



Washington History in the Classroom

This article, © the Historical Society of Washington, D.C., is provided free of charge to educators, parents, and students engaged in remote learning activities. It has been chosen to complement the DC Public Schools curriculum during this time of sheltering at home in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.



“Washington History magazine is an essential teaching tool,” says Bill Stevens, a D.C. public charter school teacher. “In the 19 years I’ve been teaching D.C. history to high school students, my scholars have used *Washington History* to investigate their neighborhoods, compete in National History Day, and write plays based on historical characters. They’ve grappled with concepts such as compensated emancipation, the 1919 riots, school integration, and the evolution of the built environment of Washington, D.C. **I could not teach courses on Washington, D.C. history without *Washington History*.”**



Bill Stevens engages with his SEED Public Charter School students in the Historical Society’s Kiplinger Research Library, 2016.

Washington History is the only scholarly journal devoted exclusively to the history of our nation’s capital. It succeeds the *Records of the Columbia Historical Society*, first published in 1897. *Washington History* is filled with scholarly articles, reviews, and a rich array of images and is written and edited by distinguished historians and journalists. **Washington History** authors explore D.C. from the earliest days of the city to 20 years ago, covering neighborhoods, heroes and she-roes, businesses, health, arts and culture, architecture, immigration, city planning, and compelling issues that unite us and divide us.

The full runs of *Washington History* (1989-present) and its predecessor publication the *Records of the Columbia Historical Society* (1897-1988) are available through JSTOR, an online archive to which many institutions subscribe. It’s easy to [set up a personal JSTOR account](#), which allows for free online reading of six articles per month in any of their journals, or join the Historical Society at the [Membership Plus](#) level for unlimited free access to our publications.

Primary Voices

Growing Up in Washington II

Great Depression and World War II

Editor's note: During 1998 and 1999, volunteers for The Historical Society interviewed dozens of Washingtonians on the experience of growing up in Washington. Interviewers asked what was unique to growing up here, and what was universal. This project, led by HSW Curator Jill Connors and commemorating the bicentennial of the federal government's arrival in 1800, led to the exhibit "Growing Up in Washington," and a companion publication of selected extracts from the interviews. The exhibit is scheduled to close in spring 2002, but Washington History has gleaned portions of the exhibit and the interviews, which are presented here and beginning on pages 41 and 64.

The curator would like to thank Adrienne deArmas, Mychalene Giampaoli, Brian Joyner, Linda Lantz, Jim Mahoney, Jessica Nemeths, Gail Redmann, Danette Sokcich, Sheila Wickovski, the HSW staff, and especially the interviewees for their contributions to "Growing Up in Washington."

Marion Jackson Pryde

Marion Jackson Pryde remembers childhood's simple pleasures—skipping rope, winding the Maypole, and ice cream on the Fourth of July. She was born on December 6, 1911, the fourth child of Samuel C. and Eliza Barnett Jackson. Samuel was a butler at the White House from

the Taft to the Truman administrations, and Eliza raised their six children in their home at 15th and T streets, N.W. Attending Sumner, Bell, and Dunbar High schools, Marion participated in theater, music, and debating, and while a student at Miner Normal School won second prize in a predominantly white national oratorical contest. Today, Marion lives in Takoma Park in Northwest Washington and is a retired teacher.

"The churches provided most of the cultural activities for us. I remember Marian Anderson sang at our church before she became famous. My older sister took me there to hear her, and it was great. Marian Anderson was on her way to greatness when she sang at our church, but she hadn't achieved status yet. It was too bad we couldn't go to concerts and things downtown, but the church provided entertainment for us.

"We loved the Dramatic Club because Miss Burrill was in charge. We'd either participate in the play or backstage. We put on 'Bluebird' over at Armstrong [High School] and it was quite a production. In one scene the bluebirds flashed across the screen and



Marion Jackson Pryde in front of her family's home, 1533 T St., N.W., 1928. Courtesy, Marion Jackson Pryde.

she wanted some noise like the bluebirds were singing. There was a little whistle you could buy and dip into water to make a little bird-like sound. I remember going down to the ten-cent store with another little girl to get these whistles. We were dipping whistles into buckets of water behind the screens, blowing whistles, and spilling water.

"We didn't have many places to go, so we made our own fun. We had marble steps on our front stairs and the boys played marbles. Skipping rope was a favorite pastime, and ring games. My mother was very kind and very innovative. I remember on the Fourth of July she couldn't take us to any special place, but she made ice cream and she bought ice cream cones. She would have the children on the block, who very much like the rest of us couldn't go anywhere special. We would race and whoever won would get an ice cream cone as a prize."

Markus Ring

Markus Ring remembers his childhood exploits using the White House lawn as his playground. The fourth child of Nathan and Karoline Ring, Markus was born on November 23, 1915. His

father had migrated from Austria in 1892 and his mother from Germany as an infant. The family lived above his father's shoe repair shop at 722 17th Street, N.W. Nathan proudly crafted shoes for prominent Washingtonians, including presidents from Theodore Roosevelt to Franklin Delano Roosevelt. As a child, Markus attended Force Elementary School. His family moved to Petworth in 1924, where he attended Petworth Elementary, MacFarland Junior High, and McKinley Technical High schools. Today Markus lives in Bethesda, having retired from the U.S. Army as a lieutenant colonel.

"Social activity in those days centered around the old Jewish Community Center at 16th and Q streets, N.W. It was there that I joined a group of fellows in a sort-of fraternity known as Sigma Delta. We met Saturday evenings at the center for basketball and swimming, and maybe movies later in the evening. The group met again on Sunday afternoons and participated in debates with other clubs. It was at this time that I met my future wife, Erma Martin.

"We lived [on 17th Street] near the intersection of Pennsylvania Avenue, and whenever we heard of a parade, my sister Frieda and I would go to the grocery store and salvage wooden crates. We would rent the crates for ten cents to short people who wanted to see the floats and bands coming up the avenue. People would stand for ten minutes or so, and then give the crates back. We would rent them to the next person. We made enough money that my father took the money to the Old Lincoln National Bank and opened up a savings account.

"There were three other kids in the neighborhood, and we used to go over to the White House about once a week to exercise President Harding's dog, a champion Airedale by the name of Laddie Boy. We met President Harding on four or five occasions, and he would be standing in the door as we brought the dog back. He would pat us on the head and send us back to the kitchen. Mr. Harding left orders that we were to be given ice cream, cookies, and

milk in the White House kitchen after we walked the dog. We four fellas have voted Republican ever since.

"Back in the 'twenties there were seven papers: the *Post*, the *Star*, the *News*, the *Times*, the *Herald*, the *Bulletin*, and I think *Sporting News*. The fellow who printed them would give us ten copies of the latest and we would stand on the streetcar platform in front of what is now the Renwick Gallery. The streetcar driver would let us in the front door. Then we would walk down the aisle selling the newspapers. The papers cost two cents, and people would give us a nickel and say, 'Keep the change.' The driver would crawl at the lowest speed from 17th up to 18th giving us time to sell our papers, because we had to get off at the next stop."

Damon Cordon

Damon Cordon became a Washingtonian and an American while playing baseball in the alleys, learning English on the playground, and going to the movies on Saturdays. Born on June 19, 1932, Damon was the first in his family to be born in the United States. His parents migrated from Greece in the 1920s and settled near Dupont Circle. Damon went to Force and Weightman schools during the Great Depression and World War II. His family moved to Cleveland Park so Damon could attend Woodrow Wilson High School. Today Damon lives in Northwest Washington and is the managing director of a human resources consulting firm for nonprofit organizations.

"World War II was an exciting time. We became aware that something was going on, because there seemed to be more people around, particularly the military. One thing that none of my friends did, but I took quite an interest in, were military patches and regimental pins. I developed a little spiel and would approach the military men, both enlisted and officers, to ask them if they had any spare chevrons, regimental pins, or other types of military insignia. Over time I was able to collect a couple of cigar boxes' worth of these things.



Markus Ring at his family's home, 312 Taylor Street, N.W., 1926. Courtesy, Markus Ring.

"Christmas was sparse in my family, and in a number of families as well. The thing that was enjoyable was the hanging stocking. Because I liked nuts, my parents would stuff it with pecans, walnuts, almonds, and tangerines—and oranges were hard to come by in the winter. If you could get one, that was a treat. There might be a coin in there. I liked raisins, so I would get a little bag of raisins thrown in. Those were the small gifts. You would hang the stockings from the bedposts, since there were no fireplaces. You'd compare your treats with the other fellows.

"I was at Weightman School for first and second grade. I was treated differently for those years, because my first language was Greek. I didn't speak English, and I had a hard time understanding the teacher. When I heard my name, I would stand up and be mute. My teacher found this quite annoying, understandably so. She would



Damon Cordom in front of cherry blossoms, 1937. Courtesy, Damon Cordom.

pin notes to my sweater and I would take them home. The notes in effect said, 'Mr. Cordom, you have to teach your child English. He doesn't understand class lessons.' My dad would march me up the next morning and tell her, 'My job is not to teach my son English. That's your job.' I remember bringing those notes home every few days and, little by little, I was just forced to learn English, because I got immersed.

"We all looked forward to getting out of school [for the summer], and then we didn't know what to do with ourselves. We played baseball. The lot had debris and broken glass. We would clean it and get cardboard bases or use our sweatshirts. We would play kick the can and hide 'n' go seek. Because some of the boys would not be around, we would permit some of the girls who lived in

the apartment house to play. People didn't talk too much of vacations because the money wasn't there. We would pack picnic baskets and go to Hains Point and have an outing there.

"I worked in Pittles Bakery for three years on weekends and some weeknights. I was the only one in my immediate crowd who worked during high school. Pittles was on Nebraska and Connecticut avenues. Since the bakery was two blocks from my house, I didn't lose much time commuting. I lost weight while I worked there, which was surprising because I had access to sweets while I was there—as long as the customers didn't see me eating. I was pretty active, and I had a horrendous dental bill because of eating there. My parents refused to pay it, saying I was working."

Loretta Carter Hanes

Loretta Carter Hanes spoke of her childhood as a young African American in segregated Washington. Loretta, the sixth child of Hattie Louise Thompson and Joseph Washington Carter, was born on May 5, 1926. Joseph was the first professionally trained black baker in Washington, and Hattie cared for their nine children. Loretta lived at 328 Bryant Street, N.W., in Shaw, a community of neighbors who watched over her. She exuded confidence, personality, and a desire to reach the stars, despite her family's poverty. She attended Lucretia Mott Elementary, Shaw and Garnett Patterson Junior High, and Armstrong High schools. Today, Loretta lives in Northwest Washington and is director of D.C. Reading Is Fundamental, Inc.

"Fourth and Bryant where I lived was all colored. North Capitol was all white, and we couldn't go beyond that point. The playground on Fourth Street was for the black kids, and the playground on Second Street was for the white kids. As a child I could not understand why I had to cross Fourth Street to go to my playground, and why I couldn't go to the white playground. So one day I wandered into the Second Street playground, and the white children stoned me

and said, 'Your dress is raggedy. Get out, get out, get out.' I ran back home crying, because I could not understand how we were all there together but we couldn't share it.

"Mrs. Peterson had this stamp contest before Christmas. There was a vacant house right around the corner from school, and this was the house of a doctor, someone who traveled. In the corner was a big bag of letters from all over the world. I took those letters to Mrs. Peterson, and I got that prize. I kept that prize all wrapped up in a little box and I would shake it. I wasn't supposed to open it up until Christmas, so my mind just went all over. I did not know what it was. When I opened it up, it was a chocolate star for Christmas, and I could hardly eat it, it was so hard. I was a little disappointed, because my imagination had carried me all around the world and back again.

"Mrs. Harriet Boxdale Short, who worked at Howard, walked past my house, and I would sit on my steps and throw stones at her. She was beautiful, and I just wanted her attention. So one day she said, 'Look, girl, what is your name?' I told her and she said, 'I want to speak with your mother.' I got so scared, but I got my mother and Harriet said, 'Mrs. Carter, I want to teach Loretta how to tap.' My mother said, 'Fine.' [Mrs. Short] would take me to her little sorority room at Howard, and I ended up dancing for a March of Dimes benefit. I did this while others would sleep, because this was a midnight show. Every evening I would get home from school, go to sleep, and rest. Then the neighbors would walk me to Redeemers Hall for rehearsal at 12th Street.

"In the summer we did a lot on the playground. We went to the Mott, Howard, and Banneker playgrounds. There were professionals at every playground. We were lucky to be at Howard, because those were the cream of the crop, and they would teach us sports. My mother would teach us little dances and songs, and I would do them. I



Loretta Carter Hanes, left, and friends after gym class, Armstrong High School, 1943. Courtesy, Loretta Carter Hanes.

couldn't wait to teach the children 'Two steps forward. Two steps back. This is the ball and jack.' I was always teaching the children something. We'd sing and play, and I was always showing off. We were occupied and didn't have time to get into trouble.

"World War II was a scary time and a hard time. There were blackouts and rations. I was in high school and took a job at the water department. It was hard because I would get home in the middle of the night in the dark. It was not comfortable for the other workers because it was segregated."

