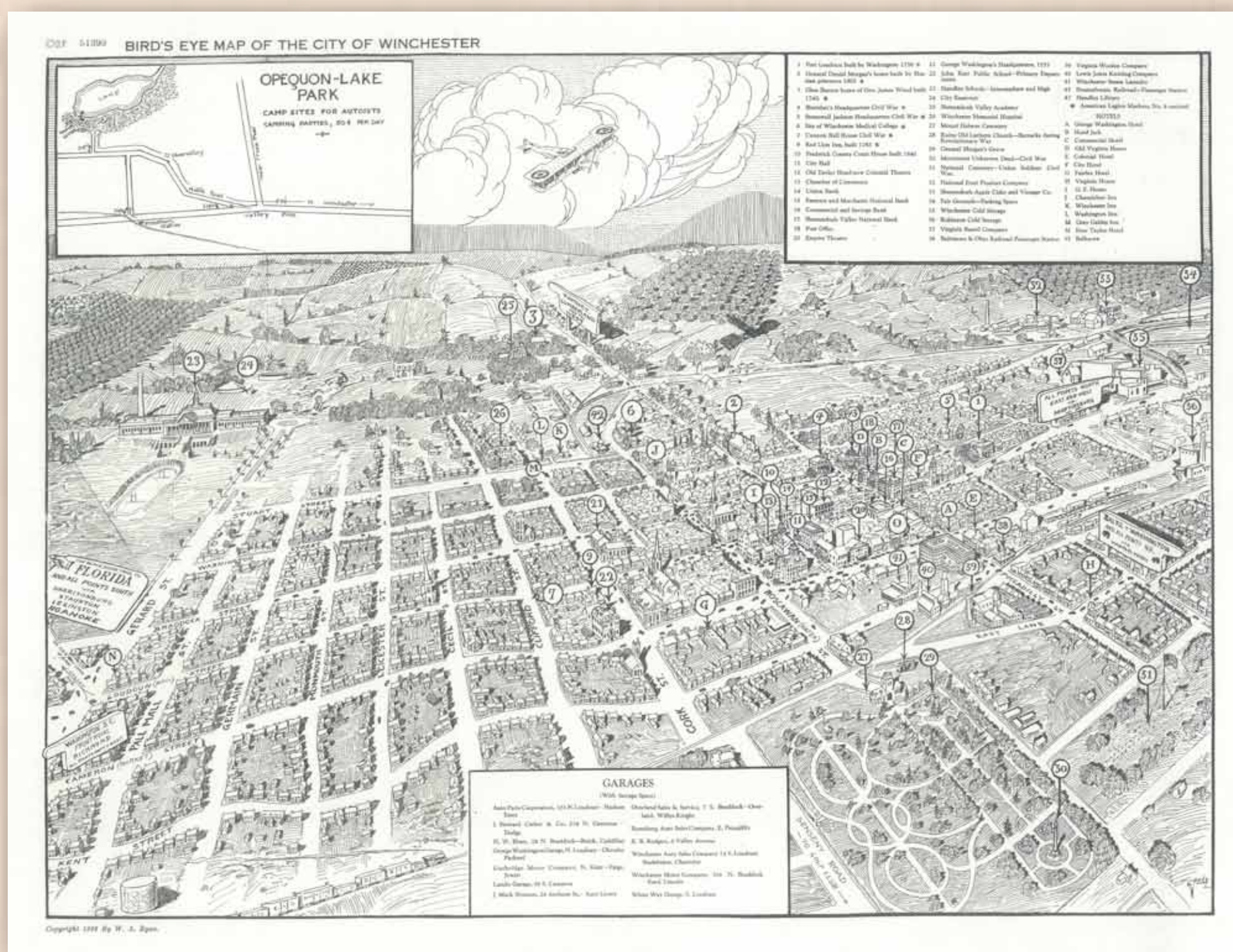


What Was It Like?

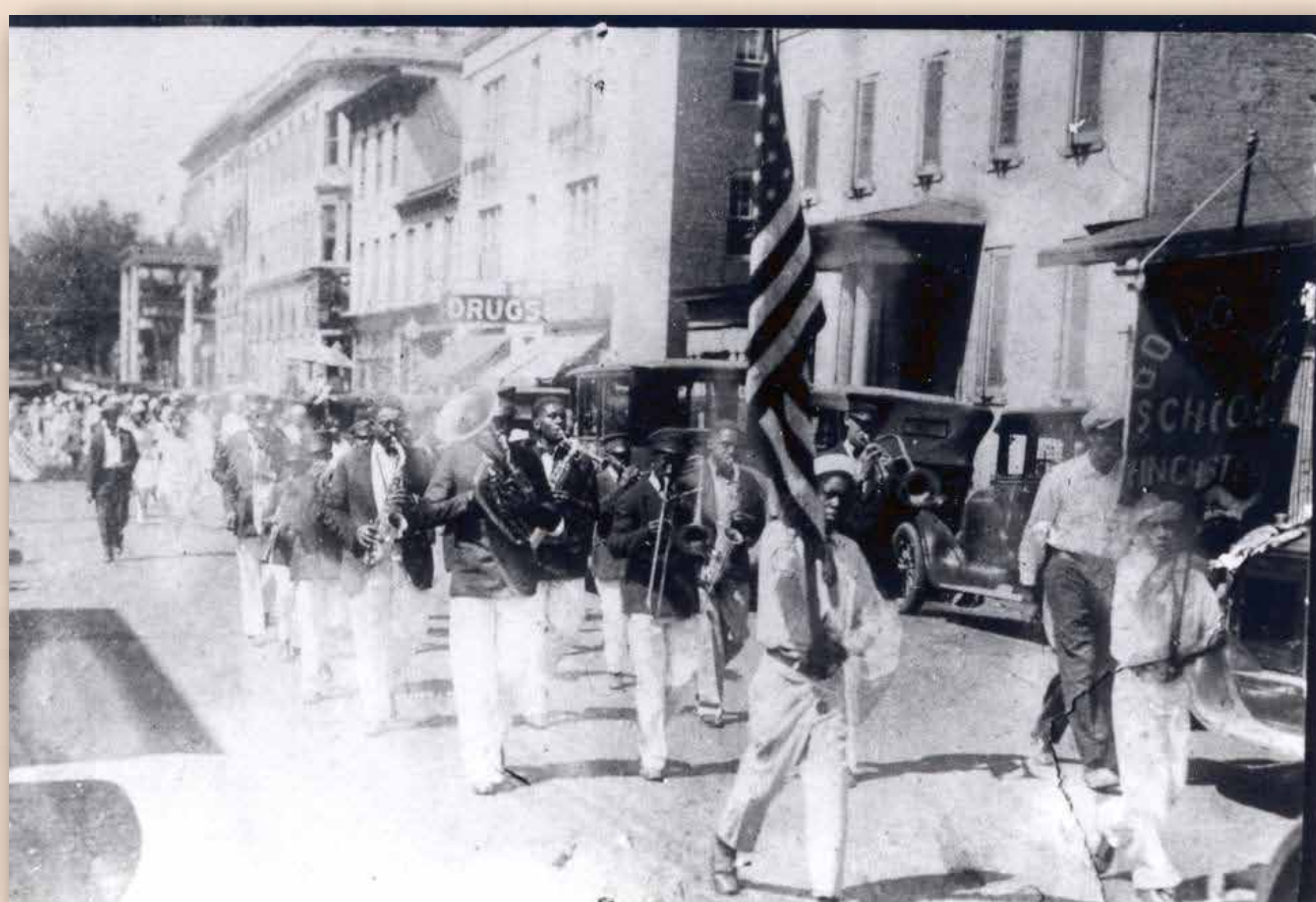
1

In our age when men and woman of many different races, origins, and backgrounds interact in daily life, it can be difficult to comprehend life in our small, but racially divided, community just over a half century ago. To help bridge this gap, ask yourself: What would your average day be like if you were African American, or if you were white, in Winchester, Virginia, at the time of *To Kill a Mockingbird* in the 1930s?



Aerial Perspective of Winchester, 1926
Library of Congress, Washington D.C.

Race divided communities like ours in every aspect of life. Where men and women worked, where and how they shopped, what they did for entertainment, how young people were educated provide only some examples of segregation. Yet at the same time black people and white people were constantly encountering each other — interacting and depending upon one another in the life of the community. Cooperation required trust and respect. But at the same time, fear and aversion, force and occasionally violence dominated relations among white and black people.



Parade celebrating the opening of the Frederick Douglas School in 1927
Handley Library, Stewart Bell Archives, Winchester, Virginia

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What Was It Like?

2

One of the strongest pillars that united and uplifted the black community in segregated Winchester was the Frederick Douglas School. Originally housed in an old stone building on Piccadilly Street, Douglas School's 150 students and 6 faculty members relocated in 1927 to a new facility on Kent Street built with funds from the Handley Trust. White students attended the glorious, new John Handley High, opened five years earlier and also constructed with Handley Trust funds.



Handley High School Class of 1942
Handley Library, Stewart Bell Archives, Winchester, Virginia



Douglas High School Class of 1944
Handley Library, Stewart Bell Archives, Winchester, Virginia

Winchester's leading black citizens struggled to give their children the highest quality education possible. But Douglas students worked with outdated books and equipment handed down from Handley. Even Winchester's fine Handley Library was off limits to the black community. So the Douglas School provided a branch library on campus for the segregated public.



Douglas School Band
Handley Library, Stewart Bell Archives, Winchester, Virginia


Highly competitive Douglas sports teams earned a reputation for excellence competing against other regional segregated schools. The school also sponsored a beloved drum line and majorette corps that excited everyone in the community.



Powell W. Gibson was Douglas School's first principal
Handley Library, Stewart Bell Archives, Winchester, Virginia



Kirk N. Gaskins Sr. was Douglas School's second and final principal
Gaskins went on to become Winchester's Assistant Superintendent after integration.
Handley Library, Stewart Bell Archives, Winchester, Virginia

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What Was It Like?

3

Douglas School produced black doctors, ministers, and lawyers, but most graduates worked in subservient roles in white society. Typical employment for a black woman was limited to cooking or childcare for white families. Black men often worked as janitors, drivers, cooks, and porters in many of Winchester's white institutions and businesses.



Future Mayor Stewart Bell Jr. and his unidentified nursemaid Bell would eventually be known as "Mr. Winchester" for how he exemplified the community.
Handley Library, Stewart Bell Archives, Winchester, Virginia

Peppered throughout Winchester were densely populated neighborhoods of black residents. Even though black citizens had their own doctors, service providers, and merchants, interaction between the two segregated populations was a regular occurrence.



Willard Gibson and his in-home printing press
Gibson published a local black newspaper known as *the Virginia Informer* during the 1940s
Handley Library, Stewart Bell Archives, Winchester, Virginia

Unwritten codes ordered these interactions. When a black family went to a movie at the Palace or Capitol theaters, they entered separately and sat in the balcony. Black and white people used separate drinking fountains, public restrooms, and many other facilities. Some white-owned stores and restaurants served black people, many did not. Blacks had their own eateries and shops.



Employees of Brown's Barber Shop
Brown's was an example of one of Winchester's many black-owned and -operated businesses.
Handley Library, Stewart Bell Archives, Winchester, Virginia

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What Was It Like?

4

Even Winchester's beloved Apple Blossom Festival was segregated. The young ladies of Douglas School wouldn't dream of riding in the Queen's court as Scout might later have in her own school.



The 1945 Apple Blossom Court of Queen Shenandoah
Handley Library, Stewart Bell Archives, Winchester, Virginia

Parades featured dazzling performances from the Douglas School Band and the Gibson Majorettes and Bugle Corps.



Gibson Majorettes and Bugle Corps
Handley Library, Stewart Bell Archives, Winchester, Virginia

Eventually integration made the Douglas School redundant. The strict rules of segregated society loosened and faded away. The children of Winchester's newly empowered black families went on in the decades after the time of *To Kill a Mockingbird* to earn titles such as Winchester's "First Black Registered Nurse" or "First Black City Council Member." As you try to understand Harper Lee's Maycomb, Alabama, take a few moments to ask yourself "What Was It Like" for our small community at a pivotal juncture in history?



Coronation of Miss Douglas School 1945
Handley Library, Stewart Bell Archives, Winchester, Virginia

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Could It Happen Here?

1

Consider the case of Howard Walker

Was he to Winchester what
Tom Robinson was to Maycomb,
Alabama, in *To Kill a Mockingbird*?

Howard Walker was a black man who lived in modest circumstances with his mother and siblings in a simple house on West Clifford Street in Winchester amid a small pocket of black residents in a white, working-class neighborhood. He went to the segregated Frederick Douglas School and later was a standout fullback for a local club football team. Popular, friendly, he dressed stylishly and was known as “Howdy.”



Howard Walker's Class at the old Douglas School c. 1924
Handley Library, Stewart Bell Archives, Winchester, Virginia

He was 26 on March 8, 1944, when he was arrested for raping a white woman, Jessie Hillyard Glaize. The same age as Walker, Glaize graduated from Handley High School in 1936, where she was known as “talented . . . not only artistic, musical, and literary, but . . . also a good leader.” By 1944 she was married, and her husband was overseas serving in WWII.

Walker and Glaize were not strangers. He had previously been hired to drive her to Fort Belvoir, where her husband was temporarily stationed. Driving for white people was common employment for black men at the time. Whatever happened next, word soon spread around town that the two were having an affair. In the racial climate of the day, these rumors were inflammatory. His family and friends warned Walker of the peril—to himself and the black community—of his “carrying on” with a white woman. For her society, a relationship with a black man was an unspeakable shame.



Jessie M. Hillyard's Senior Photo
Handlian 1936, Handley Library, Stewart Bell Archives, Winchester, Virginia

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Could It Happen Here?

2

What really happened on the night of March 7 may never be known. As first reported in the papers the next day, Glaize was accosted in her home at 127 Peyton Street by a black man masked in a handkerchief and wielding a knife. When she wrestled the knife from him, the assailant “losing his nerve, rushed from the house.” Members of her family “denied” publically that she had been “criminally attacked.”



Winchester's Jail at the Time of Walker's Arrest
Handley Library Stewart Bell Archives, Winchester, Virginia

Later that evening Glaize described the incident to a neighbor, who called the police. A dragnet soon spread over the black community that overnight snared thirty or forty men for questioning and possible identification. But the next day the knife led police to the American Viscose plant in Front Royal, where Walker worked. The police accused him of raping Jessie Glaize and took him to the Winchester jail.

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Could It Happen Here?

3

Accounts differ as to whether or not Walker was ever positively identified as the assailant, but he was next subjected to a night of questioning and interrogation. According to Walker, the police told him that the evidence was sufficient to convict him for rape, that the people of Winchester were “getting up” and “would like to get hold of you,” that he “had better confess” or he would be left to the mob’s mercy, but that if he did confess, the police would “help” him. Walker asserted that he was called a “vile name” and threatened with “physical violence and injury.”



Chief of Police C. W. Hollis
Hollis oversaw Walker's time in jail and knew Walker before his arrest.
Handley Library Stewart Bell Archives, Winchester, Virginia

Despite his “continued protestation of innocence,” he was kept without food, and by the next morning he was not only “exhausted and confused” but also “bewildered,” “unable to think,” and “driven to weeping.” In this state he was brought to James P. Reardon, Commonwealth’s Attorney for Winchester, where, according to Walker, he was again threatened that if he did not confess he would be taken “out like they did a colored fellow a couple of years ago and hang you up.” If he confessed, he was promised that court-appointed attorneys would defend him and that the prosecutor would do “all he could to avoid the imposition of a sentence of death.” Walker confessed that morning, the 9th of March.

In sworn statements the Commonwealth’s Attorney and the police officers denied that any of Walker’s claims about his interrogation were true. Then under the counsel of two prominent attorneys, Elliott Marshall and W. C. Armstrong, Walker pled guilty and waived any right to a jury trial. Whatever his relationship with Glaize and whether or not he had committed a rape, these men headed Walker for conviction and a prison sentence, but not execution. Reardon, on his part, did not recommend that Walker be sent to the electric chair.

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Could It Happen Here?

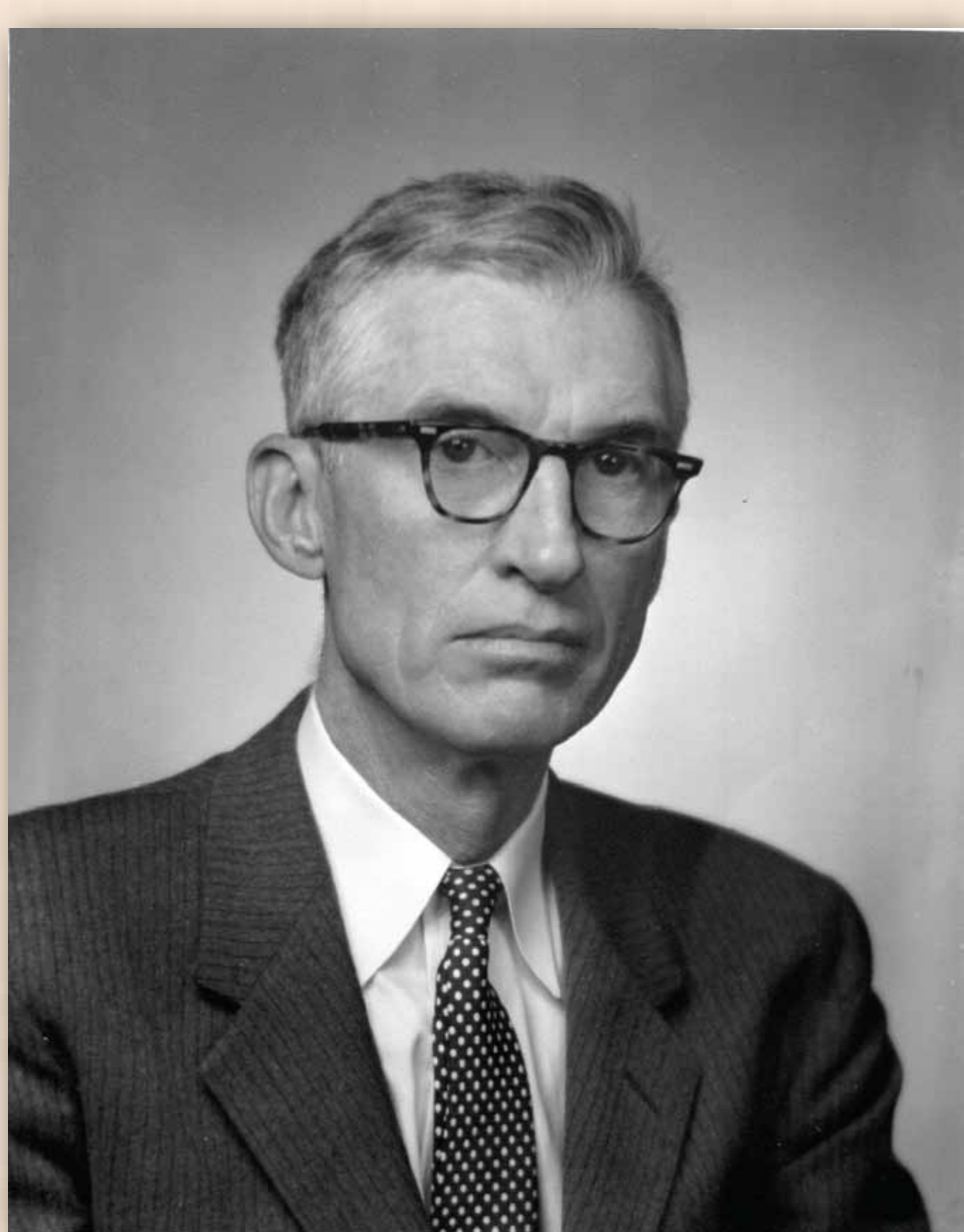
4

Judge Burr P. Harrison scheduled Walker's hearing and sentencing for Saturday, March 18, 1944, at 1:00 p.m. On Saturdays people from throughout the countryside flooded into Winchester for market day. Not surprisingly, the courtroom in City Hall was "packed," and a large crowd assembled outside.



Judge Burr P. Harrison
Handley Library Stewart Bell Archives, Winchester, Virginia

Walker was understandably "nervous" and sat throughout the proceedings with his head "sunk in the palm of his left hand." His facial muscles "twitched from time to time." Witnesses for the state established that a capital crime had been committed and that Walker had confessed to it. Jessie Glaize submitted her evidence privately in the judge's chambers.



Attorney Elliot Marshall
Marshall was the court-appointed attorney on Walker's case
Handley Library Stewart Bell Archives, Winchester, Virginia

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Could It Happen Here?

5

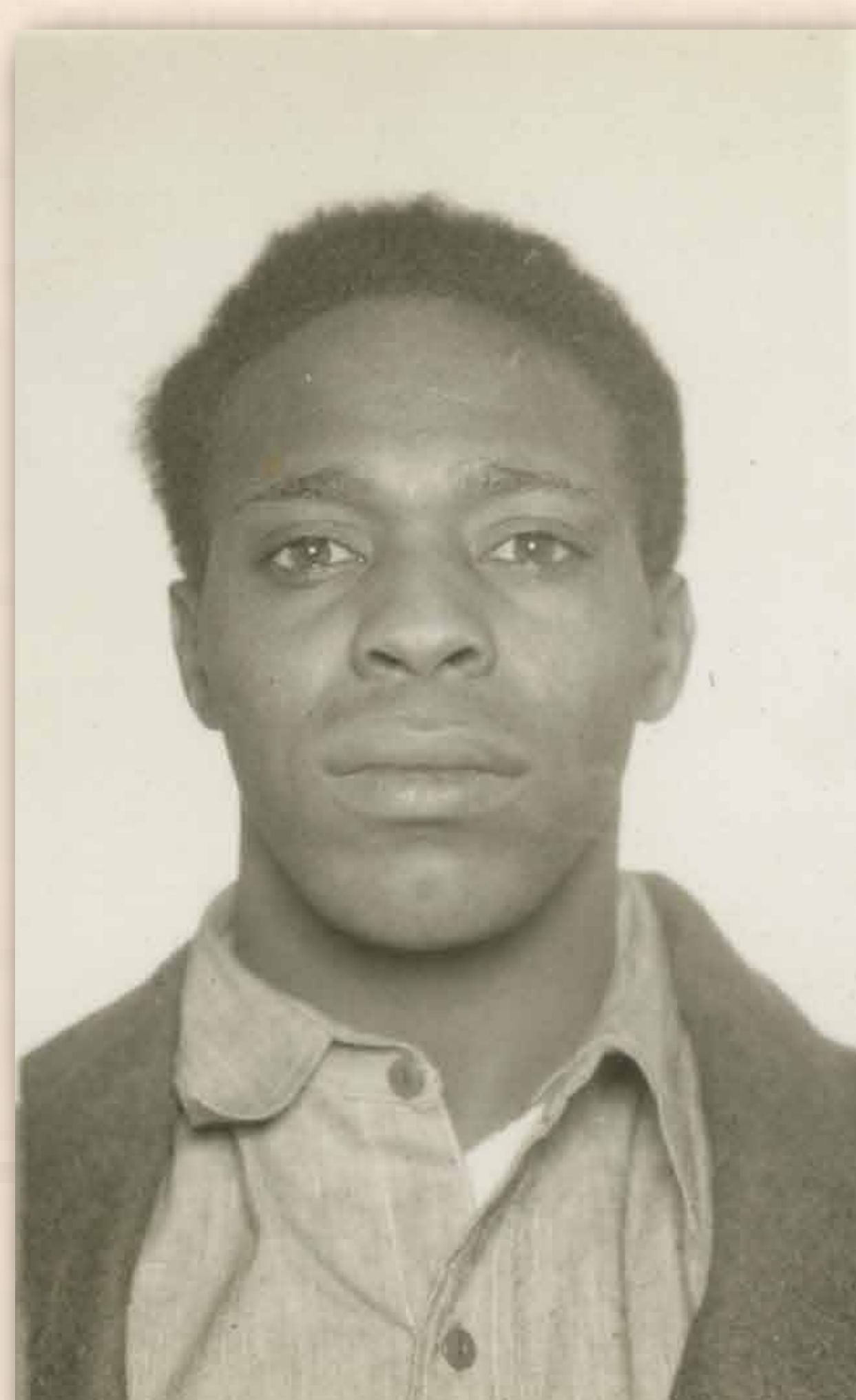
Walker's attorneys called no witnesses, but they did request that the Commonwealth's Attorney "explain what brought about the confession of the prisoner." The judge quickly interceded, asserting that the confession "did not necessarily play much part" and a "positive identification as to clothes and other details" was sufficient to convict Walker.

But the FBI laboratory report on the physical evidence of the case had only been completed the day before and may not have yet been in the hands of any court officials. It failed to confirm that any rape had been committed on the night of March 7 or that Walker had even been on the scene of the alleged crime.



Rouss City Hall
Handley Library, Stewart Bell Archives, Winchester, Virginia

Without regard to this evidence and contrary to actions taken by attorneys on both sides to preserve Walker's life, Judge Harrison then sentenced him "to be electrocuted until he be dead" a little more than a month later on April 28, 1944. A spectator shouted, "Didn't I tell you?"



Howard Walker's Death Row Photo
Library of Virginia, Richmond

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Could It Happen Here?

6

The black community came together over Walker's plight, raised a defense fund, established a branch of the NAACP, and secured the services of the famous law firm of Oliver Hill and Spottswood Robinson, which would achieve international renown in the Civil Rights Movement. Despite their appeal and a one-month reprieve by Governor Colgate Darden, Walker perished in the electric chair at 8:41 a.m. on May 26, 1944, at the state penitentiary in Richmond.

The state refused to surrender Walker's body to his family for burial remanding it instead to the "anatomical board" probably for dissection at the Medical College of Virginia. The man had been completely destroyed. Only his story remains for us to consider.



"Old Sparky," the Electric Chair in the Richmond Penitentiary
Library of Virginia, Richmond

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Could It Happen Here?

7

During the decades following the tragedy of Howard Walker, his story fell from public view. The speed and uncertainty of what had happened dazed Winchester. Only now are its pieces fitting back into place.

THE LEGACY

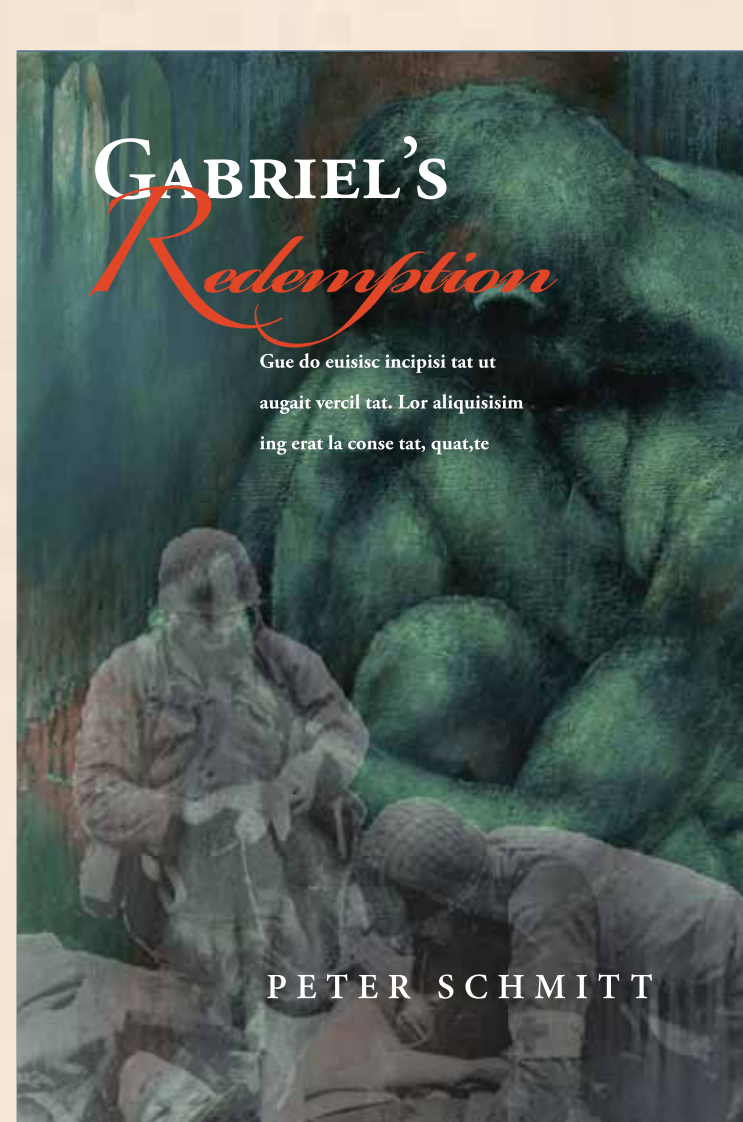
The perceived injustice of Walker's struggle mobilized the black community. Local black businessman, George Cary, raised a defense fund and referred the case to the NAACP. Just weeks after Walker's execution, Cary and 200 members of Winchester's black community united to found Winchester's branch of this organization.



NAACP members, 1944
Handley Library, Stewart Bell Archives, Winchester, Virginia

In 2003 local author Peter Schmitt was inspired by Walker's story to write a novel titled *Gabriel's Redemption*. According to Schmitt:

"Ten years ago, I was looking for my second novel. A friend told me an amazing true story that happened in Winchester in 1944. The tale enthralled me. I decided to research the story. I gathered court records, newspaper, accounts and interviews, building a story on how this could have happened. When one of the people I interviewed told me she had heard "If he was here, (the woman's husband), he would have stood up for Howdy." To me, that was the novel. The legal documents and newspaper articles are the actual documents. A novelist knows his characters as he knows the people around him, so I have lived with Howard Walker for ten years. I wanted people to hear the story, then I wanted people to talk about it, and finally to see Howard Walker exonerated."



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Could It Happen Here?

8

YOU DECIDE

1. What was the nature of the affair between Walker and Glaize?
2. Would evidence of an affair have changed the verdict? Or was Walker “guilty” regardless? Did the color of his skin render his death inevitable? Was he “doomed” from the beginning?
3. What really happened at 127 Peyton Street on the night of March 7, 1944? The evidence that a rape took place is ambiguous. The victim’s family denied it. The physical evidence and the FBI report cannot confirm it. Walker insisted that he was innocent during his interrogation. If he ever faced his accuser, it was in the private chambers of a judge, not in open court. There is no record of what was said in those chambers.
4. Whose account of Walker’s interrogation and confession is true? Walker, on one side, and the Commonwealth’s Attorney and the police, on the other, submitted sworn statements that directly contradict each other.
5. Why did Judge Harrison impose the death sentence when attorneys on both sides had set Walker up only for a prison sentence? The Commonwealth’s Attorney made no recommendation for sentencing, and Walker’s attorneys threw him on the mercy of the court by pleading him guilty and waiving a jury trial.
6. Was there a crowd—a mob—at the courthouse for Walker’s sentencing on March 18, 1944? The judge had moved the hearing from a Tuesday to a Saturday, when everyone knew the town would be “mobbed” by country people. Could anyone have claimed that day that Walker had to receive the electric chair or else face the mob? Was then Walker sacrificed to restore social order and the racial partition of the community?
7. How could a community allow this to happen?
8. What is the legacy of Howard Walker’s story for us today? Is it our version of *To Kill a Mockingbird*?

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