

MR. BURLING'S SPRING POOL

I do not know what kind of a man Edward B. Burling Sr. was. He was born February 1st 1870 (the same year as my grandparents in Denmark) and died at 96 on September 3rd 1966, two years before I heard of him. (His gravestone in New Hampshire says Oct. 3rd). As I have learned Mr. Burling was one of Washington's "superlawyers" and a brief look at his firm (now "Covington") cannot but impress—one of DC's most powerful and important firms. He founded it in 1919 with another lawyer named J. Harry Covington.



Why I however, as a young man, heard of Mr. Burling, has nothing to do with the practice of law. I first heard his name in reference to the 400-acre piece of land that he had once owned along the banks of the Potomac River in McLean, Virginia. It was called the "Burling Tract" and my U.S. Studies teacher, Mr. Paul Douglas told us about it. A new "cause" was being born! Hey—it was the sixties.

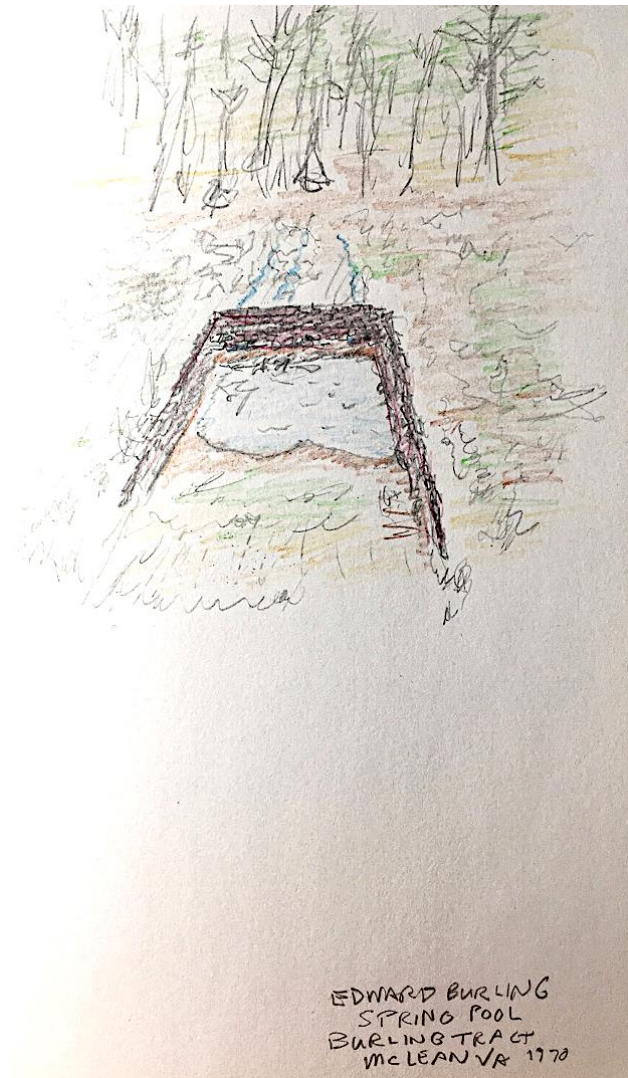
I became involved with a grass-roots effort to preserve the Tract from imminent development—and this was my personal introduction to environmentalism. Mr. Burling's land remains largely intact today as the [Scott's Run Nature Preserve](#),¹ 335 of those 400 acres, at least. In the summer of 1971, I was present when former U.S. Interior Secretary Stewart L. Udall spoke at its dedication. A *Washington Post* summary of those days is in a 2009 article [here](#).² All that remains of Mr. Burling's footprint is the site of a retreat cabin he built on the land—actually just the chimney. It is here:



¹ <https://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/parks/scotts-run>

² <https://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2009/06/09/AR2009060903699.html>

What few will remember, unless they hiked that tract in the late 1960s or early 1970s, was the ruin of a spring fed swimming pool that Mr. Burling dug himself (or so I was told in 1969). I visited the tract many times at the end of my junior year, throughout my senior year (often taking friends with me) and even once the next year when Secretary Udall spoke. And even though I worked in McLean for the Navy after college, I have never yet been back. But I have sketched the pool from memory, here:



The pool had not been maintained in any sense for years, an aspect which always enchants me with old structures. Untouched, pristine, they always retain a measure of their former dignity, to me. The little pool was fed, flowing downhill, by springs on the site. It was brick lined and not very deep. I doubt any evidence remains today—it was not thought to be a significant part of the site even in 1969. But it enchanted me as I imagined attorney Burling, sitting or lying in it on warm summer days after grueling lawyer-work in hot Washington, then wandering up the hill to his lonely cabin to fix a bit of supper. I don't know—maybe that's not how he used it. But that's how I imagined it. D.C. can be particularly torturous in the summer.

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