

RASEC recommendation to restore the name of our town hall

(Lynn Mento and Dick Cavicchi)

RASEC Recommendation

- **RASEC recommends the Town Council consider returning the name of Washington Grove's community center from the 1957 rename of 'McCathran Hall' back to 'Washington Grove Town Hall' as it was often called after it was built in 1901.** [Note: The official name from 1901-1957 was 'Assembly Hall' but we believe that has religious overtones that would be inappropriate for a town hall today, and historians have noted that the building was referred to as either 'Assembly Hall' or 'Town Hall'.]
- We believe this is a critical move for the good of Washington Grove's future as the name of our community hall harkens back to a time of racist and exclusionary behavior and we can now choose to move beyond honoring those times through an original, historic and inclusive name.
- Beyond the generally racist times, there is enough published evidence of Roy McCathran, who we honored by renaming the Hall after him in 1957, engaging in significant racist behavior that is now in direct conflict with the Council's resolution of May 2023 to *"take steps that undo the effects of systemic racism, bias, discrimination, and inequities, which impact the quality of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness for Town residents and our neighbors."*

RASEC Recommendation

- Of note, this recommendation is **not** about:
 - ‘Accusations’ of any kind – it is simply a review of published photos, articles and town communications
 - Diminishing the fact that in the time of Jim Crow some (mainly white) people’s attitudes and beliefs about race were different than in the present day
 - Singling out Roy McCathran as the sole participant in any of this activity
 - Reading into Roy McCathran’s intentions or beliefs
 - Slighting the good he did as Mayor of Washington Grove
 - Minimizing the help he provided to neighboring communities and to those in need
 - Casting aspersions on nor questioning the beliefs, values and actions of his living family and friends
 - Focusing on details that are both distracting and insensitive to the impacts of racist behavior, e.g. whether Roy McCathran sang or played the cornet for his solo ‘coon song’ in the minstrel shows, when he stopped wearing blackface over the time from 21 to 44 years old when he was part of the Washington Grove minstrels, whether the fact that Black people participated in some minstrel activity makes it somehow less harmful and derogatory, etc.
 - Focusing on the past – in fact, it’s just the opposite. It is only about our future commitment as a town to our anti-racist resolution, to moving beyond the time period where we had systemic racism, and the future inclusive name of our town’s gathering spot

RASEC Recommendation

- We are simply saying that now that we have seen these published photographs and articles, we as a town can not un-see them. Now that we know we can not un-know.
- We now have an opportunity to show to Grove residents (today and in the future) and surrounding communities that we stand behind our words in the anti racism resolution, we are focused on the future of Washington Grove instead of the past, and we believe in an inclusive and welcoming future for the Grove.
- Although there will certainly be pain and discomfort for those who are passionately rooted in the past and those who feel a personal ownership of our town hall, we must recommend returning back to an original name for our town hall is in keeping with the Town's work to approve the "Acknowledging Washington Grove's Racially Exclusionary Past and Committing to an Equitable and Inclusive Future" resolution in May of last year and the work to remove the racial deed covenants.
- The basis for this recommendation is laid out in the following slides.

Context: The Town Council approved the resolution that specifically notes our commitment to condemn the racist behaviors laid out in the following slides and envision a town that fosters inclusion (relevant highlights below)

WHEREAS the Town acknowledges the policies and practices directly imposed by the Town that have caused harm to residents of Emory Grove and our other neighboring communities, both historically and currently, including these policies and practices *[including]*:

- **Selling properties with racially restrictive covenants and deed restrictions** from 1929 to 1953, which prevented Black people (as well as Jewish people, Asian people, and people of other marginalized communities) from purchasing property in the Town.
- **Producing annual parades and minstrel shows in which performers wore 'blackface' costumes, disrespecting Black people's dignity and ignoring the damaging history of slavery**


NOW THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED THAT THE MAYOR AND TOWN COUNCIL OF WASHINGTON GROVE:

- Acknowledge, apologize for, **repudiate, reject and condemn all racially motivated, discriminatory, or exclusionary aspects of the Town's history**, and deeply regret the pain, hurt, and suffering that has been caused; and
- Welcome all people; recognize the rights of individuals to live with dignity, free from discrimination based not only on race, but also on national origin, sexual orientation, gender identity, disability, religion, spirituality or belief, and immigration status; value inclusion, equity and justice; **unequivocally condemn racism and bigotry, whether in rhetoric or in action; and envision a Town that fosters diversity, equity, and inclusion; and**
- Where they have authority and responsibility, **will take steps that undo** the effects of systemic racism, bias, discrimination, and inequities, which impact the quality of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness for Town residents and our neighbors; and
- To these ends, will... **Further address any policies or practices that may have the effect of being racially biased or harmful, and foster an unbiased and inclusive environment** free of discrimination and harassment toward any person or group

1) There is published information on Mayor McCathran's leadership role in the development of Washington Grove's '*racist real estate covenants and deed restrictions*' that we '*apologize for, repudiate, reject and condemn*'

"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:

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1. **That each property owner was to be issued a fee simple deed**
 2. The that 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.

The fee simple deed form for lots was to include only three covenants: (1) That any house constructed thereone 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."**

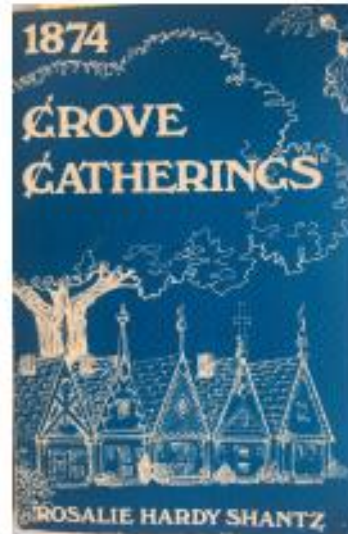
Source: From Philip Edward's history of Washington Grove, 1988, on the committee responsible for home deeds

Note: Racial covenants were common but not universal in our area. The Montgomery County segregation project map shows about equal numbers of subdivisions with and without racial covenants.

2) Beyond his leadership role in the development of the deed covenants, there is published information on his ongoing promotion of these covenants on properties transferred during his time as Mayor for which we 'apologize for, repudiate, reject and condemn'

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



Note: These racist deed covenants did not apply to Mayor McCathran's house as they only applied to properties that were transferred, not to properties that were passed down in a family as his was from 1910-1991

3) There is published evidence of Mayor McCathran in blackface as a minstrel and as playing a leading role in these performances
'disrespecting Black people's dignity and ignoring the damaging history of slavery' and that we
'acknowledge, apologize, repudiate, reject and condemn', per the Town's resolution



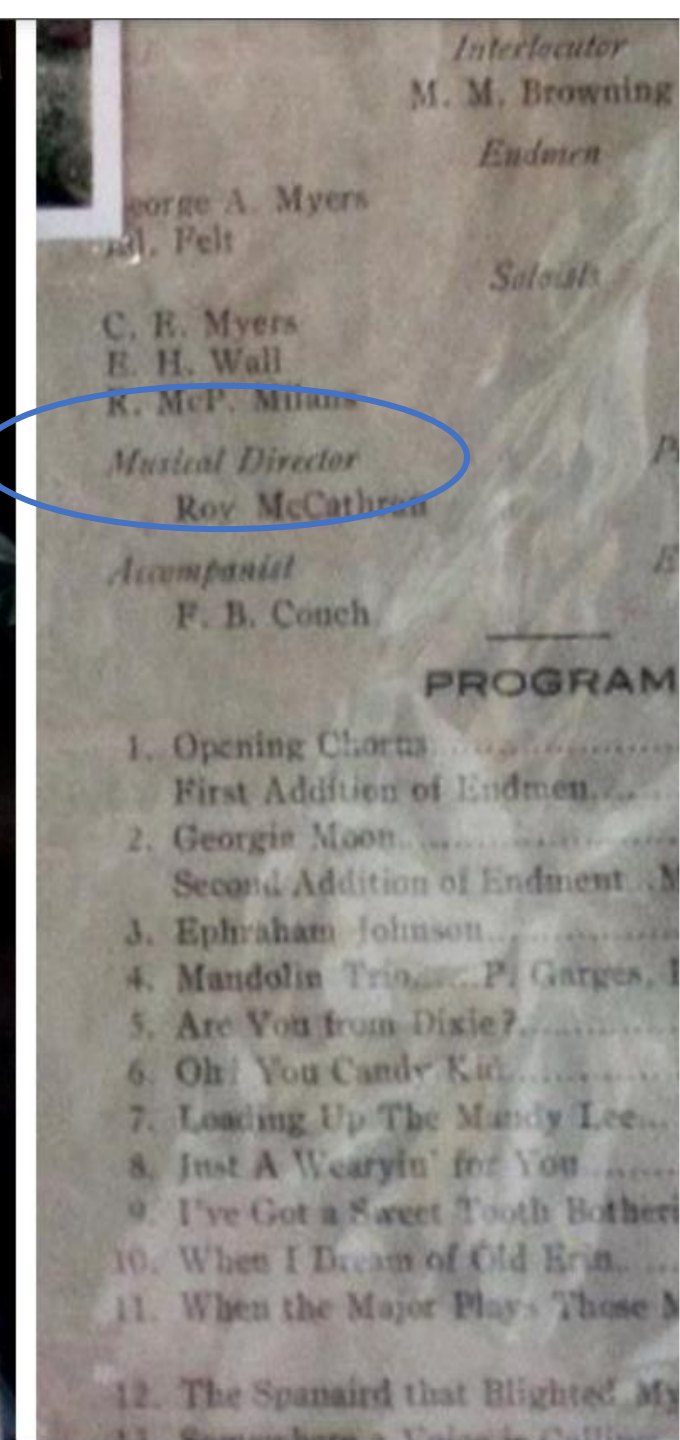
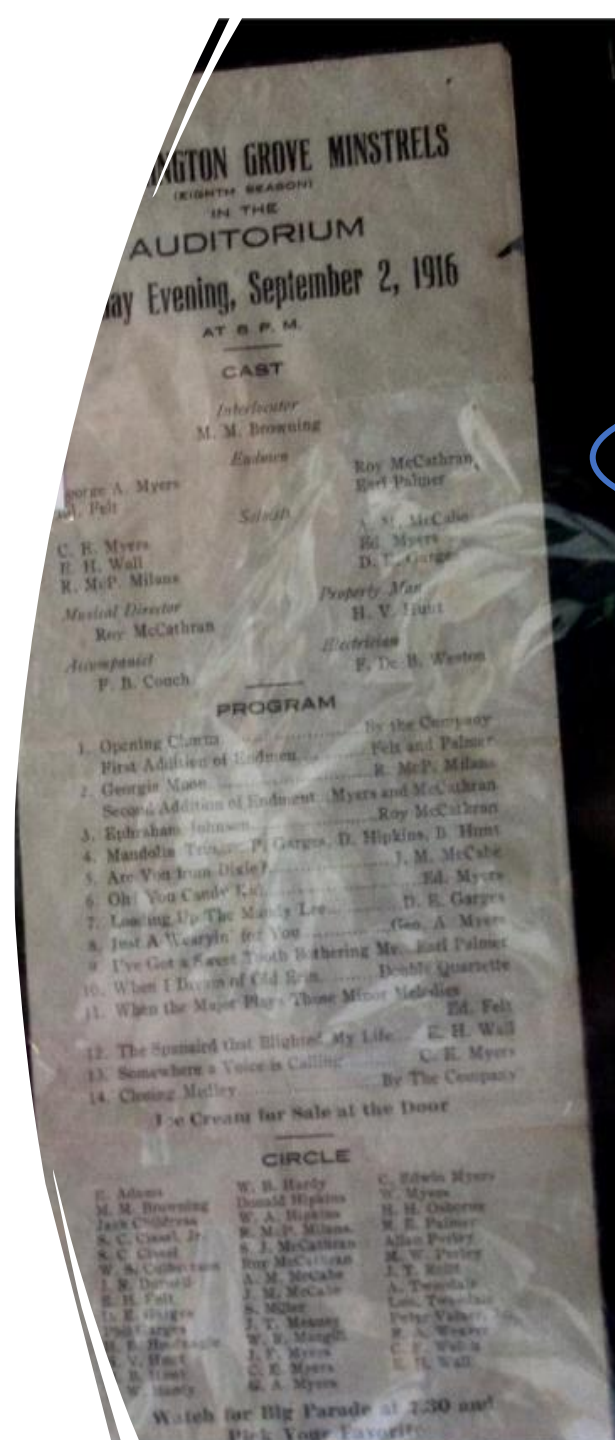
McCathran Hall — Formerly Assembly Hall



Minstrel & Mayor Roy McCathran

4) Mayor McCathran's minstrel involvement was well-documented and restated with pride

- He had a leadership role as Musical Director in the *Washington Grove Minstrels*
- “Roy McCathran was a born leader and musician, organizer of the band, end man of the minstrels, cornet soloist, vocalist, and master of ceremonies.” Grove Gatherings, Rosalie Hardy Shantz
- From his published retirement notice in the Washington, D.C. “Sunday Star” in 1957:
“Mr. McCathran recalls with pleasure the Chautauqua days and the years of the early 20’s when he had a 50-man minstrel show...”
- From his obituary in “The Montgomery Sentinel” in 1959:
“He will also be remembered for the minstrel shows he conducted annually for 10 years when summer visitors came to the former resort city.”



4) The minstrel shows went on for decades (1909-1932; Roy aged 21-44 years old) and extended far beyond the Grove as they were held in the auditorium which seated 1,400 and were attended by hundreds from outside the Grove

WASHINGTON GROVE.

A large audience in the big auditorium Friday evening enjoyed the second annual minstrel show by the Grove Minstrels. Visitors from all parts of the country attended.

On the ends were two pairs of humorous black men, who were the life of the show. John J. Gorman with Harry Vollmer of Washington and Dan E. Garges with Roy McCathran of the Grove. Roland R. Roderick made a suave interlocutor, and also gave an excellent baritone solo, "Some One."

THE SUNDAY STAR, WASHINGTON, D. C., AUGUST 14, 1910—PART I.

the company. Daniel Garges and Roy McCathran were end men. "Ragtime Soldier Man" was sung by Roy McCathran, after which R. McP. Milans sang "Just Some One." Daniel Garges sang "Melinda's Wedding Day," and the company sang "Maryland." The rest of the program was as follows: "Dancing in the Moonlight," sung by E. H. Felt; "The Green Grass Grew All Around," by a quartet; "At the Gate of the Palace of Dreams," sung by Dr. W. B. Hoofnagle; "When Uncle Joe Plays a Rag," sung by R. E. Palmer; "Camp Meeting Time," sung by Bart Bean. A medley, sung by the company, closed the program.

THE EVENING STAR, WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 3, 1913.

GIVE MINSTREL SHOW.

Washington Grove Athletic Association Entertains Friends.

Washington Grove Athletic Association gave its fourth annual entertainment Friday night, August 30. Prior to the show the minstrel troupe paraded through the Grove headed by their own band, playing popular airs. The performance opened with a chorus by the circle of more than thirty black faces. Solos, assisted by the

chorus, were sung by Messrs. Teepe, Palmer, Felt, McCathran, Hoofnagle, Myers, and Garges. End men were Garges and McCathran.

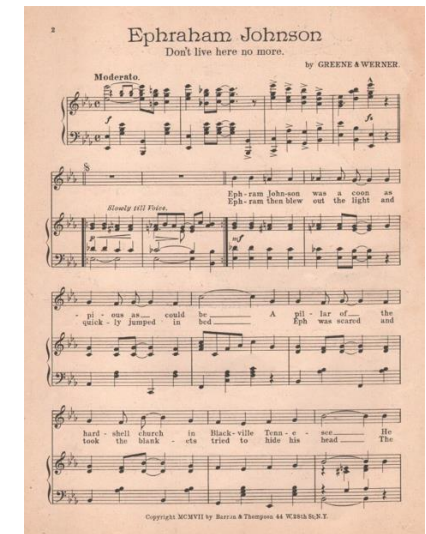
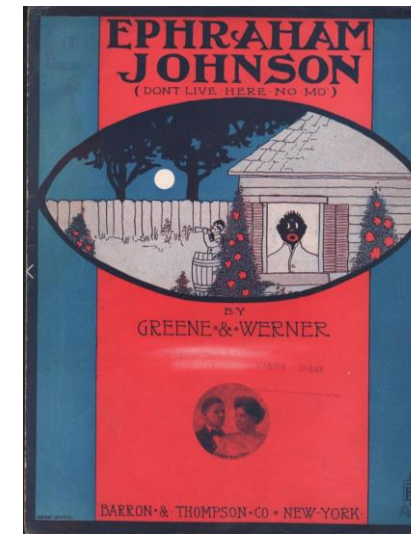
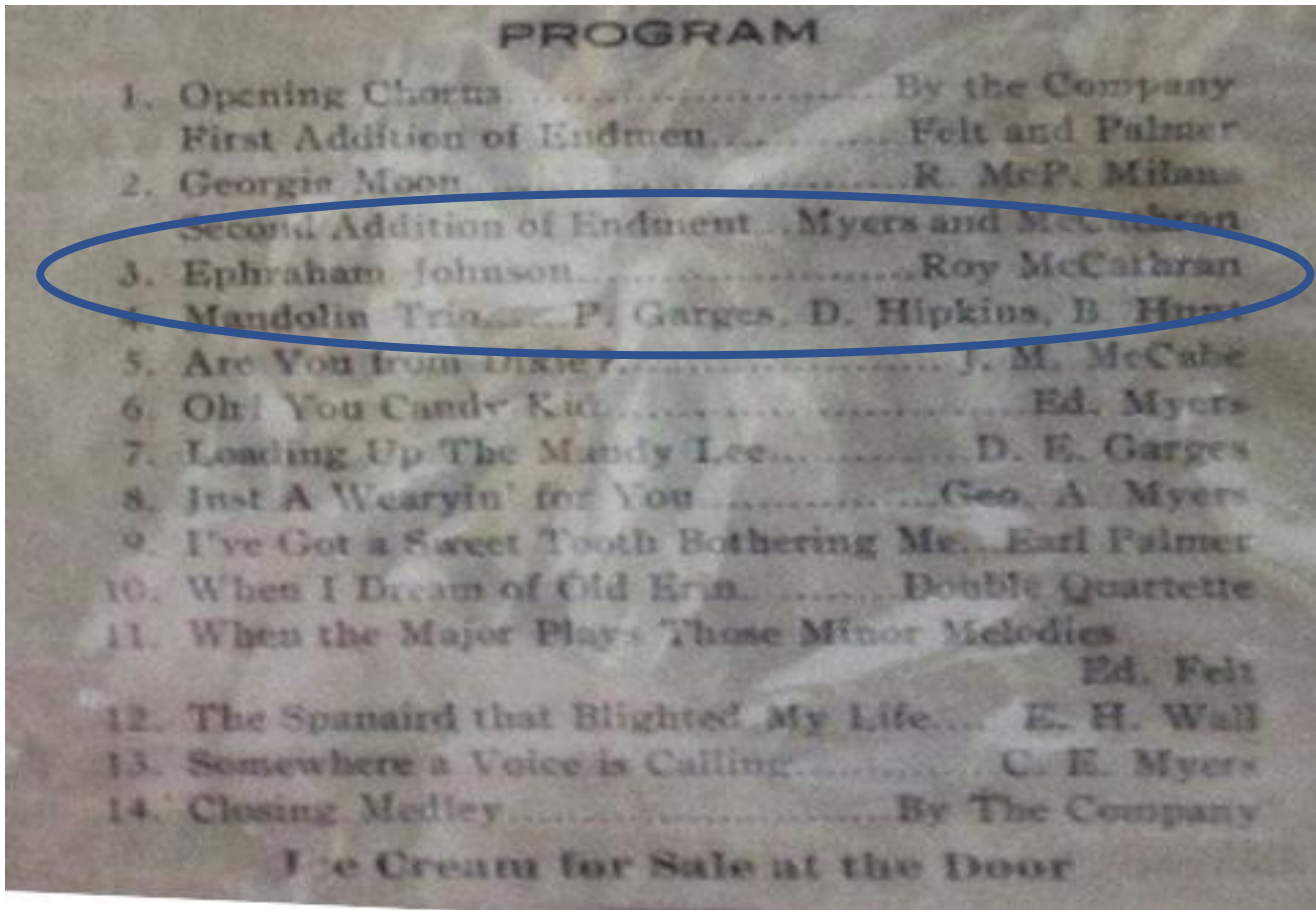
The final chorus was led by Mr. I. L. McCathran, one of the Grove end men, with a huge razor. This met with great success. Mr. Frank Pierce and Mr. Theo Howard also assisted with their usual big hits.

THE WASHINGTON HERALD, SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 1, 1912.

MINSTREL SHOW

Washington Grove residents will stage an old-fashioned minstrel show tonight.

The Washington Times
Saturday – August 20, 1932



In a typical “coon” song, “Ephraham Johnson Don’t Live Here No More” (Greene and Werner, 1907), the protagonist is “a coon as pious as could be” who mistakes the sound of a youngster blowing on a fishhorn for Gabriel’s trumpet, jumps into bed, pulls a blanket over his head, pretends to snore, then shouts out when he hears a knock at his door:

Ephraham Johnson don’t live here no mo’,
He’s done left this place more than a week ago;
Eph’s gone away and that’s a fact,
I don’t think he’s ever coming back.

In notated form, “coon” songs establish the black identity of their protagonists through various conventions of the popular stage: proper names commonly associated with African American characters (Alexander, Ephraham, Mose, Eliza); code words such as “honey” and “baby” as forms of address; lyrics purporting to reproduce the syntax and pronunciation of black speech; behavior associated in the public imagination with black Americans; and sometimes the visual representation of stereotypical black



Odessa Shannon, the first African American woman to serve as an elected official in Montgomery County

5) The path to a name change is well-forged – and we’re recommending something even simpler: Returning to an original name for the building

- 2020 renaming of Col. E Brooke Lee Middle School in Silver Spring to Odessa Shannon Middle School
 - Col. E. Brooke Lee was a prominent state and county politician who founded the county’s Planning Department and established its first land use and zoning system. However, in doing so, he “actively developed racially restrictive covenants which prohibited African Americans from buying or renting real estate in the county,” according to the resolution.
 - “The commemoration of Colonel Lee and his legacy stands in opposition to the values of the Board of Education of Montgomery County and its work toward equity and justice,” stated the Board of Education.
- Seven additional Montgomery County school names under renaming consideration
- U.S. is renaming 660 mountains and rivers...a path has been forged
- And ours is easier: Just returning the town hall to an original name

A Recap of the Facts

- Irving LeRoy McCathran was president of Washington Grove Association 1922-1923, had a leadership role through the transition to a municipality in 1937 and served as the Town's first mayor 1937-1957.
- I.L. McCathran served on committee that established that racial covenants would be applied to WGA and then Town properties that would be transferred to homeowners. These covenants prevented Black people (as well as Jewish people, Asian people, and people of other marginalized communities) from purchasing property in the Town.
- These covenants were continually applied to properties transferred during the years of his mayorship up through 1953.
- I.L. McCathran organized, directed, and performed leading roles as singer, 'endman', chorus leader, in parades and minstrel shows 1909-1932.
- The minstrel shows consisted of (with few exceptions) sung songs on a variety of topics, but included songs stereotyping African Americans, with hypersexualized portrayals, mocking their religion, glorifying plantation days, and using 'dialects'. Performances were done by men in "blackface". Between sung numbers, 'endmen' in blackface performed a variety of jokes or skits, also with racial stereotypes as part of the act.
- In 1975, the Women's Club of WG published a book by R. Shantz that used as the photo of I.L. McCathran a pose with him in his minstrel costume in blackface.
- These minstrel shows in the old auditorium, attended by as many as 1400 from in and out of the community, established WG's reputation as a home for "Jim Crow".
- In 1949, during Mayor McCathran's service, and in reference to defining policy for the auditorium, the Town Council declared the "established exclusion policy of the town."

APPEAR AS MINSTREL MEN.

Washington Grove Athletic Association Members Give Show.

The Washington Grove Athletic Association gave its fourth annual minstrel performance Friday night in the auditorium at Washington Grove. A first-class show was put on, with four endmen—Frank Pierce, Theodore Howard, Dan E. Garges and I. L. (Roy) McCathran—half a dozen or more soloists, and a circle numbering thirty-two singers, including Charles E. Myers, Dr. W. B. Hoofnagel, Edward Felt, C. E. Palmer, W. T. Teepe, I. L. McCathran, Frank B. Couch, Dr. A. T. Utz, Rob H. Walker, Charles E. Myers, Jr., R. J. Hall, A. H. Keim, B. M. Meeks, H. E. Mockabee, W. R. Macgill, M. Walker, P. Valaer, H. V. Hunt, M. M. Browning, M. Perley, Jay McCathran, J. T. Means, W. A. Hipkins, J. I. Rolff, E. T. Gaddis, A. M. Merriam, H. H. Osborn, E. Meany, Billy Hardy, George H. Felt and M. Knott.

The show was preceded by a parade of the minstrel men, headed by their own band. The audience, which filled the auditorium to its capacity, included many persons from the country and nearby towns, as well as a majority of the residents of Washington Grove.

- With published images and documented evidence of Roy McCathran's leadership role in the racist behaviors we repudiate and strive to fix, we believe it is essential to put our actions where our town beliefs now lie and return the town hall to its original inclusive name to reflect our future, our beliefs and the kind, respectful soul of the Town.
- We leave the final determination of action steps to the Town Council but we believe this process should include reviewing the included presentations, having educational discussions with town residents, gathering feedback, and engaging residents with the decision.
- We have confidence in the town's sincere commitment to the approved anti racism resolution to *'unequivocally condemn racism and bigotry'* and *'take steps to undo the effects of systemic racism'* from the past and to allow inclusive town events to be held without any hypocrisy in a space that echoes and supports our belief in *'a Town that fosters diversity, equity and inclusion'*.



Thank you
Questions & discussion
