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The Ginter Park Historic District

The Ginter Park Historic District is a turn-of-the-last-century residential neighborhood located in what is now Richmond's northside.

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John Garland Pollard residence (corner of Chamberlayne and Walton)(demolished)(from the Carneal & Johnston Negative Collection at the Library of Virginia)

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INTRODUCTION

The Ginter Park Historic District, one of Richmond's first streetcar suburbs, was conceived and planned by Major Lewis Ginter, a prominent Richmond industrialist and philanthropist of the late 19th century. The district encompasses residential neighborhood that was originally laid out as Ginter Park by the Lewis Ginter Land and Improvement Company in the late 1890s.

Ginter Park features a wide array of late 19th-and early 20th century architectural styles ranging from modest weather boarded builders' cottage to large pretentious Colonial Revival mansions. Other distinctive styles found throughout the historic district include Tudor Revival, Spanish Colonial, Bungalow, American Foursquare, modified Queen Anne, and Shingle Style. Unique examples of poured-in-place concrete structures with Colonial Revival appearances provide an interesting deviation from typical construction practices of the 1920s seen along one block of Seminary Avenue. The variety and innovativeness of single family housing types within Ginter Park make a tour down any of its wide avenues a textbook study in American architectural forms of its period.

The land comprising the present-day Ginter Park Historic District was primarily agricultural farmland throughout the 19th century. Ginter Park was annexed by the City of Richmond in 1914 and today retains those qualities of enlightened turn-of-the-century residential planning that give it its local reputation as "Queen of the Suburbs".



Ginter Park, Richmond's Ideal Suburb

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HISTORY OF GINTER PARK

In the early 1890s, towards the end of his life, Ginter turned his ambitious attention to community planning by purchasing several hundred acres of farmland in Henrico County north of Richmond and beginning the construction of streets and utilities that would serve a new community.



Major Lewis Ginter (via VCU)

Ginter's concept for his development epitomized state-of-the-art community planning in its day by its generous residential plat subdivisions organized in an extended grid pattern, its varied and eclectic juxtaposition of fine single family dwellings within the grid layout, and its trend-setting reliance on the new mechanical wonder, the electric trolley, to carry its residents to and from the city center as well as to the Lakeside Park and Country Club further north.

The community's development occurred in two distinct phases: the first, in the late 1890s, witnessed the initial survey and construction of streets and utilities; the second, in the first two decades of the 20th century, saw the development of the individual residential lots promoted by the Lewis Ginter Land and Improvement Company.

In the first phase, Major Ginter, wealthy businessman and co-founder of the American Tobacco Company, purchased several hundred acres in what was at the time Henrico County, just south of his own country estate of Westbrook. (Westbrook, an expansive high-Victorian mansion of the finest architectural

merits, was demolished in the 1970s.)



Westbrook (from [Suburban Reflections via VCU](#))

Ginter's first priority was to improve the existing road surfaces of Laburnum and Melrose avenues by hauling in tons of crushed stone from nearby quarries on Hermitage Road. Ginter then had new roads constructed according to the community plan with tile sewer lines laid in the roadbeds.



Hedges along Chamberlayne (1929)(from [the Library of Virginia](#))

In order to give definition to the new boulevards and avenues, thousands of deciduous shade trees were planted and miles of hedges were established. Newly drilled artesian wells provided fresh drinking water.

After Major Ginter's death in 1897, development of the community was carried on by the Lewis Ginter Land and Improvement Company, under the direction of Miss Grace Arents, Major Ginter's niece and heiress. Miss Arents continued the philanthropic work of her uncle by sponsoring the establishment of St. Thomas Episcopal Church, located today on the corner of Hawthorne and Walton avenues.



St. Thomas Episcopal (Hawthorne and Walton)

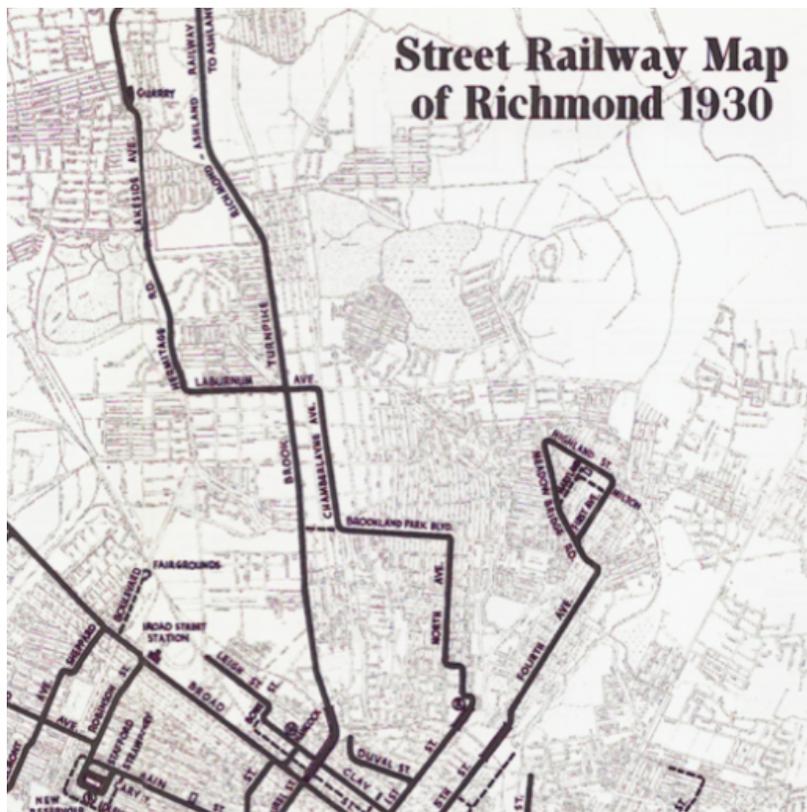
Prior to his death, Ginter had enticed the Union Theological Seminary to relocate its facilities from Hampden-Sydney by the offer of twelve acres in the center of the suburb valued at \$50,000. Construction began on the Seminary in 1896 and continued through the second decade of the 20th century. The educational and cultural atmosphere provided by the institution and its erudite faculty was a major incentive in attracting families to Ginter Park.



Union Theological Seminary (from the Virginia Department of Historic Resources)

The other major factor contributing to the success of the venture was the convenience of a new electric streetcar line. The nation's first electric trolley system was begun in Richmond in 1888, and in 1891 the construction of a viaduct at 1st Street over a ravine opened the way for development north of the city.

By 1895 a streetcar line from Barton Heights was extended past Brookland Park Boulevard up the median of Chamberlayne Avenue to Laburnum Avenue, where it turned west to Hermitage and then north on Lakeside to Lakeside Park. The electric trolley provided Ginter Park residents with cheap, fast transportation into downtown Richmond at a modest cost of five cents for the fifteen minute ride.



Detail of Richmond Trolley Map (1930)(from Carlton McKenney's Rails in Richmond)

At the turn of the century the only completed residences in the suburban development were two groupings of workmen's cottages (one on Chamberlayne Avenue north of Laburnum, and the other on the 3600 block of Hawthorne, then known as Cottage Avenue) the waterworks houses on Westwood Avenue, and the faculty residences on and around the Seminary Quadrangle.

Early in 1906 co-executor of Ginter's estate and former business associate, Thomas F. Jeffress, organized the Lewis Ginter Land and Improvement Company to promote the sale of building lots and rekindle the dream of the ideal suburb. Advertisements lured inner-city dwellers to venture out to "an ideal suburban community" with attractions of a clean, restful environment ("no trading, no commerce, no factories, no smoke"), pure sparkling water, convenient transportation, and large lots on elegantly landscaped streets.

Beautiful and Progressive Ginter Park

THE SUBURB WITHOUT AN EQUAL

All of these homes are in Ginter Park. For full information and descriptive folder, apply to
LEWIS GINTER LAND AND IMPROVEMENT CO.,
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From the Times-Dispatch (April 1910)

New residential construction began immediately, boomed in 1908 to 1910, and continued at an intense level until the beginning of the First World War. A second building boom occurred in the twenties and lasted until the Great Depression. The first investors in the community had varied professional backgrounds ranging from executives in manufacturing and insurance to owners of retail stores, lawyers, doctors and clergymen.

The Ginter Park Residents Association was founded in 1909 to promote the interests of the new neighborhood in matters such as police security, fire protection and sanitation. Within three years of its founding the Residents Association voted to leave Henrico County and incorporate as a town. Governor John Garland Pollard began his political career as Ginter Park's first mayor in 1912. The town of Ginter Park was a short-lived phenomenon: it was annexed by the City of Richmond in 1914.

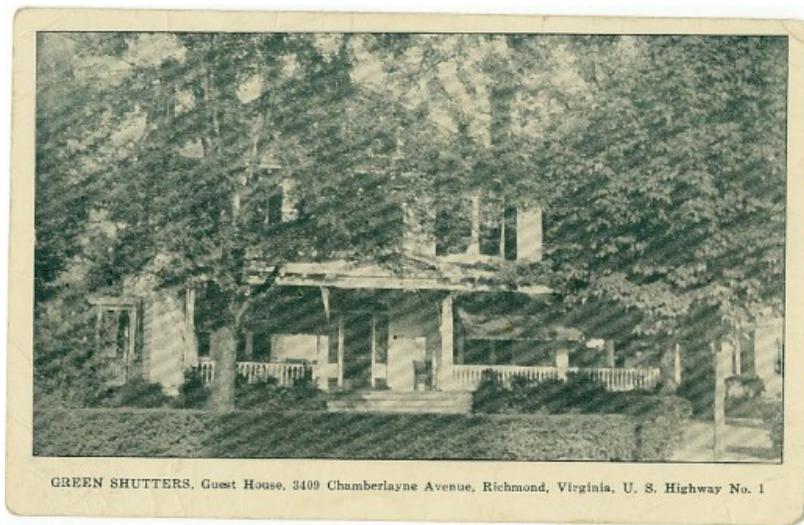


John Garland Pollard (from William & Mary)

With the increase of automobile traffic through the twenties and thirties, Depression-hit residents of Brook Road and Chamberlayne Avenue vied for the

commercial designation of U.S. Route 1. Chamberlayne Avenue was awarded this distinction, which was later to become its nemesis.

By 1951 the Ginter Park Directory listed thirteen **tourist homes within the district**, a marked deviation from Ginter's ideal community of single family dwellings.



3409 Chamberlayne Avenue (from Chamberlayne Avenue)

Many of the large homes along Chamberlayne were converted into nursing homes during the fifties as the heavy volume of trucks and local traffic made the avenue less desirable for families. Eventually the construction of Interstate 95 around the city doomed the tourist business along Chamberlayne, but the precedent to allow multi-family dwellings along this major artery had already been established.

From the late 1950s to the present many of the fine mansions along Chamberlayne were demolished to make way for more profitable multi-apartment units. The decision to rezone Chamberlayne Avenue to accommodate multi-family apartment complexes resulted in the wholesale demolition of some of the grandest historic structures ever built in Ginter Park.



The Colonies at Ginter Park : 3200 block of Chamberlayne Avenue

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ARCHITECTURE OF GINTER PARK

The Ginter Park Historic District contains 302 contributing buildings, 50 noncontributing buildings, 179 contributing structures, and 25 noncontributing structures.

Ginter Park encompasses a wide, eclectic variety of homes built from the early 1890s through the 1930s. Punctuating the regular pattern of houses and yards is a surprising variation of architectural styles, ranging from modest Queen Anne cottages to stately Colonial Revival mansions.

Elaborate examples of American Foursquare, modified Queen Anne, Bungalow, Spanish Colonial, Tudor Revival, Shingle Style, and even Egyptian Revival/Vernacular can also be found throughout Ginter Park, though the predominant style is probably best described as Colonial Revival/Builder's Vernacular.



3207 Seminary Avenue / "Spring Grange"

Spring Grange, a unique survivor of the late 18th century, is a quaint vernacular farmhouse located at 3207 Seminary Avenue. This house provides one of the few reminders of the area's rural origins. The two-story, central-passage farmhouse presents a Greek Revival appearance on its west-facing Seminary Avenue elevation; however, a two-story ell to the rear features beaded clapboard and hand-pegged window construction. The rear ell appears to be the original farmhouse supposedly dating from the 1780s. The Italianate brackets on the west facade's cornice and portico suggest that the house underwent a modernization during the mid-to-late 19th century.

On the 1906 Lewis Ginter Land and Improvement Company plat map this property is identified by the name "Rawlings" and is situated halfway between Seminary and Chamberlayne avenues. Its exceptional placement interrupted the orderly layout of new home sites and called special attention to its established position in the once rural landscape.

Spring Grange symbolizes the "before" condition of the 19th-century landscape before Ginter's intensive development transformed the many open farm tracts into a new, denser suburban community.



3408 Noble Avenue

Four surviving Ginter Park Water Works cottages located at 800, 810, and 814 Westwood Avenue and 3408 Noble Avenue provide a transitional view of the pre-development Ginter Park landscape. A glass plate photo in the Valentine Museum collection shows these ca. 1890 modest Queen Anne cottages framed by new unpaved roads and sidewalks, newly planted trees in tree boxes, and vacant, unimproved home sites immediately adjacent to the cottages.

An advertisement by the Lewis Ginter Land and Improvement Company for the sale of these open house lots described the extent of improvements undertaken throughout the planned community:

“When the streets had been graded and the fine system of avenues paved, the question of sewerage was quickly settled. As the new blocks were opened sewer and water lines were put down. Within the past eighteen months avenues, extending more than 3,000 feet have been added to the chain of driveways and along the edges the privet has grown. Years of attention and thousands of dollars wisely expended have threaded the park with rows of luxuriant trees.”



Chamberlayne and Westwood

Also constructed during this seminal stage in the community development were the granite and limestone obelisks which mark the corners of major

intersections.

Another ensemble of six Queen Anne-style cottages in the 3600 block of Hawthorne Avenue may offer the earliest evidence of Ginter's direct architectural impact. These German-sided and weatherboarded frame houses at 3601, 3603, 3605, 3607, 3609, and 3611 Hawthorne Avenue were built as dwellings for Ginter's workmen who were hired to construct the new roads, lay in the water and sewer lines, and plant hedges and trees prior to the waves of housing construction that followed in the next decade.



3611 and 3609 Hawthorne Avenue

All of the cottages exhibit similar design features one to two stories with intersecting gable roofs and gable dormers. Some of the original polychromatic slate roofs feature floral patterns of red and tan colored slate. The single-story porches are supported by slender turned columns and trimmed with ornate turned or cut-out pattern balusters. Now-missing spindle friezes and trussed projecting eaves once added a decorative exuberance to these modestly scaled builders' homes.



3601 Hawthorne Avenue

The largest house in the group, located at 3601 Hawthorne Avenue, is purported to have been the supervisor's home. It retains many of its High Queen Anne-style features such as an ogee-shaped tower projecting from the southwest corner and a large circular stained glass window on the north elevation. It is apparent from the design of these first builders' houses in the

master plan that Ginter held high expectations for the quality of the future domestic architecture to be constructed in his planned community.

Ginter Park's first residential construction boom began in the first decade of the 20th century. In an advertising supplement to the Times-Dispatch dated May 3, 1908, photo illustrations of fifteen of the finest houses recently completed in the new community are shown. These homes typify the large scale Colonial Revival/Builders Vernacular style that dominates the general character of the neighborhood today.



RESIDENCE OF MR. JAS. B. BARKER.



RESIDENCE OF MR. OWALLEY SANDERS.

RTD 1908

These expansive homes were marketed for successful businessmen and community leaders; that is, an exclusive, wealthy clientele. Some of the finest examples of these mansions can be seen along the 3500 block of Seminary Avenue, notably at 3500 and 3501 Seminary. These two grand houses epitomize the ambitious spirit of the age by their monumental scale and materials, and by their extravagant trim and finishes.



3501 Seminary Avenue

For example, the two-story portico of the Gresham House at 3501 Seminary is supported by four massive Doric columns, each carved from single blocks of granite approximately twenty-five feet in height. These tremendous shafts of stone may be the largest non-segmented classical columns in Richmond.

The portico floor features a polychrome pattern of ceramic tiles in mosaic patterns. The oversized windows and doors all boast delicate bevelled and leaded glass, even in the highest dormer windows. The interior is finished with expensive hardwoods and includes finely turned walnut balusters on the elegant formal stair. Five stone mantels and chimneys provide impressive interior focal points.



3500 Seminary Avenue

By contrast, the Paschall House directly across the street at 3500 Seminary, favored the asymmetry and multiple roof forms popularized by the Queen Anne style. The conical tower projecting above the porch gives the primary facade a playful, informal character, in counterpoint to its stately neighbor across the street.

The identical coursed-ashlar wall construction, granite porch columns, and terra-cotta roof visually relate the Paschall House to the Gresham House despite their opposing stylistic differences. That these two stylistically different houses could be constructed simultaneously (ca. 1908) with identical building materials underscores the enthusiastic eclecticism practiced by builders and

architects in the first part of the century.



Paschall House (RTD 1908)

It is also significant to note that a pencil rendering of the Paschal House served as the centerpiece of the 1908 Times-Dispatch advertising supplement for the Lewis Ginter Land and Improvement Company. The primary importance given to the rendering in the ad suggests that these two homes were considered among the finest in Ginter Park, to be emulated by all would-be home owners contemplating buying nearby vacant lots. In effect the architectural standards of the community were to be set and judged by the quality of these two prototype houses.



Lewis Ginter Community Center (3421 Hawthorne Avenue)

The most prominent example of the Tudor Revival style in Ginter Park has been a major community landmark since its completion in 1908. The Lewis Ginter Community Center at 3421 Hawthorne Avenue is characteristic of the style as seen in its steeply pitched gable roofs, decorative half-timbering, and rough textured stucco cladding. The Craftsman influence of the heavy timbered entrance portico is also apparent in the detailing of the exposed joinery.



Lewis Ginter Community Center (3421 Hawthorne Avenue)

In 1915 a new Ginter Park Elementary School opened at 3817 Chamberlayne Avenue. The new school, an imposing Italianate structure with a square central tower centered above the main entrance, anchors the northern entrance to Ginter Park via Chamberlayne Avenue. Constructed by the City of Richmond for the newly annexed suburb, the civic building is distinguished by its broad Roman tile hip roof and an ornate leaded stained glass semi-circular fanlight over the main entrance. Ginter Park Elementary School is set into the stained-glass mosaic, creating a colorful backlit sign that is particularly impressive at night.



Ginter Park Elementary School (Chamberlayne Avenue)

In 1922 Grace Arents donated the community center to the Residents Association with the legal stipulation that it be named after her uncle, Lewis Ginter, and that the building be used for non-profit civic, social, and cultural purposes. To the present day that mandate has been honored by the community.

Various organizations such as the Ginter Park Women's Club, the Garden Club, the Masons, and the Boy Scouts have utilized the facility on a regular basis for more than half a century. Social dancing under the watchful eye of the Cotillion Club often occurred in the expansive auditorium on the second level.

In 1923 a large community swimming pool and a gymnasium were added. A second pool was added in the 1960s to respond to the community's shifting

interest towards summertime recreational activities. No other building within the historic district has been so closely identified with the community's formative period and subsequent history.



The greater Ginter Park community contains a variety of churches serving more than a dozen denominations. Five churches lie within the historic district boundaries: St. John's Baptist on North Avenue (1893), St. Thomas Episcopal on Hawthorne Avenue (1912), Ginter Park Methodist on Laburnum Avenue (1950s), the Gospel Lighthouse on Moss Side Avenue (1950s), and Ginter Park Presbyterian (1960s) on Seminary Avenue. St. John's Baptist, the oldest church structure in the district, retains its original multicolored stained glass windows and ornamental slate roof; however, the original clapboarded siding has been concealed by a more recent stucco treatment.



Union Theological Seminary

The Union Theological Seminary Quadrangle, bounded by Brook Road, Chamberlayne Avenue, Westwood, and Melrose avenues, is considered the masterpiece of Richmond architect Charles H. Read, Jr. The ensemble of eleven academic structures arranged in a formal quadrangle provides a major focal point for the community, and is a continuing source of cultural and ecclesiastical activities for greater Richmond. The architecture is Read's own inimitable eclecticism; a dominant Richardsonian Romanesque quality with Gothic Revival crenellations and Queen Anne turrets and railings.



3417 Hawthorne Avenue

Shingle Style architecture may be best represented within the district by the four adjacent houses at 3417, 3419, 3420, and 3422 Hawthorne Avenue. The partially shingled dwelling at 3417 Hawthorne provides a good example of the eclectic spirit of the first decade of the 20th century. The long exposed eaves lend a Craftsman influence to the design, while the semi-circular entrance canopy supported on large consoles gives the primary facade a distinct Colonial Revival appearance. In addition, the shell motif within the transom recalls another popular motif of the Colonial Revival genre.



3419 Hawthorne Avenue

The dwelling at 3419 Hawthorne Avenue, constructed in 1909, follows the American Foursquare floor plan, yet is completely shingled on the exterior, which is unusual for the Foursquare house type. The quarrel-paned upper sashes in all the windows also suggest a degree of Colonial Revival influence.



3420 Hawthorne Avenue

The house at 3420 Hawthorne Avenue, built in 1926, exhibits a clear Colonial Revival intention. The symmetrical primary elevation, the ornate broken pediment over the entrance, and the fine dillion cornice surrounding the house all contribute to its colonial character.



3422 Hawthorne Avenue

By contrast, the oldest shingled house at 3422 Hawthorne Avenue (ca. 1905) shows a distinct Queen Anne influence characterized by its trussed gable ornamentation, asymmetrical facade, and two-over-two double-sash window configuration. This vernacular design retains its original standing-seam metal roof and cedar shingle cladding at the second story. (This house can be seen in a panoramic photograph of the early Ginter Park neighborhood (ca. 1910) as published in Hale's *Photographs of Richmond*.)



3215 Seminary Avenue

Three houses within the historic district warrant special mention because of their unique design features or construction. At 3215 Seminary Avenue the perimeter walls of this Spanish Colonial dwelling are constructed of step-poured concrete with a rough form-board finish. Bands of horizontal joints in the concrete indicate that the concrete pour was accomplished in several stages. This house exemplifies the willingness of some builders and homeowners to experiment with new building materials and construction methods, while retaining similar design expressions as their neighbors.



3604 Seminary Avenue

Similarly, the house at 3604 Seminary Avenue exhibits a unique Egyptian Revival influence, and may be the only domestic example of the style in the state. The house resembles an American Foursquare with its 2-story square plan and center portico, yet its flared concrete cornice and matching portico cornice are unmistakable references to the Egyptian Revival motif. The stout Doric columns supporting the porch are without Egyptian capitals or proportions however, which suggests that the builder was selectively borrowing from the vocabulary of the Egyptian Revival, while treating the remainder of the design in a more typical builder's vernacular.



3601 Brook Road

The third house at 3601 Brook Road displays an exuberant Mediterranean Revival influence. Classical proportions, terra-cotta pigmented stucco, and limestone quoins and lintels give this house its special Palladian character. The masonry parapet screens the low slope of the roof from view in the Italian Renaissance tradition. The relieving arches above each window are adorned with a bas-relief sculpture of a serpent and swag. In the dormer window projecting above the parapet in the center bay a bust of Beethoven celebrates the profession of the house's owner. By its grand style and exotic detailing this house epitomizes the individuality and surprising idiosyncrasies of many of Ginter Park's finest residences.



bust of Beethoven

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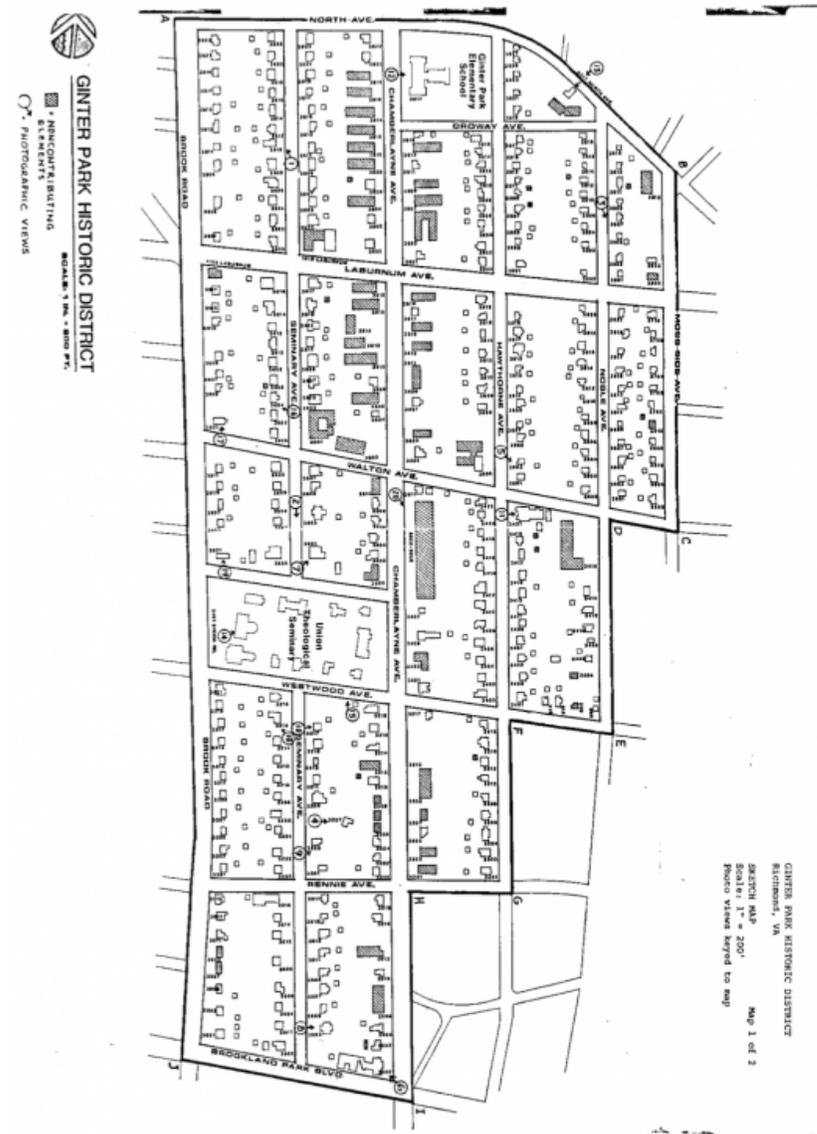
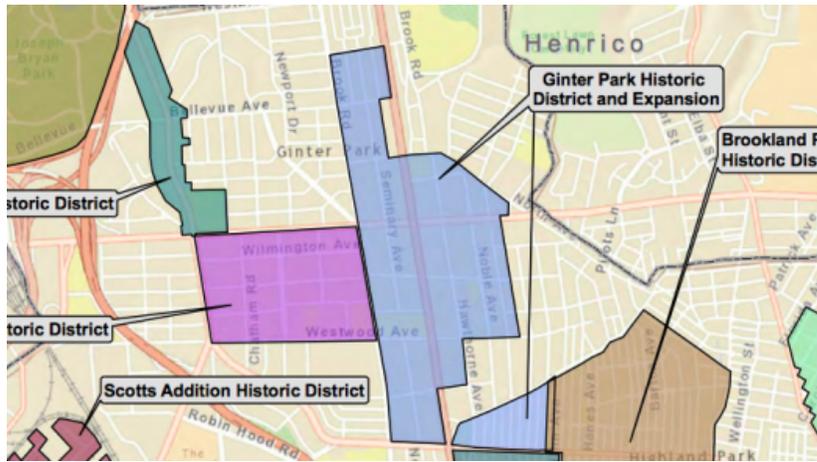
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MAPS

Following the neighborhood's original plat of development, the district boundaries are Brook Road to the west, Claremont Avenue and North Avenue to the north, Brookland Park Boulevard to the south, and a stair step pattern of

Chamberlayne Avenue, Rennie Avenue, Hawthorne Avenue, Westwood Avenue, Noble Avenue, Walton Avenue, and Moss Side Avenue to the east.

Both of the maps below are from the DHR application for the Ginter Park Historic District.



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CREDIT AND SOURCES

The text above is almost entirely sourced from the the registration form from the [Ginter Park Historic District application to the National Register of Historic Places](#) (PDF). That text, dated 1986, includes much more more than is shown here, including an entry for every property in the district.

The application form was prepared by Douglas Harnsberger and Anne Thorn of the Ginter Park Residents Association. I have simply made some edits to the text, formatted it to HTML, and added the embedded media.

All photos are by John Murden unless otherwise noted.

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from Suburban Reflections via VCU

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