

Howard Lansdowne remembers segregation and a slower, simpler time

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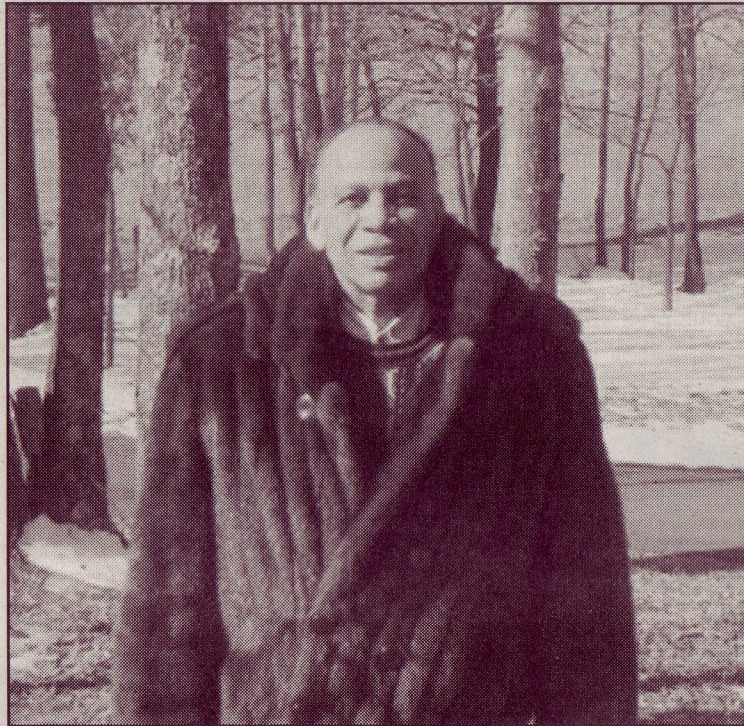
“‘It was a very hot day,’ my mother described the day I was born June 23, 1934,” Howard P. Lansdowne of Haymarket, said. “Back then, houses were hot in the summer. Dr. Wade Payne of Haymarket, owner of the old Winterham property, delivered me at home, the eleventh and last child of my parents ...”

Howard Lansdowne, who will turn 74 in June, grew up in what was known as Waterfall, but became part of Haymarket, according to Eugene M. Scheel’s book, “Crossroads and Corners—A Tour of the Villages, Towns and Post Offices of Prince William County, Virginia, Past & Present.”

Before the area was called Waterfall, it was called Bridgett Town, which was settled by African-Americans. James and Kitty Bridgett gave the area its name, according to Scheel. Today’s Jackson Hollow Road, which is off Waterfall Road, was previously called Bridgett Town Road, Lansdowne remembered.

According to Scheel’s October 2000 African-American Heritage Map of Prince William County, “Butler Baker, Kitty [Bridgett’s] brother ran the store. Reportedly, the strongest man in upper Prince William when he saw his first Model T, he lifted it up by the front fender to see its underbelly. [This area was] once upper Prince William’s largest black village with more than 100 people.”

Lansdowne remembered Baker’s store on Mountain Road. “Baker had these great gingersnap cookies,” he said. He recalled his father buying the special gingersnaps as a treat for the family. The family also shopped at



Heidi M. Baumstark / the Bull Run Observer

Howard Lansdowne was born and raised in the Waterfall area of Haymarket, which was previously known as Bridgett Town after the Civil War in 1865.

Melton’s Store in Haymarket, which was near the old firehouse on Washington Street.

Lansdowne continued with his memories of his parents, George Wade Lansdowne and Mamie Hatcher Lansdowne. His father was born in 1884 and worked in the early 1900s for Col. Edmund Berkeley on Evergreen farm in Haymarket. George lived on the farm in a little house. In fact, there is a Lansdowne Lane near Evergreen; “my grandfather, Robert Lansdowne, gave that land to my Uncle Albert,” Lansdowne explained. His mother was born in 1890. To remember the family legacy, two roads on Bull Run Mountain, George Lansdowne Drive and Mamie Lansdowne Lane, are named in their honor.

In 1925, George moved his

family and settled on Mountain Road. Lansdowne and his older brother, Wilmer, who was born in 1919, have always lived on Bull Run Mountain. Wilmer remembered being a young teen working with his father on Otis Latham’s Snow Hill Farm on U.S. 15. “My dad got \$1 a day for a man’s wages; since I wasn’t a man yet, I earned 75 cents a day,” Wilmer recalled.

In those days, schools were segregated. The Lansdowne children walked to Antioch School #3 on Jackson Hollow Road from first to seventh grade. For high school, “we were bused to Manassas Industrial Regional High School. I remember riding the bus. Driving on those unpaved roads, the dust would float into the windows; and in the winter, I remember the bus being so cold,” Lansdowne said.

Some early grade-school memories include a kind teacher; “I think her name was Miss Evelyn Toler. But then there was this other teacher; she was really mean. My mother would walk down to the school and tell her to stop hitting her boy!” Lansdowne said, who was about 10 years old at the time.

Other memories include walking barefoot all summer until late fall since “our shoes had to be saved for cold winters,” Lansdowne said.

As a young teen in the late 1940s, he started playing with the adult baseball players in Catharpin. From there, he played with the men in Gainesville and in Aldie in Loudoun County. “The teams were still segregated and we played other black teams,” according to Lansdowne.

He continued playing baseball in his senior year of high school. When he graduated in 1951, he was offered a baseball scholarship to a college in Ohio. But, “I didn’t go because my parents were elderly and I stayed home and went to work in Arlington.”

He also helped organize a softball team for girls and young ladies and remained involved. The team traveled and played other girl teams in Middleburg and Leesburg. His two sisters were on the team and later his wife, Annie Mae Robinson

Lansdowne, played; the couple has five boys, four girls and many grandchildren—19 in all.

As a young adult, he was one of the only ones who had a car and would pick up “the players from all over the area and take them to play in the [baseball] games. “It was helpful to them. It gave them something to do on Sundays and kept them out of trouble! Our team was called the Virginia Stars. It was entertainment for us; there really wasn’t much else to do. People looked forward to watching a ball game on Sundays,” Lansdowne recalled.

Lansdowne and his family still attend Olive Branch Baptist Church on Mountain Road, which was established in 1869. “We’d walk to evening church prayer meetings with the light of a kerosene lamp,” Lansdowne remembered.

These are some of the memories which personified the life of Howard Lansdowne. As a closing thought, he shared, “Blacks would be doing their thing and the whites did their thing. We all got along though. The area was so rural with lots of farms. Growing up in the ‘30s and ‘40s, we played with our neighbors—life was much slower and simpler—these are some of my memories ...”

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