

McLean Connection March 8, 2006:

Planted in the Memory of McLean Community leader and longtime McLean Citizens Association board member Richard Poole passes away at 86.

By Aranya Tomseth

A few months ago, David Poole called his brother Richard Poole to check in and see how he was doing. Richard Poole was plagued by a number of health issues, but when David asked his brother how everything was going his reply was characteristically optimistic - "no problem." "I asked him how he could be so cheerful in the face of so much, and he said 'I'm leathery,'" said David Poole. "But underneath all of that leather and traditionalism and practicality was a warm heart."

On Sunday, Feb. 26, at the age of 86, Richard Armstrong Poole died of a heart attack at his home in McLean. He is survived by his wife of 48 years, Jillian H. Poole, his two sons Anthony H. Poole and Colin R. Poole, his brother David Poole and two granddaughters.

An adored community leader and a long-time member of the McLean Citizens Association (MCA) Board, Poole was known for his steadfast dedication to the growth and preservation of trees in McLean. He was chair of the McLean Trees committee for 30 years, and subsequently helped to oversee its recent transformation into the McLean Trees Foundation. He was also the first MCA "Citizen of the Year."

"He devoted himself to the preservation of trees, and when I say devoted, I mean that he made it a full-time job," said MCA president Susan Turner. "But in addition to all of his community service, he was just a dear, dear man."

Turner added that "most of the trees which line the streets of downtown McLean exist because of the efforts of Dick and his committee."

"He will be sorely missed by our citizens," she said.

Those who knew him are finding comfort in the legacy of green that he leaves behind. "His memory will live forever in the many trees that he planted in our community," said MCA member Merrily Pierce.

POOLE WAS BORN in Yokohama, Japan in April of 1919, to a family that had been involved in the import-export trade for decades. His family moved to Summit, N.J. in 1923, and in 1940, he graduated from Haverford College in Pennsylvania. Poole then joined the Foreign Service. During World War II Poole served in the Navy, and was a member of the Japanese constitutional committee after the war was over. Subsequently, he helped to frame the new Japanese Constitution.

"He was a young Navy Ensign serving on General MacArthur's staff," said MCA member Wade Smith. "He is still known in Japan for this."

In fact, last week the Japanese Embassy contacted Susan Turner to confirm Poole's passing. "They called because they want to report his death in Japan," said Turner.

Upon completing his duties for the Japanese constitutional committee, Poole returned to the Foreign Service. Over the course of his career, he held diplomatic posts in Canada, Colombia, Indonesia, Japan, Singapore and Burkina Faso. He retired in 1979.

Poole was also a member of the MCA's Planning and Zoning committee, as well as an MCA representative on the McLean Planning Committee.

"He was always offering his expertise in tree preservation and replacement to developers proposing projects," said MCA member Herb Becker. "Consultation with Dick was often a condition for MCA's support of a given development."

Poole served on the McLean Planning Committee's Main Street subcommittee, as well as on other subcommittees such as Design Standards and the Civic Place subcommittee. In addition, he was instrumental in managing and leading the profitable newspaper bin collection effort at Cooper Middle School.

Dranesville District Supervisor Joan DuBois says she first met Poole in the 1980s. He was going to be out of the country for a short period, so DuBois acted as chair of the McLean Trees committee during his absence.

"My husband and I continued to work with Dick at the Cooper School site for a number of years after that," said DuBois. "Dick and I picked up many blowing newspapers over the years and became great friends."

DuBois says she is very saddened by his passing. "I will truly miss him," said DuBois. "He was a dear friend."

MCA Environment, Parks and Recreation committee chair Frank Crandall, who worked with Poole for many years, laments the loss of one of McLean's most dedicated citizens. "We have lost one of our true oak trees," said Crandall. "He will be greatly missed but he has left a living monument of trees all over McLean."

ON SATURDAY, MARCH 4, a memorial service was held for Poole at St. John's Episcopal Church in McLean. His son Colin Poole, who lives in Santa Fe, N.M., described his father as "a consummate gentleman of a bygone era," and "the personification of 'steady on.'"

"He was as tenacious and stubborn as a stump," said Poole. He added that his father's rule of thumb was "if you don't finish don't worry because finishing is not the point." "Pop was the kindest man I ever knew," said Poole. "Without my dad I feel like I've lost my shadow."

Richard Poole's other son, Anthony Poole, who lives in Arlington, also spoke at the service. "This last week has been the hardest of my life," said Poole. "Pop was my guiding light. He had many wonderful qualities that I will aspire to and try to live by." Anthony Poole remembered his father as a kind man with "the patience of Job." "Nothing seemed to phase him," said Poole. "He was always the calm in the storm. Whatever he did, he over-did."

Poole's godson Tony Parry said that one of his fondest memories of his godfather was "riding in his cool open car in Virginia." "He has shown me and family love and friendship and hospitality and support beyond words," said Parry. "I always looked forward to his unfailing good humor and warm company."

Anthony Poole remembers his father as a man "who loved the outdoors - plants, birds and just simply digging in the dirt." "During his first career he worked around the world," said Poole. "During his second career he planted the world, here in McLean."



Photo by Bill Byrnes
Dick Poole at McLean Day.