



Alexandria Times

Established in 1797 as *The Alexandria Times and Advertiser*

Out of the Attic

Remembering Eudora Lyles

Alexandria Times, February 28, 2019

Image: Eudora Lyles, courtesy Alexandria African American Hall of Fame

As Black History Month comes to an end, and Women's History Month begins, we'd like to take a moment to remember Eudora Lyles, who played a big role in Alexandria's 20th-century history.

Born in Alexandria in 1918, Lyles was one of the first graduates of Parker-Gray High School. She championed Alexandria's minority residents through her activism and political involvement. She also founded the Inner City Civic Association, which was a reaction to the 1972 zoning proposals that threatened to wipe out the inner-city neighborhood which included her residence on North Fayette Street.

In a 1999 oral history interview, Lyles noted that one of her first experiences with housing issues was during urban renewal, which she dated as far back as the 1930s. She remembered how her mother and sister were forced to sell their houses for less than market value; finding new houses for the reduced amount that the city had given them had proved an impossible quest.

Lyles responded to the proposal to build the eight-lane highway through northern Alexandria not only by founding the Inner City Civic Association, but also by involving herself in other civic associations to stop the plan, which disproportionately affected Alexandria's African American residents. Lyles wrote letters, made phone calls, attended city council and zoning meetings and led a seven-year fight which resulted in a victory for herself and her neighbors.

After the victory over the highway, Lyles continued to advocate for Alexandria's residents, especially on housing issues. She served as co-chair of the Economic Opportunity Commission, and was a board member of Micah Housing, Inc., the Community Block Grant Community, the Martin Luther King Program Committee, the Black Caucus and the National Association for the Advancement of Colored Peoples. Lyles also worked on the United Way study on housing issues and belonged to the Tenants Organizing Project. In 1985, the Alexandria Commission for Women recognized her work as an advocate on housing issues by presenting her an award.

Lyles was also a gifted musician who taught herself to play the piano and ukulele. She often performed for military members at the local USO, and once performed in front of Robert Kennedy at the Jockey Club in Fredericksburg.

Lyles was married to Perry Hamilton Lyles Jr. They had four children: Perry, Johnathan, Eudora and Paula. Lyles died on July 6, 2000.



"Out of the Attic" is published each week in the Alexandria Times newspaper. The column began in September 2007 as "Marking Time" and explored Alexandria's history through collection items, historical



Office of Historic Alexandria City of Alexandria, Virginia

images and architectural representations. Within the first year, it evolved into “Out of the Attic” and featured historical photographs of Alexandria.

These articles appear with the permission of the Alexandria Times and were authored by staff of the Office of Historic Alexandria.