



# Carlyle House

## DOCENT DISPATCH

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Northern Virginia Regional Park Authority 

### *Alexandria During World War II: Life in the Wagar Apartments*

By Linda Greenberg

In the 1942 Alexandria City Directory, twenty-eight apartments are listed with householders under Wagar Apartments at 129 North Fairfax Street. Wagar Apartments, a four-story plain, white-painted brick building with ornamental cornice and decorative balcony, had been built as a hotel in 1855 by James



*Wagar Apartment Building, 129 North Fairfax Street. The building had 28 apartments and included the Bank Building as well as James Greene's original hotel structure. 1940. Courtesy of the Library of Congress.*

Greene, a successful, local furniture maker. The hotel had subsequently become a hospital during the Civil War, a hotel again in 1865, and then, in 1906 an apartment building after it was purchased by Ernest Wagar. When it was built, the hotel completely blocked the view of the Carlyle House to the passerby on North Fairfax Street. Lloyd Diehl Schaeffer, a Virginia businessman, purchased the Wagar Apartment building in 1940 and was instrumental in saving the Carlyle House from demotion during the 1960s. Schaeffer eventually sold the entire property to the Northern Virginia Regional Park Authority in 1969.

Mary Rebecca Bush McCullough and her daughter Jane, born in 1928, moved from Trenton, NJ, to the Wagar Apartments in 1930. Mary's husband, a surgeon, had died, and Mary and her daughter moved to Alexandria to live with her mother and father, John and Lizzie Bush, in the Wagar Apartments at 129 North Fairfax Street. In Alexandria Jane's mother met Milton Leadbeater and eventually married him when Jane was 13. Milton was the son of Clarence Leadbeater, the last



*Jane McCullough at Camp Norwood, 1946. She was 18. Courtesy Joan Poland*

#### **CARLYLE HOUSE**

*Sarah Coster, Site Administrator*

*Helen Wirka, Site Specialist*

*Lacey Villiva, Education Assistant*



pharmacist to own and operate the Leadbeater Apothecary on North Fairfax Street. When Milton married Jane's mother, he offered to adopt her. Jane declined because her ambition was to be the fourth generation of McCulloughs to be physicians. As Jane recalls, apartment #5 was spacious and the family had a phone. Their apartment was on the second floor and ran the entire length of the Cameron Street side of the bank section. The Bushes' rent was \$45 a month. Jane believed apartment #5 "was the largest apartment in the whole city." The apartment included a very large living room with dining area, kitchen, pantry, study and three bedrooms and bathroom. The bathroom accommodated the usual fixtures plus an old Singer foot-treadle sewing machine, a bamboo planter and a large rocking chair. Jane's best friend, Grace, lived on the same floor; Jane communicated with Grace by knocking on her closet wall. (The rent remained at \$45 for the duration of the war. At the end of the war when the rent freeze ended, many of the apartments were remodeled. Number 5 was divided into three apartments and each rented for \$80 a month.)

World War II intruded in Jane's daily life in several ways. One was the air raid drill. It was scheduled every few weeks. The city was divided into districts with an Air Raid Warden for each district. Sirens were positioned on poles throughout the city to sound the alarm. Jane was proud of her contribution to the war effort: she was one of two girl Air Raid Messengers. Her job was to run errands or take messages from one warden to another, as necessary, during the air raid. City residents were given blackout curtains and were supposed to use them during a drill so that enemy planes could not identify the city by its lights. The warden's job, when there was an air raid drill, was to make sure the streets were cleared of pedestrians and no lights were visible. Jane's grandmother, Lizzie Bush, feared that Jane would be killed during an air raid drill. She also feared that saboteurs would blow up the torpedo factory and they would all be killed. Jane's mother worked for the government during the war. First she worked for the General Account Office (GAO) in Washington as a Statistician; later she joined AB&W Transit Company (purchased by

Metro in 1973) in Alexandria as a Statistician. Many companies were pleased to hire women during the war because most able white men had been drafted. On October 16, 1943 an ad in The Alexandria Gazette for The Chesapeake & Potomac Telephone Company of Virginia at 1306 Mt. Vernon Avenue sought "Women for the telephone work 18-50." Jane's grandfather, John Bush, worked for the International Correspondence School, one of the first correspondence schools in America. As the ad below explains, their popularity increased because of the training needs caused by the war. The I.C.C.'s office was in the alcove of the lobby of Gadsby's Tavern. At that time the building's exterior brick was painted yellow, and it was the Royal Hotel.

The I.C.C. offered correspondence – by mail – classes for those without access to local institutions. The Alexandria Gazette, October 1943.

Jane worked too. She was the first girl to deliver The Alexandria Gazette DAILY NEWS OF ALL NORTHERN VIRGINIA whose banner read, America's Oldest Daily Newspaper Established 1784." The Gazette cost five cents and was



published every afternoon except Sunday. Under its masthead were “God’s Word” and the Editorial. A Saturday paper was typically eight pages, a weekday paper ten pages. Jane delivered papers along South Lee and South Fairfax by bike. She used her paper route money to pay for dance and piano lessons. Her dance teacher, Mary Callaway, taught dance in the large, front room in the bank building section of Wagar Apartments. Callaway’s apartment was behind her dance studio. Its entrance was from a hall under the steps of the 129 North Fairfax entrance. Access to the dance studio was from a separate entrance. Dance teacher, Mary Ellet Cabell Callaway, taught ballet and tap classes during the school year and managed a camp in Norwood, Virginia, the site of her family’s home in the summer. Callaway, known as “MCC” or “Aunt Mayne” captivated most by her enthusiasm for dance and joie de vivre. Still she was a demanding dance teacher, and Jane took lessons from her for 12

years, from age 3 to 15, when she graduated from high school. Callaway’s cousin, Jeannette Coley, recalls that after several years on North Fairfax Street, Mary moved the studio to Prince Street and then to the Confederate Lodge Building.

Below Jane’s apartment in the bank section of Wagar Apartments was Clover Demaine’s apartment. Demaine gave voice lessons. (Her family operated a funeral home, the Demaine Funeral Home, then as now at 520 South Washington Street.) Above Jane lived a family whose son, a little older, played the piano. When he switched from the piano to organ, Jane saw an opportunity to acquire an instrument she had long wanted. To her delight, the boy upstairs agreed to sell the piano for only \$5. It cost \$3 to have the piano moved down to her apartment!

Jane’s daily life involved school and family. She began school at 3 by attending classes at the home of Mrs. McDonald Douglas who lived on King Street near the Masonic Temple. Here she learned to read and write. By the time she was six she had learned enough to apply for admission at St. Agnes, then located off Russell Road in Del Ray. She was accepted and began classes there in the fourth grade. She remained at St. Agnes for two years, grades 4 and 5. Her tuition to St. Agnes was paid from the insurance money received from her father’s insurance policy. After that she enrolled at the Cameron Street Elementary School (today’s Jefferson Houston Elementary School) and attended grades 6 and 7 there. This school had been built as a high school for grades 8 through 11. (There was no 12th grade then.) By the time Jane graduated from elementary school, the high school, George Washington High School, was on Mt. Vernon Avenue. Today this building is the George Washington Middle School.

Jane graduated from 11th grade in 1944 when she was 15. In 1944 there was no school bus. Jane either rode the King Street bus or rode her bike to school. One year when she was in high school she took part in a strings program. She rode her bike to school and balanced her cello on her bike as well. (She also learned to play a violin, tenor sax,



*Mary Callaway, dance teacher and director of Camp Norwood, was known for her enthusiasm and high standards. She taught dance in the front room, first floor, of the Bank Building. Her apartment was behind the studio. Mary or “MCC” or Aunt Mayne is pictured here with Jeanette Cabel Coley and Jeanette’s brother. Circa 1950.*



French horn and drums.)

From childhood, Jane planned to become a physician. She completed her undergraduate degree at Mary Washington College with a major in premed and a minor in German and music. When she graduated from college in 1948 she was too young to be accepted at the University of Virginia Medical School. To make money she went to New York City hoping to find a job in musical comedy. When a job did not materialize she auditioned and was selected to join the June Taylor dancers. As a June Taylor dancer, she appeared in the Colgate Comedy Hour and the Martin & Lewis Show; she worked as well in Las Vegas, Havana, Miami Beach, and was offered the lead role in the road company production of South Pacific.

Jane never became a physician. In 1951, while dancing at the Flamingo Hotel in Las Vegas she met Air Force pilot Lt. Stan Parris (1929-2010). They married after a whirlwind courtship. Soon thereafter Stan returned to civilian life, and the couple returned to Virginia. For a short while (1954), Stan worked for Southern Iron Works as public relations director and administrative assistant to President Boguess. Stan received his law degree in 1958 and then sought political office. He was elected to the Fairfax County Board of Supervisors, the Virginia House of Delegates, and the U. S. Congress representing Virginia's 8th District, where he served six two-year terms. One of his accomplishments was establishing the Torpedo Factory Art Center. Jane was elected President of the 93rd Congress Wives Club. They divorced in 1975 and Jane married her high school sweetheart Gerald Smallwood.

Today Jane Smallwood lives in Kitty Hawk, NC. She plays, and teaches, duplicate bridge and practices tap dancing with the Wright Tappers, a senior performing group.