World War II Chinquapin Village

With the advent of World War II, the United States government reactivated the Alexandria Naval Torpedo Station on the waterfront. Employees at the Torpedo Factory dramatically increased from 38 people in 1938 to more than 5000 in 1946. This large influx of new employees required more housing than was available in Alexandria. Chinquapin Village War Housing Project was constructed by the Navy to accommodate Torpedo Factory employees and their growing families.

Chinquapin Village was a neighborly place with frame houses neatly lining courts radiating from a circular road, still used in Chinquapin Park today. Residents, such as Jerry Sare, remembered it as a "lovely place." Three members of the nine-person Sare family are pictured above in front of their Chinquapin home with the family dog; left to right, Jerry, his mother Dorothy and brother Bill, about 1947.

Courtesy of Jerry Sare

Living in Chinquapin Village

Working class families from many different states moved into Chinquapin Village and became a homogenous community through their shared work experience, values and goals. A bus transported employees to the Torpedo Factory every morning and returned them at the end of their shift. The Factory functioned with three shifts of workers each day, seven days a week during the height of World War II.

Jerry Sare remembered, "It was a big family. Small town family. . . When you walked down the street you could speak to everybody, because you knew everybody. Of course, there were 300 families, and you could easily have 1500 people, with all the kids . . ."

The 150 duplexes built in Chinquapin Village were constructed to house 300 families. The homes were assigned by lottery to Torpedo Factory workers, who received units with one, two or three bedrooms depending upon family size. The village was designed to be an almost self-contained community, since it was some distance from the town. It included a maintenance building, community hall with large auditorium, softball field, playground and security fence. The boxing club, scouts, a theater group, teen club and church meetings all used the community hall.

Brice Warthen recalled, "We had a team and played in Northern Virginia Softball League. And when we played you'd find people would come out and sit in their folding chairs . . . along the embankment. . . it was a closely knit community."

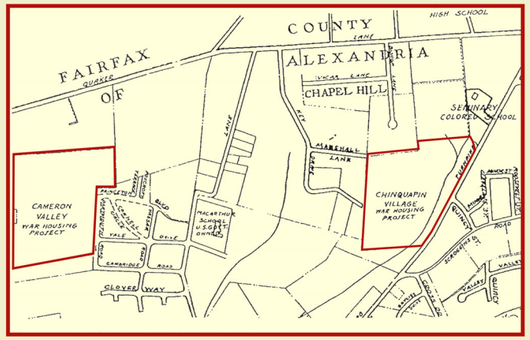
Chinquapin Scores Win

Chinquapin Village and Fairlington nines were victorious in yesterday's Northern Virginia Softball League games. The Chinquapin team dged out the league leading Parkfairfax nine, 7-6, while Fairlington nosed out Cameron Valley, for their first win of the season, 7-4.

Alexandria Gazette, 15 May 1947 *Alexandria Gazette, 13 June 1947*

Chinquapin Village was an active place, and sports were an important part of community life. The Chinquapin Boxing Club produced several Golden Glove boxers. The softball team played local teams from other new developments, such as the Cameron Valley Housing Project and Parkfairfax.

Brice Warthen. recollected, "Every Saturday night they had dances, and people from Alexandria (And, we knew everybody, I mean we went to G.W. [George Washington] High School so you knew everybody). . . They'd come out and go to the dances at the community center. A very nice place."



The parcels of land for two World War II federal housing projects, Chinquapin Village and Cameron Valley, appear on this 1946 map. Children from Chinquapin Village walked through the woods (now Forest Park) to reach MacArthur School, noted on the map as owned by the U.S. government. The school was built for children from the two projects.

Alexandria Library, Special Collections.

The 150 duplexes in the Chinquapin Village Housing Project were arranged around courts connected to a central, circular road, the "Chinquapin Circle." A triangular-shaped, common play area can be seen in the center of the village in this mid-1940s map.

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Torpedo Factory workers march with a Mark XIII torpedo made at the Torpedo Factory in the Alexandria Navy Day Parade in the 1940s.

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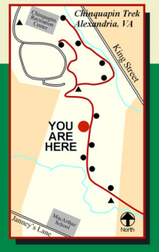

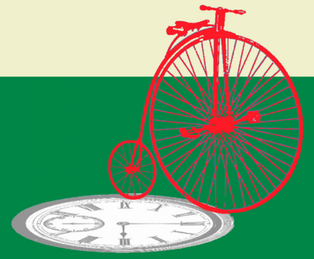

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