

William Wallace Alsop (1881-1968):

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The Emil Schnellock murals painted in the lobby of George Washington Hall from 1940 to 1945 are a snapshot of life at the then Mary Washington College of the University of Virginia during World War II.¹ Despite a country unified by the war effort, a substantial portion of American citizens were still under the cloud of segregation. Perhaps then, it is not surprising that the single representation of an African American, William Wallace Alsop, stands alone, divorced from the other representations. But who was this man and why was his likeness selected?

William “Wallace” Alsop was born on March 5, 1881 in Spotsylvania County, Virginia to Waverly Alsop, noted at the time as a white laborer and married, and Alfronia “Phoebe” Dawson, noted as a mulatto and single.² The two are not noted as being married to each other at the time of Wallace’s birth, however the lack of nuptials appears to have not hindered the size of the family. When William “Wallace” was born, he already had two sisters and a brother with another four brothers and sisters to come.³

Wallace moved with his entire family on February 11, 1892 to Fredericksburg when his mother purchased the two-story wood frame house at 521 Hanover Street from Henry and Lucy Deane, adjacent to her eldest daughter Ida Thornton.⁴ The Deanes were at the time selling African American families homes in the Liberty Town neighborhood of Fredericksburg.⁵ While living in Fredericksburg, Wallace learned to read and write along with his brothers and sisters living just a few blocks from the “two-story brick building...on the north corner of Princess Anne and Wolfe Streets...”⁶ Apparently Wallace showed some promise in school being listed on the honor roll in October 1892.⁷ However, despite this academic promise, Wallace appears to have ended his studies at the 5th grade.⁸ With limited education and the constraints of entrenched racism, Wallace found himself employed as a day laborer and living at home in 1900 at the age of 19.⁹

¹Edward Alvey, *History of Mary Washington College 1908-1972* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1974), 236.

² 1880 United State Census (Population Schedule), Courtland District, Spotsylvania, Virginia; p. 13, family 110, dwelling 103, line 49; June 1880; National Archives Microfilm T9, roll 1391.

³ 1910 United States Census (Population Schedule), Fredericksburg (Independent City), Virginia; p. 19A, family 377, dwelling 350, line 96; 22 April 1910; FHL microfilm: 1375642, roll T624_1629.

⁴ Deed of Sale from Henry Deane and wife to Alfronia Dawson, 17 February 1892, Fredericksburg, Virginia, Deed Book DD, page 397. Fredericksburg Clerks Office, Fredericksburg, Virginia.

⁵ Matt Scott and Gary Stanton, “The Domestic Architecture of African-Americans during the Era of Jim Crow,” *Journal of Fredericksburg History* Volume 15, 2016: 25.

⁶ Silvanus Quinn, *The History of the City of Fredericksburg* (Richmond: The Hermitage Press, 1908), 200.

⁷ Honor Roll, Fredericksburg, VA, *Fredericksburg Star*, 8 October 1892, p. 3, col. 6.

⁸ 1940 United States Census (Population Schedule), Courtland District, Spotsylvania, Virginia; p. 2A, dwelling 29, line 37; 7 May 1940; FHL microfilm, roll m-t0627-04296.

⁹ 1900 United States Census (Population Schedule), Fredericksburg Lower Ward, Fredericksburg City, Virginia; p. 25, family 516, dwelling 494, line 16, 16 June 1900; FHL microfilm 124173, roll T623_1854.

Roughly a year later on February 20th 1901 Wallace married Rose [Rosa] Lucas.¹⁰ A short while later around 1902 their first child, Carlisle was born, followed by Gladys (c. 1906) and then Ellwood (c. 1909). During this period, the new family moved to the Falmouth area in Stafford County, Virginia where they rented a house as Wallace began work on a local dairy farm.¹¹ While Wallace was beginning this new job, his older brother Murray began working for R. G. Hilldrup, a hauling company, as a driver.¹² The job was apparently good enough that Wallace decided to leave his job at the dairy farm and began working for Hilldrup as a “coachman” and then an “outs driver” starting around 1912-1913.¹³ On December 21, 1913, Wallace and Rosa also had their last child, Wallace Howard Alsop.¹⁴

R.G. Hilldrup was at the time of Wallace’s employment located on William Street in Fredericksburg. With location likely in mind the family again packed and moved, this time back to town. Initially the family appears to have been renting a home on 11th Street starting around 1913 but by 1920 they are living at 1111 Winchester Street.¹⁵ Unfortunately, a short time after the move to 1111 Winchester Street Ellwood, their third child would pass away.¹⁶ Within the next decade Wallace and Rose would separate and by 1930 Wallace was living with his eldest sister Ida Thornton at 519 Hanover Street, adjacent to his childhood home.¹⁷

During this tumultuous time Wallace would change jobs again, this time becoming a chauffeur and general utility man for the Fredericksburg State Teachers College (FSTC), the precursor to Mary Washington College, in 1922. The job description consisted primarily of taking the young women as well as professors to and from locations in and around the Fredericksburg area. Over the ensuing decade Wallace would enhance his standing at the FSTC, taking control of the maintenance of the “trio” of buildings on campus at the time.¹⁸

¹⁰ Ancestry.com. *Virginia, Select Marriages, 1785-1940* [database on-line]. Provo, UT, USA: Ancestry.com Operations, Inc, 2014. FHL Film Number 2048487 reference id rn22

¹¹1910 United States Census (Population Schedule), Falmouth, Stafford, Virginia; p. 9A, family 152 dwelling 152, line 34; FHL microfilm 1375662, Roll: T624_1649.

¹²1910 United States Census (Population Schedule), Fredericksburg (Independent City), Virginia; p. 19A, family 377, dwelling 350, line 96; 22 April 1910; FHL microfilm: 1375642, roll T624_1629.

¹³ Draft Registration Card for William Alsop, 12 September 1918, Roll 1991279, Spotsylvania County, Virginia.

¹⁴Birth Certificate for Howard Wallace Alsop, 21 December 1913, Certificate No. 1913052376, Virginia Department of Health.

¹⁵ 1920 United States Census (Population Schedule), Fredericksburg Upper Ward, Fredericksburg (Independent City), Virginia; p. 7B, family x, dwelling x, line x; date; roll T625_1888.

¹⁶ Death Certificate for Elwood Lee Alsop, 12 August 1920, File No. 21031, Virginia State Board of Health.

¹⁷ 1930 United States Census (Population Schedule), Fredericksburg (Independent City), Virginia; p. 14A, family 311, dwelling 264, line 34; 14-15 April 1930; FHL microfilm: 2342201, roll T626_2667.

¹⁸ Edward Alvey, *History of Mary Washington College 1908-1972* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1974), 109-110.

On December 24, 1934 Wallace remarried, this time to Alberta “Bertie” Coleman.¹⁹ Within the same year Wallace and Berite purchased a home on rural route #3, valued at around \$5,000, in Spotsylvania County.²⁰

When George Washington Hall opened in 1941, the new building was placed under his care, a responsibility which Alvey notes in his “History of Mary Washington College,” he took very seriously. During special events at George Washington Hall, Wallace “...would put on a blue-gray uniform trimmed in red and gold braid and stand in the foyer as a sort of official doorman.” While he was promoted in 1942 to Senior Mechanic and placed in charge of all buildings on campus, with the exception of dormitories, and again four years later in 1946 to Janitor Foreman, he continued his presence at George Washington Hall events. During this same period, Wallace was portrayed in his uniform by Art Professor, Emil Schnellock in the George Washington Hall murals of 1940 to 1945.²¹

Wallace retired from the college in July of 1956 after 35 years of service to the institution. He was honored with a meritorious service award in December of the same year with the story being carried by *The Free Lance-Star*.²² Roughly 12 years later on July 7, 1968 Wallace passed away at the age of 87. He was laid to rest in Shiloh Cemetery in Fredericksburg.²³

¹⁹ Ancestry.com. *Virginia, Select Marriages, 1785-1940* [database on-line]. Provo, UT, USA: Ancestry.com Operations, Inc., 2014.

²⁰ 1940 United States Census (Population Schedule), Courtland District, Spotsylvania, Virginia; p. 2A, dwelling 29, line 37; 7 May 1940; FHL microfilm, roll m-t0627-04296.

²¹ Edward Alvey, *History of Mary Washington College 1908-1972* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1974), 109-110.

²² MWC Citation, Fredericksburg, VA, *The Free Lance-Star*, 4 December 1956, p. 3.

²³ William W. Alsop obituary, Fredericksburg, VA, *The Free Lance-Star*, 9 July 1968, p. 5.

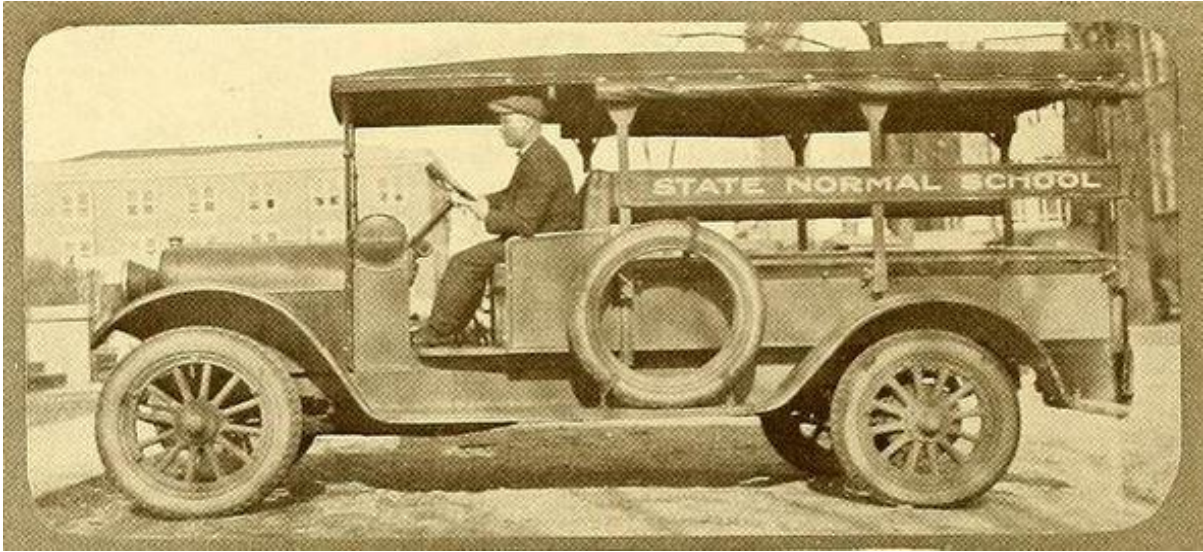


Figure 1: Image from 1924 of unnamed African American driver at the Fredericksburg State Normal School, possibly William Wallace Alsop (Battlefield Yearbook 1924 p. 142).



Figure 2: Image showing the presentation of the Meritorious Service Award to William Wallace Alsop on December 3, 1956 (UMW Centennial Image Collection)



Figure 3: William Wallace as represented in the Emil Schnellock's murals in George Washington Hall painted between 1940-45 (Photo by Karen Pearlman of K. Pearlman Photography, 2015).