

Remembering The Mayor of Lexington Place

Walter Slaughter, the “Mayor of Lexington Place,” died in his home on Monday morning, August 10, 2009 at the age of ninety-seven. He had lived in the same house since 1956.

Walter was raised on a farm outside of Charlottesville, Virginia. He was one of ten children -- five boys and five girls. The family owned two horses. One pulled the plow, the other took the family to church on Sunday. At an early age Walter was expected to handle multiple chores at the farm. He also brought in extra money doing odd jobs at the University of Virginia -- lawn care, gardening -- whatever opportunities were offered a black boy in the early twentieth century.

His father was a blacksmith as well as a farmer. He also expected his sons to go into smithery. But at the age of eighteen Walter heard that there were jobs in Washington. He headed north. He worked for the federal government for forty-two years, at the Pentagon, at the “public hospital” (later D.C. General and now closed) and the U.S. Postal Service. He received a letter of commendation from the Postmaster General for his long and exemplary service.

Shortly after arriving in Washington, Walter met an attractive young woman at a marathon dance in Georgetown. The marathon lasted well beyond the dance. Walter and Eloise Slaughter married and had six children: Cornelia, Robert, Pearl, Frances, Marquita and Walter Jr., nicknamed Walkie, all raised on Lexington Place. Frances Slaughter, known fondly for providing outstanding pre-school education to our Capitol Hill community, remembers the strict family rules: you never missed school and you never missed church. Apparently Walter believed in “tough love” even before the term was coined.

When asked how he became the “Mayor of Lexington Place,” Walter would shrug it off with a sly smile. But the old-timers on Lexington know



The many faces of Walter Slaughter. Photo Collage: Tom Hamilton

full well. He was a founding member of the Stanton Park Neighborhood Association (SPNA), in the days when it met in people’s houses, before finding a permanent home at the Northeast Branch Library. At one of SPNA’s annual dinners, coinciding with Walter’s eightieth birthday, Walter was greeted with a large cake and a rousing rendition of “Happy Birthday.” Two remnants of Walter’s public concerns, in case you wondered where they came from -- the metal, neighborhood watch signs behind people’s houses and the small, green signs reading “Please clean up after your dog.”

Before SPNA he formed the Lexington Place Community Organization, known informally as The Club. The Club met regularly, held clean-up functions in the street and in the alleys, convened annual block parties and held fund raisers for many a worthy cause. Marion Barry, just getting started in D.C. politics, came to an early block

party. Walter thought that was just fine. His wife, Eloise, was somewhat less enthusiastic.

Perhaps Walter came to community activism because of the times in which he lived. He grew up in the Jim Crow South and moved to Washington, which at the time was still a sleepy southern town. He lived through the civil rights movement, the marches, the riots, the burning of the nearby H Street corridor. He believed that by walking and working hand in hand, he and his fellow believers in social justice could make a difference. “You can’t fight a battle by yourself,” he said. Later in life he was an active member of the New Abundant Life Missionary Baptist Church on 15th Street, NE.

Walter is survived by a large, loving family: His surviving children include Marquita Slaughter-Cook, Frances Slaughter, Delonte Clyburn, Brenden Antonio Slaughter, Breanna Nicole Walton, and a son in law, Howard Cook, Jr. He is also survived by eighteen grandchildren, twenty great grandchildren and twenty-one great great grandchildren. He lives on within us all.

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Boos and Kudos to Washington Gas & DDOT

Boos directed at Washington Gas for using a jackhammer to dig up the new paving stones on 7th Street at Eastern Market to get at a gas leak. The pavers were design to be pried up in just such cases.

Kudos awarded to both Washington Gas and DC Department of Transportation (DDOT) for doing such a good job restoring the street using warehoused pavers due to DDOT’s foresight in ordering extras.

However, can we ask that the next time utility work needs to be done, the jackhammers stay away? After all, there are only some many of those pavers still in storage. And why, after all that work on the street with replacing a lot of the underground

infrastructure, should anyone need to dig up the street again?

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Don't Narrow Pennsylvania Ave.

On the evening of July 1, three alternative concept designs for a totally revamped Eastern Market Metro Plaza were presented for the first time to the public. The designs were developed by a "capitol hill town square" task force funded through Barracks Row Main Street.

Many good reasons were given for making better use of this semi-neglected site, but none of them seem to justify the enormous interruption in local residents' and merchants' lives and livelihoods, especially for the cost of probably millions of dollars in federal and District money that wholesale ripping up and replacing all that is there now would entail.

Our main concern with all three plans proposed, however, centers on one thing all three have in common: reducing part of Pennsylvania Ave, SE from eight lanes to four or six lanes.

When L'Enfant put forth his design for the "City," he based it on the idea of broad avenues radiating from the executive mansion (now the White House) and the Capitol. These wide avenues were to provide "long vistas that would give direction and character to the City." And how wide should these avenues be? Their width was such a central part of his plan that he specified their width. He wrote: "Every grand traverse avenue and every principal divergent one . . . is 160 feet in breadth, and thus divided: 10 feet of pavement on each side (20 feet); 30 feet of gravel walk, planted with trees on each side (60 feet); 80 feet in the middle for Carriage Way (80 feet)." In its entirety, this adds up to 160 feet.

The total width of Pennsylvania Avenue, SE is 145 feet. No matter what else is done to improve the Eastern Market Plaza, the one characteristic that should be preserved first, foremost and for future generations of residents, merchants and visitors is the width of Pennsylvania Avenue, SE. We hope those who make decisions will make this a #1 priority in any plans adopted and implemented for this site.

Tom Morris & Jann Bradley

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Fowl Play

I need to let you know about some new fowl play in our neighborhood—but it's a good kind.



ABOVE: Rather than replacing the pavers, Washington Gas patched the street with ugly cold pack. Photo: Andrew Lightman

LEFT: Workers from Washington Gas dig up 7th Street SE jack-hammering expensive pavers. Photo: Andrew Lightman

BELOW: DDOT and Washington Gas fully repaired the street. Photo: Andrew Lightman



On May 3, we hatched eight chicks in an incubator in our house. We have been raising them, and recently moved them into our backyard. Many of you have seen them when they "free range" in the corner yard next door at 14th and G.

We want to keep two or three hens in our yard. They are quiet (unlike roosters) and they will start laying eggs in a few months. Leah and Ada have been having a great time with them, and have been very diligent about helping their parents keep the nesting area clean.

Recently, a passerby called 911 after seeing the chickens in the corner yard. We were then visited by DC Police and then Animal Control. We have 10 days to either secure a permit for the chicks or remove them from the premises.

DC Code is unclear, but support from our neighbors will help us make the case that we deserve a permit. Would you please sign the attached statement? Feel free to include any thoughts of your own that you would like to make.

As we hope you already know, we are committed to being good neighbors regardless of DC regulations, so please let us know if you have any concerns about the fowl play we are undertaking.

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