

ABSTRACT: George Duvall is a long term resident of Cottage City. He is an avid firehouse enthusiast, working for the Cottage City Fire Department in some capacity for over 60 years. In the past, he and the local children would play games on the street and in the town. Functions were a big part of community when he was growing up including: Christmas parties, dances, and Halloween parties. Most of these events were sponsored by the fire department. Still enamored by the town, he has continued to live in Cottage City, despite the many families and friends who have moved away. New businesses and a relocation of the firehouse have also changed the town he once knew. George keeps his sense of community and identity as a member of Cottage City, despite these changes.

George Duvall on Cottage City: “Well, I think it’s a unique little town, because it has survived everything around it. It’s not a town that gave up. It went ahead. It took care of itself. It’s a town that still looks out for its people. It’s also interested in what its neighbors do. I think it’s really still going ahead. It’s still a nice town for someone who wants to be in a nice town, even raise a family. Like I said, at one time, all these houses were filled with families when we first moved here in 1947. Course, I’ve been living in this section since 1943, I guess, or back in the 1940s. It’s still a good town to live in. I still enjoy it.”



Old Cottage City Firehouse – Built Circa 1923



New Firehouse (Cottage City, Mt.Rainer, and Brentwood) Bunker Hill Fire Station

BIBLIOGRAPHY REFERENCES:

“Bunker Hill Fire and Rescue Company Inc.” (Bunker Hill Fire and Rescue Company Inc.: 30 March 2007) <http://www.bhvfrc.com/> (March 18, 2008).

Folder. Bladensburg Fire Department 1942-1948
Location: Prince George’s County Historical Society

American Legion. Snyder-Farmer-Butler Post No. 3 (Bladensburg, MD). *First Annual Dance; November 11, 1972, 10:00 to 1:00; Bladensburg Fire Department Hall 1972*
Location: UMCP HBK Maryland Room Maryland Folio F181.6 A4

Port Towns Interview Project
Suzanne Stasiulatis interviewing George Duvall Jr.
Interview at 3713 40th Ave., Cottage City (Brentwood), MD 20722-1606
December 14, 2007

Suzanne: Can you state your name, age, and where you're from?

George Duvall: George P. Duvall Jr. My age is 83. I'm originally from Washington D.C., but I've been in Maryland for all of my life, most of my life.

Suzanne: How long have you been a resident of Cottage City?

George Duvall: I've been here since 1947.

Suzanne: What is your occupation or previous occupation?

George Duvall: I am retired right now. And I worked for two different hardware firms. I worked for People's Hardware, when they were in existence. They had 16 stores. They had one right here on Bladensburg Road, where I first started. That was back in 1943. And I worked for McIntyre's Hardware, who bought out People's Hardware. And I retired from them. I've been retired since 1987.

Suzanne: What's your favorite childhood story in Cottage City?

George Duvall: I guess, I've always being a fire department buff. I was kind of attracted to that in my early days. Even as a youngster, I used to go by the firehouse, just to see the fire trucks and whatever. I think that was probably one of my favorites here in the town. I really grew up in Colmar Manor across the way. When I left D.C. that was in my early years. I had to be 8 or 9 years old when I came here. I lived in Colmar Manor. I was practically raised there. Then, we moved out on Annapolis Road, and spent some time there. I guess I kind of let that be my guide, and ended up in the fire department.

Suzanne: And you still do that now?

George Duvall: Oh yeah. I've been in over 60 years in the volunteers. It's been a good place. A lot of activity went on in Cottage City in the early years. Of course, we did a whole lot of things. I guess that was kind of my favorite thing that I got involved with.

Suzanne: If you were writing a history of Cottage City, what would you include?

George Duvall: Well, I think the main thing I would do would maybe include the early years when there were so many families here. This was originally, when I came here, really a family town. This whole block was nothing but families. I knew everybody on this block and a lot of people in Cottage City period. Of course, we would all get together. And I would think that would be the main thing. There were a lot of kids brought up here. We all had families here. I had four. Some of them had six. The Scott

family had 12. There were a lot of kids. And it was really a family town. And I think that's what kept it together really. And it has stayed together a long time.

Suzanne: How did you get together? Did you go over to people's houses?

George Duvall: Yes. All the kids played together and we did all the time. We got out. We played on the streets. We had baseball games and different things like that. The kids on this block played hide-and-go-seek, and all kinds of things and volleyball or whatever.

Suzanne: I've heard about the hide-and-go-seek games.

George Duvall: Yes, and they played a lot of dodge ball. Dodge ball was popular back in those days when I was coming up. They'd get out on the street. Course, we always got in trouble. We weren't supposed to play on the street, but we always did anyway. The Scotts built a big train area. They had a big train blowing and a town that they had, Pottsville. They all worked on that and got things together. It was a big thing when the kids were coming up. Course, when I got into Cottage City, I was a little older when I came here. I was more or less born, like I say, in D.C. We moved into Maryland when I was in the 5th or 6th grade. I still went to Holy Name School in D.C. I graduated from Catholic school in the 8th grade. During that period we moved here to Colmar Manor in Maryland. And I lived here the rest of my life.

Suzanne: We want to know about history and development in the community. What were your experiences as a child or young adult in Cottage City? Or Colmar Manor?

George Duvall: Well, like I say, there were a lot of activities back in those days, because there were so many kids. We all got together. There was a lot doing. The town sponsored a lot. Colmar Manor sponsored a lot of young teen dances. They had a Boys Club over there at one time. And both towns worked with that. We both participated at going over to Colmar Manor.

Suzanne: Was it a joint thing? Did they work together?

George Duvall: Yeah. They did work a lot together, Colmar Manor did. It made a big change, after the kids started getting older, separating themselves from the town. But the town did do a lot for the kids in those days. And we had the Halloween parties. Things like that. The fire department was a big participant in the town. As a matter of fact, it was kind of the hub with our hall that we had. We always had Christmas parties and dances and things for the kids. We were the original sponsors of the Halloween parties that they had, and the giveaways and the candies and stuff that went on in the fire department. That was early even in my life. I participated in lots of those even before I joined the fire department.

Suzanne: And they still do that today.

George Duvall: Yes. They're going to be there for Santa with Christmas and stuff. The fire department was there for the Halloween party. They brought the fire trucks over. We still participate in what the town does and what goes on. But it's still a viable town as far as I'm concerned. So, many people have changed. So many people have left. But it's still a nice town to be in.

Suzanne: Why do you think the people left?

George Duvall: Well, I think a lot of it was because the kids grew up. Like my four left. And a lot of the people, where there was only the mother and father left, to take care of the houses take care of the town. A lot of them went other places and moved into apartments or retirement homes for people, when they didn't want to upkeep or their families. Course, I stuck it out here.

Suzanne: How had Cottage City changed since you lived here?

George Duvall: Well, of course, a big change is the people. As far as what went on, the races, and the different people have changed. Like I say, I used to know everybody. Now, I maybe only know 2 or 3 people on this block to really get together with or have a conversation. Most of its all changed. And it's still changing everyday. With the different types people that are coming into the towns and to the organizations. I know for one thing, the church has really changed. Now, we have Spanish masses and Spanish classes. The whole thing has just changed as far as people go. The town itself is still working hard to upkeep the town and keep things going. But there is a lot they could still do. We need to change some laws in the town which they have not kept up with, because of population and the growth in the towns. Many people coming in, lots of people where it's just a single family home for 3 or 4 families. It's making a big difference in that respect. The other thing is the lack of people taking an interest. We have a hard time even getting people to run for the jobs in the town. That's how much it has changed. At one time, people used to fight to take these jobs. You'd have 3 or 4 people running for different positions. Now, you have to pull our teeth to get you to run for a job. I think that's the biggest thing. Things have to change a little bit. Like I say, they have to change some laws in the town and do some things like that. It's still a quiet town.

Suzanne: Why did you decide to stay here?

George Duvall: Well, I don't know. I guess I just planted my roots here and there was a lot going on. And when I did get involved with the fire department...I was a member of the fire department before I went into the service in 1943. I graduated from high school and I went in the Navy when I came out of high school. I was working part-time in the hardware business all through high school. I spent 3 years in the Navy. I came out and I went back to the fire department before I was married. I went through a lot of schooling. I became fire chief. I was in there for 26 years as a fire chief, and many other jobs in the fire department. I kind of made a life of it, I guess. My kids all joined. My wife was a member of the fire department. And it kind of made things stable here. And I just stayed. I still try to work with them, go to meetings, whatever, and try to keep up a little bit with

them. But that was the big thing that kept me here. Like I say, the fire department was the hub of two towns, Cottage City and Colmar Manor.

Suzanne: What was high school like for you?

George Duvall: I went to Bladensburg High School. And I graduated from there. That's back in 1943, when I went into the service. But I graduated from Holy Name. I went 8 years in there. After I moved to Maryland, my father drove us in every morning. We all went there all 4 of the kids. I had a great time in high school. I enjoyed going. I'd even go early in the mornings and play basketball for 2 hours before we went to class, and participated in a lot of stuff at the school. I played basketball. Of course, back in those days they didn't have football, only touch football, because they didn't allow you to play because of injuries and stuff like that. They didn't carry any kind of insurance or anything. So, everything was just basketball and soccer and touch football, things like that. But I graduated from Bladensburg. That's when I went into the service. I enjoyed going to high school. I knew a lot of people.

Suzanne: Did you participate in any activities when you were younger?

George Duvall: Oh yeah. I did most anything that they did. At one time, I even worked it out with the town and the fire department, where we worked for the town. We would clean up. We'd have clean up weekends. In the fall we'd help them pick up leaves. We would work on different functions that they had: the Halloween parties, the Christmas parties, all those different things for the kids. Down in the park, they built that beautiful ballpark for us down there, the tennis courts and all that. It really gave them a place to really participate.

Suzanne: What's your favorite spot in the community? Where do you like to go?

George Duvall: Well, there aren't a whole lot of places to go in this small town, I'll tell you. But I don't have really a favorite spot.

Suzanne: Fire department.

George Duvall: Well, that, until we moved. We owned that building, and the fire department, the county forced us to move. They merged Cottage City, Mt. Rainer, and Brentwood together in this new station over there. And it's not like owning your own building. We're in somebody else's building, but that's where the center of the activity was, at the fire department. Anything that really went on of any importance was done there. Course, we had the big hall there, which made a difference which the town of Cottage City didn't have at any time, until they built that new building and had a hall of their own. But that was the hub. Everything that went on... We did a lot of work there. Our fire prevention work that we had people for, everything, you know, we participated in it. That was the hub in both towns.

Suzanne: Any really nice houses in town?

George Duvall: Well, people have really worked to maintain beautiful homes here to keep up the homes. They're not run down. Courses they're all old. These houses were built in 1929, 1930. And they've been well maintained. There are very few of them that people haven't taken care of. We have a couple of historic places here. What they did before they filled in all the area at Moyer's Park where we had a big lake there, which used to be great to go to. And we had a big old house there with a mill and a big wheel on it that would spin, the water would turn. But all that was torn down when the commercial people came.

Suzanne: They took out the lake?

George Duvall: Yeah, they took out... They built the home down there for the aging. They did away with all that down there at Moyer's Park. But that used to be kind of a picturesque place. In the winter time, it used to freeze over. They did some ice skating there and different things. But they did away with all of that. That used to be a good, popular place people would go. But other than that it was, you know, about an average place here. There wasn't much to do.

Suzanne: How do you feel about the term Port Towns? Is it an effective term at drawing attention to history to the community?

George Duvall: Well, it originally started out very good. I was possibly in on the original groundwork that we started with that. But I don't think it has come out like we projected it in the early days. I think the big thing there is the fact that we had a problem getting money to start it with. Course everything takes money. I think this was a big thing. I don't think it's progressed like we thought it would be. We thought that a lot of this would be a lot of joint things done like police departments and different things that are going on. And, of course, for years we have tried work out a deal with Colmar Manor, I did when I was on the commission, to have a joint police department. But we could never really get it together. It just never materialized. We talked about it a lot. But we hoped that the Port Towns would bring some of that together, you know. And they have really progressed in Bladensburg where the river and all that down there and the bridge built between the two towns, Colmar Manor and Bladensburg. That's really progressed. They've done a lot there. And I think it has been a good theme park there. They've had a lot of activities, a lot of things going on with their canoeing and different things. It has come a long way. But I don't think it has progressed as much as they thought it would, you know, to where we would be that close together, as far as what the people would be, you know. But I think it's been a good thing to bring us together and it has in a lot of cases. But I think it'll still work out. They're still trying to bring it aboard. Like there doing now, we're trying to get it together a little more. And I think that's what they need to do.

Suzanne: How have conceptions of race changed? Is there racism in the community?

George Duvall: Well, I don't know actual racism. But there are a few things that have changed, of course, as far as what we're doing now with the green card carriers and the non green card carriers and what's going on. Those kinds of things have changed to where...I don't know, people are kind of uneasy in some respects, I guess, as far as what's happening, because the population in town as far as homes go. Where there were maybe 4 or 5 people living in a house, we might have 12. And this is one of the things the town hasn't done anything about, as far as what's going on. It doesn't affect me in any way. But I've heard a lot of people speak about what's happening, as far as residential things that are happening now. There are people with businesses that are in this town that shouldn't be. They've got dump trucks and front-end loaders and things that shouldn't happen in this town. I guess they have to make a living, but it's just not for this town. These things shouldn't be in the town. Some of them have as many as a couple of dump trucks, front-end loaders, and different things that shouldn't be parked on the streets. These streets were only made for parking, a lot of them, only on one side. These things protrude out, you know, farther than an automobile. It's hard to pass. But I think these are the things some of the people are seeing in the town. I don't think the town has made enough in the way of ordinances. We never had to put up with it, so. It's something they have to change with, and I think they have to correct. This is something they have to do. But as far as violence or anything of that sort or kind or anything, I don't think it has affected us that much. But I think the big thing is just what people see on the streets and what's happening, different things. All the automobiles that it's bringing...places that people have to park. The town just wasn't made for that.

Suzanne: How do children fit in the story of Cottage City? Do children who grow up in here stay in the community? And why?

George Duvall: Not that many. Like I say, all 4 of mine left. I don't think there is enough here to keep them. Any kid that has hopes or ambitions of something that they want to do, it's not in this town. They have to go somewhere else where it's going to really get ahead or make a difference or a job or whatever. But I think that's basically why the kids don't spend more time or live here. And of course, the only ones that are here now, I would say, are the ones that either work locally or they are in the government, which is only a half an hour or an hour a way from what they have to do. And of course, there are all kinds of buses and metro and everything to take them there, which is why they stay here probably. But I think that's the only thing that keeps them here. Anybody who wants to get on the outside or get into big business or other things, they have to leave this town. I don't think it's here I think that's a major reason they all leave.

Suzanne: How is the town connected to the other communities? We talked about the fire department, but also through transportation, families staying in the area? What is that dynamic like working with other communities?

George Duvall: Well, we don't have any kind of transportation ourselves as far as the town goes. I mean a lot of towns do have their own bus service and different things like that. Course, we do have one that is connected between us and Colmar Manor where they could take the elderly to different things: to the store, to a doctor's appointment. But you

have to make an appointment for that, it's not something that runs automatically. They try to stay connected with meetings. I don't think they get together enough really. It's not a joint thing. And of course, like Cottage City and Colmar Manor, I don't think they have much to do with their next closest, Mt. Rainer and Brentwood. Even when I was on the commission, we never met much with those people, except for overall meetings, like county meetings and state meetings, where we would go to conventions and things like that. You would see them and participate in different things. But I don't think locally they do really. We're trying to get this Port Towns thing together to really a start to try to bring some of it together. I think there are a lot of joint things they could do that would help. But I'm not sure anybody wants to undertake that entire job. When you only work for a few little pennies a month working on the commission, there aren't a lot of people who want to get involved with a lot of things like that.

Suzanne: What were the major political issues in the past or today?

George Duvall: Well, I don't know whether I could really pinpoint something to that, but, like I said earlier, the biggest thing is to get people to run for jobs or get involved with jobs. And this is what, the town is still having that problems. I know in this town's last election, in 2 wards we didn't even have anybody elected. I don't know whether the people are just trying to fade away from politics or just get out of small town politics. It's not really working out. Like I say, even if you pay people today, they really don't want to get too involved in it. I don't know. When I started, when I was on the commission, we only got 10 dollars a month for the meeting. The people don't have that anymore. Unless you're giving them money, 100 dollars or 150 dollars or whatever they get, I don't know what they even give today. I have no idea. Unless there's money involved, you can't even get people to run. I don't know what it would be, really, today.

Suzanne: What economic changes have occurred in the past 10 to 20 years? Business development?

George Duvall: Not much in this town, because we don't have space for it to do anything. As a matter a fact, the only thing that changes is Bladensburg Road. And, of course, that changes so much...first there's a tire place and then there's something else in there and then there's something else. The only major thing that has stayed here is the industrial area up here. And, of course, that's all changed except for the new people that are up there. They've been here a long time, and some of those other buildings up there. A couple of wholesale places have been in the town for a long time. But that's the only industrial park we have, is that one section. There used to be a lot of bar rooms and places like that along this pike. In the early days, they claimed that you could start at one end and be drunk by the time you got to the other end. We had so many bar rooms, places from the district line on down. But all of that has changed now. It went into all commercial properties now, like all the Burger Kings, McDonalds. The big grocery was the big thing that came in here.

Suzanne: Do you feel history can contribute to revitalization? The idea of the Port Towns can spur...

George Duvall: I think so. If it's carried on. Things like this get started, but it's carrying them on that, you know. I don't know if this...I know it's done a whole lot for some individual towns. I know it's done for us. It has brought us closer to the county and to state, as far as monies to get, like keeping our streets paved and all these things that are going on. It has done a lot for that, because as a group I think they have more power. They're getting more done. There's more money devoted to these things. Just like now, they're going into all this...of course it has been a few years, it would have been into the recycling business and all that bit. And I think all of that is through the Port Towns, pushing all these things. They have trash cans on different corners, on the pike to try to keep things clean and up to date. And all of this is done through the Port Towns. And I think it is helping in a lot of respects. And I think if they keep up with it, push it, they could go further with it. But, I don't know, it remains to be seen.

Suzanne: 10 years ago the concept of the Port Towns was created. Has anything changed since the creation of the Port Towns?

George Duvall: Oh, I think so, the whole area as the four towns. The Bladensburg area has really flourished, as far as the lakes go and all that. It's brought the Park and Planning in more and more. I know we developed here locally, like I say, with the baseball field and the tennis courts and the different things in the town. There are summer programs, I think, that the Port Towns have helped to bring, different things like that. I think it has helped.

Suzanne: What are your satisfactions or dissatisfactions with the community? What can be done?

George Duvall: Well, like I say, the towns got to get busy and make some ordinances to try to control the population. We're going to be overrun here shortly and their going to try to catch up with it and it's going to be hard to do. I guess being close to travel and the bus routes and metro and all that, I would imagine that's why this area is building up so much, as far as the Hispanics go and what's going on in the area. I think that's something that's got to be controlled.

Suzanne: Is there anything that sticks out, "Yay! Cottage City!"

George Duvall: Not really. I just like being here. It's a good town. I've never had a minute's problem in this town. I don't think anybody else has really. But they've tried to keep up with everything. And they have done a lot, as far as keeping up the appearance and everything. Course, in recent years, I know of side work done, sidewalks and curbs, streets redone and things like that.

Suzanne: We talked on the phone a little about your address being Brentwood instead of Cottage City for the mailing address. How do you feel that affects identity in Cottage City?

George Duvall: Well, when I was on the commission, we didn't like it at all, because we felt it would confuse our tax money. When the county took over collecting our tax money, we were never certain that some of it went to Brentwood. I mean we were still incorporated as Cottage City and Colmar Manor was and everybody else was. But when the post office was put in there, everything was addressed to the post office. And like I was telling you, when somebody says, "Well, yeah, this address is in Brentwood." Well, it's not in Brentwood it's in Cottage City. I've had a lot of people call me and say, "Look I'm on Rhode Island Ave. in Brentwood and I can't find 40th Ave. over here." And I say, "Well, I'm in Cottage City. You have to cross Rhode Island Ave. and come into Cottage City." It confuses people. And everybody talks about Hyattsville. Well, it's not Hyattsville. It's just like this accident we had down here, this killing we had on Bladensburg Road. Yes, this guy runs a tire place down here on Bladensburg Road and somebody killed him. I don't know whether they've captured him or not. But when they put that out, they put it out as Bladensburg. Well, not that we want to claim that, but you know that's a miss thing for Bladensburg. I mean, it really didn't happen in Bladensburg. It happened on Bladensburg Road in Cottage City. I think it should be corrected. But that's fine if Brentwood wants to have a post office, let them have a post office but not call Cottage City, Brentwood. I always put Cottage City. I never put Brentwood.

Suzanne: Does it still go there?

George Duvall: Oh yeah, as long as you have the zip code.

Suzanne: Ok. This is my last question. In what respects is Cottage City unique and how is it unique among the Port Towns in general?

George Duvall: Well, I think it's a unique little town, because it has survived everything around it. It's not a town that gave up. It went ahead. It took care of itself. It's a town that still looks out for its people. It's also interested in what its neighbors do. I think it's really still going ahead. It's still a nice town for someone who wants to be in a nice town, even raise a family. Like I said, at one time, all these houses were filled with families when we first moved here in 1947. Course, I've been living in this section since 1943, I guess, or back in the 1940s. It's still a good town to live in. I still enjoy it.