

# William E. Wood

*Civil Rights Leader and Founder of  
Rockville's Memorial Day Parade*  
Rockville Resident 1897-1980



William E. Wood is best known for establishing in 1944 what has become a cherished tradition for Rockville – the Memorial Day Parade. Rockville's parade is the oldest and one of the largest in the Washington metropolitan area. Mr. Wood's idea for this event originated with his childhood memories of parades held by the Odd Fellows, a local fraternal organization. These annual parades along Washington Street were established traditions within the black communities of Rockville by the early 20th century. Mr. Wood revived the tradition and transformed it into the large, Citywide celebration that we continue to enjoy today. He remained involved with the organization of the parade, and served as its grand marshal until 1972. He and his family are honored at this event each year.

A descendant of one of Margaret Beall's

slaves, Mr. Wood was active in local civil rights struggles. He was a leader in the desegregation of the Rockville Drive-in movie theatre (now the site of College Square condominiums) that was located within sight of his house on Martin's Lane. He successfully led the opposition to changing the name of the road from Martin's Lane to Nelson Street when Woodley Gardens was developed. Due to his leadership, the historic name that honors Samuel Martin, who settled there in the 19th century, continues today. Mr. Wood was co-founder of Johnson-Hood-Graham Post 151 of the American Legion, a post for black war veterans until it merged with Henderson-Smith Post 86 in 1998. A well-respected and admired long-time Rockville resident, and informally regarded as the "Mayor of Martin's Lane", William Wood died in 1980.