



Preserving
The Randallstown Community Building
9000 Liberty Road, Randallstown, Maryland

A Report for the Landmarks Preservation Commission
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I. Background (1727-1927)

The community of Randallstown dates back to 1727 when Lord Baltimore sold 109 ³/₄ acres to Christopher Randallⁱ. For the next century, this land developed into a small village of farms, taverns and smith shops, nestled near the old Liberty Pike between Baltimore and Libertytown.

In 1843, a young German immigrant, J. Adam Klohr, purchased 26 acres of land where Liberty Road, Church Lane and McDonogh Roads now restⁱⁱ. It is in this modest clapboard farmhouse, which still stands today, that the story of the Fieldstone Community begins. Adam Klohr gave his home to his son, I. Henry Klohr. In 1879, a young journeyman stonemason came to board with the Klohr's while he was learning his trade.ⁱⁱⁱ He fell in love with Henry's daughter Wilhelmina, married her and made Randalistown his home. In 1885, he founded his own stone masonry company and worked as a craftsman and contractor^{iv}. In 1891, he purchased the land across from his father-in-law and built his own home. It was the first stone home in Randalistown and stands today as the hallmark of the Fieldstone Community Ruff would build.

In 1910, Seymour's eldest son, John Klohr Ruff joined his firm and Seymour Ruff and Sons, Inc., Masonry Contractors was born. By this time, the Ruff's were pillars in the developing community of Randallstown.

In 1923, Seymour Ruff and Sons, Inc. finished acquiring the acreage where the Fieldstone Community Stands today. They designed roads and lots, working around the existing farm houses, and began to build custom built stone homes.

II. A New Community Building for Randallstown

The Current Randallstown Community Building was built to replace an earlier lodge hall built by the Knights of Pythias in 1880.

That original hall was a tall, unadorned three story structure and was the largest building in the area. It had classrooms, an auditorium with a stage and the lodge's meeting rooms. A building society met at night once or twice a month as there were no banks closer than Baltimore or possibly Pikesville. The auditorium was used for group meetings, church suppers and even dances. This building, through the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century was the center of life for the surrounding area.

It was at this building that John K. Ruff, his sister Elizabeth and younger brother Seymour had gone to school. When John K. was older, and a partner in his fathers masonry contracting business, he became involved in the decision to build the current Randallstown school. The old hall was in poor shape, and the classrooms rat infested. John K.'s dedication to his hometown was evident when, with the school commission undecided on where to build a new school in the area, he proposed that if the school was kept in Randallstown, he would build it at cost. The commission quickly and gratefully accepted. The new school was built in 1908, and of course is still in use.

The old hall was no longer used as a school, and deteriorated further, eventually being demolished around 1910. At around this time, Liberty Road was upgraded from a dirt track, and eventually paved and from here through the 1920's and 30's the population of the area grew from about 4700 to over 6300.

It was decided in the 1920's that the community needed to replace the old Hall, and in 1927, the current building was constructed. It cost \$100,000 which was backed by the Knights of Pythias. That debt was paid back by the community by groups and clubs giving dinner, dances and a booth run annually at the Timonium Fair.

This concept of the community rallying to raise funds for the betterment of the town has its roots in two previous fundraisers. In 1921, \$13,500 was raised by popular subscription for installing electricity and then in 1924, \$32,500 was raised for a trackless trolley that ran from Gwynn Oak Junction to a barn a few miles beyond Randallstown. Other contributions for the Community building came from thirty four regional businesses who donated their time, equipment, or discounted merchandise and services to the effort.

Further community involvement in paying for the building occurred in the 1930's with the establishment of a Debt Liquidating Program, led by John K. Ruff as its General Chairman. The Program was made possible through a life insurance investment plan submitted by the Lincoln National Life Insurance Company of Ft. Wayne, Indiana, and is detailed in the booklet copied as part of our written presentation.

This program is further evidence of the close link between this building and all of the people of the community.

Life itself in and about the building at that time is best summed up by an article in the Baltimore Sun of December 18, 1932, written by Katherine Scarborough and titled "Baltimore's Spreading Suburbs- Out Liberty Road:

"No spot on the map possibly could be more community minded than is Randallstown. Concrete evidence of its civic and neighborly spirit is to be found in its \$100,000 Community Building, which is the center of the business, athletic and social life of the village. Residents of the place raised the money to build and equip this building and the result is a perfectly equipped clubhouse, with monogrammed china for the dining room, artistic draperies, a hall with dressing room and a modern stage.

In the building lodge rooms are provided for the Knights of Pythias, the Daughters of America, the Catholic Daughters of America and the Junior Order, United American Mechanics. Dances are held, and card clubs meet in the community building, and it also affords space for a grocery, the post office, a dentists offices, and a tailor shop and a drug store, complete with a living apartment for the druggist and her family. The feminine pronoun is correct, for this Randallstown pharmacist is a woman, Mrs. Robert Clark."

An account by Mary Grimm Ruff, wife of John K. Ruff, written in 1939 also describes the community hall as a community center not to be duplicated in the state" and

continues with " the hall contains a drugstore, the A&P store, the Post Office, a Barber Shop, the bowling alleys, an auditorium, lodge rooms and the bank. When it was built the committee thought that only one store could be supported there, now five are prospering. It is at the hub of a buying public. Dances are held there on Saturday nights drawing people from the adjacent farms and towns and even from the city. Any Saturday night at any time from 8pm to 12:00 midnight, the ball, the bowling alleys and the stores are crowded."

Mrs. Ruff goes on to describe the bank as "independent. Its directors are local people. It has 1200 depositors; its assets are 4 million dollars. It has steadily gone ahead even in the past year of financial depression.

All of these accounts therefore, give us a very clear picture of this building as the center of community life for many miles around, and for a good part of the 20th century.

III. Historic Preservation for the Randallstown Community Building

The Community building warrants inclusion on the Baltimore County Landmarks List for many reasons. First and perhaps foremost is to preserve the lost art of stonemasonry. The stone for this building was locally quarried (Woodstock Granite Quarry, Co.). Stone masonry is rare and no longer cost effective. The art of chipping stone into a mosaic pattern to create one of the sturdiest, finest and most beautiful buildings made is virtually a lost art.

Secondly, this building was created by one of this country's finest stone masonry teams. Seymour Ruff and Sons were incredibly prolific stone masons, responsible for constructing over 50 churches, the additions on the old Towson Court House, the Towson Post Office (BMT#X) , the Lehigh University Library, and hundreds of beautiful residences. It was not only built BY Seymour Ruff and Sons, in a sense, it was built FOR Seymour Ruff and Sons. John K. Ruff. chaired the committee to raise the funds for the building and pay off the remaining debt on the building. He served as president of the bank in the community building for its first 20 years. At his death in 1961, he considered the creation of the Randallstown Community Building to be one of his life's greatest accomplishments.

Thirdly, the community building is a significant part of the history of Baltimore Suburban development. As roads became passable, Randallstown began to grow. The townspeople built their first town hall in 1880, where they educated school children and former slaves. When the population reached 4500, they built a school and when the old Hall fell into disrepair they built one of the grandest multi-purpose community and commercial structures of its time. It was used far and wide by communities throughout Baltimore, Howard and Carroll Counties. The people of Randallstown had everything they needed in this building, a post office, pharmacy, general store, bank and recreation. It was a town center 50 years ahead of its time.

Fourth, it represents a time in American history when "neighbors were neighbors". When the whole town pulled together to make their community a better place to live. When life revolved around the Saturday night dance, the soda fountain at the pharmacy and the gang down at the bowling alley. It is unthinkable today that a small town could raise \$100,000 to build its own community center. And in 1927, \$100,000 was a lot more than it is today.

Finally, the Randallstown Community Building warrants landmark designation because it is one of the last of its kind. And fortunately, this beautiful old building is in remarkably good shape - viable for many purposes. An independent firm of architectural historians, hired by the county found the building to be "one of the few intact commercial buildings from the first half of the 20th century remaining in this developing town. The building retains integrity of location, setting, feeling, design, workmanship and materials. It is, therefore, eligible for inclusion in the National Register of Historic Places under Criterion C.

ⁱ Ruff, Mary Grimm, "Randallstown", 1939

ⁱⁱ Treischmann, Laura, EHT Tracerics, Inc., Capsule Summary of the Henry Klohr House (BA-2901).

ⁱⁱⁱ Constantine, Elizabeth Ruff, "Randallstown, (1827-1980) - A Community in Contrast, 1980, p.12

^{iv} A Story in Stone, 1929, a publication by Seymour Ruff and Sons, Inc. exhibiting their work.