



The Maggie L. Walker National Historic Site: An Administrative History



Megan Taylor Shockley

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By Megan Taylor Shockley

Presented to The Maggie L. Walker National Historic Site
Interior Region 1, North Atlantic—Appalachian

Prepared under a cooperative agreement between
The Organization of American Historians and The National Park Service

August 2022

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NATIONAL PARK SERVICE
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
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August 2022

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A Note on Sources

At the time of publication, the records were unprocessed. These records can be found at either the National Archives or the Maggie L. Walker National Historic Site. Please contact the curator for details. All interviews were conducted by the author over the period of two years. Transcripts and recordings are in the possession of the Maggie L. Walker NHS. All images used in this work are courtesy of the Maggie L. Walker National Historic Site, Richmond. Photos are unprocessed but are available digitally.

Introduction

In 1909, Maggie Walker said, “We need not wait for God to come down in any visible form, or for Him to exert any other than human agencies to awaken us from our sloth. . . . We can do; we will do; we are going to do now.”¹ The Maggie L. Walker National Historic Site development’s story, much like Walker’s story, is one of proactive leadership in the face of great challenges. From the founding of the Maggie L. Walker Historical Foundation (MLWHF), whose goal was to purchase and turn the Walker home into a museum, to the NPS securing the funding and expertise to create the site visitors experience today, individuals and groups worked together to create a site worthy of this important leader. In so doing, they not only stood at the vanguard of the African American preservation movement, but also at the forefront of changes in National Park Service policies and directives, which began to focus more on crafting inclusive narratives to reflect the diversity of America. In their cultural resources management, interpretation, programming and partnerships with community groups, and focus on staff diversity and providing accessible visitor services, local NPS personnel advanced the NPS goals of connecting with a broader audience. Moreover, they introduced “untold stories” into the American history narrative. In this way, the site essentially modeled the new agendas of NPS directives issued from the 1970s through the twenty-first century.

Maggie Walker as a Historical Figure

Although Walker gained fame and national influence during her time as she battled discrimination and gender inequality and established three significant business concerns—a bank, department store, and newspaper—when the NPS formally acquired the site, her story had been largely lost to history. For a woman who directed a major national fraternal organization and served as one of the first female bank presidents, she had been largely ignored by historians. Walker rubbed elbows with the leading civil rights leaders of the early twentieth century, like W. E. B. DuBois, Langston Hughes, Mary MacLeod Bethune, and Nannie Helen Burroughs. Walker supported Janie Barrett Porter (founder of Virginia’s Industrial School for Girls) and Mary MacLeod Bethune as friends and colleagues in the struggle for civil rights. She worked with the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, the National Association of Colored Women, and other organizations to advance equality. She helped organize a boycott of the the segregated Richmond streetcar

¹ Quoted on the Maggie L. Walker Historical Site Facebook page, 20 November 2020, last accessed 26 March 2021, <https://m.facebook.com/MaggieL.WalkerNHS>.

system in 1904 and led a voting rights movement in Virginia.² When the National Park Service acquired her home in 1979, no historians had examined her significant work as a philanthropist, civil rights leader, and feminist. Despite the fact that her ascent from the daughter of a formerly enslaved woman to the Right Worthy Grand Secretary Treasurer of the Independent Order of St. Luke, her notoriety during her lifetime was eclipsed by the narratives of other civil rights leaders in the later twentieth century, when historians began to examine the civil rights movement.

Why was Walker's legacy muted in the larger narrative of the civil rights movement? As historians of women explain, it took quite some time for both contemporaries and historians alike to acknowledge the significant role played by all women in the civil rights movement. Furthermore, prior to the late twentieth century, historians focused more on the efforts of civil rights activists in post-World War II America, which obscured the work of Walker and her contemporaries in setting up the organizations that undergirded the more militant desegregation efforts of the late twentieth century. As a practical matter, some of Walker's disappearance in the historical canon may have been a result of a lack of access to her personal manuscript collections, as well as the records of her business concerns, the Independent Order of St. Luke and the St. Luke Penny Savings Bank, which became Consolidated Bank and Trust. Walker's prodigious archives of correspondence and diaries had been kept privately by the family. In addition, the Independent Order of St. Luke retained its records, and there is no evidence that historians sought or received access to these documents.³

The one institution that addressed Walker's story was the Black press. Throughout the decades after Walker's death and preceding the National Park Service's purchase of the site in 1979, African American newspapers across the country highlighted Walker's story. From the Norfolk-based *New Journal and Guide* to the *Chicago Defender*, readers could learn about Walker through features. Although papers did not address her as much in the 1940s and 1950s, there appeared to be renewed interest in the 1960s and 1970s, possibly because of the emergence of Black power and her strong link with African American

² Scholars who have explored Maggie Walker's life and work in detail include Gertrude Woodruff Marlowe, *A Right Worthy Grand Mission: Maggie Lena Walker and the Quest for Black Economic Empowerment* (Washington, D.C.: Howard University Press, 2003); Shennette Garrett-Scott, *Banking on Freedom: Black Women in U.S. Finance Before the New Deal* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2019).

³ These issues are addressed by many scholars, including Belinda Robnett in *How Long? How Long? African American Women in the Struggle for Civil Rights* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000); the contributors to Vicki Crawford et al., *Women in the Civil Rights Movement 1941-1965: Trailblazers and Torchbearers* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1993); and Janet Dewart Bell, *Lighting the Fires of Freedom: Women in the Civil Rights Movement* (New York: The New Press, 2018). There are many works that discuss the long civil rights movement in terms of how African Americans continually challenged oppression after the Civil War, including Jane Dailey et al., eds., *Jumpin' Jim Crow: Southern Politics from Civil War to Civil Rights* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000).

entrepreneurialism and self-determination. Even in the Black press, however, Walker's story merited only sporadic mentions from the time of her death until the acquisition of her property by the National Park Service.⁴

In Richmond, Walker's house stood as an almost fully intact artifact of Walker's time and history. Walker's daughter-in-law, Hattie N. F. Walker, kept the house nearly as it was during Maggie Walker's lifetime, making only a few cosmetic changes in the 1940s. She had always wanted the house to become a museum, according to her niece, Mamie Walker Crawford. Harriet (Hattie) Walker acquired the home, which had been left to her brother-in-law Melvin Walker, with the admonition to pay the mortgage or the house would become the property of St. Luke's. Melvin Walker died a year after inheriting the home. Hattie Walker secured the house with the promise to pay off the mortgage. Mamie noted that while they expected her grandmother's possessions to be divided amongst the descendants, Hattie wanted everything to remain where it was. Her daughter, Maggie Laura, could not convince her to sell the home, even after Hattie moved to Chicago to live with her. The house was in the hands of a caretaker after Hattie moved to Chicago, and according to Maggie Laura, Hattie could not afford to maintain the large house. The house deteriorated with only the caretaker residing there, and without extensive restoration, was in poor shape at the mercy of vandals, who may have taken items, including silver.⁵

Jackson Ward

The neighborhood had also deteriorated in the years since Maggie Walker lived at 110 ½ E. Leigh Street. Once known as the "Harlem of the South," Jackson Ward was the center of Richmond's African American life and culture in the Jim Crow era. Jackson Ward's star rose in the early twentieth century, spurred on by the growth of Black businesses. As African Americans fought for economic power, the emerging Black middle class of Richmond constructed stately row houses on E. Leigh Street, nicknamed "Quality Row." Through the first decades of the twentieth century, Jackson Ward was the center of Richmond's civil rights activity, as well. Walker led a boycott of the segregated streetcar

⁴ NPS Park Guide Ben Anderson has a database of references to Walker in articles, and has transcribed a number of these articles.

⁵ Mamie Walker Crawford, Interview by Diann Jacox, 46–49, "Maggie L. Walker Oral History Project," Volume 1 (National Park Service, October 1986); Maggie Laura Walker Lewis, Interview by Diann Jacox, 25, 55, "Maggie L. Walker Oral History Project," Volume 2 (National Park Service, October 1986); Walker died intestate, although she left a number of handwritten notes disbursing her ten properties. Her surviving son, Melvin, received only her home with its mortgage, according to the notes, because she had paid many of his debts already. He contested the will, and the property was divided amongst the grandchildren, with Hattie making a deal to pay the mortgage of the property. See Appendix C, "The Will Controversy," in Gertrude Marlowe's *A Ransom for Many* (unpublished manuscript, National Park Service, 1997). Several oral histories from the grandchildren also note that there seemed to be missing silver, and Maggie Laura noted the area's deterioration and subsequent vandalism as the potential cause, "Maggie Walker Oral History Project," Volume 1, 70–71.

system, several neighborhood leaders sat on the Lily-Black Ticket (including Walker as Superintendent of Public Instruction) to protest white Republicans' shunning of the Black vote, and civil rights activists made phone calls and organized from Slaughter's Hotel in the 1940s and 1950s.⁶

Completely segregated—the 1940 census listed the six tracts comprising Jackson Ward as 90 percent Black—Jackson Ward fell victim to policies enacted by an all-white city council and racist federal government. During the New Deal, Jackson Ward was one of the neighborhoods redlined in Richmond, meaning that the federal government refused to provide loan funding assistance there. From the city's lack of appropriations for infrastructure construction like sewers, to allowing industrial sites to locate to the area and create brownfields, to the redlining in the 1930s, the segregated neighborhood was marginalized even during Maggie Walker's lifetime.⁷

By the 1950s, policies that made Jackson Ward vulnerable, as well as middle-class flight to other neighborhoods, caused a decline in the urban population in general. Economic racism kept Richmond's African Americans impoverished; by 1960, over 50 percent of African American families earned just over \$3,000 a year, compared with fewer than 30 percent of white families. Moreover, although African American men could theoretically always vote in Virginia after the passage of the Fifteenth Amendment, and Black women received that right after the passage of the Nineteenth Amendment, all Virginians had to pay a hefty poll tax. This tax accrued yearly, keeping many economically marginalized people from voting. It was not deemed unconstitutional until 1966. Locally, the city of Richmond's policies kept power entirely in white hands until the 1970s. In 1946, Richmond's Master Plan proposed to clear Richmond "slums" and make the city more car-friendly. During the 1950s, the city council spent millions of dollars—much of this from the federal government—to subsidize the construction of housing projects, relocating seven thousand of Richmond's citizens to segregated public housing. Furthermore, the decision to put Interstate 95 directly through the heart of Jackson Ward decimated an already struggling community. By 1958, the project had demolished nearly four hundred homes and displaced more than two thousand families. It also separated the northern part of the neighborhood physically. These actions, as well as the relocation of white-collar jobs

⁶ Information about Maggie Walker can be found in the NPS Virtual Exhibits and in Gertrude Marlowe, *Right Worthy Grand Mission*; Julian Maxwell Hayter, *The Dream is Lost: Voting Rights and the Politics of Race in Richmond, Virginia* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2019), 39–44.

⁷ Gregg Kimball and Elsa Barkley Brown, "Mapping the Terrain of Black Richmond," *Journal of Urban History* 21, no. 3 (March 1995): 204. For more information about city and federal policies that negatively affected Jackson Ward, see Rachel Spraker, "What's Haunting Jackson Ward? Race, Space, and Environmental Violence" (MA Thesis, Virginia Commonwealth University, 2006) and Christopher Silver, *20th Century Richmond: Planning, Politics, and Race* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1984). For a map of redlining and how it affected Richmond, see Richard K. Nelson et al., "Mapping Inequality: Redlining in New Deal America," University of Richmond Digital Scholarship Lab, last accessed 20 January 2021, <https://dsl.richmond.edu/panorama/redlining/#loc=15/37.554/-77.458&city=richmond-va&area=D1>. Julian Maxwell Hayter, *The Dream is Lost: Voting Rights and the Politics of Race in Richmond, Virginia*, 22–23.

outside the city, caused a tremendous population decline in Jackson Ward in the 1950s and 1960s. By the time the Supreme Court determined in 1977 that Richmond would have district-based elections, resulting in the election of a majority-Black council and the city's first Black mayor, damage to Jackson Ward had already been done. The neighborhood had a smaller, poorer population and many abandoned and derelict buildings marring the landscape. Retired NPS curator Hyman Schwartzberg remembered that when he first worked at MAWA, a police officer "said that the corner of Second and Leigh had the highest incidence of crime in the city of Richmond. So that's not a place you wanted to be at night for sure and here we were from the Park Service to get this open. So that was not the best area in the world."⁸

It was in this period that first the Maggie L. Walker Historical Foundation (MLWHF) and then the National Park Service (NPS) moved to save Walker's home. In the ensuing decades, the NPS worked to make the site an example of excellent management, interpretation, and outreach. In so doing, the service took the lead in Jackson Ward's revitalization, as well as in restoring Maggie Walker to her rightful place in the history of significant African American leaders.

⁸ Julian Hayter, *The Dream is Lost*, 50–55, 87, 14, 31–32, 2. For a history of how African Americans fought for political power in Richmond, as well as the ramifications of years of political and economic racism on city politics, see Lewis Randolph and Gayle Tate, *Rights for a Season: The Politics of Race, Class, and Gender in Richmond, Virginia* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2003). John Moeser and Rutledge Dennis discuss these issues, as well as the ways in which whites tried to retain power through annexing portions of Chesterfield County to the south, in *The Politics of Annexation: Oligarchic Power in a Southern City* (Cambridge, MA: Schenckman Publishing Company, 1982); Hyman Schwartzberg, interviewed by Megan Shockley, 19 July 2021, 6.

CHAPTER ONE

The Maggie Walker Home: From Private Plans to NPS Acquisition

In 1975, a group of African American Richmond residents formally organized the Maggie L. Walker Historical Foundation (MLWHF) to support the purchase and restoration of Walker's home. At the same time, the National Park Service engaged in a major effort to become more inclusive, both in the types of sites it held and in the narratives those sites told. These efforts converged in 1978, when enabling legislation in the Omnibus Parks Bill proposed the NPS acquire the Maggie Walker house, with the support of the MLHF. From 1976 to 1979, when the NPS received the deed to the site, the MLWHF led the campaign to advocate for site preservation. The NPS navigated the acquisition process, set the standard for cultural resources management and interpretation, and negotiated a working relationship with the Foundation.

The MLWHF and the African American Preservation Movement

The MLWHF grew out of an interest in preserving local Black history. A member of the local Association for the Study of Afro-American History (now the Association for the Study of African American Life and History, or ASALH), Mozelle Sallee Baxter, had examined Walker's life as part of a chapter history project. She convened a group in December 1974 to discuss the potential purchase of the Walker house for a historic house museum and Black history and cultural center. This group met a month later with the ad hoc committee to save the Consolidated Bank & Trust Building. The committee failed to save the circa 1911 building that had housed Walker's bank, the St. Luke Penny Savings Bank, which merged into Consolidated Bank & Trust under Walker's chairmanship. The bank itself tore down the building for a parking lot and constructed a new one across the street. Losing Walker's bank to the wrecking ball, at the hands of the institution she built, most likely proved the impetus to preserve Walker's home, and the organization formally incorporated into the MLWHF in 1975.¹

¹ "The Maggie L. Walker Historical Foundation," 15 July 1986, Box 1, MLWHF Notebook 2, MLWHF.

The citizens who founded the MLWHF had expansive plans to center Walker’s home in a larger preservation effort of Jackson Ward. Walker’s house, a grand example of Italianate architecture in the nationally renowned historic Black neighborhood, Jackson Ward, was unoccupied and had deteriorated. They were community leaders. In a local newspaper article, reporter Barbara Green called the group of organizers “prominent.” Rev. Dr. E. D. McCreary, pastor of the Mount Carmel Baptist Church and professor of religion at Virginia Union University, served as president. Mozelle Sallee, the Vice President, was the chair of the Richmond Chapter of the Society for the Study of Afro-American Life and History. Dorothy Rice, who later served as president of the MLWHF, described the founders as “the established middle class[,]” comprised of “mostly retired teachers, preachers, club people.” She remembered them as educators, relating Black history, culture, and tradition to the community. As she explained, “these people were so proud of their legacy, the legacies they inherited, and the legacy that they would leave someday.” They were the people to whom the community looked for leadership.²



Members of the Maggie L. Walker Historical Foundation.

² Dorothy Rice, Interviewed by Megan Shockley, 21 July, 2021, 5; Clipping, Barbara Green, “Museum Set by Blacks at Walker Site,” *Richmond News Leader* 16 October 1975, 1, 6, Box 1, MLWHF Notebook 1, MWLHF.

The expansive program of the Foundation included centering Walker's home in a greater effort to preserve Jackson Ward as a historic neighborhood. MLWHF's early financial syllabus explained its goal: to "conserve, restore, and maintain the house and contents as a monument to Maggie L. Walker, as a museum of Black history and culture, as a library of banking and finance, and as a stop on the famous Richmond tour."³ McCreary told Green, "Our specific and immediate goal is to purchase the home and make it a national shrine, like the Edgar Allen Poe House or the Frederick Douglass House in Washington." McCreary explained the group had a three-phase plan to purchase, restore, and maintain the building, with a one-year completion date. The MLWHF hoped to secure funding from the National Park Service, under the National Preservation Act of 1966, according to the article. Once the Foundation finished restoring the Walker house, members planned to acquire other homes in Jackson Ward. McCreary told Green, "People have bought these houses cheaply, painted them or put Williamsburg brick on them, and destroyed much of their historical character." He also evinced concern with development destroying the original neighborhood. MLWHF determined to reverse that trend, starting with the Walker house itself.⁴

The MLWHF represented a growing trend in African American preservation, which swept the country in the second half of the twentieth century. During this period, many neighborhood African American museums emerged, prompted by meetings between activists and leaders of their respective Black communities. Associate Professor of History and author of *From Storefront to Monument: Tracing the Public History of the Black Museum Movement* Andrea Burns argued that these museums and their collections "offered a distinct rebuttal to the narrative of invisibility practiced by mainstream museums with regard to the presence and historical agency of African Americans."⁵ Throughout the country in the 1960s and 1970s, homegrown Black history and culture museums emerged in donated spaces, dominated largely by collections donated by the local communities in which they were situated and staffed by volunteers. These museums often served as cultural centers as well, serving the Black community that surrounded them, and asserting powerful stories of survival and pride. Influenced by the Black nationalist movement, these museums were led by people who challenged white-centric traditional museums with exhibits and outreach programs. By 1978, museum professionals founded the African American

³ Financial Syllabus, n.d. (pre-August 1976), Box 1, MLWHF Notebook 1, MLWHF, 3.

⁴ Barbara Green, "Museum Set by Blacks at Walker Site," *Richmond News Leader*, 16 October 1975.

⁵ Andrea Burns, *From Storefront to Monument: Tracing the Public History of the Black Museum Movement* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2012), 4.

Museums Association (renamed in 1998 the Association of African American Museums) as an umbrella organization to facilitate interchange between Black museum institutions. By 1988, there were fifty-eight institutional members.⁶

With its goal to tell the story of Walker herself, the history of Black finance in America, and the role of Jackson Ward in fomenting Black economic and community success, the MLWHF countered over a century of a Confederate-dominated past in the city of Richmond. The 1970s Richmond museum scene was limited. Although Richmond had many museums and historic sites, none were dedicated to telling an Afrocentric history of the city or the region. Even the National Park Service sites in the area focused on the military history of the Civil War. The MLWHF was clear in its mission, but also in its determination to serve as a leader in the Richmond preservation movement. As in other cities, this home-grown collection of local leaders understood the significance of their intervention into the traditional narrative of the city. Mozelle Sallee told Barbara Green that the foundation was not accepting white members at the time because “we all felt that blacks should take the lead.” McCreary expressed concern to Green about the losses Jackson Ward had already faced with city redevelopment, suggesting that older people might not be able to pay higher property taxes in the district. He told Green that wealthier people, both Black and white, were moving back to the city and if they came to Jackson Ward, they would “change the character” of the neighborhood. He supported the integration of the neighborhood, but he worried that “some of the original black community would be destroyed.” The foundation’s planned projects, he said, would be a sure way to preserve Black history in the face of new developments. The group appeared to be aware of the racial politics of gentrification, as well as how a historic site in the center of a historic Black neighborhood could assist the community.⁷

The MLWHF was a local group with local concerns; however, it recognized the national importance of Walker and the house itself and proceeded to plan for a site that would draw visitors from outside the city. Its goal was to raise money through contributions (memberships), donations from businesses and philanthropic organizations, and federal and local grants. Within a year it had received \$2,500 from the city of Richmond, just over \$1,000 from board members, and over \$1,350 from the Astoria Beneficial Club, which had designated the Maggie Walker site a long-term project. The city council had voted in support of providing the money for the purchase of the house, which McCreary valued at \$40,000. The MLWHF originally planned to purchase the home from Walker’s granddaughter, Dr. Maggie Laura Walker Lewis, when she was in town from Chicago in

⁶ Burns, *From Storefront to Monument*, 4–10.

⁷ Barbara Green, “Museum Set by Blacks at Walker Site.” Note: While an earlier article noted there were two white advisors who were members of the foundation, both from the Virginia Historic Landmarks Commission, they did plan to expand later. At this point, all members were from or still lived in Jackson Ward. Glenn Frankel, “Black Preservation Done Black—the Maggie Walker House,” 7 May 1975, *Richmond Mercury*, 3, 11.

August of 1976. Lewis inherited the house from her mother, Hattie, who bought out the mortgage and installed a caretaker to live there as she resided in Chicago. MLWHF members hoped to make the house an operational site by the end of 1976, although the financial syllabus noted, “being a group of volunteers and amateur fund raisers, we cannot prudently set an exact date as to when we shall be fully operational.”⁸

In the meantime, the MLWHF organized itself and crafted a broad preliminary site plan. First, it filed to be a nonprofit corporation. Its bylaws explained the broad view it took of Richmond’s African American history. The bylaws stated the foundation’s goal: “To acquire and preserve houses, buildings, monuments, sites, and objects in and around the city of Richmond that are connected with or illustrative of the history and culture of the People of Richmond, Virginia, and the United States.” The MLWHF determined to buy, mortgage, and rent property, and function as an institution of education both in Richmond and beyond, focused on history and culture, as well as architecture. The foundation established a committee structure, which included planning, membership, fundraising, public relations, and a restoration and curatorial committee. The latter would provide a furnishing plan and structural report, as well as a plan for cataloging and curatorial maintenance plans. A community and educational resources committee would locate and secure funding for other restoration projects, and a documentation and library committee planned to sponsor programs focused on the history of Jackson Ward and prominent Black leaders. An arts committee wanted to schedule classes and events at the Maggie L. Walker community center the foundation planned for the carriage house, used as a garage by Walker and located behind the house. One committee planned a center for technical assistance to facilitate programming for small businesses. In these ways, the foundation followed the model of other African American history and cultural centers with broad programming that went further than the scope of a single-interpretation narrative centered on the house and Walker.⁹

As it organized, the MLWHF also secured the groundwork for the Walker house’s acquisition and restoration. In 1975, the foundation worked with the Virginia Historic Landmarks Commission and ASALH to nominate the Walker house for the National Register of Historic Places. The NPS determined that the house was worthy of inclusion as a National Landmark, which meant that its history was significant in telling the story of the nation, rather than just of a community. The Walker house was the first historically

⁸ Financial Syllabus, 1–3, quote on 3; Mamie Walker Crawford, Interviewed by Diann Jacox and Celia Suggs, “Maggie L. Walker Oral History Project,” Volume 1, National Park Service, 48–49. The Astoria Beneficial Club, a prominent civil rights and philanthropic organization in Richmond, was established in 1901. Members worked on a wide range of projects in the community. These included supporting the Community Hospital, erecting the Bill “Bojangles” Robinson statue, and providing scholarships to students and financial aid to the United Negro College Fund. <https://www.astoriabeneficialclub.org/history.html>. Last accessed 28 August 2021.

⁹ Bylaws, n.d., n.p, Articles 5 and 6, Box 1, Notebook 1, MLWHF; “Recommendations for the Purpose and Functions of the Committees of the Maggie L. Walker Historical Foundation,” n.d., n.p., Box 1, Notebook 1, MLWHF.

significant Black-owned structure in Richmond placed on the National Register. An article about the nomination noted one of the unique qualities of the home; many of the original artifacts and décor remained inside the home.¹⁰



An early NPS photo of the Maggie Walker house, circa 1978

Shortly after securing landmark status, the foundation applied for a HUD Community Development Block grant of \$145,000 on behalf of the organization, with funding to be received and disbursed by the city of Richmond. These grants came from a new federal government initiative to assist low- and moderate-income communities to provide necessary infrastructure and reduce blight. The money would commission a feasibility study for the restoration and use of the Walker house, as well as the acquisition

¹⁰ Clipping, “Maggie L. Walker’s Home Nominated for National Recognition,” 20–24 May 1975, Box 1, Notebook 1, MLWHF. While this is essentially true, much of the wallpaper and most of the original paint had been covered over, and indeed most of the wallpaper had been covered over by Hattie Walker after Maggie Walker’s death. According to the national register, Walker’s site preceded Third Street Bethel AME by a few weeks, although the church had been registered by the state just a few months prior to the Walker site. Bethel never received landmark status, however. For more information, see “Historic Registers,” Virginia Department of Historic Resources website, last accessed 4 April 2022, <https://www.dhr.virginia.gov/historic-register>.

and restoration of the property. The foundation budgeted the feasibility study at \$7,000, the house purchase at \$40,000, and the restoration of both exterior and interior structures and artifacts at \$98,000. In a letter to City Manager William Leidinger, McCreary wrote, “We are aware that the potential and importance of this endeavor is equaled by the amount of work ahead for all involved.”¹¹ But with the foundation incorporated and committees in place—with members who had already successfully navigated the national register nomination—the time was right to acquire the house.

The coalescing of a group committed to saving the Walker house not only coincided with the movement of community activists across the country to establish Black history and cultural sites; it also happened at a time when the National Park Service was expanding its historical interpretation. In the 1970s, the NPS determined to include more diverse narratives and populations in its cultural resources management and interpretation program. This change at the NPS came at a fortuitous time for the MLWHF, as the Walker site fit neatly into the new interpretive focus.

The NPS and the Movement toward Inclusivity

In 1970, the NPS had established the Task Force for the National Parks Centennial Commission to survey and define both the challenges and goals, current and long-range, for the next century. This thirty-four-member advisory committee sought input from citizens, urban and labor leaders, and students. One of the biggest takeaways from the commission was that the NPS was not serving the needs of the larger American public. Many were concerned about the dearth of urban parks for the large city populations and the lack of relevancy for urban dwellers. The report of the commission noted the need for diversity both in the staff of the NPS and in interpretations to “make all citizens feel welcome in the parks.” It also suggested an expansion of urban park sites and more interaction between the public and NPS in the planning stages of parks.¹²

The report is broken into several sections, and those dealing with interpretation came up with similar conclusions about the lack of inclusivity at the NPS. In the section on education and culture, Minnesota Historical Society Director Russell W. Fridley and his associates noted that because the NPS at the time was largely a “land-management

¹¹ Edward McCreary, “Funding Request Community Development Block Grant,” December 1976, Box 1, Notebook 1, MLWHF; “Community Block Grant Information,” US Department of Housing and Urban Development, last accessed 23 March 2020, https://www.hud.gov/program_offices/comm_planning/communitydevelopment/programs; Edward McCreary to William Leidinger, 9 December 1976, Box 1, Notebook 1, MLWHF. For information on the National Register nomination and the letter designating landmark status, see “Virginia NHL, Walker, Maggie Lena,” National Archives Catalog, last accessed 7 September 2021, <https://catalog.archives.gov/id/41679129>.

¹² The Conservation Foundation, *National Parks for the Future: Visions, Realities, Prospects* (Washington, D.C.: The Conservation Foundation, 1985), 4–5, 8, 13. Quote on 8.

agency[,]” interpretation, education, and social/scientific issues “are too often relegated to a low rung on the ladder of priorities[.]” They also wrote that only twenty of the seven thousand NPS staff were actively involved in historic preservation. In addition, the writers argued that the interpretation programs that existed were “too often narrowly conceived, unimaginatively represented, and out of touch with contemporary scholarship.” Only three sites focused specifically on the history of Black Americans (Frederick Douglass, George Washington Carver, Booker T. Washington). This group urged NPS to acquire more sites that focused on people of color. In the “National Parks and Urban America” section, Mark Battle and his colleagues wrote that “old historical and cultural biases” must be eradicated in the interpretive material at parks, and original research needed to be conducted to counter older and outdated sources. Both groups reiterated that more people of color needed to be hired as historians and in other NPS capacities, and that interpretation had to be more responsive to the needs of people of color.¹³ As National Park Service Artist in Residence Alan Gusson summed up, the National Park Service did not need to create more Williamsburgs, but could instead perhaps design additional Frederick Douglass Centers.¹⁴

In 1972, responding to the commission and to assert control over federal preservation policies, NPS crafted the “plan for history” (Historic Plan), which categorized significant themes in American history. These included more traditional foci, like exploration, colonization, war, and political/military issues, but also reflected the impact of the new social history that had emerged in the 1960s. The sections on labor, intellectual, and social reflected the growing historiography that explored grassroots movements, community history, and everyday American actors in shaping history. The larger categories were subdivided into forty-five units, and historical parks in the system were divided up into their respective categories. In addition, the plan for history established an expansion program, which would create more opportunities for cultural resources management and interpretation professionals within the NPS, as well as address the desires of specific Congressional representatives to create new districts in their areas. The benefit of this new plan, according to Professor of Geography and park expert Ronald Foresta, was that it enabled the expansion of both gender and race history, as many categorizations could recognize the contributions of previously overlooked populations. Slavery fit into American ways of life, civil rights into social movements, and abolition into humanitarian movements, for example. Creating subsections, he argued, “gave the agency the freedom to add more units commemorating Black achievement when they became available.” In his study of the National Park Service leadership, Foresta noted that senior NPS officials

¹³ The Conservation Foundation, *National Parks for the Future*, 65, 73. From Russell W. Fridley et al., “The National Park System as Education and Cultural Institution,” 57–66 and Mark Battle et al., “The National Park Service and Urban America,” in The Conservation Foundation, *National Parks for the Future*, 67–75.

¹⁴ The Conservation Foundation, “The Symposium Reports: A National Parks Dialogue” (Appendix of *National Parks for the Future*), n.p.

recognized the benefit of using historic preservation to connect with social activism.¹⁵ While Foresta's opinion of the plan was that it failed to put historic preservation on an equal footing with natural conservation, and that Congress largely ignored the plan in favor of simply adding sites as they saw fit in their districts, the plan certainly justified the expansion of more diverse historic parks.¹⁶

The path to inclusivity had been laid by the National Park Service; all that was needed were the sites that could be identified and incorporated. The need was critical, as only four African American history-specific sites were listed in the National Register of Historic Places as of 1971. To identify more potential sites, the NPS worked with the Afro-American Bicentennial Corporation (later renamed the Afro-American Institute for Historic Preservation and Community Development, founded by brothers Robert DeForrest and Vincent DeForest [they spelled their names differently]). The DeFor(r)est brothers established the institute in 1970 to ensure that significant African American history sites would be included in the bicentennial celebrations. They worked with groups to get Black history sites listed as National Historic Landmarks, with great success. As a result of the brothers' work identifying relevant sites, the number of registered sites rose to sixty-one sites in twenty-two states and D.C. by the late 1980s. The brothers were contracted by the Department of the Interior to identify sites from 1972 to 1976 in anticipation of the nation's bicentennial, and worked under the direction of Charles Wesley, director of ASALH at the time. The brothers were also concerned about the destruction and gentrification of historic Black communities; efforts to save Black history sites would also help African American residents better understand the significance of their stories and the communities as a whole.¹⁷

Movement toward NPS Acquisition of the Walker Site

It is at this point that the story of the Walker site and the National Park Service plan of expansion and inclusion crossed paths. The MLWHF received the HUD grant, and Richmond City Council approved \$12,000 for a feasibility study. The city contracted

¹⁵ Ronald Foresta, *America's National Parks and Their Keepers* (Washington, D.C.: Resources for the Future Publications, 1984), 136 (where he calls it the plan for history with no quotes or italics), 155, 138–47. Quote on 147. For a full discussion of the plan and its ramifications, both positive and negative, see 138–66.

¹⁶ Foresta, *America's National Parks and Their Keepers*, 149–53.

¹⁷ D.C. Preservation League, Civil Rights Tour, "Education, Afro-American Institute," <https://historicsites.dcpreservation.org/items/show/995?tour=12&index=13>; Fred Brown, Jr., "Preserving America's Black Historic Landmarks," *Washington Post*, 20 February 1979, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/lifestyle/1989/02/20/preserving-americas-Black-historic-landmarks/68a2c680-7abd-42a4-85c7-68d87f9a03f9/>; Yvonne Shinhoster Lamb, "Robert DeForrest, 72; Institute Cofounder Identified Black Sites," *Washington Post*, 12 March 2007 in *Boston Globe* obituary section, http://archive.boston.com/news/globe/obituaries/articles/2007/03/12/robert_deforrest_72_institute_cofounder_identified_black_historic_sites/, all accessed 24 March 2020.

Vincent DeForest to conduct the study, with a due date of November 1977. The feasibility study would include a status on all systems and structures, and address whether the MLWHF was the appropriate organization to supervise the site. The City Council planned to provide an additional \$126,000 of the grant money to purchase and restore the house should the study's outcome be positive.¹⁸

Before this could happen, it appears that the DeFor(r)est brothers got the National Park Service involved. Bob Utley, who had served as Chief Historian of the NPS, as well as Director of the Office of Archeology and Historic Preservation before he moved to the Deputy Executive Director of the President's Council on Historic Preservation, recalled the DeFor(r)ests' interest in the site. Although Utley was no longer with the NPS when he served on the president's council, in an interview he called the site "controversial." Utley remembered that he helped comment on the "plans" DeForest brought to him, which were presumably the drafts for the feasibility study. Utley said it was he who suggested to DeForest to get the site added to the Omnibus Parks Bill in 1978 by enlisting the support of the Congressional Black Caucus. Utley himself argued, "So yes, I had something to do with the Maggie Walker House. I would not have given that advice if I had not felt I could make a case for that particular site." What made it controversial? Although he did not specifically reference the Walker site, Utley suggested that former NPS Chief Historian Ed Bearss and others believed certain "so-called Black landmarks . . . were improperly inflicted on the Park Service." They did not see the national significance of these sites.¹⁹

Even after the site's full inclusion, skepticism apparently remained within the NPS. Hyman Schwartzberg recalled, "Even though she was important in the early Civil Rights movement, and she did important things, they were stretching it a little bit." He considered the inclusion at the time to be part of the "Park of the Month Club," when politicians created a multitude of parks as part of pork-barrel spending programs. David Ruth, who served as Chief of Interpretation beginning in 1991 and later served as the site's superintendent, recalled that "there were a lot of folks who were looking at that as not a really great African American national site, that it had in fact more connection to state and mostly local [history]." Ruth attributed those beliefs to "the misunderstanding and lack of knowledge of who Maggie Walker was, what she did, and how she accomplished it." In a letter written over a decade after acquisition, Bearss exempted himself from this particular group,

¹⁸ William Leidinger to City Council, 28 July 1978, Box 1, Notebook 1, MLWHF.

¹⁹ Robert M. Utley, Interviewed by Richard Sellars and Melody Webb, 24 September 1985–27 December 1985, Tape 9, 26 September 1985, last accessed 24 March 2020, https://www.nps.gov/parkhistory/online_books/utley/utley7.htm.

although he noted that he had several colleagues who “questioned [Walker’s] significance and have spoken of the ‘thinning of the blood.’” He asserted that the Walker biography produced in 1992 proved them wrong, but it attests to the questions that existed in 1978.²⁰

Why might the Walker site have been a controversial addition? A site interpreting Maggie Walker would be the first NPS site focused on the history of an African American woman, thus expanding inclusion to race and gender; moreover, it fit the bill for a new emphasis on urban parks. Perhaps Bearss and/or his colleagues were of the opinion that the new social history was not as significant as the military history they had spent their careers studying. Perhaps it was because Richmond already had a major national park system, focused entirely on Civil War battlefields and sites. A Maggie Walker historic site did not fall neatly into the scope of the existing NPS unit in the Richmond area, but it was too small to merit a full complement of NPS staff. Walker’s relative obscurity in the larger canon of African American history also caused concern. Even years after the site’s inclusion as a new park, the Conservation Foundation’s *National Parks for a New Generation* report used the Maggie Walker site as one of the examples of “undeniably obscure” units that “are not on anyone’s list of world-class wonders[.]” Still, this report conceded that the expansion of parks broadened and varied NPS holdings in positive ways—whether or not it approved specifically of the Walker site.²¹

Despite any internal NPS concern regarding the significance of the Walker site, the DeFor(r)ests successfully secured the support of influential congressmen. Parren Mitchell, founder of the Congressional Black Caucus, wrote to Phillip Burton, the Chair of the Subcommittee on National Parks and Insular Affairs on June 21, 1978, that the Congressional Black Caucus supported the site’s inclusion. He claimed the Walker home was one of sixty-one sites identified by the Secretary of the Interior over the last four years by the Afro-American Bicentennial Corporation/Afro-American Institute and two dozen of

²⁰ Hyman and Janet Schwartzberg, interviewed by Megan Shockley, 19 July 2021, 14; David Ruth, interviewed by Megan Shockley, 25 June 2021, 5; Ed Bearss to MARO Director, Attention: Park Historic Preservation Division, 28 February 1992, MAR_Historian_MAWA_File, digital copy currently in possession of MAWA Museum Curator; Ronald Foresta, *America’s National Parks and Their Keepers*, 151.

²¹ The Conservation Foundation, *National Parks for a New Generation*, 240–41. Quote on 240. Bearss was commenting on an early edition of Gertrude Marlowe’s “A Ransom for Many” manuscript, commissioned by the National Park Service.

the country's most highly regarded Black historians. Mitchell also explained that it was the first unit specific to African American women's history as well. Legislation moved forward, passing first in the House in July 1978.²²

It appears that at this point, the MLWHF and City of Richmond officials got word that their plans for a local historic site had been taken up by the federal government. DeForest's feasibility study had been due in November of 1977, and William Leidinger informed the city council that the MLWHF and Richmond's Director of Planning and Community Development had already issued numerous extensions. We cannot know if DeForest was delaying the feasibility study intentionally as he lobbied Congress, but Leidinger's letter explained to the council that he and the foundation were in the dark about DeForest's activity. Leidinger wrote, "This development came as a surprise to the City Administrator [himself] as well as to the foundation." Reporter John Dillon of the *Richmond Times Dispatch* opined that Vincent DeForest "appears to be both villain and hero in the current situation." While the delays of the report cost the site damage because repairs could not be done, DeForest was responsible for its inclusion in the bill. Dillon even noted that the NPS was surprised by the home's inclusion, and he quoted an unnamed supporter in Washington who called the inclusion a "legislative 'miracle.'" Essentially, it appears that while DeForest was being paid by a grant secured by the MLWHF and disbursed by the City of Richmond focused on turning the Walker site into a locally owned historic site, he was lobbying to place the site into the NPS structure without consultation with the group that hired him.²³

Reactions to DeForest's actions were generally positive, despite the surprise that accompanied the announcement of the bill. Leidinger argued that as an NPS historic site the Walker house could benefit Jackson Ward economically, and he and many foundation members supported the development. According to former MLWHF president Faithe Norrell, Maggie Walker's granddaughter Mamie Evelyn Crawford "really worked hard to get this house purchased by the Park Service." Although she was not active at the time, she recalled that Crawford worked with a representative from the NPS and with the

²² Parren Mitchell to Phillip Burton, 21 June 1978, 14–15, in Appendix B, DeForest et al., *Maggie L. Walker National Historic Landmark Restoration and Utilization Feasibility Study* (hereafter *Feasibility Study*); Legislative History of the National Parks and Recreation Act of 1978 (Public Law 95-625), compiled by the Subcommittee on National Parks and Insular Affairs, December 1978, last accessed 26 March 2020 <https://www.rivers.gov/documents/record/95-625-legislative-history-national-parks-recreation-act.pdf>, 462. While the Walker site was the first NPS unit dedicated to African American women's history, the NPS-administered Capitol Parks East was the site of the Mary MacLeod Bethune memorial statue, erected by the National Council of Negro Women in 1974. For more information, see "Mary MacLeod Bethune Memorial," NPS Capital Parks East, last accessed 7 September 2021, <https://www.nps.gov/places/000/mary-mcleod-bethune-memorial.htm>.

²³ Leidinger to City Council, 2; John Dillon, "Help May Be Near for Walker Home," clipping, *Richmond Times Dispatch*, Box 1, Notebook 1, MLWHF.

foundation. Perhaps she served as a liaison between the two organizations; we cannot know for sure, but it would make sense that as a family representative who lived on the east coast, she may have been instrumental in the transaction.²⁴

There were concerns with the NPS plan as well, however. Leidinger related conversations with a representative of the NPS in which the official said funds might not be available until 1980. There were already significant repairs required, but if the city purchased the house outright, ostensibly to do the repairs, the NPS could not reimburse the city. If the house were purchased with the Community Development Funds, the NPS could reimburse that purchase; Leidinger himself suggested that perhaps the funds could be used to purchase the house, but the rest of the money promised might be held back or the federal government may not see the “urgency” in disbursing the money. MLWHF spokesperson Nessa Johnson also told reporter John Dillon that there was another concern: the foundation ““want[s] to see it become a shrine. If it goes to the Park Service, we could live with that, but we would like to see the foundation—local people—in charge or control . . . so it won’t be so far away from us.””²⁵ Given the work the foundation had put in since 1975, and the foundation’s determination to keep membership in the community, this was perhaps not a surprising reaction.

DeForest was getting the work done; he turned in several draft chapters before the bill went to the Senate. From what Leidinger had seen, he reported to the city council that there was “strong justification” for the site’s restoration. While they lacked the final cost analysis and a layout of MLWHF responsibilities, foundation members saw positive feedback in the first few chapters. We cannot know exactly which chapters Leidinger referred to in the letter, but the first few chapters most certainly were the ones that addressed the foundation’s own history, and the history of Jackson Ward and Maggie Walker, which were included in Part 1, Background, Chapters 1–3 in the final study.²⁶

The chapters Leidinger and the MLWHF surely saw situated Walker’s story within the larger context of Jackson Ward and African American history. It provided a short biography of Walker herself, as well as an architectural history of the house and surrounding neighborhood. It provided a profile of Jackson Ward using the most recent (1970) census; the city of Richmond was 41.7 percent African American, and Jackson Ward was 99.6 percent Black. The average age of Jackson Ward residents was also 44.2, about 15 years higher than the overall city age, with an income of \$4,918, compared to Richmond’s \$8,673. Households living below the poverty level were at 39.6 percent in Jackson Ward, and 71.5 percent of homes were rentals, as opposed to the city total of 17.5 percent and 48.4 percent, respectively. Despite these challenges, the study noted that the strengths of the

²⁴ Leidinger to City Council, 2; Faithe Norrell, Interviewed by Megan Shockley, 7 July 2021, 2.

²⁵ Leidinger to City Council, 3; John Dillon, “Help May Be Near,” 6.

²⁶ Leidinger to City Council; *Feasibility Study*.

neighborhood were its centrality to bus routes and its “visual cohesiveness” in terms of its wealth of late-nineteenth-century structures. The study noted that Jackson Ward was named a National Historic Landmark District in 1978, making it the largest historically Black Landmark in the country. And the study also explained that because of the neighborhood’s historic significance, “the residents and the City are deeply committed to a total revitalization of the neighborhood.” It noted the millions already spent in the neighborhood on community development and suggested that the Walker site would do well as a result of ongoing stakeholder interest.²⁷

The feasibility study also addressed the ongoing work of the foundation, as part of the question was whether MLWHF was an appropriate group to oversee operations. The issue, however, may have been seen as moot by DeForest, who was working to get the site included in the bill. However, the study noted that the foundation “has made progress in organizing itself, developing plans for the . . . house, and obtaining community support.” However, it “lacked a clear-cut strategy for program development[,]” which the feasibility study explained was its goal. The study’s initial chapters stated that the foundation “played a pivotal role” in securing a right of first refusal on the purchase of the house from Dr. Maggie Laura Walker Lewis, raising money for ongoing repairs, and installing a permanent caretaker. It also praised the foundation for working with the consultants of the feasibility study to develop program, staffing, and budget proposals. It mentioned that the foundation had already begun conducting tours and putting together educational programming in the form of slide shows, and had secured a meeting with Congressman W. E. Fauntroy, who toured the site with board members. The first part of the feasibility study praised the foundation, the city, and interested citizens, and emphasized that the story of Walker needed to be told and should be told in the context of this historic site.²⁸

While the feasibility study was ongoing and the bill made its way through Congress, National Park Service officials toured the site and connected with members of the foundation. David Kimball, the planning chief of the Mid-Atlantic Regional Office in Philadelphia, joined Sylvester Putman, Superintendent of Richmond National Battlefield Park, to see the house. Kimball explained to John Dillon that the National Park Service would have to assist the foundation in caring for the property if the bill passed. He also told Chair of the MLWHF Planning Commission and resident site caretaker Nathaniel Gilliam that the NPS would be more than willing to work with the foundation if the bill was approved in the Senate. Sylvester Putman, one of the first African American NPS

²⁷ *Feasibility Study*, 3–19. Quotes on 15 and 19. Jackson Ward had been named to the National Register of Historic Places in 1976, but became a designated National Historic Landmark almost two years later in 1978. The Virginia Historic Landmark Commission Staff prepared the paperwork to include the Jackson Ward district, so it clearly supported the incorporation of more African American sites into the register. See “Jackson Ward,” Virginia Department of Historic Resources, last accessed 4 April 2022, <https://www.dhr.virginia.gov/historic-registers/127-0237>.

²⁸ *Feasibility Study*, 2, 12–20. Quotes on 2 and 20.

Superintendents, may well have been a reassuring presence to board members, as he was already a resident of the area and was surely aware of the significance of Maggie Walker and Jackson Ward.²⁹

The Mid-Atlantic Regional Office (MARO) and Washington Office (WASO) also got involved in planning for the potential site acquisition at this point, meeting with board members and explaining how NPS might move forward. James Michael Lambe, the NPS Chief of the Office of Legislation, explained to Gilliam that the bill was an authorizations bill, rather than an appropriations bill, which meant that the money had to come from a later appropriation, probably the following spring (1979). He did, however, assert that staff of both RICH and MARO “[are] more than willing to offer you technical assistance and guidelines in making temporary repairs to the house and out-buildings.” He reassured Gilliam that the MARO staff was looking forward to working with MLWHF. MARO Regional Director Richard Stanton himself came down to assess the site in September of 1978 and met with foundation members. He discussed the procedures of sale and transfers of property, the agreement with the city over the \$60,000 allocation the city had set aside for the Maggie Walker project, and the timetable. After his visit, Sylvester Putman wrote to McCreary that Stanton was “enthusiastic” about the site’s possibilities and was “most anxious” to work with MLWHF to “achieve the objectives” set forth in the pending legislation.³⁰

Plans to Transition the Maggie L. Walker House to a National Park Site

Stanton kept his word and began to set up procedures to secure the site and the structures proposed within the boundaries of the amendment. Putman notified the Associate Regional Director of Administration and Operations, Planning and Resource Preservation, and Chief of the Lands Division that Stanton was “most interested” in the project. He told Putman to start working with the Lands Division to “insure [*sic*] a smooth and orderly National Park Service transition.” Around the same time, Stanton reached out to Dr. Lewis, telling her of his interest in working with the foundation, as well as the “potential the National Park Service will have in interpreting, not only the house, but Maggie L. Walker, her times and achievements.” He also wrote that the historic context in which Walker stood out as a leader was also interesting, and made sure to mention that the bill included

²⁹ Dillon, 6.

³⁰ James Michael Lambe to Nathaniel Gilliam, 9 August 1978; Sylvester Putnam to Richard L. Stanton, 8 September 1978; and Sylvester Putman to E. D. McCreary, 5 September 1978, all in Central Files, Folder L58 Proposed Area.

additional properties surrounding the house so that the site could retain its “historic integrity” within the larger neighborhood. He cc’d Vincent DeForest, Putman, and Robert Nunn of WASO to keep them all informed of his intentions.³¹

The NPS also crafted a plan for operating the Maggie Walker site. At some point after the site visit, Joseph Karban, Acting Director of MARO, sent the Chief of the Office of Legislation at WASO a cost estimate that must have been developed during the initial visit. In it was listed the staff positions; a management assistant and historian (GS-9) would be immediate hires, as well as two GS-4 Park Technicians for interpretation. The plan was to add another seasonal park technician for interpretation in year two. One graded maintenance worker and one laborer would also be immediate hires. Salaries for personnel were estimated at \$76,500 in year one and \$110,500 in years two and three, with benefits at \$6,569 for the first year and \$10,030 thereafter. Uniform allowances would be \$2,000 for the first year and \$3,800 after that. Utility payments were budgeted at \$16,000 for the first and \$20,000 in the second and third years. Other startup costs included \$3,000 extra in utilities for furnace repairs and security, office equipment (\$5,475), and other equipment like a ¾ ton truck, radio system, and tools, at \$16,000 the first year, \$19,500 the second year, and \$11,500 the third year. Total net disbursements for the site were estimated at \$125,544 in year one, \$170,830 in year two, and \$162,830 in year three, with gross disbursements at \$150,652 in year one, \$204,996 in year two, and \$195,396 in year three. It was clear that should the site be included in the omnibus bill, NPS was prepared to spend a good deal of money to properly establish and maintain it.³²

By the time the bill moved to the Senate, supporters representing diverse interests testified in favor of keeping the site in the bill. Parren Mitchell continued to shepherd the amendment through Congress. In his testimony to the Senate Subcommittee on Parks and Recreation in support of the Amendment in the H.R. Bill that included the Walker site, Mitchell argued for both Walker’s significance and the importance of Jackson Ward as a neighborhood. He cited the Afro-American Bicentennial Project, explaining that in 1971 the NPS had partnered with Black scholars to work on building a more inclusive National Historic Landmarks Program, and that by 1976 there were sixty-one sites on the National Register of Historic Places dedicated to Black history. He also explained the importance of using preservation to positively affect neighborhoods of all incomes. Mamie Evelyn Walker Crawford submitted testimony, reiterating the importance of the site for Black women’s history. She opined, “To my knowledge, there has never been an Afro-American woman honored by the National Park Service; this will be a unique opportunity to correct this

³¹ Sylvester Putman to Richard Stanton and Associate Regional Director, Administrative Operations, Planning and Resource Preservation, and Chief, Lands Division, n.d.; Richard Stanton to Maggie Walker Lewis, 13 September 1978, both in Central Files, Folder L58 Proposed Area.

³² Joseph W. Karban to Chief, Office of Legislation, Enclosed Cost Estimate for MAWA, 21 September 1978, Central Files, Folder L58 Proposed Area.

oversight, particularly, in view of the rising tide of approbation and recognition which is presently being bestowed upon our sex.” Richmond Mayor Henry L. Marsh III appeared, with McCreary at his side. Providing a short summary of Walker’s achievements, he noted that the artifacts in the home meant that the site could serve as a “time capsule” of sorts, highlighting a critical period in US history. He also claimed that visitors to Jamestown, Williamsburg, Monticello, and Washington, D.C., would pass right by the site on the interstate and could visit for a better understanding of Walker and the Black community in “the nation’s struggle for greatness.”³³

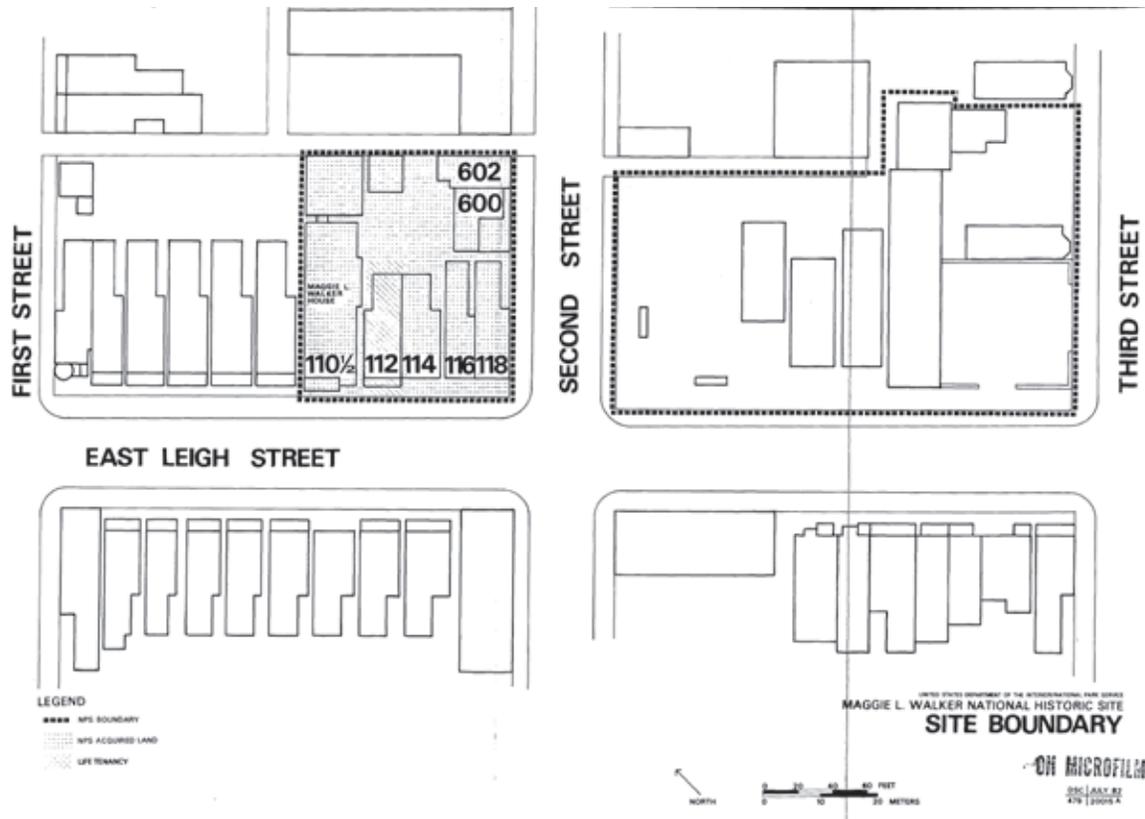
The National Park Service also openly supported the site’s inclusion. Deputy Director Ira Hutchinson went before the Senate Subcommittee on August 4, 1978, and said, “The establishment of this historic site would aid in the National Park Service effort to give increased recognition to the role of minorities in the growth and development of this nation.” Hutchinson asserted the site’s significance for the ways it could promote the history of minority-owned businesses and community uplift through the story of Walker’s rise as a businesswoman and service to African Americans.³⁴

The enabling legislation for the Maggie L. Walker National Historic Site passed the Senate and was signed by President Jimmy Carter on November 10, 1978. Significant in this legislation, 95-625 Section 511, which covered the site in the larger legislative work, is the boundary extension. The amendment provided the Secretary of the Interior the right to acquire land from Walker’s house to Third Street, a block past the Walker site toward downtown, and extending to the alley behind the house, which comprised half a block of Second Street. Congress appropriated \$795,000 for the acquisition of land and \$500,000 for the building of facilities for visitor use.³⁵

³³ Parren Mitchell, Testimony, to the Subcommittee on Parks and Recreation of the Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources, in Support for the Maggie L. Walker National Historic Site Amendment to the Omnibus Parks Bill, H.R. 123536, 4 August 1978, 16–17; Mamie Crawford, Testimony on Behalf of Maggie Walker Lewis, 12–13; Statement of the Honorable Henry L. Marsh, III, Mayor of the City of Richmond, to Parks Subcommittee of the Energy and Natural Resources Committee of the United States Senate, 4 August 1978, 18–20, all in Appendix B, *Feasibility Study*.

³⁴ James Carroll, News Release, “Park Service Recommends Maggie L. Walker House in Richmond as National Park Service Site,” 4 August 1978, Box 1, Maggie L. Walker Historical Foundation Folder, Suggs.

³⁵ Public Law 95-625, Section 511, 10 November 1978, <https://www.nps.gov/mawa/upload/Public-Law-95-625.pdf>.



Boundary map from the 1982 *General Master Plan*

Richard Stanton, Director of MARO, said that the Walker site was significant not only because it illustrated the “pioneer efforts of a remarkable Black woman” but also because Walker herself “exemplifies the role of minorities in the growth and development of this nation.”³⁶ Having visited the site, Stanton knew its possibilities prior to the passage of the legislation. What a reporter who quoted his reaction to the acquisition did not mention was that the site was also situated in a heavily developed urban area, so it was also notable for being a new urban park. In this way, the Walker site fulfilled two of the recommendations presented in *National Parks for the Future* just six years before.

Working with the MLWHF

The process of acquiring the house, however, would prove a bit more challenging than getting the enabling legislation passed. First, the question was how to purchase the site itself while maintaining a positive relationship with the foundation. MLWHF had been paying for all fuel and electric bills, critical repairs, and a caretaker for the past three years.

³⁶ Virginia Churn, “Walker House Future Brighter: Foundation Almost Ready to Buy Historic City Site,” *Richmond Times Dispatch*, 19 November 1978, 1.

An official from NPS told Virginia Churn that NPS planned to work with the foundation in a “cooperative effort” and that “we appreciate what they have done to preserve the site up till now[,]” but it was clear that the NPS needed to take control of the planning from this point out. How to actually acquire the house became a matter of some debate. The city had adopted an amended ordinance in light of the pending legislation in August 1978 that provided \$60,000 to the foundation for the purchase of the site and immediate repairs, with the condition that should the foundation release the property to another party, the city would get the money back. The MLWHF informed Putman in January of 1979 that they planned to purchase the house in order to make the immediate repairs that had already been recommended by the NPS. In a letter to Stanton, Nathaniel Gilliam also proposed the MLWHF own the house outright and lease it to the NPS for \$1 a year “so that the Maggie L. Walker Foundation can have ultimate ownership of the premises [*sic*], or if lease is not possible, assign the premises.”³⁷ But the plan outlined by the legislation asserted that NPS would seek to acquire the sites in the boundary, not just inhabit them. And the NPS was prepared to spend a great deal of money on the operations of a small site, one that was supposed to be under ownership of the NPS, not another entity.

After the MLWHF made its plans known, NPS officials had to determine how to proceed without alienating the members with whom they wanted to establish a strong working relationship. Apparently, the MLWHF was having trouble getting the HUD funds disbursed for the purchase, which was putting the entire NPS project on hold. Putman wrote to Stanton, “I am convinced that *now* is the time for positive action on our part.” He drafted a letter to Dr. Maggie Laura Walker Lewis requesting a meeting to purchase the house based on the NPS appraisal, and a draft to McCreary explaining that the NPS would purchase the home directly from Lewis herself. Putman suggested sending copies to WASO, Bob Nunn, Vincent DeForest, Nathaniel Gilliam, and Lewis’s realtor, B. A. Cephas. In an unsigned letter to McCreary, an NPS official wrote, “With all due respect to the Foundation, we feel that this action is in the best interest of the property and the Maggie L. Walker National Historic Site.” The letter explained that allowing the foundation to continue to hold the first right of refusal was holding up restoration projects critical to preservation. The NPS worked through attorneys to fashion an agreement reimbursing the MLWHF \$1,711.80 in expenses paid and determining an “agreeable sum” for “services rendered” by the real estate agent.³⁸

³⁷ Churn, “Walker House Future Brighter,” 1; City Ordinance Adopted 29 August 1978, Box 1, Notebook 1, MLWHF; Nathaniel Gilliam to Richard Stanton, 23 February 1979, and “A Proposal: The Relationship between the Maggie Lena Walker Foundation and the National Park Service,” both in Box 1, Folder 1, MLWHF.

³⁸ Sylvester Putman to Richard Stanton, 6 February 1979; Letter to McCreary, n.d., no signature (may have been a draft written by Putman and enclosed with the above-cited memo); Henry A. Towles, Attorney to W. Harrison Bruce, Attorney, 10 March 1979, all in Central Files, Folder L1425 Holdings (other than Federal), Maggie Walker Foundation.

The National Park Service also had to fashion a working relationship with the foundation, which members certainly expected and for which they had already created a proposal. The feasibility study had suggested that the NPS should create a plan of operation to immediately protect the property before the purchase, formalize the role of the foundation, and identify potential cooperative education programs. In its proposal to work with NPS, the foundation suggested it would “advise and recommend to the National Park Service a Director, Curator, and other personnel for the house.” It wanted members to serve as hosts for house events and sponsor Black History Month events and other special celebrations with the assistance of the NPS. It planned to create a library at the site, develop audiovisual materials and conduct oral histories of residents of Jackson Ward and greater Richmond with the assistance of NPS, and act as a liaison between the Walker site and other properties/institutions. It expected members to receive free admission to fee-based events and the use of facilities for free or a “nominal cost” for programming and meetings of civic, historical, or cultural groups. It also proposed operating a gift shop at the site.³⁹

The first Memorandum of Agreement laid out exactly what the responsibilities of the board and the NPS were to be. The NPS acceded to many of MLWHF’s requests, including free access, provided notice was given to those in charge, and as long as their visits did not impede the staff or the visitor experience. Foundation members would indeed receive assistance from NPS in planning events and working on oral history and library projects. Foundation members could also seek assistance from/partnerships with outside organizations with the director’s approval, and would indeed serve as hosts and volunteer docents. The NPS also agreed that the director would consult with a foundation-approved advisory board on matters of house management, preservation and exhibition of artifacts, and before structural or interpretive changes. With the approval of the site director, the foundation would be allowed to sell merchandise, but in the event the foundation secured a concessioner contract, the NPS would review the financial records and sales items and would require the foundation to secure a full-time manager.⁴⁰

What the NPS made clear in the MOA, however, was that site-related personnel decisions were entirely within its purview. The MOA established that the Superintendent of Richmond National Battlefield Parks would be responsible for the administration and management of the site. The agreement also stated that the advisory board could “advise and/or recommend” personnel for the NPS to hire at the site; it had to have “the clear understanding that all personnel actions will be subject to regulations of the U.S. Office of

³⁹ *Feasibility Study*, 92–93; “A Proposal: The Relationship between the Maggie L. Walker Historical Foundation and the National Park Service,” included in letter from Nathaniel Gilliam to Richard Stanton, 23 February 1979, Box 1, MLWHF Notebook 1.

⁴⁰ Memorandum of Understanding, Signed by Richard Stanton and E. D. McCreary, 13 April 1979, in Sylvester Putman, *Statement for Management for the Maggie L. Walker National Historic Site*, 1981, MAWA Park Records Box.

Personnel Management, the U.S. Department of the Interior, and the National Park Service.” Because the foundation had originally formed with the intent to save the house and run it as a local historic site, it appeared that the NPS was trying to make clear that there was a national hiring process already in place for park service staff. Its concession to consult with the foundation by hearing its personnel recommendations may have been a nod to the foundation’s original desire to appoint the directors and staff.⁴¹

Acquiring the Maggie L. Walker House and Artifacts

The National Park Service purchased the site directly from Dr. Maggie Laura Walker Lewis for \$50,000 in the summer of 1979. The official date of transaction was June 29 with the title recorded July 12, although the transfer ceremony was held on July 15, Maggie L. Walker’s birthday. A condition report explained just what the NPS was getting into with this site; although the exterior’s structure was sound, it needed much cosmetic work. Moreover, while the house was in better shape and larger than many surrounding it, the building still needed an updated electrical and plumbing system, major roof and a few other repairs caused by prior leaking, the removal or repair of the partially collapsed carriage house, repair or replacement of rotted trim and the side porch, and complete restoration inside. It had an inadequate furnace, with two hundred gallons of oil burned per month without heating the house properly, knob and spool wiring, and galvanized pipe plumbing. The inspector concluded, “Its condition at this time can only be considered fair.” This undated condition report may have been part of the original appraisal that was done sometime before February 1979. It may have also drawn from a report done by William J. Davis, Consulting Engineer, who produced a structural condition report in February 1978. That report noted termite damage and rot in the joists, an addition that was not as high quality as the original structure, the state of the carriage house with its partially collapsed north wall, and temporary support structures holding up the rotted second floor and roof.

⁴¹ Ibid.

Whenever it was crafted, the writer made clear that the concerns the foundation had with ongoing deterioration were justified, and work would need to be done quickly to stop any further damage.⁴²



The garage located behind the Walker house, 1978

⁴² Richard Stanton to Herbert Kahler, 13 July 1979, and deed executed by Maggie Walker Lewis and ENPMA, 29 June 1979; Margaret Krueger (Title Attorney) to MARO Land Acquisition Officer, 16 October 1979; "Description of the Improvements," 12–15; all in Central Files, Folder L1425 Holdings (Other than Federal), Maggie L. Walker; William J. Davis, Consulting Engineers, "Report on Structural Condition of the Maggie L. Walker House, 1101/2 E. Leigh Street, Richmond, Virginia," 6 February 1978, 110 E. Leigh Structural Cond 1978 Folder, MAWA Reports Box. Prior to the home's sale, newspaper reports said that the house would be sold for \$40,000. This, perhaps, was the price agreed upon between Maggie Laura Walker Lewis and the MLWHF, but the NPS may well have valued the property higher, or perhaps Lewis had reconsidered her prior offer to the MLWHF. A 13 November 1979 memo from the Superintendent from Herbert Rothenberg with information related to the official closing listed the land itself as valued at \$15,700 and the improvements (house, carriage house) at \$34,400 for a total of \$50,000, Central Files, Folder L1425 Holdings (Other than Federal), Maggie L. Walker.



The courtyard area behind the house, 1978

And it was not just structural issues that plagued the house. While serving as a ranger at Petersburg National Battlefield Park, Jim Bell visited the house at the behest of Sylvester Putman. He remembered seeing all of the awnings ripped, and the house situated on a block that had greatly deteriorated over the decades. Although one renter remained and tried to maintain her house, he remembered seeing the detritus of squatters who used the other abandoned homes as sites for drinking alcohol. The inside of the Walker home was no better, he recalled—“it was a mess, ain’t no doubt about it.” He said that Gilliam stayed upstairs in the back, but the house itself had “all stench smell in it” caused by beer and whiskey bottles that littered the floor. He blamed Gilliam for the “mess,” and said the “best thing” was for the NPS to get him out of the home.⁴³

Despite the state of the home, it was a treasure trove of authentic Walker artifacts. Eastern National Park and Monument Association (ENPMA) purchased all of the contents of the home from Lewis for \$27,500 and donated them to the National Park Service on June 29, 1979. This collection may have been as valuable as the site’s structure. The feasibility study cited a letter written by Brock W. Jobe, curator at Colonial Williamsburg, who

⁴³ Jim Bell, Interviewed by Megan Shockley, 3 August 2021, 31.

wrote: “I envy the position you are in at the Walker House. No historic house has to my knowledge, ever begun with such a high percentage of original furnishings. You will be able to interpret Maggie Walker’s personality in a way that we cannot do with any of the original owners of houses at Williamsburg.” Seven students from Richmond Public School’s Open High had worked under the direction of MLWHF member and Open High teacher Nessa Johnson to inventory the house in the summer of 1978, but the feasibility study outlined a process for a more formal furnishings report to be undertaken in the future. Essentially, the NPS got a site that looked as if Maggie Walker still lived there, albeit with tremendous damage caused by leaking and neglect. The site itself was a time capsule of sorts, one that needed extensive restoration, to be sure, but was unique, nonetheless. Moreover, included with the physical artifacts was an extensive manuscript collection that held Walker’s personal diaries as well as portions of her business records. These would prove invaluable to the NPS as they worked to craft an interpretative narrative.⁴⁴

Initial Interpretation

The NPS needed these artifacts and manuscripts to build an initial interpretive framework with which to contextualize Walker’s life. The challenge for NPS historians was a dearth of secondary source material, and while the artifacts purchased by ENPMA included a wealth of documents, they required archival processing before they could be fully illustrative. The only full-length secondary source that existed was Wendell Dabney’s 1927 biography, commissioned by Walker herself. The 1982 Maggie L. Walker site’s *Historic Structure Report* noted that it “contains many demonstrable inaccuracies.” A short article commissioned by the Afro-American Bicentennial Corporation by Charles Simmons drew heavily on this biography and was the only other published academic work at this point. The article provided details about Walker’s building of the Independent Order of St. Luke and information about her personal life, including the accidental shooting of her husband by

⁴⁴ *Feasibility Study*, 56; Clara Silverstein, “Maggie Walker Home Becomes a Classroom,” *Richmond News Leader*, 4 July 1978, clipping, Box 1, MLWHF Notebook 1. The inventory conducted by the Open High School students is in the MAWA Reports Box.

her son and the subsequent murder trial that Dabney believed was orchestrated by Walker's enemies, as well as her knee injury that allegedly confined her to a wheelchair in later life, a dubious claim later disproven.⁴⁵

There was misinformation about Maggie Walker that the NPS would eventually work to correct, although in this early period it accepted these facts. A 1978 press release relating the NPS's testimony before the Senate Subcommittee described Walker as the "paraplegic daughter of an ex-house slave, Elizabeth Draper, and of a Northern abolitionist author, Eccles Cuthbert [*sic*]." A later briefing statement outlining the financial details of the law and the responsibilities of the NPS continued to describe Walker as the daughter of a "northern abolitionist father." It would take some time to parse out the facts of Walker's birth, including the fact that her father was actually an Irish immigrant who fought for the Confederacy. Walker was certainly paraplegic, but only in her later years; in fact, by the time of the deed ceremony, NPS staff believed her condition may have been caused by diabetes. And there was always talk of Walker being the first female bank president in the United States (which was also included in the initial press release). This was difficult to prove and turned out to be factually incorrect.⁴⁶ Scholarship conducted later disproved much of the early information believed about Walker, but at the time, it would have been difficult for historians to piece together an accurate narrative based on extant secondary sources.

MARO historian Diann Jacox pieced together "Historical Highlights of Maggie L. Walker's Life and Career" in July 1979, in time for the Deed Transfer Ceremony. In it, Jacox noted that Walker was a leader in "several areas of public life previously unexplored by either women or Blacks." While there were many African American women who had led social, political, and business movements in the nineteenth century and early twentieth century, including Sojourner Truth, Ida B. Wells, and Madame C. J. Walker to name a few, it shows how little was known about African American women's history in the late 1970s. Jacox focused on Walker's work with the IOSL, including her position as the newspaper editor, her building of the general membership and youth programs, and the St. Luke Bank and Trust and its merger with another bank to become Consolidated Trust. She noted that Walker's life reflected the growth of African American societal participation at the turn of

⁴⁵ Wendell Dabney, "Maggie L. Walker and the I.O. of St. Luke: The Woman and Her Work"; Margaret Pearson Mickler and John M. Dickey, *Historic Structure Report*, 130; Charles Simmons, "Maggie Lena Walker and the Consolidated Bank and Trust Company." Note: The NPS now interprets Walker's infirmity differently; the accepted story is that Walker had diabetes, which caused her disability that ended her ability to walk. By the time of the deed ceremony, NPS was describing Walker's condition as being caused by "diabetic gangrene," which can be found in literature from the time, including newspapers that pulled from press releases (see Jerry Turner, "National Park Service Assumes Ownership of Walker Home," *Richmond Afro-American*, 28 July 1979, 8). Diabetic gangrene was also listed on her death certificate. While her knee injury inhibited her ability to walk, subsequent research has suggested that a combination of factors, including diabetes, may have confined her to the wheelchair permanently. See later chapters for other claims overturned.

⁴⁶ James Carroll, Department of the Interior News Release, 4 August 1978, Box 3, Folder 38.15 Newsletters/NPS/Others, Suggs; Briefing Statement, n.d., Central Files, Folder L58 Proposed Area.

the century. Jacox also discussed the critical nature of the Black uplift movement, touching on IOSL's attempt to appeal to a broad economic spectrum and Walker's involvement with the NAACP, Hartshorn Memorial College and Virginia Union University, National Urban League, and her founding of the Richmond Chapter of the National Association of Colored Women. The short piece avoided information about Walker's private life but detailed the critical role of the Maggie L. Walker Historical Foundation in preserving her house. Jacox also explained the centrality of the house to the preservation of Jackson Ward, which would be "fitting" for a Walker legacy.⁴⁷

Jacox did not name her sources in this overview of Walker's life, but she remembered the lack of available sources for her project. As a new historian at MARO who had completed coursework for a PhD at the University of Pennsylvania, Jacox said, "I read what I could read; there weren't any secondary materials at the time." She recalled using some of the St. Luke's publications (perhaps the *Herald*), as well as her diaries that the Park Service acquired in the purchase. She looked for Walker's connections with other organizations, notably the National Association of Colored Women, and with "like-minded" women for clues into Walker's world. She eventually interviewed the grandchildren. But as she admitted, "I tried to develop a narrative using whatever I could find." And given what she had to work with, her essay is quite thorough.⁴⁸

The NPS most likely used Jacox's work and the extant secondary sources to produce its first brochure on the house in 1979, and it also noted the feasibility study in the text. The quadrifold pamphlet described Jackson Ward's centrality for the social and economic lives of African Americans, and noted that W. E. B. DuBois, Booker T. Washington, and Mary MacLeod Bethune were visitors to Walker's home. It described the house's structure, and the wealth of both manuscripts and artifacts that were "amazingly preserved" that would help tell the story of Walker once the house was open to the public. It explained how the house was altered to address Walker's "confinement" and "infirmity" with the addition of the elevator and porch. This side of the brochure focused on the physical attributes of the home, and included several photos of its interior and selected artifacts, along with an exterior shot of the front of the house.⁴⁹ The other side briefly described Walker's life in context with larger American social movements at the turn of the century. It explained how Walker became involved with the Independent Order of St. Luke

⁴⁷ Diann Jacox, "Historical Highlights of Maggie L. Walker's Life and Career," Quote on 1, Box 1, Notebook 1, MLWHF. A copy is also in the MAWA Reports Box, Historical Highlights Folder. Jacox also said that Sylvester Putman had discussed beginning an oral history project to help fill in the gaps in 1979, but the project did not get off the ground until 1981 (Diann Jacox, "Oral History Project: Interviews with Mr. Anthony J. Binga, Mamie Evelyn Crawford, Mrs. Bernetta Young Plummer, Dr. Maggie Laura Walker Lewis, Mrs. Elizabeth Mitchell Walker Randolph, and Mr. Armistead Walker," i).

⁴⁸ Diann Jacox, Interviewed by Megan Shockley, 9 September 2021, 7–8.

⁴⁹ Maggie L. Walker National Historic Site Brochure, 1979, Early Park History Box. Subsequent research has not conclusively proven that Washington ever visited the home.

and where she went to school, as well as her movement from schoolteacher to national leader and a businesswoman who founded a bank. While the brochure contains a picture of her family, the only mention of her private life was her marriage to Armistead Walker, son of prominent builders, and her determination to continue working despite her comfortable economic station. It also briefly mentioned the class-based nature of her society, in which “numerous exclusive social clubs were formed whose members heartily disapproved of any ‘intruders’ who might attempt to join their numbers.” Juxtaposing Walker’s nature and drive to work for all of society against this group, the brochure positioned her as a race leader who reached across class lines to work for all African Americans.⁵⁰

The 1979 Deed Ceremony

Staff had completed initial research and negotiated with Maggie Laura Walker Lewis by the summer of 1979; the only work left to do was to formally mark the occasion. The MLWHF and NPS put on a major event for the deed transfer, on Walker’s birthday, July 15, 1979. The optics were extremely important here, as the Walker site was significant in its unique position as the first dedicated unit to commemorate the activities of an African American woman. In addition, the groundwork laid by the MLWHF had to be acknowledged. Working together with the MLWHF, the NPS put together a dedication ceremony and a reception following at the neighboring Sharon Baptist Church. Although the site was officially owned and run by the National Park Service, the MLWHF headlined the formal invitations, perhaps as an acknowledgment of all their efforts.⁵¹

The ceremony itself was significant in the number of prominent African Americans who attended and spoke. Maggie Walker’s descendants took up two rows at the front of the crowd. The ceremony featured Black speakers, except for Frederick Rath, the Executive Secretary of the ENPMA, who spoke before the ceremonial transfer of the artifacts deed. Other speakers included Dr. Bettye Collier-Thomas, the Director of the Bethune Museum and Archives; Don Hayes, pastor of Walker’s church, the First African Baptist Church; Thomas Kelley, the former Deputy Administrator of the Richmond Department of Community Development, who had helped to shepherd the project through the city commission in the early days; and Henry L. Marsh, Mayor. Representing the MLWHF were William Carter III, Executive Secretary, and Mozelle Sallee Baxter, Vice President. The federal side of the transfer was represented by Sylvester Putman, who presided over the

⁵⁰ Ibid. It also listed another inaccuracy, Walker’s birth date, which Elvatrice Belsches discovered was 1864, not 1867.

⁵¹ Invitation to the Deed Ceremony, 15 July 1979, Box 1, Notebook 1, MLWHF. As noted previously, the Bethune Memorial erected in Washington, D.C., could be considered the first “site” dedicated to African American women, but that is a statue within a larger site. This was the first unit that focused entirely on the life of a Black woman.

ceremony; Wallace Green, Deputy Assistant Secretary of the Department of the Interior; and Ira Hutchinson, Deputy Director of the NPS. Richard Stanton was also there and took part in the official deed transfer, but he stayed out of the photo op in which Maggie Walker Lewis handed the deed to Hutchinson and made just a single one-line acceptance remark during the transfer ceremony.⁵²



Deed transfer ceremony. Included in the picture are Superintendent Putman at the podium and Dr. Maggie Laura Walker Lewis crossing in front of Ira Hutchinson.

The speakers focused on the significance of Walker and her life, the transfer of the property to the National Park Service, and the duty of the community and the NPS to maintain Walker's legacy. Baxter said that the MLWHF was pleased with the development, "knowing that the Maggie L. Walker home will always be a home of culture and history, and we are all grateful to the National Park Service and all our many friends and

⁵² National Park Service, *Maggie L. Walker National Historic Site Deed Transfer Ceremony*, Richmond, Virginia, Video, last accessed 24 April 2020, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qypONiAv614>; Full unedited ceremony video, National Park Service, digital file in possession of MAWA.

well-wishers.” Kelley noted that “my heart was touched the first time I walked into the Maggie Walker house,” and that the site symbolized what the country should be about. Henry Marsh said that although Walker had always been remembered, it was “fitting” that she was to be commemorated just as more women and African Americans were being recognized for their contributions to American society. He placed Walker in the company of notable American historic figures, mentioning that she grew up in the state that “produced eight presidents,” in the city of Patrick Henry’s famous speech (“Give me liberty or give me death”), and within walking distance of John Marshall’s house and the capitol designed by Thomas Jefferson. Marsh argued that Walker did not view her race and gender as impediments, but “achieved with her society as she could at that time.” He also mentioned the importance of the home to Jackson Ward’s revitalization.⁵³

Bettye Collier-Thomas pulled the lens back to discuss just why the preservation of the Walker home was so significant. Collier-Thomas talked about Walker’s “nontraditional job” and “unusual position” but also how she served as a role model for so many. She bemoaned the loss of African American history; how so many icons like Walker were not taught about in school, and how scholars must “identify, collect, preserve, and exhibit documents and manuscripts and material artifacts which collectively tell the story of Black life and history.” Taking the opportunity to address the people sitting in front of her, she wondered how many in the audience had archives sitting in attics just waiting to be preserved so that others could study the contributions made by significant African American organizations. She called the Walker house “tangible evidence” of the Black experience and praised the efforts to “resurrect the life, the history, and the contributions of Maggie L. Walker.” Coming from the director of one of the most prominent archives of twentieth-century Black history, the description of the efforts already underway at the Walker site was high praise, indeed.⁵⁴

The representatives from the Department of the Interior/NPS reflected the ongoing interest in expanding the representation of diverse communities within the NPS. Wallace Green said, “It should be obvious to poor and minority Americans the significance of today’s commemoration of Maggie Walker.” Walker, he said, symbolized that “the quality of life we seek is in direct proportion to our individual and collective economic status.” He referenced the economic climate in which the United States found itself in 1979, noting that as the country moved into recession, this site will represent redevelopment and fulfill the dream of Walker for African Americans to have a strong economic base and full participation in society. Ira Hutchinson spoke about the expansion of sites representing people of color in the NPS, arguing that Walker joined a “very select group of Black Americans” whose achievements merited the preservation of places important to their lives. Like

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

Collier-Thomas, Hutchinson referenced other African Americans whose lives “have gone all but unnoticed” but that he hoped this site would be the start of a larger reclamation process. Moreover, he mentioned Walker’s paralysis in later life, and said that the NPS would be making the site accessible for differently abled people, as they were doing throughout the parks nationwide. He promised that the NPS “shall commend to our best historians and interpreters, architects, etc. the honored task of enlarging and protecting our store of knowledge.” He wanted to see Walker’s home become a site to encourage others on their own paths. Green and Hutchinson recognized the unique opportunity presented to the NPS with the acquisition of this site.⁵⁵

Conclusion

When Dr. Maggie Laura Walker Lewis spoke at the ceremony, she said, “This is one of the most auspicious occasions of my life . . . my grandmother would say, ‘I like this, I like this, I like this.’” She also discussed the way her mother “struggled” to maintain the property for the decades between Walker’s death and the site’s acquisition by NPS.⁵⁶ Lewis’s mother and Walker’s daughter-in-law, Harriet/Hattie N. F. Walker, was but one actor (albeit perhaps the most important) in the story of the house’s preservation. Were it not for the efforts of the MLWHF, with the support of the City of Richmond and ASALH, combined with the interest of Vincent DeForest, the site may have gone unnoticed by federal government officials. The support of NPS during the Omnibus Parks Bill’s movement through Congress, as well as the work done in Richmond by Sylvester Putman and his staff, along with at the regional level by Richard Stanton and the MARO/WASO staff, set up the Maggie L. Walker National Historic Site for success. The preservation and acquisition of the site is a story that reflects how local community activists, local government, and the federal government worked together to achieve a concrete goal—saving the house—while helping to advance the NPS’s larger goal of building a more inclusive and diverse park system.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

CHAPTER TWO

From Acquisition to Opening: The Challenges of Planning and Restoration

Once NPS acquired the Walker house, work began in earnest to restore the site and its related artifacts, acquire additional structures within the boundary, and craft a series of planning documents that would determine future growth. Working together with the community and preservation professionals, NPS staff at the national, local, and regional level established plans for conserving and interpreting the buildings, manuscripts, and artifact collections. Their dreams for the site conflicted with the stark realities of limited budget resources, neighborhood blight that had led to neglect of existing structures, and limited extant secondary sources on Maggie Walker that challenged the interpretive staff. From the time NPS took official possession of the site, to the time the Walker house opened in 1985, personnel found their ambitious plans tempered by the economic and material realities of the site's condition. Still, they developed management, interpretation, and conservation plans, rehabilitated the Walker house and began streetscape restoration, pursued research, and protected the valuable artifacts.

Early Interventions: Building the Streetscape

Shortly after the deed ceremony, the NPS focused on securing the properties between the Walker house and 2nd Street, all of which lay within the legislated park boundary. As early as August 3, 1979, the NPS sent out property inspection certificates for 112-118 E. Leigh Streets, and informed Superintendent Sylvester Putman that the land office would begin the appraisal process with the approval of the owners, Richard and Gail Jackson (112), Eggleston Jr. Inc. (114), and Albert Wilkins (118). Putman wrote to MARO's regional director that he was "encouraged and pleased" with the speed at which the inspector provided condition reports, and that he was "appreciative of the cooperation of the

property owners involved.” In a draft of the Land Acquisition Plan, Putman explained that these specific sites were significant to the historic viewshed and for storage, offices, and visitor services. All the property owners, he claimed, were interested in selling.¹

From 1980 to 1981, the NPS acquired six total structures from private owners on the eastern corner of the block surrounding the Walker house. In December 1980, it finalized the purchase of 602 North 2nd Street, which had been a grocery store during Maggie Walker’s life, for \$19,000. In February, Eggleston Inc. sold 114 E. Leigh Street to NPS for \$20,150. Later that month, NPS purchased 116 and 118 E. Leigh Street (formerly the law offices of famous civil rights lawyer Oliver Hill) as well as 600 N. 2nd St (most recently a laundromat), for a total of \$52,500.²

These transactions seemed to go smoothly, and it appeared that NPS offered values that were more than fair to the absentee property owners. Jackson Ward was a “blighted” neighborhood, and considering all but one were not only vacant but in terrible condition (as staff would learn upon engaging in renovation work), the sellers were probably quite eager to offload them. Still, owners received compensation that may have exceeded their expectations. 114 E. Leigh, for example, had sold in 1973 for just \$11,000, so the NPS offer of \$20,200 was a significant increase in value. 112 E. Leigh went for just \$6,500 in 1971, and the NPS bought it for \$23,000. 602 N. 2nd Street had been purchased in 1959 for \$7,300, so the former owner was surely appreciative of an increase in value of over 100 percent.³

The one occupied property, 112 E. Leigh Street, was a challenge to acquire from the start and plagued Superintendent Sylvester Putman for years after the owners signed the initial deed. Richard and Gail Jackson, brother and sister, owned the home and rented it to Mrs. Courtney Smith. They agreed to sell the property but retain a twenty-five-year reservation fee to continue collecting rent at the cost of \$5,328.00, which the National Park Service removed from the \$23,000 purchase cost of the house. The original deed was signed July 9, 1980, with the reservation agreement completed August 28, 1980. Relations between the Jacksons and the NPS were generally cordial, although Putman had to remind Richard Jackson that no structural changes were to be made to the house without written

¹ Vincent DeForest et al., *Maggie L. Walker National Historic Landmark Restoration and Feasibility Study* (Washington, D.C.: The Afro-American Institute for Historic Preservation and Development, 1978), 32–33. On p. 95 the study listed several other properties, including 208 E. Leigh, 210/12 East Leigh, and 604 N. 2nd. Of all these homes on the list, only 112 was occupied by a resident. 208 E. Leigh and 604 N. 2nd were active commercial properties at the time. John Lansdale to Sylvester Putman, 3 August 1979; Realty Specialist, FRSP to Richard Schwartz, Chief, Land Acquisition MARO, 3 August 1979; Sylvester Putman to Regional Director, 3 August 1979; Sylvester Putman, Draft, Land Acquisition Plan, 1979, 2–3. MAWA Park Records Box.

² NPS Land Resources Division Master Deed Listing Status as of 2/28/87 Area 4790 MLWHNHS, All in Central Files, Folder L1425 Holdings (Other than Federal) Folder; Jackson Ward Walking Tour, National Park Service, <https://npplan.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/10/Jackson-Ward-Walking-Tour-Transcript.pdf>. The Tax Realist record lists the entire parcel on the corner of Leigh and 2nd Street that went for \$52,500 as 5,282 square feet of property, purchased on 19 March 1980.

³ All of these values can be found at the Richmond Property Search website, <https://apps.richmondgov.com/applications/propertysearch/Search.aspx>. Last accessed 6 September 2020.



consultation from NPS in 1982 when Jackson began a renovation on the front porch. A year later, a furnace fire caused over \$9,800 worth of damage to the structure, and a note on the settlement notice suggested getting an assurance from Jackson that he had fixed the furnace properly. Jackson agreed to donate fifteen feet of land behind the home so NPS could install a large air-conditioning unit, and at this point perhaps he determined that it would be easier to donate all rights to the property. In 1983, the Jacksons relinquished the reservation agreement for \$1, provided Smith could remain in the home for the remainder of the twenty-five years.⁴

At this point, the NPS and the title agency determined that the Jacksons needed to sign a quitclaim deed to relinquish all interests in the property. A quitclaim deed is one that does not transfer real property but clears any title clouds by notifying the public that the signer has no right or claim to the property in question. The Jacksons officially signed over the relinquishment of the lease in 1985 for \$1. All of this should have been easy to manage, but in April 1985 the title agency required a new quitclaim deed. By this time Gail Jackson (Smartabbey) lived in California, and John Costello, NPS Realty Specialist, hand-delivered a quitclaim deed to her in December. A year passed, with no signature. In February, Costello wrote to Jackson noting that she had failed to respond to calls or certified letters, and that he would be sending a notary public directly to her medical practice for her convenience to sign the papers. This did not work, and by May 1986, she had still not signed a new copy that had been delivered in April.⁵

It may have been her brother who finally succeeded in pressing Jackson to complete the paperwork. Richard Jackson sent a tax bill to Sylvester Putman for him to handle; it was most likely tax on the rental payments he had been receiving. Perhaps seeing an opportunity to finally resolve the quitclaim issue, Putman responded to Jackson that under condition 6 in the "Rights of Use" document that he enclosed with the letter, the reserver was responsible for all tax payments and assessments. He also wrote, "We regret having to

⁴ John Lansdale to Dr. Reginald Jackson, 4 February 1980; Warranty Deed Signed 9 July 1980 by Richard and Maria Jackson and Gail Jackson; Sylvester Putman to Dr. Reginald Jackson, 11 August 1982, both in Central Files, Folder L1425 Holdings (Other than Federal), Jackson Ward, 112 E. Leigh Street Folder; Note on letter from Ray Wilson to Mr. Tankersley, 12 March 1983, Central Files, Law Enforcement Folder; "Conditions of Rights of Use and Occupancy of Single Family Noncommercial Property," n.d.; Sylvester Putman to Courtney Smith, 17 July 1983, Central Files, Folder L1425 Holdings (Other than Federal), Jackson Ward, 112 E. Leigh Street Folder.

⁵ John Lansdale, Realty Specialist, to Dr. Reginald Jackson, 4 February 1980; Warranty Deed Signed 9 July 1980 by Richard and Maria Jackson and Gail Jackson; Sylvester Putman to Dr. Reginald Jackson, 11 August 1982; Note on letter from Ray Wilson to Mr. Tankersley, 12 March 1983, Central Files, Law Enforcement Folder; "Conditions of Rights of Use and Occupancy of Single Family Noncommercial Property," n.d.; Sylvester Putman to Courtney Smith, 17 July 1983; George Pastrick, Chief, Land Resources Division MARO to Richard Jackson, 6 July 1983; Sylvester Putman to Chief, Land Resources Division MARO, 6 November 1983; Assignment of Lease to NPS Signed by Richard Jackson and Gail Jackson Smartabbey, 22 March 1985; Anne Deuster, Escrow Services, Lawyers Title Insurance Corporation to Sylvester Putman, 4 April 1985; John Costello to Gail Jackson Smartabbey, 27 January 1986; John Costello to Gail Jackson Smartabbey, 10 February 1986; John Costello to Gail Jackson, 6 May 1986; all in Central Files, Folder L1425 Holdings (Other than Federal), Jackson Ward, 112 E. Leigh Street Folder.

mention this problem; but this situation probably would not have occurred if we could have been successful in persuading Gail to sign and return the Quitclaim Deed she now has in her possession.” For good measure, Putman sent copies of the letters NPS had sent to Jackson in California and told her brother to take note of the dates. So whether it was Richard’s intervention or Gail’s decision to end the matter, Putman got his signed quitclaim deed on June 18, 1986, and the escrow agent of the Lawyers Title Insurance Corporation completed the deal with a newly recorded deed addition in February 1987. Putman informed Richard Jackson that the signed quitclaim released him of all obligations, and the tenant began making payments directly to NPS in March.⁶

While this incident could be dismissed as a nuisance involving an extremely busy and distracted co-reservor who probably believed she had already signed enough paperwork, it illustrates the care with which NPS staff managed acquisitions in Jackson Ward. All the Jacksons involved were prominent physicians. Reginald, the father, was Chief of Radiology at Community Hospital, which his physician father had established. His son Richard was on the medical staff at the time, and Gail had moved to California to establish her practice. Reginald still lived in Jackson Ward at the time the quitclaim issue consumed Putman’s time. The letters from park service staff to the Jacksons were professional and polite. NPS staff appeared to be treading lightly to avoid alienating this family. In private, however, Putman may have been feeling differently. When he sent the quitclaim deed copy to MARO’s Chief of Land Resources Herb Rothenberg in September of 1986, he wrote, “Let [*sic*] hope that this will put an end to all this madness.” The escrow agent wrote to Putman, “I must tell you that your note of 12 January, 1987, where you tell me that you ‘pray to God that this is the last time I have to obtain a signature from Dr. Jackson’ made my day.” Putman also wrote in a memo to the MARO Chief of Land Resources, “Needless to say we are glad that the adventure is concluded.” This was a hassle that lasted for years, and Putman’s diplomatic skills may have been stretched to their limits. But the NPS could not do anything with the home while the Jacksons held reservor rights. Putman claimed success only after a sustained period of effort.⁷

⁶ Sylvester Putman to Richard Jackson, n.d.; Quitclaim Deed signed by Gail Jackson, 18 June 1986; Evelyn Baker to Sylvester Putman, 12 February 1987; Sylvester Putman to Richard Jackson, February 1987, all in Central Files, Folder L1425 Holdings (Other than Federal), Jackson Ward, 112 E. Leigh Street Folder.

⁷ “Twenty-One African American Physicians Recognized on Bon Secours Legacy Wall,” 22 May 2018, *Style Weekly*, last accessed 20 April 2020, <https://www.styleweekly.com/Studi/archives/2018/05/22/twenty-one-african-american-physicians-recognized-on-bon-secours-legacy-wall>. Last accessed 20 April 2020; “About Dr. Gail Jackson,” <https://drgailjackson.com/about/>; “Assignment of Lease,” 22 March 1985; Sylvester Putman, Routing and Transmission Slip to Herb Rothenberg, 11 September 1986; Evelyn Baker to Sylvester Putman, 12 February 1987; Sylvester Putman to Chief, Land Resources, MARO, 17 February 1987, all in Central Files, Folder L1425 Holdings (Other than Federal), Jackson Ward, 112 E. Leigh.

Early Cultural Resources Management

The acquisition of buildings to preserve the streetscape was but one challenge related to cultural resources at this time. In addition, staff had to determine how to handle the artifacts, some of which remained in roughly the same place Walker had put them herself; others that the caretaker moved. In late July, Bill Jedlick, Regional Curator, and Kathy Menz, Division of Reference Services Curator, assisted Conservator Toby Raphael in surveying the collection and making recommendations about how to best conserve the valuable artifacts. Toby Raphael reported, “The overall condition of the collection is that of below average” due to the house’s intermittent occupation since Walker’s death, and as a result of water damage caused by improper maintenance of the house. Raphael pointed out that the caretaker Nathaniel Gilliam had been using some artifacts, crowding others into several rooms that he was not using, and exposing artifacts to food and fireplace/cigarette smoke. Raphael listed all the artifacts in the direst condition, as well as the general threats to these items, including ones that were broken, or had suffered mold or water damage.⁸

Raphael recognized the work that had already been done by both amateur volunteers and professional staff but made suggestions for continuing the inventory. The survey sponsored by MLWHF and conducted by Open High students was of “acceptable quality” and listed about 75 percent of all artifacts. Raphael suggested opening all drawers, making sure all elevator and back bedroom contents were included, and noting which artifacts still needed tagging. He also said the professional photographic survey was also about 75 percent complete, but that Maggie Walker’s room and porch, as well as all items in the bedrooms, books in order on bookshelves, and prints/photos needed to be included. He recommended that artifacts in the most fragile states be identified with red tags, and that the staff find contractors who could pack and store artifacts according to the Division of Museum Services guidelines. “Extremely sensitive objects” must move to existing park storage at Chimborazo, and the vault would have to be rearranged to accommodate the new collection. Everything else would go to an offsite storage facility with a secured cage constructed using specifications from Harpers Ferry Center (HFC) or regional specialists. A regional curator had to supervise all activities. HFC Manager Mark Sagan followed up with MARO Regional Director on these recommendations, noting that park staff could finish the inventory immediately, and regional and Reference Services staff members could assist with the transport and storage part. By August, the photographic survey was

⁸ Mark Sagan to Regional Director, 27 July 1979; and Toby Raphael, “Trip Report,” to Chief, Branch of Conservation Labs from Ethnographic/Textile Curator, Branch of Conservation Laboratories, 24 July 1979, both in MAWA Reports Box, Furnishings Survey Folder.

complete.⁹ The care with which national, regional, and local staff addressed these artifacts reflects both the professionalism of the curators and conservators and the interest NPS had in maintaining and restoring this significant collection.

Unfortunately, the artifacts were not removed in time to prevent a theft, which occurred shortly after the visit of the conservators and curators to the site. On August 17, 1979, sometime between 12:30 and 5:00 p.m. while Nathaniel Gilliam was out, a break-in occurred. The thief stole various seemingly random items from the home, including several armchairs and side chairs, a tea cart, a table, a lamp, several vases, bisque figurines, and pottery. The total estimated cost of the theft was approximately \$4,060, but more devastating was the fact that these were Walker's personal property, invaluable for the interpretation of the home. Gilliam filled out a police report, and Putman asked the local FBI office to get involved as well, to no avail. Only the lamp was recovered. Given the nature of the theft, it is possible that someone was aware that the artifacts would be moving soon, and so took the opportunity to steal items before they were permanently secured offsite. If this were an "inside job," the thief may well have been aware of when Gilliam would have been out. Given that most surrounding structures sat abandoned, it would not be surprising if there were no witnesses, even in the middle of the afternoon. We cannot know how robust the police response to missing chairs and porcelain figures was, but Putman issued a memo to the Chief Ranger and park technicians that allowed them to carry firearms within the MAWA boundaries, and to be on the alert for suspicious activity.¹⁰

The theft, and the general disrepair of the home, must have made it clear to the NPS that time was of the essence when it came to restoring the Walker home. In October 1979, Regional Director James Coleman, Deputy Regional Director Nathan Golub, Associate Regional Director and Chief of Interpretation and Operations Chester Harris, Associate Regional Director Sydney Bradford, and Historic Architect from the Planning and Research Division Henry J. Magaziner met with Sylvester Putman and Kenneth Apschnikat, Chief of Interpretation and Regional Services, to discuss how to address the most immediate needs of the site. They prioritized research, determining a Historic Structures Report and interviewing Dr. Maggie Laura Walker Lewis about the

⁹ Raphael, "Trip Report, Richmond NBP"; Mark Sagan to MARO Regional Director; Nathan Golub to Richmond Superintendent, 10 August 1979, MAWA Reports Box, Furnishings Survey Folder.

¹⁰ Sylvester Putman to Russell Gray, 20 August 1979, Law Enforcement Folder, Central Files; Revised Missing Items Report, 24 August 1979 and 5 September 1979, MAWA Reports Box, Theft Folder; Sylvester Putman to Chief Ranger/Park Technicians, 18 August 1979, Law Enforcement Folder, Central Files. There is no evidence of further investigation within the files, or how diligently police looked for the artifacts in question. The only way we know the lamp was recovered was because of a handwritten note next to the item listed on the Revised Missing Items report. It did not explain how the lamp was returned to the site, or where it was found, but it described the lamp as a "white metal, female form base" valued at \$350. Presumably, none of the other items were recovered. This may not have been the only theft from the site; before it belonged to the NPS, several family oral histories note that it appeared that there had been more silver in the home during Walker's lifetime.

house and the placement of artifacts within was key. They next focused on planning; they set goals for the completion of a General Master Plan and an Interpretive Prospectus, as well as an Interim Interpretive Plan to be written by a historian.¹¹

At the meeting, the staff decided that priority they determined as second actually needed to be completed first. This included the house's rehabilitation and the cataloging and conservation of the collection. The Walker house needed rewiring, new gas setup, insulation, stabilization of the front and side porches, restoration of the plaster ceilings on the first-floor and second-floor bedrooms after a full roof replacement and restoration of the tin ceilings in the living room, library, and replacement of the living room wallpaper. They planned to bar entry to the carriage house, as the walls were partially collapsed. The plan called for a new alarm system, which was made particularly salient by the theft. By moving quickly on priority two, NPS regional and local staff clarified that shoring up the structure was the most pressing need. Given the work that needed to be done, however, a partial April opening for "regulated visits" seemed a bit overly optimistic.¹²

There was so much repair work to be done that staff spent months determining how best to proceed before working on the complex internal house systems. The outdated and faulty wiring appeared to be of particular concern. NPS Engineer M. Veatch visited the site in November 1979 to assess the state of the system. He described the seventy-year-old first-floor panel with knob and tube grounding and explained that almost all of the circuits in the home were overloaded, with 30-, 25-, and 20-amp fuses boosting the 15-amp circuits in the house. He wrote, "This dangerous practice must be stopped" and suggested removing all fuses over 15 amps from the house. He also registered concern with the renovation, observing that workers used the house's electrical system to power their tools, which must stop. Nathan Golub of MARO wrote to Putman that following Veatch's advice "should increase electrical resistance to the ground which is unacceptably low in circuit 5 and uncomfortably low in several others." Given the serious fire hazard presented by this kind of wiring, prioritizing its repair was important.¹³

In January 1980, Assistant Energy Coordinator of MARO Larry Klock also conducted a site visit. He suggested a vapor barrier between the roof and roof floorboards, additional insulation in the roof's crawlspace, on the walls, and floor, and a venting of the crawlspace if moisture condensed after the repairs. He also recommended repointing the brick walks, caulking around all the baseboards, and weatherproofing all doors and windows. All second-floor structures that extended over open first-floor porches needed to be

¹¹ Associate Regional Director, P & RP to Regional Director, 10 October 1979, re: trip report, 10/2-3 to MAWA, Box 2, Folder D-52.17 (Misc), Suggs.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Nathan Golub to Putman, 9 November 1979; M. Veatch, "Maggie Walker Electrical System," both in Box 2, Folder D-52.17 Electrical, Suggs.

insulated, as well as the elevator shaft and heating pipes in the basement, and automatic thermostats were a necessity. While that was happening, staff also procured a survey for rewiring and secured a structural services report on 114 E. Leigh. They determined that the Walker house floors did not need to be reinforced, but the floor examination delayed the start of the rewiring process.¹⁴

All in all, Superintendent Sylvester Putman reported that the focus in 1980 was on simply repairing the Walker house and carriage house building to stop the continued deterioration. The operating budget for work in 1980 was \$124,900. This paid for floor plan drawings, the construction of a chain-link fence, and the installation of a security system. In addition, work finally began on the interior and exterior of the home, with some of the money funding the restoration of the elevator, awnings, and light fixtures, as well as the replacement of plumbing, ceiling and furnace repairs, and exterior painting. In addition, contractors replaced the roof, converted the heating from oil to gas, updated the electrical system, and rebuilt the collapsed carriage house wall.¹⁵

African American contractors did much of the work on the house. Putman told a reporter that “we wanted to get minority contractors involved in this project[,]” which of course was a nod to the work done by African American architects and craftsmen in the past. But also, the hiring of African American–owned construction firms fell firmly within the Section 8a Small Business Development program of the Small Business Act, which established preferential contracting on some projects if a business was comprised of 51 percent of a minority group. After Presidents Johnson and Nixon laid the groundwork for this program with executive orders and initiatives in the 1960s and 1970s, Congress provided statutory power to this Section 8a Business program through amendments to the Small Business Act in 1978. Batchelor’s Contracting replaced the roof, Bullock Painting and Contracting painted the exterior, and Hampton-based Young Electrical Co. rewired the house. As contractors shored up the Walker structure, staff cleared and secured the surrounding buildings.¹⁶

Putman noted the early progress made on the house in his 1980 annual report. He mentioned that MAWA staff—a historian, lead park technician, part-time clerk-stenographer, seasonal park aide, and temporary laborer—were able to move into the back of the second floor of the Walker house after February. He also stated that the work done was

¹⁴ James Coleman to Putman, 12 February 1980; Larry Klock, “Trip Report, Richmond NBP, 16 January 1980,” 9 February 1980, both in Box 2, Folder D-52.17 Planning (Misc), Suggs.

¹⁵ Sylvester Putman, Superintendent’s Annual Report, 1980, 3, NPS (RG 79), Entry 17, Superintendents’ Annual Reports, Box 44, Richmond National Battlefield and Maggie L. Walker National Historic Site, Reports from 1980, 1982, 1986–93, 2001.

¹⁶ Roxanne Stenson, “Local Builders Restore Historic Walker House,” *Richmond Afro-American* 31 January 1981, 1, 19, quote on 19; Congressional Research Service, “SBA’s ‘8a Program’: Overview, History, and Current Issues,” updated 3 August 2021, last accessed 8 September 2021, <https://sgp.fas.org/crs/misc/R44844.pdf>.

managed with “a tremendous amount of maintenance . . . provided by the Richmond National Battlefield personnel.” He wrote, “Without their assistance, we would have been hard pressed to initiate any kind of maintenance program.” To stop the deterioration of the site, Putman needed all hands on deck to fix the problems that resulted from decades of neglect.¹⁷

Putman also described the early interpretive efforts undertaken by staff. They researched in the collections of the Virginia State Library, the Richmond Public Library, and the Library of Virginia, IOSL headquarters, and area museums to begin building a Walker biography. They contacted residents of Jackson Ward and acquaintances or associates of Walker to begin collecting oral histories. Personnel also started to acquire books for the research library, focusing on late nineteenth/early twentieth century African American history, Richmond history, and the history of Black professionals. Putman tried to open several front-floor rooms of the house for a birthday commemoration but failed to receive enough funding at the time to restore the rooms properly for an adequate interpretation. Staff produced a brochure in 1980, describing the architectural features of the home on one side, and Walker’s early life, her expansion of IOSL membership, family life, and her decline and alterations to manage her disability on the other. The pamphlet provided a way for visitors to learn about the home while it remained closed to the public.¹⁸

At the same time as extensive repairs were underway in the home, staff continued to make progress on artifact conservation. In 1980, they created an archive and collection management system and purchased curatorial storage supplies and a/v equipment. They started a card catalog system and completed accessioning the collection. Bill Jedlick, MARO curator, visited several times to help with the process and locate area restoration professionals for contracted conservation work. Reese’s Antique Company worked on artifacts in most dire need of restoration, and Nathaniel Gilliam restored the chandeliers and sconces. Contract professionals also completed the wallpaper study in 1980. As the staff moved forward, a well-cataloged, professionally managed Walker collection began to take shape.¹⁹

¹⁷ Sylvester Putman, Superintendent’s Annual Report, 1980, 12, 14.

¹⁸ Sylvester Putman, Superintendent’s Annual Report, 1980, 12; NPS Brochure, c. 1980, Box 1, Notebook 2, MLWHF.

¹⁹ Putman, 1980 Superintendent’s Report, 12–13.



The dining room before and after renovation.

Planning for the Future: Creating Site Development Documents

Repairing the Walker house had to take priority in 1980, as the lack of maintenance had taken its toll on both the structure and the artifacts within. But national, regional, and local staff had also listed as a priority the creation of a *General Management Plan/Development Concept Plan (GMP)*, as well as other important planning documents. In 1981, employees from RICH and MAWA, the Denver Service Center (DSC), MARO, Virginia State Historic Preservation Office (also known as the Virginia Department of Historic Resources [SHPO]), and the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation crafted a document planning how both the site and the interpretation of the site would look through the next five years. Collaborators worked on the *GMP* and related documents for almost two years, and the finalized 1982 report represented the hope that the Walker site would not only promote African American history but would also serve as a centerpiece in Jackson Ward's revitalization.

The *GMP*'s development began with a Statement for Management, which included collaboration with the public. Putman mailed a brochure, the draft statement, pre-planning workbook, and an invitation letter to attend a charette-style session to 180 people, including members of the Maggie L. Walker Historical Foundation (MLWHF). The workbook gave a short history of the site and an explanation of the planning process, and even included a self-addressed, stamped envelope for anyone to submit feedback via mail.²⁰

The Statement for Management established three interpretive goals: "To commemorate the life and times of Maggie Lena Walker"; to use the home and artifacts to interpret broader events that affected Black business and the community both in Richmond and the United States; and to create facilities that would advance community programs focused on education and culture. After providing a brief history of Walker, the statement listed several threats to the site itself, including the fact that multiple buildings not included in the boundary were not protected by any preservation statutes, so "there is no assurance that the historic setting, of which the site is an integral part, will be preserved for the future." The statement also explained that access to the site was restricted by necessity, because of the condition of the property and artifacts, and that the access might remain closed for several years. As restoration progressed, staff built the resources needed to interpret the site, which were currently lacking, as research was scant at this time.²¹

²⁰ "Summary of Pre-Planning Response, Maggie L. Walker NHS-GMP, 13 May 1981," Box 1, Notebook 1, MLWHF.

²¹ Sylvester Putman, preparer, "Statement for Management: Maggie L. Walker National Historic Site," Approved by James Coleman, 17 July 1981, MAWA Reports Box, 2, 9, 11, quote on 9.

A major focus of the Statement for Management was the inclusion of the wider community in both planning and programming. Perhaps it was a nod to the NPS's new interest in drawing in urban visitors, or possibly it resulted from the already established relationship between NPS staff and the MLWHF; whatever the case, local personnel consciously involved the community at every level. The statement recognized interest from groups like Historic Richmond, MLWHF, Independent Order of St. Luke (IOSL), and the supporters of Project One, a plan to improve properties around Jackson Ward that included a \$12 million civic/convention center, shops, and a 375-bed hotel, representing a public-private partnership investment of \$50 million overall. In addition, the statement noted, "Restoration plans of the newly formed Jackson Ward Rehabilitation Committee favorably complement site management's own initiatives to minimize visual intrusions, sounds, and other sensory manifestations originating off-site." The statement described the Committee's "goal of working with interest groups and organizations to eliminate or restrict adverse influences which affect the esthetic [*sic*] environment and experience of park visitors" as aligned with NPS management's objective. Together with the stated desire to draw in educational groups, interest groups, and other community visitors to the site for tours and events, NPS officials made it clear that this site would be not only a welcoming place for all but also a model for development in Jackson Ward.²²

Public reactions to the statement were scant but generally supportive. Of the 180 invited, 26 people attended one of three meetings at the Richmond Public Library, facilitated by Putman, the staff, and Susanne Stutzman, DSC-based Planning Team Captain. Eleven more sent responses. Those who contributed noted concern with lack of parking and the lack of preservation initiatives on Leigh Street, and several supported an expansion of the boundary or façade easements on Leigh Street for that reason. Most respondents favored films, rotating exhibits, a children's area, as well as printed materials and books for the public.²³

One potential negative effect of the establishment of the Maggie Walker site came to light in the responses. As Putman put it, several responses said that "expansions [were] good, but do not cause conflict, do not displace homeowners, concerned about changing racial/economic conditions if boundary changes[.]" This reflected a growing concern with gentrification, spurred by both the site's development and a \$700,000 HUD block development grant for public improvement, which enabled the city to repair and construct sidewalks, pave alleyways, and conduct other projects to shore up the crumbling infrastructure. A 1980 *New York Times* article described the grant money as a boon to the neighborhood, "Once written off as an inner-city blighted area with a high crime rate[.]" The article identified the MLWHF's actions as a catalyst in securing interest in the neighborhood as a

²² "Statement for Management," 10, 12, quote on 10.

²³ "Summary of Pre-Planning Public Response," 2, 8.

historic district, and the new loan programs designed to assist low-income homeowners in purchasing and restoring homes as stimulating a turnaround in development. Reporter David Frossard called the historic site “a symbol for the successful renovation and reclamation of an entire neighborhood.” Putman agreed, telling Frossard that he was seeing home restoration occurring around the site as NPS worked on the Walker house.²⁴

The *Times* article foreshadowed the fears of the respondents to the Maggie Walker Statement for Management, however, when it featured in the story the only white family on a block of African American residents. The Simpson family could be described as “urban pioneers,” white gentrifiers moving to a previously segregated district to take advantage of low-cost housing with historic character. More affluent residents could follow, making housing prices and tax assessments rise, which often push out long-time residents who can no longer afford to live there. Mrs. Simpson, a real estate agent, revealed her privilege and lack of awareness about her neighbors’ concerns with shifting demographics when she told the *Times* reporter, “I have a list of whites who want to buy houses but there’s nothing for sale. I have done my level-headed best to sell houses around here but the homeowners won’t sell. They get very angry if they’re approached.”²⁵ Given whites’ historic treatment of African American city residents, deep-seated mistrust of the motives of white residents in previously segregated Black neighborhoods was not surprising, and those who saw the Maggie Walker site as a benefit for Jackson Ward also seemed well aware of the negative effects new development could bring.

The Statement for Management provided one base of information that would be contained in the *GMP*; staff also conducted an Environmental Assessment to determine how the site would be used as part of the long-range planning process. The *GMP* included the plan that emerged as the most feasible, given the circumstances. The final Summary of Assessment, published in January 1982, explained the challenges and possibilities of the site. Members of the public attended two open houses at the site, and local personnel, Suzanne Stutzman, and Whit Watkins received comments. Despite a heavy snow that hampered participation at the first session, about a third of those who received invitations showed up to comment. Many MLWHF members were there, and a city council person, a representative from the Task Force for Historic Preservation and the Minority Community, members of the local and D.C.-area National Parks and Conservation Association, and Richmond on the James (a preservation society) went to the event. Reflecting on the open houses, Sylvester Putman wrote, “Interest in the site and National Park Service involvement

²⁴ “Summary of Pre-Planning Public Response,” 9; “Virginia Capital’s Jackson Ward: Change in a Historic Black Area,” *New York Times*, 27 January 1980, clipping in Box 3, Folder K-54-17 Maggie Lena Walker Newsarticles (Current), Suggs; David Frossard, “The Inner City’s Ongoing Renaissance,” clipping, 8 April 1980, MAWA Reports Box, Press Releases Folder. Note: The *Times* article was a special to the Sunday edition. It was printed on the same page as an article on Atlantic City casino construction on p. 29, so it may have been a filler piece but related enough to the page headliner that it was included.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

is strong, with virtually everyone's concern that something is done to get the site open and operating, without strong preferences for how that is accomplished." The eighty people who weighed in on the plans may have been the most interested, but local media covered the open houses, so all Richmond residents could keep tabs on the site's development.²⁶

The Environmental Assessment contained a demographic description of the surrounding community, which explained the nature of declension that had occurred since the 1960s. Briefly describing Walker's significance, the assessment said that Jackson Ward had "powerful credentials as the foremost Black community in the nation" at one time. Citing the factors leading to a decline in population and wealth, it noted that crime was a problem, and many residential properties stood vacant. Still, the Project One, 2nd Street revitalization study, and conservation plan for the central wards, Arts District, and other historic districts as well as the establishment of MAWA were contributing to a turnaround in Jackson Ward. The assessment explained that because the Walker house extended three feet farther out than the houses surrounding it, it had clear sight lines far down both sides of Leigh Street. The gas station on the block toward downtown was included in the legislated boundary and altered the historic appearance, but the 100 block of Leigh was essentially unchanged, although not because of any historic district ordinances. When the site finally opened, with a "moderate level of development" the assessment predicted a potential visitor count of 25,000 a year.²⁷

The bulk of the assessment focused on potential site development plans, complete with blueprints for each one. The alternatives ranged from restoration on the Walker house lower first-floor front rooms, with the back rooms and carriage house converted to operations, the upstairs for a storage vault and workspace, and the remaining buildings "moth-balled," or stabilized but kept empty and virtually as is, to a full reworking of all building sites. This would include a visitor center in 114 E. Leigh, and leasing of office space in 116, 118, and 600–602 2nd Street buildings to "legacy organizations" that "reflected Mrs. Walker's philosophy of education, thrift, and self-help." In this scenario, 112 would be reserved for staff housing once the tenant moved out. An alternative to office space proposed was to convert those buildings to businesses on the first floor and rental housing on the top floors. Each of these models would draw potential revenue for NPS, and "would reestablish the vital Jackson Ward setting of Mrs. Walker's era." A community-focused proposal suggested constructing meeting, exhibit, class, and flex space in 116 and 118 E.

²⁶ Open House Invitation to Discuss Environmental Assessment and Alternatives, 27 February 1982, Box 1, Notebook 1, MLWHF; Sylvester Putman, Superintendent's Annual Report 1982, NPS (RG 79), Entry 17, Superintendents' Annual Reports, Box 44, Richmond National Battlefield and Maggie L. Walker National Historic Site, Reports from 1980, 1982, 1986–93, 2001, 14, 17–18. Quote on 17.

²⁷ "Summary of Environmental Assessment, Maggie L. Walker National Historic Site/VA," January 1982, Early Park History Box, untitled folder, 1–5. Quotes on 1, 5.

Leigh, with an auditorium and stage in 600–602 2nd Street buildings. In addition, the assessment discussed land acquisition needs; several plans included purchasing the gas station on Leigh Street and obtaining façade easements on the 100 block of E. Leigh Street.²⁸

Plans also included how the site could accommodate and educate visitors. Each plan listed adaptations for differently abled visitors, with the mothballing proposal listing no accommodations, to the community/business-focused proposals suggesting elevators. The minimal plan also had more minimal interpretation, focused just on Walker’s personal life. The office space plan would add Walker’s accomplishments and legacy; the businesses/residential plan could focus on Walker’s life, accomplishments, and the history of Jackson Ward; and the community space would include all the above-listed topics. The yard area would serve as a visitor meeting space, as well as a launching point for tours, particularly if the cinderblock garage attached to the parcel at the back of 112 E. Leigh St. were removed, which was a suggestion for most plans. Parking could be accomplished with the acquisition of the gas station, with a concessioner or private developer providing parking there, or with the NPS leasing twenty spots nearby. A bus zone could ease congestion as well.²⁹

The Environmental Assessment projected the costs and impacts related to the different site plans. While the mothballing and minimal intervention required the fewest onsite staff and lowest financial commitment, the cost would be greater in the detriment it may cause; as the report stated, impacts could include “continued unsavory activities in neighborhood” and the “public image of NPS harmed by lack of action.” With the rehabilitation and rental of the buildings, NPS could recover some of the costs, although the financial outlay would be much greater, with costs projected to be between \$530,000 to \$838,000 in phase one, depending on which model emerged as the top pick, and then between \$338,000 to \$899,000 in phase two. The mothballing/minimal work model would cost only \$205,000 in phase one, and nothing in phase two. Projected five-year costs for construction and running the site (including salaries) were lowest at \$1,297,000 for the most minimal work, ranging to a high of \$4,255,000 for the community center model. The benefits of a full reconstruction, however, seemed to outweigh the financial cost; as the report noted, any model that utilized all buildings in some manner would foster positive relationships between NPS and the community.³⁰

Also referenced in the *GMP* was the *Historic Structure Report (HSR)*, which was not published until several months after the publication of the *GMP*, but provided information about the buildings, streetscapes, and artifacts that informed the publication. Authors Margaret Pearson Mickler and John M. Dickey called the Walker house “one of

²⁸ “Summary of Environmental Assessment,” 1–9, 24, quote on 8. The assessment has detailed explanations of six proposed uses for the site, as well as accompanying blueprints.

²⁹ “Environmental Summary,” 23–24.

³⁰ “Environmental Summary,” 24–25. Quote on 25.

Richmond's best examples of Italianate style." Explaining that it represented her personal achievements, as well as Black uplift, it drew on information from Diann Jacox's early study, the National Historic Register nomination, and interviews, as well as Sanborn fire maps, historic photos, and the Walker manuscript collection to situate the house in a historic context. After providing a complete architectural and social history of the house, the authors suggested an interpretation centered on 1928, as all additions had been done by that time. They argued that oral histories could assist with the placement of furniture and that the major pieces that had been stolen should be replaced. After relating a short history of Jackson Ward's wealthy residents and the way the 100 block of E. Leigh would have looked, the *HSR* suggested easements to maintain the façade and the reconstruction of the buildings back to the way they looked in the Sanborn Fire Maps and contemporary photographs. The authors noted that the removal of more recent additions to 116 and 118 E. Leigh and the restoration of front porches would help recreate the 1928 landscape. Describing the "particularly intrusive changes" in 600–602 N. 2nd St, they called for the restoration of porches and removal of store windows to replace with one based on a 1955 photo, along with the removal of the laundromat addition to the front of the store to make way for the auditorium. The *HSR* also provided advice for the construction of ramps and an elevator to make the site more accessible.³¹

The *HSR* was a tremendous asset for the planning teams involved in site restoration, as it brought together myriad resources, both historic and contemporary, to explain how the neighborhood and acquired structures changed over time, as well as how structural engineers and conservators approached the restoration process. The appendix included a wallpaper, paint, and drapery analysis, as well as a description of how the 100 block changed from white to Black over time. It included an inventory of all artifacts and a structural engineering report that pointed out how much weight the Walker house joists could support (sixty pounds per square foot), noted termite damage, and suggested the use of steel or banded wood beams to reinforce carriage house trusses. The *HSR* reiterated the need for more information, and the authors wrote that the staff should research and write an accurate Walker biography, which would "be rewarding to the site and of great significance to the public." An archeological dig could parse out the original kitchen foundation, which they surmised had been an outbuilding at one point. The report also included the NPS Package Estimating Detail, which was valid through June 1982. This report lists the

³¹ Margaret Pearson Mickler and John M. Dickey, *Historic Structure Report, Maggie L. Walker National Historic Site*, for the United States Department of the Interior National Park Service Mid-Atlantic Regional Office (Philadelphia, PA, December 1982), 3, 4, 7–15, 90, 116, 116a, 119–21. Quote on 3. While the report doesn't state when the laundromat was added, the MARO Architect's Memo of 29 March 1984 (MAWA Reports Box, Field Trip Report Magaziner Folder), noted that all walls on the first floor had been knocked out and were now supported by a steel beam. The concrete floor was uneven where the washers and dryers had been, but if the NPS elected to maintain the storefront, it could be repainted to not appear as such an intrusion on the earlier landscape. In the realist tax report, 600 N 2nd Street is listed at just 1,464 square feet of space, so it would have been a small auditorium with the front of the laundromat removed.

work planned to this point, which included thousands of square feet of masonry repairs and brick repointing, as well as ten-ton climate control system installations, repapering/repainting, reconstruction of porches, revamping electrical in all additional structures, as well as the demolition of the rear wing additions on 116/118 and the entire 5,200 square foot laundromat and the renovations to the storefront. The total cost estimate on all projects totaled \$475,500.³² The *GMP* took photographs directly from the *HSR* to explain how to retain/restore the streetscape within the historic boundary and seemed to draw from the *HSR* to create the restoration plan.

The *GMP* merged several of the recommendations from the Environmental Assessment, Statement for Management, and *HSR* draft with regards to site development, and ultimately provided a two-phase ten-year plan. Contributors determined that they would restore and re-furnish the first floor and front of the second floor of the Walker house for interpretation. The back half of the second floor would serve as NPS offices and storage. The plan called for a modern elevator to be installed next to the original, and for the restoration of the carriage house to be used for maintenance and storage. 114 E. Leigh Street would be renovated into a visitor contact station housing exhibits and a sales area on the first floor, with the second floor housing a meeting room, library, and staff offices. The visitor contact space would be expanded into 112 E. Leigh once the tenant vacated the building. 116–118 E. Leigh’s exteriors would be restored on the outside and renovated for offices on the inside. If legacy organizations refused to rent the offices, NPS would expand the search for tenants to commercial/business enterprises. 600–602 2nd Street would be either razed to build or converted into a conference hall to be used by NPS, community, and cultural organizations for events, lectures, and other programs. The space would be designed for maximum flexibility. One space would be converted into a large room capable of handling multiple meeting/event formats, with restrooms, storage for tables and chairs, and support areas, “subject to architectural and engineering determinations.” The plan called for the removal of the cinderblock garage on the alley behind Leigh Street for tour launching and special event space.³³

The *GMP* recognized that not only would this kind of dramatic restoration take a tremendous amount of effort and money, but that it was also threatened by the lack of zoning in Jackson Ward. Borrowing the description of the surrounding neighborhood and the threats it faced from the Environmental Assessment, the *GMP* included a detailed map of Jackson Ward that included descriptions of other historic buildings. Despite the neighborhood’s designated national historic district status, no façade encumbrances existed.

³² Mickler and Pearson, 90, 120–21, 130, appendices. Quote on 121.

³³ Suzanne Stutzman et al., *General Management Plan/Development Concept Plan, Maggie L. Walker National Historic Site* (Washington, D.C.: National Park Service/U.S. Government Printing Offices, 1982), iii, 18, 21–22. Quote on iii. According to Cindy MacLeod, they envisioned an elevator to be constructed directly behind the original one in the Walker house.

The plan called for a redrawing of the site boundaries to include the 100 block of E. Leigh Street. It suggested the NPS purchase façade easements from owners on the 100 block for 10–20 percent of the home’s value if private historic preservation group or city ordinances failed to implement or purchase easements. The *GMP* also suggested the NPS acquire the gas station to the east of the 100 block on Leigh Street but cutting back the boundary to the east just after the gas station. The building could be razed to install a parking lot with handicap-accessible spaces. The plan designated a two-zone management system, with a historic zone to focus on the “preservation, protection, and interpretation of cultural resources and their settings” and a park development zone to support the site with visitor services like parking. Of course, all buildings would be restored to their original colors, with ornamentation as documented in the Historic Structures Report, and the facades of 600–602 2nd Street would be improved to “reduce the visual intrusion of the modern addition” as the renovated space accommodated visitor facilities.³⁴

The *GMP* included a basic interpretive plan based on Walker’s private life, professional achievements, and a history of Jackson Ward. These themes would be set in the larger framework of the “period of change for the Black race in the United States and for the nation,” as the summary explained. Staff would introduce these themes on tours, in publications, and at special events. Subthemes included Walker’s career as a bank president and the importance of the St. Luke Penny Savings Bank to Jackson Ward; Walker’s role as a fraternal leader and her role in growing the Independent Order of St. Luke; Walker as an educator/child advocate, including her “educational philosophy” of “thrift, morals, [and] hygiene”; and as the editor of the *St. Luke Herald*. The study situated Walker as an influential leader in Jackson Ward, including as a leader in the struggle to vote; as a “matriarch” of her large family; and as a “successful woman” leading the Richmond Council of Colored Women, working with girls’ schools, and her views on women as a social force. Additional subthemes included her national activities, particularly with regards to her work with the NAACP and her relationship with influential national leaders; how she managed her disability; and Walker’s representation of upper-middle-class Black culture.³⁵

The *GMP* explained that the narrative of these themes would be exhibited via artifacts and the house itself, displays in the visitor center, and publications as well as programming and events in the conference hall. Interpretation would focus on the front rooms of the house because there was enough information about and artifacts from these spaces to make it work. Deeper analysis and exploration of the subthemes would be

³⁴ Stutzman et al., *General Management Plan*, 4–6, 11–12, 15–16, 18. Quotes on 11, 16.

³⁵ Stutzman et al., *General Management Plan*, 17–18. Quote on 17.

provided by various publications, and souvenirs would also relate back to the larger themes, perhaps including a selection of reproductions of artifacts. The *GMP* called for an interpretive prospectus, which would help to define and guide the exhibit narratives.³⁶

The *GMP*'s suggestions for visitor services incorporated access for all people, regardless of abilities. This was particularly critical, as the plan stated, because of Maggie Walker's own physical challenges later in life. Handrails and ramps would assist visitors with limited mobility. Of concern was the second floor of the house, as this is where Walker spent a good amount of time after being confined to a wheelchair. A ramp between buildings 114 and 116 E. Leigh could take visitors needing extra assistance to a new elevator, built next to the original.³⁷

All the work to be done would be handled with conservation and cultural resources management at the forefront. As the *GMP* noted, "All actions proposed for the house will be guided by the approved historic structures report." Tour groups would be limited to fifteen to protect the house, and programming would expand outside the walls to accommodate larger crowds. Collaborators foresaw Jackson Ward history walking tours, and staff presentations in schools, for example, possibly with the assistance of partner organizations. In addition, NPS planned to secure concurrent jurisdiction with Richmond police and deputization of rangers so that they could enforce Virginia laws within the historic zone, which would improve protection of both people and artifacts. The alarm system would be modified and improved as needed and would expand to the visitor services center to protect the artifacts within.³⁸

The ambitious program established by the *GMP* required a tremendous amount of financial and community support. This plan required a historian or site manager, museum specialist/protection ranger, clerk-typist, two ranger interpreters, and two maintenance workers to permanently staff the site. It also required the assistance of partnering organizations, like MLWHF, other area museums that could lend support, Richmond's fire and police forces, and organizations to lease the office space. Moreover, the plan suggested attracting financial sponsors to fund construction and possible operation of the conference hall and leased building, as "limited funds" might delay the implementation of all but the Walker house restoration.³⁹

The *GMP* established a two-phase program to spread costs and work. The first five years would focus on the restoration of the house, renovation for the visitor contact lobby and all work within 114, a courtyard renovation (after an archeological study), and stabilization of and façade work on the remaining buildings. In addition to an interpretive

³⁶ Stutzman et al., *General Management Plan*, 18.

³⁷ Stutzman et al., *General Management Plan*, iv, 15, 19–20.

³⁸ Stutzman et al. *General Management Plan*, iv, 11, 7, 15, 21, 23–25. Quote on 15.

³⁹ Stutzman et al., *General Management Plan*, iv, 25–26. Quote on 26.

prospectus, the *GMP* called for a Maggie Walker biography, Historical Resource Study, Historical Furnishings Report (underway), Historic Grounds Study, a Collection and Preservation guide, an energy conservation plan, and a Land Protection Plan which would include façade easements, redrawn boundary lines, and the acquisition of the gas station. Years 5–10 would see the construction of the conference hall, parking area, office restoration, a modern elevator installation, renovation of 112 for housing, an expansion of the visitor lobby space, and the creation of energy conservation plans for the remainder of the buildings. The total cost of implementing the two phases was \$1,883,000 for phase 1 and \$1,850,000 for phase 2. The collaborators projected annual costs of \$223,000 per year, with \$135,000 dedicated to personnel costs. Projected income from leasing office space was \$15,000 per year, and energy conservation plans could save another \$9,000 per year.⁴⁰ Personnel from the DSC, MARO, and Richmond Battlefield Parks joined local SHPO staff and other contributors in their belief that this site could become a powerful symbol of the NPS's new focus on inclusion and diversity. But to do it right would cost a tremendous amount of money, and the availability of that funding remained to be seen.

Planning for Interpretation and Collections Management

Interpretation during the pre-opening period centered on producing the Interim Interpretive Plan, published in October 1984. This plan covered the major interpretive themes and a Scope of Collections Statement. It also determined the personnel needed to carry out various interpretation and restoration tasks, as well as a budget for the planned exhibit installation. Many team members consulted on this plan, led by George Mackenzie, MARO Historian in the Division of Interpretation. Assisting Mackenzie were local staff members Putman; Keith Morgan, Chief of Interpretive and Visitor Services; Elizabeth Browning, Special Assistant to the Superintendent on detail from Valley Forge; local ranger Celia Jackson (later Suggs); and Museum Technician John Ryan. William Jedlick and several division chiefs and staff members from Harpers Ferry also worked to craft the ambitious plan. They designed the plan to be flexible, noting that it was to guide work until the 114 E. Leigh Street visitor facilities site received funding to open, and it focused on a plan that was not “expensive or irreversible.”⁴¹

The team determined several major emphasis areas, with supportive subthemes throughout. The Statement of Significance addressed Walker's role as a “prominent civic leader and successful business woman” who helped the Black community as she participated in political, economic, and social activities in Jackson Ward and the nation. It

⁴⁰ Stutzman et al., *General Management Plan*, 29–30.

⁴¹ George Mackenzie et al., “Interim Interpretive Plan for the Maggie L. Walker National Historic Site,” Approved by James Coleman, MARO Director, 22 October 1984, MAWA Reports Box, 1.

recognized her relationships with other prominent leaders, including W. E. B. DuBois, Booker T. Washington, and Marcus Garvey. The statement explained, “She shared with them the faith, hope, and aspirations for improvements in the quality of life for all Black people and worked relentlessly to shape their ideas into realities.” Subthemes to address in exhibits and tours included her role as an executive in banking, a newspaper editor, and a business developer; her role as a leader in fraternal organizations like IOSL, NACW, and NAACP; and her importance as an educator, including how her philosophies on “thrift, morals, and hygiene” affected the way she organized and ran educational programs, and how she represented women as leaders and community organizers. Finally, interpretation would address Walker as a “matriarch” of a large family, including her personal life and how she coped with her disability in later life.⁴²

The team established goals of the interpretive program, including how and where interpretation would highlight the themes. In an orientation section, a presentation on how Walker confronted prejudice, as well as the role of women as symbols of mobility, would present an overview for visitors. The house tour would explain her experience as a family and Black community leader, as well as the significance of Jackson Ward, business, and community in Walker’s time. Anything not covered in the house could be relayed in exhibits, publications, and an audiovisual program. The team suggested rotating exhibits using Walker’s artifacts, as well as photographs of Jackson Ward. They believed that Walker’s elevator would draw tremendous interest, with particular significance for visitors with disabilities, although they recognized that building code and superintendent restrictions could limit possibilities for the elevator’s use.⁴³

The plan established a protocol for the visitor experience, both on- and off-site. On busy days, at least two staff and two volunteers from the Volunteers in Parks (VIP) program would be present. Visitors could go through the front entrance for an orientation in the front parlor. Differently abled visitors could take the side entrance into the building from a walkway on the east side, and the plan suggested a way to widen the walk to accommodate wheelchairs. Although these visitors could not get up the stairs, they could view an album or watch an a/v program about the second story. Label size and placement would be crafted with visibility in mind, any staff with sign language skills would be used on tours, and personnel would receive “sensitivity training” to help provide an inclusive visitor experience. The team suggested publications to expand interpretation to interested visitors. Although local and MARO staff produced an interim brochure, ultimately a site pamphlet based on the Harpers Ferry Center Unigrad system, a teacher/student workbook, and a biography would supplement information received on tours. In addition, handbooks on Jackson Ward and the Walker house, “contracted to a professional author,” could make a

⁴² Mackenzie, “Interim Interpretive Plan,” 1, 3–5. Quotes on 3, 5.

⁴³ Mackenzie et al., Interim Interpretive Plan, 6–8.

significant contribution. For those who wanted to explore further, a research library would provide information on Walker, Black history, regional history, Black business, NPS history, microfilm, periodicals, and interpretive materials. The MLWHF wanted to assist in building the library collection. The plan also called for outreach programs, including a slide show, for schools and local community organizations, provided enough staff were available to go offsite.⁴⁴

In addition to a tour/exhibit plan, the Interim Interpretive Report determined the acquisition process for additional artifacts with its statement on the scope of collections. In it, the team defined acceptable acquisitions as ones that were of high quality, illustrative of Walker's lifestyle, family, and professional activities, and those that would provide information for researchers and interpreters working on exhibits. Explaining that "it is not the intent of the National Park Service to document and preserve the archival materials of each of these organizations[,]” the team decided that only those artifacts that contributed to the site's history, or on how well they documented Walker's personal involvement in the many groups of which she was a member, would be collected. The collection's focus related to Walker's personal life, the IOSL, national business groups, educational activities, involvement with the women's club movement, relations with national leaders, and work in civic or civil rights organizations, as well as general life in Jackson Ward. Only the Superintendent could accept donations, and the curator would record/catalog them. Loans would be accepted, particularly those that were the results of scientific investigations, and artifacts could be used in research or loaned out, but only under the direct auspices of the curator. Only the curator and Chief of Interpretation would have direct access to the collection.⁴⁵

The Interpretive Prospectus team recognized the tremendous effort that would have to go into getting the site up and running and provided staff and budget projections to accompany their report. At a minimum, staffing would need to include a GS-9 Park Ranger, GS-7 Museum Technician/Historian, GS-3 Clerk-Stenographer, and WG-5 laborer. The team recommended two park technicians and a laborer to be added by 1986 and explained that given the extent of curatorial work involved, the museum technician position would need to be maintained for at least five years. Moreover, the team determined that MLWHF and other interested groups would have to shore up the work of the paid staff, arguing, "It goes without saying that volunteers will necessarily be required to assume heavy responsibilities in the operation of the site." The interim exhibit plan for 114 E. Leigh could be produced in-house with guidance from HFC. The ten silkscreen panels, three freestanding exhibit panels, and one to two display cases, with a slide show, exhibit labels, and copy,

⁴⁴ Mackenzie et al., "Interim Interpretive Plan," 9–12, 15. Quotes on 10, 12.

⁴⁵ Mackenzie et al., "Interim Interpretive Plan," 17–19.

would interpret Walker as a bank president and Jackson Ward's history, at a cost of \$53,650 to \$61,650. Projected costs for exhibits, the Walker biography, Historical Resources Study, and Historic Furnishings Report totaled over \$183,000.⁴⁶

The Realities of Restoration

The expansive program laid out in the *GMP* and Interpretive Prospectus came up against the budgetary realities of the early 1980s, which stalled projects and hampered overall progress. In 1981, President Ronald Reagan proposed a budgetary overhaul to accommodate massive capital gains tax cuts. Included in his budget was a proposed cut to the Department of the Interior, which led to wrangling with Congress for almost a year. In October of 1981, the Senate passed a bill funding the Department of the Interior at \$7.6 billion, which was \$1 billion over what Reagan had deemed acceptable for the balanced budget. The report, *National Parks for a New Generation*, published in 1985, described the Reagan era as a “period of budget stringency” and “austere domestic spending.” This created a problem because parks created in 1978 and 1980, like the Maggie Walker site, sat unfinished as the money was not available to handle the backlog. The report argued, “Only determined action by Congress has provided funds even to begin to address this backlog.” This national problem adversely affected the Maggie L. Walker site. In 1982, Sylvester Putman reported on construction delays, owing to the battle between Reagan and Congress over the appropriations bill. As he explained, “Doing more with less is difficult enough, but doing more with nothing is impossible.”⁴⁷

Putman and the rest of the staff, along with contractors, managed to get the work done, albeit not on the time frame he would have liked. The Walker house represented the most significant of the work projects, because at a minimum it had to be completed before the house could open. In 1982, crews removed wallpaper in eleven rooms, took down the post-1930s tile ceiling from the second-floor study, rewired all of the period lamps and

⁴⁶ Mackenzie et al., “Interim Interpretive Plan,” 26–28. Quote on 26. Proposed plan for 114 completed by Celia Suggs and Interpretive Planner from Harpers Ferry Center Michael Paskowsky.

⁴⁷ “Senate Votes Interior Department Bill Exceeding New Reagan Budget Goal,” *New York Times*, 28 October 1981, last accessed 26 August 2020, <https://www.nytimes.com/1981/10/28/us/senate-votes-interior-dept-bill-exceeding-new-reagan-budget-goal.html>; Conservation Foundation, *National Parks for a New Generation*, xxiii, li, quote on xxiii; Sylvester Putman, Superintendent’s Annual Report, 1982, 16. An article assessing Reagan’s impact on the NPS shows mixed results, mainly because Congress balked at major budget cuts. Journalist Maura Dolan explained that Congressional appropriations continued, and in fact there was a spending boom of \$1.9 billion to help infrastructure, following what she termed the traditional “boom and bust” cycle of park funding. Donation boxes and increased entry fees, as well as private donations, also shored up NPS budgets, but conservation and park expansion declined in the Reagan era. Maura Dolan, “Reagan Record on Parks Gets Mixed Marks,” *Los Angeles Times*, 21 June 1988, last accessed 5 April 2022, <https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-1988-06-21-mn-4615-story.html>. For a detailed description of the NPS under the Reagan administration, see Bonnie Satchatello, “Political Influences on the National Park Service: Past and Present” (MA Thesis: University of Richmond, 1990), last accessed 5 April 2022, <https://scholarship.richmond.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1983&context=masters-theses>.

fixtures, installed two gas heaters in the carriage house, replaced mortaring, covered the masonry parapet wall with copper, and fixed the alarm system. Putman's top priority was instituting proper climate control, and by September of 1983 that system was in place. Plans moved forward in 1983 for plastering, completing exterior painting, and renovation of 114 E. Leigh, and at this point staff targeted July 15, 1984, for the site's opening date.⁴⁸

But an opening for 1984 was not to be. Painting took longer than expected, for one thing—although staff and volunteers began prepping for final painting in the first part of the year, Putman could not finalize a contract until July, most likely because of budget constraints. And Putman reported to MLWHF members that painting went slower than it should have, because the contractor promised a crew of ten painters, but only two showed up daily. While the contractor had to pay \$100/day for the delay, the cost to the site was its continued closure.⁴⁹

Problems plagued the other buildings, as well. Although the *GMP* had suggested the possibility of demolishing buildings 600–602 N. 2nd Street, NPS administrators vetoed the idea. Claiming that the “removal of the structures would be a serious error with harmful consequences to the service[,]” NPS Associate Director of Cultural Resources Larry Rogers told the MARO Director that the site and the Jackson Ward Historic District would be adversely affected by such a move. Instead, he suggested looking into leasing a portion of the buildings, with or without the laundromat façade. At the same time, he suggested that whatever was to be done had to occur with haste to avoid any further decline in the condition. He argued, “Demolition by neglect is a charge against which there is no defense. I am sure the park would not want to lend credibility to those who are always willing to accuse us.”⁵⁰ Once again, Putman may well have found himself in the position of doing more than he anticipated, but without the necessary financial support to make that happen.

In early 1984, MARO regional architect Henry Magaziner and MARO staff member Cynthia MacLeod traveled to Richmond to see the site's progress and consult on 600–602. They met with local staff, as well as Michael Gold, Executive Director of Historic

⁴⁸ Putman, Superintendent's Annual Report, 1982, 3, 8, 14, 15; MLWHF Board Meeting Minutes, 14 September 1983, Box 1, Notebook 2, MLWHF. For details on the air conditioning, see Paul Sweet to Sylvester Putman, 23 June 1983; and Paul Sweet, Engineering Report, to Sylvester Putman, 10 August 1983, both in Box 2, Folder D-52.17 Planning (Misc), Suggs. To get a modern cooling system in place, basement air handlers had to be installed, heating pipes had to be removed from under the house, new duct work installed in a third of the crawlspace, and space for ducts had to be cut into walls on the first and second floors. Part of the yard of 112 needed to be used for a large refrigeration unit. And just to add to the challenge of restoration, Sweet found that posts in the attic had to be replaced immediately and a cut beam needed to be patched.

⁴⁹ Photo by Jerri Bass with caption, 25 February 1984, Central Files, K34 News Media Folder; North American Painting Cost Breakdown, 18 July 1984, re: contract K4000-4-0047 Interior Painting—\$8,200; and Preconstruction Conference, 5 July 1984, both in Box 2, Folder D-52.17 Painting (Interior and Exterior) Maggie L. Walker House Folder, Suggs; Muriel Smith, MLWHF Board Meeting Minutes, 12 September 1984, in MLWHF Folder A22, located in library cabinet drawer.

⁵⁰ Larry Rogers [?], Associate Director, Cultural Resources to Regional Director, 25 November 1983, MAWA Reports Box, Field Trip Report Magaziner Folder.

Richmond Foundation, and Calder Loth of the Virginia Historic Preservation Office. Magaziner reported that all the columns on 114 were rotted, and noted major damage on the west porch, where there was a sagging roof. The south porch's paint was almost gone completely, the windows were in poor condition, balusters were missing from the roof, and paint peeled off everywhere. He suggested the building may well be NHR eligible, but he also wrote, "But Register or no Register, it does present a very unfortunate picture of the Park Service to the visiting public. It is seriously in need of funding." And while praising the plaster work and structural supports put in around windows at the Walker house, he said the copper plumbing lines coming from Maggie Walker's bathroom needed to be supported and insulated, and that staff should consider re-enameling the stove. Magaziner noted that more research needed to be done to see if 118's additional wing was added during Walker's lifetime, to determine if it could be removed. But with all these structures' issues, 600–602 N. 2nd Street were in worse shape. 602 had cracks in the ceilings exposing the attic above, rotting wood, and was missing steps and part of the roof, which exposed the entire structure. 600 had an uneven concrete floor, a steel beam support in place of a missing original front wall, and rotted second-story floorboards due to massive leaking from the roof.⁵¹

Given the state of the buildings, it may have seemed like a struggle to know where to begin, but Magaziner and the group collaborated to search for a potential solution. Michael Gold wanted to see apartments developed in the buildings and provided the names of several potential developers. Calder Loth was more concerned about how damaged the buildings were, which presented a serious safety concern, but Magaziner said, "We explained that there is no way the Park Service could fund a major restoration on these properties or even their stabilization in the foreseeable future." Loth wanted to preserve the back lot view, which would have been Walker's view from the house, but also suggested retail or apartments to fill the site. MacLeod explained that 600 could not be included on the register with the laundromat façade/extension in place. Magaziner wrote that he would contact Richmond's Chief Engineer with the Building Department to secure accommodations for building leases, with provisions that tenants restore the three building sides visible to the Walker house. He would have to get SHPO to approve the façade removal, which would then make the leasing program eligible for a tax abatement. Magaziner also had to negotiate with the engineer, and in addition, the leasing plan contradicted the *GMP*'s call for a community center. He promised to rework an existing NPS call for leases to include

⁵¹ Henry Magaziner, "Field Trip Report," 21 March 1984, MAWA Reports Box, Field Trip Report Magaziner Folder, 1–2, 4. Quote on 2.

the buildings and compile a list of potential renters. Finally, he said, “I will go to a Chinese restaurant and look for a fortune cookie with a message saying, ‘Your efforts to achieve the impossible will be rewarded.’” He opined, “Leasing these wrecks will be tough!”⁵²

Staff produced a final and amended Request for Proposals for leasing the buildings in 1985, just before the house opened to the public. It describes the primary focus on restoring the streetscape of Maggie Walker’s era. The back additions of 116/118 could be removed only if it were determined they were added after 1934. The cinderblock garage would remain on site. The RFP explained the Tax Act ramifications to potential developers; Section 212 of the Economic Recovery Act of 1982 allowed for any lessor holding a lease of eighteen or more years would receive a 25 percent tax credit to rehabilitate the structure. To take advantage, leaseholders had to keep as many interior architectural details as possible, and all lessors needed to assist in helping further the mission of the NPS. Massage parlors, adult bookstores, video arcades, and businesses that sold alcohol were prohibited from applying to the lease program, and nonprofits were welcomed but would not benefit from the tax credit. All developers would have to follow the standards in the 1983 revised Secretary of the Interior’s guidelines and the Historic Structures Report for renovation. In addition, buildings were required to be accessible, renovations would have to be completed within two years, and developers would need to set aside \$20,000 for an archeological program to be conducted by NPS.⁵³

It is unclear why the leasing program, suggested by the *GMP* and supported by local, regional, and national staff, never appealed to potential tenants. Perhaps Magaziner’s concern over the state of the buildings worried potential developers, as well. Had the leasing program worked, the site would look dramatically different from the site we see today and may well have served as a commercial/residential center in Jackson Ward. However, it would have left far less room for the expansion of research and visitor service facilities.

Preserving Artifacts

As mentioned previously, NPS staff were extremely concerned about the state of the artifacts in the home, and as work began on the house restoration, personnel also commenced the lengthy process of cataloging and conservation. The sheer number of artifacts, the deteriorated state of many objects, and the lack of support staff complicated the lengthy process. Putman managed to pull together enough support from local staff, volunteers,

⁵² Henry Magaziner, “Field Trip Report,” 21 March 1984, 3–4, quote on 3; Henry Magaziner, “Program for 2nd Street Buildings, Maggie Walker Complex,” MAWA Reports Box, Field Trip Report Magaziner Folder.

⁵³ “Amendment to R.F.P. for Leasing 116, 118, East Leigh Street and 600, 602 North 2nd Street, Richmond, Virginia,” Early Park History Box, Black Notebook, “Digest,” 416, 16, 29, “Minutes.”

contractors, and regional staff to complete the conservation process on most artifacts on display by the time the house opened in 1985. The restoration of the objects in the home started immediately and continued throughout the period.

The conservation process began in 1980. By 1982, local staff had cataloged four hundred artifacts, with HFC working on conservation. Putman recorded the restoration of several pieces of furniture and a marble table in his 1982 Annual Report. Even with the work ongoing, staff struggled to put artifacts back on display by the July 1985 opening. A reporter from a local newspaper noted that just two days before the opening, workers had yet to hang the reproduction curtains and were still cleaning the glass bookshelves casing as they set up room barriers. As NPS ranger Celia Jackson explained to him, “Every room was just stuffed with furniture. . . . It’s just deteriorated in places across the years.”⁵⁴ Given the state of the collection, managing the conservation effort may well have been just as challenging as restoring the building itself.

While the furnishings of the home needed a great deal of attention, paper-based artifacts and manuscripts were also in dire need of processing and conservation. In 1981, volunteers Arthur Page and Steven Erisoty, two students from Cooperstown Graduate Program in the Conservation of Historic and Artistic Works, spent the summer restoring photographs and prints under the supervision of Park Technician and Site Coordinator Tom Tankersley. The students worked on fifty framed artifacts for a planned display, focusing on family photographs, posters, diplomas, and newspaper reproductions. HFC conserved the artifacts in the worst shape. The students noted that “poor framing technique, acidic materials, soot from a coal furnace, and excessively high humidity had taken a heavy toll.” Every item they recorded suffered from mold growth. The students taught Tankersley how to properly preserve paper materials with mylar and acid-free storage, as well as how to use the recording hydrothermograph and sling psychrometer given to the local staff by HFC. As deteriorated as the objects were, Page and Erisoty claimed that one of the greatest challenges was simply getting access to the site “within the confines of government regulation and restriction.” They argued that had it not been for local personnel, they would not have been able to provide the professional conservation services on site in a space set aside for them inside the house itself.⁵⁵

Local, regional, and national staff also worked on the archival collection as the house and furniture restoration progressed. In 1984, at the request of MARO’s regional curator, Chief of the Office of Library and Archival Services at HFC David Nathanson surveyed the manuscript collection to make recommendations. Describing the collection

⁵⁴ Sylvester Putman, Superintendent’s Annual Report, 1982, 3, 15; Bruce Potter, “Maggie Walker House to Open,” *Richmond News Leader*, 12 July 1985, 10.

⁵⁵ Arthur H. Page IV and Steven Erisoty, “Report on the Summer Work Project at the Maggie L. Walker National Historic Site June–July 1981,” Cooperstown Graduate Program in the Conservation of Historic and Artistic Works, MAWA Report Box, 3–4, 7–8. Quotes on 3, 8.

as “potentially significant,” he recommended eight to ten feet of shelving for storage of a dozen manuscript boxes. Outside of basic recommendations related to conservation—fumigating all items, removing paper clips and rubber bands, unfolding all material, and placing everything in acid-free paper—Nathanson also urged staff to limit access to the collection to anyone not already using it for research purposes. He noted that the collection was scattered and that the environmental conditions were not ideal for storage. He said that the need to process and conserve the materials were reason alone to close the collection, but also staff simply did not have the time to oversee heavy use of the collection. He did note that personnel needed to create an accessible inventory and finding aid for researchers, as well as determine copyright and privacy restrictions before general use. It would take over a decade for the curator to write a detailed formal collections access policy, but Nathanson’s recommendations established a basic guideline for archival management, which he based on the NPS Museum Handbook.⁵⁶

When Nathanson mentioned the collection’s location, he was most likely referring to the fact that staff had to store materials wherever they could, especially when the house was under renovation. Shortly after the theft, staff moved the collection to the U-Haul building on Lombardy Street. Retired curator Hyman Schwartzberg recalled that they rented an entire floor of the warehouse and essentially tried to recreate the rooms and their artifacts in the floorplan. Schwartzberg recalled that this allowed him to see everything laid out logically. While not ideal in terms of conservation, it remained in the storage unit until the home opened in 1985.⁵⁷

Staff and contractors completed the Walker house restoration by July 1985, although many of the suggestions in the *GMP* had not yet been addressed. At some point during 1985, the 112 and 114 E. Leigh Street buildings received new roofs, chimneys, and cornices, but much work remained to be done on all the remaining buildings owned by NPS. Still, the cost of renovations to this point totaled \$500,000, which represented a portion of the overall capital investment of 3.5 million. Putman explained to a reporter the reason behind the delays were twofold; first, staff had underestimated the poor condition of the house, and second, Congressional appropriations were “tighter” than he had anticipated.⁵⁸

⁵⁶ David Nathanson to Sylvester Putman, 24 July 1984, and David Nathanson, “Maggie L. Walker Papers: Report and Recommendations,” 24 July 1984, both in Box 3, Maggie L. Walker Papers Archival Suggestions from Harpers Ferry Folder, Suggs, 1–4. Quote on 1. It appears that the “Collection Access Policy and Research Procedures,” which is undated but includes materials up to 1999, sets the formal research policy for the collection. It can be found in Box 3, Collections Access Policy Folder, Suggs.

⁵⁷ Hyman and Janet Schwartzberg, interview with Megan Shockley, 19 July 2021, 7–9. The curator has pictures of the warehouse floor in the collection.

⁵⁸ “Maggie L. Walker National Historic Site Historic Treasures Revived: A Perspective,” NPS Pamphlet, n.d., Box 1, Notebook 2, MLWHF; Jerry Lazarus, “Walker Mansion Will Open on July 14,” *Richmond Times-Dispatch*, 14 July 1985, clipping in Maggie L. Walker Dedication Ceremony 15 July 1985 FA-82.15, Library File Cabinet.

Attempts to Expand the Streetscape

As the *GMP* explained, while the 100 block of E. Leigh looked much the same as it had in the 1920s and 1930s, the remaining portion of Leigh within the boundary remained problematic. As the *GMP* suggested, Putman attempted to acquire the Exxon station that marred the historic landscape just past the corner of Leigh and N. 2nd Street. As with renovations, money was the issue. In 1982, he learned from Richmond's Exxon district manager that the company planned to designate the property as excess, so he wrote to a representative of Exxon's Land Management Division to see if Exxon would donate the land, as NPS did not have the funds for the purchase. He explained the potential tax break a donation would bring, and mentioned the positive publicity it could garner Exxon, particularly within the Black community. He said that the city administration, civic organizations, and the Chamber of Commerce supported NPS acquisition. The Richmond Exxon district manager also wrote a supporting letter, acknowledging the difficulty of securing a donation, but arguing, "As you may not recognize, this effort to perpetuate a culture and segment of Black Richmond history is quite near and dear to many in the city." Citing the large number of African Americans on the city council, he also mentioned that the entire area had been made a top development priority.⁵⁹

Putman did not receive the answer he sought. Instead, the Exxon Land Division representative sent him a copy of a letter the Real Estate Coordinator mailed to Daniel Brockner, Executive Director of the Richmond Convention and Visitors Bureau, who had also written a letter in support of Exxon's donation to NPS. In it, the Exxon coordinator explained that the real estate division could only sell land, not donate it. Only the marketing department could review the request. The real estate coordinator empowered the Richmond Exxon District Manager to contact the regional office for approval, and then if the regional office refused the request, the parties could work out a sale. The series of letters related to this potential real estate deal appears almost as if Exxon was trying to offload the decision-making to various parties, which must have seemed convoluted at the time. Given how much effort Putman had to expend on overseeing other cultural resource management projects, it may be likely that he had to postpone any further efforts to secure this land for the NPS.⁶⁰

⁵⁹ Sylvester Putman to Edmund Gates, 18 January 1982, Folder L1425 (Holdings, Other than Federal), Central Files; D. A. Donald to John B. Turner, 22 January 1982, with copies to Putman, US Department of the Interior, NPS, and RICH, Folder L1425 (Holdings, Other than Federal), Central Files.

⁶⁰ Edmund Gates to Putman, 25 January 1982, with a copy of letter from S. M. Fisher to Daniel E. Brockover, 8 January 1982, Folder L1425, Holdings (Other than Federal), Central Files.

Interpretation

Staff did not just have their hands full with managing cultural resources; they also had to build an interpretive program from the ground up at the same time. Although the actual Interim Interpretive Plan was not complete until 1984, the same staff who worked on the larger plan were on the ground working on day-to-day efforts to interpret the site with the resources available at the time. Drawing on multiple resources, including regional staff and contractors, local staff created a research program to interpret the house, and the surrounding community, in addition to Walker's personal and professional life. The source base included archeological, oral, and archival research, and provided the analysis for house tours and the exhibit.

At the outset, staff had indicated the need for an archeological assessment for the site. Brooke Blades, assistant archeologist at MARO, came to Richmond in 1981 to conduct a preliminary study. She spent four days there, assisted by local historian Susie Peters from the Virginia Historic Landmarks Commission, as well as faculty members from Virginia Commonwealth University. Diann Jacox, MARO historian, Celia Jackson, and Sylvester Putman also helped. Blades traced the provenance of the Walker house to John Ferguson, who purchased a lot from John Jackson in 1882 and appeared as a resident in 1883. She recorded the previous owners of surrounding properties and noted where privies in the Sanborn Fire Map of 1895 had been. Using city directories, Blades described the major change in the racial composition of Leigh Street; from English/Irish immigrants in the 1880s, to mixed in the 1890s to early 1900s. Although she said privy pits most likely existed behind the houses, Blades noted that a full-scale excavation would be extremely difficult, owing to the concrete sidewalks and buildings. It would also be hard to discern which artifacts were used by the African American community exclusively, as the neighborhood had been racially mixed for so long. Still, she explained that they may be able to look behind 112-14 and 600-602 to locate areas in which to dig, which could unearth a "stratographic profile predating nineteenth-century occupation." Any excavating they could manage that might provide information on turn-of-the-century urban life would be a "major contribution," as excavations of similar locations were limited.⁶¹

In addition to collecting evidence through preliminary archeological research, NPS staff continued to build the oral history program begun in 1979. Diann Jacox, MARO historian, had originally conceived of the program to gather information about the house, Walker's life, and her work with IOSL and the community. Jacox and Celia Jackson interviewed four of Walker's grandchildren and two children of Walker's employees. They conducted the interviews in 1981, which were transcribed, bound into two volumes, and published in 1986. These histories form the groundwork of the initial interpretations, based

⁶¹ Brooke Blades, "Preliminary Archeological Assessment," May 1981, MAWA Reports Box, 3, 6-11. Quotes on 10, 11.

on the memories of those who had direct contact with Maggie Walker, and topics cover her personal life, including vacations, how she coped with her disability, what the house looked like during her time, and her IOSL work. Celia Jackson then took over the project and expanded the interviews to include community members, friends and acquaintances of Walker, and members of IOSL. Celia Jackson (Suggs) continued to conduct interviews for two decades. These interviews provide invaluable impressions and recollections about Walker, her work and family, and the businesses and communities in Jackson Ward. Grandchildren gave their opinions on Walker's declining health, what the house looked like when they lived there, and their impressions of their formidable grandmother and her visitors. They discussed Polly Payne, the "adopted daughter"-turned-housekeeper, who managed the daily workings of the home, and the many relatives who resided in the house.⁶²

NPS had thousands of documents related to Walker's personal life and work, but to work through the collection would take time the staff simply could not dedicate. Instead, NPS contracted with Gertrude Marlowe, Howard University sociologist, with the support of other Howard colleagues and students, to work on a book-length biography of Walker in 1984. The contract, totaling over \$78,000 and supervised by MARO Associate Director John Bond, called for the production of scholarly work describing Walker's personal and professional life, including her participation in business ventures, social and fraternal organizations, civic and religious groups, and politics. The research would provide the groundwork for exhibits, printed materials, and talks at the site. One of the problems discovered from the oral histories was that "certain myths surrounding Maggie Walker's life" existed, which needed greater dissection with an examination based on contemporary sources. Moreover, oral histories alluded to the great number of organizations with which Walker was involved, well beyond IOSL, and researchers were to determine the extent of her involvement in business, fraternal, and civic organizations, as well as with her relationships with other prominent African Americans at the time. Researchers planned to explore her personal life, including familial relationships and friendships, as well as the impact of her disability on her life. The due date of the biography was December 1986, an ambitious time frame, given the lightly processed state of the Walker collection and the sheer number of primary sources involved.⁶³

Researchers began by establishing their source base, timeline, and project scope. First, they reviewed newspapers, visited the home and met with Jackson and Jacox, and began to gather information on African American organizations, businesses, and other organizations in order to determine Walker's social networks and place her in context with

⁶² Amy Federico and Ethan Bullard, "MAWA Oral History Collection Summary," March and May 2013, Digital Resource in curator's collection; Diann Jacox, "Maggie Walker Oral History Project," Vols. 1&2.

⁶³ MLWHF Board Meeting Minutes, 9 May 1984, Box 1, Notebook 2, MLWHF; Cooperative Agreement between National Park Service and Howard University, September 1984, Box 1, Notebook 2, MLWHF; There is also a contract agreement, signed 1 October 1984, located in the Howard University Maggie L. Walker Biography Quarterly Report #1, October 1–December 31, 1984; Box 1, Notebook 2, MLWHF, 1.

Jackson Ward's development. They discovered her influence with the Richmond Council of Colored Women, the NAACP, and with the International Council of the Darker Races of the World and learned that she was an important player in Richmond politics. Several months later, they visited Richmond repositories and built a general chronology. The researchers noted, "The gaps and discrepancies [of the Walker timeline] are impressive." They also explained the difficulties of researching at MAWA, Consolidated Bank, and IOSL, which were not set up to accommodate research. While the project was not completed prior to the house's opening, ongoing research provided valuable information for staff preparing the tour script, and Celia (Jackson) Suggs cited the research in the bibliography of her tour orientation guide.⁶⁴

The tour orientation guide, written by Suggs while the Howard team researched the biography and crews worked on restoration, provided necessary information for docents. As Suggs explained in the guide, "Just as she inspired many during her lifetime, a good interpretive tour of her home can inform and inspire many who would want to know more about Mrs. Walker and the community in which she lived." Focusing on her personal life, philosophies, business and public concerns, and features of the house, the study situated Walker within the large movement of African American uplift and civil rights, Jackson Ward and community/economic development, and Black leadership in the early twentieth century. Suggs included a bibliography for docents to explore, which included Muriel Branch's and Dorothy Rice's biography for children, secondary sources about Black history in general, the oral histories conducted from 1981 to 1983, newspapers, the Historic Structures Report, and the *GMP*.⁶⁵

Suggs provided a basic summary of Walker's personal and professional life. She included information about Walker's father, her mother and stepfather, and her marriage to Armistead Walker and the birth of her three sons, as well as the purchase of the home in 1904. She related Walker's son Russell's accidental fatal shooting of Armistead in 1915, as well as her mother's and Russell's deaths in succession, her 1908 injury (broken kneecap), and her eventual wheelchair confinement in 1928. It explained that her funeral procession upon her death in 1934 was one of the largest ever held in Richmond. Suggs suggested describing the house filled with thirteen people, and the numerous guests who would stay at that time, including Nannie Helen Burroughs, Janie Porter Barrett, and Mary McLeod Bethune. She also offered ideas about when to discuss personal details; explaining that the living quarters, sun porch, and kitchenette would be good areas in which to educate visitors about how the Walkers lived. In the library, parlors, and Maggie Walker's bedroom and

⁶⁴ "Interim Report on the Maggie L. Walker Project," 1 May 1984, Department of Sociology/Anthropology, Howard, Early Park History Box; Quarterly Report #1, October-December 1984, 2; Celia Suggs, "Maggie L. Walker NHS: An Orientation," n.d., c. 1984-85, Box 3, Folder K-18.15 Maggie L. Walker NHS an Orientation Folder, Suggs.

⁶⁵ Suggs, "Maggie L. Walker NHS: An Orientation," bibliography, 26.

sunporch, Suggs told docents to discuss business and philanthropy concerns, including her work with IOSL and other fraternal organizations. She also included relevant quotes from Walker's diaries, so docents could use Walker's own words to illustrate important concepts.⁶⁶

Suggs also provided docents with a detailed architectural history of the Walker home. She explained the five stages of expansion, from the previous owner's additions to the inclusion of electricity and eleven rooms, as well as the enclosure of the porches, during Maggie Walker's lifetime. She included a floorplan with the descriptions of the rooms, including architectural features about woodwork, original tiles, and columns, as well as details about how NPS conducted wallpaper and paint analyses and created reproductions based on the samples and descriptions from oral histories. She described how the NPS restored the structure, beginning in 1979, and pointed out the new roof, plumbing, and wiring, as well as structural stabilization.⁶⁷

Although it is unclear exactly when Suggs completed the script for the house, it appears that the earliest working documents and research provided what she needed to educate docents. Betty Browning from Valley Forge NHS came to MAWA to assist Suggs in training tour guides in September 1984, and she attended a meeting of the MLWHF, who provided several volunteer docents for the home. Because the main method of interpretation relied on house tours, it was critical for NPS to develop a strong, informed, and reliable base of volunteers upon which they could draw when the house opened to visitors.⁶⁸

Recruiting for volunteers began in earnest at the end of 1984, with Suggs and Browning coordinating the program. An undated Type 61 Fund Information Sheet for the Volunteers in Parks Program (VIP), completed by Suggs at some point, explained the justification for VIP funding. Although undoubtedly completed later than July 1985, many of the concerns that she listed were the same as the ones faced upon the site's opening. At this time, she explained that VIPs were needed to staff the visitor center and oversee the bookstore and exhibits. She justified the cost of the expenses reimbursement by arguing that VIPs would protect natural and cultural resources, helping with documenting historical and ethnographical studies of the buildings, artifacts, and historic landscape, and educating the community on cultural preservation. VIPs would help with resource preservation as they assisted with conservation efforts, and would support visitors by helping with special programs and interpretive activities on- and off-site. Suggs expected that the VIPs would collaborate with community groups, like the Historic Jackson Ward Community Development Corporation, to "eradicate unacceptable conditions, unlawful acts to person and property." This would create a safer environment overall, reducing

⁶⁶ Suggs, "Maggie L. Walker NHS: An Orientation," 7, 24, 25.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 22–25.

⁶⁸ Muriel Branch, MLWHF Board Meeting Minutes, 12 September 1984, MLWHF Folder A22, Library Cabinet Drawer.

vandalism and violence endemic in the urban environment. She reiterated the significance of the Walker site, explaining it “has served as an anchor and an example of what can be accomplished in communities like the Jackson Ward National Historic Landmark District.” Suggs recognized the critical roles filled by VIPs when staff was limited.⁶⁹

Local NPS officials worked to recruit volunteers by reaching out to community networks. Putman created a form letter to send to interested people, explaining that participating in the site’s opening was “an opportunity to participate in the trials and the triumphs” associated with such an event. He argued that it was critical to promote the history of Walker, and that there were many volunteer opportunities available. These included working as a docent and helping with technical projects behind the scenes, like caring for the collections. Keith Morgan sent a letter directly to MLWHF members referencing the Memorandum of Agreement signed by both parties, explaining the kinds of duties VIPs could expect, including working to prepare exhibits and in cataloging and conservation. He also wrote directly to MLWHF member Phyllis Dance, asking if she and any other members could participate. He explained that staff needed tour guides to assist Thursday through Sunday, the days slated for tours to run continually. Volunteers would also work at special programs, including offsite slideshow presentations. And as noted earlier, both Suggs and Morgan attended MLWHF meetings.⁷⁰

Community Programming

The VIP program was just one way that the NPS staff tried to involve and interest the community in exploring and promoting the history of Maggie Walker and Jackson Ward. While concentrated on many efforts, from researching and completing the myriad reports necessitated by a site opening, to digging into the renovation process, staff could not afford to let the Walker site slip from the consciousness of the community while it was closed to the public. And in fact, community was always at the forefront of staff concerns. Celia Suggs remembered that from the earliest days, “we wanted it to be a community-based

⁶⁹ Celia Suggs, “Type 61 Fund Information Sheet: Volunteers in the Parks Program,” n.d., Box 4, Volunteer Program Justification Folder, Suggs. It is unclear when Suggs completed the form, but she mentioned Vision 2000 as one of the community groups with which VIPs could work. A project of the Richmond Renaissance association, Vision 2000 put out a report on Jackson Ward in 1988. In addition, the Jackson Ward Community Development Corporation formed in the 1980s. So, most likely, this sheet dates to a time near the opening of the site.

⁷⁰ Sylvester Putman, form letter, n.d., and Keith Morgan, Acting Superintendent, to MLWHF, 5 October 1984, both in Box 4, Folder 94 Correspondence (Volunteer) Folder, Suggs; Keith Morgan, Acting Superintendent, to Phyllis Dance, 5 October 1984, Box 1, Notebook 2, MLWHF. From 1983 to 1987, Richmond ranked number one in violent crime rates across the commonwealth, with an average 1,288 crimes committed per 100,000 people. The Department of Criminal Justice Services noted “Richmond’s rates of aggravated assault, murder/non-negligent manslaughter, rape, and robbery are unparalleled elsewhere,” Commonwealth of Virginia, The Department of Criminal Justice Services, *Violent Crime in Virginia*, May 1989, last accessed 15 September 2021, <https://www.ojp.gov/pdffiles1/Digitization/117249NCJRS.pdf>.

operation . . . we were supposed to be involved in what's going on in the community."⁷¹ With the assistance of the MLWHF, staff were able to compile both on- and off-site programming while the site was still officially closed to the public, helping to keep Maggie Walker at the top of mind, even though the construction zone kept people away from East Leigh Street.

A yearly celebration of Maggie Walker's birthday anchored the events staff and MLWHF sponsored. While the funding for restoration of the front rooms did not come through in time to open them for Walker's birthday commemoration in 1980, NPS still held a small celebration at the house attended by MLWHF members and friends. It ended with a wreath-laying ceremony presided over by the pastors of Sharon Baptist, Mount Moriah, and First African Baptist Churches, Putman, and the president of Consolidated Bank. The following year, NPS briefly opened the home on Walker's birthday for interested people to see the restoration process; MLWHF members Nancy Jo Taylor and E. D. McCreary wrote the press release for the event, noting that the event was also cosponsored by MLWHF. In 1982, the MLWHF hosted a dinner on Walker's birthday to honor the authors of a children's book on Walker, Muriel Branch and Dorothy Rice, both of whom were members of the MLWHF. Two hundred people attended, including the mayor and Richmond city officials.⁷²

Other programming supported the NPS mission of promoting the story of Maggie Walker and Jackson Ward. In 1980, Putman reported that sixty schoolchildren attended a "classroom on wheels" Grayline tour of the site, and Putman gave a tour to forty-five guides from the Virginia Museum (of Fine Arts, possibly, as there was no other Virginia Museum in Richmond at the time, or perhaps the Virginia Historical Society). Staff attended a career day at Virginia Union University and presented brochures on the site to the attendees of the national "Conference for a Black Agenda for the '80s." The following year, Nancy Jo Taylor led a two-hour tour of Jackson Ward. The Valentine Museum sponsored the tour for twenty people, which included a stop at the Maggie Walker site, in 1981. And by 1982, Putman noted that 1,500 people participated in programming, and that staff provided offsite programming and exhibits, conducted special tours of the site, fulfilled information requests, and assisted researchers.⁷³

⁷¹ Celia Suggs, Interviewed by Megan Shockley, 24 June 2021, 22.

⁷² Sylvester Putman, Superintendent's Annual Report, 1980; John Brown Jr., caption, "Birthday Remembered," *Richmond Afro-American*, 26 July 1980, 13; "A Pilgrimage to the Grave of Mrs. Maggie Lena Walker, 15 July 1980," Box 1, Notebook 1, MLWHF; Nancy Jo Taylor and E. D. McCreary, "Maggie Lena Walker's Birthday Celebrated Amid Restoration Process," Press Release, 1981, Box 1, Notebook 1, MLWHF; "Birthday Celebration to Mark 115th," *Richmond Afro-American*, 15 July 1981, clipping, Central Files, K34 News Media Folder; Sylvester Putman, Superintendent's Annual Report, 1982, 15.

⁷³ Putman, Superintendent's Annual Report, 1980, 13; Cassandra Wynn, "Black History Comes Alive on Tour of Jackson Ward," *Richmond Times-Dispatch*, 16 February 1981, A9; Putman, Superintendent's Annual Report, 1982, 14.

The Opening

In July 1985, after six years of work and half a million dollars expended, the restored house museum finally opened to the public. NPS staff marked the day with a special opening ceremony. Keith Morgan exclaimed to staff, “We have finally made it!” and asked all staff and volunteers to show up ready to work, with staff in their Class A dress uniforms, looking “as sharp as you can.” Maggie Laura Walker Lewis cut the ribbon to mark the official opening in front of a platform of political, business, and civic leaders, including pastors of two large African American churches, State Senator Douglas Wilder, the Richmond city mayor, the vice mayor, the city manager, representatives from Richmond Renaissance, MLWHF members, the Chairman of Consolidated Bank & Trust, and the Director of IOSL. Most notable, perhaps, was the presence of high-level NPS personnel, including Director William Mott, Chief Historian Ed Bearss, and MARO Director James Coleman. This suggests the important place the Walker site had in the new program of inclusion and expansion set by NPS in the 1970s. A crowd of hundreds heard Richmond School Superintendent Dr. Lois Halwsrrison, the first African American woman to run a large city school system, give the keynote, and then stood outside in a line stretching around the block to take the tour. Despite the July heat, the day seemed a great success.⁷⁴

Conclusion

The Maggie L. Walker site benefited from the expertise of local, regional, and national NPS staff, as well as community leaders and academic/professional researchers, as they worked together to develop and implement plans for the site’s restoration/renovation, protection, and interpretation. The staff who researched and wrote these plans operated at a time of contraction for the NPS, caused primarily by Reagan-era budget cuts. Their plans could not be completed by the time the Walker house opened, and some would never come to fruition. It was surely a challenge to draft these documents while the Walker house was undergoing extensive renovation. Still, the staff’s interpretive vision helped to shape the direction of research on Maggie Walker’s life and community, as well as the development of the site itself. The failure of full implementation during this period suggests how difficult large-scale renovation would have been, given the lack of funding received and the deteriorated state of the buildings. Given the limitations posed by these two challenges, perhaps

⁷⁴ Jerry Lazarus, “Walker Mansion Will Open on July 14”; Keith Morgan to Interpretive Staff and Volunteers, 12 July 1985, and “Platform Guests for Opening Dedication Ceremony,” both in Maggie L. Walker 1985 Dedication Ceremony A-82.15 Folder, Library File Cabinet. While it is unclear whether or not the visitors received a house tour, a work chart for the day that can be found in the folder listed in this citation suggests that there were floaters in the house, suggesting more of an open-house style tour with folks walking through in line; “Maggie Walker House Opens,” *Richmond Afro-American*, 20 July 1985, 1, 12.

we can consider instead how much the staff managed to do with a small budget but large-scale community support. As the house opened to the public, the overwhelmingly positive community response made the need for more inclusive NPS sites more apparent.



Visitors standing in line to see the restored Walker house interior at the 1985 opening ceremony

CHAPTER THREE

Expansion

The period between July 1985 and April 1997, the opening of the visitor center, marked a time of intense activity at MAWA. After the opening of the Maggie Walker house to the public and the establishment of a preliminary interpretive framework, staff focused on advancing critical NPS initiatives in managing cultural resources, expanding interpretation and programming, and, in the early 1990s, working with the community to meet larger preservation goals. Much of the work happened under the supervision of Cynthia (Cindy) MacLeod, who served as Superintendent from 1990 to 2008. She took a dynamic leadership role onsite, supervising major construction projects, and in the greater Richmond community to raise awareness about MAWA and the ongoing precariousness of Jackson Ward’s historic integrity in the face of development. By April 1997, the Maggie L. Walker National Historic Site boasted several major building restorations, which included a new visitor center. It also had a collections management program, a robust school education program, a completed biography that advanced site interpretation, and strong community partnerships with preservation and commerce/tourism/civic organizations. Still, problems continued to challenge the site, namely, the destruction of historic buildings that threatened the site’s historic landscape, lack of parking, and inadequate funding that held up projects and kept the site understaffed.

As the Superintendent of the site, Cindy MacLeod’s interest was in preservation; as an architectural historian, she saw the value of the historic Jackson Ward neighborhood and the stories told by the buildings. She argued that the Walker house itself was not impressive from an architectural standpoint—it was, in fact, “ordinary” comparatively, but she also understood the importance of the stories the house could tell, and began to, in her words, “encourage more research into Maggie Walker.” She also recalled becoming interested in the privately owned St. Luke Building, which she found more important than the house itself. As MacLeod explained, “[Walker] hired the architect. She paid for the building. It was her vision.” Although MAWA never extended its boundary to acquire the St. Luke Building, it was clear when MacLeod arrived that her era would see a twofold expansion. One, focused on the site, saw physical changes, as well as a more robust interpretation. The other would focus the preservation effort outward, as MacLeod fought changes that wrought damage to the historic neighborhood.¹

¹ Cindy MacLeod, interviewed by Megan Shockley, 29 August 2021 3, 7.

As MacLeod worked in Richmond to expand the scope of MAWA's influence, national NPS leaders set an ambitious plan for the twenty-first century. To this end, seventy-five park leaders, academics, park staff, community advocates, and park supporters met to investigate and discuss the challenges and successes and future of the NPS to mark the anniversary of its seventy-fifth year. With them, they brought the findings of working groups across the country who made recommendations about resource management, organizational streamlining, and accessibility. The end result of this gathering was *The Vail Agenda* in 1992, which established goals for the NPS to achieve in the 2000s. These included providing access to a more diverse public, empowering its personnel to serve as leaders on park issues at local, national, and even international levels, and widening its research to incorporate the newest historiographical, sociological, and scientific work of scholars. As the Maggie Walker site expanded, visitation rose, and the staff's focus on high-quality restoration and preservation, leadership in the preservation community, development of a progressive, inclusive scholarly narrative to support the interpretive program, and partnership with local organizations made it stand out. In essence, MAWA could be considered a perfect example of the *Vail Agenda's* goals.

Managing Cultural Resources: Expanding Restoration

When the NPS purchased the buildings on the block surrounding the Walker house, almost all but one was vacant, and all had been neglected. Once the Walker house opened to the public, work on restoring the other buildings began in earnest, when the money was available. From 1985 to 1988, contractors installed new roofs and restored the cornices of 112 and 114 E. Leigh Street, removed the paint from 114's exterior, and took the front facade off of the laundromat. By the end of 1988, NPS had spent \$53,000 on projects related to 116–118 E. Leigh Street, including painting the exterior and removing the front yard and wall at 114 E. Leigh. In 1989, Superintendent Dwight Storke told members of the Maggie L. Walker Historical Foundation (MLWHF) that the site was the third funding priority in the Mid-Atlantic Region, and by that time, workers were busy removing the layers of exterior paint from remaining buildings and installing an upgrade to the security and computer system. That same year, contractors replaced deteriorated wood and repainted the Walker house porch. Workers also painted the buildings next to the Walker

house, removed the front yard and wall of 114 E. Leigh Street, and worked on the facades of 600–602 N. 2nd Street, in anticipation of a major restoration project by the NPS Williamsport Training Program, slated to begin in 1990.²



Streetscape of NPS-owned buildings on East Leigh Street prior to renovation/restoration

² “Historic Treasures Revived, ‘A Perspective,’” n.d., but printed for the 10th Anniversary of the Maggie L. Walker NHS, 1988, Box 4, “Historic Treasures Revived” Folder, Suggs; Dwight Storke, Annual Report 1988, Box 1, Annual Reports Folder, Suggs; MLWHF Board Meeting Minutes, 14 December 1988, Box 1, Notebook 3, MLWHF; MLWHF Board Meeting Minutes, 13 September 1989, MLWHF, Library Drawer 1, Folder A-22 MLWHF; Keith Morgan, Acting Superintendent, Annual Report of the Richmond National Battlefield Park and Maggie L. Walker National Historic Site, 1989, Central Files, Superintendent’s Annual Reports Folder.

Expansion



Streetscape: Corner of E. Leigh and N. 2nd showing NPS-owned buildings prior to renovation/restoration

Cindy MacLeod's entry as superintendent marked a great period of restoration and renovation at the site. As she remembered, the previous longtime superintendent Sylvester Putman had a limited vision when it came to site expansion. She recalled, "He thought everything was done. He thought both parks were . . . wrapped up with a bow and ready to just be. And I was like, oh my gosh, there is so much left to do." Although Superintendent Dwight C. Storke Jr. laid the groundwork from 1988 to 1989 and Interim Superintendent Keithel (Keith) C. Morgan oversaw its development from 1989 to 1990, the work done under MacLeod's leadership through 1997 restored the buildings back to how they looked in the 1920s. Construction also provided needed infrastructure for park personnel and visitors. This work reflected one *Vail Agenda* goal: "The repair and maintenance of existing park facilities should be undertaken and designed to fulfill the purpose of conveying park values to the public, while protecting the special qualities of each park unit."³ MAWA represented a model of historic restoration in a community long neglected, and its centrality in Jackson Ward, located on the historic "Quality Row" and major commercial thoroughfare, enabled the NPS to claim a well-deserved role as a leader in neighborhood preservation efforts.

The first major project brought in the Day Labor Crew from the Williamsport Preservation Training Center to work on the exteriors of 600 N. 2nd Street and 116–118 E. Leigh Street. These building projects had been prioritized by MARO architect Reed Engle. In 1989, the crew stabilized and installed second-floor windows at 600 N. 2nd Street. Between February and August 1990 under the supervision of Randall Copeland, WPTC Project Supervisor, and Lynn Keener, project leader, work crews reconstructed doors and windows for 600 N. 2nd in Williamsport, bringing them to MAWA for installation. They refaced the brick around the installations, repaired cornices, built vents into the roof soffits, and removed the framing and roof of the laundromat. They then reconstructed the original building walls, matching the original veneer with pressed brick, and took down the chimneys in both 600 and 602. They repaired cornices, soffits, rafters, and trim in 116–118 E. Leigh Street. The cost of this exterior work totaled \$103,400. This work radically altered the streetscape on the block behind and beside the Walker house. In addition, as MARO Director James Coleman explained to MLWHF members on a visit in 1989, it provided valuable experience to the trainees.⁴

A running list of repairs during this period illustrates the poor condition of the homes. Crews restored fencing and other wooden structures in anticipation of painting 114 E. Leigh Street. In 1990, the NPS provided \$10,815 to repair rotted wood at the Walker

³ Cindy MacLeod, interviewed by Megan Shockley, 3; National Park Service, *National Parks for the Twenty-First Century: The Vail Agenda*, 22.

⁴ Michael Colyer and Lynn Keener, "Preservation Projects: Maggie L. Walker National Historic Site 600&602 North Second Street and 116-118 E. Leigh Street, Richmond National Battlefield Park, Richmond, Virginia, 1990." Available in digital form in E-TIC and in hard copy in library drawer, Folder D-10 Maggie L. Walker; MLWHF Board Meeting Minutes, 8 February 1989, Box 1, Notebook 3, MLWHF.

House. In 1991, cornice work on some structures was delayed as the contractor left before completing the job, and the NPS staff did metalwork. Williamsport Training Center staff also returned to work on the facade and install an exterior porch and walkway on 600 N. 2nd. In 1992, cyclic work funding priorities included rebuilding the back wall, repointing and repairing the southside wall, and providing new roof support to remove temporary bracing from 600 North 2nd Street; repointing the rear alcove of 602; and repairing or replacing the cornice frieze on the north ell walls of 116–118. Crews repointed exterior walls on 118 E Leigh and 600–602 N. 2nd Street and reopened a wall of 600–602. They also installed a new canopy, touched up paint, planted bushes, put in planters, and repaired plaster in the kitchen at the Walker house.⁵

In 1992, researchers also determined how to restore the buildings around the Walker house to the proper time period. Looking at the Sanborn Fire Maps of 1925 and 1954, they determined that the owners of 116 and 118 E. Leigh Street had completely renovated the buildings sometime in the 1950s. Owners removed a porch from the east side of 118 and installed a second-story bathroom. The researchers also asserted that a picket fence had stood in front of 600–602, and that 602 had a second-floor porch. This kind of research was critical for ascertaining how the restoration work would proceed, in order to craft the most accurate streetscape.⁶

As work proceeded, MacLeod sought funding from wherever she could to support these costly projects. In 1993, she asked for funding from the Rebuild America project to repaint all Leigh Street exteriors, mitigate the lead paint problems, and replace the exterior fabric. Staff repaired all the screen frames, supported the foundation of the Walker house with a jacking post, and completed a full electrical upgrade of the home to allow for a new HVAC upgrade. Crews replaced the roof and repointed brick in 116–118 and 600–602. In 1995 and 1996, the Walker house received brick repointing and UV-blocking windows. The next year, three roofs got new coats of paint and snow guards. Cyclic funds covered all

⁵ Cynthia MacLeod, Annual Narrative Report, 1990 RICH and MAWA, Box 1, Annual Report Folder, Suggs; “Memo from Chief, Williamsport Training Center, HFC to MARO Director, Re: Maggie L. Walker NHS FY 1991 Preservation Project, 19 February 1991,” MAWA Park Records Box, Maggie Walker House-Roofing Folder; Jeffrey Pascale to Chief, Park Historic Preservation Through Chief, Historic Architecture (Acting), 27 November 1990; Box 2, Folder D-52.17 Planning (Misc.) Maggie Walker House, Suggs Muriel Branch, MLWHF Board Meeting Minutes, 13 February 1991, Box 1, Notebook 3, MLWHF; Chief, Williamsport Training Center, to MARO Director re: Maggie L. Walker House NHS FY 91 Preservation Project, MAWA Park Records Box, Maggie Walker House—Roofing Folder; Cindy MacLeod to Linda Maiden, MARO, re: Scope of Work, 11 August 1992, MAWA Park Records Box, Folder 112 Leigh Street Repair Porches; Cynthia MacLeod, Annual Narrative Report, 1992, Central Files, Superintendent’s Reports Folder.

⁶ D5217 Subject “Review of Data for Site Structures 116-118 E. Leigh Street; 600; 602; and 02 ½ North Second Street, 15 October 1992,” top drawer, file cabinet, Superintendent’s Office, Jackson Ward Folder 1.

manner of work, including Leigh Street building structures/foundation repairs in 1997, which were sketched out by Dick Dretsch of MARO. By 1994, NPS had already spent almost \$3 million on repairs.⁷

As noted above, because of the age of the homes, lead paint contamination was a continuing concern. In 1993, Annette Skinner of the Industrial Training Company reported her findings from a lead inspection for 114 E. Leigh in which she noted the interiors were within acceptable lead level guidelines. The exteriors were dangerous, however, because flaking paint and paint chip debris left from prior projects posed a contamination threat to the surrounding soil. John Ingle and Dick Dretsch from MARO notified RICH Chief of Maintenance Jerry Helton that they would come down to look over specs and test the lead content of the Walker house and 112 in preparation of stripping and repainting the porches of 112 and 114. MacLeod noted in her annual report from 1994 that lead abatement and repainting comprised part of the cyclic budget.⁸

MacLeod also asked for Architecture and Engineering plans for 600–602 N. 2nd and 114 E. Leigh at a cost of \$28,000, in the “Rebuild America” funding request. Although it was unclear whether the money came from this grant or not, in 1996 a group of architects and engineers produced the “Leigh Street Structures Restoration Report,” which focused on the facades and some interiors of 112–118 E. Leigh Street. The Charlottesville architecture group Browne, Eichman, Dalglish, & Paxton, P.C., drew on photos from the *Historic Structures Report* to design a plan to restore facades to their appearance in 1920. This would require reconstruction or renovation of all front porches (all but 112 had been removed), based on the similar porches across the street. The Valentine Museum had a picture of the original porch ironwork. The report included a paint analysis: 112 was most likely always white, 118 was probably gray with a white or green shed addition, and the others were indeterminate because of “diligent painting preparation over the years” or neglect.⁹

⁷ Cindy MacLeod to MARO Director, 9 April 1993 and “National Park Service Mid-Atlantic Region Economic Stimulus Project Documentation, RICH/MAWA Cyclical Maintenance, 11 March 1993” both in top drawer, Superintendent’s Office, Folder Economic Stimulus; Cynthia MacLeod, Superintendent’s Annual Report, Richmond NPB/Maggie L. Walker NHS CY 1994-1995, 5, and Cynthia MacLeod, Richmond National Battlefield Park, Maggie L. Walker National Historic Site, Northeast Field Area Annual Report, Fiscal Year 1996, both in Central Files, Superintendent’s Reports Folder; Management Team Meeting Status Reports (Hereafter MTM), 9 January 1997, Box 1, Folder A 40.35 MTM 1997, Suggs; Historic Jackson Ward Vision 2000 Annual Report, 5 December 1994, 21-2, Top drawer, file cabinet in Superintendent’s Office, Jackson Ward National Register Documentation Folder.

⁸ Annette Skinner, “Report of Findings: Lead Inspection for 114 Leigh Street,” March 1993, MAWA Park Records Box, Folder 112 Leigh Street Repairs; Fax Cover Sheet to Jerry Helton from John Ingle 29 April 1993 and “Assessment of Actions Having an Effect on Cultural Resources” form for MAWA, MAWA Park Records Box, Roofing Folder; MacLeod, Superintendent’s Annual Report ... CY 1994-1995, 5. There was a note attached to the records of “Assessment of Actions” saying that they would hold off on 112 for the time being.

⁹ Browne, Eichman, Dalglish, & Paxton, P.C., Historic Architects, Charlottesville, with Hanover Engineer, P.C., and Preservation Services Inc., “Leigh Street Structures Restoration,” Quote on 2, MAWA Reports Box.

As the architects worked, the Hanover Engineers examined the structural integrity of the buildings. They determined that there was water damage in the framing of 112, bad floor joists in 114 supported by deteriorating timber beams and crumbling brick, and cracks in the walls. A mud-filled pit between the structures suggested a plumbing problem. Inspection of building 116 showed insect damage, all first-floor framing above the cellar deficient, and not enough structural support in the walls because of removals when ductwork was installed. Building 118 had prior fire damage in first-floor joists, missing bricks in the supports, and moisture. In the Walker home, ductwork renovation was also left settling where the walls were now inadequately supported. In addition, the engineers noted potential water damage in joists under the first-floor bathroom.¹⁰ The amount of work that had already been done, coupled with the work left to do, illustrates how the absence of owner-occupants facilitated decades of deterioration.

Restoration work in this period was not without its challenges. The perennial problem, it seems, was a limited budget. Money issues held up renovations, and MacLeod consistently commented in her annual reports about the fiscal challenges facing the site's restoration projects. In her 1990 annual report, MacLeod noted that workers from the Williamsport Training Center were busy on the N. 2nd St. buildings, "renovating those buildings, whenever the money is available." In fact, the work done by the Williamsport Training Center in 1991 had actually been approved in 1987, and presumably the holdup was likely getting the finances to do it. In 1993, MacLeod wrote that although MARO provided \$358,500 in cyclic funds for restoration and building stabilization because MAWA was one of very few sites dedicated to African American history, "it should receive more recognition and financial support for stabilization and restoration of its buildings." The next year, she posited that "an operating budget of \$194,000 kept MAWA at a minimal level, with visitor services severely under-funded and maintenance and restoration activities limited." Acknowledging that the \$227,700 provided in cyclic funds for work on the buildings boosted the budget, MAWA had to count on the RICH budget for supervisory staff compensation.¹¹

And even if they had the money, maintaining the structures that had suffered from neglect for so long was an ongoing challenge. The 1996 *Resource Management Plan* laid out the blueprint for future projects, as well as ongoing threats to the structures. The plan noted that pest control would remain critical, as insects and vermin threatened not only buildings but artifacts. It suggested that staff try to mitigate pests without the use of chemicals if possible, to protect the artifacts, and monitor them monthly. The plan called for buildings to be included in the updated List of Classified Structures, which the MARO

¹⁰ Ibid. The Structural Report can be found inserted within the larger report.

¹¹ Cynthia MacLeod, Memo to Regional Director, MARO, Subject: Annual Narrative Report 1990, 8 April 1991; Cynthia MacLeod, Annual Narrative Report, 1992; Cynthia MacLeod, Superintendent's Annual Report Maggie L. Walker National Historic Site 1993, 1, all in Central Files, Superintendent's Reports Folder.

architect was revising, as well as an updated Cultural Resources Bibliography and a Historic Structure Preservation Guide which could help determine guidelines for repair and cyclic maintenance. The plan noted that all buildings either had or would have updated climate control and security, but none had modern fire suppression systems, just fire detection alarms. Only the Walker house had an alarm system by 1996, but renovation plans included alarm installation. Staff continued to perform building maintenance on a scheduled basis, although the schedule was not part of the formal cyclic plan. Instead, the plan called for a set schedule to investigate “problem symptoms” and “determine the legal/policy requirements and the extent of preservation needed for the 20th century historic buildings.”¹²

Collections Management

The buildings were not the only artifacts that required increased attention in this decade. Staff had constantly worked on the manuscript and small artifact collection since receiving the items through donation, and this period of expansion saw more conservation and archival management activity. Staff upgraded facilities, conserved and cataloged the collections, and set policies. While they made significant progress, by the time of the visitor center opening, archival management remained a concern.

In 1985, Celia Suggs, now a MAWA historian, raised issues about the ownership over the intellectual rights of the Walker collection. This sparked a conversation between MARO staff about who actually owned the copyright. Bob Marra of the Regional Solicitor’s office originally believed that the property, but not the rights, had been transferred. MARO Associate Regional Director John Bond cited a 1979 letter from the former Chief of Land Acquisition to the Lewis family attorney as evidence that the property rights were indeed part of the original transfer. Marra wanted a bill of sale, but Bond was concerned that “we may stir up something if we go back and request a Confirmatory Bill of Sale and Dr. Lewis is sick and tired of the matter.” He was also concerned that the Lewises might want more money for additional rights. NERO attorney Anthony Conte sided with Marra, explaining the issue was about whether the original bill of sale transferred the actual intellectual property rights. Regional officials reviewed the original documentation, and in 1986 MARO Associate Director Julian Bond notified the superintendent that after review of the letter given to Maggie Laura Walker Lewis’s lawyer by the former Chief of Land

¹² *Resource Management Plan, Maggie L. Walker National Historic Site*, Draft. 1996, 9–10, 30, 32, 15, Quote on 15, MAWA Park Records Box.

Acquisition, the NPS did indeed own the physical and literary rights to the collection. By 1993, Chief of Interpretation David Ruth confirmed to a historian the NPS did indeed own the rights, and the matter was settled.¹³

Wrestling with how to manage the collection was not limited to understanding ownership rights. From the outset, staff had to contend with subpar storage facilities as they worked to catalog and conserve manuscripts and artifacts. This collection included manuscripts and artifacts from the Independent Order of St. Luke. The NPS began to acquire papers when the IOSL moved out of the St. Luke Building in 1981 and added to the collection when the IOSL went into receivership with the State Board of Insurance in the mid-1980s. Retired curator Hyman Schwartzberg remembered going to the building and securing donated artifacts from the insurance commissioner in charge, including office machinery, which was a departure from what the collection had acquired before. At the time, he wrote that he planned to create an operations manual for “Historic Housekeeping” and “Collections Accessibility,” as well as catalog all items on exhibit, while Suggs planned to work on a card catalog system. In 1989, Acting Superintendent Keith Morgan reported that staff built an area to hold artifacts, “a saving’s [*sic*] to the park.” By the following year, staff had completed cataloging over four thousand artifacts within the house and were progressing in their work on the manuscript collection.¹⁴

In 1991, staff upgraded the humidifier in the home. The following year, curator Hyman Schwartzberg informed Regional Curator Bill Jedlick of the need for two hydro-thermographs and a four-drawer insulated file cabinet. In 1993, a contractor completed a Collections Management Plan, and developed a guide for storage and prioritization of work. In 1994, the MLWHF realized that there were artifacts at the St. Luke Building, now owned by the Stallings family. MLWHF board members Nancy Jo Taylor purchased a few artifacts, and Bill Sydnor secured some as well. Taylor planned to discuss creating an inventory with Sydnor, and Muriel Branch said that Sydnor planned to donate his items. Johnny Mickens determined to speak with Stallings about plans for the building. It was not until 2020, however, that the NPS would secure the bulk of manuscripts from the IOSL

¹³ Celia Suggs to Staff, Maggie L. Walker NHS, 11 December 1985; James Coleman to Anthony Conte, 20 September 1985; Anthony Conte to MARO Director, March 1986; John Bond to RICH Superintendent, 5 June 1986; “Recording of Telephone Conversation,” 4 June 1986 all in MAWA Reports Box, Folder H-30-19, Maggie L. Walker Literary Rights; John Bond to Superintendent, Richmond NBP, 5 June 1986, in “literary rights correspondence” digital folder held by the curator; David Ruth to Suzanne Lebsock, 3 March 1993, MAWA Reports Box, Folder H-30-19, Maggie L. Walker Literary Rights.

¹⁴ Hyman and Janet Schwartzberg, interview with Megan Shockley, 19 July 2021, 17; Keith C. Morgan, 1988 Annual Statement for Interpretation; Maggie L. Walker National Historic Site, 17 May 1988, Box 3, FY 1998 Interpretive Report Folder, Suggs; Keith Morgan, Annual Report 1989; Ethan Bullard, notes on first and second draft.

building. By 1996, the park received CRPP money to help complete the MAWA cataloging, and in 1997 the site received a \$5,000 grant to restore artifacts on exhibit in the Walker house.¹⁵

Even with the upgrades to policies and storage, the 1996 *Resource Management Plan* identified the work still to be done in order to best care for the artifacts onsite. Although the plan noted that the 15,000 artifacts and 5,000 manuscript items (including the 2,500 on exhibit) were in climate-controlled storage, it identified the vault as “substandard and the items are subject to humidity and temperature fluctuations.” Moreover, the vault did not meet NPS standards for protection against fire, theft, or climate variation, and did not meet minimum space requirements. The plan also explained that only about half the collection had been inventoried to this point. The MARO curator suggested a contractor to complete the work, because staff time was so limited. The artifacts also needed to be entered into the Automated National Cataloging System. The plan noted that once the visitor center was complete, the staff could implement the Collections Management Plan by creating a workspace and building a vault with storage that met curatorial standards.¹⁶

In addition, staff had amassed hours of oral histories, which needed transcribing. By 1986, Jacox and Suggs had completed Volumes I and II of the transcriptions. Suggs reported a plan to complete more transcripts in 1988, presumably of the oral histories she began to collect in the 1980s after the first round of interviews had been completed and transcribed. These interviews focused on people who lived in Jackson Ward, who worked for IOSL, or who knew Walker, and Suggs recorded these directly onto audio cassettes. MacLeod again noted that the staff attempted to clear the oral history backlog in 1993, but ultimately the collection was not fully cataloged and organized until 2013.¹⁷

The *Resource Management Plan* also identified records that were not part of the original accession but were nonetheless critical to the park’s history—the records created by the NPS staff itself. It stated that the park’s collection of blueprints, photos, plans, and other documentation was not protected or organized, and that the state of the records “contribute to confusion, disorganization, and space shortages within the park’s

¹⁵ Cynthia MacLeod to MARO Regional Director, 8 April 1991; Cynthia MacLeod, Richmond National Battlefield Park and The Maggie L. Walker National Historic Site Annual Narrative Report 1991; Cynthia MacLeod, Annual Narrative Report 1992; Hyman Schwartz to Files RICH/MAWA, 30 October 1992; top drawer, Superintendent’s Office, Economic Stimulus Folder; Cynthia MacLeod, Superintendent’s Annual Report Maggie L. Walker National Historic Site 1993; Muriel Branch, MLWHF Board Meeting Minutes, 14 September 1994, Library Drawer 1, Maggie L. Walker Historical Foundation Folder; Superintendent’s Annual Report, Richmond National Battlefield Park, Maggie L. Walker National Historic Site, Northeast Field Area Annual Report, FY 96; MLWHF Board Meeting Minutes, 9 April 1997, Box 1, Folder MOU, Suggs.

¹⁶ *Resource Management Plan, Maggie L. Walker National Historic Site*, draft, 1996, 11, 19, 17. Quote on 11.

¹⁷ Keithel C. Morgan, 1988 Annual Statement for Interpretation, 22; MacLeod, Superintendent’s Annual Report Maggie L. Walker National Historic Site 1993; Amy Federico and Ethan Bullard, “Oral History Collection Summary,” March 2013; Revised May 2013, digital document in possession of curator.

administrative archives, interpretive research archives, and museum collection.” This park collection needed to be included in the records management plan, and all materials, including the newer park records, needed to be stored in acid-free materials and shelving. These records, it explained, were a critical part of cultural resources management, and all should be moved to a central location.¹⁸

Although construction of the new visitor center space was complete by April 1997, the collection of artifacts remained under threat, according to NERO Museum Services Center Senior Curator Janice Hodson. At the request of the Denver Service Center, she traveled to view collections at MAWA, RICH, and Appomattox Court House National Historical Park. Hodson explained that all of the MAWA records and artifacts were still stored in four rooms of the Walker house and two levels of the garage, which was so overcrowded no one could access or maintain the collection. The artifacts in the garage received minimal protection. Although the new visitor center had 200 square feet of curatorial space with 132.5 square feet for a vault and reference section with fire systems and shaded windows in place, the temperatures were not adequate for collection storage, as they had been installed with visitors, rather than the collection, in mind. She said that should the entire park system consolidate its collection, as stated in the RICH collection management plan, at least 1,510 square feet of storage would be needed, with its own refrigeration, humidity, and temperature controls to create the perfect microclimate for the larger collection.¹⁹

Although staff knew what needed to be done to preserve and maintain artifacts, they were constrained by lack of space and money. Still, documentation about the amount spent on curatorial work during this period shows that it was a priority. Although curatorial was not broken out in the 1989 Annual Interpretive Program report, based on other categories, it may well have received \$10,880 out of the \$98,082 budget. In 1991, curatorial received the highest percentage of the interpretive budget allocation—\$29,777 out of \$98,506. In 1993, curatorial work received \$34,790 of the interpretive budget that totaled \$110,100. The only category higher was for General Management and Administration, which was \$38,216. In 1996, curatorial and research comprised \$48,048 of the total interpretive budget of \$109,000, by far the largest portion of the budget, although it is unclear how much of that would have been designated as the research portion of curatorial work.

¹⁸ Ibid., 20.

¹⁹ Janice Hodson to Bob Holzheimer, 7 April 1997. Drawer 2, File Cabinet in Superintendent’s Office, Folder MAWA-10238 Rehab.

By 2010–11, the park’s structure got reorganized so that curatorial fell under the Resource Management Division rather than interpretation, but until that point, interpretation funded the work done in curatorial at MAWA.²⁰

Archeology

During this period, as staff conserved and cataloged artifacts and manuscripts, archeologists worked outside the buildings. Although archeological activity often conserves cultural resources, at the Walker site, excavation furthered interpretation. It appears that archeology’s main contribution at MAWA was to better explain the urban history of the site. NPS staff had repeatedly called for an archeological excavation of the site in order to better understand the urban landscape. An undated report suggests that the work eventually happened. The goals of the dig were to locate the placement of outbuildings, fences, plants, and paving, as well as to “identify stratigraphy and historic grades.” It would also “assess significance for future compliance” as well as identify any “probable results” of a future larger dig. It found over a foot of coal ash and other debris in some portions of the yard, and potential drain construction at the intersection of the garage and carriage house. There had been an outbuilding between 112 and 114 and fencing in the corner of a lot. The dig located the position of plantings and confirmed that the Sanborn maps were accurate. Unfortunately, construction debris dumped behind 112’s lot suggested that a dig would not be as useful for finding evidence of residents’ activities, but the writer saw more potential behind 600–602 N. 2nd, as the site likely had a privy; in fact, the writer determined the area eligible for the National Register.²¹

Subsequent archeological explorations provided evidence of early twentieth-century domestic life, as well as construction activities. In 1994, MARO’s Allen Cooper monitored the trench parging project around 600–602 N. 2nd to discover any artifacts. He noted that the ash sublayer, as well as several kitchen-related artifacts, held promise of greater discovery with a major excavation. That excavation occurred several months later, and archeologists uncovered evidence of kitchen detritus, building materials, and a few other examples of early twentieth-century domestic life. An Archeological Mitigation Plan (1995) determined the course of action needed to determine that the work done would have “no

²⁰ U.S. Department of the Interior Annual Interpretive Program Report, FY 1989, MAWA; U.S. Department of the Interior Annual Interpretive Program Report, FY 1991, MAWA; U.S. Department of the Interior Annual Interpretive Program Report, FY 1993, MAWA; U.S. Department of the Interior Annual Interpretive Program Report, FY 1996, MAWA, all in Central Administration Files, Folder K2621 Annual Reports. Note from Ethan Bullard from comments on second draft of this manuscript.

²¹ “MAWA Archeology” Report, n.d., drawer 2, file cabinet, Superintendent’s Office, MAWA 10-238 rehab folder. Stratigraphy is essentially the study of rock strata.

adverse effect” ruling by National Historic Landmark Officials. The report cited three previous archeological digs which located the original foundations for 600–602 N. 2nd, deposits of coal ash, as well as a layer of “domestic refuse” which included manganese glass dated to post-1915, as well as one that found the garage had been “severely impacted by deposition of construction debris” most likely from neighboring structures, which was not historically significant. It proposed a block excavation survey to examine the fill and the potential privy in the back of 114 to locate evidence of household activities throughout the decades. In 1997, Allen Cooper returned to conduct a dig behind buildings 114–118 E. Leigh, determining the placement of porches. At this point, these areas behind the buildings were added to the revision of the National Historic Register nomination for their archeological significance.²²

Protecting the Site from Outside Threats

Pests, moisture, and deterioration posed threats to the buildings and collections, but staff also had to guard against problems created by MAWA’s urban environment. This problem was not unique to MAWA; the *Vail Agenda* participants wrote that across the country, urban sites faced the challenge of “fighting to maintain the quality of their park units as their neighborhoods struggle with severe economic and social problems.” The report cited violence and drug use as threats that “ignore park boundaries” and made policing more complicated.²³

The 1985 *Land Protection Plan* explained that the decades prior to the NPS site establishment had not been prosperous ones for the neighborhood. Noting the construction of the highway, suburban flight, and the decline of the central business district, the plan described Jackson Ward as a neighborhood lacking in “cohesiveness” and “prestige”

²² Allen Cooper, “Archeological Monitoring of Parging Trenches, 600–602 North Second Street, Maggie L. Walker National Historic Site, Richmond, Virginia,” 1994, digital archive; R. Christopher Goodwin and Associates Final Report: Archeological Investigation at the Maggie L. Walker National Historic Site,” 6 March 1995, digital archive; “Archeological Mitigation Plan, Maggie L. Walker National Historic Site, Richmond, VA,” n.d., MAWA Park History Box, MALW Nomination Revision FY 96 Folder. Although it is undated, there is a note attached dated 8 May and 15 May 1995, so I believe it dates back to when the visitor center construction was well underway; Allen Cooper, “Archeological Investigations for Reconstruction of East Leigh Street Porches, Maggie L. Walker National Historic Site, Richmond Virginia,” 1997, digital archive. In 1995, Cooper and David Orr also conducted a dig around the cinderblock garage, determining that what originally had been considered a drainage pipe was actually a track for a garage door—David Orr and Allen Cooper, “Archeological Testing, Cinder Block Garage, 112 E. Leigh Street, Maggie L. Walker National Historic Site, Richmond, Virginia,” 1995, digital archive. A draft of the 1997 revision describes the courtyard seating area as designed to reflect the fence lines and natural plantings discovered during excavations: “Section 7, Draft 6/97,” 9, Box 2, Folder H.32, Maggie L. Walker House National Register Nomination, Suggs.

²³ U.S. National Park Service, *National Parks for the 21st Century: The Vail Agenda: Report and Recommendations to the Director of the National Park Service from the Steering Committee of the 75th Anniversary Symposium* (Washington, D.C.: National Park Service, 1992), 15–17, 45. Quotes on 17 and 45.

and populated by “older, more transient, lower income people.”²⁴ The state of the homes purchased by the NPS reflected the general decline of the neighborhood as a whole in the second half of the twentieth century.

Neighborhood decline had led to a rise in crime, which caused problems for MAWA staff. This was nothing new; MLWHF member Faithe Norrell remembered how vibrant the community had been even as late as 1969, and “to come back and see how it had declined was sad.” MAWA Law Enforcement Ranger Leslie Winston also remembered the difference between the “hustling and bustling” Jackson Ward of his youth and the “run down” neighborhood he returned to as an NPS staff member in 1988. He recalled the “boarded up” buildings and closed businesses, a stark contrast to the neighborhood he remembered enjoying. Several retired staff members remembered the Eggleston Motel next door being an ongoing nuisance. Winston recalled the motel being open but in a “bad state” in 1988. Former ranger Jim Bell described the motel as “a headache . . . operational for them drug addicts and stuff.” He tried to get maintenance to put tarps along the back fence so “visitors wouldn’t have to look over there to that, you know.” Former Chief of Interpretation and Superintendent David Ruth also recalled the motel as “quite a haven for criminal activities” with rooms rented hourly. When he arrived in 1991, he remembered “instances of crime almost daily within that section, and at night the interpreters would have to be careful leaving the site, particularly in winter.”²⁵

In 1990, staff found evidence of heroin and/or cocaine in the immediate area, and they worked to build a group of informants to help with surveilling the property. MacLeod acknowledged some progress when said that the “high profile of NPS employees” and Richmond City Police patrols “discouraged” drug dealers who had worked around the site. A year later, someone was shot in the alley behind the carriage house, and after a few “incidents of unruly visitors” trespassing and confronting the workers, staff received panic alarms. These clipped to employees’ belts and enabled them to summon police at the touch of a button. In 1993, Chief of Interpretation and CRM Keith Morgan wrote that while the situation had improved, unwanted intruders remained a concern. These “violent or deranged persons” either came in with a group of tourists or via a staff member who

²⁴ *Land Protection Plan, Maggie L. Walker National Historic Site, Richmond, Virginia, 16 September 1985*, Recommended by Sylvester Putman and approved by Regional Director James Coleman Jr on 25 September 1985, Central Files, Folder L1425 Holdings #2. As late as 1992, of a survey of 800 buildings in Jackson Ward, 150 were deemed “substandard” and 78 were vacant, according to notes taken by Celia Suggs. Jackson Ward Housing Collaborative Meeting Notes, 16 November 1992, Box 1, Folder FA-22 Jackson Ward Revitalization Vision 2000 Richmond Renaissance Folder, Suggs.

²⁵ Faithe Norrell, interviewed by Megan Shockley, 7 July 2021, 18; Leslie Winston, interviewed by Megan Shockley, 30 July 2021, 6–8; Jim Bell, interviewed by Megan Shockley, 3 August 2021, 31; David Ruth, interviewed by Megan Shockley, 25 June 2021, 7–8.

unwittingly opened the door, thinking a visitor was outside. Morgan mentioned the panic alarms, but also explained that staff were not law enforcement officials and had no formal enforcement training.²⁶

Vandalism also affected the MAWA buildings throughout the period. In 1990, a weekly report from the Williamsport Training Center crew explained that they planned a weekly cleanup of the site and street area as they worked, to maintain a “clean and graffiti free” site that would be “a respected part of the neighborhood.” In 1996, someone attempted to break into 114 by kicking in the door, and the fence at 116/118 had to be repaired after another incident. In 1996, someone stole \$200 worth of lumber from the site, and the windows at the visitor center under construction were broken twice in several weeks. Staff replaced the glass with lexan, a polycarbonate sheet that would not be so easy to break. Suggs reported several incidents to the MLWHF, and members discussed how they could “motivate neighborhood people to cherish the site; how we could establish better communication with the community.” They planned to discuss an activity they could do with members of the community to bring them into the fold. And yet vandalism continued; in November of that year, management discussed the problem in a team meeting, noting that someone broke the convex mirror in the alley. The staff planned to ask Richmond police to increase patrols around the site.²⁷

It was not just active vandalism that threatened the historic integrity of MAWA. The 1985 *Land Protection Plan* laid out key environmental challenges, focusing on the lack of protection for the neighborhood’s historic buildings. It noted that while Leigh’s streetscape remained relatively unchanged since Walker’s time, none of the buildings were protected, and if altered, would negatively affect the site. The NPS supported Jackson Ward’s inclusion into the City District program, which was like a localized National Landmark program that actively prevented owners in designated neighborhoods from changing facades without official approval. Richmond’s Department of Planning and Commercial Development also supported this move, but ultimately, the city did not move forward with this plan

²⁶ Cynthia MacLeod, Annual Narrative Report, 1990 RICH and MAWA, Box 1, Annual Report Folder, Suggs; Cynthia MacLeod, Richmond National Battlefield Park and The Maggie L. Walker National Historic Site Annual Narrative Report, 1991; Keith Morgan, Annual Statement of Interpretation for 1993, 28–9, quote on 29, MAWA Reports Box. It should be noted that MAWA was not the only site in RICH with problems. Details about incidents of drug use, theft or attempted theft of artifacts, illegal gun possession, and daytime sexual activity at other parks, including Chickahominy Bluffs and Cold Harbor, can be found in the annual reports.

²⁷ “Weekly Report No. 2,” in “Preservation Projects: Maggie L. Walker National Historic Site”; Management Team Meeting Minutes (MTM), 13 March 1996, 1, MTM, 3 April 1996, 5, and MTM 21 April 1996, 3, and MTM 11 July 1996, 3 and 25 July 1996, 3; all in Box 1, Folder MTM 1996, Suggs; Muriel Branch, Secretary, MLWHF Board Meeting Minutes, 14 September 1994, Box 1, Notebook 3; MTM, 13 November 1996, 3, Box 1, F FA 40.35 MTMs 1996, Suggs.

because residents were generally suspicious of the city's motives, according to Manuel Deese, the city manager. Instead, the city would support the NPS's attempt to secure facade easements.²⁸

The NPS was not the only institution acknowledging and trying to mitigate the problems in Jackson Ward. The *LPP* explained that the city of Richmond's Project One hotel/office complex plan, a revitalization study of 2nd Street, and a conservation plan for the central wards spelled a potential turnaround for the neighborhood, with efforts supported by the Richmond Old and Historic District and neighborhood associations. One of the most active associations at this time was the Jackson Ward Vision 2000 Community Council, convened to address problems affecting the lives of people who lived and worked in Jackson Ward. Short-term goals included shoring up business and residential areas, improving the "gateways" to the neighborhood, mitigating highway noise, and supporting commercial development. Longer-range plans included creating parks, elderly housing, new mixed-use buildings and office space, a hotel, and large-scale private housing, with support from nonprofits, private developers, and public institutions. The NPS participated actively with Jackson Ward Vision 2000 Community Council. This illustrated yet another call in the *Vail Agenda*, that of partnering with other organizations to protect their resources, as well as those on the National Historic Register.²⁹

The NPS supported the rehabilitation of dilapidated housing in the area, which positively contributed to the historic streetscapes of the neighborhood. MacLeod wrote in her 1990 annual report, her first full year of tenure at RICH/MAWA, that NPS staff reached out to preservation groups, museums, and even tourism officials and programs to "raise the park units' profile[.]" MacLeod and Suggs were on the Jackson Ward Vision 2000 Committee, which was progressive in its desire to maintain socioeconomic diversity in the community. Suggs wrote "give support" in the notes of a 1992 meeting discussing the Task Force for Preservation in the Minority Community's plan to secure grant money from the city of Richmond to purchase and flip eight homes. Interfaith Housing planned to rehab

²⁸ *1985 Land Protection Plan*; Manuel Deese to Putman, 6 August 1985, Central Files, Folder L1425 Holdings #2. In considering why residents may not have trusted the city, we can consider the long-standing treatment of Jackson Ward residents by city council.

²⁹ *Land Protection Plan*; "Jackson Ward Vision 2000: Richmond, Virginia," Technical Report, May 1988, 1, 57–63, Box 1, Folder FA-22 Jackson Ward Revitalization Vision 2000 Richmond Renaissance Folder, Suggs; National Park Service, *The Vail Agenda*, 79, 126. And the report also stated that the NPS should give assistance to public and private groups seeking to address external threats to the sites, cooperate with government officials in the protection of National Historic Landmarks and other National Register sites, and participate in land-planning efforts with other organizations to mitigate external threats to sites. 79, 127.

and resell several homes, with the help of area churches, and the Vision 2000 Committee proposed contacting homeowners to help them secure grant and loan money for upgrading properties.³⁰

Modeling what the *Vail Agenda* called proactive partnering with other groups, NPS also continued to call for a way to include the facades of E. Leigh Street's 100 block to protect the historic streetscape. Proposed in the 1985 *Land Protection Plan*, an easement plan prohibiting owners from altering the outside of their buildings could be extended by a boundary adjustment, or barring that, perhaps the City of Richmond or historic preservation groups could secure easement agreements. The plan included the easement agreement from the Martin Luther King Jr. National Historic Site as a model. Putman reported that the city strongly supported the easement plan, and would prefer the NPS to fashion the agreements, but also suggested Virginia Historic Landmarks as a potential partner in securing the easements. A 1987 addendum to the protection plan, which encompassed 500 buildings in the historic district, including the facades on the 100-block of Leigh Street, received approval from the city. The problem, however, was that the city could provide designs for owners, but the owners themselves had to request action first. In essence, as the addendum admitted, "the city was relegated to a reactive position" regarding facade restoration, although the council remained supportive of the NPS acquiring facade easements.³¹

Superintendent MacLeod supported restoration and renovation of preexisting homes to accommodate modern family life/businesses and salvage unused or underused buildings; however, the effort to develop Jackson Ward took a negative turn in 1991, when "revitalization" plans threatened the neighborhood's historic fabric. Through the 1990s, MacLeod positioned herself as an outspoken critic of development at the cost of Jackson Ward's original buildings. The first battle involved the expansion of the Greater Richmond Convention Center, which had already caused the destruction of multiple buildings. This expansion would triple the center's size and raze all houses and businesses located on Marshall between 4th and 5th Streets and west to 3rd Street. MacLeod wrote to the mayor that although the goal was "laudable," the cost would be to the historic neighborhood. She argued, "A portion of the National Historic Landmark Jackson Ward District would be obliterated, which is a continuation of a very unfortunate pattern." Citing the repeated

³⁰ Cynthia MacLeod to Regional Director, MARO, Subject: Annual Narrative Report 1990, 8 April 1991 Jackson Ward Housing Collaborative Meeting Notes, 16 November 1992, and Jackson Ward Housing Collaborative Sub-Committee Meeting Report, 9 December 1992, both in Box 1, Folder FA-22 Jackson Ward Revitalization Vision 2000 Richmond Renaissance Folder, Suggs.

³¹ National Park Service, *The Vail Agenda*, 79; *Land Protection Plan*; Sylvester Putman to MARO Regional Director re: MAWA Land Protection Public Review, 16 September 1985 with enclosed letter from Manuel Deese, City Manager to Putman, 6 August 1985 in Central Files, Folder L1425 Holdings #2; Addendum, Land Protection Plan, Maggie L. Walker National Historic Site, 1987, Central Files, Folder 14 Land Protection.

destruction of Jackson Ward in the name of benefiting civic projects, she explained that many organizations and individuals worked to rehabilitate and restore the community because of its unique qualities. She exclaimed, “It is time to stop the destruction.”³²

Although MacLeod and the community were unable to halt the expansion of the convention center, the new construction incorporated a few facades of existing buildings into the entrance as a nod to the historic district. In addition, the convention center’s entrance faces Jackson Ward, which was a concession given to the community. However, the center itself did little to spur economic development in the neighborhood, and its footprint further obliterated a significant portion of a neighborhood that had already been under siege by developers.

The second fight in which MacLeod engaged hit a bit closer to home, as the proposed building site was within less than two blocks of the Walker house. City planners approved the construction of Jackson Center, a large office building complex, on 2nd Street. This project threatened the historic law office of Virginia’s first black lawyer to argue before the Virginia Supreme Court, Giles Jackson, and the site of many civil rights planning meetings, the Slaughter Hotel. MacLeod joined Freddy Ray of the Task Force for Historic Preservation and the Minority Community in denouncing the project. Telling a reporter she thought that planners would maintain more historic buildings, she called the salvage of a piece of facade and a small display planned for the lobby a “token effort.” While city officials claimed that the buildings violated multiple codes and the Giles Jackson office was vacant, MacLeod told another reporter, “The motive is good, but in the process of saving Jackson Ward they are destroying it.” MacLeod, whom one paper identified as a leader in these 1991 efforts, was unsuccessful in her attempts to stave off these two widely supported municipal projects. She later recalled the tearing down of the Jackson office as “heartbreaking.” She explained, “money and development almost always wins out over architecture[,]” and there was a lack of regard for black history. She admitted, “the prejudices were just still too strong, or the ignorance. I’ll just say ignorance.”³³

MacLeod got Jackson Ward named as one of the country’s most threatened historic districts, as a result of all the destruction of old buildings. In 1991 the National Park Service included Jackson Ward in its report to Congress on the top priority list of threatened properties. MacLeod explained to a reporter that while the list carried no regulation power, it highlighted the problem that many buildings were neglected to the point where nothing could be done to save them. She denounced the construction of nonconforming

³² Clipping, Michael Paul Williams, “Richmond Centre Expansion Proposed,” *Richmond Times-Dispatch*, 29 January 1991, and Cynthia MacLeod to Walter Kenney, 15 February 1991, both in top drawer, Superintendent’s Office, Jackson Ward N.R. Nomination Documentation Folder.

³³ Clipping, Tom Campbell, “Demolition Upsetting at Jackson Ward Site,” *Richmond Times Dispatch*, 27 April 1991; Clipping, Teresa Lemons, “Endeavors to Aid Area Criticized,” *Richmond News Leader* 26 April 1991, 25, 31; Clipping, “Jackson Ward’s Historic Fabric Threatened, Parks Official Says,” all in top drawer, file cabinet, Superintendent’s Office, Jackson Ward Folder 1; Interview with Cindy MacLeod, 17.

structures like the four-story Jackson Center. A year later, MacLeod updated the Historic Landmark Status Report, noting its continued threatened nature owing to new construction being “incompatible in terms of height, mass” to historic buildings, and her fear of “wholesale demolition” down 2nd Street, as well as at 14 W. Clay Street, which received a demolition permit as well. She recommended trying to get city officials, the Redevelopment and Housing Authority, the Industrial Development Authority, and community and booster groups to see value in preservation rather than destruction.³⁴

While speaking to a reporter about Jackson Ward’s threatened status, MacLeod alluded to a new project that posed a direct concern to the Maggie Walker site; the proposed construction of a large office building just to the north of 600–602 N. 2nd Street to replace a dilapidated motel and auto body shop that was the former site of the True Reformers Building, owned by Neverett Eggleston Jr. This proposed structure would be essentially adjacent to the proposed visitor center on 2nd and Jackson Streets. Eggleston Plaza, as it would be called, would be 70,000 square feet, and at least five stories, although a later letter referenced eleven stories. Eggleston originally proposed to city council that he would build the property if the council would agree to relocate the city health department to the offices; this became a source of controversy later, as the cost per square foot was significantly higher than the current office space rental. Moreover, the property was encumbered by over \$300,000 in liens, which concerned some council members.³⁵

Cindy MacLeod stepped in to protect the Maggie Walker site from the encroachment. She wrote to the city manager, explaining that she knew he was aware of the “thousands of scarce dollars” NPS had spent at the site. She argued that this project would further harm a neighborhood “damaged” by redevelopment construction. She maintained that while she supported building on the site, no one had notified her about any potential designs at this point. A five-story building would make the Walker site look “dwarfed overshadowed, and . . . insignificant.” MacLeod cc’ed the MLWHF, the city architectural review board, and the local city councilman. Almost a year later, MacLeod continued to fight the development. She wrote to city council, recognizing that while there were several controversies surrounding the construction project, “Our *only* concern is for the design, mass, and scale of any new construction.” She said both preliminary designs she reviewed failed to take into account the “historical character” and “architectural ambience” of the Maggie Walker site and neighboring Jackson Ward properties. Calling both “national

³⁴ Clipping, Virginia Churn, “Will Jackson Ward Stay on Threatened List?” *Richmond Times Dispatch*, c. May 1992, G1; Cynthia MacLeod, “National Historic Landmark Status Update,” 15 April 1992, both in top drawer, file cabinet, Superintendent’s Office, Jackson Ward Folder 1.

³⁵ Clipping, John Maloney, “The Heart of the Deal?” *Style Weekly*, 23 February 1992, 8; Clipping, Alaida L. Jones, “Eggleston Plaza: Paving the Way for Black Economic Revival,” *The Voice*, 6:12 (August 5–11, 1992), 1, 5; Terry Cox to Robert C. Bobb, 28 April 1992; Clipping, “Former Eggleston Motel May Be Office Project Site,” *Richmond News Leader*, 28 April 1992, 1, 5; all in top drawer, file cabinet, Superintendent’s Office, Jackson Ward Folder 1.

treasures[,]” she maintained that the sites “should not be treated with arrogance or spoiled by mediocre design.” She also reminded the council that the NPS had spent over \$3 million in taxpayer money to restore the site and hoped that development would be sensitive to the historic fabric surrounding it.³⁶

Other officials and concerned citizens supported MacLeod’s point of view. Architect and Chair of the City Commission of Architectural Review, Terry Cox, wrote to Richmond’s City Manager that the commission was worried about the “negative visual impact” a large multistory project would have on the NPS site. The commission cited the “character of the Jackson Ward neighborhood” as a central feature in the historic district, and while it supported any Richmond Renaissance developments, it called for buildings no taller than forty feet high. Sandi Stovall, chair of the Jackson Ward Association, wrote to city council a year later. She explained that although the association had unanimously voted to support the Eggleston project, members wanted to be kept apprised of the development, expecting the building to be compatible with surrounding architecture and to “not affect the integrity” of the Maggie Walker site.³⁷

The project was beset by controversy from the outset, which ultimately led to its demise. City council offered to pay Eggleston \$295,000 for the property, but he and his supporters claimed it was worth more. Eggleston found two investors to pay for the building’s construction just a month after the purchase offer, but two years later, in 1995, city council decided the proposed rent was too high, and determined that the health department offices would remain in place. It appears that controversies unrelated to the Walker site led to the project’s defeat, but NPS benefited from the project’s abandonment.³⁸

Through this period Superintendent MacLeod and the NPS served as leaders in neighborhood preservation, something the *Vail Agenda* explicitly called for superintendents to do. In 1992, MacLeod responded to a request to review buildings on Madison Street by a law firm that had purchased them. She explained that they were two of the few frame structures left standing in the NHL district, and they could be restored. She challenged their plans to build parking on the site, asserting, “The value of a historic district is greater than the mere sum of its elements.” Losing two “modest structures” would affect the district adversely, despite the need for parking. By 1994, MacLeod was a Jackson Ward Vision 2000 board member, and attended meetings in which members brainstormed

³⁶ Cynthia MacLeod to Robert Bobb, 19 May 1992; Cynthia MacLeod to City Council Members, 4 March 1993, both in top drawer, Superintendent’s Office, Jackson Ward N.R. Nomination Folder.

³⁷ Terry Cox to Robert Bobb; Sandi Stovall to City Council Members, 7 March 1993, top drawer, Superintendent’s Office, Jackson Ward N.R. Nomination Folder.

³⁸ Clippings—“Eggleston Debate Rages at City Council,” *Richmond Free Press*, 13 March 1993; Jeremy Lazarus, “Eggleston Wins \$9 Million,” *Richmond Free Press*, 1–3 April 1993; “Project Revives as Another Fades in Jackson Ward” and Gordon Hickey, “Renting Is Termed a Better Option for Health Office,” *Richmond Times Dispatch*, 3 January 1995; Gordon Hickey, “Eggleston May Have to Compete for Jackson Ward Development,” *Richmond Times Dispatch*, 23 February 1995, all in top drawer, file cabinet, Superintendent’s Office, Jackson Ward Folder 1.

projects like the African American Sports Hall of Fame and the renovation of the old Richmond Beneficial Building and 2nd Street Bank into apartments and an office building. It also supported the Jackson Place subdivision project, a massive development that would span Jackson and Duval Streets, and N. 2nd and 3rd Streets.³⁹

MacLeod also discussed the redevelopment of Leigh Street between 2nd and 3rd streets with the Office of Economic Development. This site had been the historic A. D. Price funeral home, a center of the Jackson Ward community. This building was scheduled to be razed for parking. MacLeod told an official that the building was within the stated bounds of the NPS historic site and suggested that the SHPO get involved to determine whether the building was a contributor to the neighborhood before taking any further action. As NPS wrote in its annual report to Jackson Ward Vision 2000 in 1997, “Too many of the historic buildings . . . remain under threat of demolition or neglect.” The report pledged that the NPS would continue to work with community members to preserve the history and “spirit” of the buildings and neighborhood.⁴⁰

MacLeod may have led the charge for preservation, but other staff were also involved in the effort. During this time, Chief of I&CR Keith Morgan wrote that staff had fashioned a relationship with Richmond Renaissance, a group dedicated to economic redevelopment and boosterism in the city, as well as with planners and other preservation groups. Morgan argued, “The objective is to insure [*sic*] long term preservation and maintain historical integrity as opposed to razing the old to make space for new and more modern structures.” He believed that collaboration with the city and private entities could balance growth in the face of development projects, citing the Eggleston plan, and the building of three hundred townhomes within two blocks of MAWA. In another report, Morgan claimed the NPS “has established a mutual working relationship” with city officials and other groups to “participate in development activities taking place” in the area. He said that the Hippodrome, the main event center of Jackson Ward during Maggie Walker’s time, was on the docket for restoration plans in 1993. The 1996 *Resource Management Plan* draft mentioned that staff tried to monitor the neighborhood for properties up for sale and other threats but called for a GIS system to better track development. And Celia Suggs recalled that she, Keith Morgan, and later David Ruth “were always going

³⁹ National Park Service, *The Vail Agenda*, 4; Cynthia MacLeod to James Thorsen, 23 June 1992, top drawer, file cabinet, Superintendent’s Office, Jackson Ward Folder 1; Historic Jackson Ward/Vision 2000 Meeting Notes, 19 April 1993; Historic Jackson Ward Vision 2000 Community Council, 14 April 1994; Historic Jackson Ward Vision 2000 Community Council, 18 October 1994.

⁴⁰ Report to Historic Jackson Ward/Vision 2000 Community Council, 11 June 1996; “Maggie Walker NHS Report,” all in Box 1, Folder FA-22 Jackson Ward Revitalization Vision 2000 Richmond Renaissance, Suggs; Historic Jackson Ward Vision 2000 Community Council Annual Report, 22 February 1997, 14, Box 1, Folder A22 Historic Jackson Ward Association, Suggs.

to meetings” to serve as liaisons to the community. As she remembered, “it was just one meeting after the next, one organization after the next.” They recognized the importance of widespread support.⁴¹

Interpretation

In this period, as researchers completed long-term projects, staff used the information uncovered to craft narratives in the form of essays, docent training, and exhibits. This expanded the scope of our historical understanding about Walker’s life and career, as well as the world in which she lived. It also corrected the historical account on several occasions, although certain inaccuracies remained written into the Walker narrative.

Ongoing research continued to produce evidence of Walker’s activities and inform onsite interpretation. In 1986, Diann Jacox wrote an essay for the first volume of the transcribed oral histories, to contextualize the interviews and to provide information that, as she said, “is not readily available elsewhere[,]” as the Howard research project was nowhere near complete. Using primary sources and information uncovered by staff research to that point, Jacox provided a brief history of the IOSL and Walker’s advancement through its ranks. She explained how Walker shifted its focus to one of uplift, expanded activities to a newspaper, bank, and retail store, and the subsequent restriction of activities due in part to the pressure of the state insurance board to standardize actuarial tables. Jacox also highlighted Walker’s concern for women, her participation in the National Association of Colored Women, and her efforts with the Virginia Industrial School for Girls. She also positioned Walker as a civil rights leader, noting her efforts with the Richmond Urban League, among other groups, as well as her personal involvement with politics and work for women’s suffrage. Jacox also explained Walker’s work as a civic leader in Jackson Ward, including her commercial and philanthropic projects with the Southern Aid Society, and her recruitment of talented women to work for the IOSL.⁴²

Jacox also took the opportunity to point out inaccuracies in and ongoing questions regarding the historical record on Walker. She asserted that even though Walker was not America’s first female bank president, emerging information suggested that the sheer number of institutions in which Walker involved herself, including the founding of a bank that remained independent at the time Jacox wrote the essay, made her a notable figure.

⁴¹ Keith Morgan, Part 2, Annual Interpretive Operations Plan, 24, Box 3, FY 1998 Interpretive Report, Suggs. Note: It is hard to tell which interpretive report this belongs to, as the folder says 1998 but the report inside was from 1988, but because it mentions the Eggleston project, I am assuming it is part of 92 or 93; Keith Morgan, Annual Statement for Interpretation, 24, MAWA Park Records Box; *Resource Management Plan*, 25; Celia Suggs, interviewed by Megan Shockley, 24 June 2021, 23.

⁴² Diann Jacox, “Introduction,” National Park Service, *Maggie L. Walker Oral History Project Vol. 1*, October 1986, 6–44.

Interestingly enough, although Jacox argued that Walker had not been America's first female bank president, this myth found its way into the visitor center exhibit, as well as the 1991 film. Jacox challenged the one extant biography written by Dabney, which named her stepfather William Mitchell as her biological father. Jacox cited oral histories and Walker's own manuscripts citing Eccles Cuthbert as her father. In addition, she refuted the idea that an injury to her kneecap caused her long decline into poor health. Using Walker's own journal, Jacox suggested Walker suffered from a "progressive degenerative disease," and mentioned that Dr. Maggie Laura Walker's medical opinion was that her grandmother suffered from a deteriorating spinal cord issue. Jacox also pointed out where questions remained; without more organizational records, and with the IOSL records closed to the public at the time of the research, it was impossible to know the extent of Walker's work in many institutions. She also argued that Armistead Walker's accidental death at the hand of his son merited more examination. Although Mamie Walker Crawford mentioned that Russell Walker's legal defense caused financial hardship, no one else provided details in their interviews.⁴³

Ultimately, Jacox's essay showed both the advances made in the research on Walker's life as well as the holes still left in the story. She also made clear the significance of the oral histories. It was through the family stories, she explained, that she learned aspects of life not recorded in the manuscripts; for example, the story of Polly Payne's work as a housekeeper from a young age, the separations between Walker's sons and their wives, and the story of how Walker expanded her home to accommodate her sons' growing families. Jacox claimed that after analyzing oral histories, "it became clear that Maggie Walker's personal and family history, and to some extent her professional activities, were very tied up in the development, appearance, and use of her home."⁴⁴ This interpretation set the narrative base of the house tour.

The 1986 interpretive guide for docents drew on the latest research as it suggested themes for discussion in each room. Although each docent could draw on the sources listed by the guide's author and NPS Historian Jean Schaeppi, which included the diaries, oral histories, and ongoing Howard University research project, Schaeppi asked volunteers to check their information with staff before giving it on the tour. As she explained, "Some recent research has turned up data in conflict with accepted beliefs, so compare sources, consult with staff, and have your talk reviewed by your supervisor before presenting it to the public." The interpretive guide pointed out topics to present in different areas, including the work of Polly Payne, Mamie Crawford remembering Melvin Walker listening to records in the sitting room, artifacts and room layouts referencing the importance of

⁴³ Diann Jacox, "Introduction," 4–7, 44, 46–48. Quote on 47.

⁴⁴ Diann Jacox, "Introduction," 49–56. Quote on 56.

family, as well as Walker's growing disability. It also placed Walker's life in a larger context, explaining why, for example, guest rooms were so critical for the black middle class in the segregated South.⁴⁵

While Schaeppi encouraged tour guides to craft their own presentations, she also warned against bringing up "touchy subjects" like Armistead's death, "Maggie's parent-age[,] and the deaths of the Walker sons. Instead, she said, if someone asked, then they could respond briefly and "as objectively as possible." In a way, Schaeppi encouraged the docents to cover up aspects of history that may have been difficult to discuss, possibly in an attempt to avoid marring Walker's status as an icon of the black business and social community of Richmond. This avoidance of "unpleasant" topics was reiterated in an undated interpretive guide, which may well have been based on Schaeppi's guide and drew on oral histories, the Historic Furnishings Report, and the Howard study. The guide said, "We do not give complete media coverage of the incident" during tours, explaining that guides needed to be sensitive to child visitors, and to focus on the stories they wanted visitors to remember. This concern continued and was reiterated by Faithe Norrell in a 2015 Facebook post about the anniversary of Armistead's death. She worried that children would focus on just this tragedy, as they often did when she taught about the assassination of Martin Luther King Jr., and that would be their only takeaway. To allow the tragic accident to eclipse all of Walker's accomplishments would, indeed, be yet another tragedy.⁴⁶

As research and interpretive guides for house tours progressed, so did the exhibit plan for the orientation room. Anita Smith of the Museum Production Division at HFC designed the exhibit, with the input of Keith Morgan. It presented a panel with an overview of Walker's leadership roles and the institutions in Jackson Ward. It also covered Walker's political and business leadership, as well as other leaders with whom she worked. The exhibit included a case with décor, such as the lamp from the newel post in the hall, and a case with fraternal and communal organization artifacts. A section on uplift and black leadership philosophy accompanied a large picture of Maggie Walker. The modular seating and a credenza-style desk for an information center originally included in the plan did not make the final budget, but all of the interpretive elements did.⁴⁷

By 1988, Keith Morgan described the interpretive framework as established and functional. A total of 4,500 visitors toured the home Thursday through Sunday from 9:00 to 5:00, where they could view the exhibit and photos of Jackson Ward on the first floor

⁴⁵ Jean Schaeppi, "Interpretive Guide, Maggie L. Walker N.H.S., 1986," Box 1, Notebook 2, MLWHF.

⁴⁶ Jean Schaeppi, "Interpretive Guide, Maggie L. Walker N.H.S., 1986," Quote in asterisk at bottom of page; "Maggie L. Walker N.H.S. Interpretive Guide," n.d., Box 2, Folder H-22.17 Notes (Misc), Suggs; Facebook post, 20 June 2015, Maggie L. Walker NHS Page, with response, <https://www.facebook.com/MaggieL.WalkerNHS/photos/a.159898055208/10153430871000209>. Last accessed 30 September 2021.

⁴⁷ Anita Smith to Keith Morgan, 19 May 1986; Division of Museum Production, "Maggie Walker National Historic Site Exhibits," May 1986; Anita Smith to Keith Morgan, 15 July 1986, all in Box 3, Folder K 18.17, Jackson Ward Exhibit Plans for Orientation Room MAWA House, Suggs.

Visitor Contact Station. Some of the 13,000 artifacts not displayed in the home were on exhibit, and tour guides limited group sizes to protect the house. The main interpretive vehicle remained the house tour, and Morgan explained the importance of docents in his report, noting “Interpreters’ ability to employ a variety of interpretive skills are essential factors for a quality tour. Diplomacy is an asset when working with large tour groups and school groups.” The interpretive guides drawn up for docents helped standardize tour guide presentations to some extent, and the exhibit in the visitor center area reinforced the themes introduced in the house tours: Maggie Walker as a fraternal leader; as a “successful woman outside the home”; as an educator; and as the matriarch of her large family who learned to “cope” with her disability later in life. Morgan asserted the key objectives visitors would take from the site, which included an understanding of how Walker succeeded in the face of racial and gender inequality, and how Jackson Ward’s rise in influence illustrated a time of change for African Americans. He identified the remaining interpretive needs—a map for cultural resources, a historic resources study, a historic furnishings report, a preservation guide for the collection, and more oral histories, as well as the completion of the biography.⁴⁸

By the time Morgan mentioned the Howard University/Gertrude Marlowe biography in 1988, it was long overdue. Although cited in the NPS’s *CRM Bulletin* as an example of how parks could partner with universities, the relationship had not been without its challenges. The completion date when originally commissioned by the NPS at a cost of \$80,000 was December 1986, but by February 1991, the draft was missing four chapters and the introduction, as well as copies of primary and secondary sources, as required in the agreement. Gloria Porter, NPS contracting officer, wrote to the Howard University comptroller’s office, Gertrude Marlowe, and Marlowe’s department chair about the delay. Porter acknowledged that Marlowe’s medical problems necessitated extensions, but “rather than resulting in the completion of a high-quality research product, these extensions have simply resulted in the near paralysis of our interpretive program at the park.” She reminded them of the serious commitment the park undertook in agreeing to the project, as well as the publicity the project received. She concluded, “We and our park have a great deal at stake here and feel that we have invested too much of our time, effort, and money not to now insist on a speedy completion of the entire project.” Porter proposed a timeline for completion by December 1991.⁴⁹ This project began long before a working group argued that the NPS should team up with academic historians to benefit from the latest

⁴⁸ Keithel C. Morgan, 1988 Annual Statement for Interpretation, 15–19, 11, 31, 33, 2, 4, 5, 20. Quotes on 33, 4, Box 3, Suggs.

⁴⁹ “Black History,” *CRM Bulletin* 12, 1 (April 1989), Box 3, Folder K-18.15 Interpreting Minorities and Women in the National Park Service; Gloria Parker to Henry Jackson, 27 February 1991, MAWA Reports Box, Folder FH-22.17 MAWA Biography Project, Howard University, Dr. Gertrude Marlowe.

scholarship in *The Vail Agenda*. In this situation, the partnership appeared to delay work done onsite, and in the absence of Marlowe's monograph, Jacox and others researched on their own to inform interpretation.

Marlowe completed a draft in 1991, but it would be another year before it was ready. MAWA curator Hyman Schwartzberg seemed disappointed with the result of the draft. He wrote to Chief I&CRM David Ruth that although the manuscript provided a good deal of information about the organizations in which Walker was active, successfully contextualizing Walker in her world, he lamented the lack of history surrounding Walker's personal life. He wrote, "Surprisingly, there is little new learned about Mrs. Walker. Most of the facts and perceptions of her personal and public life are those that are commonly known and used daily in the interpretive program." He praised the fact that the document gathered the information known about Walker into one place, but the work "does little . . . to amplify our knowledge and understanding of Mrs. Walker." Perhaps this is because the work took so long to produce, historians at NPS had been poring over the onsite collections themselves in order to build the interpretive framework needed for the site, so they had found much of this information. Celia Suggs's critique was not as pointed; she wrote to Ruth that she wanted Marlowe to distinguish what issues needed further research and hoped that Marlowe could answer the questions of whether Walker's mother was a paid servant, and whether an official birth record of Maggie Walker existed. Marlowe revised the draft and presented the final copy of "A Ransom for Many" in the summer of 1992.⁵⁰

Interpretive activities continued to expand through the period, as staff looked to produce a wide variety of methods to share information about Walker and the neighborhood in which she lived. In 1993, MacLeod reported that the curator mounted a special exhibit focused on the collection's photographs, and staff rewrote the park bulletin. Staff also expanded interpretation to the exterior of the house, planting flowers and shrubs in planters to reproduce the look of the house during Walker's time. The same year, Bill Sydnor received funding from the Virginia Foundation for the Humanities to write and produce a documentary. An advisory committee formed to assist Sydnor, which included MacLeod, the director of the Black History Museum and Cultural Center, E.D. McCreary, the Dean of Graduate Studies at Virginia State, and Nancy Jo Taylor.⁵¹ This 1998 documentary, which premiered on PBS as "Our Inspiration: The Story of Maggie Lena Walker," took the information gathered during research into Walker's life to a much greater audience.

⁵⁰ Hyman Schwartzberg to Chief, I&CRM, 2 August 1991; Celia Suggs to David Ruth, 11 October 1991, both in MAWA Reports Box, Folder MAWA Biography File; Gertrude Marlowe to John Bond, 18 June 1992, and Invoice, CRM/MARO Req #CRM-92-345, signed by John Bond, 23 June 1992, both in MAWA Reports Box, Folder Gertrude Marlowe CESU and Publishing. A full copy of the original manuscript is in the digital library.

⁵¹ MacLeod, Superintendent's Annual Report Maggie L. Walker National Historic Site 1993, 3; Charles W. Sydnor to Cynthia MacLeod, 23 August 1993, Box 4, Folder H22 Research and Publications on Maggie L. Walker, Suggs.

Programming

Interpretation was one way to bring the Walker story to a larger audience; the challenge for a house museum is that the largest exhibit is static, providing little incentive for multiple visits. Local staff provided a wide range of programming, both on- and off-site, to appeal to a diverse public and bring visitors back onsite for special events. Often teaming up with MLWHF or other community partners, NPS staff collaborated to find ways to engage the public.

The NPS often worked with MLWHF to produce Maggie Walker Birthday Anniversary celebrations that entertained and informed the public on topics related to Walker's life and legacy. Events included a 1986 dinner at the Flamingo Lounge honoring four local banking officials and discussing the work of Gertrude Marlowe and Bill Sydnor, and a 1987 celebration at the Carpenter Center, featuring Walker's speeches and music played at IOSL conventions. In 1989 Consolidated Bank and Trust joined MLWHF as sponsors for special exhibits and guided tours, and the next year the NPS hosted a "birthday fanfare" including costumed interpreters, a "memorabilia" display, and other special exhibits. Staff teamed with MLWHF again in 1992 to sponsor a gospel performance, reading of "vignettes," and an open house.⁵²

In 1992, NPS expanded the scope of the birthday festivities for a 125th birthday anniversary celebration. The NPS worked with the Eastern National Park and Monument Association, the Maggie Walker and James River Chapters of the Associated Business Women of America, and Media and Tech Departments of Richmond Public Schools to produce "A Musical Tapestry of Sister Maggie." In addition, the NPS, ENPMA, MLWHF, and Consolidated Bank and Trust sponsored an academic symposium at the Marriott, attended by scholars, Walker descendants, and the public. The symposium's goal, according to a press release, was to "serve as a forum for community participation, as a medium for disseminating historical data; and as a means to share resources." Noted historian Elsa Barkley Brown presented the concept of Maggie Walker as a "womanist"; MacLeod spoke on Walker's multiple roles in her family, business, and community; and Gertrude Marlowe discussed Walker's business acumen. The symposium must have been popular, because the

⁵² Muriel Branch, MLWHF Board Meeting Minutes, MLWHF, 11 December 1986, Box 1, Notebook 2, MLWHF; Muriel Branch, MLWHF Board Meeting Minutes, 8 April 1987 and 14 May 1987, Box 1, Notebook 3, MLWHF; "National Park Service to Commemorate Maggie L. Walker's 121st Birthday," Box 1, Folder A 82.15 Maggie L. Walker's 128th Birthday Celebration Folder, Suggs; Press Release, "National Park Service to Commemorate Maggie L. Walker's 122nd Birthday," n.d., Box 1, Folder Black History Month 1993, Suggs; "National Park Service to Commemorate Maggie L. Walker's 123rd Birthday, 15 July 1990, Box 1, Notebook 3, MLWHF and A 82.15 Maggie L. Walker's 128th Birthday Celebration Folder, Suggs; "National Park Service to Commemorate Maggie L. Walker's 124th Birthday and the 75th Anniversary of the National Park Service," Box 1, Notebook 3, MLWHF; Program, "Maggie L. Walker's 124th Birthday," MAWA Park History Box.

NPS held one focused on Jackson Ward and business entrepreneurship the following year. Walker birthday celebrations continued through this period, with events like costumed interpretation, storytelling, and other special activities to involve the community.⁵³

Hosting Christmas events brought visitors both to the site and to the neighborhood and proved popular. From 1987 to 1992, the NPS invited groups to place a holiday wreath on the door of the Walker home, while the interior was decorated with garlands, Christmas trees, and holiday centerpieces. The NPS worked closely with community partners to facilitate the popular Christmas events. In 1987, MAWA participated in “At Home in the City: A Holiday Tour in the Historic Jackson Ward.” Visitors could pick up coupons for the tour at the Black History Museum and Cultural Center and Richmond on the James, and the tour featured MAWA, Steamer Company #5, the Richmond Dairy Building, Park Place Restaurant, and several private homes. In 1994, the MLWHF and NPS held a large outdoor celebration. Individuals, businesses, and organizations helped; Neverett Eggleston provided hot cider, Scott’s funeral home donated money, Parks and Recreation got 2nd Street closed, Steamer Company No. 5 loaned a fire truck and Santa costume for Bill Sydnor to wear, and a company printed the program for free. The program featured a theatrical presentation by Nessa Johnson and Alice Calloway, which featured dancers, music, and living history interpreters. The program looked like a front page of the *St. Luke Herald*.⁵⁴

NPS collaborated with Downtown Richmond Inc. to participate in Reindeer Days, a special weekend-long program designed to draw people from the suburbs back to the city for Christmas shopping and activities. Downtown Richmond Inc. placed advertising supplements in newspapers with maps and charts of all participants and provided a trolley service that ran to each stop. Activities included stories told by Walker’s grandchildren, visits from Santa, ornament and card making, caroling around the piano, then caroling to the Black History Museum and other sites, and a play. In 1996, NPS paid for the Santa costume and goodie bags for children, but the MLWHF provided the treats for the bags, which included materials on the site and the foundation. Themed “Christmas at Home,”

⁵³ Clipping, Michael Paul Williams, “Walker’s Legacy Is Praised,” *Richmond Times Dispatch* B1, 6, in MAWA Reports Box, Maggie L. Walker NHS-1993 Newsletters Folder; Caption-clipping, “A Musical Tapestry of Sister Maggie,” Box 1, Folder MLWHF, Suggs; “Maggie L. Walker’s 125th Birthday Celebration,” Box 1, Folder A 82.15 Maggie L. Walker’s 128th Birthday Celebration, Suggs; Symposium, 18 July 1992, Celebrating Maggie Walker’s Birth, “Maggie Lena Walker: Perspectives in Innovative Leadership,” Box 3, Notebook 1, MLWHF; “2nd Annual Maggie L. Walker Symposium: Historical Perspectives on Jackson Ward, at the Forefront of African American Entrepreneurship,” program, Box 1, Notebook 2, MLWHF; “National Park Service to Commemorate Maggie L. Walker’s 128th Birthday,” n.d., Box 1, Folder A 82.15 Maggie L. Walker’s 128th Birthday Celebration, Suggs; Program, “Happy 129th Birthday, Maggie L. Walker,” 15 July 1996, Box 1, Notebook 3, MLWHF.

⁵⁴ Clipping, *Richmond Afro-American*, 19 December 1992, MAWA Reports Box, Folder Maggie L. Walker NHS 1993 Newsletters; Remainder of 1991 Interpretive Report, 50, Box 3, Folder Calendar of Events MALW 2001, Suggs; “November 22, 1987: At Home in the City: A Holiday Tour in Historic Jackson Ward,” 20 December 1987, 1–5, Box 1, Folder Historic Richmond Foundation, Suggs; Bill Sydnor, MLWHF Board Meeting Minutes, 14 December 1994, Box 1, Notebook 3, MLWHF; Program, “Maggie L. Walker Foundation, National Park Service, City of Richmond Present a Quality Row Production, *Sawedi* (Gifts from the Elders),” 11 December 1994, Library cabinet drawer 1, Folder Maggie L. Walker Foundation.

MAWA activities in Reindeer Days included storytelling every thirty minutes, caroling, musical performances, and a black Santa.⁵⁵ The collaboration with Downtown Richmond Inc. publicized the work of the NPS to a broad and diverse local audience throughout the greater Richmond region.

Santa, crafts-focused activities, and goodie bags illustrate that NPS staff were aware of the importance of appealing to children. In fact, many of the interpretive and annual reports refer to the large number of school groups who visited the Walker house, so children were a critical constituency. In addition, the *Vail Agenda* suggested that in order to attract a more diverse candidate pool for staff positions, the NPS should bring its message to younger visitors to increase their awareness about the institution. Given that the percentage of black students in Richmond Public Schools (RPS) totaled 84.4 percent in 1980–81 and 88.5 percent in 1990–91, working with the RPS would certainly achieve the goals of reaching out to communities of color.⁵⁶

In 1990, MAWA personnel kicked off an initiative to partner with RPS on a major curriculum initiative, coordinating activities highlighting the work of Maggie Walker and the history of Jackson Ward in classrooms across the city. MacLeod sent a funding priority notification to MARO, stating that MAWA needed an additional GS-5 park ranger (\$22,000), coverage of phone, travel and supplies for supporting costs (\$4,500), printed materials (\$2,500), and video production (\$5,000). She explained they planned to roll out a pilot program in Spring 1991, then develop materials and train teachers for full implementation in the 1991–92 academic year. In spring 1991, Park Ranger Jamie Wolfe met with Cheryl Burke, Social Studies specialist, and Thomasina Binga, Superintendent. They discussed producing a ten-minute video that would highlight the architecture of the home and the history of Jackson Ward, as well as Walker’s life and business ventures. The group planned to produce a mission statement at their next meeting. According to Wolfe, the statement would include the wording from the 1916 Organic Act, which created the NPS “to conserve the scenery and the natural and historic objects and the wild life therein and

⁵⁵ Press Release, n.d. [December 1995?], Box 1, Notebook 3; Bill Sydnor, MLWHF Board Meeting Minutes, 9 October 1996, Box 1, Notebook 3; “Reindeer Days 1995 Evaluation,” Box 5, Folder Downtown Inc.; “Reindeer Days,” Advertising Promotional Supplement, *Richmond Times Dispatch*, 21 November 1995; Meeting of the Projects/Special Events, Programs, and Public Relations Committee,” MLWHF, 9 November 1996, Box 5, Untitled Manila Folder, MLWHF; Patricia Jones-Jackson and Sheila Spurlock-Shaw, MLWHF Board Meeting Minutes, 13 November 1996, Box 1, Notebook 3.

⁵⁶ National Park Service, *The Vail Agenda*, 32–33, 44, 52–53; Joshua P. Cole, “Richmond Public Schools: Post-Court Mandated Desegregation,” 18.

to provide for the enjoyment of the same in such manner and by such means as will leave them unimpaired for the enjoyment of future generations.” This would be incorporated into the teacher guide or video.⁵⁷

By 1991, staff completed “An Educational Guide to Maggie L. Walker National Historic Site,” for the Adopt-a-School program. MacLeod, Suggs, David Ruth, Schwartzberg, and Wolfe coordinated the project, with the assistance of Binga, as well as middle- and high-school social studies teachers. The goal of the program was to educate students both in the classroom and at the National Historic Site, “to encourage the student to develop an interest in the citizens, architecture, neighborhoods, and history of this city and the nation through the understanding of Maggie L. Walker in black history and women’s history.” The guide provided teachers with information about Walker’s background, rise to prominence, and challenges, including themes from the Interim Interpretive Report, as well as a map of Jackson Ward that showed prominent buildings. It placed her in context with other national leaders and at the forefront of the uplift movement in the black community. Projects aimed at different ages included a vocabulary exercise, a discussion of biography, and analysis of the poem “Women’s Plea” by Maggie Pogue Johnson, which she dedicated to Walker. There were site-related activities from which to choose, and post-site activities like a word search, game-show type quiz, timeline, and even a bar graph analysis project.⁵⁸

MAWA personnel recognized that not all schools could take students on field trips. For these teachers, they produced a video. Using money from the previous fiscal year, staff contracted a production company to create the educational documentary, focused on grades 3–7. If this is the documentary that Keith Morgan cited in his FY 1991 report, it cost \$7,000 to produce and reached about 23,350 people, which would include the students in the school program. This was simply an extension of the outreach staff had been doing for several years; Morgan had noted in the 1988 Annual Statement for Interpretation that staff conducted offsite programs, both to promote awareness of the site and to serve a constituency that may not be able to visit in person. The school program expanded in 1995, when

⁵⁷ Cynthia MacLeod to Associate Regional Director, M&I, MAR attention Chief, Interpreter and Visitor Services, re: Educational Funding Priorities, 23 October 1990, Box 2, Folder K-18.15, Adopt-A-School Program, Suggs; Memo from Jamie Wolfe to Chief of Interpretation, 25 April 1991, Superintendent’s Office file cabinet drawer 2, Folder MAWA School Program; “Organic Act,” <https://www.nps.gov/grba/learn/management/organic-act-of-1916.htm>. Last accessed 28 January 2021.

⁵⁸ “An Educational Guide to Maggie L. Walker National Historic Site,” Adopt-A-School Program, 1991, MAWA Reports Box, 5–9, 13, unnumbered pages.

NPS staff received an \$8,000 grant from the National Park Foundation to create traveling exhibit trunks. Schools could borrow the trunks, which included a timeline of world events banner that enabled teachers to put Walker's life in context with historic events.⁵⁹

The movie produced with the school grant money, titled "The Maggie L. Walker Story," became the movie shown at the visitor center, somewhat by default, as it was what the NPS had available at the time. This ten-minute video focused on Walker as a grandmotherly figure, not as a civil rights or feminist activist, and was geared to the schoolchildren for whom it was originally written. It had factual errors, due in part to the production of the work happening before Marlowe produced the biography, and it was repetitive. It focused on her work, rather than positioning her as an important civil rights leader. Looking back on it as the former Chief of Interpretation, Assistant Superintendent, and finally, Superintendent, David Ruth noted its shortcomings. He admitted that the research was thin at that point, and staff only had what was available. He believed the movie reflected her personality accurately, but failed to situate her within a larger political and social context, so it did not capture her importance as a leader. It was, however, what the NPS had to show to visitors, so it was used through the second decade of the twenty-first century. And in fact, as Ruth noted, it gave staff the opportunity to speak with visitors about the significance of ongoing research and changing interpretation.⁶⁰

MAWA staff also connected with youth through the Junior Ranger program. Implemented in 1991–92, the program provided a pamphlet of activities to young visitors. The requirements to receive a Junior Ranger badge were: take a house tour, describe two rooms and explain their importance; view the exhibit in the orientation room, name the street upon which the IOSL building stood as well as two people in the images, and explain the individuals' significance; and complete two activities in the packet. The packet included a brainstorming session on how kids and families could help take care of parks, a lesson about the site history and ranger jobs, and a short biography of Walker's life and work. Activities provided a wide range of topics to appeal to kids, including a matching game, an anagram with "Maggie L Walker National Historic Site," and a questionnaire based on

⁵⁹ Cynthia MacLeod to Manager, HFC, re: Maggie L. Walker video, 23 February 1992, Central Files, K3417 Radio and Television Production; Memo from Cindy MacLeod to Chief, Office of Public Affairs, re FY 1992 Annual Audiovisual Activity Report, 15 June 1993; U.S. Department of the Interior National Park Service Annual Interpretive Report 1991; Cynthia MacLeod, Richmond National Battlefield Park and the Maggie L. Walker National Historic Site Annual Narrative Report 1991; Keith Morgan, 1988 Annual Statement for Interpretation, 39; Cynthia MacLeod, Superintendent's Annual Report, Richmond National Battlefield/Maggie L. Walker NHS CY 1994&FY 1995, 2; Bill Sydnor, MLWHF Board Meeting Minutes, 8 November 1995, Box 1, Notebook 3, MLWHF.

⁶⁰ To view the entire script, see Box 3, "Maggie L. Walker Story—Video" Folder, Suggs. Some factual errors include naming her as the first female bank president, and calling her elementary school the Lancaster School, when it was the Lancasterian School, which was also called the Valley School. She later attended Richmond Colored Normal School after going to the Navy Hill School. There were several inaccurate quotes, and her birthdate was listed as 1867, which has been challenged since then. For more information about the production of the movie, see David Ruth interview, 14–16.

artifacts and information provided on the tour. This program targeted youth ages eight to sixteen, with recurring Junior Ranger sessions on Saturdays. The staff planned to publicize the program in the media, churches, and community centers.⁶¹

Since the opening of the site, NPS staff exhibited creativity and flexibility as they initiated myriad programs to entertain, educate, and promote the site. From cleaning up the Evergreen Cemetery and laying wreaths on Maggie Walker's grave, to hosting booths and extending house tour hours during the wildly popular 2nd Street Festival, hosting tables at Community Day in Providence Park and the Down Home Reunion in Jackson Ward, staff provided programming appealing to many interests. They held summer weekend living history programs, walking tours of Jackson Ward, and special programs like their Tenth Anniversary, featuring keynote speaker Gary L. Hume, Deputy Division Chief of the Preservation Assistance Division of NPS, and a seminar on historic preservation in Jackson Ward for area educators, co-sponsored by the Historic Richmond Foundation, Historic Jackson Ward Association, Virginia Department of Historic Resources, and several area churches. Staff planned special programming for Black History Month events, collaborating with the Black History Museum, the Valentine, the Museum of the Confederacy, and the Marshall House to interpret three hundred years of black history. The NPS sponsored a film festival one year for Black History Month and engaged Alexandria James of Creative Initiative Medium Enterprises to interpret several prominent African American women from antebellum, Reconstruction, and early twentieth-century Richmond.⁶²

⁶¹ Chief, Interpretation and Cultural Resources, Draft, Annual Statement for Interpretation, 1991 (partial), 23, Box 3, F K-18.17-Statement for Interpretation NHS (1990), Suggs; Draft—Junior Ranger Program, Box 2, F K-18.15 Junior Ranger Program (Draft), Suggs; Remainder of 1991 Interpretive Report, 58-9, Box 3, Folder Calendar of Events MALW 2001, Suggs.

⁶² MLWHF Board Meeting Minutes, 6 July 1989, Box 1, Notebook 3; Clipping, *Richmond Afro-American*, 12 January 1991, Box 1, Notebook 3, MLWHF; MLWHF Board Meeting Minutes, March 1992, Box 1, Notebook 3, MLWHF; Bill Sydnor, MLWHF Board Meeting Minutes, 11 October 1995, Box 3, Notebook 1, MLWHF. "Downtown Presents, Meeting of the Second Street Advisory Committee, 18 October 1994"; Box 1, Folder A-82-15 Second Street Festival 94, Suggs; Bill Sydnor, MLWHF Board Meeting Minutes, 11 September 1996 and 21 September 1996, Box 1, Notebook 3, MLWHF; "Living History Program to Be Presented at the Maggie L. Walker House," (1988), Box 3, Folder K1815 Living History Folder, Suggs; "National Parks Mid-Atlantic Council Fall Meeting 1991 Park Reports Richmond NBP and Maggie L. Walker NHS," drawer 2, file cabinet, Superintendent's Office, Mid-Atlantic Council 5.05 Folder; Bill Sydnor, MLWHF Board Meeting Minutes, 12 April 1995; Box 1, Notebook 3, MLWHF; 10th Anniversary Program, 10 November 1988, Box 4, Folder Historic Treasures Revisited, Suggs; Brochure, "The Role of Historic Preservation in the Economic Development of the National Landmark District Jackson Ward: A Seminar for Richmond-Area Educators," 14 October 1994. Top drawer, file cabinet, Superintendent's Office, Jackson Ward Folder 1; "A Celebration of African American History at Richmond's Downtown Museums: 28 Feb 1993 [?]," and "Maggie L. Walker National Historic Side Film Festival," n.d., both in Box 1, Black History Month 1993 Folder, Suggs; "Maggie L. Walker National Historic Site Celebrates Black History Month with 'Life Stories of Famous African Americans,'" February 1994, Box 1, Folder A82.15 Black History Month 1995, Suggs; "The Maggie L. Walker National Historic Site Celebrates Black History Month 1995," Box 1, Notebook 3, MLWHF. One living history program premiered in the summer of 1988, and ran every Sunday. Titled "A Visit to Miss Maggie's," it featured costumed interpreters reenacting a visit in 1934. "Living History Program to Be Presented at Maggie L. Walker House," n.d., Box 3, K-1815.3 Living History Program Folder, Suggs.

How did such a small staff manage to host so many events and create so many educational tools? In 1989, only three permanent and one temporary staff member worked on site. In 1991, four full-time staff members and one part-time worker had to divide their time between programming and other responsibilities like interpretation and cultural resources management. Although by 1993 MAWA had six staff members, that number was still insufficient. In order to handle all of the needs of the public, staff relied on partners and volunteers with whom they could work. The 1993 Annual Statement for Interpretation noted that MAWA staff collaborated with people from other museums, historical societies, civic organizations, city personnel, and neighborhood groups to plan educational and cultural events.⁶³

Partnering with community organizations for one-time events worked well, but for daily tours and ongoing support, NPS staff at MAWA relied on the work of individual volunteers and received funding from the formal Volunteers in Parks (VIP) program, which reimbursed volunteers for expenses related to their work, like travel. MLWHF minutes attest to the sheer number of activities in which members participated, from acting as tour guides, to hosting open houses at the 2nd Street festival and putting together Christmas programming. Volunteers also organized the library collection based on the Library of Congress catalog system and collated serials. Volunteers could also assist with research and exhibit projects, and with photography/videography. Interpretive Reports estimated that volunteers were critical in supplementing the work of staff; in 1989, for example, an estimated twelve volunteers did the work of half of a full-time employee. In 1991, three volunteers did the work of one full-time employee, and in 1993, twenty-one volunteers did the work of two employees. In 1994 the number had dropped to fifteen volunteers doing the work of one FTE, according to the Interpretive Report, but MacLeod counted twenty-four volunteers who totaled six hundred hours' work. This valuable work freed up staff time to give tours to visitors.⁶⁴

MAWA staff supported the volunteer base with training and expected a high level of professionalism from them. Docents received a copy of the early interpretation guide, as suggested by the one found in the MLWHF records. In 1995, Suggs and Nancy Jo Taylor

⁶³ "Opportunities for Docents at the Maggie L. Walker National Historic Site," n.d. but post-1991 based on the hours of operation, Box 4, Volunteer Justification Folder, Suggs; U.S. Department of the Interior National Park Service Annual Interpretive Program Report, FY 1989, MAWA; U.S. Department of the Interior National Park Service Annual Interpretive Report, FY 1991, MAWA; U.S. Department of the Interior Annual Interpretive Program Report, FY 1993, MAWA; all in Central Administration Files, Folder K2621 Annual Reports; Chief, Interpretation and Cultural Resources, Annual Statement for Interpretation 1993 Maggie L. Walker National Historic Site, 15.

⁶⁴ Evidence of all hosting activities, from Christmas open houses to helping with special tours while the National Baptist Congress was in town in 1987 (Suggs to "Associate," 29 May 1987, Box 1, Notebook 3) can be found in the notebooks of the MLWHF; Librarian Description, n.d., Box 4, F Orientation Packets, Suggs; U.S. Department of the Interior National Park Service Annual Interpretive Program Reports, FY 1989, 1991, 1993, 1996; Cynthia MacLeod, Richmond National Battlefield Park, Maggie L. Walker National Historic Site, Northeast Field Area Annual Report, FY 1996.

created a docent program brochure, focusing on the goals of the MLWHF and including an action shot of a docent giving a house tour. Several members volunteered to speak to community groups in order to bolster the base of VIPs. Suggs told MLWHF members that the new eighty-hour training program would include speakers, walking tours, viewings of symposium recordings, and required reading. She assured them that most of the work could be done on their own time and required just a full-day onsite session. The volunteer guide explained that tour guides and room monitors had to have a “working knowledge of American, Richmond, and African American history during the twentieth century specifically related to the themes and cultural resources of the park[,]” as well as an understanding of park operations and good communication skills. Volunteers would be evaluated on the accuracy of their presentations, as well as their “effectiveness and compliance with park standards and operating procedures.”⁶⁵

Paid staff may have expected much from their volunteers, but it was clear that they respected the work that they did. In an undated Fund Information sheet for the VIP program, the authors explained that VIPs would help document landscapes and buildings threatened by the destruction caused by development, as well as educate the community in a way that could show citizens the importance of saving Jackson Ward. Volunteers would be working with and within community organizations like Vision 2000 and other community groups “to eradicate unacceptable conditions, unlawful acts to person and property[,]” and help create a safe, clean environment for the site. And perhaps most important, when asked how the VIPs would provide “other advantages,” the author noted that the VIPs themselves would “instill national pride” by serving as community leaders and docents at a site that “has served as the anchor and an example of what can be accomplished in communities like the Jackson Ward National Historic Landmark.” These VIPs, the author argued, comprised an important part of the NPS’s goal of reflecting America’s diversity.⁶⁶

Visitor Services

The volunteers and staff worked hard to interpret the history of Walker and Jackson Ward both onsite and in outreach programs and tried to make visits onsite run as smoothly as possible, despite constraints imposed by the state of the historic buildings and the urban setting. Staff did what they could to protect the historic resources and accommodate visitors. In addition, management recognized that the staff should be diversified, which not

⁶⁵ Bill Sydnor, MLWHF Board Meeting Minutes 8 March 1995 and 12 March 1995, Box 1, Notebook 3, MLWHF; “Volunteer Tour Guide/Volunteer Room Monitor,” September 1993, Box 4, Folder P94 Job Descriptions/Volunteers.

⁶⁶ “Type 61—Fund Information Sheet, Volunteers in Parks, Maggie L Walker National Historic Site Volunteers in the [*sic*] Park Program,” n.d., Box 4, F Volunteer Program Justification, Suggs; Cindy MacLeod, 1992 Annual Narrative Report.

only would better represent the constituency who visited the site but also would advance the larger goals of the NPS to represent the multicultural population of the country. They worked to meet the goal by crafting a strong EEO program. Finally, the NPS funded a major renovation of 600–602 to create a visitor center, which is still in use today.

Visitors to the site faced several obstacles. First, the lack of designated parking posed a problem. To ameliorate the parking situation, Sylvester Putman attempted to get MAWA included on a downtown trolley route. He told MLWHF members that GRTC had not yet responded. It was possible, he noted, that MAWA's limited hours would make it difficult to be included on a regular route. That same year, president of MLWHF Mozelle Baxter wrote to the 6th District Representative on city council asking for the council to designate 2nd Street from Leigh to the alley as one-hour parking for visitors, explaining that the parking situation deterred individuals and tour groups from visiting. Later, Superintendent Dwight Storke wrote that acquiring the gas station on Leigh Street was not a "feasible solution" for the lack of parking and asked to work with the city to set aside spots on 2nd Street just for visitors. However, in 1992 Cindy MacLeod told Ron Foster of Richmond's Office of Economic Development that individuals had to search for parking, often parking on the east side of 2nd Street, opposite where the designated spots were. She also noted that buses often stopped to unload passengers right in front of the site on Leigh Street, which created a dangerous situation. She mentioned that NPS could not fund any improvements on land that it did not own, and that Philadelphia and Atlanta had built parking for NPS sites. She admitted that this solution was problematic, though. She explained, "I am equally concerned about the alarming loss of historic structures and construction of incompatible new structures[.]" She suggested continuing the conversation about the parking situation.⁶⁷

In addition, visitors unfamiliar with Richmond's street system may have had trouble navigating the many one-way routes around Jackson Ward, and even understanding which of the many downtown exits would be best for accessing the site. Dwight Storke told a committee planning a historical park in Jackson Ward that he met with the Virginia Highway Department and would receive better signage on I-95 and I-295 for all RICH park areas. In 1996, Dorothy Geyer designed an entry sign for MAWA that fit better with the cultural landscape than the traditional metal NPS sign, and RICH/MAWA received \$2,175

⁶⁷ MLWHF Board Meeting Minutes, 11 December 1985, Box 1, Notebook 2, MLWHF; Dwight Storke to Associate Regional Director, Cultural Resources, n.d. but included with memo from 6 September 1989, Box 3, Folder K-18.15 Maggie L. Walker NHS: An Orientation by Celia Suggs, Suggs; Mozelle Baxter to Walter Kenney, 24 November 1988, Library cabinet drawer 1, Folder A-22, Maggie L. Walker Historical Foundation; Cindy MacLeod to Ron Foster, 13 March 1992, Top drawer, file cabinet, Superintendent's Office, Jackson Ward N.R. Documentation Folder.

for road signage, which is located on I-95/64. Moreover, the MAWA site brochures included maps of the neighborhood—although in this time before widespread internet use, visitors making travel plans would not have access to this.⁶⁸

Another way to accommodate visitors at NPS sites was to present a friendly and diverse cadre of tour guides, docents, and educators. *The Vail Agenda* made this a priority in its goalsetting for the twenty-first century. It stated that in a nation becoming more diverse, the NPS needed to devise attractions for a broader audience. In order to do this, it stated, “It will be important to attract and retain people knowledgeable in special cultural and historical fields, and it will be necessary to make the Service a more attractive career option to minorities.” The plan called for diversifying recruitment plans and focusing on affirmative action to hire more people of color.⁶⁹

MAWA already reflected diversity, before working groups began putting together *The Vail Agenda*’s plans. Boasting one of the few African American superintendents in the service upon its opening with Sylvester Putman, it also hired Celia Jackson (Suggs) to serve as ranger. Dwight Storke, the superintendent who took over after Putnam, announced in 1988 that “Park management has identified the Equal Employment Program as an Integral part of park operations.” The park’s goal for the year included making sure assignments, promotions, trainings, meeting attendance, incentives, and other employment-related items be “carried out on a fair and equitable basis throughout the park!” Storke also reported that Equal Opportunity (EO) training was developed for employees. He noted that he hired the first African American Law Enforcement Division staff member, Leslie Winston, and achieved 100 percent of his diversity goals in several hires. Storke wrote that the EO Committee planned to recruit from “special audiences and universities” for seasonal interpreters. He also told the MLWHF in 1988 that all supervisors underwent EEO training, and that he applied to the Incentive Work Project, to receive money for providing jobs to first-time offenders. The EO Committee’s bylaws explained its significance: it would advise the superintendent; provide information to staff about special programming, including the Federal Equal Opportunity Recruitment Program; increase diverse representation in the parks by creating an Affirmative Action plan and conduct special seasonal recruitment visits; and prepare EO reports. It planned to address problems “which might otherwise remain unquestioned or resist being answered[,]” by identifying discrimination and proposing solutions.⁷⁰

⁶⁸ Jackson Ward Historical Park Ad Hoc Committee Meeting, 16 June 1988, Library cabinet drawer 2, Jackson Ward Historic Park—Maggie L. Walker Historic Foundation Folder; MTM, 7 March 1996 and 8 May 1996, Box 1, MTM 1996 Folder, Suggs. Brochures have small maps on the back.

⁶⁹ NPS, *The Vail Agenda*, 44, 52–53.

⁷⁰ Dwight Storke, Superintendent’s Annual Report, 1988; MLWHF Board Meeting Minutes, May 1988, library cabinet drawer 1, Folder A-22 Maggie L. Walker HF; “Equal Opportunity Committee Bylaws,” RICH, MAWA, n.d., c. 1990s (Cindy MacLeod’s signature line at the end), top drawer, cabinet, Superintendent’s Office, EEO/Work Force Diversity Plan Folder.

The goal was important, but in 1992 Cindy MacLeod joined a group of superintendents who questioned the good of the many EO reports they generated. MacLeod and several area superintendents, including Fredericksburg and Spotsylvania National Military Park and Shenandoah National Park, held a meeting to propose a “Quality Improvement Team” to fix EO reporting problems. These superintendents were concerned about the time it took to produce quarterly EO reports, twice-yearly seasonal reports, and annual AEP accomplishment and affirmative action employee program goal reports. They wanted to know what happened to the data, and whether or not this data could be found somewhere more easily than they could produce it. As Shenandoah Superintendent J. W. Wade, author of the EO memo, wrote, “information for information purposes is inappropriate.” This group suggested producing just annual reports. They also argued that rather than emphasize reporting, “there should be much more emphasis and effort put into establishing realistic expectations and opportunities to make improvements[.]” They were not challenging the goal of diversity; instead, they posited that time spent generating reports on the workforce, which seemed to have no concrete outcome, would be better spent making real change on the ground. This memo makes clear that sometimes, well-meaning goals can get stymied by bureaucratic requirements, leading to frustration and possibly stifling change. At MAWA, however, both the composition of the staff, especially with the inclusion of veteran Petersburg National Battlefield park ranger Jim Bell in 1997, and the large number of volunteers from the MLWHF, had diversity. However, as will be discussed later, both locally and nationally, the NPS staff was not inclusive and reflective of the greater American population.⁷¹

By far the most ambitious visitor-service-related project of this period was the construction of the visitor center. The existing visitor center, located in the Maggie Walker house itself, was problematic for many reasons. First, it detracted from the historic authenticity of the Walker house. Moreover, as Keith Morgan wrote, the visitor center was not particularly welcoming, especially when compared with more standard centers at other parks. In 1988 he wrote, “Visitors walk down the gang way along the east side of the . . . house and find their way to the entrance door, knock, and wait to be admitted to the visitor contact station . . . room in the rear of the house. Uniformed interpretive staff is challenged to assure all a warm welcome.” Finally, gathering so many people into a small space affected adversely the house and its artifacts. The structure was not designed as a contact station for visitors, and moving exhibits and other orientation activities to a separate space would better preserve the home.⁷²

⁷¹ Superintendent Shenandoah NP to Regional Director, Attention Equal Opportunity Manager, re: EO Reporting Requirements, 21 June 1992, top drawer, Superintendent’s Office, EEO/Workforce Diversity Plan Folder; Historic Jackson Ward Vision 2000 Community Council Annual Report, 22 February 1997, 14–15.

⁷² Keith Morgan, 1988 Annual Statement for Interpretation, 30; “National Park Service Mid-Atlantic Region Economic Stimulus Project Documentation RICH/MAWA Project: Cyclic Maintenance,” 11 March 1993, top drawer, file cabinet, Superintendent’s Office, Economic Stimulus Folder.

Staff introduced the idea of a visitor center in 1989. The original GMP had called for the visitor center and library for researchers to be located at 114 E. Leigh, with a conference hall at 600–602 2nd Street. Analyses of the structures determined that neither of these projects could be done; altering 114 E. Leigh in such a way would affect the “integrity of the structure[,]” and engineering studies on 600–602 determined that the conference hall was not feasible there. Instead, in 1989 the approved, updated GMP called for the visitor center, staff offices, and library to be located in the N. 2nd Street buildings.⁷³

The visitor center planning and implementation moved slowly. In 1991, MacLeod requested funding for construction. In 1993, the project was named priority number three in a list developed for the Economic Regional Stimulus Project of MARO. MacLeod asked for architecture and engineering plans, as well as for money to convert the cinderblock garage to bathrooms. That year, the site received \$80,000 in cyclic funds to begin design and construction. The plans included a space with a reception area, auditorium to seat thirty to forty-five people, bookstore, offices for staff, library, curatorial storage, exhibits, and media preparation space. All public space would be handicap accessible, with no alterations to the outside facades. Construction moved forward with the hiring of Techcon Inc., an African American–owned firm from Norfolk, Virginia, as general contractor. With a completion date of 1994, the visitor center, as MacLeod stated, “will accommodate Maggie L. Walker’s ever-growing family of visitors.” Chief of I&CRM David Ruth told a reporter that the additional buildings would provide more room for exhibits and orientation space. ENPMA would establish a bookstore inside the facility, assisted by MLWHF volunteers, as it already had a small selling space in the house.⁷⁴

The completion date of 1994 came and went, as work progressed at a snail’s pace. Construction was occurring, as a memo reported a \$260,000 expenditure line in construction at MAWA in 1995. While we cannot know exactly what held up construction, it may have been a number of issues. In 1996, Cindy MacLeod explained that she failed to receive the funding for vacancies, and she also referenced “the impasse of Congress and the President.” This impasse led to the closure of parks, and although it is unclear whether funding the visitor center was a central problem, it could have been one of the mitigating

⁷³ Regional Director to RICH/MAWA Superintendent, 6 September 1989, and Dwight Storke to Associate Regional Director, n.d., both in Box 3, Folder K-18.15, Maggie L. Walker National Historic Site: An Orientation by Celia Suggs, Suggs.

⁷⁴ Cynthia MacLeod, Richmond National Battlefield Park and the Maggie L. Walker National Historic Site Annual Narrative Report 1991; “National Park Service Mid-Atlantic Region Economic Stimulus Project Documentation RICH/MAWA Project”; Cynthia MacLeod to MARO Director, re: Rebuild America Project; Cynthia MacLeod to Chief, Maintenance Division and Chief, Historic Architecture Branch, MARO, re: rehabilitation of 600–602 North Second Street, MAWA NHS, n.d., top drawer, file cabinet, Superintendent’s Office, Jackson Ward Folder 1; “Renovation Underway for visitor center at the Maggie L. Walker National Historic Site,” n.d., Central Files, Folder K34 News Media; Clipping, “Visitor center planned for Walker home,” MAWA Reports Box, Maggie L. Walker NHS-1993 Newsletter Folder; MLWHF Board Meeting Minutes, 14 September 1994, Box 1, Notebook 3, MLWHF; Cynthia MacLeod to Principal Office, ENP&MA, 30 November 1994, Box 1, Annual Report, Folder, Suggs; Cynthia MacLeod, draft of letter to Mozelle Salle Baxter, 20 January 1992, Box 2, Folder H 22.17 Documentary MALW 96 Bill Sydnor; Suggs.

factors. In addition, although MacLeod had originally called for bathrooms in the cinder-block garage, as late as 1996 staff seemed to be divided over what to do with the building. Ultimately, Dick Dretsch from MARO visited the site in spring 1996 to decide what to do with the large block structure, which was a contributing historic building. A week later, MARO staff determined the best course of action was to remove the cinderblock structure and rebuild from the ground up. As work progressed, personnel moved into offices in January 1997 and planned the dedication for April. NPS held the ribbon-cutting ceremony on April 4, 1997, with Congressman Bobby Scott delivering the keynote speech.⁷⁵



Opening Ceremony for the visitor center. Cindy MacLeod is in uniform on the raised stage.

⁷⁵ Administrative Officer Barbara to Cynthia MacLeod, re: Richmond Area Museum Group 1995 Statistical Report, cabinet drawer 2, Superintendent's Office, Museum Directory Activities Folder; Cynthia MacLeod, Richmond National Battlefield Park, Maggie L. Walker National Historic Site Northeast Field Area Annual Report FY 1996; MTM, 3 April 1996, 10 April 1996, 9 January 1997, all in Suggs, Box 1, Folder FA 40.5, MTM 1996; Clipping. "Maggie L. Walker Historical Foundation," *Richmond Voice*, 2–8 April 1997, MAWA Reports Box, News Releases Folder. It may be useful for current staff to know that as plans for the visitor center progressed, staff planned a National African American Entrepreneurship Hall of Fame to be constructed in the building adjacent to the Walker house. This site would charge admission and included in that would be a Walker house tour. While acknowledging that MAWA could not produce the funds, they called for a nonprofit board to oversee the Hall of Fame, which would report to the NPS Superintendent. Sponsors would underwrite exhibits and spaces, and NPS staff could assist and monitor space, with a separate administrative assistant and executive director for the Hall of Fame. For more information, see "Maggie Walker National Historic Site Development Plan (Draft)," MAWA Reports Box; "Maggie Walker National Historical Site Development Plan (Draft)," Box 2, Folder H-32, Folder Maggie L. Walker House National Register Nomination.

Conclusion

This period of expansion in everything from reconstruction to interpretation and programming—and even staff—led to a corresponding expansion in visitation (see table 1). From 1988, when Storke expanded the hours to include Wednesday, through the first half of 1997, visitation generally rose. It is also significant that overall, people of color made up between 65 and 75 percent of the visitors, for years when that data was collected. Perhaps this is why William Mott, Director of the NPS, said that the site was one of his favorites, according to James Coleman, MARO director, who relayed the story to MLWHF members in 1989. It could certainly be why the Maggie L. Walker site was featured in a flyer, “Black History in the National Parks,” as an example of the NPS’s attempt to identify and acquire significant sites of Black history and partner with leading experts in African American history to expand the NPS narrative.⁷⁶

Table 1. Annual Visitation Numbers, 1988–1997

Year	Visitation
1988	4,500
1989	?
1990	6,068
1991	5,306
1992	6,546
1993	9,396
1994	10,362
1995	9,496
1996	8,728
January–July 1997	5,604

Information from Keith Morgan, “1988 Annual Statement for Interpretation,” 15; “Maggie L. Walker National Historic Site Statistics,” n.d., Box 3, Interpretive Plan 1990–92 Figures Folder, Suggs.

Still, challenges remained. The greater neighborhood faced threats from continued blight and development. And Cindy MacLeod’s desire to save the neighborhood had mixed results. In fact, she remembered with some frustration that the MLWHF focused so much on Walker’s house itself that they failed to see the greater value in expansion. As she

⁷⁶ Clipping, “Historic site hours extended,” 8 July 1988, Box 3, Living History Program Folder, Suggs; Information from Keith Morgan, 1988 Annual Statement for Interpretation, 15, 24; David Ruth, Draft, Annual Statement for Interpretation, Maggie L. Walker National Historic Site, 1991, 25–26; David Ruth, Annual Statement for Interpretation, 1992, Maggie L. Walker National Historic Site, draft, 30; David Ruth, Annual Statement for Interpretation, 1993, Maggie L. Walker National Historic Site, draft, 35, Box 3, Interpretive Plan 1990–92 Figures Folder, Suggs; MLWHF Board Meeting Minutes, 8 February 1989, Box 1, Notebook 3, MLWHF; “Black History in the National Parks,” n.d., Box 3, Folder K-18.15 Interpreting Minorities and Women in the National Park Service.

explained, their “old fashioned way of thinking” kept them from supporting her wider vision. David Ruth also remembered in this period that MacLeod failed to get the MLWHF to “increase their role and function.” They seemed to want to “enshrine her grand possessions and belongings” rather than situate her in a larger narrative of American civil rights. Staff had their volunteers to assist with critical onsite duties like staffing the visitor desk and helping with special events, but seemed to want more vision from their MLWHF partner.⁷⁷

In addition, MAWA remained quite separate from, and not as high profile as, her sister Civil War–era battlefield park. David Ruth remembers “pushback” from some in the NPS about the value of investing so much in the visitor center when visitation “hover[ed] in the 10,000 to 12,000 . . . a year.” Faithe Norrell recalls that while “we never felt like the red-headed stepchild” of the RBNP, she believed the Maggie Walker site being included with Civil War–era park sites made for “odd bedfellows.” And during this period, this was the case, because the two staffs worked almost independently. MacLeod also recalled that many of the people who worked at the battlefield sites were into military history and “didn’t really care” about what went on at MAWA. MacLeod, however, worked to bridge the chasm by trying to “integrate the staff[,]” having them work at different sites. She also tried to make the administrative staff work at both, noting that she wanted staff to “not have resentment that Richmond Battlefield would carry a lot of the expenses for Maggie Walker.” The fact that she mentioned this suggests that the problem was there and that it needed addressing. She worked toward this goal during her tenure.⁷⁸

This period of growth, however, reflects the dynamic leadership of administration and the work of staff to enhance the site itself, the programming, and the community partnerships, despite challenges. MAWA staff found new dimensions to Maggie Walker’s story and shared them publicly, directed important building and restoration projects to enhance visitor services, and fought to protect the fragile infrastructure of Jackson Ward. In effect, in terms of its outreach and educational programming, appeal to diverse constituents and attempts to increase diversity in its volunteer and paid staff, and work within an urban setting with various institutional partners, MAWA served as a model for *The Vail Agenda* goals.

⁷⁷ David Ruth interview, 19–20, 22.

⁷⁸ David Ruth interview, 10; Faithe Norrell interview, 25; Cindy MacLeod interview, 5–6.

CHAPTER FOUR

The Final Phase of Restoration, 1997–2005

The opening of the visitor center provided much-needed space for interpretation and visitor services, but the site remained half-restored. From 1997 to April 2005, when staff held a ribbon-cutting ceremony to open the new permanent exhibit in the Leigh Street buildings, MacLeod shepherded the site through another phase of development, ultimately completing the full restoration/renovation of all buildings, expanding curatorial storage, increasing authenticity in the interpretation of the house, and expanding the exhibit to better contextualize Walker within the community and the country. In addition, staff and volunteers continued to reach out to the community, partnering with more organizations to tell the Maggie Walker story to a wider public.

By advancing a vigorous program of restoration, interpretation, and community partnerships, MAWA personnel fulfilled the directives of the wider NPS, as well as a new vision established by the Northeast Regional Office (NERO) in 1997, which became the regional office for Virginia sites after an administrative reorganization. In 1997, it published “The Road Ahead,” which included six goals for advancing “excellence in interpretation and education.” It exhorted staff to “Discover the Untold Stories” by finding more inclusive narratives from multiple points of view. It encouraged them to find new ways of imparting information to diverse learners and a wide array of schools. The report stated that every park needed a curriculum-based program for primary and secondary schools. It called for a professional, diverse staff. It encouraged parks to embrace technology to reach new visitors and improve the visitor experience. And it called for staff to connect their local narratives to larger themes both within and outside of the NPS, seeking partnerships to assist with this goal.¹

This regional directive appeared to build from the NPS-wide initiative of 1996 to craft a more inclusive, scholarly historical narrative. Citing the *Vail Agenda*, NPS Historian Dwight Pitcaithley argued that the NPS had lost sight of current historiographical trends in the previous twenty-five years, as it shifted its focus to CRM. This caused a narrowing of the vision. Curators interpreted just the artifacts themselves, instead of using artifacts to advance broader interpretation of an issue or time period. He claimed, “To be meaningful, history must be examined totally—the uncomfortable along with the comfortable, the complex along with the simple, the controversial along with the inspirational.” He cited the

¹ NERO, “The Road Ahead,” included in Ron Thompson et al., *Long-Range Interpretive Plan: Maggie L. Walker National Historic Site* (National Park Service, May 1998), 13–14.

Organization of American Historians/NPS partnership that began in 1993 as an effort to rework the existing narrative frame, as well as the NPS Advisory Board, started in that same year and chaired by the renowned academic historian James O. Horton, to introduce new scholarship to NPS interpretation.²

In addition to increasing the level of diversity in narratives and scholarship, the NPS raised the stakes in trying to become inclusive and welcoming sites. In 2003, NPS Director Fran Mainella issued Order 75A. Mainella directed local sites to engage a broader group of community partners, ensuring that a multiplicity of points of view would be heard in the decision-making process of each park. In addition, Mainella called upon staff to foster open communication with a variety of stakeholders, attending their meetings, informing them of any changes to the site or issues that may affect them, and considering their input when making decisions. She also called for the building of websites and other e-tools to increase the reach of each site.³

This new direction, really begun with the *Vail Agenda* and updated by Pitcaithley, NERO, and Mainella, reflected programs already advanced by MAWA. The very existence of MAWA expanded the traditional narrative of the NPS, and a variety of programming addressed a wide audience. But the expansion of the site to be more accessible, the crafting of a broader narrative located in African American history in the permanent exhibit space, and the promotion of new programs and partners, as well as the continuing effort to maintain an inclusive workforce on site, made MAWA a standout in the way it illustrated the NPS's progress.

Planning for the Twenty-First Century

MAWA's direction in this period followed the path set by the *Strategic Plan*, written by MacLeod, Dave Ruth, Mike Andrus, and Hyman Schwartzberg, and updated in 2000 for the years 2000–2005. The plans focused on CRM, interpretation, facilities, work culture, and efficiencies. By 2002, the first plan asserted that all buildings would be in good condition, with renovation of the Leigh Street facades; the second plan said they would like to improve the condition of four structures on the classified list by 2001. The first plan noted that the whole collection would be cataloged and stored properly, and staff would seek out and “preserve significant cultural resources within the community that relate to the Maggie Lena Walker story.” It also called for “excellent non-personal interpretive media and exhibits” backed by solid research and expanding research services. The 2000–2005 plan

² Dwight Pitcaithley, “The Future of the NPS History Program,” “The Future of the NPS History Program.” *The George Wright Society Forum Journal*, 13, 5 (1996), 51.

³ Fran Mainella, “Director’s Order 75A,” 14 November 2003. Updated by Mary Bomar, 30 August 2007. https://www.nps.gov/policy/DOrders/DO_75A.pdf. Last accessed 21 March 2001.

also noted that staff wanted a cultural landscape inventory done and an archeological site listed in ASMIS by 2005. By 2002, staff would identify and ameliorate all potential hazards, and work to bring crime down. Staff would continue to be diverse, with over 80 percent holding basic competencies, supported by appropriate computer systems. The Government Performance and Results Act of 1993 (GPRA) goals included an 80 percent visitor satisfaction rate, a 60 percent rate of understanding of the park's mission and goals in the first strategic plan, and a 65 percent rate of understanding with a 95 percent satisfaction rate in the second iteration. The first report featured annual worksheets to reflect how the staff could reach these goals, working yearly on different phases of the project. While ambitious, these plans provided the road map for development over the four years.⁴

At the same time, a team put together the *Long-Range Interpretive Plan*, which identified longer-term (5–10 year) goals. Also published in 1998, this document was the product of a wider team of stakeholders and staff. MAWA rangers and guides Jim Bell, Celia Suggs, and Randy Peyton worked with MLWHF president Muriel Branch, interpretive specialist from Chesapeake/Allegheny support office Pat Bell, Historic Jackson Ward Executive Director Sandi Stovall, MacLeod, Ruth, Schwartzberg, and Andrus. Ron Thompson facilitated the group work, which identified problems, evaluated current interpretative efforts, and set goals. This plan broadly addressed everything from staff diversity to revamping the middle-school education program, but the group seemed to spend a great deal of time reevaluating interpretation and visitor services.

The plan incorporated the goals of the strategic plan as they related to CRM and interpretation, but it also went a bit further. The group pared down the multiple interpretive themes to three critical issues: Maggie Walker's entrepreneurial ability, including how she achieved her success despite numerous setbacks and challenges, and her leadership qualities. The final theme focused on "her outspoken and often eloquent commitment to a variety of philosophical positions including; self determination; self-help; education; thrift; personal responsibility, mutual support and cooperative effort; feminism and gender identity; race pride; improved race relations; and devotion to her religion." The plan asserted that interpretation needed to better contextualize Walker in the national story of African American progress, so that visitors could understand her significance and her place in larger social movements. Noting that visitors often confused her with Madame C. J. Walker, the plan suggested highlighting the fact that Walker was a symbol of African American aspirations and success during this period. It explained that a new furnishing report and the restoration of the E. Leigh Street building facades advance interpretation. It

⁴ Cindy MacLeod et al., *Strategic Plan, Maggie L. Walker National Historic Site: 1998–2002*; Cindy MacLeod, Jerry Helton, David Ruth, and Barbara Krick, *Strategic Plan for Maggie L. Walker National Historic Site, Fiscal Years 2001–2005*, Approved by Cindy MacLeod, 30 September 2000, all in Box 3, Strategic Plan MAWA NHS FY 2001–2005 Folder, Suggs.

called for more research to determine Walker’s place in Jackson Ward and the nation, her leadership of the IOSL, her philosophies about race, gender, and work, and her parents and family life.⁵

The plan also discussed visitor support. It noted the lack of parking and signage. As the plan explained, parking was often the issue visitors brought up, but it related to “other, less often verbalized, perceptions of safety in an unfamiliar urban setting.” The plan established goals for more directional support, as well as finding more community partners to sponsor programming like Jackson Ward walking tours. Finally, the plan called for a reassessment of educational programs and exhibits, with a focus on the call for “untold stories,” and more time for visitors to reflect and absorb information with exhibits that were not dependent on guides. The plan also noted that second-floor access was critical for those who could not walk up the narrow stairs. This new focus on visitor experience meant to “inspire and encourage contemplation[,]” a free-choice style learning process, reflected the growing consensus of museologists at the turn of the twenty-first century. They argued that a nondidactic museum experience that enabled visitors to control their own experience left stronger impressions than museums that tried to tell visitors what they should learn.⁶

Cultural Resources Management: Ongoing Challenges

The historic buildings in MAWA continued to need constant maintenance. In 1997, for example, staff repaired the foundations and replaced the fences at 116/118 E. Leigh Street, using cyclic funding. In 1998, the NPS spent over \$50,000 to replace the roof, restore the parapets, and repoint the brick on the Walker house. Just two years later, the park’s newsletter reported that almost half of the site’s \$545,000 budget—\$238,000—was dedicated to preservation and protection of buildings and artifacts.⁷

Cataloging and protecting the artifact and manuscript collection also remained a constant concern at this time. In 1997, a team from NERO’s Boston office traveled to MAWA to assist in clearing the backlog of uncatalogued artifacts. The following year, a

⁵ Ron Thompson et al., *Long Range Interpretive Plan*, 3, 6–13, 22–24, 27, 37. Quote on 9.

⁶ Ron Thompson et al., *Long Range Interpretive Plan*, 11, 13–18, 32–36. Quotes on 13, 17; the focus on “free-choice” and nonlinear learning became the major focus of museologists in the late twentieth century. John Falk and Lynn Dierking summarized the scholarship and explained how free-choice learning worked in museums in *Learning from Museums: Visitor Experiences and the Making of Meaning* (New York: Rowman and Littlefield, 2000).

⁷ Management Team Meeting Minutes (Hereafter MTM), 16 July 1997, 3, Box 1, Folder A 40.35 Management Team Meetings 1997, Suggs; Cindy MacLeod, Richmond National Battlefield Park and Maggie L. Walker National Historic Site Northeast Regional 1998 Annual Report, Central Files, Folder A2621 Superintendent Reports; “FY 2000 Budget and Activities Summary,” *The Quarterly* 2 (Winter 2000), 4.

contractor completed cataloging all of the artifacts in the Walker house. Staff also put all historic photos on a CD-ROM, to increase accessibility and prevent further deterioration of the collection.⁸

Preserving Community Resources

As personnel maintained the sites they had already restored, they also continued to try to protect the historic resources related to Maggie Walker, both within and outside of Jackson Ward. Neglect, crime, and development continued to plague the neighborhood. In 1998, MacLeod noted a 58 percent increase in crime across the Richmond National Battlefield Park district, which included the thefts of the donation boxes at Chimborazo and MAWA, for which no perpetrators were ever apprehended. The City of Richmond had invested in Jackson Ward to try to ameliorate poor conditions. Together with RRHA, it had rehabilitated 219 residential units from 1987 to 1997. It had spent over 15.6 million dollars on building infrastructure improvements, including increased lighting, tree planting, and sidewalk construction and repair. It had purchased 105 land parcels for the planned Jackson Place development and spent 300,000 dollars on rehabilitating Third Street and demolishing dilapidated buildings. However, the Jackson Place project was still not under way, and the anticipated economic benefits from the Jackson Center construction never materialized; people who worked there did not spend money in the community. There was not enough retail to support the neighborhood as a destination, and lower property and rental values were not pulling in potential investors. Although the construction of MAWA's visitor center, the expansion of Third Street Bethel AME, the reconstruction of the Hippodrome Theater, and the 2-million-dollar restoration of the A. D. Price Funeral Home signaled the positives of development in Jackson Ward, these efforts had failed to stave off the population decline, problem with homelessness, and crime. And from 1991 to 2001, the development that did occur led to the razing of over 100 buildings. With the proposed expansion of the convention center at the end of the twentieth century, more buildings were in the path of destruction.⁹

MacLeod worked with other preservationists to put together a grant for the U.S. Department of the Interior's "Save America's Treasures" program in 1999. The grant requested \$2.5 million to rehabilitate some historic buildings and move others out of the

⁸ MTM, 16 July 1997; MacLeod, Richmond National Battlefield Park and Maggie L. Walker National Historic Site Northeast Regional 1998 Annual Report.

⁹ MacLeod, 1998 Annual Report; Mary Means and Associates, Economics Research Associates, and A. G. Dobbins Associates, "Revisiting Vision 2000: Neighborhood Economic Development Strategies for Jackson Ward," Prepared for Richmond Renaissance and the City of Richmond, August 1998, 5, 8, 9, 14–15, 19–20; Leslie Winston, Interviewed by Megan Shockley, 12; Clipping, Gary Robertson, "'Alarm Bell': National Trust Places Historic Jackson Ward on List of Endangered Sites," *Richmond Times Dispatch*, 26 June 2001, top drawer, Superintendent's Office, Save America's Treasures Folder.

path of the expanding convention center, which would be matched with in-kind and cash donations by the city, RRHA, convention center developers, and Richmond Renaissance. Arguing that “in the past 50 years there has been more demolition than rehabilitation[,]” the grant named the threats to Jackson Ward: “being an inner-city minority neighborhood squeezed by road construction, Virginia Commonwealth University construction, Convention Center expansion, and the need for parking lots to accommodate the users of the new facilities.” The grant requested funds to move five houses on Clay and four on 3rd (including the home of noted newspaper editor and Walker colleague John Mitchell Jr.) out of the path of the convention center construction, as well as funding to restore and renovate several significant historic structures, including Tucker Cottage, the oldest remaining building in Jackson Ward, the Elks Lodge, and the W. W. Browne House. The grant was one of 64 projects in 24 states to receive funding, but only at \$650,000 of the total requested. This would allow for building rehabilitation, but not the moving of threatened structures.¹⁰

The grant money came with several restrictions, and those involved with the rehabilitation worked to manage within them. The money could not be used for providing loans for owners, and each building receiving money had to propose a separate working budget and be a contributing building. In addition, the Virginia SHPO and NPS had to complete Section 106 surveys before any work began. As of December 2000, the buildings at 523–527 N. 1st Street were under Section 106 review, the Elks were searching for a private developer to contribute funds to the renovation of the Elks Lodge, and the Black History and Cultural Museum provided a budget and planned to renovate the exhibit space at 1–3 East Clay and in 2002 would ultimately plan a move from the Dill building on Clay into the Leigh Street Armory, which received funding to repair the roof. The Southern Aid Building conversion to apartments was scheduled to begin after the Section 106 review and grant agreement were complete. The Booker T. Washington School (OIC Building) needed new documentation and building use descriptions, but it was eligible for money as well. A different source of revenue materialized to pay for the move of 515/517 North 3rd Street, and the convention center integrated the facades of 523/525 into the front of the building.¹¹

The grant money helped rescue several buildings in Jackson Ward, but the neighborhood continued to be plagued with both destruction from development and buildings that continued to deteriorate from lack of care. MacLeod told MLWHF of her concern

¹⁰ Connie Bawcum to Joe Wallis, 24 November 1999; U.S. Department of the Interior Save America’s Treasures FY 1999 Historic Preservation Fund Grants to Preserve Nationally Significant Intellectual and Cultural Artifacts and Historic Structures and Sites, both in top drawer, file cabinet, Superintendent’s Office, Jackson Ward Folder 1; clipping, Gordon Hickey, “Treasure Trove/Grant to Help for Buildings in Jackson Ward,” *Richmond Times Dispatch*, 21 May 1999, top drawer, file cabinet Superintendent’s Office, Save America’s Treasures Folder.

¹¹ Joe Wallis to Connie Bawcum, 17 December 1999, and Jackson Ward Save America’s Treasures Project Update, 20 January 2000, both in top drawer, file cabinet, Superintendent’s Office, Jackson Ward Folder 1; Gordon Hickey, “Treasure Trove”; “Jackson Ward House Moving Project,” 29 June 1999, top drawer, file cabinet, Superintendent’s Office, Save America’s Treasures Folder; “About,” Black History Museum website, last accessed 1 March 2021, <https://www.Blackhistorymuseum.org/preserve-stories-that-inspire>.

with the condition of the motel next door, which sat in its dilapidated state after the redevelopment project fell through. Members promised to contact Eggleston and a city official to see what could be done. By 1998, Consolidated Bank and Trust had purchased and then resold the property, but still it sat empty.

The *Richmond Free Press* noted Jackson Ward's continued placement on the ten most threatened historic sites in 2001 and 2002, as a result of continued development. Cindy MacLeod told a journalist for the *Richmond Magazine*, "Everybody talks about saving Jackson Ward, but all I ever see is more and more new building." One of the ongoing problems identified by Jennie Knapp, Executive Director of Richmond Alliance to Conserve Old Richmond Neighborhoods (ACORN), was that the city encouraged outsiders to plan "revitalization" efforts without concern for the history and culture of the neighborhood. A journalist ran through a list of efforts spanning the decade, including Project One's Sixth Street Marketplace, which was an abject failure, the convention center, Jackson Center, and Marriott, which had to receive assistance from the city. Local residents and businesses were not consulted in the planning, which happened under the auspices of the mostly white Independent Taxpayers Association. In addition, what residential development occurred promoted gentrification. Theodore Holmes, longtime Jackson Ward resident, told the journalist, "Today, we see more whites moving in, and that's good, but we hope that there is room for long-term residents and the elderly folks who live here. I'd like to see it stay that way." These ongoing problems caused the Vice President of the National Trust for Historic Preservation to tell a reporter that the neighborhood sat at the top of the endangered sites list and was in serious trouble.¹²

In 2002, city officials and private developers proposed an \$80 million downtown development deal to revitalize the area from 5th through 7th Streets between Leigh and Grace, demolishing the failing 6th Street Marketplace. Richmond City Council proposed creating a five-member Broad Street Development Authority to oversee the project. However, the Historic Jackson Ward Association bowed out. Representatives for the neighborhood objected to the fact that private owners would need to pay back the money, and that those within the development zone would pay annual assessments. The neighborhood's city council representative Sa'ad El-Amin told a reporter: "Neither history nor people have been kind to Jackson Ward." Citing the interstate, Richmond coliseum, convention center expansion, and Project One, all of which were created in the name of progress but did little to help the surrounding community, he reflected residents'

¹² Bill Sydnor, MLWHF Board Meeting Minutes, 10 September 1997, MAWA Park Records Box, unprocessed folder; MLWHF Board Meeting Minutes, 13 May 1998 and 9 December 1998, Box 2, Notebook 5, MLWHF; clipping, Dave Pittman, "Neighborhood 'Endangered,'" *Richmond Free Press* 23–25 May 2002, A7, Box 4, untitled folder, Suggs; Harry Kollatz Jr., "Tug-of-War," *Richmond Magazine*, January 2001, 66–77, Quotes on 66, 77; clipping, Gary Robertson, "'Alarm-Bell': National Trust Puts Historic Jackson Ward on List of Endangered Sites," 26 June 2001, *Richmond Times Dispatch*, top drawer, file cabinet, Superintendent's Office, Save America's Treasures Folder.

skepticism in previous projects. As one reporter noted, the city had spent millions on neighborhood revitalization with little to show, including a six-million-dollar investment in Jackson Place, which remained unbuilt.¹³

MacLeod continued to stand at the vanguard of preservation in the neighborhood, even taking on Virginia SHPO's revision of the original National Historic Landmark nomination. In September of 2002, the department submitted documentation to include extending the period of significance through the militant civil rights era, the 1940s–1960s, without providing an opportunity for MacLeod to review it. MacLeod learned about this many months later, and immediately wrote to staff at the National Trust for Historic Preservation, as well as NPS officials and SHPO staff, that the document should never have been accepted without MAWA or at least NERO's approval, and that many of the buildings included were in bad shape. She criticized the lack of condition reports for each building and questioned whether buildings constructed less than fifty years ago even qualified. She also noted that the documentation included more buildings that had been razed than were still standing. Arguing, "I know that the update of the district documentation was done to allow a historic tax rehabilitation project for a 1970 building—that has driven what I think is a shoddy project," she asked for a reopening of the case, and a revision of the boundary to include buildings in question. The Director of SHPO made changes to the language that made clear this revision was simply an addition, and not an amendment, of the original, so as to not diminish the importance of the earlier period. She promised to revise the boundaries to include the new buildings and would do a complete study of the district to cite the changes to the landscape.¹⁴

As Superintendent MacLeod led the charge to protect the historic resources of the surrounding neighborhood, retired Ranger Jim Bell worked to protect another significant Walker site. Evergreen Cemetery, where Walker and many other prominent members of the African American community are interred, was in poor shape as a result of years of little care. The cemetery was privately owned and had no continual care provisions. Moreover, as descendants moved from the area, fewer stakeholders remained who could care for the graves properly.¹⁵

Today, Jim Bell recalls his reactions to Evergreen Cemetery when he first transferred back into the NPS from early retirement. Celia Suggs told him that they needed to see the site, so they traveled there on a lunch break. He said, "I tell you the truth it was a shock to me, I couldn't believe it." He described having to "wade through vines and stuff" to get to

¹³ Clipping, Dave Pittman and Jeremy Lazarus, "Ward Opts Out of \$80 Million Downtown Deal," *Richmond Free Press*, 10–13 July 2002, A1, 6; clipping, Jeremy Lazarus, "\$3M Investment Plan for Jackson Ward," *Richmond Free Press*, 23–25 May 2002, A7.

¹⁴ Carol Schull to Cindy MacLeod et al., 17 July 2003; Cindy MacLeod to Patrick Andrus, Carol Schull, et al., 16 July 2003; Cynthia MacLeod to Carol Schull et al., 22 July 2003; Kathleen Kilpatrick to Carol Schull, 9 September 2003, all in drawer 3, file cabinet, Superintendent's Office, Folder Jackson Ward updated 2003.

¹⁵ Comments from Ethan Bullard on first draft.

gravesites. A 1998 newspaper article described Evergreen as “a jungle of disarray.” Journalist Jaymes Powell described the cobblestone paths that had been looted for stones, as well as rampant overgrowth of weeds and vegetation. Bell told Powell, “It’s terrible out here. . . . We owe it to [Walker] and other people out here to keep the place up.” Bell argued that Evergreen was the equivalent of Hollywood Cemetery, burying ground of prominent whites, notably Confederates, and that it deserved money for restoration so it could be added to an NPS Walker-related tour. Bell determined to do something about the situation.¹⁶

Bell found partners in the community and set out to rehabilitate Evergreen Cemetery. He linked up with the president of the Burying Ground Society to seek her support and met with a Henrico County official about installing a historic marker on the site. The official agreed that the county would assist and would work on cleaning and clearing the cemetery entrance. In October 1998, volunteers, including students from St. Catherine’s School, began to clear the area around Walker’s grave. In 1999, Bell worked with Lieutenant Colonel Ashton from the George Wythe High School and received funding for junior ROTC participants to clean up the entire cemetery over the summer. Many supported this work, including MLWHF member Rev. Akida Mensah, who helped organize the effort, other MLWHF and Historic Jackson Ward members, and the Burying Ground Preservation Society of Virginia. One hundred ROTC cadets, supervised by a dozen AmeriCorps workers, cleared the cemetery. The MLWHF newsletter praised the group effort, stating, “We are also clearing the way for the recovery of our history. We are clearing the way for race pride and uplift, scholarship and tourism.” By 2001, students from the Richmond Technical Center’s brick mason program constructed new entrance pillars, giving the cemetery a more prominent appearance from the road.¹⁷

Interpretation

During this period, local, regional, and national staff partnered to advance the research and presentation of Walker’s life in multiple formats. In so doing, they illustrated NERO’s call to find the untold stories and Pitcaithley’s urging to tie local history to a larger national narrative. Personnel humanized Maggie Walker in a number of ways, and illustrated her national significance, even if she remained relatively absent from the lexicon of important Progressive-era historical figures.

¹⁶ Jim Bell, interviewed by Megan Shockley, 15; Jaymes Powell, “A Jungle of Disarray: Cemetery Shows 50 Years of Neglect,” *Richmond Times Dispatch*, 17 August 1998, B3.

¹⁷ *The Maggie Walker Herald* #3, November 1998, 1; *Maggie Walker Herald*, #4, April 1999; *Maggie Walker Herald* #6, June–July 1999, ed. Muriel Branch; all in Box 2, Notebook 5, MLWHF; *Maggie Walker Foundation* flyer/newsletter, n.d., Box 5, Articles of Incorporation Folder, MLWHF.

In 1999, multiple contractors began work on a deeper analysis of Walker’s home, trying to contextualize family life by examining the furnishings within. Money from the Special Fees fund enabled the NPS to contract Ellen Denker, owner of a museum consulting/collections assessment company, to write a complete *Historic Furnishings Report*. In the fall of that year, NE Cultural Resources Center Architectural Conservators Barbara Yocum and John Scott traveled to the site in order to conduct wallpaper and paint analyses, respectively. With the assistance of Denker, Yocum determined what original wallpaper belonged to which rooms, how well the wallpaper chosen or reproduced matched the original, and which rooms needed reproductions closer to the originals. Scott took 328 paint samples and analyzed them under a microscope to best match the original colors with Munsell’s color notation system. He also sampled furniture finishes to find the best matches. As staff reviewed the reports, MacLeod explained that they discovered Walker’s original choices of curtains, wallpaper, and paint were “much bolder and more colorful than much of what is displayed.”¹⁸

Denker’s *Historic Furnishings Report Vols. 1 and 2* draft was complete in 2001 and finalized in 2004. She used photographs, legal documents, oral histories, research on the artifacts, and the 1999 paint and wallpaper reports to provide a furnishing plan for every room in the house. Volume 1 gave a detailed history of the emergence of the MLWHF, the NPS, and the site acquisition, as well as a history of the occupants. Denker described each room’s use, the color, and if/how it differed from current staging. She explained where artifacts were, noting that the Cigar Store Indian had been removed from the house by Maggie Laura Walker Lewis, who gave it to her son. Volume 2 contained a detailed blueprint for furnishing each room. When information was unavailable, Denker contextualized the furnishings of similar homes in order to best determine how each room would have looked.

The point of this research, as *The Quarterly* told readers, was to redesign the house exhibit to “transport visitors into the world of Maggie Walker.” As the researchers conducted their work, the NPS responded. In 1999, staff spent \$30,000 on period and reproduction furniture. In 2001, they hired a contractor to reproduce Walker’s wheelchair, based on the specifications described by Denker, which is currently on display in the front parlor. In 2005, personnel completed designs for the reproduction wallpaper, and using the Fee Demonstration Funding, worked with Harpers Ferry Center (HFC) to secure both historic and reproduction furniture that was not in the vault, but that Denker had identified in the plans. Because the wallpaper company hired by the NPS went bankrupt, the project did not get completed at that time. It is scheduled for completion in 2024. Staff

¹⁸ *Maggie Walker Herald* Issue #6, June 1999, Box 1, MOU Folder, Suggs; John Scott, “Interior Paint Analysis, Maggie L. Walker National Historic Site,” November 1999, MAWA Park Records Box; Barbara Yocum, “Wallpaper Assessment Trip Report, Maggie L. Walker National Historic Site, Richmond, Virginia, September 20–24, 1999,” MAWA Park Reports Box; Cindy MacLeod, Superintendent’s Report: The State of Richmond National Battlefield Park and the Maggie L. Walker National Historic Site, FY 2001 and FY 1999, both in Central Files, Folder Superintendent Annual Reports.

also rearranged the laundry room to resemble the original 1920s version and started to create a window treatment plan. Moreover, staff repainted the house to better match the colors found in the analysis.¹⁹

During this period, staff found methods to share interpretative findings in various ways. In addition to adding and rearranging artifacts and reproductions according to the *Furnishings Report*, staff added Walker's original office desk to the visitor center exhibit in the fall of 1999. The newsletter pointed out to readers that the marks from her wheelchair illustrated how she accommodated her disability. Staff also shared the Walker story in prose. In 1998, staff completed the site unigrid folder, partnering with HFC to produce the informative pamphlet. In addition, staff worked to get Gertrude Marlowe's final product, *A Right Worthy Grand Mission: Maggie L. Walker and the Quest for Economic Empowerment*, out with Howard University Press in 2003. This book, an expanded version of the NPS manuscript "A Ransom for Many" had been many years coming. Marlowe died before a contract with Carlson to publish the manuscript could be executed, and Carlson went bankrupt before it could produce the book. NERO Solicitor Anthony Conte wrote to Carlson's bankruptcy trustee, requesting that Howard University receive publishing rights. He maintained the NPS financed the research and therefore held serious interest in the project's fate. He argued the publication would help to fulfill the goals of the site, the NPS, and the Department of the Interior. By 2003, over five years after Conte wrote to the trustee, Howard published the book. This brought Walker's story to a much wider audience of scholars and students of African American history. The largest interpretive effort of this period was the creation and installation of the permanent exhibit in the Leigh Street buildings, which will be discussed later.²⁰

The research uncovered by this point complicated many of what MLWHF member Faithe Norrell called the "urban legend stories" that had been told about Walker. By this point, the origins of Walker's father were no longer in question. David Ruth had notes on

¹⁹ "Maggie L. Walker's Home Receives a Facelift," *The Quarterly* Issue 20, January 2006, 2; MacLeod, Superintendent's Report, FY 1999, FY 2001; Cindy MacLeod, Richmond National Battlefield Park and Maggie L. Walker National Historic Site 2005 Superintendent's Report, and Cindy MacLeod, Superintendent's Annual Narrative Report FY 2006 Richmond National Battlefield Park and the Maggie L. Walker National Historic Site, all in Central Files, Superintendent Annual Reports Folder; *The Quarterly*, Issue 23, May 2007, 1, 4. For details on the wallpaper project, see the files in the curator's office, PMIS 227120. When the original company went bankrupt, NPS had already paid for the design of the reproductions. The company mailed the original wallpaper back to an incorrect address, and they were never recovered. However, the funding is now available and the project should be completed by 2024.

²⁰ *The Richmond National Battlefield Parks Quarterly* Newsletter, Issue 1, Fall 1999, Box 2, Notebook 5, MLWHF; Cindy MacLeod, Richmond National Battlefield Park and Maggie L. Walker National Historic Site Northeast Region 1998 Annual Report, in Central Files, Superintendent Annual Reports Folder; Anthony Conte to MARO Director, Attn. Diann Jacox, 18 September 1989; Gertrude Marlowe to Diann Jacox, 1 August 1991, both in MAWA Reports Box, Biography Review Folder; Anthony Conte to John Pereira, 10 October 1997, MAWA Reports Box, Folder H-22.17 MAWA Biography Project. While we cannot be sure of why Howard's production was so delayed, the press had only been in operation since 1972 and closed its doors in 2011, so perhaps it was because of lack of personnel or funding to get the book into physical production. Because Marlowe had passed in 1996, there was no author to push for a swift resolution.

the discovery of Eccles Cuthbert's origins, discovered after the publication of Marlowe's book. The notes stated that Cuthbert was Irish, enlisted with the 1st South Carolina Regiment, then reenlisted in a different South Carolina regiment, and was transferred to hospital duty in Richmond. This evidence, the note explained, came from the Compiled Service Records of the National Archives. In addition, Marlowe had challenged Walker's own claim of her birth date as 1867 in her research. Another note in Ruth's files explained that birth certificates for this period in Richmond were challenging to come by, but the 1900 census listed her birth date as 1865. The evidence, it concluded, put her birth date at 1864–65. Later research would confirm 1864. As they learned new information, staff worked to incorporate the discoveries into the programming.²¹

Programming

The period between the opening of the visitor center and the Leigh Street buildings saw an expansion of activities at the site. While popular programs continued, staff worked to attract larger audiences to these events with additional activities. Staff and volunteers also continued to provide a good deal of community outreach, fulfilling a goal of the NERO report. Moreover, staff found more community partners to assist with program development and execution, thus achieving yet another goal.

The Maggie Walker birthday celebrations seemed an annual favorite of visitors, but in this period, staff worked to expand the reach and scope of the programs. In 1997, the 130th Birthday celebration lasted for four days. It included a roundtable discussion of Jackson Ward, a luncheon honoring MLWHF founders Gladys Shaw and Phyllis Dance, a cemetery cleanup with a special invitation extended to Maggie L. Walker High School alumni to participate, a worship service at First African Baptist Church, and a book signing by MLWHF members and authors of *Pennies to Dollars* Dorothy Rice and Muriel Branch. The following year, a two-day celebration featured noted Richmond historian Gregg Kimball and business owner and longtime Jackson Ward resident Aurelia Ward in a public talk about Jackson Ward. The celebration also included musical performances and a gravesite wreath-laying ceremony. In 1999, Bill Sydnor presented his documentary "Our Inspiration: The Story of Maggie Lena Walker" at Virginia Union University. The next night, the living history presentations expanded to a "History Comes Alive" program, with

²¹ "Notes on the identity of Maggie Walker's father," and "Notes to files re: birth date of Maggie Walker," September 2003, Box 3, Education Folder, David Ruth Interpretive Files.

interpreters portraying leaders Maggie Walker, Frederick Douglass, and Mary McLeod Bethune, and entertainers Jelly Roll Morton, Ella Fitzgerald, and Marian Anderson. The following year, the MLWHF held an afternoon birthday tea at MAWA.²²

By the early 2000s, NPS staff broadened the scope of Walker's birthday celebration by partnering with Downtown Presents and the MLWHF to expand the celebration as part of Downtown Presents's "Big Gig" concert series, a popular long-running event that introduced Richmonders to a wide variety of music in different venues across the city. NPS secured additional sponsors—the grocery store Community Pride, the Jackson Foundation, Pepsi, and Channel 12—to help fund the event. Portions of Leigh and Second Streets were closed off so that more people could attend, and the celebration featured a cake and activities for kids. Approximately 2,500 people attended the celebration, and hundreds waited in line to tour the home. This partnership continued throughout the period and grew to include presentations and exhibits from other NPS site rangers, the Federal Reserve bank, a lunchtime lecture series, and a birthday tea in 2004. Sponsors included the African American Experience Fund of the NPS Foundation, Wachovia Bank, and Home Depot.²³

While this kind of broad community-based programming was right in line with NPS directives to reach out to new partners and find new audiences, not everyone appeared convinced that working with Downtown Presents was a good idea. At a 2001 meeting of the MLWHF, Althea Lewis expressed worry over the proposed partnership. She argued that the MLWHF might lose its "position of influence as planner and co-sponsor" to the much larger, well-known, and well-funded Downtown Presents. She proposed that the board sponsor its own events instead. This conversation led to a discussion over who owned the rights to Maggie Walker's image, an issue Reverend Akiah Mensah promised to pursue. After "much discussion," the majority voted to work with Downtown Presents and the NPS.²⁴

²² "Maggie L. Walker Historic Foundation Celebrates Maggie L. Walker's 130th Birthday," and Flyer, "The Maggie L. Walker Historic Foundation and National Park Service Are Co-Sponsoring a Cleanup. . ." both in Box 5, untitled manila folder, MLWHF; "Maggie L. Walker's Richmond," Box 2, Notebook 5, MLWHF; Michael Paul Williams, "'Friends' Pay Homage to Walker," *Richmond Times Dispatch*, 16 July 1999, B1; "Maggie L. Walker's 132nd Birthday Celebration Scheduled," and "Itinerary: Renaissance Woman: Maggie L. Walker Foundation Events Committee," 14 June 2000, Revised 6/29; both in Box 1, July 15–August 15, 1999, Folder, Suggs.

²³ "Birthday Celebration for Maggie Walker," *The Quarterly*, Issue 8, Summer 2001; "On July 15, 2001 the National Park Service, the Maggie L. Walker Historical Foundation and Downtown Presents Will Celebrate Maggie L. Walker's 134th Birthday," and Cindy MacLeod to Christina Risatti, 17 September 2001, both in Box 1, MAWA's 134th Birthday July 15, 2001, Folder, Suggs; "The Big Gig Presents Maggie L. Walker's 134th Birthday Concert," program, MAWA Park Records Box, MLWHF Folder Part 1 of 2; "'National Park Service Celebrates Maggie L. Walker's Birthday Anniversary,'" 2 July 2002, Box 2, Notebook 5, MLWHF; Press Release, 2 July 2003, Box 2, unprocessed material, MLWHF; "Richmond National Battlefield Park Maggie L. Walker National Historic Site 2003 Calendar of Events," Box 8, Calendar of Events 2004/MAWA Folder, Suggs; "Maggie L. Walker 137th Anniversary Birthday Celebration," 2004, Box 1, MAWA's 138th Birthday Celebration Folder, Suggs.

²⁴ Muriel Branch, MLWHF Board Meeting Minutes, 10 January 2001, MAWA Park Records Box, MLWHF PR Folder.

In addition to attracting wider audiences with an upgrade in programming, MAWA staff also expanded and upgraded children’s programming. In 1997, Celia Suggs brought staff and volunteers to host a booth at Downtown Presents Family Jubilee, held on Browns Island and cosponsored by Ukrop’s and Target. Staff helped kids make bookmarks and IOSL regalia, Nancy Jo Taylor and Nessa Johnson told stories to kids, Hyman Schwartzberg created a portable exhibit, and a Virginia Commonwealth University (VCU) professor sketched the Walker house and related buildings on site. This collaboration continued through this period, introducing the story of Walker to hundreds of children through a variety of hands-on activities each June. Staff also updated the Junior Ranger program after receiving \$4,000 for production costs from the Fee Demonstration Program in 2000. Introduced during Black History Month, it reached 960 children that February. Staff continued to update this popular program, putting together a spiral-bound book in 2004 targeted at children ages 8–12. This book contained several activities, focused on the information children would see in the new permanent exhibit and the house. The “leader” of the experience was Maggie Laura Walker Lewis as a child. Funding from ENPMA, Parks as Classrooms, and the Fee Demonstration Program covered production expenses.²⁵

Rangers and other staff and volunteers continued to focus on engaging area school-children. In 1999, staff also produced its first program based on the Virginia Standards of Learning. RICH and MAWA Education Coordinator Patrice Ferrell and Jim Bell (at this point retired and working as a volunteer) worked with Jewel Turpin, History Education Coordinator for the Richmond City Schools, to develop two educational programs. “Mrs. Walker’s Neighborhood” for grades 1–2 focused on the importance of community and community leaders, and “Ride the Wind” introduced Maggie Walker as a leader of the civil rights movements to children in grades 3–4. These programs were held on Tuesdays, when the house was not open to the general public. Several years later, Maggie Walker was the subject of the Richmond Ballet, RPS, the Science Museum of Virginia, and the Federal Reserve Bank–sponsored Minds in Motion, a program that introduced public-school fourth graders to movement, dance, and academics. In 2004, 1,400 fourth graders toured the Walker house, learned about her, and then worked with choreographers to create an interpretive dance story, titled “Banking on a Dream: The Maggie L. Walker Story.” Johnny Mickens III, RPS sixth grader and great-great-grandson of Walker, narrated the performance. The weekend shows at the Arthur Ashe Center drew over 10,000 people.²⁶

²⁵ Celia Suggs to Kerry Ellis, 7 June 1997, Box 1, Folder A-86.15 Family Jubilee 1997, Suggs; “Downtown Presents Calendar of Events 1999;” “Downtown Presents Ukrop’s/Target Family Jubilee” to be held 2 June 2001; Celia Suggs to Partner, 1 June 2002, all in Box 1, Family Jubilee 2001 Folder, Suggs; Celia Suggs to VIP, June 2003, Box 1, Family Jubilee 6/7/03 Folder, Suggs; MacLeod, Superintendent’s Report: The State of the . . . Parks FY 2000; Fatihe Mickens, MLWHF Board Meeting Minutes, 11 February 2004; Spiral-Bound Junior Ranger Activity Book, both in Box 2, Notebook 5, MLWHF; “Spotlight on Education,” *The Quarterly* Issue 18, March 2005, 3.

²⁶ “Ride the Wind at Maggie L. Walker National Historic Site,” *The Quarterly*, Issue 2, Winter 2000, 7; “Minds in Motion: Richmond Ballet Focuses on Maggie Walker,” *The Quarterly*, Issue 16, June 2004, 4.

Programs that had been popular continued. As before, personnel hosted movie and speaker series for MLK Day, and Black and Women’s History month events, made sure that each Christmas open house had special performances, and provided special walking tours of Jackson Ward. They continued to host booths and give tours at the 2nd Street festival. Staff also started a special “Voices of the Community” program in 2002. Moreover, they took the opportunity to promote very special events in honor of the centennials of Walker’s founding of the *St. Luke Herald*, the St. Luke Penny Savings Bank, and the St. Luke Emporium.²⁷

The *St. Luke Herald* anniversary kicked off in 2002 with a major symposium, “The Voice of the Community,” held at the Maggie L. Walker Governor School. The symposium featured a roundtable of prominent journalists, including Raymond Boone, founder of the *Richmond Free Press*, and noted editorialist and journalist Michael Paul Williams of the *Richmond Times Dispatch*, who discussed topics related to the Black press. Attendees viewed a portion of the movie *The Black Press: Soldiers without Swords* and enjoyed presentations on topics that included the history of the Black press and the role of women in the Black press. This symposium signaled the launch of a year-long project conceived by ranger Monamma Al-Ghuiyy and funded by a \$25,600 grant from the Robins family through the NPS Foundation’s African American Experience Fund. This program, designed to meet seventh-grade civics and English SOLs, explored the role of Black and mainstream newspapers both in the contemporary and historical context. Students would produce their own newspapers and go on field trips. The program began with two classes at Boushall Middle School.²⁸

For the 100th Anniversaries of the establishment of the St. Luke Penny Savings Bank (1903) and St. Luke Emporium (1905), NPS and MLWHF teamed up with other partners to host commemorative events. In 2003, the MLWHF hosted an anniversary gala for the bank under tents next to Consolidated Bank & Trust. A trolley shuttled participants from the parking lot of the Maggie L. Walker School to the site, where they enjoyed an

²⁷ Evidence of Christmas open houses, a Jackson Ward tour, speakers and programming for Black and Women’s History Month, and other events can be found in the unprocessed papers of MLWHF Boxes 1 and 2, as well as in Box 1, Notebook 5, and Box 3, untitled scrapbook, MLWHF. Information is also located in Box 5, Folder Maggie L. Walker Historical Foundation, MLWHF; Box 1, Folders Black History Month 1999, Black History Month 2001, Black History Month 2/02, A-8215 Second Street Festival 10/95 10/96, Christmas 97, A 82.15 Christmas 1998 Wreaths Around Richmond, 13th Second Street Festival 10/5–7/1, and Historic Downtown House Tours, FA 40.35 Management Team Meetings 1997, Suggs; Box 3, Folders Calendar of Events MALW 2001, untitled manila folder, Suggs. Other news releases and calendars can be found in Box 8—Blue Folder, Folder Media and Publicity Submissions, and Folder Calendar of Events 2004 MAWA, Suggs; as well as in the Superintendent’s Reports folder, located in the Central Files.

²⁸ 2002 Program, “The Voice of the Community,” Box 2, unprocessed papers, MLWHF; “Maggie L. Walker National Historic Site Celebrates the St. Luke Herald Newspaper,” 17 October 1992 [*sic*], Box 8, Media and Publicity Submissions Folder, Suggs; National Park Foundation to Cindy MacLeod, 13 December 2001 and “Black History Through Media,” January 31, 2002, both in drawer 2, file cabinet, Superintendent’s Office, Media Folder; “National Park Ranger Launches ‘Black History Through the Media’ in Schools,” 31 January 2003, Box 8, Media and Publicity Folder, Suggs.

outside evening of food and drink. This program received funding from Dominion Energy, Howard University Athletes, and Ukrop's. To honor the Emporium's founding, MLWHF held a fashion show and Black Entrepreneurs' Market at the Maggie L. Walker Governor's School. Models wore both period and modern clothing in the show. This event must have proved popular, because it ran for several more years. In 2006, dress shop owner Lucille Cephas put together a large fashion show at The Showplace, complete with gospel music. This show also commemorated the founding of the St. Luke Emporium, and tickets cost \$30 to attend. The program noted that a portion of the proceeds would benefit the MLWHF. A program insert detailed the work of the MLWHF, including providing scholarships and planning a summer leadership institute.²⁹

Just as in previous years, NPS staff relied on volunteers to assist with the many on- and off-site programs offered to the public. Suggs continued to hold volunteer training sessions for the many jobs they could perform, including tour guides, visitor service assistant, educational program assistant, library assistant, curatorial aide, and photographer. A general orientation session included an overview of the NPS and VIP programs, a session on interpretation, a Walker history session, a tour of the exhibits (including the one that would open in 2005), and a ninety-minute walking tour of Jackson Ward. And each year, staff honored volunteers with a reception or special program, usually in April, when the NPS celebrated National Volunteer Week.³⁰

When considering the very small staff size, as well as the curatorial, conservation, and research work staff members completed in addition to providing tours, it is not surprising that they relied on hundreds of volunteer hours each year to help them run the site. Phyllis Dance estimated one year (c. 1998) that MLWHF members performed at least 1,224 hours of recorded service, but "many more hours of planning and development. . . go unrecorded." The 1998 Superintendent's Report noted that VIPs did 1,154 hours in interpretation and 70 in maintenance, and they conducted 50 tours and 19 offsite presentations. In 2000, 30 volunteers did 1,202 hours of work both on and offsite, including participating in 15 outreach programs. By 2004, there were so many programs running that Cindy

²⁹ Invitation and RSVP Card, 100th Anniversary Gala of Founding of St. Luke's Penny Savings Bank; MLWHF Board Meeting Minutes, 12 November 2003, both in Box 2, unprocessed papers, MLWHF; MLWHF Board Meeting Minutes, 10 November 2004, Box 5, Maggie L. Walker Historical Foundation MLK 2005 Folder, MLWHF; Faithe Mickens, MLWHF Board Meeting Minutes, 8 February 2006, Box 5, Folder with "Maggie L. Walker Historical Foundation" written in red ink, MLWHF; Program, "C Us Boutique: 3rd Annual Spring/Summer Fashion Show," 8 April 2006, Box 5, unprocessed, MLWHF.

³⁰ "Maggie L. Walker National Historic Site Volunteers in Parks Training," 26 June 2004, and "Volunteers in Parks Job Descriptions," in Box 4, Volunteer Training Program Folder, Suggs; "Volunteers Inspire by Example," 7 March 2005, and "Volunteers in Parks Job Description," n.d. but times house was open were listed from Monday–Saturday (which was in place by 2000 according to the Strategic Plan published in that year) both in Box 4, VIP Training 2005–2006 Folder, Suggs. The information on special events to honor volunteers can be found on the annual calendars of events, as well as in the MLWHF notebooks.

MacLeod told MLWHF members that she needed help—even though Willette Johnson and Diane Foster together logged over 1,000 hours. She promised to give a book and a lunch to volunteers who performed 100 or more hours of service.³¹

Visitor Services

Volunteers and staff worked hard to provide robust programming for visitors to special events and onsite, and that programming was but one component of the effort to make visitors feel welcome and included. In 1997, the park received \$5,500 in money for signage, and an upgrade of signs for MAWA was “high on the list[,]” according to Management Team Minutes. Another ongoing issue remained parking. MacLeod wrote to Maxine Williams, President of the Historic Jackson Ward Association, that “parking has always been an issue.” She still made clear, though, that while A. D. Price Funeral Home and the Mocha Temple assisted by allowing visitors to use parking when available, NPS could not advertise the sites. She made clear, however, that she did not condone razing any buildings to provide lots. And in 2000, MacLeod increased the visitor hours from five days a week to six, providing more flexibility for visitors.³²

Working to diversify the staff, particularly given the kinds of visitors at MAWA, also continued to be a priority during this period. Overall NPS seasonal hires appeared to be a concern in 1997, as management discussed the fact that if the NPS did not create a viable plan to increase diversity, the Department of the Interior would take over the hiring process, and individual parks may have their automatic rehires withdrawn. MacLeod noted that they reached diversity goals with their summer hires in 1998. As of September 1998, she reported, seven of thirty-two employees were women and eight were people of color. Of five new hires, one was a woman, and one was a person of color. The seasonal hires included 21 percent women and saw an increase in people of color from 50 to 61 percent. One white woman converted from the Student Temporary Employment Program (STEP), and two African American women were appointed to the STEP program in summer 1998. She committed to conducting affirmative action programs and hiring at an institution of higher education that had a large percentage of nonwhites. She also agreed to increase women by 25 percent in the seasonal hires. Two years later, MacLeod wrote that as the result of an “outside investigation into staff concerns[,]” she made a few changes in the

³¹ Phyllis Dance, “Maggie L. Walker Historic Foundation Annual Volunteer Report,” n.d. but estimated to be 1998 based on a program she referenced, Box 2, Notebook 5, MLWHF; Cindy MacLeod, Richmond National Battlefield Park and Maggie L. Walker National Historic Site Annual Report, Northeast Region, 1998; Cindy MacLeod, Superintendent’s Report ... FY ’00; MLWHF Board Meeting Minutes, 12 May 4, Box 2, unprocessed papers, MLWHF.

³² MTM, 30 May 1997, Box 1, Folder FA 40.35 Management Team Meetings 1997, Suggs; Cindy MacLeod to Maxine Williams, 20 April 1999, top drawer, file cabinet, Superintendent’s Office, Jackson Ward NR documentation Folder; MacLeod, Superintendent’s Report ... FY 2000.

staff, “partially to ensure a non-discriminatory environment.” She scheduled EO training sessions for the entire staff and followed up in other ways as a result of the investigation. She also noted that a focused local recruitment helped increase the proportion of minority seasonal and permanent staff.³³

Renovation of the E. Leigh Street Buildings and a Permanent Exhibit

The most significant event in this period was the completion of the Leigh Street buildings and accompanying permanent first-floor exhibit, which opened in April 2005. Although plans for completion began in 1997, funding and contractor issues delayed public opening by two years after the anticipated date. Still, when it opened, the project represented the completion of a vision twenty years in the making.

Planning for a full reconstruction of the E. Leigh Street buildings began in June 1996, when MacLeod put in a package proposal to “Stabilize/restore” 112, 114, 116, and 118 E. Leigh and install a fire suppression system in the Walker House. The package included a cost estimate of just over 1.3 million dollars and included the full restoration of porches and other exterior features, full systems infrastructures for all buildings, and a climate control added to the carriage house, as well as restoration of the historic elevator. The proposal explained that if NPS were to ignore these derelict buildings, not only would important historic resources be lost, but also “the NPS will be seen as perpetuating blight in the neighborhood and not living up to its commitment to the community.” It noted that the windows were about to fall out, the artifacts were inadequately stored with improper climate controls, and the buildings posed safety hazards to the general public. Restoration, it argued, would provide much-needed space for curatorial storage, offices that could be moved out of the Walker house, and space for legacy organizations to meet, which had been promised by the NPS in the 1970s. It also suggested using the original elevator to provide access for all who wanted to see the second floor. This proposal suggests that at this point, staff had scrapped the idea of renting out buildings to legacy organizations, as there were “no takers” for the offer to lease the other buildings. However, it did mention that restoring the buildings would be beneficial to NPS public relations, as the city and Congressman Bobby Scott were interested in the revitalization of historic Jackson Ward.³⁴

³³ MTM, 18 June 1997, 2–3, Box 1, Folder 40.35 Management Team Meetings 1997, Suggs; MacLeod, Richmond National Battlefield Park ... 1998 Annual Report; “Superintendent’s Contract for Diversity Improvement, Richmond National Battlefield Park, Maggie L. Walker NHS,” Signed by MacLeod 9 April 1999 and Marie Rust, NERO Director, 14 May 1999, top drawer, Superintendent’s Office, EEO/Workforce Diversity Plan Folder; MacLeod, Superintendent’s Report ... FY 2000.

³⁴ “United States Department of the Interior National Park Service Development Study/Package Proposal,” signed by Cynthia MacLeod, 7 June 1996, drawer 2, file cabinet, Superintendent’s Office, MAWA 10-238 Rehab Folder, quotes on 1, 5.

Planning for the major project moved ahead in 1997 and 1998, as teams gathered to complete the preparation work. Staff from DSC and NERO came together in spring 1997 to assess the conditions of the buildings and consider alternative plans that included minimal restoration and no programming, or only renovating the first floors of 114 and 116/118 for residential and office units. They concluded that the facade work, including porch restoration, should take precedence, and that the front-facing rooms should retain architectural features/stairways as much as possible. The courtyards were of minimal significance, so the elevation could be raised in order to provide access to wheelchairs. Later that year, DSC and MAWA staff signed an agreement to complete the work, with designs and analysis slated for 1998–99, and construction contracts to be awarded in 2000. The document established teams from NERO, DSC, and MAWA, and outlined each group’s duty, with DSC preparing the construction plans, and NERO and MAWA providing information, analysis, and decisions. A 1997 Archeological Report explained that the work would not damage any critical resources, and the Virginia SHPO gave approval to the design plan, including changes to the back of the buildings to expand ease of access. One of the aspects left out, however, was the climate control system in the carriage house. It has a gas heater but no cooling system as of 2022.³⁵

MacLeod sent a memo to the NERO Director explaining that through the planning process, local, regional, and DSC staff determined that the original GMP needed updating. These included changing 112 from curatorial to office space, including space for MLWHF. 114 would become the curatorial vault for all artifacts in the RNBP system, which was in line with NERO’s 1997 recommendation for artifact storage. 116–118 would expand to include a first floor for education and second floor for office space. She noted that visitor center use showed the need for additional exhibit/education space, both of which helped achieve the goals of the Comprehensive Interpretive Plan.³⁶

Although the completion of these buildings had been a stated goal as early as the first GMP, the plan faced obstacles. As a 1998 Project Report explained, “Funding is tight, especially with the additional work necessary to produce adequate measured drawings.” At this point, about \$75,000 was available for preparatory work. Cost concerns caused the elimination of several elements of the project. Staff deleted the new climate control systems for the carriage and Walker houses; they determined the existing system in the Walker house was adequate, and all artifacts could be moved to 114. They also decided that adding

³⁵ Northeast Regional Cultural Center Building Resources Program, “Maggie L. Walker National Historic Site Historic Structures Condition Report,” n.d. but synopsis places origin in March 1997; “Project Agreement, Maggie L. Walker N.H.S. Stabilize/Restore Historic Resources, MALW 116 06/07,” Signed by MacLeod on 24 November 1997; Cindy MacLeod and David Ruth, “Richmond National Battlefield Park Section 106 Case Report,” 20 October 2000, all in drawer 2, file cabinet, Superintendent’s Office, Folder MAWA 10-238 Rehab Folder.

³⁶ Cindy MacLeod to NERO Director, 24 July 1998, re: General Management Plan, Maggie L. Walker NHS, Box 3, Interpretive Plan MAWA May 98 Folder, Suggs.

to or altering the Walker house elevator was cost-prohibitive and potentially damaging to the existing structure; instead, they would make a video of the second floor and install an elevator to meet ADA requirements in the adjacent building. A review found that the porch restoration would be more costly than anticipated, and the roof of the Walker house was deteriorated enough that it needed repair. And money was not the only obstruction. Courtney Smith still lived at 112 E. Leigh Street, with the twenty-five-year lease option that had been provided with the quitclaim deed. As Cindy MacLeod wrote to a regional staff member, “She’s elderly; technically, we could not renew her lease but morally/politically we must, so we’ll have to work around her occupancy I guess.” The NERO Realty Officer noted that the leasing rights were signed in October of 1986, and MacLeod had issued a special permit for Smith to lease for five years beginning in May 1995.³⁷



An event in the courtyard before the full renovation

³⁷ “Project Report: Maggie L. Walker National Historic Site Stabilize/Restore Historic Resources,” 10 January 1998; “Maggie Walker NHS Package 116-06, 25 June 1998,” and MacLeod to Betty Janes, 6 January 1997; all in drawer 2, file cabinet, Superintendent’s Office, MAWA 10-238 Rehab Folder; Boyd Sponaugle to Cindy MacLeod, 16 July 1998, drawer 2, file cabinet Superintendent’s Office, General Folder. Technically, if still bound by the agreement made in 1980, Smith should have had renter’s rights through 2005.



The courtyard prerenovation

Funding proved more difficult than staff had anticipated; from 1998 to 2000 supporters struggled to get Congressional support. MacLeod told MLWHF members that Senators Warner and Robb were trying to get back the funding that had been pushed to the 2001 budget; the newsletter exhorted members to “Please, please, keep the calls, emails, and letters going!! Put the pressure on.” In 1999, Clinton budgeted 1.795 million for the project, which the Senate subcommittee deleted. The newsletter provided contact information for Representative Bobby Scott and Senators Warner and Robb—explaining “I’m afraid our silence might be construed as complacency.” The pressure campaign may have played a role in Senators Warner and Robb formally committing to support the Walker restoration on the floor of the Senate in 1999, and the MLWHF newsletter asked members in 2000 to write to Robb to thank him for his role in restoring the project’s funding.³⁸

Once NPS secured the line-item construction funding, staff could begin to prep for construction. They planned for work to begin in 2001, and by the end of 2000, contractors had removed all hazardous material from the site and construction drawings were complete. However, the NPS faced a remaining obstacle—the tenancy of Courtney Smith.

³⁸ *Maggie Walker Herald* #3, November 1998; MLWHF Board Meeting Minutes, 11 November 1998; *Maggie Walker Herald* #6, June/July 1999, Ed. Muriel Branch (who may well have authored the quote) in MLWHF Box 2 Notebook 5; MLWHF Board Meeting Minutes 20 October 1999, Box 2, Notebook 3; *Maggie L. Walker Herald* Volume 2 Issue 6, June 2000, Box 2, Notebook 5, MLWHF.

MacLeod was aware of the ramifications of moving an elderly woman from the home she occupied for decades, and the questioning she faced from MLWHF members in 2000 reflected the challenges of the situation. In an email to David Ruth and MacLeod, Celia Suggs related a meeting in which members asked about whether Smith had a life tenancy; the minutes of the meeting state, “The Foundation was told that Mrs. Smith would have life time rights[,]” which was not correct. Foundation members asked who would pay the difference if Smith could not find another rental at an equivalent cost, and about the obligations of the NPS to assist with the move. At the meeting, Suggs assured the MLWHF that the NPS would help to assist Smith and the foundation in making the move as easy as possible, and E. D. McCreary volunteered to help find Smith a new home. By the end of 2001, however, MacLeod essentially had to evict Smith. Writing a formal letter to her, MacLeod reminded her that they informed her “at least 2 years ago” of the plans to renovate 112 E. Leigh St. She explained that construction had been approved to start in December 2001, but “work cannot be performed effectively, economically, or safely” with her still in place. MacLeod told Smith she had to vacate by February 1, 2002, and reminded her that MacLeod had asked the MLWHF to assist in the relocation efforts. In retrospect, MacLeod admitted that the NPS perhaps did not handle the situation “as well as we could have, should have. I think in the end she wasn’t all that happy.” But she did argue that they let her stay longer than intended, made sure she found a new place, and that the new place was probably better than the conditions of the rental home.³⁹

The incident with Smith seemed to create tension between the MLWHF and NPS; this was not the only construction-related matter that appeared to affect the relationship between the two institutions. As plans developed for Smith’s former residence to become office space, Muriel Branch met with Smith to talk about the space the Foundation expected to receive. Mozelle Baxter’s niece, Jean Williams, believed that the MLWHF had been promised the entire house. She promised to look through the archives for supporting evidence. Although MLWHF members appeared to drop that assertion, several months later Faithe Mickens noted in the minutes that “the Foundation is still questioning their ‘closet’ space[,]” arguing that they needed more room for their records. Phyllis Dance had

³⁹ MacLeod, Superintendent’s Report ... FY 1999; MacLeod, Superintendent’s Report ... FY 2000; MAWA-116 Stabilize/Restore Historic Resources Telephone Conference Minutes, 29 February 2000, drawer 2, file cabinet, Superintendent’s Office, MAWA Rehab Water Issues Folder; Celia Suggs to David Ruth and Cindy MacLeod, 9 November 2000; MLWHF Board Meeting Minutes, 8 November 2000, both in MAWA Park Records Box, MLWHF PR Folder; Cindy MacLeod to Courtney Smith, 21 November 2001, Central Administration Files, Rent-Mrs. Courtney Smith Folder. Restoration plans included a detailed landscape design for the block, based on a Cultural Landscape Inventory that had identified elements within Jackson Ward that could be incorporated into the site. This undated document provides suggestions for fencing and detailed instructions on the types of plants that could be incorporated into the landscape. See “Landscape Design Guidelines for Leigh and Second Street,” n.d., drawer 2, file cabinet, Superintendent’s Office, MAWA 10-238 Rehab Folder; Interview with Cindy MacLeod, 13.

five scrapbooks and more at her home and planned to meet with MacLeod to secure more space for the office and displays. A year later, MacLeod said that the MLWHF could move to the upstairs of 112.⁴⁰

The restoration/renovation project faced some challenges from MLWHF, but also from issues related to the construction itself. The contractor, Prestige Construction, was to complete the project by the end of 2002, which included the exterior restoration of Leigh Street buildings, the installation of a fire suppression system in the Walker house, and the installation of an elevator in the rear of 114/116. NPS Facility Manager Daniel Hodgson recalled that the project seemed problematic right from the start. The Denver Service Center had already awarded the construction grant when Hodgson arrived at his new post before the work began. He remembered that Cindy MacLeod had asked him to investigate the construction firm hired, and he found there had been several complaints lodged against them for nonpayment of subcontractors. Both he and MacLeod lobbied to hire a new firm, but DSC said since it was the end of the fiscal year and the contract had already been awarded, they needed to move forward with the contractor. Coupled with this, Hodgson recalled, was a shrinking of DSC personnel, so that the staff in Denver could not come out to supervise the project. Instead, as he explained, he was the expert, “But I had no actual authority on the project. All I could do is talk to people and say, hey, this is not right, this is not right.” And Hodgson did his best throughout the project to make sure that work got done correctly.⁴¹

In February 2003, Hodgson complained to DSC’s Project Coordinator Randy Copeland and others that the contractor waited six months to get submissions for a sprinkler system installer, and that the work done was shoddy. He also noted that NPS began paying for utilities in December and were now spending \$50 a day to heat buildings that still lacked windows. Contracting Officer John Fox said he did not receive revised schedule updates, and the work was only about 90 percent complete, with the fire and security systems not linked. He explained that NPS knew of no “excusable delays[,]” including weather. Tony Conerly, Prestige Construction’s project manager, blamed the delays on the NPS’s slow decision-making progress and having to submit multiple preconstruction plans. No matter the explanation, NPS began to assess liquidated damages against the construction company in January 2003. Delays continued, as the construction company could do no work on the Walker house during Black History Month.⁴²

⁴⁰ MLWHF Board Meeting Minutes, 12 November 2003; Faithe Mickens, MLWHF Minutes, 11 February 2004 and 10 March 2004; all in Box 5, unprocessed, MLWHF; Faithe Mickens, MLWHF Board Meeting Minutes, 12 January 2005, Box 5, Folder Maggie L. Walker Historical Foundation.

⁴¹ Daniel Hodgson, interviewed by Megan Shockley, 20 July 2021, 3.

⁴² Clipping, “Maggie L. Walker National Historic Site Construction Project Is Underway,” *Free Press*, 10–16 July 2002, Box 4, untitled folder, Suggs; John Fox to Kenneth Jones, 4 February 2003; Daniel Hodgson to Randy Copeland et al., 29 January 2003; Tony Conerly to Willie DeOcampo, 6 June 2003; Walter Schmidt to Kenneth Jones, 12 August 2003; all in drawer 2, file cabinet, Superintendent’s Office, MAWA Rehab Folder.

By this time, there was a substantial punch list of work that needed completion, but the biggest problem concerned the safety systems. When the installers tested the fire suppression system in February 2003, the pressure blew apart a pipe in 114 E. Leigh, damaging the wall and spreading water on the floor. Hodgson wrote to Conerly, “I am worried we will be given a time bomb, waiting for one of my workers to accidentally bump a pipe, causing serious harm.” Conerly refuted his statement and questioned why the NPS would have wanted to install a system without fully investigating what it looked like or how it worked. DSC ended up sending an engineer out to check on the system, although the NPS accepted that the work had been mostly completed by April. By May, a punch list still went uncompleted. NPS Contracting Officer Walter Schmidt notified Prestige Construction’s owner that NPS would begin to charge liquidated damages again, which had been halted in April when the NPS accepted substantial completion. The fact that the work remained to be done, Schmidt said, “has caused severe undue hardship on the park that can no longer be tolerated.”⁴³

Despite the delays, construction was mostly complete by the end of the 2003 fiscal year. MacLeod noted in her annual report, “The park spent considerable [*sic*] more staff time than planned to administer and oversee the project, but the park assistance and occasional intervention insured a sustainable and useable product.” A team coordinated by Northeast Museum Services staff Alicia Paresi and Sara Wolf, assisted by MAWA staff, relocated all artifacts to the new storage in 114, and created a spreadsheet to map out each artifact’s location. They suggested that the staff input all items into the ANCS (the standard NPS collections management database system), clean objects that were stored in poor conditions, and check artifacts for mold and water damage, especially the book collection. By this time, NPS had received additionally promised funding to complete the renovation of the Leigh Street buildings. MacLeod wrote to supporters, “It is a rare pleasure to watch a historic architectural gem regain its luster and dignity.” Explaining that the funding from the Line-Item Construction Fund and Fee Demonstration Program allowed for \$2 million in renovation, MacLeod explained that the interior courtyard and elevator expanded access to the public, and that the interior exhibit hall in 112 would include an exhibit on the history of the St. Luke Penny Savings Bank.⁴⁴

⁴³ Daniel Hodgson to Tony Conerly, 3 February 2003; Tony Conerly to Daniel Hodgson, 3 February 2003; William De Ocampo to Kenneth Jones, 14 April 2003; Walter Schmidt to Kenneth Jones, 12 August 2003; all in drawer 2, file cabinet, Superintendent’s Office, MAWA Rehab Folder.

⁴⁴ MacLeod, Superintendent’s Report ... FY 2003; Northeast Museum Services Center, Completion Report: Technical Assistance Project August 18–29, 2003, Maggie Walker National Historic Site, Richmond, Virginia, MAWA Park Records Box; Coordinating Meeting, 9 September 2002, 2, drawer 2, file cabinet Superintendent’s Office, MAWA Rehab Folder; “Superintendent’s Letter,” *Park News: The Quarterly*, Issue 14, July 2003, 1.

The Final Phase of Restoration, 1997–2005



Current streetscape of Maggie Walker National Historic Site on E. Leigh St.

Once the buildings were complete, planning began on the permanent exhibit to be installed on the first floors of 116–118. In an early proposal, David Ruth suggested a learning center model, with guest researchers and information from other relevant sites, with a general theme of centering Walker in greater African American life and culture during her lifetime. He conceived of a “hands-on approach about entrepreneurship, civil rights and *Jim Crow* [sic], banking, women’s rights, Black newspapers, education, and images of African Americans.” He wrote that NERO suggested to WASO a \$200,000 grant for the exhibits from the Fee Demonstration program. Although the interactive learning center model changed, the theme remained the same.⁴⁵

In February 2004 the NPS contracted Southern Custom Exhibits of Georgia to script and build the exhibit, and work progressed quickly from there. The exhibit focused on Walker’s background, family, the IOSL, the bank, civil rights, and her legacy. Visitors would start in the visitor center and view the movie, tour the exhibit, and then enter for the first time through the front door of the Walker house for the tour. The blueprint, complete in September 2004, explained the floor plan of 116–118 as being biographical. It addressed Walker’s parentage and upbringing, how her mother’s laundry business influenced her, as well as the influence of Jackson Ward and the First African Baptist Church. It included a discussion of her development of race consciousness, first displayed at the protest over segregated graduation ceremonies. A panel explained the IOSL, and her rise through its ranks, as well as its Juvenile Division. The family panel focused on the centrality of kin ties but did not shy away from the accidental shooting and murder charge, as well as how Walker’s foes tried to use that to unseat her. Other panels included information on the bank, as well as a mock-up display of a teller window. Later, a supporter loaned the site what at the time was believed to be a small handheld child’s bank for the exhibit, now currently understood to be a fundraising promotion for the IOSL Educational Loan Fund. Panels also covered the *St. Luke Herald*, the St. Luke Emporium, and contemporaries with whom Walker was acquainted. Finally, the legacy section included her 1901 speech calling for the IOSL to expand, excerpts of other speeches, and even information about the Maggie L. Walker Governor’s School. The exhibit would be interactive, featuring audio buttons.⁴⁶

The new permanent exhibit, combined with the additions to the Walker house based on the *Historic Furnishing Plan*, promised a dynamic new experience to visitors. As MacLeod explained, before the renovations, visitors had to gather in the rear of the home and walk past the laundry room and kitchen to get to the start of the exhibit. Now, they would start in the visitor center, then learn about Jackson Ward outside on the sidewalk, and

⁴⁵ David Ruth, “Maggie Walker Learning Center for African-American Studies,” Box 3, Maggie L. Walker Learning Center Folder, Suggs.

⁴⁶ Faith Mickens, MLWHF Board Meeting Minutes, 11 February 2004, Box 2, unprocessed, MLWHF; “Revised Concept Plan,” September 2004, MAWA Park Records Box; “Maggie L. Walker National Historic Site Acquires Bank,” *Quarterly*, Issue 18, March 2005, 2. Note from Ethan Bullard in comments about the bank/promotional product.

begin where Walker’s guests would have entered, in the parlor. Artifacts that had been in the vault would be on display in the exhibits and in the house, just where they may have been used in Walker’s time. The permanent exhibit, as MacLeod said in her annual report, “pioneered a design-build concept” and provided context for what the visitor would see in the home. The exhibit, funded by the Fee Demonstration Program, reflected the NPS movement to take park stories and place them in context with national movements. In addition, the exhibit allowed for docents to pare down the information they would have to tell visitors, and enabled visitors to walk through the exhibit at will, choosing where they would like to focus their attention. This provided a strong contrast to the methods of imparting information through the movie and tour and reflected free-choice learning ideals. The exhibit opened to the public in April 2005 with a special ribbon-cutting ceremony.⁴⁷

Theoretically, the exhibit was designed as an interactive exhibit to be explored by individual visitors; in reality, this apparently never happened. Instead, rangers ended up leading tours through the exhibit hall, as there were no extra personnel on hand to staff the hall itself all the time. This led, at times, to awkward encounters with visitors, according to Park Guide Ben Anderson and RICH/MAWA Curator Ethan Bullard. Instead of visitors taking their time and reading the prodigious amount of text on the panels, they stood listening to their tour guides provide the same information, as they tried to look at the text without breaking attention from the guide. Ultimately, the rangers stopped leading visitors through the exhibit hall, once a new visitor center movie provided the information presented in the exhibit hall.⁴⁸

Conclusion

The final large-scale project to complete the site ended with the ribbon-cutting ceremony to mark the opening of the exhibit and the buildings that housed it. With the exception of the opening of a few rooms in the Walker house, the site as it stood in 2003 represented the completion of the two-decade project. Programming continued to expand along with the buildings, and staff worked to increase the number of educational opportunities for children.

Until FY 2005, with the exception of one year, attendance increased, and offsite programming at area festivals took the Walker story to more people in different ways (see table 2). While we don’t have all of the numbers for these programs, and it is unclear whether someone tracked attendance at every single major event, the variety of programs

⁴⁷ “Maggie L. Walker NHS Redefines Visitor Experience,” *Quarterly* Issue 17, September 2004, 2; MacLeod, Richmond National Battlefield Park and Maggie L. Walker National Historic Site 2005 Superintendent’s Report, central files, Superintendent’s Reports Folder; “Maggie L. Walker News Release: Ribbon Cutting and Exhibit Opening at the Maggie L. Walker National Historic Site,” MAWA Reports Box, unfiled.

⁴⁸ Ethan Bullard and Ben Anderson, interviewed by Megan Shockley.

increased, reflecting a desire on the part of staff to engage in outreach. MacLeod noted that she was not sure why 2005 witnessed such a decline in numbers, although other area museums saw the same decrease in visitors.⁴⁹

Table 2. Annual Visitation On and Offsite, 1998–2005

Fiscal Year (September–October)	Onsite Visitors	Community Program Contacts
1998	8,802	20,450 (and 7,592 website hits)
1999	10,434	7,521 (and 9,651 viewed audiovisual material)
2000	9,364	21,891
2001	9,881	4,644
2002	11,786	14,450 (and 159,217 website hits), materials loaned to 4,500
2003	11,118	34,203 and materials loaned to 51,720
2004	11,563	
2005	8,560	8,362

Information from “National Park Servicewide Interpretive Report, 4790 Maggie L. Walker National Historic Site, 1998,” 18 October 1998, Box 3, Folder FY 1998 Interpretive Report, Suggs; “Servicewide Interpretive Report, 4790 Maggie L. Walker National Historic Site FY 1999, Central Files, Folder A2621 Annual Reports; “Annual Interpretive Report Summary—Maggie L. Walker National Historic Site 10/1/99–9/30/2000,” Box 3, Folder FY 1998 Interpretive Report, Suggs; Cindy MacLeod, “Superintendent’s Report: The State of the Richmond National Battlefield Park and the Maggie L. Walker National Historic Site FY 2001,” central files, Folder Superintendent’s Reports; National Park Service Servicewide Interpretive Report, 4790 Maggie L. Walker National Historic Site, FY 2002, Box 3, Folder FY 1998 Interpretive Report, Suggs; “National Park Service Servicewide Interpretive Report, 4790 Maggie L. Walker National Historic Site,” FY 2003, Box 3, Folder FY 1998 Interpretive Report, Suggs; Cindy MacLeod, “Richmond National Battlefield Park and Maggie L. Walker National Historic Site 2005 Superintendent’s Report,” central files, Superintendent’s Reports. (MacLeod noted that it was hard to understand the decline in numbers, except that other sites experienced similar declines.)

And most importantly, these years saw a realization of the original vision established in the *General Management Plan*. Every NPS building on the block was put to use in a way that benefited the public. The site stood as an example of thoughtful, useful Jackson Ward preservation/renovation. Moreover, the publicity brought to the site, as well as new educational programs and the premiere of Bill Sydnor’s documentary “Our Inspiration” helped promote Walker’s story to a general audience. The premiere of the documentary at the Library of Virginia in 1998 was accompanied by the naming of the day as “Maggie Lena Walker Day” by Certificate of Recognition from the General Assembly. The Honorary Sponsoring Committee for the gala included such notables as Oliver Hill, Virginia Delegate Viola Baskerville, and Congressman Don McEachin. Large corporations, including Virginia Power (now Dominion Energy), Circuit City Foundation, Crestar Bank, and

⁴⁹ Cindy MacLeod, Richmond National Battlefield Park and Maggie L. Walker National Historic Site 2005 Superintendent’s Report.

Consolidated Bank were among those who contributed over \$5,000 to the project. It seemed that Walker's story was finally getting the recognition it deserved, thanks to the work of so many to research and tell it.⁵⁰

In fact, Deputy Secretary of the Interior J. Steven Giles visited the site in June 2004 to see the construction, and according to the park newsletter, "praised the transformation of the site and the improvements in the neighborhood." The article noted that Giles remembered his college years in Richmond and Jackson Ward's "less savory" reputation. MAWA's transformation, and the continued leadership of MacLeod, helped anchor the community of preservationists who sought to save the historic buildings of Jackson Ward.⁵¹

And more than helping to restore the neighborhood around them, the staff at MAWA brought the history of Maggie Walker to thousands of people in Richmond, and more who visited via the web. Cindy MacLeod explained the significance of incorporating African American history into the larger national narrative at the parks: "To some, these contributions are part of the nation's previously hidden history; to others, they are part of a proud heritage unjustly ignored or denigrated by the country's mainstream. We cannot afford to be ignorant of each other's history or blind to the intertwining of all our histories." She argued that their responsibility was to represent historical figures with all their complexities, and to make people see that "the unfamiliar" should not mean the "unimportant."⁵² Her belief that education could support understanding and broaden world-views was supported in the resources management, interpretation, and programming at the site. As staff worked to bring the site to a near state of completion, they recognized the vision of the NPS to expand the traditionally narrative canon of history, to reach out to more diverse populations, and to contextualize local stories in significant national contexts.

⁵⁰ Program, "Maggie Lena Walker: 'Our Inspiration,' A Gala Celebration of Her Life and Accomplishments," 12 September 1998, Box 1, William Sydnor Collection.

⁵¹ "Deputy Secretary Visits Maggie L. Walker National Historic Site," *The Quarterly*, Issue 16, June 2004, 1.

⁵² Cindy MacLeod, "The Superintendent's Letter," *The Quarterly*, Winter 2001 Issue, 1.

CHAPTER FIVE

Looking Forward, 2007–2020

After the opening of the buildings and exhibit hall, a chapter in the site’s expansion closed. However, staff moved forward, embracing new technology to expand their reach; working with new community partners in various programs designed to keep Maggie Walker’s name at the forefront of Richmond history and maintain an inclusive and welcoming environment; and working to incorporate new discoveries in Walker-related research. From 2005 to 2020, the staff at MAWA presented relevant, updated programming, expanded conservation and interpretation efforts, and used new tools to take the Walker story beyond the walls of the site.

As had been the case in previous periods, MAWA’s work reflected the broader NPS plan to further expand its reach in the twenty-first century. The National Parks Conservation Association created an independent commission in 2008 to work on a new plan for the park’s next hundred years. The National Parks Second Century Commission built on previous work done to re-vision NPS prerogatives, and in 2009 released a report, “Advancing the National Park Idea.” The report called upon the NPS to embrace a more collaborative process in protecting natural and cultural resources. It suggested that NPS staff foster local community initiatives with partners, facilitate lifelong learners, and promote diversity. It argued that the NPS needed to be better at addressing changing community and environmental conditions, adapting to new climate realities, and telling hard stories. It suggested the park service reach out to citizens who could become stewards of the parks as volunteers and new urban populations who could benefit from park visits. It also exhorted the NPS to use new technologies and develop new research in order to reach out beyond the bounds of their respective localities.¹

The NPS built on these concepts in the 2014 “Call to Action: Preparing for a Second Century of Stewardship and Engagement.” This report stated: “We will fully represent our nation’s ethnically and culturally diverse communities. To achieve the promise of democracy we will create and deliver activities, programs, and services that honor, examine, and interpret America’s complex heritage.” It also committed to the conservation of not only the parks but also the communities surrounding those sites. In addition, the NPS

¹ National Park Service, *National Park Service System Plan: One Hundred Years* (U.S. Department of the Interior, 2017), 8-11, accessed 23 March 2021, 8–11, <https://parkplanning.nps.gov/files/NationalParkServiceSystemPlan2017.pdf>; Parks Second Century Commission, “Advancing the National Park Idea,” accessed 23 March 2021, 19–21, 28–30, https://www.iucn.org/sites/dev/files/import/downloads/uscommission_report09.pdf.

determined to find better ways to be more inclusive, welcoming diverse populations and connecting young people to parks, which would foster lifelong relationships. Moreover, it promised specifically to tell the story of civil rights, as well as examine American narratives in diverse ways. The report included promises to better conserve both natural and historic resources by improving organizational flexibility and adaptability.²

Managing Resources, Interpretation, and Visitor Services after the Site's Completion

Although the period after the final renovation/restoration may have seen fewer large-scale projects, other challenges and discoveries kept staff busy in the twenty-first century. In addition to dealing with climate change that exacerbated the necessity of ongoing repair of centuries-old buildings, staff had to mitigate structural problems that cropped up several years after the completion of the construction project of 2001–3. Moreover, although many house museums suffer from fairly stagnant exhibits, interpretive staff worked to introduce new elements during this period.

MAWA site buildings needed constant maintenance, especially in the face of climate change, which increased rainfall and extreme weather events in Richmond (heat/precipitation in the form of rain and snow). In July 2008, contractors began to replace the roof of the Walker house; a leak had caused water damage on the second floor. The following year, contractors completed other exterior repairs, and by 2011 the house required repainting. Ongoing repairs included porch railing and painting at 114, managing leaks in 118, replacing awnings, and fixing broken windows. And in 2017, the “Foundation Document” argued that climate change adversely affected the house, with bigger temperature swings causing structural problems. The western exterior wall of the Walker house had moisture problems, and the bricks needed repainting again. This led to damage to the interior library wall, when the moisture seeped through the bricks and plaster and damaged the reproduction wallpaper. In addition, some of the wood from the 2001–3 construction project needed painting and/or replacing.³

² National Park Service, “A Call to Action: Preparing for a Second Century of Stewardship and Engagement,” 2014, accessed 23 March 2021, quote on 5, https://www.nps.gov/calltoaction/PDF/C2A_2014.pdf.

³ For more information on climate change and its effects locally, see RVA Sustainability Climate Change page, <https://www.rva.gov/sustainability/climate-change>; NDRC, “Climate Change and Health in Virginia,” April 2018, accessed 22 March 2021, <https://www.nrdc.org/sites/default/files/climate-change-health-impacts-virginia-ib.pdf>; Management Team Meeting Notes (Hereafter MTM), 28 July 2008, 28 September 2009, 7 January 2009, 10 January 2011; MTM January 2015, February 2015, April 2015, 14 February 2016, 10 April 2016, 8 May 2016, 25 September 2016. MTM notes in possession of curator; Ethan Bullard, comments on draft 2; National Park Service, “Foundation Document: Maggie L. Walker National Historic Site” (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of the Interior: June 2017), 11, 16, accessed 13 April 2022, <http://npshistory.com/publications/foundation-documents/mawa-fd-2017.pdf>.

Staff prepared to meet climate change effects head on. By 2007, they had managed to reduce their own electricity usage by 11 percent at both parks, a 25 percent reduction since 2003. Later, Chief Law Enforcement Ranger Tim Mauch prepared a Hurricane Preparedness plan for RICH/MAWA. The plan includes backing up all hard drives and covering the computers with plastic, sealing all cabinets and drawers, wrapping compact shelving and furniture in plastic, and securing artifacts in the vault and pantry, removing pictures from exterior walls and elevating them off the floors. The curator was to have the regional museum emergency coordinator's number on hand and would send an email to NERO alerting them of the weather situation. RICH/MAWA Law Enforcement Ranger Leslie Winston was designated as a member of the damage assessment team to check out MAWA. By 2017, the "Foundation Document" called for the installation of a generator to maintain power and protect the artifacts in cases of weather-related outages, something that has become more of an occurrence in the area in the last decade.⁴

Climate change was not the only environmental problem threatening the buildings and collection; a faulty HVAC system caused a serious mold problem that damaged the artifacts in the vault. The mold situation was exacerbated by a lack of oversight in the collection. As Ethan Bullard explained, Hyman Schwartzberg, who had been in charge of maintaining the collection, retired. The NPS did not immediately fill his position, Bullard recalled, so there was no one monitoring the HVAC system that already seemed to have some problems. By the time the new curator Klydie Thomas came in, a year later, the collection had gone without monitoring. Current curator Ethan Bullard explained that this can be a recurring problem in the NPS; he admitted, "Unfortunately something that the Park Service does not do well is succession planning." In this situation, that failure to plan proved costly.⁵

A 2007 assessment written by experts from HFC noted that the actual 2003 construction completion report suggested that staff check for mold or water damage, which was an early indication of a problem. In 2006, park staff reported mold growth around the HVAC vent and on several artifacts in 114. An environmental engineering firm came in to assess the levels on the first floor of that building and the second floor of the visitor center and discovered the "previously acknowledged" problem with the HVAC system enabled high humidity levels to accumulate. In the fall of 2006, staff installed a dehumidifier in the

⁴ Cynthia MacLeod, Superintendent's Annual Narrative Report FY 2006, Richmond National Battlefield Park and Maggie L. Walker National Historic Site, Central Files, Folder A2621 Superintendent Reports; Tim Mauch, "Richmond National Battlefield Park/Maggie L. Walker National Historic Site, Hurricane Preparedness and Recovery Severe Weather Plan," April 2013, Approved by David Ruth, David Ruth Records, MAWA Emergency Plans SOP's Folder. The park already had a "Continuity of Operations Plan" in place, also written by Tim Mauch in 2011 (Approved by Margaret Noes for David Ruth, 6 August 2011), also found in the Ruth records, which established who would be in charge of each aspect of operations in an emergency, so the hurricane plan built on this. "Foundation Document," 12. MAWA will receive a backup generator to cover the entire site in FY 2025. This will be funded through PMIS 247235, for \$322,000, according to Ethan Bullard (notes on draft 2).

⁵ Ethan Bullard, Interviewed by Megan Shockley, 23 September 2021, 6–7. Quote on 6.

HVAC system, as well as a UV filtration system, but by summer 2007 humidity was at 80 percent. Two portable dehumidifiers got the humidity down to 45 to 55 percent, but that was hardly a solution. Curator Klydie Thomas contacted Harpers Ferry Center and asked for an investigation team to visit. She told the team that green mold on many artifacts had been untreatable. The HFC team noted that only one artifact had been described as having a mold problem in 1979—although the team was unsure of whether the objects were clear or the report was not comprehensive.⁶

The HFC team assessed the damage and suggested remediation techniques. The problem was severe; the team explained that the mold could cause health problems, on top of damaging artifacts. All of the artifacts on the open shelving had some level of mold growth; those stored in archival boxes fared better. Many of the artifacts would need “intensive remediation,” according to the HFC team; others could be spot treated. The team provided a spreadsheet of artifacts and mold removal techniques. They suggested demolition of affected sheetrock and removal of contaminated walls and ceilings as the best solution, but at the very least, staff would need to disinfect the area, clean all affected ductwork, and contain the contamination to control the spread of mold growth. Cindy MacLeod sent an emergency request through PMIS to secure funding, which enabled the park to upgrade equipment and dehumidify the storage vault.⁷

Ultimately, the collection received the care it needed. Thomas brought on interns and help from NPS colleagues, and, as she recalled, “I just rolled up my sleeves and went to work.” Thomas had experience with mold remediation in the wake of Hurricane Isabel, which caused damage to Colonial National Historical Park collections when Thomas was curator there. In fact, she argued, “mold happened to be my thing.” As she recalled, she and her few helpers treated 100 percent of the artifacts, with little funding. Ultimately, Bullard installed new dataloggers equipped with LCD screens to better record and display the humidity, temperature, and sometimes light readings in the vault, as well as the museums themselves. In addition, Bullard maintains a strong relationship with the HVAC technician, who is, in fact, “on speed dial.”⁸

Beyond securing its safety, one of the most critical aspects of a curator’s job is defining a collection’s scope and making it accessible to the public, both of which curator Ethan Bullard formalized in this period. In 2013, Bullard and curatorial intern Amy Federico began compiling the data related to every oral history conducted, from the 1970s through the twenty-first century, including notes on where supporting documentation

⁶ Eric Schindelholz and Kathryn Wyant, “Mold Condition Assessment of Collections: Survey Report and Treatment Recommendations, Maggie L. Walker National Historic Site Richmond National Battlefield Park,” July 2007, MAWA Park Records Box, 4–5. Quote on 4.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 6–7, appendix; Cynthia MacLeod, Superintendent’s Annual Narrative Report FY 2006.

⁸ Klydie Thomas, interviewed by Megan Shockley, 4 August 2021, 7; Ethan Bullard, interview, 7–8. Quote on 7.

could be found, as well as information about who was involved in the interviews. They included this information in the finding aid, a comprehensive catalog of oral histories divided into series based on the dates of the interviews. Several years later, Bullard revised the Scope of Collections Statement. It updated what the collection held, what kinds of objects could be accessioned, which included anything with direct association with the park itself, and who could accept materials. It discouraged restricted gifts or loans unless for a specific exhibit, and established guidelines for researchers. This provided a clear direction for the management of the archives moving forward.⁹

As personnel managed the effects of a faulty HVAC, they also dealt with continued problems from the fire suppression system. In 2005, MacLeod reported that contractors replaced the high-pressure mist system in the Walker home with a “less intrusive” one. But this one proved no better than the original system, and according to MacLeod, it suffered “major failures” just two years later. The WASO architect’s office assisted MacLeod in getting the installer to repair the system at no charge. Even at that, the 2017 “Foundation Document” deemed the fire suppression system ready for a change—again—to something even “less intrusive” than the one currently installed, although it remains a high-pressure mist system.¹⁰

In addition to maintaining the systems and infrastructure of the old buildings, staff continued to introduce new interpretive elements onsite. In 2006, onsite personnel worked with HFC to secure historic furniture and reproduction window treatments to complete the MAWA interpretation based on the HFC. They received funding from the 20 Percent Fee Demonstration for this work. A year later, staff completed the window treatment plan for the Walker house, and a year later, the Elegant Draperies company installed 1930s-style window treatments. Staff also prepared a biographical pamphlet to accompany a “101 Prominent Colored Persons” poster, which was reproduced for sale from the original in Walker’s library in 2006. In 2008, curatorial-treated artifacts would be displayed in the two new upstairs rooms. Staff used the *Historic Furnishings Report* to complete the Walker home’s interpretation, opening up the remainder of the rooms to the public in 2009. In 2015, Ethan Bullard and historian and park guide Ben Anderson worked on new wayside projects, which interpreted Walker’s home and Jackson Ward (which is not installed yet as of spring 2022). These projects also included reproducing a series of large photos that

⁹ National Park Service, “Finding Aid: Maggie L. Walker Oral History Collection, 1979–2010”; Ethan Bullard, “Department of the Interior National Park Service Maggie L. Walker National Historic Site Scope of Collections Statement,” 13 February 2018.

¹⁰ Cynthia MacLeod, Richmond National Battlefield Park and Maggie L. Walker National Historic Site 2005 Superintendent’s Report, and MacLeod, Superintendent’s Annual Narrative Report FY 2007 Richmond National Battlefield Park and Maggie L. Walker National Historic Site, all in Central Files, Folder A2621 Superintendent Reports; “Foundation Document,” 12. Ethan Bullard notes that MAWA will be getting a replacement for the fire suppression system, with PMIS 247053 providing a replacement for the house and vault for over \$200,000 (notes on draft 3).

could be rotated into the visitor center window and large metal banners. These provide information and interpretation to those in the area, as well as visitors who show up after the site is closed.¹¹

Incoming staff inherited a very static and very expensive exhibit hall; they determined to set up temporary exhibits in the visitor center to showcase the extensive artifact and photograph collection and to provide new interpretation to visitors. Ben Anderson recalled the other permanent ranger who worked with him was interested in cars, so he created a binder of the history of Walker’s cars in 2012–13 that still sits at the visitor center desk. Anderson and other staff members mounted several temporary exhibits in the visitor center beginning in 2014, including “Women in the Walker House,” featuring four generations of women related by blood or marriage who lived under the same roof; a thirty-year retrospective on the history of the NPS at the Walker site; and one commemorating the 1916 NPS Centennial. This one used a Facebook post connecting Walker’s history to other NPS sites, in an exhibit that included brochures from the parks in the exhibits. These small exhibits, bounded by the three-panel display available, enable visitors to learn stories not easily told on the house tour and in the exhibit hall.¹²

Staff also maintained safety standards for themselves and visitors during this period. They also continued to work to increase accessibility. In 2009, contractors upgraded the video/audio system with assisted listening devices, message boards for the audio, and captioning. In 2010, the Management Team brought up an issue that had not gone away, the problem with bus loading. Several years earlier, the Safety Committee Meeting determined that buses offloading on the opposite side of Leigh Street from the home (going with their traffic pattern) were extremely dangerous, because of the problem with street crossing. It suggested offloading on the north side of Leigh Street, in front of the home, as a safer option. By 2010, with increased traffic in the area, buses were continuing to unload across the street, and the management team determined that they needed to encourage bus drivers to unload either on Leigh or in the vacant lot that had once been the home of the now-demolished Eggleston Motel. That same year, park maintenance staff had to raise the height of newly installed directional signs on 2nd street by the visitor center by ten inches, as people were hitting the signs with their heads when they cut the corner to the entrance. In 2012, the

¹¹ Cynthia MacLeod, Richmond National Battlefield Park ... FY 2005; Cynthia MacLeod, Superintendent’s Narrative Report FY 2006; “Maggie Walker House Gets ‘Special’ Treatments,” *The Quarterly*, Issue 23, May 2007, 1, 4; MTM 7 May 2008; David Ruth, “Superintendent’s Letter,” *The Quarterly*, Issue 26, November 2008, 1; MTM Notes, 22–26 June 2015; MTM, 26 February–3 March 2017; Ethan Bullard, notes on the second draft.

¹² Ben Anderson, interviewed by Megan Shockley, 29 September 2021, 42–45; Ethan Bullard, notes on the first draft.

Safety Committee toured the Walker house to determine whether the library lights hung too low, and whether there was a need for formal evacuation plans. They also wanted to see for themselves if the exit signs were confusing, as a safety audit had mentioned.¹³

Maintaining the Walker Site in a Gentrifying Jackson Ward

While the MAWA buildings would remain unchanged with the exception of ongoing repairs since their completion in 2003, the same cannot be said for the neighborhood. Although crime and derelict buildings remained problematic, the face of Jackson Ward changed dramatically in the second decade of the twentieth century, bringing new challenges. The Walker site found itself affected in several ways, positive and negative, and staff tried to address the negative effects as best they could.

Much of the change was positive; in 2007, MacLeod noted that the NPS worked with the City of Richmond’s public works department to get the dilapidated Eggleston Motel complex next to the site torn down, for example. Staff also drafted an update for the St. Luke Building NHR nomination, possibly in an unsuccessful attempt to give the building National Historic Landmark status. Moreover, Jackson Ward experienced an influx of new residents, beginning around 2000, which caused the average cost of a home to rise by \$100,000.¹⁴

The NPS praised, and took credit for, many of these positive changes that took place in Jackson Ward. The 2015 “State of the Park” report explained that from the very beginning of its residency in the neighborhood, the site “has been a positive force in influencing private and public development and *redevelopment* of its surrounding neighborhood. . . . [The site] complex has served as a shining example of preservation, adaptive reuse, and historic integrity.” It claimed credit for the demolition of the motel, as well as the removal of the abandoned Exxon gas station on Leigh Street that lay within the original historic boundary, as well as the redesign of the convention center to face the neighborhood. Noting the motel and gas station’s locations just outside the boundary of the locally designated Jackson Ward City Old and Historic District, the report discussed increased development, particularly on the 2nd Street Corridor. The report did not relate the 2009 collapse of the Eggleston Hotel (diagonally across from MAWA). Although built to look a

¹³ MTM, Week of 8 June 2009, 1 March 2010; Safety Committee Meeting Minutes, 17 May 2004, Box 1, Safety (RNBP/MAWA NHS) Folder, Suggs; MTM 1–23 April 2010, 8 November and 11 November 2010. Safety Committee Meeting Minutes, 14 November 2012, David Ruth Records Rich 7532 Box, Safety Committee Meeting Folder.

¹⁴ Cynthia MacLeod, Superintendent’s Annual Narrative Report FY 2006; Note from Ethan Bullard in the comments on the first draft; Leah Whitehurst-Gibson and Bruce Mitchell, “Gentrification: A Mixed Bag in Historic Richmond, Virginia Neighborhood,” 9 April 2019, National Community Reinvestment Coalition, accessed 22 March 2021, <https://ncrc.org/gentrification-a-mixed-bag-in-historic-richmond-virginia-neighborhood>.

bit like the original, the site’s subsequent redevelopment into a restaurant/apartment altered the streetscape and showed just how close new development could get to the site. Moreover, with the influx of new people came increased pressure on parking, which had been a perennial problem. The city did change some of the one-hour parking spots in front of the site on 2nd Street to two-hour spots, but parking remains an issue as more and more residents park on the streets.¹⁵

The increase in population and development also had some negative effects. While positive for investors and those with the means to renovate the old buildings, development pushed out many older residents who could not afford to remain. This caused a decline in the African American population from almost 70 percent in 2000 to just over 22 percent by 2012. And while there was a general decline in the crime rate from 2000 to 2012, crime increased fairly steadily from its low in 2004 to about 2010, when it began to increase again. In 2010, the Community Policing Division came out to do a security survey for MAWA’s buildings, and staff changed the front door locks, presumably because of crime concerns. Furthermore, the poverty rate increased from 31 percent to 33 percent, and just over 26 percent of buildings remained unoccupied. In 2015, the NPS “State of the Park” report noted that one of these homes—adjacent to the Walker house—was currently for sale, but was unoccupied and used by squatters, and suggested increasing the site boundary to include the property and the vacant lot behind the site. Two years later, the “Foundation Document” explained that threats to the historic landscape remained outside of the MAWA historic boundary, because of lax regulation that negatively affected the streetscape. It called for adding “Quality Row” to Leigh Street signs, and “Black Wall Street” to 2nd Street signs, as well as updating the National Historic Register, and viewshed analysis. Moreover, with development came increased traffic. In 2015, a two-car wreck at the corner of Leigh and 2nd Streets seriously damaged the fence and porch railing, and the “Foundation Document” noted that car accidents pose a continual threat to the buildings.¹⁶

¹⁵ National Park Service, “State of the Park Report: Maggie Walker National Historic Site,” February 2015, “State of the Park” Series No. 20, NPS, Washington, D.C., 8, v–vi, viii; MTM Notes 20 April 2009 and 26 September 2011. MAWA had to be closed for a day due to a mandatory evacuation of the area, and staff helped the response agencies by opening 112 E. Leigh as an operations center for EMS and firefighters. MTM, 23 June, 30 June 2019; Note from Ben Anderson in the comments on first draft.

¹⁶ Leah Whitehurst-Gibson and Bruce Mitchell, “Gentrification: A Mixed Bag in Historic Richmond, Virginia Neighborhood”; Stephanie Kensler, “Jackson Ward Neighborhood Plan,” prepared for the Richmond Redevelopment Authority, Spring 2014, 31, 35, last accessed 22 March 2021, https://wilder.vcu.edu/media/wilder/murp-studio-plans/ursp762/pdfs/s14/S14_SKensler_Jackson_Ward_Neighborhood_Plan.pdf; “State of the Park,” 25–26; MTM, 7 September 2010 and 1 and 16 November 2010; National Park Service, “Foundation Document,” 16, 18; MTM, April 2015; “Foundation Document,” 11. I witnessed the aftermath of damage caused by a wreck in 2019 when I was researching onsite, and Ethan Bullard told the Friends of the Boatwright Memorial Library group about the damage caused by a recent car accident in March 2021.

Updating Education: Leadership and Inclusion

The staff at MAWA had always modeled the tenets of the NPS’s calls to engage youth through multiple activities, but in this period they created a new program that enabled young people to learn history, analyze leadership skills, and develop their own. Originally conceived of by ranger Monamma Al-Ghuiyy and MLWHF’s Faithe Mickens and Twyla Kitts in 2005 as a program for middle school students to “recognize the legacy of leadership left by Maggie Walker,” the Summer Youth Leadership Institute was designed to study enterprises important to Walker, newspapers, banking, family, fraternal organizations, and entrepreneurship. Walking tours, offsite visits, and guest speakers would complement the programs offered by staff. The program did not happen in 2005, but the groundwork established by the program organizers created a model that worked in 2006.¹⁷

In 2006, Al-Ghuiyy, Mickens, and Kitts teamed up to raise funds to support the program and welcomed students to an intensive week-long program focused on banking, newspaper publishing, and entrepreneurship. Each student produced a portfolio themed “A Personal Legacy,” and the ultimate goal for each student was to learn about Walker and develop their own leadership skills and drive for community service. They opened it to high school and middle school students, and funds raised lowered the student enrollment fee to \$25 (the 2005 fee was \$225). Nineteen students between the ages of ten and fifteen participated, and Al-Ghuiyy won an NPS STAR award for her role in developing the program.¹⁸

The program, however, may have caused tension between members of the Maggie L. Walker Historical Foundation. Although she was not there at the time, Supervisory Park Ranger Ajena Rogers remembered hearing that there might have been controversy over who was to participate in the institute—whether it would be for foundation members’ relatives or open to the public. At any rate, the institute created a “schism,” as she described it, and although it was not the cause of the organization’s demise, it was a symptom of the problems that had emerged, and the foundation faltered and ultimately ended. Faithe Norrell, former MLWHF president and member, could not remember exactly what happened, but that the MLWHF “came to a rather abrupt end[,]” because “we had met our goals.” Another former leader, Dorothy Rice, remembered that the MLWHF faltered when

¹⁷ Pamphlet, “Maggie L. Walker Historical Foundation Programs: College Scholarship Humanities Award and Summer Leadership Institute” and “Maggie L. Walker Leadership Institute Agenda,” 2005, both in Box 5, Blue Folder, MLWHF; MLWHF Board Meeting Minutes, 13 July 2005, Box 5, Folder Maggie L. Walker Historical Foundation, MLWHF.

¹⁸ “Maggie L. Walker National Park Service U.S. Department of the Interior Individual Service for Summer Youth Leadership,” 2006, Box 5, Blue Folder, MLWHF; “Agenda/Plan for 2006 Leadership Institute,” Box 5, Maggie Walker Summer Institute 2006 envelope, MLWHF; Cynthia MacLeod, Superintendent’s Annual Report FY 2006 Richmond National Battlefield Park and the Maggie L. Walker National Historic Site; “US Department of the Interior Award Certificate Application for Monamma Al-Ghuiyy,” signed by Cindy MacLeod, Drawer 2, file cabinet, Superintendent’s Office; Interview with Ajena Rogers, 28.

the founders passed on, and there was division within the ranks because of a particularly divisive member. And Jim Bell recalled a situation in which he could not track down a donation that had been put in the care of MLWHF, which, as he admitted, “can be so damaging to your morale.” It appears that a combination of factors led to the demise of the MLWHF, but whatever the overarching reasons, it meant that staff could no longer rely on a long-term partner.¹⁹

In 2009 Superintendent Dave Ruth charged then-Supervisory Ranger Eola Dance with reinstating the Summer Youth Leadership Program. Without the MLWHF, the NPS staff had to look to a new community partner. They found willing participants at the Maggie L. Walker High School, which had been turned into a Governor’s School (MLWGS). In 2009–10, the NPS and MLWGS created a partnership agreement to engage in the Park Stewards Program, for which the site had received a \$9,000 grant from the National Park Foundation. Students created the Maggie L. Walker Civic Society to provide service in the name of “humanitarian causes, as demonstrated by Maggie Walker and the work of the Independent Order of St. Luke.” In the summer, they would join other students in the Leadership Institute. The program received \$5,000 for computer supplies and other necessary items and got \$4,000 for a teacher stipend from the National Park Foundation. In 2010, eighteen youth between the ages of eleven and eighteen visited the Booker T. Washington National Monument, Frederick Douglass NHS, and Mary McLeod Bethune Council House NHS. Supervisory Park Ranger Ajena Rogers continued the program after Dance’s departure, and it continues to this day. While the program looks different in 2021, as it was entirely online and shortened to three days, it continued the partnership between NPS and the MLWGS.²⁰

NPS staff continued providing high-quality educational programming to youth, once again modeling the new national stewardship initiatives, and securing assistance from institutional partners for grants and other kinds of support for the projects. In 2006, staff received \$5,000 from the African American Experience Fund to develop new activities for children within the permanent exhibit hall. Not only did they do 84 educational programs for 2,649 children that year, but staff also held an educational summit that, according to MacLeod, “identified steps to creating a viable education program.” The following year,

¹⁹ Ajena Rogers, interviewed by Megan Shockley, 8 October 2021, 28; Faithe Norrell, interviewed by Megan Shockley, 7 July 2021, 13; Dorothy Rice, interviewed by Megan Shockley, 21 July 2021, 18; Interview with Jim Bell, 3 August 2021, 19.

²⁰ “Interpretation and Cultural Resources Management Staff Notes, 22 June 2009,” Box 4, FY 2009 Staff Notes, David Ruth Interpretive Files; Ajena Rogers interview, 27; Summer Leadership Program Folder; 2009–2010 Park Stewards Program Grant Agreement between the Maggie L. Walker National Historic Site and the National Park Foundation; “NPF Park Steward Grant Program 2010, Maggie L. Walker Summer Leadership Institute”; and Project Identification—PMIS 161375 Title YPP 2011 Present Youth Summer Leadership Institute; all in Maggie L. Walker Civic Society, Park Stewards Program, Library Table; “Maggie L. Walker Youth Summer Leadership Institute,” 16 March 2021, <https://www.nps.gov/mawa/learn/kidsyouth/summer-leadership-institute.htm>, last accessed 23 March 2021.

staff launched two SOL-based educational programs for elementary school students. “Pennies and Nickels to Dollars,” for grades 2–3, and “Walker’s Lasting Legacy,” for grades 4–5, focused on leadership, communication, math, writing, and social studies, and included hands-on activities. Staff also created a Traveling Notebook program, which contained a video, timeline poster, biographies, activities sheets, and pamphlets and bookmarks for students to keep. Teachers could borrow the notebook for up to two weeks. That summer, staff held a summer crafts program called “Make-It and Take-It Thursdays” for daycares, the YMCA, the Boys and Girls Club, and visiting families, using Maggie Walker’s scrap-books as an inspiration for making their own.²¹

When staff reached out to new grade levels and new partners, they opened up myriad possibilities for education, and this effort continued through the next decade. In 2008, the education team updated the Junior Ranger booklet, creating activities that matched the permanent exhibit. They did this with the assistance of Annie Evans of Elko Middle School, who served as the teacher in the 2008 Teacher/Ranger/Teacher program that summer. In 2009, MAWA set up laptop computers, and Interpretation used them for educational programs. Patrice Ferrell, Education Coordinator, worked with staff that November to develop “delivery techniques” for educational programming, and the team completely revised the educational program in 2010. In 2016, staff redesigned the Junior Ranger book and traveling trunks with money they received from the NPS Civil War to Civil Rights Initiative Fund. Community partnerships continued; Ben Anderson, for example, teamed up with a staff member of the Virginia Department of Historic Resources to give a talk about Jackson Ward and the National Register of Historic Places to commemorate the fiftieth anniversary of the National Historic Preservation Act. And to commemorate the NPS centennial that same year, MAWA commissioned noted Richmond mural artist Sir James Thornhill to produce a community mural at MAWA, which he worked on in the courtyard. Members of the community were invited to participate in the effort, thus adding a dimension of visual arts to the educational offerings onsite. This mural, painted on plywood, continues to be popular with visitors, as they enjoy taking photos in front of it.²²

²¹ Cindy MacLeod, Superintendent’s Report, FY 2006; “Spotlight on Education,” *The Quarterly*, Issue 22, December 2006, 3; Cynthia MacLeod, Superintendent’s Annual Narrative Report FY 2007 Richmond National Battlefield Park and the Maggie L. Walker National Historic Site; “Maggie L. Walker N.H.S. Traveling Notebook,” n.d. but in Box 8, Educational Programs 2007 Folder, Suggs; “Successful Summer Program at Maggie L. Walker National Historic Site,” *The Quarterly*, Issue 24, September 2007.

²² Annie Evans, “Teacher to Ranger to Teacher” evaluation and printout of website, <http://www.schoolnotes.com>, updated 2008, in Box 4, Teacher/Ranger/Teacher Folder, David Ruth Interpretive Collection; MTM, 25 June 2008, 9 November 2009, 16 November 2009, 12–19; “State of the Park 2015”; MTM, 12–19 June 2016, 17–31 July 2016; Ben Anderson and Ethan Bullard provided more information about the Centennial projects in the notes on the first draft.



Youth Leadership Institute class in front of the Maggie L. Walker mural, with Andrea DeKoter on the left and Ajena Rogers on the right.

Responding to New Archival Discoveries

In the early 2000s, the NPS managed several major developments that both added to and altered Maggie Walker’s biography. From a major acquisition of significant IOSL organizational records, to rewriting the story of Maggie Walker’s biography, MAWA staff actively worked to make a more complete and accurate narrative of Walker’s life available to the public. In so doing, they have helped visitors and researchers better understand Walker’s life and work.

The NPS worked to acquire a significant collection of IOSL papers that doubled the collection of known organizational records. These records included records of business transactions, publications and published materials, and other information relevant to understanding the work of IOSL. In addition, it contained correspondence, not just to

Walker, but also the mimeographed responses Walker sent to writers. Although it took over a decade to finally secure this collection, NPS is now in the process of making this collection easily accessible to researchers for the first time.²³

In 2009, a group of students from the College of William & Mary (W&M), the Sharpe Scholars, located a cache of boxes in the attic of the St. Luke Building when they were on a tour with their instructor, Dr. Heather Huyck. The Sharpe Scholars program had already partnered with the NPS to produce a historic pamphlet on the St. Luke Hall for the NPS in 2006–7, which had provided information on Walker, the building, and the IOSL. The pamphlet listed partners to the project as Walker Row Partnerships (Ron Stallings' development enterprise), the Richmond Redevelopment and Housing Association, the NPS, and the Sharpe Community Scholars. In addition, the partners hosted a program titled "Maggie Walker, the Independent Order of St. Luke, and the St. Luke Building: A Partnership to Recognize, Preserve, and Interpret Her Life." Elvatrice Belsches, local historian, MAWA Curator Klydie Thomas, and others gave presentations on Maggie Walker, Jackson Ward, and the state of the program. Through this research, the Sharpe Scholars attempted to promote the St. Luke Hall to National Landmark status.²⁴

Although early reports attested that the students discovered the wealth of material, Ron Stallings' sister Wanda later stated that she and her father had found them in the basement decades earlier after they purchased the St. Luke Hall. These documents had apparently been left in the basement when the IOSL relocated to a new building. The Stallings said they put the papers in the attic to protect them from vandalism and other potential sources of destruction.²⁵

Ron Stallings and Heather Huyck signed a loan agreement with W&M Special Collections for the period of a year so that the Sharpe students could "make copies of the St. Luke Collection" and process them. MAWA curator Klydie Thomas assisted in the transfer of the boxes to W&M. She traveled to the college to teach a workshop on how to

²³ News Release, "Major Collection of Rare African American Archives Donated to the National Park Service," 8 December 2020, Maggie Walker NHS website, accessed 14 April 2022, <https://www.nps.gov/mawa/learn/news/major-collection-of-rare-african-american-archives-donated-to-national-park-service.htm>.

²⁴ Program, "Maggie Walker, the Independent Order of Saint Luke, and the Saint Luke Building," 14 April 2007, Box 8, 2007 Activities Folder, Suggs; Monica Griffin to Ron Stallings, Draft Letter, 13 July 2006, Box 6, Ron Stallings/William and Mary Agreement Folder, David Ruth Interpretive Collection.

²⁵ "Draft 3.2 Agreement Maggie Walker/St. Luke Collection Project, WM NPS Stallings Huyck," n.d., Ethan Bullard Box, Folder 2 Correspondence. These students were taking a class on Walker as part of the Sharpe Program, a scholarship program at W&M that engaged students with the community.

handle the fragile manuscripts. Thomas also prepared an accession receiving report before the loan agreement was signed, listing Ron Stallings as the signatory, which was the first step towards accessioning the collection with a full deed of gift.²⁶



Klydie Thomas with a student safely removing the collection from the St. Luke Building

In 2009 the partnership held the first annual Maggie L. Walker Heritage Day in April, in which students presented a pamphlet they wrote on the St. Luke Building. The president of Consolidated Bank and Trust and the 5th City District Councilman spoke, and Margaret Stallings, Ron and Wanda’s mother, received the first annual Maggie L. Walker Heritage Award. At this event, the partnership formally announced the discovery of the boxes, with records dating from 1898 to 1935, as well as the Stallings’ loan to W&M and subsequent plan to donate the original documents to NPS. The following year’s event saw

²⁶ Loan Agreement from the Special Collections Research Center of William and Mary, Signed by Heather Huyck on 20 March 2009 and Ronald Stallings on 21 March 2009, Huyck-Stallings-NPS Agreements 2009–2017 Folder, Bullard Collection; Ethan Bullard, “Thoughts on the IOSL Archives,” 7 December 2018, Bullard collection; “Accession Receiving Report,” 2009, Huyck-Stallings-NPS Agreements 2009–2017 Folder, Bullard collection.

over 1,400 participants and extensive press coverage. In a letter to Huyck, Superintendent David Ruth praised the Sharpe Scholars program and Huyck for their efforts to raise funds and national attention for the project.²⁷

But the efforts of the Sharpe Student Scholars and Huyck to process approximately forty feet of archival material within the space of a year proved to be too challenging. As Bullard recalled in 2018, the plan to process and digitize such a large collection would have been a gargantuan effort for anyone. Huyck maintained the papers through the calendar year. And although NPS protocol would have been to process papers prior to digitization, MAWA staff tried to support the work of the students at W&M. NPS funding secured one hundred acid-free folders and provided financial support for purchasing of additional archival materials like acid-free boxes and a camera, as well as \$1,000 to support the hiring of a student assistant at W&M. As of October 2011, Huyck wrote up a new agreement between the parties, extending the deadline to 2015 and asserting that the students were at the halfway point of the project, with 11,000 metadata entries finished and 8,000 digital photographs done (metadata links physical records to digital ones and is the first part of the digitizing process). One of the ongoing problems, as Ruth explained in many emails, was that the NPS could not enter into agreements with any parties other than the direct donor(s), so MAWA staff were limited in what they could do. The 2011 agreement did, however, continue to assert that the NPS would be the “eventual and final repository for the Collection.”²⁸

The situation became more complicated in 2014, with miscommunication and a move of the collection. At first, Huyck notified the NPS that Swem Library wanted to keep the original documents and asked NPS to reiterate its interest in the collection. Then, Huyck questioned how serious the NPS was about taking the donation. Evidence from contemporary emails suggest that NPS interest in acquiring and processing the collection had never wavered. Indeed, Ethan Bullard had made it clear that the NPS had the space and resources for the collection many times.. David Ruth had only mentioned his concern about any limitations the Stallings might place on the collection and said that they could not execute a deed of gift through Huyck or any third party. That did not dampen his enthusiasm for acquiring the collection, which he expressed multiple times to the Stallings. Huyck left W&M in 2014, and over the course of this process the library at W&M took the space from the project, which further complicated an already challenging situation for the NPS. Huyck took the papers with her to an office at Colonial Williamsburg. Community volunteers who had been working with the students previously, named the “Maggie Walker

²⁷ Pamphlet, “Maggie L. Walker National Historic Site: St. Luke Hall,” 2009, MAWA Reports Box, loose papers; “Discoveries Mark First Annual Maggie L. Walker Heritage Day,” *The Quarterly*, 27 July 2009, 2, 6; David Ruth to Heather Huyck, 20 April 2010, David Ruth Records Box Richmond 7532, Correspondence Folder.

²⁸ “Thoughts on the IOSL Archives,” 7 December 2018, Bullard collection; Agreement draft, c. 2011, Huyck-Stallings-NPS Agreements 2009–2017 Folder, Bullard collection; Ethan Bullard, Memo to File, 12 April 2022, MAWA-00100, St. Luke Hall IOSL Papers summary 2009–2020, Ethan Bullard collection.

Community of Williamsburg, Virginia,” took over the metadata logging process once the project left W&M. Huyck and the volunteers continued to work, but controversy also arose over the donation process.²⁹

For the next several years, the NPS worked to maintain relationships and prepare to receive the collection from the Stallings. In a 2016 letter to Stallings and Huyck, Ruth explained that the NPS had launched a civil rights preservation initiative, which could fund the project’s formal processing, conservation, and digitization. Ruth suggested a multi-phase strategy to acquire, preserve, and make the collection accessible to researchers. MAWA actually submitted a PMIS statement to fund a four-part digitization project with the papers, based on the promise of the gift that had been laid out in prior agreements, and the Northeast Regional Office approved it. Chief of Interpretation Andrea DeKoter and Park Guide and former Sharpe Program Graduate Assistant T. A. Ben Anderson met with the Maggie Walker Community, Huyck, and others to plan a major event at the Jackson Ward’s Hippodrome Theater, in which the Community would be honored for their efforts in working with the documents, and MAWA would formally acquire the boxes. The ceremony included recognition of the partners and a keynote presentation by internationally renowned historian Darlene Clark Hine. But the Stallings did not donate the papers at this time. Because the Stallings did not donate the collection, MAWA used the money received to digitize other manuscripts in the Walker collection at MAWA.³⁰

In the meantime, it appeared the NPS and the Stallings family were unclear about the status of the collection. Huyck engaged Iron Mountain to digitize documents for the project, but Bullard notes that no one had seen any of the digitized materials to this point.

²⁹ Draft 3.2 Agreement Maggie Walker/St. Luke Collection Project, William and Mary National Park Service Ron Stallings Heather Huyck, n.d; Draft Letter, David Ruth to Ronald Stallings, n.d., but later attached to an email to David Ruth and Ajena Rogers on 15 March 2012 with time stamp on document of 3.2.2011; Ethan Bullard to David Ruth et al., 15 September 2011; Sara Wolf, Director of Northeast Museum Services Center to Huyck, cced to Ajena Rogers and David Ruth, 19 March 2012; Heather Huyck to David Ruth, Sara Wolf, and Ajena Rogers, 19 March 2012; David Ruth to Heather Huyck, 19 March 2012; Heather Huyck to David Ruth and Ajena Rogers, 15 March 2012; David Ruth to Ethan Bullard and Kristen Allen, 21 March 2012; Ethan Bullard to David Ruth and Kristen Allen, 21 March 2012; David Ruth to Ronald Stallings, 12 March 2012; Heather Huyck to Ajena Rogers, 19 August 2014; Heather Huyck to David Ruth, 22 August 2014; David Ruth to Heather Huyck, cced to Ronald Stallings, Ethan Bullard, et al., 2 September 2014; Heather Huyck to David Ruth, cced to Ronald Stallings, Ethan Bullard, et al., 2 September 2014; Ethan Bullard to David Ruth and Kristen Allen, 3 September 2014; all records in Ethan Bullard Box, Heather Huyck Correspondence Folder 2; Gregory Schneider, “Uncovered Boxes Shed Light on Maggie Lena Walker, an African American Icon and First Woman to Own a U.S Bank,” *Washington Post*, 26 March 2017, https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/virginia-politics/over-boxes-from-the-last-century-an-eight-year-discussion-about-race-life-and-womanhood/2017/03/26/29eb0370-08db-11e7-b77c-0047d15a24e0_story.html. Last accessed 23 March 2021; Jeremy Lazarus, “Owner Seeks Return of Walker Papers,” *Richmond Free Press*, 2–4 March 2017, A1, 5. For more emails related to these specific events, see the Heather Huyck Correspondence folders in the Ethan Bullard box.

³⁰ Ethan Bullard, notes from first draft; David Ruth to Ronald Stallings and Heather Huyck, 4 November 2016; Note from Ben Anderson, first draft of the manuscript; Ethan Bullard, “Thoughts on the IOSL Archives”; conversation with Ethan Bullard, 13 April 2022; Gregory Schneider, “Uncovered boxes”; “Notes Meeting MLW Community and NPS,” 23 August 2016; Gregory Schneider, “Uncovered boxes”; Jeremy Lazarus, “Owner Seeks Return”; Jeremy Lazarus, “Walker Papers Return Home,” *Richmond Free Press*, 9–11 March 2017, A1, 4; Program, “Dear Co-Workers: A Celebration of Maggie Walker,” 10 March 2017, Ethan Bullard Box, Heather Huyck 2014–2016 Folder; “Notes on the State of Virginia,” 21 and 28 July 2019.

In fact, the NPS and Stallings only received one hundred scans in 2020. Ultimately, the Stallings family requested that Huyck return the papers via their lawyer, and Ron Stallings personally traveled to Williamsburg to pick them up. But as they had done throughout this period, the NPS made clear that accessioning the papers was a priority. They supported the work at W&M, secured funding for the processing of the collection, and included the collection in the revised Scope of Collections Statement, naming the acquisition a priority in the Foundation Document and Regional Guidance for the incoming superintendent.³¹

It was not until conversations between the new Superintendent Doyle Sapp and the Stallings family alone that the Stallings decided to donate the collection. In 2019, Bullard applied for a Women in Parks grant from the National Park Foundation, which secured \$16,000 to pay an independent appraiser, Wanda Stallings, picked from the list given to all potential donors. The Stallings officially donated the collection in December of 2020. As of this writing, the NPS is processing the collection at their Northeast Museum Services Center (NMSC) in Charlestown, Massachusetts. This two-year, \$210,000 project requires three dedicated, trained, professional archivists to complete. The efforts of Huyck brought national attention to Maggie Walker and her work in national news outlets and ensured the preservation of artifacts that she and volunteers rehoused in appropriate archival folders and boxes; however, the length of time it took may have concerned the Stallings, who then wavered on donating the papers to the NPS, according to Bullard. As he also asserted, because the collection was not in the hands of the NPS for over ten years after the first loan form determined the final disposition of the papers to them, MAWA staff could neither use federal funds to conserve and process the collection, nor share the collection with researchers and visitors. With this collection, along with the IOSL materials William Sydnor used in his documentary and donated in 2020 directly to NPS, MAWA can present a much more detailed description of the work of IOSL and Walker.³²

The discovery of the papers was not the only historical bombshell that dropped during this period. Because so little research had been done on Walker, new information often changed the canon of knowledge about the prominent leader. In January 2006, Cindy MacLeod notified the MLWHF that new research conducted by Elvatrice Belsches confirmed that Maggie Walker had not been born in 1867. Belsches, a local historian and author, had been researching in the Freedman’s Bureau bank records, and came across a record of Walker establishing a bank account that would date her birth to 1864. MacLeod

³¹ There are multiple emails between local and regional NPS staff, Huyck, and other stakeholders in Ethan Bullard Box, Heather Huyck 2014–2016 Folder that indicate the complexity of the situation, including David Ruth to Ronald Stallings and Heather Huyck et al., 4 November 2016, which indicates Ruth’s confusion at why anyone would think NPS would not want the collection digitized; Ethan Bullard, “Memo to File, 12 April 2022.”

³² Interview with Ethan Bullard, 50–51; “Major Collection of Rare African American Archives Donated to National Park Service,” 8 December 2020, <https://www.nps.gov/mawa/learn/news/major-collection-of-rare-african-american-archives-donated-to-national-park-service.htm>, Last accessed 23 March 2021; Ethan Bullard, “Memo to File, 12 April 2022”; Ethan Bullard, “Memo to File.”

explained that they could not know why Walker chose 1867, except that it did coincide with the date of the establishment of the IOSL. Discussion ensued about how to present this new information, so as not to be confusing. What is interesting, however, is that the official change in birth date announcement did not “break” until 2009, when the public officially learned about the change in the *Richmond Times Dispatch*. At this point, NPS changed the anniversary dates for the birthdays. David Ruth told the *Times Dispatch* reporter that the NPS had always suspected that the original birth date was questionable—as noted in the previous chapter—but that Belsches’s new information ““pretty much seals the deal.””³³ It is unclear why there is an almost three-year gap between the discovery and the announcement, especially given the importance of the birthday celebrations as annual programs. At any rate, Belsches shared her research at the 145th birthday celebration in July.

The NPS has also spent a great deal of time countering another factual error that Maggie Walker was the first female bank president in America. This notion circulated widely. It became ubiquitous in the retellings of Walker’s story, found in newspapers from the time, and repeated in the public Walker narrative, including on the house tour, the 1991 film, and the introductory panel in the exhibit. Park Guide Benjamin Anderson remembered coming across the information refuting this claim in a 2007 Federal Reserve Bank pamphlet on women bankers. He explained that it was uncomfortable for interpreters to wrestle with the long-standing narrative introduced at the site, and even more difficult for many visitors to understand. Anderson determined to research deeply into the histories of women bankers, and he found over twenty other women who had been bank presidents.³⁴

Anderson used this information to publish an article on the “Stories” section of the website, introducing Walker in context with several other earlier women bankers. What he pointed out is that Walker does appear to be the first Black woman president, and that unlike most of the other early women bank owners, who inherited their status as privileged widows or daughters, Walker established her bank like all of her other businesses, through her own entrepreneurial talents, starting as she did from nothing and building from scratch. Moreover, she did this in a fairly large city, compared to many of the white women, who ran small-town local banks. As with the birth date, this new information does not diminish Maggie Walker’s place in history; complicating the narrative suggests just how superlative a businesswoman Maggie Walker really was.³⁵

³³ MLWHF Board Meeting Minutes, 11 January 2006, Box 5, Folder Maggie L. Walker Historical Foundation, written in red ink; Wesley P. Hester, “New Birth Year Uncovered for Maggie L. Walker,” 5 July 2009, *Richmond Times Dispatch*, https://richmond.com/news/new-birth-year-uncovered-for-maggie-l-walker/article_fa123847-0e9f-5494-bf91-9e6bc609a1fb.html, last accessed 24 March 2021; “National Park Service to Commemorate 145th Anniversary of Maggie L. Walker’s Birthday,” 5 July 2009, accessed 24 March 2021, <https://www.nps.gov/mawa/learn/news/birthday2009.htm>.

³⁴ Ben Anderson interview, 15–21.

³⁵ *Ibid.*; Maggie L. Walker National Historic Site, “Early Women in Banking,” 15 November 2019, accessed 26 October 2021, <https://www.nps.gov/articles/000/early-women-in-banking.htm>.

Engaging with Visitors through Digital Media

This era witnessed the expansion of digital technology that fundamentally reshaped the way public history sites interact with visitors. Although staff at MAWA had already created a website, later they took advantage of new technologies to broaden access to the collection; as curator, MAWA gained a staff member experienced in film-making technologies. Bullard created a new documentary for the visitor center, updating interpretation and pitching the script to a broader age range.³⁶

Early on, the staff at MAWA appeared to be savvy about using digital resources. Although staff launched the website in 1999, work began on its expansion to include several virtual exhibits in 2008. Staff worked closely with the National Park Service’s Museum Management Division to determine how best to present themes in a digital exhibit. The four categories of the draft included “Life at Home,” which included family, personal struggles, personal style, and working from home; economic empowerment, which incorporated Walker’s business enterprises; social activism, including her work on racial uplift and gender equality; and her legacy. A NPS Museum Services staff member asked Klydie Thomas if it would be possible to group artifacts in the collection, as it was harder to contextualize individual pieces. The categories became the virtual exhibit’s subpages, and the pictures, taken by Carol M. Highsmith, consist of single photographs of artifacts or group pictures of related artifacts organized into collections on each subpage.³⁷

Local NPS staff wrote specialized lessons for teachers based on the virtual exhibit. Teaching materials included a speech to women about economic empowerment, an IOSL Juvenile Department handbook and a speech about children, and images of Walker’s family, her business, and the home’s interior. Patrice Ferrell and Eola Dance conducted a teacher workshop in February 2009 to explain how to utilize the virtual tour functions and met with staff from the Teaching with Museum Collections in a workshop to review the lesson plans for the site. The site officially launched in 2011, and it offers a wealth of information to teachers, from a rubric explaining how artifacts could be used, to links to outside websites, evaluation guidelines, contacts for field trips, and other helpful materials. This free material can be used by teachers to help their students learn about Maggie Walker, Jackson Ward, and, more broadly, African Americans, Jim Crow, and uplift in the early

³⁶ For more information about how technology has transformed the way museums interact with the public, see Kirsten Drotner and Kim Christian Schroder, eds., *Museum Communication and Social Media: The Connected Museum* (New York: Routledge, 2013).

³⁷ David Ruth, “Interpretive Report,” Fiscal Year 1999, Box 3, Interpretive Report Folder 1999, David Ruth Interpretive Collection (this report said personnel spent one hundred hours on developing the site that year); National Park Service, “State of the Park,” 2015, 13; “Maggie L. Walker National Historic Site: Themes and Subthemes for Maggie Walker Virtual Exhibits, Draft 4” and Andy Chamberlain to Klydie Thomas, 2 June 2008, both in Ethan Bullard Box, Virtual Exhibit Project/Digital Imaging Project Folder; “Museum Collections: Maggie L. Walker National Historic Site,” accessed 24 March 2021, https://www.nps.gov/museum/exhibits/Maggie_Walker/index.html.

twentieth century. This may have been a tremendously valuable tool for teachers locked down during COVID, as it provided both learning materials and a full-fledged museum exhibit for students.³⁸

Park staff also developed a digital database, making primary sources accessible to researchers no matter where their location. As mentioned earlier, when the NPS secured funding to process the papers that it ultimately did not receive from the Stallings family in 2017, staff pivoted to use the already-designated funds to provide access to important pieces of the onsite collection. Working with the NPS Denver Service Center and NMSC archivists, staff shared hundreds of digitized documents on a customized NPGallery portal. The selected archives include diaries, correspondence, speeches, material from organizations in which Walker was involved, publications, and photographs. This database is searchable and fully accessible to the public.³⁹

At the same time that staff developed the virtual exhibit online and built a digital database, they took advantage of another emergent digital source—social media. Park Guide John Donahue created a Facebook page in 2009, and when he left another Park Guide took over maintenance of the page. Ben Anderson took over the maintenance of the page in 2014 when he became permanent staff. Anderson realized that the page had few followers, and he determined to make better use of the page by scheduling posts regularly, trying to connect with Facebook themes and hashtags. In addition, Anderson had spent a tremendous amount of time compiling a database of historic newspaper articles that discussed Maggie Walker. As he explained, “the newspaper database has really been more or less the foundation for a lot of what I’ve been able to do on social media.” He searches the database for articles relevant to the date, and links with other historic parks by talking about Walker’s interactions with other famous leaders of her time and discussing other important relevant events. In 2016, Anderson launched the Instagram profile after attending an NPS social media training. Today, the Facebook page has over 4,800 followers, and the Instagram profile has over 5,250 followers. Walker’s story is now available to anyone who has access to a cell phone.⁴⁰

The MAWA staff appeared to have a plan regarding digital resources before the National Park Service adopted a park-wide policy. It was not until 2013 that the National Park Service issued a directive meant to “transform NPS.gov into a world-class digital experience and communications tool.” It called for an upgrade of local park websites, a better design for mobile users, and increased functionality with updated interfaces, all in

³⁸ “Teaching with Museum Collections Lesson Unit Plan Template, US Department of the Interior Museum Management Program,” Ethan Bullard Box, Virtual Exhibit Folder; MTM, 28 January 2009, 4 March 2009; National Park Service, “State of the Park,” 2015, 13; Maggie L. Walker Virtual Exhibit Lesson Plans, accessed 24 March 2021, https://www.nps.gov/museum/tmc/tmc_park.html#MAWA.

³⁹ Conversation with Ethan Bullard, 13 April 2022; Maggie L. Walker National Historic Site Digital Database, accessed 13 April 2022, <https://npgallery.nps.gov/mawa>.

⁴⁰ Ben Anderson interview, 29–35, 39–40.

time for the 2016 Centennial. Its goal was to improve individual park websites, enable trip planning, and facilitate user experiences across linked websites. The MAWA staff had been working on their website upgrade years before the official announcement of the NPS policy, and continued to create tools to enhance digital users' experience.⁴¹

Another new technology emerged in the early twenty-first century—the podcast—and MAWA staff members were early adopters. Podcasts first emerged in the early twenty-first century, and received a boost when iTunes loaded three thousand podcasts into its streaming service. It is only recently, however that podcast audiences grew, from 19 million in 2013 to 62 million in 2019. So, when Eola Dance, Mike Andrus, Klydie Thomas, and Elvatrice Belsches met in 2009 to discuss creating a podcast tour of Jackson Ward, they were on the cutting edge of a major trend. The staff picked the sites for the tour, and Belsches researched and narrated the tour. The park created a map of the one-mile walk to accompany the tour, which was available for download or at the visitor center. As former ranger Susie Sernaker recalled, this was a home-grown production, where staff acquired the skills they needed to create a professional production. From realizing that they could not record outside because of ambient noise, to creating an ad hoc sound room in the building, they did what they could to make an excellent product on a “shoestring budget.” Sernaker learned how to use the digital program Garage Band for music and sound engineering, and Audacity for editing.⁴²

Although the 2015 “State of the Park” document explained that the podcast needs revision because of continuous changes in the neighborhood landscape, the tour remains a valuable resource for visitors to Richmond. It can be accessed through the Maggie Walker website or the NPS app, and information includes a downloadable map and transcript of the podcast. The visitor center also loans out preloaded iPod Nanos to those who want to take the tour.⁴³

As staff updated the historic site using the latest technological innovations, Ethan Bullard produced a new documentary for the visitor center that took advantage of the more recent historiography and archival finds and focused on major eras in US history from Reconstruction to the Great Depression. Bullard also situated Walker in a broader context of the civil rights movement, something historians had been doing for about a decade.

⁴¹ National Park Service, “NPS.gov: Our Flagship Web Presence,” accessed 24 October 2021, <https://www.nps.gov/subjects/digital/nps-website.htm>; National Park Service, “2016 Centennial Design—And Beyond!” accessed 24 October 2021, <https://www.nps.gov/subjects/digital/2016-centennial-design.htm>.

⁴² Richard Benson, “An Oral History of the Podcast,” *Esquire*, 11 September 2019, accessed 24 March 2021, <https://www.esquire.com/uk/culture/a29739101/oral-history-of-podcasts/>; Brad Adgate, “Podcasting Is Going Mainstream,” *Forbes*, 18 November 2019, accessed 24 March 2021, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/bradadgate/2019/11/18/podcasting-is-going-mainstream/?sh=4ee8068c1699>; Susie Sernaker, interview with Megan Shockley, 27 June 2021, 15–17.

⁴³ Elvatrice Belsches and National Park Service, Jackson Ward History Walking Tour, last accessed 24 March 2021, <https://www.nps.gov/mawa/learn/photosmultimedia/upload/jackson%20ward%20podcast%20mp3.mp3>; National Park Service, “State of the Park,” 2015, 17; Ethan Bullard, notes on second draft.

When he proposed the movie's development, he argued that he would include quotes, add moving images, and new footage of the Walker house, while pitching the script to a high school level, as the original had been made for elementary schools. Not only would it provide an update; it would also cover information in the exhibit hall, so if the staff was short-handed, visitors could skip the exhibit.⁴⁴

Filmmaker and curator Ethan Bullard remembered that his motivation for creating a new movie stemmed from several different criticisms MAWA staff had about the first movie. Of course, the first movie had factual errors in it, which reflected where the research was in 1991. In addition, he noted that it was one-dimensional, as it was geared toward children and cast Walker as "less dynamic" than she actually was. But most problematic, perhaps, was the film's elision of the ways African Americans experienced racial oppression in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, and how Walker worked as an activist to fight for civil rights. He remembered Jim Crow described as "hard times" in the original movie, and that it ignored Walker's ideas about fighting repressive societal structures. As he explained, "You have to talk about deep, deep inequality, racism, prejudice, discrimination, and sexism and violence and trauma." He wanted to position Walker as the "39-year-old firebrand" rather than as the "older lady" often depicted in the older site bulletins and movie.⁴⁵

Armed with new research findings and digital technologies, Bullard did most of the work writing and producing the video at home. He received \$5,000 from ENMPA's "Call to Action" Centennial Grant for the film's production. He also received money allocated from the visitor center donation collection box. Bullard managed to produce the video on a budget of just under \$8,000. The video, *Carry On: The Life and Legacy of Maggie Lena Walker*, premiered in 2017. It won the 2017 "Achieving Relevance in Technology Award" from NERO. The Acting Director of NERO told David Ruth that Bullard created partnerships, promoted new scholarship, and interpreted larger stories of African American life and Jim Crow; all tenets of the 21st Century Stewardship Plan. A year later, Bullard

⁴⁴ Historians who pushed the timeline of the civil rights movement back from the 1950s by the point Bullard produced the movie included Megan Shockley, *"We, Too, Are Americans": African American Women in Detroit and Richmond, 1940–1954* (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2004); Jacquelyn Dowd Hall, "The Long Civil Rights Movement and the Political Uses of the Past," *Journal of American History* 91, 4 (2005); Glenda Gilmore, *Defying Dixie: The Radical Roots of Civil Rights, 1919–1950* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2009); Shannon Frystak, *"Our Minds on Freedom": Women and the Struggle for Black Equality in Louisiana* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2009). However, there has been pushback to the concept that the movement originated in the South with the timeframe suggested by historians (see John R. Tilghman, "Debating the Long Civil Rights Movement: Exploring Multiracial Alliances and Disputes," *Journal of Urban History*, 40, 6). "MAWA Orientation Film Proposal," 18 November 2014.

⁴⁵ Ethan Bullard interview, 20–26. Quotes on 22, 24.

received the national “Achieving Relevance” award for his work. The movie also came in second at the 2018 National Association of Interpretation’s media awards. The film is available on YouTube and has garnered over 727,000 views there.⁴⁶

Perhaps the focus on embracing new technology was part of the reason the Maggie L. Walker site was among the thirty-six national parks chosen to be featured in the Google Cultural Institute Site in 2015. This designation placed the NPS among the world’s most renowned museums, including the Louvre, the Taj Mahal, and the Getty Museum. With the assistance of WASO, Ethan Bullard crafted three online exhibits for the institute, including a virtual tour of the house, a virtual exhibit on St. Luke Hall, and an exhibit on Walker’s fashion. Calling the possibilities for the exhibit “limitless,” Bullard explained that Walker’s history was accessible to differently abled visitors, non-English speakers, and distanced virtual visitors. This was the case, of course, only for those who had an internet connection. The site is still available on the Google Cultural Institute today, made available through the partnership between the site and Google.⁴⁷

Managing Community Relations in a New Era

In this period, MAWA worked with an even broader range of community partners in order to create new programs, maintain cultural resources, and further interpretation. The drive to find new stakeholders illustrated the tenets of the new stewardship guidelines, as the NPS sought visibility and relevancy with a broader audience. In the second decade of the twenty-first century, it seemed that MAWA personnel were everywhere in the city, forging new partnerships to create innovative programming and bring the story of Walker to the public beyond the site.

⁴⁶ ³⁹“Maggie Walker: Carry On Spending Breakdown,” 27 January 2016; National Park Service, “A Call to Action,” accessed 25 October 2021, http://www.nps.gov/calltoaction/PDF/C2A_2015.pdf; Joshua Laird to David Ruth, 25 April 2017; Gay Vietzke to Ethan Bullard, 3 July 2018; all in Ethan Bullard Box, Carry On New Orientation Film Folder. To access the video, go to <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QR3CexPZXEk>, accessed 24 March 2021; https://www.interpnet.com/nai/nai/_resources/Media_Awards.aspx and https://www.youtube.com/results?search_query=carry+on+the+life+and+legacy+of+maggie+lana+walker, accessed 25 October 2021.

⁴⁷ “Maggie L. Walker NHS Featured in New Partnership with Google,” 18 February 2016, <https://www.nps.gov/mawa/learn/news/partnership-with-google-cultural-institute.htm>, last accessed 24 March 2021; “Maggie L. Walker National Historic Site, National Park Service,” <https://artsandculture.google.com/partner/maggie-l-walker-national-historic-site>, last accessed 24 March 2021.

NPS staff had consistently hosted Black History Month, Women’s History Month, and Birthday events.⁴⁸ In 2007, however, the Birthday Celebration apparently found a new co-sponsor. MAWA had been partnering with the city to *produce* live outdoor concerts, but in this year, staff teamed up to honor what was thought to be Walker’s 140th birthday anniversary with a special program at Third Street Bethel Church. There, participants experienced living history, as an interpreter presented one of Walker’s speeches, as well as dances and readings by children, speeches by descendants, and a performance by the church choir. MLWHF served refreshments. At the 2009 145th birthday celebration held at the church, local historian Elvatrice Belsches and Superintendent David Ruth gave talks, the choir sang, and a living history interpreter presented Walker once again.⁴⁹

The 150th birthday celebration in 2014 focused on Walker’s legacy today. Given that this important commemoration took place while the battlefield sites were deep in the Civil War Sesquicentennial programming, it fit nicely with the overall theme of the programming, “Civil War to Civil Rights.” Rangers led a two-hour bus tour through Richmond, focusing on places significant to the Walker story. MAWA held a “Common Good Fair,” a kind of open house for philanthropies to meet potential interested volunteers. And the site exhibited the work of Girl Scouts, who created posters for a contest modeling the four pillars of Walker’s leadership: education, self-determination, economic independence, and civic engagement. Once again, Third Street Bethel hosted a special NPS event, titled “We Cannot Stand Alone.” Participants read selections from historic letters and newspapers lauding Walker, and several staff members gave short presentations. The NPS invited three special speakers—all prominent African American women who had fought for progress in Virginia. Viola Baskerville, CEO of the Girl Scouts of Virginia and former Vice Mayor, Virginia Delegate, and cabinet member in Tim Keane’s government, talked about Maggie Walker’s focus on youth development. Ida Outlaw McPherson, Director of the Virginia Department of Small Business and Supplier Diversity, spoke on Walker’s legacy of economic empowerment. And Jennifer McClellan, Virginia Delegate, addressed Walker’s activism. She argued that “when [Walker] saw a problem, she didn’t just talk about it. She showed up. She stood up. She fought. And we are a better Richmond, we

⁴⁸ “Events Planned to Commemorate the 138th Birthday of Maggie L. Walker,” 7 July 2005, Box 5, Maggie L. Walker Historical Foundation Folder, Suggs; Program, “Maggie L. Walker National Historic Site, City Celebrations, Maggie L. Walker Historical Foundation Presents the Maggie L. Walker Birthday Concert,” 17 July 2005, and “Events Planned to Commemorate the 138th Birthday of Maggie L. Walker,” 7 July 2005, both in Box 1, Maggie Walker’s 138th Birthday Celebration Folder, Suggs; Cynthia MacLeod, Richmond National Battlefield Park ... 2005 Superintendent’s Report; Cynthia MacLeod, Superintendent’s Annual Narrative Report FY 2006; Sandra Hicks to Celia Suggs, 10 May 2006, Box 8, 2007 Activities Folder, Suggs; Celia Suggs, “Activities for 2004–2005,” Box 8, Blue Folder, Suggs; in addition, MTM from 2009 to 2018 list many of the activities conducted by Maggie Walker staff.

⁴⁹ Cynthia MacLeod, Superintendent’s Annual Narrative Report FY 2007; “Park Celebrates Maggie Walker’s Birthday with Living History Event,” *The Quarterly*, Issue 24, September 2007, 2; Program, “Maggie L. Walker 145th Birthday Celebration,” 18 July 2009, Box 5, unprocessed papers, MLWHF.

are a better Virginia, and we are a better America because of it. You do the same.” McClellan noted the many problems still present for which Maggie Walker sought a solution and exhorted the audience to take up the mantle of leadership.⁵⁰

During this period, MAWA’s stature within the community grew. Organizations reached out to the site to include MAWA in events. First, MAWA participated for the first time in the Garden Club of Virginia’s Historic Garden Week in 2007. Walker’s house appeared in a list of historic homes generally belonging to prominent white families. In addition, both MAWA and Chimborazo participated in Richmond’s “Stride through Time” in 2009, a six-mile walking event downtown in which participants visited various historic sites. MAWA registered about just over a thousand contacts that day. In 2010, MAWA hosted a Teacher Institute sponsored by National Geographic and an elderhostel group with VCU. Several years later, staff took advantage of the UCI Road World Championships, an international event that took place in various venues across the city, including Jackson Ward. The city hung Maggie Walker banners along 2nd and Leigh Streets, staff put a pop-up informational tent outside the buildings, which included a picture of African American children on bikes from the MAWA collection. MAWA staff illustrated both a willingness to reach out to very different constituents, as well as a flexibility and creativity demanded by the new stewardship directive.⁵¹

In addition, the National Park Service continued assisting those who wanted to restore and maintain Evergreen Cemetery. In 2011, the Virginia Department of Historic Resources erected a marker at the cemetery, which completed an initiative begun by the 2009 Youth Leadership Institute students. They researched information for the historical marker in collaboration with the Maggie L. Walker Governor’s School Civics Society.

⁵⁰ “Celebrating Maggie Walker, 1864–1914,” 8 July 2014, <https://www.nps.gov/mawa/celebrating-maggie-walker.htm>, last accessed 23 March 2021; “Civil War to Civil Rights,” <https://www.nps.gov/civilwar/civil-war-to-civil-rights.htm>, last accessed 26 October 2021; “We Cannot Stand Alone: Maggie Walker’s 150th Birthday,” video, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xWhXsUFG7vs>, last accessed 23 March 2021. In the notes for the draft, Ethan Bullard explained that this was program was important, because it signified that MAWA staff had begun “to interpret sites critical to understanding Walker that are logistically difficult from the confines of the house.”

⁵¹ Suzanne Munson to Landmark Administrator, 8 September 2008, Box 8, 2007 Activities Folder, Suggs; MTM, 1 June 2009, 18 October 2010, September 2015.



Wreath-laying ceremony at Maggie Walker's grave, circa 1997.

With Walker's granddaughter Elizabeth Randolph, great-great-grandson Johnnie Mickens III, and Ranger Jim Bell.

Many of the Civics Society students were African American, as Ajena Rogers recalled, and so they could, as she explained, “touch base with the roots of African Americans” through this work. In May 2017, the NPS partnered with EnRichmond, a nonprofit organization dedicated to various kinds of outreach work in the local community. The NPS assisted EnRichmond with interpretation and programming and provided cultural resources management expertise, and EnRichmond rallied volunteers to clean the spaces. In a press release, EnRichmond announced the collaboration in June 2018, noting that the

organizations would “combine resources” to interpret and preserve Walker’s history. Ajena Rogers explained that the NPS offered conservation expertise and historical walking tours, so that they could “help to tell those stories, particularly about Maggie Walker.”⁵²

Evergreen Cemetery remained in private hands, albeit with a nonprofit, and the National Park Service consulted with, but could not involve itself in, some of the controversy that emerged over a new plan for the cemetery. Ajena Rogers sat on a large, diverse advisory committee to determine how best to preserve the cemetery. The group ultimately decided that the cemetery should be a Victorian-style garden, or rural cemetery, open to the public in a way similar to that of Richmond’s white-dominated Hollywood Cemetery across town. In 2020, EnRichmond announced a new restoration plan at the cemetery in a public forum held at MAWA. Controversy erupted almost immediately, with groups misunderstanding the recreational aspect of the cemetery. Rogers admitted that the plan was not explained well to those who opposed it; they failed to understand that Evergreen was never meant to be an active recreational park but a contemplative space. The NPS, however, is not and cannot be involved with the negotiations over space currently happening in Richmond, according to Rogers. In 2019, Evergreen Cemetery received a UNESCO designation as one of the sites associated with the International Slave Route Project.⁵³

MAWA and the Urban Agenda

The NPS continued to formulate plans to increase diversity and relevancy, particularly with regard to its constituents in urban areas. In 2012, the Stewardship Institute, formerly the Rivers, Trails, and Conservation Assistance Program, supported the creation of a new committee after the 2012 Urban Caucus—the Urban Matters Community of Practice, a partnership between NPS staff and nongovernmental supporters. This group helped to foment conversations about issues that would eventually become the foundation for the Urban Agenda, which rolled out in 2015. The time was right for this initiative; Barack

⁵² “Evergreen Cemetery,” Historical Marker Database, <https://www.hmdb.org/m.asp?m=53937>, last accessed 26 October 2021; Ajena Rogers interview, 28–29, 31–33, Quote on 29; MTM, Week of 8–13 March 2012, Week of 24 April–1 May 2016, Weeks of 18 December–1 January 2017, Weeks of 6–27 May 2017; Evergreen Cemetery Website, accessed 24 March 2021, <https://enrichmond.org/evergreen-cemetery/>; Jess Maffey, “EnRichmond Initiates Partnership with National Park Service,” 1 June 2018, accessed 24 March 2021, <https://enrichmond.org/2018/06/enrichmond-initiates-partnership-with-national-park-service/>, accessed 24 March 2021; Ajena Rogers interview, 34.

⁵³ “Write the Vision, Make It Plain: Historic Evergreen Cemetery’s Restoration Plan Unveiling,” accessed 24 March 2021, <https://enrichmond.org/events/write-the-vision-make-it-plain-historic-evergreen-cemeterys-restoration-plan-unveiling/>; Ajena Rogers interview, 33–34; EnRichmond, “Evergreen Cemetery Awarded UNESCO Designation,” 3 June 2019, accessed 13 April 2022, <https://enrichmond.org/2019/06/historic-evergreen-cemetery-awarded-unesco-designation>.

Obama had issued his Every Kid in a Park (EKIP) directive in 2015, urging Congress to fund education and field trip transportation for low-income students. EKIP also directed the NPS to provide free passes to all fourth graders and their families for any park in America.⁵⁴

In the NPS, Director Jon Jarvis asserted that “it is time to rethink the Service’s role in urban areas and address our current set of policies. As other Directors had in the past, Jarvis noted that the majority of the U.S. population resided in cities. He explained, however, that even though one-third of NPS sites were located in cities, visits to these sites comprised only 36 percent of all park visits. He argued that the future success of the NPS rested in its ability to be relevant to diverse urban populations, and how it could connect with urban communities over history and recreation. He established three principles in the call: “Be Relevant to All Americans”; “Activate ‘ONE NPS’” to share ideas between parks; and “Nurture a Culture of Collaboration” with partners. To facilitate this, the NPS chose ten model cities in which to roll out an Urban Fellows program; Richmond was one of the places chosen. NPS hired Urban Fellows to facilitate community engagement with diverse partners and build alliances between government and community institutions. Their goal was to identify opportunities for recreation and health, sustainability and historic preservation, and educational opportunities for youth.⁵⁵

Prior to the Urban Agenda’s establishment, MAWA had been working toward the goals set forth in the program. All of the Richmond-area NPS sites benefited from the Urban Agenda, receiving tens of thousands of dollars to advance programming initiatives and to support the salary of the urban fellow. The bulk of the activities focused on the recreational aspects of Richmond, taking place at the Civil War-based sites. The battlefield sites, specifically Chimborazo and Tredegar, received much of the support and programming. Still, MAWA staff participated in activities. In 2016, the parks received money from the National Parks Foundation to transport 14,800 fourth graders from Richmond and Henrico County to several area sites, including MAWA, which fulfilled part of Obama’s EKIP initiative. NPS Deputy Director of Operations Peggy O’Dell also came to MAWA to celebrate women’s history month and visited the local elementary school, Carver, to promote EKIP. She also spoke with a class at VCU and attended a luncheon at Ebenezer Baptist Church. Congressman Don McEachin also toured the Walker site with a group of

⁵⁴ National Park Service, “The Urban Agenda: Call to Action Initiative,” 28; “President Obama Announces Every Kid in a Park Initiative,” 15 February 2015, <https://www.nps.gov/subjects/centennial/president-obama-announces-every-kid-in-a-park-initiative.htm>, last accessed 24 March 2021.

⁵⁵ National Park Service, “2016 Urban Agenda,” quotes on 2, 7, Box 1, loose papers, Accordion file titled “urban agenda,” David Ruth records in Superintendent’s Office; “Urban Agenda Fact Sheet,” 15 June 2015, <https://www.nps.gov/subjects/urban/urban-agenda-fact-sheet.htm>.

fourth graders. The following year, in partnership with Virginia Commonwealth University and Virginia Tourism, the NPS premiered the park’s new documentary on Maggie Walker at the Grace Street Theater on VCU’s campus.⁵⁶

The Richmond NPS also established a relationship with Groundwork RVA to conduct archeological work across the city, including at MAWA. The organization formed in 2014 to provide access to eastern Richmond youth who lacked access to parks. In 2015, the Groundwork and NPS staff teamed up to test the Urban Archeology Corps (UAC) concept in Richmond, which had first been introduced by the Washington office in Anacostia. UAC’s first project was a weeklong pilot in March 2015, where they created a popup “information kiosk” in front of the former St. Luke Emporium on Broad Street to hand out the zines they created about the history of the site. The UAC also conducted an excavation at Gravel Hill, an antebellum free Black community. The following year, the organization conducted a dig at Chimborazo, opening up several days for community participation. In 2017, the group connected the Walker, Chimborazo, and Tredegar sites with a special guide and trolley tour focusing on how to present the histories to the community and connect the sites.⁵⁷

In a presentation to Colonial National Historic Park, staff from RICH summed up the Urban Agenda as a positive experience, but also pointed out areas of concern. The park increased collaboration with community partners, hired diverse staff for a “Play, Learn, Serve, and Work” program, and saw an increase in press coverage and attendance numbers. The Urban Agenda initiative helped the park attract new funding sources and support. The challenge, however, was not just in continuing to roll out new projects but in implementing the three Urban Agenda principles in an ongoing way, and through all activities. The presentation explained that staff were not necessarily able to reach out consistently to potential partners, and many were not used to working on new narratives or being relevant (although given what occurred at MAWA on a regular basis, this could have been directed more at staff at the Civil War–era sites). The staff and urban fellow believed that the program should continue, so that there would always be a point person for community engagement projects. To that end, the Richmond fellow was working with the Richmond Trails and Conservation Assistance Program to create a permanent “Program

⁵⁶ “Urban Agenda Budget, 11/2017” (handwritten in corner of document); “Urban Agenda Report, Richmond, Virginia, April 2015–September 2017”; both in Box 1, loose papers in large Urban Agenda accordion file, David Ruth papers at Superintendent’s Office; “Urban Agenda Model City: Richmond, Virginia,” Box 1, Folder Urban Agenda Meeting 6/13–6/15, David Ruth papers at Superintendent’s Office; MTM, 12–19 February 2017.

⁵⁷ “NPS Connections to Richmond, Virginia, June 2015–December 2015,” Box 1, Urban Agenda Richmond Folder, David Ruth papers at Superintendent’s Office; MTM, February 2015; MTM, July 2015; National Park Service, “Urban Agenda Report, Richmond, Virginia: New City—Specific Initiatives That Demonstrate the Urban Agenda 2016–2018,” accessed 24 March 2021, <https://www.nps.gov/subjects/urban/upload/2015-18-Year-Report-V7.pdf>; MTM, June 2017; Ajena Rogers and Ethan Bullard, notes on first draft; Ethan Bullard, notes on second draft.

Specialist-Engagement” position. In December 2020, RICH announced the position of Program Specialist (Community Engagement) to continue to promote activities reflecting the principles of the Urban Agenda.⁵⁸



Bringing Maggie Walker’s story to visitors at the 2nd Street Festival. From right to left, Seasonal Ranger Mark Wilcox, Supervisory Ranger Ajena Rogers, Park Guide Ben Anderson, and Seasonal Ranger Sean Higgins.

The NPS and the Maggie Walker Statue

When the protests over the Confederate statues on Monument Avenue erupted in the summer of 2020, a very different scene emerged in Jackson Ward around the statue of Maggie Walker. Activists wrote messages in chalk around her statue. Richmond youth staged a peaceful rally, featuring dance and music performances. A white flower shop owner and designer ringed the statue with a large arrangement to show solidarity with the

⁵⁸ “Urban Agenda Presentation to the Leadership Team at Colonial National Historic Park: January 18, 2017,” Box 1, loose papers in large Urban Agenda accordion file, David Ruth papers at Superintendent’s Office; “Urban Parks: Richmond, Virginia,” 4 December 2020, accessed 24 March 2021, <https://www.nps.gov/subjects/urban/richmond-va.htm>.

BLM movement. Maggie Walker’s statue, erected in 2017, had become the symbol of juxtaposition against the Confederate statues, erected by white southerners during the Jim Crow era to perpetuate the Lost Cause Narrative.⁵⁹

The statue, which stands at the corners of Adams and Broad Street, was yet another community effort in which local NPS personnel took part. The statue project moved forward with the site selection team chosen in 2014. Supervisory Ranger Ajena Rogers was on the team, but other NPS staff weighed in at a session held onsite to determine what approach to take with the statue. Their feedback included: “I think the main message conveyed should be her connection and dedication to her community (or communities). I think it should also capture her strength of character and serve as a source of inspiration for viewers/visitors.” After the site team determined that the best placement would be a triangular pocket park at the corner of Brooks/Adams/Broad Street, the city council approved the closure of Brook Road to create a pedestrian plaza. After settling a debate over the removal of a live oak tree from the plaza, the closure of Brook Road, and the size of the statue, the Public Arts Planning Commission approved funding for the project. The plan included interpretation on granite markers surrounding the statue, and the NPS presented an interpretation for the plaza that focused on biographical information, business concerns, political and civil rights activism, and her legacy.

Ajena Rogers remembers well the work of the commission in advancing the statue. She remembered that Paul DiPasquale visited MAWA in December of 2013. The sculptor of the Arthur Ashe statue and member of the commission, he was supportive of bringing the NPS on board as the city gathered stakeholders to participate in the committee for the Maggie Walker statue. Rogers sat on the committee from 2014 to 2017. She recalled the many public meetings and surveys held to discern what kind of memorial the public wanted to see, which ended up being representational rather than abstract. She recalls why they chose Toby Mendez as the sculptor—his Thurgood Marshall statue in front of the Maryland State House incorporates the building as part of the scene and casts Marshall as active. Rogers described a “quiet period” due to a personnel transition, which led to a controversy all over again with the site chosen once the project began moving, as well as the tree that ultimately was removed from the site. Some argued the tree was a symbol of lynching and the old South; others wanted to keep the tree as a green space. As the committee settled the controversies, Mendez selected a photo from the MAWA collection upon

⁵⁹ Facebook post, *Richmond Free Press* story shared by Maggie L. Walker National Historic Site Facebook page, 1 June 2020, <https://www.facebook.com/MaggieL.WalkerNHS/posts/10158537424755209>; “RVA Youth Rally Assembles at Maggie Walker Statue,” *WTVR News*, 14 June 2020, <https://www.wtvr.com/news/local-news/rva-youth-rally-assembles-at-maggie-walker-statue>; Ronald E. Carrington, “Company Uses Flowers to Send Message during Protests,” *Richmond Free Press*, <http://richmondfreepress.com/news/2020/jun/11/company-uses-flowers-send-message-during-local-pro/>; all accessed 24 March 2021.

which to base the statue. As Rogers explained, just like his Marshall statue, Mendez created a Walker in motion—moving forward, out of Jackson Ward, across the street to what would have been segregated white Richmond in her time.⁶⁰

At the unveiling ceremony in July 2017, David Ruth said, “The city is dotted with public shrines to Virginia’s exalted sons, and today, we can proudly say one of her esteemed daughters, too.” He noted that the businesses she built were monuments to business and the community, which had far-reaching effects in America. Today, Walker’s statue stands at the gateway to Jackson Ward, representing activism, change, and empowerment.⁶¹



Liza Mickens unveiling the Maggie Walker statue, with Supervisory Ranger Ajena Rogers on the left.
Film still from NPS production *Carry On: The Life & Legacy of Maggie L. Walker*.

⁶⁰ Ajena Rogers interview, 39–41, Ben Anderson note on first draft.

⁶¹ “Briefing Statement: Bureau: NPS, Issue Maggie L. Walker Commemorative Art Project,” 21 December 2015, and “Maggie L. Walker Public Art Commemoration Break Out Session Questions,” 16 April 2014, in drawer 2, file cabinet, Superintendent’s Office, MAWA Statue Folder; Ned Oliver, “Council advances plan for Maggie Walker statue amid ongoing debate,” *RTD* 14 December 2015; Brandon Shulleeta, “Packed auditorium opines Maggie Walker statue; nearby tree remains central issue,” *RTD* 12 January 2006; Jeremy Lazarus, “Walker statue to rise above Downtown plaza,” *RFP*, 25–27 February, A1, 4; Michael Paul Williams, “Will statue cut Maggie L. Walker down to size?” *RTD* 21 March 2016; Jeremy Lazarus, “Planning commission gives the Walker statue final ok,” *RFP* 21–23 July 2016, A2, all in Ethan Bullard Box, Maggie Walker Statue 2015–2017 Folder; MAWA Staff Recommendations for Draft Interpretation for MLW Plaza, Compiled 12 September 2016, revised 20 September 2016, drawer 2, file cabinet, Superintendent’s Office, MAWA statue Folder; Ned Oliver, “She didn’t just charter a bank,” *RTD*, 15 July 2017; Saraya Wintersmith, “Statue of Richmond pioneer Maggie L. Walker unveiled to cheers at gateway to Jackson Ward,” *RFP* 20–22 July 2017, Ethan Bullard Box, Maggie Walker Statue 2015–2017 Folder.

Conclusion

Although this period did not witness major physical site changes, the technological advancements and expansion of community partners suggest that MAWA once again illustrated—and was indeed ahead of—NPS national directives to build stronger partnerships, increase relevance, and embrace diversity. As with other periods, African Americans held positions of power onsite, with Klydie Thomas as curator, and Monamma Al-Ghuiyy, Ajena Rogers, and Eola Dance filling ranger/supervisory ranger positions. Visitation numbers fluctuated during this period (see table 3), with a large increase in 2016, related to the publicity and activities surrounding the NPS Centennial Year. In addition, Andrea DeKoter noted in 2016 that the park had hundreds of followers on Facebook and Instagram. In fact, during the COVID shutdown of 2020, personnel took advantage of these mediums to launch educational posts on Instagram and Facebook and host live-stream programs on Facebook, from house tours to special programming, to a virtual Jackson Ward tour. Moreover, a 2013 visitor satisfaction survey had all but one category register between 98 to 100 percent rate every aspect of the park as good/very good, which included exhibits, trails, facilities, helpfulness of employees, and maps/brochures. The lowest rating was still a 90 percent very good/good in ranger programs, suggesting that MAWA was extremely successful in engaging visitors. A visit to TripAdvisor reflects strong visitor satisfaction, with an overall 4.5-star review, dating back from as early as 2007. Over one hundred of the reviews were a full 5 stars, and overall, commenters related their delight in learning about Walker from the rangers during their tours.⁶²

Table 3. Attendance, 2006–2016

Year	Attendance
2006	7,803
2007	8,026
2008	2,549
2009	9,853
2010	12,290
2011	10,720
2012	8,261
2013	8,240
2014	11,321
2015	8,381
2016	10,174

Information from “Spreadsheet MAWA VC YTD totals,” David Ruth Records Box Richmond 7532, Folder Visitation.

⁶² “Richmond’s National Parks See Uptick in Centennial Year Visitation,” 31 January 2017, David Ruth Records Box 1, Visitation Folder; “Maggie L. Walker NHS 2013 Visitation Survey Card Data Report”; TripAdvisor’s reviews of Maggie L. Walker NHS, accessed 26 October 2021, https://www.tripadvisor.com/Attraction_Review-g60893-d108510-Reviews-or130-Maggie_L_Walker_National_Historic_Site-Richmond_Virginia.html.



Entrance to the visitor center on N. 2nd St.

By 2015, the “State of the Park Report” explained that archeological resources and museum collections were in excellent condition. The cultural landscape was appropriate and unchanging, all historic structures were in good condition, and Jackson Ward was on the road to more prosperity. It mentioned that partnerships were “a concern,” perhaps because of the demise of the MLWHF, but found new partners with MLWGS and other partners who supplied willing volunteers, as well as the National Park Foundation, which funded the Summer Youth Leadership Program.⁶³ Once the major structural work was complete, staff illustrated the creative thinking called on by NPS directives to forge new paths in technology, find new community partners, and reach visitors with new and innovative programs. They solved problems related to collections management and acquisition and encouraged scholarly activity. They embraced the Urban Fellows program, and now support a specialist in community relations to continue seeking out partnerships. Once again, the site and its personnel stood at the forefront of progress in the NPS.

⁶³ NPS “State of the Park Report,” 2015, quote on 5.

Conclusion

In just over forty years, the Maggie Walker site transformed from a collection of buildings, only two of which were inhabitable, to a complex offering educational and exhibit facilities, Walker's fully restored home, an office complex, and a collections storage vault that contains the artifacts of RICH and the Maggie Walker NHS. From the outset, personnel looked outward, seeking partnerships, and seeing the neighborhood as a historic canvas in which to situate not only the story of Maggie Walker but also the history of African American progress, civil rights, and gender rights in a Jim Crow city. Staff faced significant challenges in cultural resources management, interpretation, and providing programming and visitor services, and worked within budget constraints and a challenging city environment to do so.

NPS personnel at the local, regional, and national level committed to managing this important historic resource, devoting significant time and money to the effort. They understood the importance of the site and its artifacts, particularly the fact that the museum collection was relatively intact, even when Walker's story was not widely known. They took on the restoration and collections conservation and processing in a piecemeal fashion, achieving completion one phase at a time, when money was available. This, however, allowed for the accommodation of changes to the site plan, which generally arose from structural limitations, financial constraints, or, in the case of the office building plan, lack of interest in renting the facility. What exists today is a modern, fairly accessible site that provides visual, auditory, and kinetic learners ways to explore the Maggie Walker story. It took a tremendous amount of money but also extraordinary effort on the part of MAWA staff. Those who worked to build the historic site exhibited a sense of pride as they were interviewed about their experiences. As Mike Andrus, who moved from Supervisory Ranger to Chief of Interpretation during his time at Richmond National Battlefield Park, explained, "We started from scratch pretty much. Being involved in those kinds of programs was very rewarding, the way everything turned out."¹

As the Maggie Walker site emerged from a group of mostly derelict buildings, so too did Jackson Ward rise from its low point after being divided by I-95's construction and decimated by suburban flight in the 1950s-60s. NPS personnel took credit for much of the positive development that happened; as the "State of the Park" report noted, "Community engagement led to appropriate/sensitive development in the historic district."² Gentrification comes with its own perils, notably the exodus of longtime residents out of the area and the dwindling of the number of Black-owned businesses, but today

¹ Mike Andrus, interviewed by Megan Shockley, 2 July 2021, 5.

² "State of the Park," vi.

Jackson Ward hosts numerous residential apartment complexes, nationally renowned restaurants, and murals brightening buildings. An art gallery took over the old Steam Engine 5 building, and there are plans afoot to rejoin Jackson Ward by building a large pedestrian plaza over the interstate, as the city tries to undo the damage wrought by highway construction. The site, as MacLeod noted back in the nineties, stood as an example for the neighborhood of the possibilities of adaptive reuse, and today, many developers are restoring, rather than tearing down, old buildings. And even with positive redevelopment happening, Jackson Ward still faces threats from developers who are building massive structures, apartments, and office complexes, threatening the historic sightlines of the neighborhood. Recently, the empty lot behind MAWA, where the Eggleston Motel once stood, was fenced, presumably for some type of development. It remains to be seen what kind of building will go up there.³

As the site developed, interpretation moved forward as well. Propelled by new discoveries about Walker, as well as the more recent historiographical works on the African American middle class at the turn of the twentieth century, the home and exhibit space grew in size and complexity, from half of a house on display to the full Walker home, a permanent exhibit hall, a visitor center with updated movie and small exhibit, as well as a research library and collection for scholars. From the beginning, the NPS encouraged and supported research on Walker, both financially and by acquiring collections relevant to Walker's story. Staff incorporated the most recent research, pointing out inconsistencies and challenging traditional narratives, and cast Walker's story as illustrative of African American uplift at the turn of the twentieth century. The Junior Ranger program encourages youth to engage with the exhibits, and while the intended free-choice learning experience in the exhibit hall never materialized, the current visitor center movie covers much of the material visitors would have encountered there.

Local NPS personnel also shared findings about Walker through a diverse array of programs. As the 2015 "State of the Park" explains, the site itself has always suffered from low visitation—certainly lower than the 25,000 a year originally projected. In reality, as former ranger Hyman Schwartzberg admitted, the site cannot handle the kinds of crowds large sites get, because it simply does not have the capacity to manage that many people—and too many people put the fragile artifacts at risk. But recognizing this, staff have continued to offer programs that attract a diverse group of first-time and repeat visitors.⁴ Their willingness to be a presence at large festivals and partner with interested groups has

³ John Spiers, "Bridging the Gap: Richmond 300 Envisions Reconnecting Jackson Ward," *Richmond BizSense*, <https://richmondbizsense.com/2020/07/06/bridging-the-gap-richmond-300-plan-envisions-reconnecting-jackson-ward/>, last accessed 25 March 2021; Mel Leonor, "Richmond Neighborhoods: In Jackson Ward Memories of the Past Live amid New Growth," 28 February 2020, https://richmond.com/news/local/richmond-neighborhoods-in-jackson-ward-memories-of-the-past-live-amid-new-growth/article_3a3c0c17-6841-58a6-9b25-dfe223310654.html#tncms-source=login, last accessed 25 March 2021.

⁴ Interview with Hyman and Janet Schwartzberg; "State of the Park," 2015, viii.

enabled staff and volunteers to share the story of Walker across the region. Using the most recent technological advances, Walker staff have brought the story to an infinite audience via the website, Google Cultural Institute, and social media.

Throughout this period, staff have been focused on providing the best visitor experience possible. From focusing on safety in the neighborhood, to parking and signage concerns, to working within the constraints of historic architecture to make the buildings as accessible as possible, they have always kept the visitors top of mind. Visitors to the site are far safer and find better facilities today than they would have forty years ago.

Staff continue to complete projects called for in the 2017 “Foundation Document.” Staff are currently finishing a new Long Range Interpretive Plan. They created an emergency museum operations plan in 2020 and updated the National Historic Register nomination, which at this time is under review by WASO. The wallpaper reinterpretation/update phase one is finished and is on schedule for completion. A new five-year goal set in 2021 aims to build more of a joint interpretation between the battlefield parks and the Maggie Walker site. Staff noted that they would like to update scholarship on Walker, as the Marlowe book is out of print and there are so many new resources available with the IOSL records. This project is proposed with funding from the Civil Rights Initiative as a Special History Study, requested to begin in 2024.⁵

Personnel have worked hard to increase Walker’s visibility beyond the greater Richmond area, but more needs to be done. New scholarship has helped to share Walker’s story. Jackson Ward’s revitalization is drawing more visitors, although signage for the site is scant and inadequate. And certainly, with the increase of digital resources in the COVID era, Walker’s story is clearly and easily accessible, with supporting documentation for teachers and researchers alike. Still, until there is a broader historiography on Walker, or Walker features more prominently in books on the era, many will continue to confuse her with Madame C. J. Walker, a frequent (and probably aggravating) issue for rangers and other onsite staff.

NPS personnel agree, however, that there continue to be challenges at the site. One issue that several addressed is the challenge of building a diverse staff. As Supervisory Ranger Ajena Rogers explained, she is not on the front lines as much as other staff members, who were all white men in 2020–21. She argues that while her crew does an excellent job of interpreting the site’s narrative, representation matters to the visitors. Ben Anderson related his experience with some African American visitors giving him an “icy reception” when they learn he is their tour guide. He understands the resistance, arguing, “This is not so much about you as it is a commentary on this history of the long, troubled, complicated history of positionality of white people in relation to black history and the ways in which white people have tried to take charge of that narrative and they’ve really corrupted it in a

⁵ National Park Service, “Foundation Document: Maggie L. Walker National Historic Site,” June 2017, 19–20; Ethan Bullard and Ben Anderson, notes on first draft; Ethan Bullard, notes on second draft.

lot of ways for their own means.” He is particularly sensitive to the fact that he will never understand what his African American visitors have experienced. As he explained, one can still visit the site and never see a person of color on staff. He remembered one black visitor specifically asking where all the African American staff members were. And while he could say that Supervisory Ranger Rogers was not there at that particular time, he said that when white tour guides work with black visitors, “there is a hurdle that the white guide often has to clear, and it’s not always a guarantee the white person is going to get there in terms of being able to connect that person with the story in a meaningful way.” Still, as he opined, he understands why some black visitors could have the “well-deserved attitude” of wanting to discuss “some very sensitive stuff that comes from a deep emotional painful place” with an African American interpreter.⁶

The staff members who discussed this problem see this as symptomatic of a larger issue within the NPS that has implications on a daily basis at their site. Despite all of its efforts to work for more inclusion, it is still an overwhelmingly white organization. Ajena Rogers noted that coming up through the ranks of the NPS, “I’ve always been the ‘only’ for the most part.” Anderson believes that many African Americans “still largely see the park service as a kind of white space.” He explained that while this is changing, it is critical to have a more inclusive front-line staff. Ethan Bullard argued that the white staff can be “ambassadors,” showing white visitors that Walker’s story is significant in the larger narrative of American history, and black visitors that they have allies who respect and understand the history, even if they did not experience it themselves. Still, as he admitted, “I think though as an agency we are failing big time. It should not be an anomaly that we have only one—it seems, at a time, only one single African American [on] staff.” And Rogers said that African American kids need to see more African American NPS personnel, so that they can see the career opportunities, and that continuing the programs with historically black colleges and universities to help get students on the career path into permanent positions is important, as well.⁷ With Richmond’s two HBCUs, the Walker site could be drawing in many more local interns and co-op workers; however, interns and co-op workers need supervisors, and the current staff are already stretched very thin.

Other personnel-related challenges exist, as well. Ethan Bullard noted the problem of advancement. The site has as its personnel requirements one upper-level supervisory ranger, who is currently a GS-11, and two GS-5s. As he explains, no one can “move up and open up a spot where they can train their successor.” This, he suggests, could be one of the causes of the lack of diversity. And Ben Anderson explains that “as long as that structure remains, you’ve got these two really low-level front-line people.” MAWA has been

⁶ Interview with Ajena Rogers, 43; Interview with Ben Anderson, 57–59, quotes on 58, 59; Interview with Ethan Bullard, 31–33, quote on 32.

⁷ Interview with Ajena Rogers, 43–45, quote on 43; Interview with Ben Anderson, 58; Interview with Ethan Bullard, 31–34, quotes on 31, 33.

fortunate that the GS-5s have generally done far, far more than their entry-level description would describe. But Anderson admits that “what a site like that is going to commit itself to is having this revolving door on the front-line end of people who may or may not care a whole lot about what they’re doing.” And while the battlefield parks have four GS-9 level interpreters, who manage interns, do collateral jobs, and have supervisory duties, currently the GS-11 Supervisory Ranger and the two GS-5s do far more than the job descriptions suggest.⁸

Despite these issues, personnel have successfully expanded the story of Maggie Walker from a little-known local heroine to an illustrative example of the prominent and enterprising class of Americans who emerged during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century through their own efforts, and those who supported them. Moreover, through their careful research and interpretation, they now present a more complicated picture of Maggie Walker as an outspoken, unapologetic activist who fought for equality from her early years to her last. The purpose statement of the site reads: “Maggie L. Walker National Historic Site preserves Maggie L. Walker’s home and its setting within Jackson Ward and interprets her achievements as a civil rights activist and pioneering entrepreneur in Jim Crow–era Richmond, Virginia.” Through careful and thorough resource management and interpretation, as well as provision of programming and services to onsite and virtual visitors, the NPS achieved success in illustrating Walker’s national significance as a civil rights pioneer, fighter for gender equality, family leader, and successful businesswoman. In so doing, they modeled the tenets of the National Park Service directives to engage locally, situate site stories into broader contexts, reach out to urban populations, and achieve relevance.

⁸ Interview with Ethan Bullard, 37; Interview with Ben Anderson, 61–63.

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Appendix A

Timeline of the Maggie L. Walker National Historic Site	
1975	Community members form the Maggie L. Walker Historical Foundation
1978	Enabling legislation signed to create the Maggie L. Walker National Historic Site
1979	Deed Transfer Ceremony
1982	<i>General Management Plan</i> establishes the direction of the park
1985	Maggie L. Walker home opens to the public
1997	Opening of the visitor center
1998	<i>Long-Range Interpretive Plan</i>
1999	Website launched
2003	Publication of <i>A Right Worthy Grand Mission</i>
	Restoration of Leigh Street buildings completed
2005	Opening of the permanent exhibit
2006	Elvatrice Belsches discovers more accurate birthdate for Maggie Walker
	Youth Leadership Institute launched
2009	Independent Order of St. Luke papers found by William & Mary students at the St. Luke Building
	Social Media (Facebook) launched
2015	Maggie Walker is one of the sites chosen to be featured on Google Cultural Institute
2017	<i>Carry On</i> , updated short documentary, premieres
	Maggie Walker statue unveiled in Jackson Ward
2020	NPS acquires Independent Order of St. Luke records from the Stallings family

Appendix B

Enabling Legislation for the Maggie L. Walker National Historic Site

92 STAT. 3510

PUBLIC LAW 95-625—NOV. 10, 1978

THOMAS STONE NATIONAL HISTORIC SITE

Home and
grounds,
acquisition.

SEC. 510. (a) The Secretary is authorized to acquire by donation, exchange, or purchase with donated or appropriated funds, the Thomas Stone home and grounds, known as Habre-de-Venture, located on Rose Hill Road near La Plata in Charles County, Maryland, for establishment as the Thomas Stone National Historic Site.

Notice,
publication in
Federal Register.

Administration.

(b) The national historic site shall be established by the Secretary by the publication of notice to that effect in the Federal Register at such time that he determines he has sufficient ownership to constitute an administrable unit. After such publication, the site shall be administered by the Secretary pursuant to the provisions of this section and the provisions of the Act of August 25, 1916 (39 Stat. 535), as amended and supplemented (16 U.S.C. 1 et seq.), and the Act of August 21, 1935 (49 Stat. 666; 16 U.S.C. 461-467).

Appropriation
authorization.

(c) To carry out the purposes of this section, there is hereby authorized to be appropriated not to exceed \$600,000 for the acquisition of lands and interests therein and not to exceed \$400,000 for development.

MAGGIE L. WALKER NATIONAL HISTORIC SITE

Establishment.
16 USC 461 note.

SEC. 511. (a) The Secretary is authorized to establish the Maggie L. Walker National Historic Site (hereinafter in this section referred to as the "historic site") in the city of Richmond, Virginia.

Description.

(b) The historic site shall comprise the area extending east from the western boundary of the Maggie L. Walker House at 113 East Leigh Street in Richmond, Virginia, to Third Street and extending north from an east-west line which coincides with the front property line of such house to an east-west line which coincides with the north side of the alleyway immediately at the rear of such house. Following timely notice in writing to the Committee on Interior and Insular Affairs of the House of Representatives and the Committee on Energy and Natural Resources of the Senate of his intention to do so, the Secretary may make minor revisions in the boundaries of the historic site by publication of a map or other revised boundary description in the Federal Register.

Boundary
revisions, notice
to congressional
committees and
publication in
Federal Register.

(c) Within the boundaries of the historic site, the Secretary may acquire lands and interests therein by donation, purchase with donated or appropriated funds, exchange, or transfer from any other Federal agency. Any property within such boundaries owned by the State of Virginia or any political subdivision thereof may be acquired only by donation.

Notice,
publication in
Federal Register.
Administration.

(d) When the Secretary determines that lands and interests therein have been acquired in an amount sufficient to constitute an administrable unit, he shall establish the historic site by publication of a notice to that effect in the Federal Register. Pending such establishment and thereafter, the Secretary shall administer the historic site in accordance with the Act of August 25, 1916 (39 Stat. 535), as amended and supplemented (16 U.S.C. 1, 2-4), and the Act of August 21, 1935 (49 Stat. 666), as amended (16 U.S.C. 461 et seq.). Funds available for the historic site shall be available for restoration and rehabilitation of properties therein in accordance with cooperative agreements entered into pursuant to section 2(e) of the Act of August 21, 1935, *supra*.

Appropriation
authorization.

(e) (1) There are authorized to be appropriated such sums as may be necessary to carry out the provisions of this section, but not more than \$795,000 for acquisition of lands and interests in land and not more than \$500,000 for the development of essential facilities.

(2) Within three complete fiscal years from the date of enactment of this section, the Secretary shall develop and transmit to the Committees referred to in subsection (b) a general management plan for the historic site consistent with the purposes of this section. Such plan shall indicate—

- (i) facilities needed to accommodate the health, safety, and educational needs of the public;
- (ii) the location and estimated cost of all facilities; and
- (iii) the projected need for any additional facilities.

Plan, transmittal to congressional committees.

CROW CREEK VILLAGE ARCHEOLOGICAL SITE

SEC. 512. (a) The Secretary shall prepare and transmit to the Committee on Energy and Natural Resources of the Senate and the Committee on Interior and Insular Affairs of the House of Representatives within two years from the date of enactment, a feasibility/suitability study of the Crow Creek Village archeological site, Buffalo County, South Dakota, as a unit of the National Park System. The study shall include cost estimates for any necessary acquisition, development, operation and maintenance, as well as any feasible alternatives for the administration and protection of the area, including, but not limited to, Federal financial and technical assistance to the State of South Dakota, Buffalo County or other suitable entity.

Feasibility/suitability study, transmittal to congressional committees. 16 USC 1a-5 note. Cost estimates.

(b) Notwithstanding any other provision of law, the Secretary of the Army is directed to take such actions as may be necessary to preserve and protect such site from any adverse impact on the site and to refrain from any activities which might cause such impact until two years from the date of submission of the study by the Secretary.

Site preservation.

Subtitle B—Trails

SEC. 551. The National Trails System Act (82 Stat. 919; 16 U.S.C. 1241), as amended, is further amended as follows:

(1) In section 2(a) after "promote" insert "the preservation of,"; and after "outdoor areas" insert "and historic resources".

16 USC 1241.

(2) In section 2(a) delete "(ii)" and the remainder of the sentence and insert "(ii) secondarily, within scenic areas and along historic travel routes of the Nation, which are often more remotely located."

(3) In section 2(b) delete "and scenic" and insert ", scenic and historic".

(4) In section 3 redesignate subsection "(c)" as "(d)", and insert a new subsection (c) as follows:

National historic trails.

"(c) National historic trails, established as provided in section 5 of this Act, which will be extended trails which follow as closely as possible and practicable the original trails or routes of travel of national historical significance. Designation of such trails or routes shall be continuous, but the established or developed trail, and the acquisition thereof, need not be continuous onsite. National historic trails shall have as their purpose the identification and protection of the historic route and its historic remnants and artifacts for public use and enjoyment. Only those selected land and water based components of an historic trail which are on federally owned lands and which meet the national historic trail criteria established in this Act, are established as initial Federal protection components of a national historic trail. The appropriate Secretary may subsequently certify other lands as protected segments of an historic trail upon application from State or local governmental agencies or private interests involved

16 USC 1242.
16 USC 1244.

Protected segments, certification.