

Roy McCathran

1888 – 1959

Mayor

Town of Washington Grove

1937 – 1957

Prepared by

Joan McCathran Mahaffey



Endorsement of Washington Grove's Proposed Resolution 2023-01: Acknowledging Washington Grove's Racially Exclusionary Past and Committing to an Equitable and Inclusive Future

"Washington Grove is a special place. The vigilance of town residents has preserved the architectural character and natural environment of the town. An active citizenry has fostered a certain sense of community."

"Indeed, the special character of the Grove with its cultural traditions including community service, music, and conservation, can be greatly enriched, and expanded through diversity, equity and inclusion of people within the town and surrounding neighborhoods."

Clare Lise Kelly

March 13, 2023

Former member, Town of Washington Grove Heritage Committee

Charter member, Washington Grove HPC

Author, Places from the Past Montgomery Modern Architectural Historian

Master Planner, M-NCPPC, employment 1989-2017

Dear Mayor, Town Council, and members of the Resolution Work Group,

My family and I are grateful for the passage of Resolution 2023-01 Acknowledging Washington Grove's Racially Exclusive Past. We have always been in favor of some Resolution. A diverse community is a stronger community. All along, our objections have been to the inclusion of the Reference Document with its misinformation and negative insinuations. I want to thank the Work Group for all their time and effort in coming up with a compromise Resolution. I am especially grateful that this Resolution has passed in honor of the 150th Celebration to honor our Town's legacy.

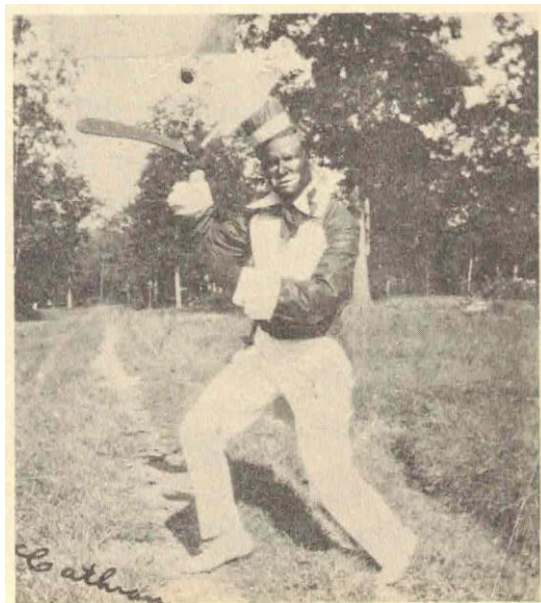
Sincerely, Joan McCathran Mahaffey

May 13, 2023

Roy McCathran was in his early twenties when pictures of him were taken in blackface. Minstrel shows with performers in blackface had been common for decades throughout the country. Unfortunately, Roy is being specifically attacked today. He is being used as a scapegoat and blamed for centuries of racial repression.

Any man makes mistakes. Hindsight is 20/20. One cannot compare today's standards with the standards of over 100 years ago. However, his worth should be judged by comparing his mistakes of the times with the good that he contributed over a lifetime. This presentation is intended to help people make that assessment of Washington Grove's first mayor, Irving Leroy McCathran (Roy) and protect the integrity of the town.

“Skits were first used to show a moral, to make a point, but in time they came to resemble vaudeville.... the shows were never quite as intemperate as vaudeville.”



Minstrel & Mayor Roy McCathran



THE WASHINGTON GROVE MINSTRELS
(EIGHTH SEASON)
IN THE
AUDITORIUM

Saturday Evening, September 2, 1916

AT 8 P. M.

CAST

Interlocutor

M. M. Browning

Endmen

George A. Myers
Ed. Felt

Roy McCathran
Earl Palmer

Soloists

C. E. Myers
E. H. Wall
R. McP. Milans

A. M. McCabe
Ed. Myers
D. E. Garges

Musical Director

Roy McCathran

Property Man

H. V. Hunt

Accompanist

F. B. Couch

Electrician

F. De B. Weston

PROGRAM

1. Opening Chorus.....By the Company
- First Addition of Endmen.....Felt and Palmer
2. Georgia Moon.....R. McP. Milans
- Second Addition of Endment...Myers and McCathran
3. Ephraim Johnson.....Roy McCathran
4. Mandolin Trio.....P. Garges, D. Hipkins, B. Hunt
5. Are You from Dixie?.....J. M. McCabe
6. Oh! You Candy Kid.....Ed. Myers
7. Loading Up The Mandy Lee.....D. E. Garges
8. Just A Wearyin' for You.....Geo. A. Myers
9. I've Got a Sweet Tooth Bothering Me...Earl Palmer
10. When I Dream of Old Erin.....Double Quartette
11. When the Major Plays Those Minor Melodies
Ed. Felt
12. The Spaniard that Blighted My Life.....E. H. Wall
13. Somewhere a Voice is Calling.....C. E. Myers
14. Closing Medley.....By The Company

Ice Cream for Sale at the Door

CIRCLE

Ed. Adams	W. B. Hardy	C. Edwin Myers
M. M. Browning	Donald Hipkins	W. Myers
Jack Childress	W. A. Hipkins	H. H. Osborne
S. C. Cissel, Jr.	R. McP. Milans	R. E. Palmer
S. C. Cissel	S. J. McCathran	Allan Perley
W. S. Culbertson	Roy McCathran	M. W. Perley
J. R. Durnell	A. M. McCabe	J. T. Rolf
E. H. Felt	J. M. McCabe	A. Tweeddale
D. E. Garges	S. Miller	Leo. Tweeddale
Phil Garges	J. T. Meaney	Peter Valaer, Jr.
H. B. Hootnagle	W. R. Macgill	R. A. Weaver
H. V. Hunt	J. F. Myers	C. F. Welch
H. B. Hunt	C. E. Myers	E. H. Wall
S. W. Hardy	G. A. Myers	

Watch for Big Parade at 7.30 and
Pick Your Favorite

There is no denying Roy participated in minstrel shows. Minstrel shows ridiculing Black people had a negative effect on Diversity, Equity and Inclusivity (DEI) nationally for at least 200 years. However, extrapolating national issues to the local level has its faults. Many of the performances of the "Washington Grove Minstrels" were not performed in blackface (see photo above, left). There is no proof that blackface was used after World War I. Furthermore, in the 1916 program, which was performed in blackface, Roy was the Music Director. His musical specialty was cornet. According to the program, the piece "Elijah Johnson" was not sung but was instrumental. The pictures above, were taken 26 years before Roy was first unanimously elected Mayor of Washington Grove in 1937.

Contemporary Interpretations of Blackface



Antique Roadshow. Season 28, Episode 1 Aired November 20, 2023

Al Jolson Record, “The Jazz Singer” Warner Brothers Vitaphone Sample disc, Disc number 6, RCA Victor Company, Inc., Hollywood California. Debuted on October 6, 1927.

Record being evaluated by Grant Zahajko, Grant Zahajko Auctions, LLC, Davenport, WA

“The film itself depicts the story of Jakie Rabinowitz. He was a young man who defied tradition of his devout Jewish family. That, of course, was **played by Al Jolson. And the one thing we have to acknowledge about that, as Al Jolson talked about and as essays about the movie have come out, is that he wore blackface. Although at the time it was documented that it wasn't in to be a derogatory or demeaning fashion.** Mm-hmm.

I think it's probably one of the most important discs relating to the movie business. I'd put an insurance value on it of \$25,000.”

Black Americans were a part of life in Washington Grove as seen here:



There was sharing of music between Washington Grove and Emory Grove as witnessed by this church picnic photograph.

Rynex Family Collection

“A parade of the troupe, headed by a real Negro band, through the streets of the Grove attracted much attention to the performance.”

The Washington Sunday Star, Aug. 14, 1910



Photograph (c. late 1800s to early 1900s) of Black American residents from Washington, D.C. walking from the train at Washington Grove to Emory Grove via Grove Avenue probably during Emory Grove's Camp Meeting.

Town of Washington Grove Archives



Washington Grove Charter Committee Recommendations

WASHINGTON GROVE 1873-1937: A HISTORY OF THE W...

The tasks of these Charter Committees, 3 different committees established over a period from 1929 to 1937, was to study the mixed matters of stockholders' rights and the form of government itself via 3 recommendations listed.

These were Roy's goals.

The committee was not tasked with authoring deeds or covenants. They were not censoring deeds.

In Roy's obituary, he is quoted "I tried to side-step it once or twice (re-election). But I made the mistake of writing the Town Charter and they think I know it all."

On the strength of Browning's motion Walker withdrew his own, but the new motion failed to obtain a second. Then, upon the plea of the retiring president, minor modifications to the motion were allowed and the way was cleared for a second committee. President Hiller announced the makeup of the new group: the three original members were to remain—McCathran,

Turnage, and Garges—and Mrs. Hardy and William Hallam were to be added.

The committee worked through June and July in apparent harmony, and delivered its report at a special meeting on August 3. Its recommendations were simple and direct:

1. that each property owner was to be issued a fee simple deed,
2. that the government was to change to that of a municipal corporation, with the details to be arranged by a new committee, and
3. that the Association was to be dissolved and the assets distributed among the stockholders

Racial Covenants were not authored by Roy McCathran

1. The first covenant is a community planning issue which established a tax base for the town. This also ensured the quality of construction so the town could collect tax revenue and pay its bills.
2. The second covenant was to ensure the zoning was non-commercial but was a residential community.
3. The third was designed to restrict certain populations, including Black Americans, from buying property in certain areas.

Unfortunately, this third covenant was common across the United States and was imported here from deeds on DC property owned by Association members. This text of the fee simple deed, was at the discretion of each property owner. **Almost half of the deeds to properties in the new town did not have racial covenants added to the deeds.**

As Mayor, Roy's job was to transfer the deeds, not to censor or edit them.

There were no deed covenants ever on Roy McCathran's property at 111 Maple Avenue.

Detailed resolutions were presented to support each of the recommendations. The fee simple deed form for lots was to include only three covenants: (1) that any house constructed thereon would conform to building setback lines, and cost not less than \$1000, (2) that no use for mercantile, manufacturing, or mechanical purposes would be allowed, and (3) "That for the purposes of sanitation and health neither the party..., his heirs, or assigns shall or will sell, rent, lease, or otherwise dispose of said land or any improvements thereon to anyone of a race whose death rate is of a higher percentage than that of the white or Caucasian race." The covenants were intended to take the place of the Association's present tight control over the use of Grove property.

Washington Grove 1873-1937, Phil Edwards

TAKEN OUT OF CONTEXT

There were two visions for Washington Grove: One was spearheaded by Major Walker, Rosalie's grandfather, who was a real estate investor and wanted to sell properties for investment to rent during the summers. Roy McCathran's vision was that Washington Grove would become a year-round community where families could raise their children. Washington Grove is the Town it is today because Roy McCathran won that debate.

By 1914, the Walker Family had purchased 33% of the Camp Meeting Association shares. When Roy spoke about the covenants and selling property, as stated below (the yellow highlighted text) **Roy was not speaking of race, color, ethnicity, creed or religion. Roy was referring to selling properties to Major Walker.** In 1918, the Camp Meeting Association voted that no more shares could be purchased by or transferred to Major Walker to prevent him from gaining control of the Association.

Rosalie Shantz, Major Walker's granddaughter, commented on page 59 of her book "Grove Gatherings" warning people about to whom they sold property should be interpreted in light of this transitional ideological conflict. These tensions are discussed in depth in the Chapter "The Walker Years" of Phil Edwards' "Washington Grove, 1873-1937."

In our opinion, recent interpretations of this quote by RASEC Committee members, have twisted Rosalie's words to support their anti-racist agenda.

"A whole book could have been written about our first mayor, who served until 1957. The mayor spent a great deal of his time on Grove business and became active in the Maryland Municipal League.

Because he handle numerous real estate transactions, he often spoke of the covenants and of selling property to the right people."



Grove Gatherings Rosalie Shantz, page 59



The Washington
Grove Band,
pictured at the
Men's Clubhouse



Roy founded the first Town Band in 1912 and led it for 16 years. Here is a picture of the band in 1918 with recovering prisoners of war from World War I. For the love of music, Roy was involved with all musical events in Washington Grove. The Washington Grove Band performed in parades and concerts throughout the area and organized WWI Bond Drives throughout Montgomery County.



Religious Diversity



McCathran Family Collection

Roy became the youngest President of the Washington Grove Camp Meeting Association in 1922. Additionally, he was the first full-time resident of Washington Grove to hold this position. The control of the Association passed from wealthy, elite Methodists from Washington, DC to full-time Maryland residents in Washington Grove. In May of 1929, the Association ceased to be a religious body. The end of the Camp Meeting tradition and the establishment of an independent church were parallel features of the end of the Association era.

This attracted a more religiously diverse community in Washington Grove.

Roy McCathran was instrumental in founding the Gaithersburg-Washington Grove Volunteer Fire Department

In 1927, Grove residents could not agree on whether the Gaithersburg-Washington Grove Fire Department should serve only the charter areas of Gaithersburg and Washington Grove, or whether it could serve other surrounding communities as well (such as the Emory Grove Community). Finally, in 1935, “**Roy McCathran led the fight to allow it to serve all the areas it could**, a position that was finally adopted....Gaithersburg and Washington Grove had been socially separated by their widely different origins and had accumulated little common history. But the camaraderie built up among volunteers by mutual community service and shared danger had a significant bridging effect on the two communities.”



Washington Grove 1973-1937, Philip Edwards, pages 359-363

As Mayor, Roy McCathran:

Was unanimously elected as Mayor at the first Town Meeting held on July 10, 1937.

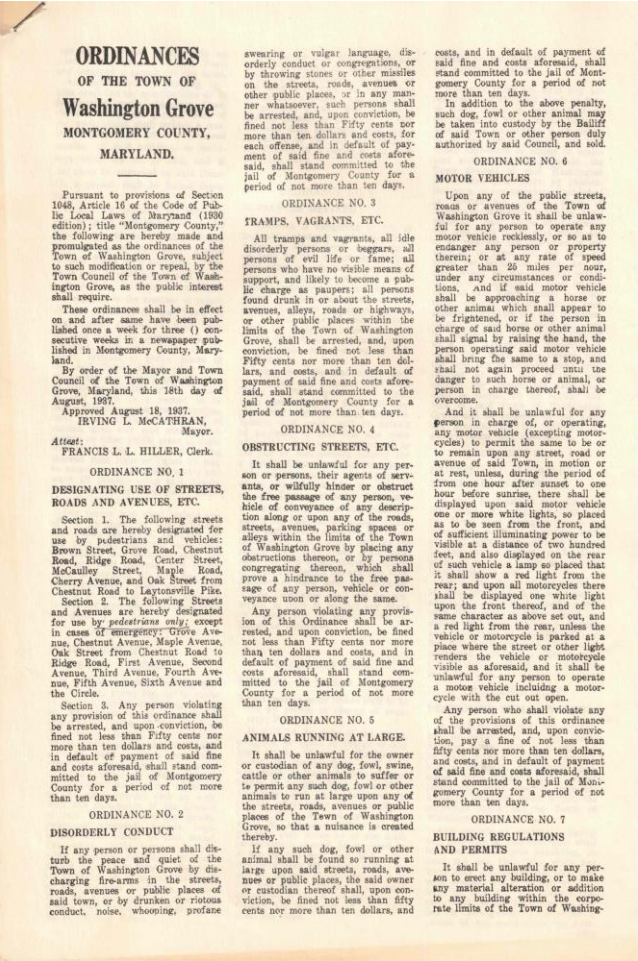
By the end of his first year, Mayor McCathran had:

- Authored and published the Town Ordinances;
- Set up the Town Meeting style of local government to give citizens more control over taxation;
- Set up a legal entity to collect and disperse taxes;
- Reconciled Association shares with deeds and transferred the deeds to the Town of Washington Grove;
- Prodded recalcitrant owners to hook their properties up to the WSSC water and sewer lines;
- Closed contaminated wells;
- Contracted for refuse removal services;
- Set in motion paving town roads.

By 1939, Washington Grove was one of the few up-county communities to have electric wiring, telephone service, piped water and sewers, and paved roads available to all residents. **After World War II, this infrastructure attracted a broader socio-economic population.**

This list includes only a few of Mayor Roy McCathran’s significant accomplishments towards creating a viable community with a family atmosphere.

Please see the index under Roy McCathran in Washington Grove 1937-1977.



McCathran Family Collection

Maryland Municipal League

Washington Grove is a small town in the middle of Montgomery County with a unique form of government. It was called by its first mayor, “a Town within a forest, an oasis of tranquility and a rustic jewel in the diadem of the great free state of Maryland.”

Irving Leroy McCathran

Before the town was created, Roy McCathran became involved with the Maryland Municipal League in 1936. **He was drawing Washington Grove into the broader community of Montgomery County and the State of Maryland.** In December 1956, Roy recommended that the Planning Committee become the Planning Commission “lest the county take over.” This matter was taken to a special Town Meeting and by May 29, 1957, the Planning Commission was operational. Roy successfully led the charge for Montgomery County for all municipalities, state-wide, to have their own planning and zoning authority. Roy also served as President of the Maryland Municipal League Montgomery County Chapter.

Home Rule

“Among the subjects in the home rule debate was the distribution of the powers of planning and zoning; this matter was taken up first. To have such authority within the municipality would probably mean creating a body responsible for that function alone, and not all municipalities wanted to create another layer of bureaucracy. The Grove, however, did. At the first opportunity a committee of Messrs. Pughe, Sylvester, and Hundley was formed to study the town’s options. Meanwhile, a bill to allow local zoning, the home rule amendment, was introduced in the 1955 Session of the Maryland General Assembly. The town enthusiastically supported it, sending Mayor McCathran to Annapolis to speak in its favor. The bill passed, becoming Article 66B of the Maryland Code, Planning and Zoning, in July. The Planning Commission of Washington Grove was in business with its first hearing scheduled for May 29, 1957.”

Washington Grove 1937-1977
Phil Edwards

From Association to Town

When the transition came the Grove had as a resident the man it would elect to be its first Mayor, a man who had served it well as President of the Association in the troubled twenties, and had worked tirelessly to preserve the Grove as a community when it was facing extinction in the thirties. He was the man who would set the tone for the new Town, who would make those all-important first decisions that would become precedents for the future, and who would leave his personal stamp upon 'The Town Within a Forest.' Irving LeRoy McCathran was a playful and spirited person, but also a reverent and spiritual one. As hundreds of people have learned by personal experience over the years, the Grove is both a playground for the spirit and a haven for the soul. Roy McCathran embodied that tradition.

Washington Grove 1937-1977

Phil Edwards

In an email, Phil Edwards, Washington Grove historian and author, wrote about Roy McCathran in response to a request by a McCathran Family member questioning if Roy was racist.

On Jan 13, 2024, at 8:23 PM, Phil Edwards:

“Thank you, it's an important testimony to the peace that (generally) is WG.

I'm curious about what's the ammunition? Roy could have been racist (many people are without expressing it), **but I have never seen an iota of evidence or indication of that in him. The times certainly was, but the man? I doubt it.**

I'm open to discussing it with RASEC, whoever they are.”

**Hundreds of article were written in newspapers about
Roy McCathran over many years**

Here are a few quotes:

- “In its present government form, Washington Grove has been called, “the best example of intelligent foresight in community planning.” Montgomery County Sentinel, 1955
- “Dr. Albert Osborn always comes to me when thinking of those rendering greatest service, and then at the head of the young men stands Mr. I. L. McCathran, (Roy) full of ideas and always in the forefront of every good work. He is the father of the new town.” Montgomery Sentential 1937, Elmon Cook
- “He’s (Roy) popular with Taxpayers. He’s been undefeated, untied, and unopposed for 16 years. He wrote the Article of Incorporation and acted as the town attorney, road engineer, director of Parks and nearly everything else.”
Times Herald, July 15, 1952, Jerry Murphy
- “Washington Grove Mayor gives case for local zoning control. He believed in Municipal home rule Amendment to the State Constitution along with Gaithersburg and Rockville via the Maryland Municipal League after 80 years of having a Planning Commission. Maryland Municipal League” Montgomery County Sentinel, March 24, 1955
- “McCathran, a patent attorney with offices in Washington, suspects that the fact he will give the town a third of his and his secretary’s time, for free, may have something to do with his spectacular political success. The largest vote ever amassed against him was 4.” Washington Post, July 13, 1953
- Roy invited all the children from the Swartzell Methodist Childrens Home come to Washington Grove should it be necessary to evacuate children from the City of Washington. Mayor’s Letter, June 30, 1942



I think that the roots of racism have always been economic, and I think people are desperate and scared. And when you're desperate and scared you scapegoat people. It exacerbates latent tendencies toward - well, toward racism or homophobia or anti-Semitism.

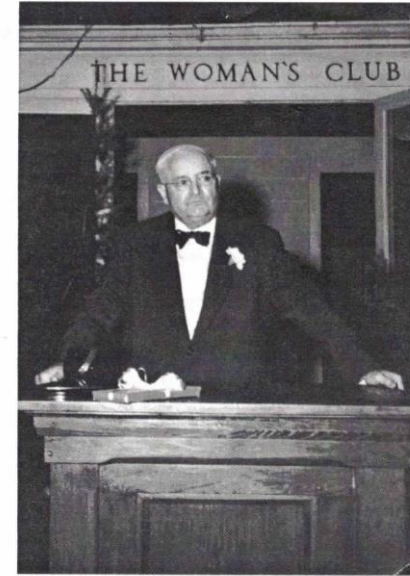
--Henry Louis Gates

**TO
IRVING LEROY McCATHRAN
FROM
THE CITIZENS OF
WASHINGTON GROVE
IN APPRECIATION OF
50 YEARS
OF DEDICATED SERVICE
TO HIS COMMUNITY
MAYOR 1937 - 1957
MAYOR EMERITUS
FROM 1957
JULY 1957**

The recommendation of the RASEC Committee to remove the name McCathran from the McCathran Hall is misdirected. Let us not do a character assassination of him or his legacy. It is unfair to make Roy McCathran the scapegoat for the nation-wide racism of the time. Roy McCathran gradually led our town out of a narrow Methodist mind-set into the modern world.



McCathran Family Collection



Roy McCathran, then Mayor Emeritus, preparing to speak at his retirement party in the garden of the Woman's Club

Roy McCathran, lovingly and proudly, gave everything he had to create and maintain the Town of Washington Grove as an independent town. He devoted his time, energy, legal expertise and personal funds to make Washington Grove. Let us all honor his work and dedication and bask in the town he created. Then we may continue to enjoy our community and the legacy we all share. Without removing the McCathran name, we can make progress in a positive way toward for a more diverse, equitable and inclusive community.