Families First

A History of Fairfax Memorial Park

1957-2007

By Garry E. Adelman

Printed and Bound in the United States.

Published by: Fairfax Memorial Park
9900 Braddock Road
Fairfax, Virginia 22032

Contents

Introduction v

Chapter 1 Beginnings 1

Chapter 2 A Catholic Cemetery 7

Chapter 3 Challenges, Change, and Vision 13

Chapter 4 Growth 19

Chapter 5 Vision Fulfilled 27

Introduction

Four men stood atop a small hill and looked over an open tract of land outside the town of Fairfax, Virginia. The terrain around them rolled off gently into the distance. It was December 1956. The group was there to settle upon the design of a new Catholic cemetery—Calvary Memorial Park. One man, a lawyer, was the cemetery's secretary-treasurer, Cornelius H. Doherty. His friend, Dr. William Dolan, was the cemetery's president. The third was landscape architect Earl C. Grever, and the last was Doherty's son, Cornelius H. Doherty, Jr. Everyone called him "Neil."

Neil Doherty could not have foreseen the importance of the land before him—he would work or live here for more than fifty years. One day his parents, grandparents, sisters, and uncles would all be buried on the hill where the four men stood. One day, he and his children will rest beside his ancestors, and unborn generations will go to the small hill to visit their graves. Of course, the Dohertys are not unique in this respect; such rituals are common in burial places across the globe. Cemeteries, like families, span generations, connecting the past, present, and future. Nowhere is this as true as at Fairfax Memorial Park.

In retrospect, on that day in 1956 the doctor, the lawyer, and the landscape architect

were contemplating a remarkable thing. They planned to create a tradition—to forever tie their lives, and the lives of countless others yet unknown, to the gently rolling land outside Fairfax. Cornelius Doherty was sure that he could do it because he believed in putting families first. He was willing to stake his venture's success or failure on this key principle. It has succeeded. Fifty years later, Fairfax Memorial Park is the premier cemetery in Northern Virginia. This is no accident. It is a place where a mother knows her children and grandchildren can visit long after her death, where a young man can go to connect with his forebears. It is a sanctuary where people have mourned, reflected, and celebrated the lives of their loved ones for a half-century.

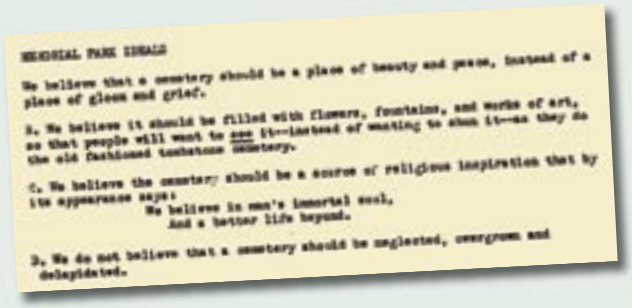
Chapter 1

Beginnings

In the days before the Capital Beltway and vast urban sprawl, the counties comprising northern Virginia were much as they had ever been—largely agricultural and sparsely populated. But by the 1950s, things were starting to change. The tremendous expansion of the federal government as a result of the Great Depression and World War II brought hundreds of thousands of federal employees to suburban Washington, DC. Many of these young professionals settled in Fairfax County, whose population had grown from 99,000 in 1950 to 275,000 by 1960. Of these inhabitants, approximately 15 percent were Catholic.

Under canon law, Catholics had to be interred in a bishop-approved cemetery. The Richmond diocese, which governed northern Virginia, had only blessed a few sites in northern Virginia as appropriate for Catholic interment—small church cemeteries and a modest section of Columbia Gardens Cemetery in Arlington. Faced with an increase in his flock, Richmond Bishop Peter Leo Ireton sought a solution. An acquaintance of Ireton volunteered to raise money and open a Catholic cemetery in northern Virginia. Ireton's attorney, Cornelius H. Doherty of Arlington, reviewed this 1955 proposal and found it to be inadequate. Ireton suggested that Doherty

Cornelius H. Doherty, Sr.



MEMORIAL PARK IDEALS

We believe that a cemetery should be a place of beauty and peace, instead of a place of gloom and grief.

2. We believe it should be filled with flowers, fountains, and works of art, so that people will want to see it--instead of wanting to shun it--as they do the old fashioned tombstone cemetery.

3. We believe the cemetery should be a source of religious inspiration that by its appearance says:

We believe in man's immortal soul,
And a better life beyond.

3. We do not believe that a cemetery should be neglected, overgrown and dilapidated.

The popularity of memorial parks was national in scope, but local forces drove their growth. In February 1960, St. Leo's Church in Fairfax printed its thoughts on "Memorial Park Ideals" in its newsletter.

Memorial Parks

In 1917 Hubert Eaton conceived America's first memorial park in Glendale, California. He envisioned "a great park devoid of misshapen monuments and other signs of earthly death, but filled with towering trees, sweeping lawns, splashing fountains, beautiful statuary, and memorial architecture." The memorial park trend was born. As alternatives to traditional cemeteries, memorial parks contain mostly flat headstones which do not obscure a landscape dotted with trees and memorials. The parks grew in popularity and spread throughout the United States in the middle of the twentieth century. This is the type of cemetery Cornelius H. Doherty envisioned—one of natural landscape. Fairfax Memorial Park vice president Michael Doherty carries on his grandfather's dedication to the model: "That's the whole thing about memorial parks; they are for the living. It's not scary; it's a pleasant place to come."

instead approach Catholic laymen in northern Virginia for funding and start the cemetery himself. Doherty was reluctant. After all, he was a trial lawyer, and a busy one at that. As a favor to the bishop, however, he offered to look into the matter.

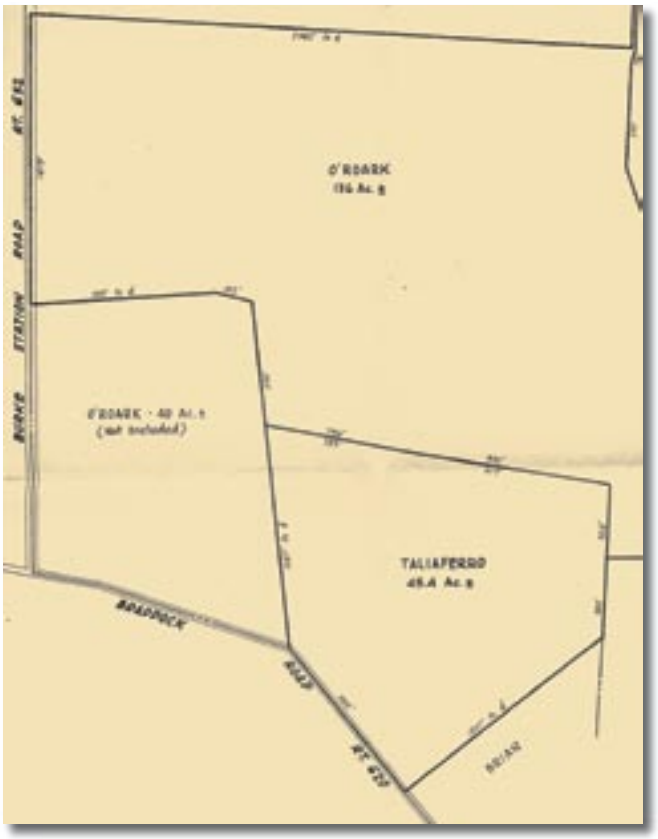
Doherty did not know a lot about cemeteries but he understood this much: while northern Virginia's population was growing, most of the newcomers were young people—members of what is now called the "Greatest Generation"—who presumably would not have need for a cemetery for a long time. Somewhat discouraged, Doherty approached his friend, Dr. William Dolan, gauging his interest in a possible cemetery—a memorial park, actually. Dolan, confident of broad support for a Catholic cemetery in the area, was interested and Doherty decided that they could make it work. Dolan wrote to Bishop Ireton on December 8, 1955, to inform him that "the men are here and the money is here and in the right hands." This was enough for Ireton.

Dolan handled the investors while Doherty looked into legal, real estate, and operational matters. Doherty capitalized on an acquaintance with the superintendent of the newly formed Gate of Heaven Catholic Cemetery in Silver Spring, Maryland, to become a quick study in cemetery management. Doherty learned how to lay out sections, became familiar with the equipment, and studied cemetery finance. Things moved quickly from there. The precursor to the present cemetery, Calvary Memorial Park, was incorporated on June 20, 1956. At their first meeting, the board tasked Doherty with finding a suitable location. Aware that population growth in Fairfax County would require a proportional increase in the need for basic services, Doherty identified two large tracts of land outside of the growing town of Fairfax. After gauging the interest of the sellers and appearing before the Fairfax County Zoning Board, he arranged for the surveying of the 181-acre "O'Roark" and "Taliaferro" tracts.

Calvary Memorial Park, Inc. purchased the land in October 1956. The following spring, a commercial realtor offered Doherty an additional 40 acres adjacent to these tracts, but at a higher price. Doherty refused. One hundred eighty-one acres was already a lot of land for a rural cemetery. The board expected to need only 20-40 acres in the near future, and the tax and maintenance burden would weigh heavily upon the limited resources of the new corporation. The realtor warned that if Calvary did not buy the land, another group would open its own cemetery right next door. "Help yourself," said Doherty, who doubted that a competing cemetery would actually materialize.

Calvary's board, consisting of Dolan (President), Thomas G. Vivadelli (Vice President), and Doherty (Secretary-Treasurer), borrowed $100,000 and sold 5,000 shares of stock, valued at $25 per share. That December, Doherty and Dolan met landscape architect Earl C. Grever at the recently purchased site. Doherty brought his son, Neil, with him. Neil planned to become a lawyer like his father and was intent upon absorbing as much information as he could. "Basically, I was just sitting at the foot of the gods and learning," he recalled.

As the four men stood atop a hill near the proposed cemetery entrance, Grever spelled out his plans to move large amounts of earth and smooth out the hills. The senior Doherty listened to Grever and frowned. "Wait a minute, wait a minute," he said. "Don't you see this beautiful, rolling land? This is the character of what we think the cemetery should look like, so we do not want to do that." Grever nodded his understanding, but upon proceeding to the next hillock, he said, "Now, we'll take this hill and move it over there." Doherty was puzzled. "Wait a minute," he said. "I told you we just want to lay roads in here, you know, where it's naturally to be laid." Still, ever the landscape architect, Grever made another suggestion for moving earth and Dolan, known for his candor, declared, "Neil, this guy doesn't hear very well,



Calvary Memorial Park purchased the larger O'Roark tract and the Taliaferro tract to the south. They did not secure the forty-acre tract at the corner of Braddock and Burke Station Roads—at least for a while.

Neil Doherty (left) and Cornelius Doherty, Sr., on June 14, 1956. This image was recorded six days before the incorporation of Calvary Memorial Park.

The digging of graves and the care of the grounds continue year-round, as in this 1974 image.

This 1862 map shows the "Furgerson" Farm at center. The area's rolling hills are clearly visible on the map.

Historic Land

Long before the Dohertys came on the scene, the site had seen its share of the trials and tribulations of a growing America. Fairfax County, named for Thomas, sixth Lord of Fairfax, was founded in 1742. The county courthouse, still standing, was erected in the town of Fairfax in 1800. In 1843 Uriah Ferguson purchased a large tract of land two miles southeast of town on Braddock and Burke Station Roads. There, he built a farm and worked the land. The Civil War found Ferguson's farm between the lines of battle—Union troops to the east and Confederate troops to the west. Men from both sides stopped to fill canteens in Ferguson's stream.

Ferguson's land was passed down through generations and subdivided, but remained largely agricultural. Calvary Memorial Park purchased 181 acres of the original tract in 1956. While most of the land around it has been developed, Ferguson's hills and fields look much as they ever did—his old farmhouse still stands.

does he?" The group laughed, Grever got the message, and they continued their tour.

Within two months Grever submitted his work plan which included construction of roads, clearing of trees, drilling a well, and installing water lines and culverts. Much other work remained. Calvary's Section One and its corresponding plots—now known as the Garden of the Crucifix—needed to be laid out. The surrounding grounds had to be attractively landscaped as well, which was no small task. Just cutting the grass on so many acres became a perpetual job.

The directors and Neil worked to prepare for the cemetery's opening, but they could only do so much. Calvary Memorial Park needed a permanent staff—a grounds crew and a sales team. That took a while. The first grounds superintendent did not work out. Within a year, Wilson Short replaced him and brought along his brother-in-law Kenneth Haines. On Haines's first day of work he helped stake out the plots for the cemetery's second section. Over the next thirty-seven years, Haines would see the cemetery grow to more than a dozen sections. When Short left in 1960, Haines took over as superintendent. Having lived on farms most of his life, Haines knew how to do this work. He also knew how to tend the extra land along with other, local farmers who grazed cattle. What Haines did not know, he learned: he took horticulture and agronomy classes, called on the Fairfax County Agricultural Agent for help with treating tree and lawn diseases, and consulted with Cornelius Doherty as needed.

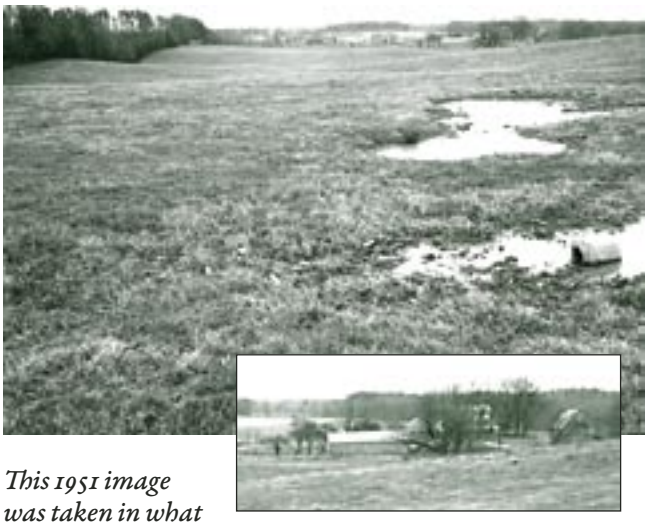
Tending the cemetery was more than just a job for Haines. He and his family moved into the antebellum farmhouse on the property and made it their home for more than three decades. "My wife and children loved this place," Haines said. "They still think of it as home." As time went on, even Haines's grandchildren came to know the cemetery. "They just loved to ride on the tractor with me," he recalled. Like most old houses, Calvary's farmhouse needed

a great deal of work. "There was no insulation in it and it was cold—oh, it was cold," Haines remembered.

Finding a good sales team took even more time. In those days, most cemeteries hired a sales manager who brought on his own team of salesmen. His team would aim to sell the most expensive plots and headstones to maximize commissions. The sales manager and his team would all make money—lots of money. This approach, however, would not work at Calvary Memorial Park, for it was clear from the beginning that this was not to be your typical cemetery. Doherty's personal philosophy put families, not profits, first. All prices for plots would be listed on the brochure. Customers would not be pushed to purchase something beyond their means or desires. "We have never, ever pressured our customers—I mean no matter what—our philosophy has always been one of guidance," said Neil.

This philosophy of guidance was first embodied by Neil's father, Cornelius H. Doherty, who also acted as Calvary's general manager. He believed families coming to the cemetery should be treated as if they were his own. Ken Haines recalled of his old boss, "He was one of the finest men I ever met in my life and he is one of the reasons I stayed as long as I did. I would rather have had that man's word than another man's contract." Because his philosophy ran against prevailing currents of the day, Doherty found that he had to build his own sales team from scratch to ensure the level of service he demanded. From then on, Doherty, and later Neil, and later Neil's son, Michael, interviewed and hired salespeople. There would be no sales managers at Calvary Memorial Park.

The cemetery's debut, however, could not await the solution to every staffing challenge. Preparations were made and grounds beautified in anticipation of the park's planned dedication on July 7, 1957. Due to illness, Bishop Ireton was unable to consecrate the cemetery, so the Right Reverend Monsignor Arthur J. Taylor acted

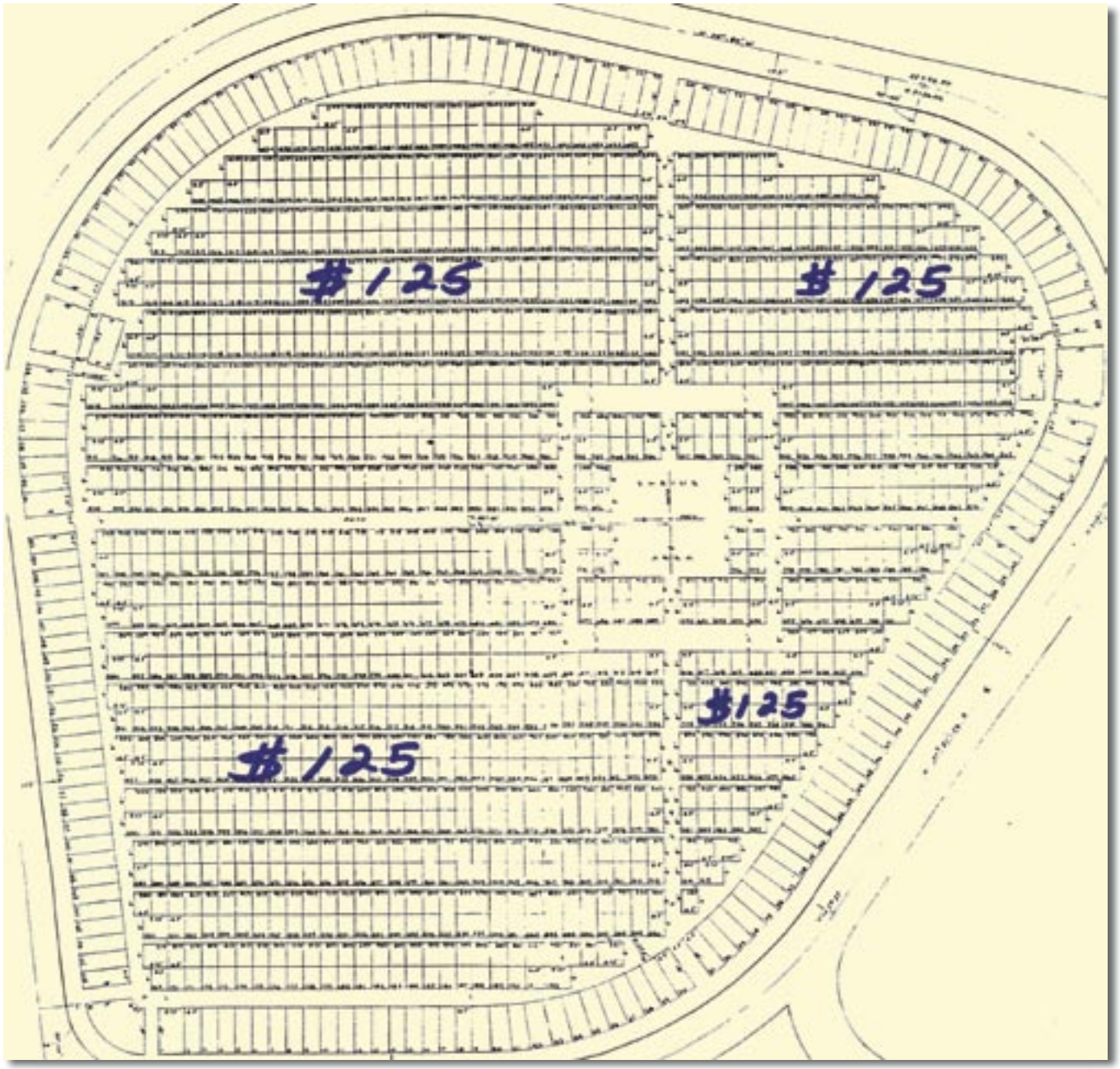


This 1951 image was taken in what would become Section Three. The antebellum farm is visible in the right background (see inset).

Founding families on the grounds in 1960 (front from left): Neil Doherty, John Patrick Dolan, Bill Dolan III, Dr. Bill Dolan, and Cornelius H. Doherty, Sr.

as his delegate. He also blessed each plot in a special section of the cemetery reserved only for priests. For all the fanfare, however, there were still no deceased on the grounds—for exactly eight days. On July 15, 1957, George A. Cunney, Sr., of Arlington, Virginia, was interred in Section One, becoming the first burial in the first section of Calvary Memorial Park.

Cornelius H. Doherty printed section maps clearly showing the prices of various options. The practice of giving customers all the information they need continues to this day.



Chapter 2

A Catholic Cemetery

After opening the cemetery, the board of directors still faced a steep challenge. Here they were, in what was considered the middle of nowhere, with a large loan to pay off and with very little revenue with which to pay it. The cemetery had diocesan approval but it was new and out of the way. In its first year, Calvary sold but a few dozen plots. Hoping to get the word out, the board asked Ireton to draft a letter recommending the new cemetery to Catholics in northern Virginia. This letter was included in Calvary Memorial Park's first brochure.

Doherty sent the new brochure to Catholic parishes in northern Virginia, but with little effect. Business was slow and Neil, acting as salesman, was often at Calvary waiting for customers to come by. To occupy his time, Neil cut grass and helped out however he could. Sometimes, he and Bill Dolan shot skeet behind the superintendent's house. Eventually, Calvary found a full-time salesman who embodied Doherty's philosophy—Martin Cottini. Cottini worked as a salesman for years and experienced the ups and downs of business, just as Neil had. Sometimes Doherty had to pay Cottini in Calvary stock due to lack of funds. Even decades after leaving the cemetery, Cottini still held onto his Calvary shares.

Calvary's first brochure contained a portrait of and a letter from Bishop Peter L. Ireton.

In these early months there was an even more challenging development in close proximity. Cornelius Doherty had too easily dismissed the threat of another cemetery on adjacent land. The new cemetery, called Fairfax Memory Gardens, was to be non-sectarian, but it still could not help but dampen Calvary's business. Complicating matters were aggressive practices of nearby cemeteries courting the Catholic community, without diocesan approval. The Calvary board had labored to become an approved Catholic cemetery and was therefore worried about these developments.

Calvary Memorial Park needed help and the Richmond diocese was there to provide it, albeit under new leadership. After a long illness, Bishop Ireton died in April 1958, never having seen the cemetery he conceived. Ireton's successor, the Most Reverend John J. Russell, led the Richmond diocese for more than fifteen years and saw Calvary Memorial Park through good times and bad. Bishop Russell would enact two key measures affecting Calvary Memorial Park. The first helped solidify Calvary's standing as an approved Catholic cemetery. The second, many years later, all but reversed the first.

On July 12, 1959, Bishop Russell drafted a letter to the clergy and laity within his diocese. He stressed the sacred character of the human body and the importance of proper Catholic interment. He noted which cemeteries in northern Virginia were appropriate for such burials. He called the growing problem of non-approved Catholic sections of existing cemeteries "deception" and lamented that the Church's attempts to stop such trickery had been unsuccessful.

Therefore, Bishop Russell announced the following regulation:

> All Catholics in Alexandria, Falls Church, Fairfax County, and Arlington County must be interred in an approved Catholic cemetery or in a Catholic section approved by the Bishop of the Diocese, specifically, the Catholic parish cemeteries, the Catholic Cemetery known as Calvary Memorial Park, and the

approved Catholic section of Columbia Gardens. Permission will be granted, of course, as in the past, for the burial also of non-Catholics who are spouses or close relatives of Catholics.

HENCEFORTH NO PRIEST WILL BE PERMITTED TO BLESS A GRAVE IN ANY UNAPPROVED CEMETERY OR TO ACCOMPANY A FUNERAL TO SUCH CEMETERY.

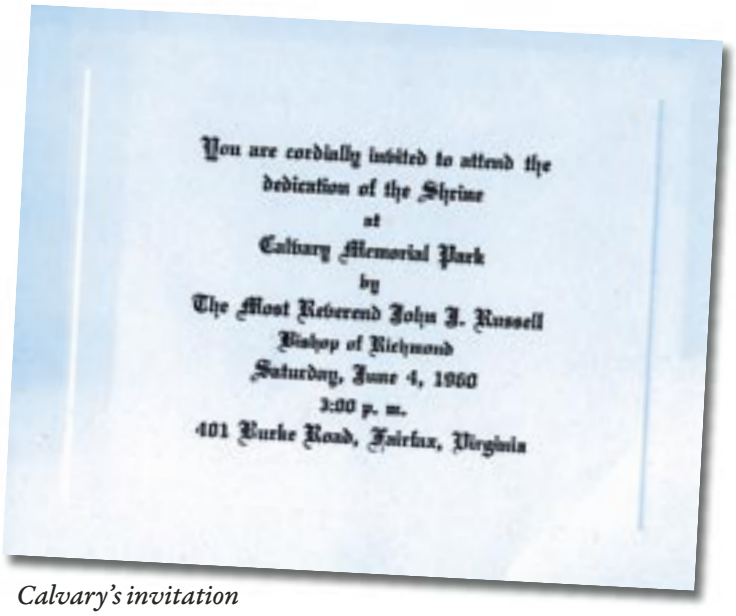
Catholics who could demonstrate that they had purchased sites before the date of the new regulation would be exempted, and priests could "continue to bless graves in Arlington Cemetery."

Russell's letter helped let potential customers know about Calvary. Priests posted the new regulation at their churches and reiterated the importance of sanctioned burial for Catholics. Doherty pushed even harder, meeting with clergy and laity, and visiting parishes, brochures in hand. The churches did their part as well. Arlington's St. Thomas More Church noted in a 1959 newsletter:

WE REPEAT—IMPORTANT NOTICE RE: CATHOLIC BURIAL—Representatives of the approved Catholic Cemetery known as Calvary Memorial Park will be calling upon our Parishioners. We remind all of the importance of making provisions for the burial of their loved ones in the truly Catholic way, in a Cemetery which has the *specific approval of the Bishop of the Diocese.* Calvary Memorial Park has this *specific approval of the Bishop* and is highly recommended to all Catholics.

Doherty worked hard to keep the cemetery before the Catholic community. He wrote letters incessantly. When a new Catholic Church opened, he would send along two copies of the 1959 Catholic Burial Regulation and request that one be "tacked in a prominent location in your church."

With increased public awareness, Calvary's board was more anxious than ever to make the cemetery look as appealing as possible. To be sure, the grounds of the memorial park were already lovely, but with several dozen flat


You are cordially invited to attend the
dedication of the Shrine
at
Calvary Memorial Park
by
The Most Reverend John J. Russell
Bishop of Richmond
Saturday, June 4, 1960
3:00 p. m.
401 Burke Road, Fairfax, Virginia

Calvary's invitation to the dedication of the Calvary Cross Shrine.

Bishop John J. Russell, right, blesses the new Calvary Cross Shrine, June 4, 1960. The three steps at the base of the crucifix symbolize the hill of Calvary, the site of Christ's crucifixion.

Statues and Sculptures

Starting with its central Calvary Cross Shrine, Fairfax Memorial Park now boasts dozens of works of art. Some of these, such as the Garden of Time sculpture, also serve a functional purpose as mausoleums and columbariums.

Fairfax Memorial Park's Calvary Cross Shine.

The Prophets sculpture in fall.

The Blessed Mother statue in Section Three (above).

The Garden of Time sculpture (below), which was augmented with a columbarium in 2000.

gravestones and no erect memorials, the land was not unlike much of the surrounding country. Even before the cemetery opened, the board of directors had discussed the need for a central shrine. They discussed the matter "very fully" with Bishop Ireton before his death. They also met with representatives from granite companies, visited other Catholic cemeteries, and discussed the matter at length among themselves. All agreed that a Calvary Cross Shrine would be most appropriate, and the board contracted Vermont-based Jones Brothers Granite Quarry to build one. The impressive 18-ton memorial, to be flanked on each side with memorial stones, cost $17,500, not small change by 1960 standards. The Crucifix, as it would be known, was dedicated June 4, 1960. The Fourth Degree Knights of Columbus and a group of Catholic war veterans formed Bishop Russell's honor guard. A number of northern Virginia priests and a host of laypersons also attended the event.

In addition to growing upward, the cemetery was growing outward as well. By 1961, customers had two sections from which to choose, which were "equally beautiful" and situated on high ground. The area directly in front of the Shrine, in Section One, was reserved for priests, but the other plots around the Crucifix were considered the "choice area." These plots were more expensive, but the price dropped for those sites further away from the Shrine. Prices were comparable in Section Two, now known as the Garden of Prayer. Prices were considerably lower when a family had the unfortunate need to bury an infant in Calvary's "Babyland" section.

Despite growing interest, Calvary Memorial Park had a tough start. As with many ventures, the question became whether the cemetery would have enough money to survive until business picked up. The board of directors authorized the sale of more stock and Doherty bought most of it. With Fairfax County's population on the rise, as well as the recent opening

of nearby Dulles International Airport and portions of the Capital Beltway, Doherty was confident in the success of Calvary Memorial Park. And although Doherty was probably not aware of it at the time, the solution to Calvary's financial problems was right under his feet.

As Fairfax County grew in population throughout the sixties (by the end of the decade, its population would be greater than that of many U.S. states), its overburdened school system expanded as well. As part of this growth, Fairfax County twice asked the Calvary Board for a right-of-way through a portion of the cemetery land to install sanitary sewers. The proposed rights-of-way were on land that would never be suitable for burials, and therefore the board accepted the County's proposals. These land sales were small but generated a bit of needed working capital for the cemetery. When the Colonial Pipe Line offered Calvary $300 for a much larger right-of-way, however, the board knew better. Colonial eventually paid Calvary more than one hundred times that amount for its right-of-way. These were the first, but not the last, times the cemetery's excess land would come in handy.

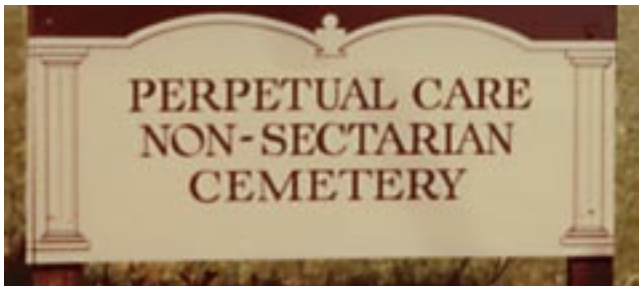
As the cemetery worked locally to stay afloat throughout the early 1960s, events were transpiring 4,500 miles away that would have a profound impact. For only the second time in nearly 2,000 years, the Catholic Church convened a council of thousands of bishops from around the world. The aim of "Vatican II," according to Pope John XXIII, was "to increase the fervor and energy of Catholics, to serve the needs of Christian people." The three-year-long council in Rome produced sixteen documents, which significantly changed Church doctrine. For example, Mass could now be said in languages other than Latin, and priests could face their congregations rather than performing services facing the altar with their backs to the parishioners. Vatican II also approved cremation for Catholics for the first time.

Preparing for interment in 1975.

The Grounds

Caring for a 128-acre cemetery is no small task, and in the early days of the cemetery there was not a lot of money available for labor-saving equipment. "When I came here," remembered Ken Haines, "we had a 24-inch rotary mower and a four-foot gang mower that you walked behind." There was also a truck with a bad transmission that only drove in reverse. As the cemetery gained firmer financial footing, however, equipment improved. Today's machinery is easier to operate, much quieter, and safer too. Now, the much larger mowers significantly reduce mowing time, protect operators from rain, and have anti-roll-over protection. Still, a large cemetery requires a lot of time—period. In the summer, cutting grass is a perpetual job. Edgar Humphreys and another gentleman used to mow the cemetery grass eight hours a day throughout the summer. That's all they did. They even ate lunch on the mower. Mr. Humphreys and his wife now rest peacefully in Section Four.

In addition to upgraded equipment, Neil and Mike Doherty are particularly proud of their investment in the land. "We seed every year and fertilize twice a year and lime it every so often," said Neil. And it shows.



Once Calvary became non-sectarian, the Dohertys worked hard to get the word out about the cemetery's broader focus.

Richmond's Bishop Russell, however, took something else away from Vatican II. In 1966, without warning, he lifted the portion of his own regulation that required interment in church-approved cemeteries. Neil Doherty was understandably alarmed. He immediately called the bishop to express his dismay at not having been consulted. Russell replied that there was no need for discussion. "I just made up my mind," he said. Neil, always one to consider both sides of an issue, replied, "Well, then, it seems to me it works both ways. I want to be able to start burying non-Catholics." Russell replied that Neil's idea made sense. Accordingly, after a decade as a Catholic cemetery, Calvary Memorial Park became non-sectarian. Calvary had a new dilemma. "Nobody really knew we had changed," recalled Neil, "and we didn't have a way of really getting the word out."

Chapter 3

Challenges, Change, and Vision

The 1960s were unhappy times for Calvary Memorial Park. The business was slow and the Dohertys were pouring more and more money into it just to pay the bills. This was not terribly surprising to Doherty, for Fairfax was a county with a low median age and roughly half the national death rate. Furthermore, Calvary now faced greater competition for Catholic business, while non-Catholic families still considered the cemetery sectarian. Then, Calvary's driving force, Cornelius H. Doherty, developed cancer in 1967 and Neil took the helm as Calvary's president.

This was a difficult time for American cemeteries in general. Jessica Mitford's 1963 best-selling book, *The American Way of Death*, portrayed funeral homes and cemeteries as crass and crooked entities preying upon the bereaved for their own personal profit. The effect of Mitford's book on the cemetery and funeral industries was profound. It made the American public leery of undertakers and cemetery salesmen. Ironically, the controversy actually played to Calvary's strengths—being honest and up-front with customers. "We didn't change anything as a result of that book," said Neil. "We've always had an above-board, first-class operation, and we just do our thing. We don't take advantage of people like some others do. People are very vulnerable

Cornelius H. Doherty, Sr.'s grave is in the Doherty family plot near the Crucifix.

This 1984 aerial view shows the recently combined cemeteries—the former Fairfax Memory Gardens at lower left and Calvary above. The Somerset South development nears completion at lower right.

at that time, but I've always told my staff I don't want to ever hear that you forced someone to buy something that they didn't want."

By 1969 Fairfax County's population had grown to 400,000, four times that of twenty years earlier. Housing needs swelled and developers worked to meet the increasing demand for single family homes. Annandale-based Bo-Bud Construction Company expressed an interest in purchasing ninety-five acres of rolling land along Braddock Road—an unused portion of Calvary Memorial Park—to construct a development of residential homes. Neil considered that the price of land in the county had risen substantially and Calvary could use the considerable profits from a land sale for debt relief and cemetery improvements. Furthermore, the divestiture of half its acreage would materially reduce its tax burden.

Neil discussed the possibility with co-founder Bill Dolan, who had taken a less active role in the cemetery after its opening. Dolan was opposed to the sale. Neil then went to see his ailing father. "We've got to do this," Neil said, "but I know Bill Dolan is against it." The senior Doherty agreed with his son and that settled the matter—Neil entered into negotiations with Bo-Bud Construction Company.

Cornelius H. Doherty would not live to see the results of this critical discussion. He succumbed to cancer in June 1969 and was buried in the Doherty family plot near the Crucifix—the very place he had stood with Bill Dolan, Earl Grever, and Neil thirteen years earlier. His grave is marked with a flat, unpretentious bronze marker, just like all the others.

Before any agreement could be made, Calvary Memorial Park's stockholders had to approve the sale. Although the Doherty family owned more than half the cemetery stock, Neil Doherty's style was to persuade rather than bully. At the 1971 Annual Meeting of Stockholders, he convinced everyone that the sale was appropriate. The corporation approved the sale of land "not needed for the planned development

of the cemetery itself" under terms "satisfactory to the board of directors." Neil prepared a contract the following month, and the board unanimously resolved that the contract was "in the best interests of the corporation."

Neil was happy. He was convinced this move was essential for the continuance of what so many people had worked so hard to build. He knew that without more capital, the cemetery faced insurmountable long-term debt. Neil signed the contract with Bo-Bud in the fall of 1971. Before the ink was dry, however, the very county growth that made this deal attractive made it impossible, at least for a while. The rapid expansion of Fairfax County's sanitary system had reached its limits, and the county imposed a moratorium, of unknown duration, on the construction of new sewers. Bo-Bud asked for Neil to wait out the moratorium. Neil, who had grown to be an astute businessman, replied, "Look, I'm not willing to wait to sell it unless you help me out here. I want you to pay the proportional real estate taxes and interest on our loan until the moratorium is lifted." This was a bold move. The taxes and interest on ninety-five acres of Fairfax County land were no small sum. Neil really wanted to consummate the deal but gambled that Bo-Bud wanted it even more.

Neil's gamble paid off and Bo-Bud agreed to his terms. While everyone waited for the moratorium to be lifted, Calvary simply went about its business. The reduced tax and interest burden increased the cemetery's cash flow, and sales rose for the next few years. In 1974 Calvary staff oversaw more than 200 burials. The sewer moratorium ended that same year, and Calvary's board of directors met in special session to formally approve the land sale.

For the first time, Calvary Memorial Park had the capital it needed. While paying off cemetery debt, replacing worn equipment, and sprucing up the cemetery were obvious uses for the new cash influx, Neil formulated a plan that would result in numerous long-term benefits.

Fairfax Memory Gardens

Between 1913 and 1924 Vernon O'Roark purchased 136 acres of land along Burke Station Road. In 1935 he bought a house, a barn and forty more acres along Braddock Road for $4,000. Reflecting the increase in the value of Fairfax County land, Fairfax Memory Gardens offered $133,000 for this same forty-acre tract in 1957.

In addition to the substantial price offered, Fairfax Memory's owner said to O'Roark, "You can keep the house and five acres for fifteen years," recalled David O'Roark, Vernon's grandson. The deal went through and David saw the cemeteries grow and eventually merge. David worked the cemetery grounds and recalled chatting with Cornelius H. Doherty, Sr., about sports from time to time.

Like the Dohertys, the O'Roark family, while never actually owning the cemetery, has a permanent presence there—David's grandparents, parents, aunt, and cousin are all buried on the grounds. David himself, while he moved away five years ago, still plans to be buried on the grounds and owns two plots in Fairfax Memorial Park. Referring to his ancestral land, he said, "I might live in Tennessee but my heart is here."

Salesman Bob Burford (right) and groundsman Rudy Lehman both worked at Fairfax Memory Gardens but stayed on to work at the combined cemetery.

Signs of the times—changing cemetery signage to reflect the new name.

While things were getting better for Calvary, the adjacent cemetery, Fairfax Memory Gardens, continued to struggle. Its grounds were beautifully maintained and, being a memorial park, it looked very similar to Calvary. But Fairfax Memory had never interred more than 100 people in any one year since its opening in 1958. Neil knew that the purchase of Fairfax Memory would secure for Calvary an existing non-sectarian cemetery, which would help change the perception that the cemetery was strictly Catholic. It would also allow for critical frontage on Braddock Road, which by the 1970s had become a major east-west artery through the county—far more prominent than Burke Station Road. This road frontage would also allow for the possible construction of a funeral home right on the property. If Calvary could offer funerary services, area families would have the option of a local, family-owned funeral home while Calvary Memorial Park could take advantage of a great business opportunity.

"So I started pestering [Fairfax Memory Gardens] about selling," recalled Neil, "and at first they said they weren't interested and so about every six months I'd call them up." In the meantime, Calvary's sales continued to climb while Fairfax's stagnated. "Finally, somewhere toward the end of '75, the guy called me and said 'yeah, I think we might be interested in selling' and we negotiated a deal." In the fall of 1976, Calvary Memorial Park Inc. purchased Fairfax Memory Gardens for $410,000. Now, with two cemeteries and two different names, the board decided to combine them—Fairfax Memorial Park would be the new designation.

David O'Roark, whose grandfather used to own the land on which both cemeteries are located, grew up in a house on the grounds. When Neil came to his home across the street to announce the cemetery sale, David was surprised but not disappointed. In later years, he always got along well with the Dohertys. "I think they've always done a great job here," he said. "Every funeral I've been to has been

handled well and my own family was buried here and they did a great job. On a scale from one to ten, I'd give them a ten." Fairfax's staff approved as well. Fairfax's best salesman, Bob Burford, as well as its grounds superintendent, Rudy Layman, David's cousin, came to work for the amalgamated cemetery.

Looking toward the future, Fairfax Memorial Park sponsored a dinner for all the undertakers in northern Virginia. This might have been considered odd at the time, for funeral directors (as they came to be called) and cemetery owners had not historically been the best of friends. Funeral directors felt that cemeteries were trying to take over their business and cemetery managers often believed the opposite. Doherty wanted to buck the trend and cultivate a good working relationship with the directors in his area. The dinner, held at a local country club, was a gesture of good will; there were no speeches, no awards, and no advertisements. It was but a gathering of those in related professions, and funeral directors looked forward to the event each year. Over time, directors came to know and respect Neil and Fairfax Memorial Park. At the same time, Neil came to know which funeral directors he might want to work with, should he ever operate a funeral home of his own.

Entering its twentieth year in business in 1977, the cemetery was finally over the financial hump. At last, the corporation had the tools necessary for long-term success—frontage on Braddock Road, a cemetery facility attractive to people of any religion, and working capital banked from the sale of the Bo-Bud land—enough to give well-deserved Christmas bonuses to the cemetery staff that year.

Mike Doherty (left), Phyllis Gregory, Ed Kennedy, and Neil Doherty at a Fairfax Memorial Park-sponsored funeral directors dinner.

Chapter 4

Growth

In its second twenty years of business, Fairfax Memorial Park grew in every possible way—more interments, new cemetery sections, additional burial options, expanded services, and increased technological abilities. The growth was made possible by more than just a better balance sheet. Fairfax Memorial Park was fortunate to grow with a loyal staff that shaped the future of the organization.

In the late 1970s, Neil's son Michael H. Doherty started working the cemetery grounds—cutting grass and digging graves. In keeping with family tradition, Michael became a practicing attorney, and he worked at the cemetery whenever he could. He started attending board of directors meetings in the early 1980s, became its assistant secretary-treasurer in 1984, and was formally elected to the board in 1989. The philosophy of the cemetery had been effectively passed on. "He has followed in his dad's footsteps," said former sales counselor Pat Farmer. "Michael cares very much about families."

When Bob Burford and other sales counselors retired in the early 1980s, Neil looked for new staff. Experience had taught him that industry veterans were unlikely to share the Doherty philosophy. So when Betty Olson

A Counselor's Work

Cemetery sales counselors perform essentially the same tasks they did fifty years ago—giving cemetery tours, describing Fairfax's offerings, selling plots and markers, and overseeing graveside ceremonies. And while doing their jobs, they see it all. Some customers pass out, others lash out—there is never a dull day at Fairfax Memorial Park. But counselors have learned to take it in stride and focus on their jobs. "If you do not keep your composure you cannot help them," said Pat Farmer. "You can do it by concentrating on helping them, but that doesn't mean that inside you're not dying from the pain they feel." Betty Olson remembered learning the same lesson: "A twenty-five-year-old fellow had passed away and I had a twenty-five-year-old son and I thought, 'oh, this could be my son.' I realized early on that you could not personalize other people's deaths—that this isn't your sister, this isn't your mother, not your child; it's somebody else's and you feel for them but you can't get so emotionally involved that you can't help them properly."

Fairfax Memorial Park's counselors stay because they like the work and the comfortable setting. "We had no sales manager checking on us to see whether we made a sale," said Betty Olson. "We could feel free to operate the way we felt that the family needed. I think we all developed sensitivity as to how to handle different people—and we had all kinds of people. Many times they walked out without purchasing but you had the feeling that you hadn't forced them into anything at all—ever."

Mike Doherty, shown here in 1978, became adept with the backhoe while working grounds.

walked into the office for an interview in 1984, Neil found that she had all the experience needed—none. She was a natural. The following year, Neil hired another natural, Phyllis Gregory. That same year, Pat Farmer came to work in the office and eventually became a counselor herself. Phyllis stayed for one decade; Betty and Pat remained for two. Backed by Neil and a dedicated grounds crew, Betty, Phyllis, and Pat propelled Fairfax Memorial Park to become one of the busiest cemeteries in northern Virginia.

And the family counselors, as they came to be called, got along very well. They worked on a rotating schedule, covering for each other when necessary. They made use of radios to coordinate between funeral directors, the grounds crew, and among themselves. "It was not unusual to hear Pat," wrote Mike Doherty, "blurt out something like 'I'll cover your Serenity . . . grab my Peace,' referring to the services in those burial sections." Working in a team-oriented, positive atmosphere made the more difficult parts of the job easier to handle.

Neil and his counselors know that families do not look forward to purchasing a cemetery plot. Fairfax Memorial Park tries to make these difficult purchases easier. It also endeavors to get the word out about how Fairfax is different from other facilities. While many cemeteries rely solely on word of mouth for business, Fairfax Memorial Park has always taken a somewhat bolder approach. When it was a Catholic cemetery, Calvary Memorial Park actively engaged laymen and clergy alike. When the cemetery became non-sectarian, Neil, the board of directors, the sales staff, and even the grounds crew cast an even wider net to market its services.

It is better for all involved if customers buy in advance. Families are shielded from the burden of making difficult decisions under duress, while cemetery staff can better prepare to deliver the park's own services. Due to national trends and marketing efforts, by 1980

a large percentage of Fairfax's customers were planning their burials in advance. Therefore, Fairfax focused its marketing on those planning for themselves—not the recently deceased. In 1985 the board got together with the sales team to create a "new type of sales program," a multi-faceted approach. The cemetery held semi-annual sales every fall and spring, offering 10-15 percent discounts. To celebrate the thirtieth, thirty-fifth, and fortieth anniversaries of the founding of the cemetery, Fairfax Memorial offered 20 percent discounts. Sales counselors staffed a booth at the annual Fairfax Senior Citizens Trade Show and, on top of all this, counselors always kept in contact with potential customers. Neil remembered, "Every time we would have a sale, Betty Olson would call or write, 'We're having a sale; why don't you consider coming back in and doing the business you wanted to do before,' and they'd come in." One month, Betty sold so many plots that the board gave her a night on the town with her husband.

Still, all the marketing in the world is inconsequential compared to creating happy customers. "I don't care how many advertisements you put out there," said Pat Farmer, "word of mouth is the greatest thing there is and that feeds to other people which feeds to even more people." The sales strategies and word of mouth worked to the cemetery's benefit, and from 1984 to 1993 business more than doubled.

Changing demographics also boosted sales. A steady increase of Asian Americans in Fairfax County during the 1970s and 1980s resulted in fewer available plots in Korean and Vietnamese church cemeteries. Wanting to remain together as an ethnic group, in life and death, church leaders in the Asian community sought out special places to inter the deceased of their congregations. It was no surprise, then, that in 1985, representatives of a local Korean Baptist church called Betty Olson expressing interest in buying some plots. What was surprising was that they wanted to pre-purchase scores of plots for the

The core staff of the late 1980s (clockwise from top left): Ken Haines, Betty Olson, Sam Haidet, Phyllis Gregory, Pat Farmer, Carol Swain, and Mary Munday.

Fairfax Memorial Park's 2005 sales staff (clockwise from top left): Cindy Colbus, Bonnie Botts, Celeste Mack, Kate Tomlin, Pat Gallagher, Alison Sowar, and Kathy LaPolla.

Some of Fairfax's personal family crypts in front of the 1985 pond.

church. The following year, a Korean Catholic church bought even more. One of the Vietnamese churches later purchased more than 1,000 plots in the cemetery. The trend continued. "At one point I had nine Korean churches," recalled Phyllis Gregory. "So I even went over to Korea—at my own expense—to visit sister churches over there. So we had quite a coming together of the cultures." Phyllis passed on what she learned to the other counselors, and all could better relate to the needs of this growing demographic. Fairfax Memorial Park had become not only multi-faith but multi-ethnic as well.

One of the reasons so many people find the cemetery appealing is the beauty and suitable nature of the grounds. Others simply appreciate the natural setting of the land and the many options to be on high ground. "Beauty is in the eye of the beholder," said Betty Olson. "Tradition, customs, experience, and religion all enter into people's choices." Indeed, Cornelius H. Doherty's original vision for the grounds has paid off. "One thing that I think makes this cemetery so special," said Pat Farmer, "which goes back to Mr. Doherty's father and to him—they did not change the ground. They wanted the rolling hills; you've never seen them go out and dig a hill away and flatten it out. They work with their surroundings and the environment. They don't tear away what is natural here, and that's important."

Families have also found the numerous cemetery improvements made in the 1980s and 1990s to their liking. Three additional sections, an attractive pond, and a new main entrance on Braddock Road were among the improvements. To address the national increase in cremation and demand for more interment options, Neil and the board developed a long-range construction plan. By 1992 Fairfax counselors could offer two mausoleums, several personal family crypts, a columbarium (for cremated remains), and special in-ground plots set aside as personal family estates. Families could

More Choices

As demand for certain services has developed, Fairfax Memorial Park has correspondingly changed its offerings. In 1984 the cemetery built its first mausoleum. It was immediately popular, and Fairfax Memorial Park has continued to add more burial options ever since. Today, customers can choose from a variety of above-ground options including mausoleums, personal family crypts, columbariums, and even cremation benches—inscribed seats into which cremains are interred. And Fairfax expanded its in-ground options as well, adding family estates and gardens all over the park.

As a percentage of the American population, cremation increased six-fold between 1970 and 2000. The industry keeps changing with national trends. Companies can now compress ashes into gemstones, while others offer to rocket cremains into outer space. While Fairfax is sure to keep up with interment and funeral trends in the future, it will likely focus on in-ground or above-ground options.

now be interred in traditional caskets and urns ("inurnments"); they could choose to remain together, as couples or as families, underground or above-ground, forever.

And customers wanted more. Responding to increased demand for headstone wreaths, Phyllis Gregory, who had experience in the floral business, started designing arrangements right in the office. Demand increased and Neil was quick to notice. In 1990 he had the old Fairfax Memory Gardens office remodeled for use as a flower shop—"The Flower Shoppe," to be exact. Fairfax Memorial Park hired Alyce Kennedy to work in the Shoppe and get families the arrangements they wanted, whenever they wanted. Alyce continues to serve a large group of regular customers who order flowers to be placed at gravesites as needed. The Flower Shoppe not only expands Fairfax's broad range of services to its families, it also makes the grounds prettier throughout the year.

Keeping the cemetery beautiful and installing so many improvements kept Ken Haines and his crew busy enough, but the great increase in business made it even more challenging. Multiple funerals on one day became commonplace. This meant more graves to dig, more tents and chairs to set up, and more memorials to be set. To assist with this work, and with park improvements, Haines hired Ed Kennedy (no relation to Alyce) in the summer of 1987. "I started here two weeks out of high school," Kennedy recalled. "It was supposed to be a six-month stint to move on to something else." Six months turned into a year, and each year Neil and Ken noticed that Ed was more than just an average worker. By 1993, with retirement on the horizon, Ken had tapped Ed as his replacement. "I taught him all that I knew," said Haines. In July 1995 Fairfax Memorial Park threw Ken Haines a retirement party in appreciation of his thirty-seven years of service to the cemetery. The board of directors officially recognized the "contributions of Kenneth Haines, too numerous to mention, but none

Mausoleums 2 and 3 (above), built in 1996 and 2002, respectively, sit on a hill in the eastern portion of the grounds. Columbarium 1 (below) was constructed in Section Three in 1992.

"The Flower Shoppe" opened in 1990 on the Fairfax grounds.

Neil Doherty (right) speaking at the retirement party for Ken Haines (left).

Ed Kennedy (above) assigning jobs on the duty board. Ed's philosophy of not wanting to see a "piece of grass out of place" is evident on the cemetery grounds (below).

too small to overlook." Ken Haines left Fairfax with a generous pension and an extraordinary legacy of service.

Upon Ken Haines's retirement, Ed Kennedy became grounds superintendent. Just like his predecessor, Ed, his wife, and three kids moved into the old farmhouse. Kennedy and his family have called the house "home" for more than a decade. As Haines's grandchildren liked to ride on the tractor, so do Kennedy's kids enjoy riding on the cemetery's golf cart. He sees no problem with raising his kids on the grounds of a cemetery. Kennedy related, "I don't hide anything from them. They see me digging and they see the funerals coming in the gate and they see the caskets sitting out there; they're not shy to ask questions and I'm not shy to tell them. I let them know exactly what life is about."

Becoming superintendent, Ed read books and trade periodicals and attended horticultural seminars. But much of what he needed was within him from the beginning. "I've always been a perfectionist," he said. "I don't like to see a piece of grass laying out of place; I don't like to see a torn-up flower; it's just my nature." This is a necessary quality for a superintendent responsible for the resting places of more than 16,000 people. "You've got to be on your toes at all times," he said. "You'll never find a cemetery that's perfect but we strive to be the best that we can be. We take care of the families' suggestions or complaints as soon as possible."

To help manage a grounds staff that has swelled to fourteen, Ed relies upon assistant superintendent Brian Munday, a twenty-year Fairfax Memorial Park veteran. And the work continues year round in heat, rain, snow, or drought. "Everyone praised Mr. Kennedy and the grounds staff for their work during one of the worst winters in recent memory," read the March 2003 minutes of the board of directors. "We were open for funerals even though other cemeteries and funeral homes were closed." During one particularly dry summer, Brian Munday assigned two crew members to

full-time watering duty just to keep trees from dying.

Staff dedication and longevity is no accident. "Mr. Doherty treated you with respect, and that carried onto the families you worked with," said Pat Farmer. "The respect was everywhere from the boss to the co-workers to the men out in the field." And Neil feels the same way about his crew: "Our counselors out here are just the greatest people in the world. They help people; they're not pushy, they're not trying to make the big sale; they're just trying to handle people who are in grief or just want to buy for future purposes, and it's just been by having that type of exposure to people who then go back out to somebody else and say 'you know what? I thought I was really going to be in for a big battle going out and buying—you know I've heard all these stories about cemetery salespeople it was nothing like that.'"

Ed Kennedy manages the largest staff in the cemetery and is particularly concerned about keeping good people. "I absolutely do everything I can do to retain staff. I don't ever put somebody doing the same job every day. I try and mix people up so they don't get bored with the same task all the time. I want everybody to learn as much as possible about this place so they can do as many tasks as possible." It also helps that Fairfax Memorial Park has offered a 401(k) plan, accumulated sick leave, vacation time, and medical and dental insurance since the early 1990s.

The result is a staff that stays. "It was the job of a lifetime," said Phyllis Gregory. "There was nothing about my job I didn't like." Betty Olson felt the same way: "It was a very satisfying and gratifying job. There was never a day when I didn't want to come to work." "It was a job, but not just a job," said Pat Farmer. "You were there to help people." Even the difficult parts of the job were gratifying. "I think you got more satisfaction out of the families you met," recalled Phyllis Gregory. "The people who lost their children and you were the first

Interment

The most elemental business of the cemetery, burying the dead, is some of the hardest work. With modern equipment, however, graves are dug in a fraction of the time compared to fifty years ago. Graves for babies and cremation urns, however, are still dug by hand. Even after the grave is dug, a lot of equipment is needed. "You need to have funeral equipment on something to get it from the garage to the site," said Ed Kennedy. "You need a lowering device, tents, a tent frame, a platform to put the device on so it doesn't go into the hole at the same time; you need vault trucks to put the vaults in the ground."

And all this has to be done very carefully. "We had the funeral of a small child of a Fairfax County firefighter," related Mike Doherty. "A lot of firefighters, friends, and family turned out. After the service and the parents and everyone left, six uniformed firefighters stayed to oversee the burial. Grounds worker Rolando Siliezar was assigned to perform the interment. While the firefighters stood at attention on either side of the grave, Rolando used two tent ropes to lower the small coffin into the ground as thoughtfully and carefully as if it was his own child. The firefighters were really impressed. They knew we cared. I think that is our greatest attribute—our employees really care."

to serve them, the people who had AIDS and were dying and you were taking care of them at the time, gosh—you know I just remember my people. It wasn't just business."

Although Betty, Phyllis, Pat, and ten-year sales counselor Ralph Carlton have retired, the tradition of service continues under seven counselors, four of whom have been at Fairfax for more than five years. To this day, Neil conducts interviews and sets the ground rules: "It's family owned and we are here to take care of the families that come in." That Fairfax Memorial has remained family owned is one of the keys to its continued success. Numerous corporations have approached Neil over the years with offers to buy the cemetery. After consulting with Mike, Neil has rejected them all. "Our business philosophy of not being overly aggressive, separating ourselves from our competition, being compassionate, nice, caring, not putting pressure on families, just having products and having people here that enjoy working with families; you know, I think they would rather deal with somebody like that than a corporation."

Phyllis Gregory remembered her brief employment with a corporate cemetery: "They put me in a room with all these recorders to teach me how to sell; we didn't do that at Fairfax. You didn't have to sell. You could always tell people that they could go somewhere else and check around, but they would come back to us because it was a more caring place. It wasn't just a burial. Nobody ever forced you into a marker or pressured you into sales. If they couldn't afford it, you gave them something nice that they could afford."

"It has always been a family-run business and families are first," said Pat Farmer. And it will stay that way. Mike Doherty is proud to proclaim, "There is no question that we are going to remain a family-owned business." Staying family-owned would also allow Neil and Mike to undertake a giant project—one that would finally allow Fairfax to offer the full range of services to its customers.

Mike (left) and Neil Doherty outside the cemetery office, 1979.

Chapter 5

Vision Fulfilled

As the years went on, Neil Doherty kept thinking of putting a funeral home near the cemetery entrance on Braddock Road. "It was always our dream to be able to serve families completely right here from the property," said Michael Doherty. For a time, the board of directors discussed the idea of leasing land to an existing funeral company, but that would not do. Much as Neil's father found forty years earlier, to guarantee the level of service for which Fairfax Memorial Park is known, this project would have to be owned and operated in-house. In 1999 the board of directors resolved to start a new corporation. Fairfax Memorial Funeral Home, LLC would build and operate a new facility itself. The board's proposal was ambitious: a 24,000-square-foot funeral home with a large chapel, several viewing rooms, a crematory, embalming facilities, offices, and ample parking, all on a six-acre plot where Braddock and Burke Station Roads meet.

In the spring of 2000, Neil submitted his funeral home proposal to the Fairfax County Board of Zoning Appeals. The plan quickly met with widespread opposition. Neil, Mike, and their attorney, Grayson Haynes, worked hard to explain their project and ease tensions. They met with local homeowners and modified their plan in the interest of area residents.


Cemetery Plan Loses Ground

Funeral home triggers debate

Crematorium Plan Mobilizes Fairfax Neighbors

The public debate over Fairfax's proposed funeral home was sometimes heated, but all worked out in the end.

Calvary's, then Fairfax Memorial Park's office, has had several different landscape plans, not to mention a few facelifts (below).

The proposed changes included fewer viewing rooms and the addition of earthen berms and trees to screen the funeral home from neighborhood view. At the county's Board of Zoning Appeals hearing on July 25, 2000, the vote promised to be close, but the motion passed 4-2, "ending one of the jurisdiction's most recent and heated debates on commercial development in residential neighborhoods."

Even after receiving approval, Neil and Mike met several times with area residents and worked to improve relations in general. In the meantime, as Neil and Mike struggled with getting site plans approved, the cemetery kept getting busier. The staff had swelled to twenty-four and the office was bursting at the seams. When the cemetery opened in 1957, the existing farmhouse had served as both superintendent's home and temporary office. With few plots sold and even fewer burials, there was not much administrative work to be done. As the cemetery got busier, however, a real office was needed. Ken Haines made a small clearing in the woods near the cemetery entrance and erected a small, two-room cottage for the purpose. A few years later, Haines cleared more trees and extended the structure. "We added onto it and kept adding on five different times," laughed Haines. By 1991, when the office staff, under administrator Mary Munday (assistant superintendent Brian Munday's aunt), had grown to three full-timers, Neil had Haines put a major addition onto the cottage, which still serves as the cemetery office to this day.

As the number of sections and graves increased, office matters became more complex. There were thousands of pages of paperwork, and as cemetery sections grew and visits by family members increased, the task of managing the records became overwhelming. Every year, all the new burial records had to be sent to Arlington, Virginia, to be microfilmed—a process that seems rather archaic today. But as well as it could, the office staff kept up with technology. Fairfax Memorial Park bought its

first computer in 1987 and in 1991 became the Washington, DC, area's first cemetery with a phone for the hearing impaired. After obtaining a digital scanner in 1992, Phyllis Gregory's daughter, also named Phyllis, and others began scanning all the cemetery records into a new computer. Five years later the cemetery designed a new tool in which most businesses were showing interest—a website.

After Mary Munday's departure in 1995, Kathy Bequeath took over as administrator and upgraded the computer equipment. Kathy implemented a cemetery management database system and software that allowed counselors to design grave markers when meeting with families. By 2003, Kathy's replacement, Gary Hosaflook, had commissioned aerial imagery of the cemetery and upgraded the cemetery software to include digital mapping capabilities. All cemetery records are now available electronically at any or all of twelve terminals in the office. As a result, families can tell the office whose grave they want to see and office staff can not only access the location in seconds, but also print out a color map from the office directly to the grave of interest. This would have been impossible twenty years earlier, let alone fifty. Pat Farmer, who started in the office in 1985, said, "I came from the manual typewriter and left in the computer age."

Yet some things remain the same. Even with all the digital technology, paper is ever present. When a funeral director calls a counselor to schedule a funeral, the counselor in turn has to prepare all sorts of paperwork and get it to Ed Kennedy. While certain tasks are fit for a computer, others are considered too important not to be done personally. Family counselor Cindy Colbus noted, "You absolutely have to bury people in the right place!"

Doing right by its customers in the cemetery is just a part of what Fairfax Memorial Park does, and has always done, for the local community. Ever since 1958, the cemetery has sponsored an outdoor Catholic Memorial Day

In 1997 Fairfax Memorial launched its first website. Today, one web page provides a portal to the cemetery and the funeral home.

Fairfax's Memorial Day masses have been popular events ever since the cemetery first opened. A 1967 mass is shown in the top photo. Immediately above, Neil Doherty (foreground) watches a mass in the 1980s.

Dedication of the September 11th Memorial. From left: Virginia state delegate Dave Albo, funeral director and member of the "DMORT" response team Todd Wolfe, District Supervisor Sharon Bulova, Michael Doherty, and pastor of the Church of the Nativity Father Richard B. Martin.

mass to honor the deceased, particularly veterans buried on the grounds. People of all faiths are invited. The events have become very popular, and today more than 700 people come to pay tribute to more than 1,000 veterans buried at Fairfax Memorial Park, whose graves each bear a flag placed by Fairfax staff.

After the attacks on September 11, 2001, it is no surprise that Fairfax wanted to do something special. Four of those killed in the attack on the Pentagon were to be interred at Fairfax Memorial Park. In a staff meeting held soon after, "Everyone discussed what we could do for those families and we all came up with the idea for a monument." On September 11, 2002, Fairfax held a ceremony honoring all those killed in the attack and paid special tribute to the four buried at Fairfax. The remains of one of the men were never located but his wife wanted him memorialized in Fairfax Memorial Park. Fairfax District Representative Sharon Bulova spoke at the ceremony.

While making plans for the September 11 Memorial, Neil and Mike finally received approval from Fairfax County to proceed with the funeral home plans. It took one year to secure zoning approval and two years to get site plan approval, so the groundbreaking ceremony on May 22, 2002, was gratifying for Neil, Mike, and the rest of the board. But much work remained. Building a 24,000-square-foot facility was no small task. It required incessant meetings, significant capital, and a lot of know-how.

As construction started, Neil sought out a consultant who knew the funeral business. He knew of a young director with solid experience and a good reputation—Peter Piscitelli. "I was actually out of the business completely," recalled Piscitelli. "I was working for the government, and I got a call from Neil and started coming up and meeting them." Every month during construction, Pete would get together with Neil and Mike, answering questions about what they needed to buy and giving advice on how a funeral home should be managed. It was

clear to Neil and Mike that Pete was a gem. In January 2003 they offered Pete a job. "I had no idea that they would ask me to be the manager of the funeral home," he said, "and so it was nice. It was a dream come true." With Piscitelli on board as manager, Neil and Mike were able to focus on getting the building completed while Pete handled operational matters.

Construction proceeded smoothly with the funeral home slated to open in August 2003. Neil and Mike needed many more staff members, however. That summer, they hired well-established funeral directors and an office staff that would share the philosophy of Cornelius H. Doherty, Sr. Unlike most operations, no one in the funeral home is paid on commission. This allows staff to focus on their main goal—service. "A lot of places are now splitting their staff up," said Pete. "You have an arrangement staff or embalming staff. Everybody here does everything; I still embalm, I still meet families, I still take funerals, and we want to make sure that everybody continues to do that."

Neil cut the ribbon and the funeral home opened on August 15, 2003. The first funeral was held just days later. Business has been brisk ever since. The staff at the funeral home would make Neil's dad proud. "The staff that we have here is fantastic," said Pete, "the service we provide is key for repeat business and things like that, but the facility is beautiful and the fact that we're family owned" makes a big difference. "You try to treat every family as if it were your own. My mom passed away in 1995 and you have to realize that a lot of these people are going through this for the first time, and that's what kind of grounds you."

While they operate under the same philosophy, the cemetery and funeral home are separate corporations with independent staffs, as required by Virginia law. Cemetery sales counselors are required to name at least three funeral homes when recommending businesses for funerary services. Likewise, Fairfax Memorial funeral home customers are free to use other

Neil Doherty, right, makes a few appropriate remarks at the Funeral Home groundbreaking.

Michael Doherty (left), Neil Doherty, and Virginia State Senator Jay O'Brien cut the ribbon upon the opening of the new funeral home, August 2003.

The Funeral Home

Fairfax Memorial Funeral Home is not like many others. "We don't push—we don't sell," said manager Peter Piscitelli. "We don't work on commission, whereas in some other places, people get commissions on casket sales, vault sales, and flowers. It's very important to me and the staff that everything a family selects, whether it be the least expensive or the most expensive funeral, that they are pleased with how things were handled and that the services are the best that we can possibly provide."

cemeteries. From the start, however, it was clear that the businesses complemented each other. "I think the cemetery first was a very big draw," said Pete. "There are a lot of churches that own property on the cemetery, so when we first opened it was convenient for families to use the funeral home because it's so close to the cemetery." And there was business from unexpected sources as well. "A lot of those same neighbors that opposed [the funeral home] have been our customers," said Mike, "and they've praised us publicly for being a good neighbor."

In the 1990s, Michael Doherty took a more active role in the cemetery, becoming its vice president and secretary. Michael has adopted a broad focus, involving himself in local, county, and state affairs to a greater extent. He began meeting with state legislators and state senators in advance of rules changes affecting the cemetery industry in 2000. That same year, he was elected president of the Virginia Cemetery Association and, after his two-year term, continued to serve on its board of directors. He has also served as a director on the Virginia Cemetery Board and the Southern Cemetery & Funeral Association. Michael's civic work has improved community relations substantially; the cemetery has sponsored events such as the summer concert series "Braddock Nights." The president of one of the homeowners' associations that had opposed the funeral home even nominated Fairfax Memorial Funeral Home for the "Best of Braddock" award that it won in 2004. On top of this, Neil had already received an award of his own. He was called before the Virginia Cemetery Association in 2003 to receive its "Distinguished Cemeterian" award—only the eighth awarded in fifty-five years.

Together, yet separately, the cemetery and funeral home are now serving more families than ever. From roughly 400 burials per year in the 1980s, Fairfax interred 700 in 2005. In the 1970s, Fairfax was just learning to deal with having three funerals on the same day. Recently, Fairfax Memorial Park held eight funerals and

a memorial service in one day. Five of these ceremonies were held at Fairfax Memorial Funeral Home. The cemetery now consists of fifteen sections, plus four "Babylands." And even more sections are being planned now. With business so brisk, it is a wonder Fairfax has any space left at all. "I always thought we had too much land for what we needed," laughed Ken Haines, "but now I'm not sure!" But Neil, Michael, and even the next generation are not likely to see the cemetery filled up in their lifetimes. Even with a steady business growth, administrator Gary Hosaflook estimated that the current cemetery land will not be full for almost a century.

The current rate of business will necessitate changes, however. The cemetery office is inadequate for future needs, and even the largest funeral home in the area is proving too small to meet demand. Neil is amazed at the increased desire for funerary services. "Building a 24,000 square foot building, I thought that would be good for years, right? Wrong—we're already starting to think about needing another chapel." Pete has even installed video monitors so that overflow crowds can still watch services from other rooms. Fairfax Memorial Park continues to prepare for the future with plans for new maintenance buildings, another pond, and more above-ground burial options.

Despite fifty years of staff changes, the Doherty family philosophy still reigns. "It became a family both inside and out," said Phyllis Gregory, "family in the office as well as the people who kept coming back." "Everyone really wants to please Mr. Doherty," said Betty Olson. "He always reminded us that service was our main focus."

And the Dohertys are very proud of what they have helped to create, as Mike reported to the board in 2002. "When you hear about other 'bad apples' in the industry it breaks your heart, because our team really cares. From Dad who sets the overall tone, to the backbone of the administrative staff, to the daily interaction the sales counselors have with the families, to

On behalf of Fairfax Memorial Park, Michael Doherty holds the newly bestowed Best of Braddock Award. Also pictured, from left, neighbor and homeowner association leader Robert Cosgriff, County Supervisor Sharon Bulova, U.S. Congressman Tom Davis, Neil Doherty, Michael Doherty, and Virginia State Senator Jeannemaria Devolites Davis.

Despite the outstanding growth of the cemetery business, Fairfax Memorial Park has plenty of land left for decades, perhaps even a century, to come.

The Fairfax Memorial Park Board of Directors, 2006. Left to right: David Dodrill, Jean Doherty Murray, Cornelius H. Doherty, Jr., and Michael H. Doherty.

the funeral directors arranging the services, to the grounds staff who perform and go the extra mile time and time again, I can report that you have a well-run organization of which you can be proud."

Neil can look back on fifty years of working with Fairfax families. "It's been a thoroughly enjoyable thing to do in addition to my being a lawyer. We've got caring people who are not trying to get the biggest sale. We're not the ones telling families what to do and that's probably the biggest compensation I get out of this business—the fact that I know nobody is telling somebody what to buy. Families are deciding for themselves after being presented with all the facts and that's not the way the big boys do it."

The cemetery has come a long way since Cornelius H. Doherty first took his son, Neil, to the rolling tract of land in 1956. Through decades of adversity and diversity, the Dohertys maintained the key, founding principles of the organization—put families first and provide great service. While these standards rendered their business challenging for a while, the Dohertys would not have done it any other way. The rewards are manifold, not only for the Dohertys, Fairfax's board of directors, and the staff, but for the thousands of families who also view Fairfax Memorial Park as a special place. As the cemetery grows, so do the bridges it builds—between staff and families, between cultures and faiths, and between past, present, and future.