

Marbury Plaque on Park Avenue

Background

William L. Marbury, Sr. was a resident of Bolton Hill in the early twentieth century, who founded the Mount Royal Protective Association in 1910 and was a signatory to the Certificate of Incorporation of the later renamed Mount Royal Improvement Association (MRIA) in 1928, predecessor organization of the Bolton Hill Community Association (2018).

As a lawyer, Marbury was state's attorney for Maryland during the Cleveland administration and became president of the Maryland State Bar Association in 1910. He also ran for the United States senate with the support of Woodrow Wilson and lost in 1913. Marbury, in turn, was a major supporter of Wilson's run for the presidency, serving as Wilson's campaign manager for the state of Maryland.



WILLIAM L. MARBURY
Dec. 26, 1859 Oct. 26, 1935
PLANTED BY
MT. ROYAL GARDEN CLUB

Marbury helped draft several state bills designed to disenfranchise Black Marylanders' voting rights from the late 1890s to 1911. As he told the *Baltimore Sun* in January 1910, "It is an anomalous condition that an inferior race should share the government with the superior one." Marbury used his position as state's attorney to make his case for the constitutionality of disenfranchisement before the Supreme Court of the United States, futilely arguing that because Maryland had never actually ratified the fifteenth amendment, the state did not have to abide by its provisions.

By 1910, Marbury had also become an advisor to members of the Baltimore City Council who were promoting residential segregation, and he helped them draft a series of residential segregation laws between 1910 and 1917, among the earliest such urban statutes in the country. When they proved so conservative as to fail to pass constitutional muster in the Supreme Court, Marbury favored enforcement tools in the form of restrictive covenants and the Mount Royal Protective Association, which was founded with the explicit purpose to stop Black people from renting or purchasing homes in Bolton Hill.

After Marbury died in 1935, the Mount Royal Garden Club installed a plaque on a small stone commemorating him on the Park Avenue median at the intersection of Park and Wilson. No one knows exactly when or why the plaque was installed. The only indirect record is an open letter from the Mount Royal Garden Club's president, Anne Graeme Turnbull, in its 1937 handbook that mentions plans to memorialize Marbury for oblique reasons:

As soon as the frost abates, we expect to plant two beautiful magnolia trees, at the south end of the 1700 Park Place Square in the memory of the late Mr. William L. Marbury. These living sentinels will always remind us of the one who did more to save this District than anyone else. His brilliance, kindness and tact won many a battle for us, and we must never forget that it is our duty to assist in making our neighborhood more livable and attractive.

All told, William L. Marbury was a major local architect of the laws and policies that created and maintained Jim Crow era segregation in Maryland, in Baltimore, and in Bolton Hill. Marbury did not, then, simply hold beliefs about racial segregation that were not uncommon for other white people of his time, he was instead a locally prominent white man who actively *shaped* the world of Jim Crow during the early twentieth century.

Review

The committee researched what was known about Marbury and the plaque placed in his honor. The Marbury plaque's purpose and placement are an enigma. However, it memorializes a former resident of Bolton Hill who would not be honored today for his public, proactive efforts to disenfranchise Black people and inhibit them from living in the neighborhood.

The committee contacted a descendent of Marbury and learned that no known Marbury descendant holds any special background knowledge of or significance for the plaque.

The committee also consulted the Bolton Hill Garden Club, successor organization to the Mount Royal Garden Club, about its opinion about the plaque. Its executive committee recommended removal of the plaque from the median. The letter to the committee from the Bolton Hill Garden Club president is appended to this summary.

Recommendation

Because of the unverified reasons for the plaque's placement but unequivocal knowledge of the revolting public reputation of the man honored by the plaque, the committee recommends removal. As a corollary, the committee suggests giving the plaque to a Marbury descendent.

Works Cited

Bogen, David Skillen. Maryland Historical Magazine. 84(1). Spring 1989, 39-49.

Marbury, William L. Jr., In the Catbird's Seat. Baltimore: Maryland Historical Society, 1988.

Mount Royal Garden Club 1937 Handbook.

Pietila, Antero. Not in My Neighborhood: How Bigotry Shaped a Great American City. Chicago, Ivan R. Dee, 2010.

Power, Garrett. "Eugenics, Jim Crow & Baltimore's Best." Maryland Bar Journal. November 2016, 4-16.

June 27, 2027

Ms. Amy Sheridan
President
Bolton Hill Community Association

RE: William L. Marbury memorial plaque

Dear Amy,

I am writing to you regarding correspondence and conversations I had with David Nyweide this Spring regarding the William L. Marbury Plaque which resides on the median of the 1600 block of Park Avenue in Bolton Hill. Our discussion, and a subsequent discussion I held with the Executive Committee of the Bolton Hill Garden Club, focused on whether the plaque should remain on the median given Mr. Marbury's activism and leadership in the early 20th century in preventing persons of different races and religions (other than white and Protestant) from living in the Bolton Hill neighborhood and other areas of Baltimore. At the time of the plaque's installation by the predecessor organization of the Bolton Hill Garden Club, the Mount Royal Garden Club, after Mr. Marbury's death the plaque was installed in his honor. At the time of his death Mr. Marbury was the president of the Mount Royal Protection Association and was very involved with other exclusionary and redlining activities including working as a representing attorney in lawsuits. The mission of the Mount Royal Protection Association was to keep the then Mount Royal neighborhood white and primarily protestant.

The Executive Committee of the Bolton Hill Garden Club has voted to have the plaque removed. It considers the plaque to no longer represent the values of the garden club and the Bolton Hill neighborhood as it is a painful reminder to many of exclusionary and discriminatory times.

I also had a telephone conversation with Hugh Marbury who is the great-grandson of William L. Marbury. He told me his family is completely all right with the plaque's removal and if it is removed, he and his family would like to have the plaque given to them.

Attached for you is Mr. Marbury's obituary which I was able to transcribe in full. Please let me know if you have any questions.

Sincerely,

Lisa Johnson
President
Bolton Hill Garden Club
email: flora.bhgc@gmail.com

c: David Nyweide