History of Rockwood Manor Park

In 1920, Carolyn Gangwer Caughey (pronounced “Coy”) ventured out of Washington, D.C., west along the Old Conduit Road (MacArthur Blvd.) to her newly purchased estate near Great Falls. Tall cedars, poplars, and oaks covered rock studded hills rolling gently down to a stream valley. The natural elements immediately suggested to Mrs. Caughey a name for her country estate, Rockwood.

A wealthy socialite whose ancestry dates back to the American Revolution, Carolyn was a skillful businesswoman with a love for architecture and a keen knack for moneymaking in real state. Who’s Who in the Nation’s Capital lists her as “active in civic betterment, especially related to better constructed and better planned homes.” It also credits her with designing one of the largest apartment houses in the Nation’s Capital at that time. Therefore, it came as no surprise to many of her close friends that she designed and personally supervised the construction of her new home. Frequent visits to auctions and antique dealers in the area helped her to furnish her country estate.

Carolyn and her husband, John Wilson Caughey, had no children. But, as a true model for women’s achievement long before such traits were fashionable, she was extremely interested in character building for young women and wanted her country estate to be used for that purpose. Her admiration for the fledging Girl Scout movement during the early 1930’s was personified by courage and leadership displayed by young Helen Zelov during a theatre fire in Washington, D.C. This led her to select the organization to become the beneficiary of her beloved Rockwood. Carolyn Gangwer Caughey died at Rockwood in July 1936.

Operated by the local council and after 1946, by the national organization, the estate became known as the “Rockwood Girl Scout National Center,” offering accommodations in its dormitory style units for civic, cultural, religious, and educational groups. At its height, Rockwood-as one of only four National Girl Scout Camps in the United States-played host to 15,000 to 20,000 Girl Scouts each year as they came to visit Washington, D.C.

Then, in 1976, the board of directors of Girl Scouts U.S.A. Inc., citing excessive costs in operating the center, announced their intention to sell Rockwood to local developers who wanted to build single family homes on the 93 acre site. Local scout troops and citizens’ associations came together in 1979 as a “Rescue Rockwood Committee” and filed a class action suit to block the sale claiming that it violated the terms of Carolyn Caughey’s Will. The case was settled in 1981. Approximately 60 acres were sold to developers. The remaining 30 acres and ownership of the Manor House, Carolyn Cottage and several other buildings were transferred to the Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission for use as a public park.

The Commission, through its Department of Parks in Montgomery County, has since renovated the property. To carry out Carolyn Caughey’s legacy, Rockwood Manor continues to play host to social, civic
and business organizations. Girl Scouts, Boy Scouts, Youth Groups, and students of Montgomery County Public Schools use Rockwood as a meeting place and for overnight retreats.

**The Manor House:** The original centerpiece of the Rockwood Manor Estate.

**Brooke Hall:** Named for Mrs. Frederick H. Brooke, National President of the Girl Scouts in 1937 after Carolyn Caughey’s death in 1936.

**Carolyn Cottage & Caughey Room:** Named for Carolyn Gangwer Caughey, the designer, builder, and original owner of Rockwood.

**French House:** (Former Nurse’s Station) Named for the former caretaker or Rockwood, Alexander B. French, whose family resided on the site.

**Girl Scout Room:** Served as a display room for Rockwood memorabilia and a mini archive of Girl Scout history.

**Hoover Room:** Named for Mrs. Lou Henry Hoover, wife of President Herbert Hoover. Mrs. Hoover was twice National President of the Girl Scouts.

**Knox Room:** Named for “Miss Lucy” Knox, who served as the Assistant Director of Rockwood National Girl Scout Center for 10 years.

**Rapidan Room:** Named for Hoovers’ presidential retreat in Shenandoah National Park. In 1941, Mrs. Hoover donated furniture from Camp Rapidan to Rockwood.

**Salomon Room:** Named for Julian Salomon, a lead planner with the National Park Service in the 1930’s whose credits include the design of “Shangri-La” the mountain retreat of President Franklin D. Roosevelt. Mr. Salomon, as the official campground and property planner for the Girl Scouts, began designing Rockwood as a full-service camping facility in the late 1940’s.

**Skyview Lodge & Weston Hill cabin:** Named for two cabins and tent areas used specifically by handicapped scouts.

**The Oaks & Tall Timbers (cabins):** Named for two of the original cabins surrounded by tent platform units at Rockwood

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