



City of Alexandria  
Office of Historic Alexandria  
*Alexandria Legacies*  
**Oral History Program**



**Project Name:** *Alexandria Legacies – Chinquapin Village Oral History Project*

**Title:** *Interview with Brice Warthen*

**Date of Interview:** *November 8, 2001*

**Location of Interview:** *Au Bon Pain Restaurant, Pentagon City, Va.*

**Interviewer:** *Jen Hembree*

**Transcriber:** *Jen Hembree*

**Abstract:** During World War II, Chinquapin Village was established as housing for workers at the Torpedo Factory in Alexandria. Mr. Warthen moved to Chinquapin with his family when he was 11 years old. He shares memories of the community's softball team and other activities provided for the children and teens. He describes the Chinquapin homes, its community center and the neighborhood context. "...It was a very friendly place to live."

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*The Chinquapin Village church community, ca. 1943  
(Courtesy of B. Warthen)*

**Schools for the Children of Chinquapin Village**

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| Jen Hembree:   | We were talking about the layout. What else were you going to add about that?  |
| Brice Warthen: | Nothing more. Everybody lived in the same style house. It was comfortable. Not a first-line house by any means, but they were comfortable. For the most part you had very good neighbors because everybody, everybody, worked in the same place, and everybody went to school. |
| J.H.:          | Was there a school for the actual village, or were you part of Alexandria?   |
| Brice Warthen: | No, there was not. There was one school, a grade school. MacArthur School was built and it was roughly halfway between Chinquapin and another development called Cameron Valley. Have you heard of Cameron Valley?   |
| J.H.:          | It was it down on the border of the, the edge of the town, near Cameron Run?   |

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| Brice Warthen:                           | Well, Cameron Valley was like Chinquapin. It no longer exists. Elementary students in grades, I suppose, one through five went to MacArthur. Now I say one through five because my brother went there and he was in the fourth grade I think when we got there. And that school is still there by the way. MacArthur. And most of the students walked through the woods to get to the school.  |
| J.H.:                                    | Forest Park, or what is known now as Forest Park? Through those woods?   |
| Brice Warthen:                           | I don't know. I can't answer that.   |
| J.H.:                                    | I have a map of Alexandria.  |
| Brice Warthen:                           | [Looking at map] There is Chinquapin and here is MacArthur School and Cameron Valley was right in here, this area here. And so the students in the lower grades just walked right to it. And at that time, this area in here, some of the streets were here, but these were not. And the students used to walk right through there [pointing to Forest Park]. Now others, I was in the sixth grade. We went downtown to Jefferson School. Which was [pause] right here, as I recall.   |
| J.H.:                                    | That's quite a trek.   |
| Brice Warthen:                           | Now, we went up to the seventh grade. Then, after that we went to George Washington High School, which everybody in the city did. That was the only high school in the city. And we all went to school there. To get back to your original question, Douglas MacArthur School was built for the kids in Chinquapin and Cameron Valley and anybody else that lived in that area. There were a few other people who lived in that area. At that time keep in mind that Alexandria ended just a block, or two past Chinquapin, Quaker Lane. |
| J.H.:                                    | So the rest of it was part of Fairfax at that time?  |
| Brice Warthen:                           | It was part of Fairfax. That's correct. Also, I'll just mention this, you probably heard of T.C. Williams High School, which is right beside Chinquapin [Park]. There used to be, where T.C. Williams is now, there was a black elementary school.   |
| J.H.:                                    | Is that the Seminary School? I think they called?  |
| Brice Warthen:                           | No. There is a Seminary. There's two in Alexandria, and at that time in Fairfax, there was the Virginia Episcopal Seminary and School. Both of those institutions are over 150 years old. [pause] But anyway, I think that is why T.C. Williams is built there, because the city owned the property. I don't know that for a fact, but it seems logical.   |
| <b>Description of Chinquapin Village</b> |  |
| J.H.:                                    | I have a question about your yards [at Chinquapin]. Were there any fences? Or did you all share the same yard?   |
| Brice Warthen:                           | The only fence...no, we all shared the same yard. There was a fence entirely around Chinquapin when we first moved in there. And the reason being, I think, was that housing—Chinquapin belonged to the Navy. Since it was Torpedo Plant workers, which was the Navy, they   |

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|  | <p>owned and operated the housing. And at some point, I don't remember when, the Navy turned it over to the Alexandria Housing Authority, or somebody else, and I don't really know when that was. I think it was, for the most part, after I left there. But other than that, no, there were no fences. Wasn't much room. We had a lot of open spaces, but right around the houses there wasn't that much room for our families.</p>   |
| <p>J.H.:</p>                                   | <p>So in between the houses.</p>  |
| <p>Brice Warthen:</p>                          | <p>Yeah, let me just show you how the houses were situated [pencil drawing]. You notice it was kind of a court-like there where my house was. There was a building here, a building here; there was one like this and one like this, and like this. Now this was, they referred to this as a court. Out here was a parking space and you come up inside and walks all around this way. Then over here, behind here, there would have been another court. A smaller—we were one of the bigger ones...it would have something along that order. And you had open spaces in here. And all these courts had some space. We had a very large one. And that's the way it was built. In a series of courts. And basically at the corners, you had the biggest courts.</p>  |
| <p><b>Activities in Chinquapin Village</b></p> |   |
| <p>J.H.:</p>                                   | <p>You said there was the community hall. Do you want to talk about anything you used to do there?</p>  |
| <p>Brice Warthen:</p>                          | <p>Well, we had the shop, as I said, where the maintenance for Chinquapin was done. There was a big, pretty large room, I suppose it would hold 200 people, and that was used on Sundays for church, on Friday night or Saturday night, maybe both, I don't remember, as a teenage club. There was kitchen facilities in it. It was pretty nice, really. Now that was not there when I first moved in. That was probably built not too long afterwards, maybe two years later or something like that. But before that there was a wooden frame building in the same place where you could hold church services, but it wouldn't hold too many people. Also...I guess it was another wood frame building next to that original one and they had a boxing club in it. Yeah, we had a couple pretty good boxers that lived in Chinquapin. I don't remember how long that existed. I know we had two brothers who went to the Golden Gloves tournament and one of 'em made it to the finals. Also, down where the recreation or community building was, there was a playground there and it was also a big softball field, and I have some knowledge of that because in 1947 I was the assistant playground manager, I worked for the Recreation Department. In fact, if you were standing out on the street, looking toward the softball field, when you got back to—where's your map? Let me show you. Okay, now. Right along here, the land drops off and you went down on an embankment all along here down to the playing field. And we had a team, played in the Northern Virginia Softball League. And</p> |

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|                | when we played you'd find people would come out and sit in their folding chairs and everything all along the embankment up top I think, so they could see. Like I say, it was closely knit community.  |
| J.H.:          | Was it softball or baseball games that were actually played?   |
| Brice Warthen: | Softball. [pause] And if you call and talk to Jerry Sare, you can remind him that you know he was the center-fielder on that team.   |
| J.H.:          | What was the name of the team?   |
| Brice Warthen: | I knew you were gonna ask that. I don't know, other than just Chinquapin. We probably had a name, but if we did, it escapes me now.  |
| J.H.:          | Did you just play other communities in the area?   |
| Brice Warthen: | We were in the league. I can tell you who all was in them, not everybody, I can't, just some of them. Parkfairfax had a team; Arna Valley had a team. I think Fairlington did—I'm not 100% sure of that. I think Cameron Valley had a team. I'm kinda guessing now. I definitely remember Parkfairfax and Arna Valley, and I don't recall the others. About six or seven [teams].  |
| J.H.:          | Did you ever play?   |
| Brice Warthen: | I was a left fielder.  |
| J.H.:          | [pause] Were you a member of any other club? Was there a Boy Scout troop?  |
| Brice Warthen: | Yes, we had a Boy Scout troop. Troop number 136. It was founded there. I was a member of that for a couple of years. I don't remember. And they had Girl Scout troops, Cub Scouts, Brownies, and they had a teen club that met in the teen center we were talking about earlier. The church had youth groups.  |
| J.H.:          | Was it a nondenominational [church]? How did it work?  |
| Brice Warthen: | Primarily. We got most of our support from the Baptists ministers in the area. And, on occasion, one of our ministers was the—who'd come out to preach—was the retired chief of chaplains of the Army, and as a personal note, he subsequently conducted my wife's and my marriage. And by the way, my wife is a third-generation Alexandrian. And I have to brag a little bit. You've heard of Cameron Station in Alexandria. They just named one of the streets for my wife's brother who was killed on Iwo Jima. They named one of the streets after him. |
| J.H.:          | Wow. Can you show me here [pointing at map]. Is it going to be on here?  |
| Brice Warthen: | Not unless this is a new map.  |
| J.H.:          | I don't know when this was printed.  |
| Brice Warthen: | It would be Grimm Drive. I don't think Cameron Station is on here yet. It's not here as a housing development.   |
| J.H.:          | So, it's one of the new [developments].  |
| Brice Warthen: | Yes, one of the new ones.  |

| <b>Design of Chinquapin Village</b> |   |
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| J.H.:                               | [pause] I had some basic questions about the street layout [of Chinquapin Village]. If there were streetlights, fire hydrants, or also would they have driveways...?  |
| Brice Warthen:                      | The fire hydrants were in there. The streetlights were in there very early. They were still paving the street right here. And they planted trees. They were real small, but if you go to Chinquapin now, Chinquapin Park, they're very big trees. And telephone service was available with the—in those days with the economy and the War effort expanding and all that, it took a while to get a telephone, but we had the service right away. |
| J.H.:                               | And you said these [pointing to map] little indentations here were for the cars, like car parks you could call them?  |
| Brice Warthen:                      | Yeah, and also you could park on the street. And there were streets like here [pointing at map]. And you have to remember another thing. This was 1941. You didn't have many cars. In other word, families had zero or one car. They didn't have two for each adult and one for each child as they do now. So parking was not a problem.  |
| J.H.:                               | I'm just curious about community gardens. There's one there [at Chinquapin Park] now, I know.   |
| Brice Warthen:                      | The only thing that you would find. Let me see if I can show you. Not this house, but back when we lived over here, off to the side here, my father would plant tomatoes. So, in that regard people planted flowers; they planted a little bit of vegetables, but not gardens as such.  |
| <b>Living in Chinquapin Village</b> |   |
| J.H.:                               | Is there anything in particular, a story, that's a good memory that you want to share?  |
| Brice Warthen:                      | No... Actually, it was a very friendly place to live. And remember, we were the newcomers to the city. Basically, the welcome was pretty good. Not a hundred percent because there were 300 families moving in to the city right away and it put some strain on their budget, as you would expect. But they and the schools—we were welcome—but still, we were a mile, two miles away basically from much else in Alexandria.                   |
| J.H.:                               | I have a question [about] supermarkets or grocery stores, etc.? Was there one provided for you?   |
| Brice Warthen:                      | Not when we first moved in. Subsequently, right down here a Safeway went in there. Jerry Sare, and one of his friends, Dave Skelley, were the first stock boys. And he reminded me of that yesterday. Needless to say, I've known Jerry for 60 years. And he and my brother and Dave Skelley, I just mentioned a moment ago, all joined the Air Force together at one time.   |
| J.H.:                               | Nice. Did you walk there then?  |
| Brice Warthen:                      | Yes. It was a small Safeway store. And I don't know how long it   |

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|                       | <p>stayed there. Somewhere along I think after I, shortly after I left there, or later, it disappeared. But what happened then, you started having more stores and the Fairlington shopping center which is just a couple blocks away; transportation, more people had cars, so I think that—and there were bigger stores. That was not a big store. So it probably had become economically unfeasible to operate.</p>   |
| J.H.:                 | <p>Did most of your extracurricular activities take place in Chinquapin, or [for] people in general, was it mostly [at] the community hall? Or did you also spend time in [what is now] “Old Town”?</p>  |
| Brice Warthen:        | <p>If I had to say where most of our activities took place, probably took place, as it does today, in the schools. Because you know our schools had football teams, they had dances, and so forth. We had activities that were centered in Chinquapin. It pretty much had become, after a while, like any other community. You saw people doing different things and you saw the differences in people, which you’d expect. And the other thing you have to keep in mind when you’re talking to anyone from Chinquapin now, generally speaking, in other words, as I’ve told you, I’m 71 years old, and I just turned 11 when we moved there. So you’re not likely to talk to many people (although there are some around) that were 30 years old then. Things look different in the eyes of an 11-year-old than they do in the eyes of a 30-year-old. And what I remember may not necessarily, in some cases, be the most important things there. And that’s why I would like for you to talk to some other people, particularly people who stayed there longer than I did. And I see Jerry quite frequently -- a real nice guy, and has a fantastic memory for people, in particular. And he may even be able to tell you [of] some other people. I was trying to think if there were some older people that were still alive. A lady who lives across the street from me now, Mrs. Kerr, is 91 or 92 years old. And she would probably see things a little differently than I did. Unfortunately, she was moved to a nursing home about a month ago. There are a couple people still living. But generally speaking you’ll have to settle for those of us that were 11 or 12. There are some I’m trying to think that were probably 20 or so that are still...but I lose track of these people, where they are. And all the rest of us were the same age or within a year or two.</p> |
| <b>Final Comments</b> |  |
| J.H.:                 | <p>I don’t have any more specific questions. Is there anything else you want to add?</p>   |
| Brice Warthen:        | <p>I’m sure there’s a lot of more that you’d like to get in your report, that’s why I recommend you talk to some other people....You did see, from Chinquapin, a vast upward mobility of the children....This is probably no greater than what was occurring say in Alexandria and Arlington, or anywhere else. Except maybe the starting point was a little bit different.</p>  |



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|  | <p>Remember, all the people that come here, as I said, were members of the working class. They come here to improve themselves, which by extension means, economically and so forth; they weren't doing too well where they come from. I know in my family, the case -- that certainly was true. But when you look back and then see the number who went on to college and graduated, and there are some out there with the Ph.D.s now. Most of them, I know of them, but I don't know them, they were younger than I was there. And I don't think that was—one of the reasons, I should say, that at the end of World War II, you've heard of the GI Bill, where they paid for veterans to go to college. In my opinion, and I was a not a veteran, I was at the tail-end, I went to college in 1947 and...[End]</p> |
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