundation cellar had a fireplace, which indicated that they or domestics may have lived there. It would be fabulous if the developer would allow an archaeological survey of the site before excavation. If an old privy or trash pit could be located, there could be 19th century ceramics, buttons, etc. If that could be done, a historic marker might be considered near Bear Branch (county park system), an idyllic setting along the creek. The end of the last farm for miles around should be noted. It is probably unlikely that the land will remain undeveloped. The owners would have had to work out a donation before the current proposal. The land is assessed at just under \$2M, and taxes are \$21,000-ish a year, though no building is on it.

- Sue Kovach Shuman, July 16, 2019

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