Afterword: What Happened to Them All

After taking this story rather thoroughly up to 1940, it would be a shame not to at least outline the later lives of these several efforts. The pound, not surprisingly, gets the longest treatment; for a good account of the local shelter scene, see Free, “No Room”. Each section ends with a brief portrait of the organization today (late 2014) supplied by the group itself.

The Pound

Subsequent to the 1945 revision of dog laws District pound procedures continued much as before under the dedicated and irascible Poundmaster Frank Marks. Legalities saw some change: the Commissioners transferred oversight from their office to the Metropolitan Police in 1953, much to Marks’ vocal annoyance. It left Police jurisdiction for the Health Department in 1958, and in 1973 to the Community Health and Hospital Administration of that Department’s replacement, the Human Resources Department. None of this came easily because of the continued confusion over what the authorizing federal acts actually allowed the Commissioners to do. Congress finally relinquished control over dogs to the Commissioners on 13 Sept 1961.

Handling of the dog tax – now called licenses – moved from the Collector of Taxes to the Superintendent of Licenses in 1952. A special study committee had reported to the Commissioners the year previous what had long been true (if not from the very earliest laws, as is my contention): “The licensing and registration of dogs is primarily a regulatory action . . . rather than a revenue-producing action.” In 1969 that office was absorbed into the new Department of Economic Development. The cost of retrieving an animal from the pound rose from $4 to $8 in 1980.

One distinct change of procedure was that the pound began to sell cats (for $1) by order of the Commissioners in 1954. The same order allowed “institutions” to buy animals (dogs for $3, cats for $2), contemporaneous with the creation of the Animal Allocation Board. This controversial body, established

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1 (Police) Reorganization Order 52, 30 June 1953 (National Archives, RG 351, Entry 21 “District General Files”, folder 1-100 “Internal Audit Reports”). In fact, the pound and all its positions were abolished and re-constituted as MPDC functions, probably bringing it under greater control than Marks liked. (Health) Wash. Post, 27 June 1958, p. A3 (Human Services) Star-News, 29 Mar 1973, p. B3, which describes the move as “recent”.

2 This problem was brought up by the Commissioners in a letter to the House District Committee (3 Dec 1959; National Archives, RG 351, Entry 21 “District General Files”, folder 1-104 “Dogs”), as the question of leashing came up once again.


4 Commissioners Order 54-398, 13 Feb 1954.
by a Commissioners Order of 23 Feb 1954, met to allocate unclaimed pound animals to local university laboratories. Marks ran – unsuccessfully – for vice-president from the anti-vivisection faction.5

And we should note that in 1960 the pound’s killing chamber had apparently become dysfunctional, since it was reported taking victims to WARL for dispatch in their Euthanaire (“a device that removed oxygen from a chamber”). The pound installed its own Euthanaire soon after this; dogs were sedated by injection before being put into the box. It switched to injection of barbiturates in 1973, the method also then used by WARL. The innovation of “lethal injection has resulted in a hardship and requires far more time to put animals to sleep,” complained Poundmaster King.6

One last legal innovation seems to have originated with a letter from the Progressive Citizens Association of Georgetown to the Commissioners in 1960, which urged regulation regarding dogs which “commit a nuisance” (i.e., poop on the sidewalk), a cause quickly picked up by other groups. A defecation-control order was on the books by 1965.7 The Commissioners repeated their vaccination requirement in 1959 (21 Apr).

Marks’ successor and former assistant, John R. King, Jr.,8 “a merry big man” of 38 from Baltimore, distinguished himself from his predecessor by stating that although he was a dog-lover (now a requirement for the job) he was no fanatic on the question of vivisection.9 Longtime poundman Matthews C. Norman took the assistant post, becoming the first African-American to hold a supervisory position at the pound. The staff and salaries had increased (to 12 men!), but in general the routine remained familiar – “the actual dog-catching is done by men with nets.” There continued to be no cat laws, to King’s great relief.10

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5 Wash. Post, 26 Jan 1954, p. 21; Evening Star, 11 Dec 1954, p. 27; National Archives, RG 351, Entry 21 “District General Files”, folder 1-105 “Animal Allocation Board”. For those interested in this issue, definitely see the thorough report of Dr. Alan M. Chesney, Dean of the Medical Faculty at Johns Hopkins University (4 Dec 1953), summarizing various states’ laws on animal experimentation and giving multitudinous statistics on the use and origin of experimental animals by institutions in Washington and Baltimore (National Archives, RG 351, Entry 21 “District General Files”, folder 1-105 “Medical Testing”). The pound sold 60-70 dogs monthly to laboratories in 1971, the only local jurisdiction to do so (Evening Star, 13 Apr 1971, p. 1; Wash. Post, 10 June 1974, p. C1, with statistics).

Marks spoke of persons purchasing pound dogs for re-sale to laboratories – “dog pirates” he called them (Evening Star, 9 May 1957, p. 68).

6 Wash. Post, 2 May 1960, p. B1; 9 May 1973, p. C1; Evening Star, 13 Apr 1971, p. 1. This device is described unfavorably in Free, “No Room”. Documents relating to stray dogs before the City Council in 1973 (8 May 1973, at National Archives, RG 351, Entry 45 “Hearing Files, 1967-1974”, “Dogs, Stray”, including King’s testimony) include a list of every city in the US using this machine. The number of animals put down could not have been great if the poundmen transported them across town for the procedure.


9 “Mr. Marks fought a constant and rear guard action to keep these quotas [of animals for experimentation] to a base minimum” (Evening Star, 26 June 1958, p. 24).

In keeping with its more sedate routine, the pound increasingly offered what would now be called community outreach activities – hosting regular dog vaccination days and Dog Week events, and advertising lovable pups for redemption.\(^{11}\)

The Randall Community Center, attached to nearby Randall Junior High School, had been established adjacent to the pound in 1936\(^ {12}\) and the city’s park department ever eyed the pound for expansion space. The city’s DDOT plans archives (holding blueprints for all city buildings) contains plans to build tennis courts over the pound site from both 1946 and 1951.\(^ {13}\) “District Recreation Board Chairman Harry S. Wendeer said his agency has repeatedly requested removal of the pound because of the smell and noise, but has been turned down because of the cost,” reported the Washington Post in 1950, after another rebuff.\(^ {14}\) The facility’s proximity to a school brought a steady stream of protests from parents and community groups.\(^ {15}\)

Efforts to move the pound continued through the 1950s (“the present facility . . . long has been a source of annoyance in the neighborhood”): to Mt. Olivet Road NE (taking a piece of the National Arboretum); to Burnham Barrier Island (“just below Benning Rd., NE,” then used “as a dump fill”); a site just north of Gallaudet University; exile to distant Blue Plains; further south to long-suffering Buzzard Point; to “the Gun Factory area” apparently near the Zoo (“This should bring a howl from Dr. Carmichael [the Zoo director]”). The planned Southwest Freeway, just to the north, furthered the need to find a new location.\(^ {16}\)

In 1965 the city contracted with the Weiss Construction Company to construct a new pound at its current 1201 New York Avenue NE address for $138,000. The blueprints for this project were prepared by W. A. MacLaurie and dated the same year.\(^ {17}\) The pound moved in July 1966, to the relief of the nearby Skyline Inn, whose manager “had a huge file of barking complaints from . . . tenants.” Since then the old pound building has been used by the Randall Recreation Center.\(^ {18}\) The building received landmark protection from the District government in 2014.

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\(^{11}\) For examples, see: (vaccination) Wash. Post, 7 July 1948, p. B2; (Dog Week) 19 Sept 1939, p. 3; (puppies) 19 Dec 1949, p. B1.

\(^{12}\) This information thanks to Tony Simon of the Commission on Fine Arts. The city at that time was given use of the land but the formal transfer of title from the Federal government occurred in 2008. Before the rec center the land had been used as a storage site by the Highway Department (Wash. Post, 10 May 1941, p. 13).

\(^{13}\) Cabinet 11/drawer 13. See also Wash. Post, 10 May 1941, p. 13 for expansion plans of the rec center.


\(^{15}\) See a number of letters from 1945-46 on this question in National Archives, RG 351, Entry 21 “District General Files”, folder 1-105 “DC Dog Pound”; Evening Star, 5 Nov 1951, p. 21, has an arresting photo of dogs and kids staring at each other through the fence. “The annual debate of just which is more annoying to whom – the pups in the dog pound or the students in [the] school – is under way again.” Marks had plenty to say about the latter! The poundmaster consistently opposed moving his operations.


\(^{17}\) Wash. Post, 24 Sept 1965, p. B3; DDOT plans archives, Cabinet 18/drawer 1, which also contains 1981 expansion plans. See also drawings in Cabinet 21/drawers 7 and 11.

\(^{18}\) Evening Star, 7 July 1966, p. 21; Wash. Post, 17 July 1966, p. L4. The institution immediately met the same noise complaints at its new, forlorn location: “They’ve been barking ever since they moved in there. It got so bad . . . I couldn’t sleep.” A 1966 proposed re-design of the rec center by Chloithiel Woodard Smith (or at least her company), found in Cabinet 11/drawer 13, eliminated the pound building in favor of a swimming facility.
The pound came under its first real period of public criticism in the early 1960s. It certainly is possible that either attention or facilities had deteriorated, but a major factor must have been heightened expectations of a public which no longer remembered packs of mangy curs in the parks and instead compared the pound to private shelters (which had the luxury of limiting their intake). One predictable element was the condition of the now-fifty-year-old pound itself. An inspector’s report of 1963 found the facility in considerable disrepair. And ticks infested the pound, something that could (and should) have been controlled.\(^\text{19}\)

Other complaints related to policy and were of the more fastidious sort: “It does not check lost dog ads; it does not provide resting boards in kennels; it does require spaying of females” and so forth. “Inspection of the pound can leave you with the impression that philosophically it has not changed since the days of President Grant” – an unkind and unfair charge.\(^\text{20}\)

Poundmaster King retired in 1974 and for four years the shop was managed by an absentee acting supervisor, the Department’s Chief of Animal Disease Control, veterinarian George Banks. With no firm oversight and strong union protection the poundmen – once Einstein’s polished gem – came more to resemble Wheelock’s slovenly crew; one ran a trash business on the side, another farmed out guard dogs.\(^\text{21}\) Facing a deluge of complaints, the District government turned to the humane organizations for assistance.

A decade earlier the city had been approached by the Humane Society of the United States, a group that split from the American Humane Association in 1954 specifically to lobby for humane legislation rather than engage in direct street work. HSUS in 1962 proposed (illogically, given its stated mission) to take over pound operations in the District of Columbia, building its own facility and using government funding for operations. Indeed, the management of local animal control services was increasingly taken over by such organizations: by 1971 the pounds in Arlington and Fairfax Counties and Alexandria, Virginia, and in Montgomery County, Maryland, had been contracted to private shelter operators. Nonetheless, HSUS got a turn-down from the city government. Now – 1978 -- the District hired a WHS-recommended candidate to take over pound operations.

Ingrid E. Newkirk\(^\text{22}\) had trained in law enforcement and served in the Montgomery (MD) County pound (until she was forced out for publicizing deplorable conditions there) and as the county’s Director of Humane Investigation. In Washington, the strong-willed and deeply committed Newkirk began a thorough house- and pen-cleaning campaign, scrubbing floors, ridding the freezing unit of “four inches of maggots” (the facility had become “a cafeteria for rats”), tightening adoption screening, and establishing the pound’s neuter/spay clinic. To gain more control over staff and procedures she recommended the District turn over operations to a private concern. The District contracted the service to WHS in 1980, keeping it at the New York Avenue location, but changing its name to Animal Care and Control


\(^\text{20}\) Free, “No Room”; see also letter, Marie L. King to Winifred A. Hunter, 4 Nov 1963, and others in the same file (National Archives, RG 351, Entry 21 “District General Files”, folder 1-105 “DC Dog Pound”), which give much more of the same.

\(^\text{21}\) Information from here to the dog-population statistics paragraph comes from cited sources and from Ms. Ingrid Newkirk via email interviews. Evening Star, 8 Sept 1978, p. D2, describes pound operations as “defunct” and cites a recent Congressional report describing pound employees as “the rudest and most impolite in the government.” The year of King’s retirement is calculated from this article, and it has a fetching photo of Newkirk. The poundmen numbered nine in 1977, with two trucks (Evening Star, 12 Aug 1977, p. B1, which gives statistics for neighboring jurisdictions also, and good photos of poundmen Lonnie Whitted and J. C. Johnson).

\(^\text{22}\) A good photo will be found in Evening Star, 8 Sept 1978, p. D2.
Facility. Newkirk stayed on as acting director (in her capacity as the District’s Chief of Animal Disease Control, succeeding Banks) until WHS’s manager, Willy Swenholt, assumed the responsibility. Soon afterward she retired from government service to found the nation animal-rights organization People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals. Ingrid Newkirk was the last District poundmaster, and Washington the last local jurisdiction to use the time-honored name Pound.

In 1970 the greater Washington area held an estimated half-million dogs and cats; 110,000 of them had been housed (and some euthanized) in the communities’ pounds and animal shelters that year; 60,000 were put down throughout the region in 1973. King in 1973 guessed the District housed 100,000 stray dogs, up from 50,000 ten years earlier. Newkirk, in 1979, returned the figure to 50,000.

Supervision of the three-year contract for animal control and sheltering (invariably awarded to WHS, although there are occasional other bidders) and also issuance of dog licenses were both under the Animal Services Program of the District’s Department of Health, Health Regulations and Licensing Administration in 2014. Three employees handle these responsibilities along with other duties. (Extermination of rats and other health hazards fall under the same Department’s Rodent Control Program.) At the time of writing, the Department is considering a major revision of animal-related regulations as well as such currently-discussed issues as care of injured wildlife, urban farming (bees, chickens), use of animals in schools for educational programs, safety of animals in emergencies, and plans for a new shelter facility to replace the New York Avenue buildings.

Although the District estimates the city alone to hold 140,000 dogs, only 4,157 are licensed. (The estimated 180,000 cats remain unregulated, although that is also being reconsidered.) Tags cost $15, of which $2 supports WHS’s spay/neuter program. Replacement tags are issued at no charge. Total income (including the $2 program donation) was $84,945 in 2014.

In 2014 the WHS shelters (New York Avenue and a satellite storefront on Georgia Avenue NW), on behalf of the District, took in a total of 9,521 animals (of which: dogs – 2,807; cats – 4,764; birds, small mammals, reptiles – 1,924, livestock – 26), half brought in to the shelter and half taken from the streets. Pick-up from homes was stopped in 2011. About 10% were returned to their owners, 60% adopted, and

24 Swenholt was, at least, the manager in 1985 (Wash. Post, 19 July 1985, p. C2).
27 My thanks to Mr. Edward Rich, Senior Assistant General Counsel of the Department of Health, for help in learning these figures.
10% euthanized (by injection) due to medical or behavioral issues (the other 20% holding in the shelter). Carcasses are incinerated by a contractor weekly; cremation at one of two private crematories can be arranged at an owner’s request.

Fees collected (adoption, vaccination shots, sales of leashes and collars, gift certificates and so forth) at the shelter totaled $767,278 (not including license-money turned over directly to the District) in FY 2014. Wildlife called in as a nuisance are taken to a separate humane organization (City Wildlife, located next to the WARL shelter) or simply released, depending on medical need.28

Washington Humane Society

The Washington Humane Society gradually recovered from its existential crisis of the early 1930s, re-orienting its work toward pets and abused animals of all sorts. The comprehensive 1971 article by Ann Cottrell Free noted that the Society had been “relatively unaggressive for many years, [but] has become more active since 1969.” In 1971 it had three paid agents. The Society had begun taking rescued animals to the city pound where they required boarding for long periods while legal questions were sorted out, swamping the pound’s capacity.29  Sister organizations existed in all neighboring suburban jurisdictions and several of them had taken over local pound operations on a contract basis.30  WHS assumed these duties for the District in 1980 on contract and has continued them since. (In one year, as a result of the inevitable criticism that engulfs any organization working with animals, another group got the work but had to turn it back to WHS soon afterward.)

As of this writing WHS has a paid full- and part-time staff of 109, 1,677 volunteers (!) and an annual budget of over $8.2 million, derived from the above-mentioned shelter fees and also investments, donations, and “contract revenue”. Besides the two shelter locations, the organization operates a spay/neuter clinic near the Navy Yard, a vaccine center, and two administrative locations, the main office being on MacArthur Avenue NW. WHS hopes to amalgamate all of these functions at one new location in the next few years.

WHS provided a total of 32,151 individual services in 2014. The breakdown is this: 2,799 adoptions; 691 animals returned to owners; 5,459 lost/found reports processed; 16,193 field service requests responded to; 5,200 low/no-cost vaccinations; 4,000 spay/neuter operations; 1,809 cruelty investigations – a wonderful record of service.

In 2016 WHS and WARL formally merged under the name Humane Rescue Alliance.31

Washington Animal Rescue League

The Animal Rescue League continued its efficient operations at O Street, supplemented by the animal clinic in the co-located but organizationally distinct (since 1950) Tail-Waggers’ Club. When that organization disbanded in the mid-1990s WARL established its own medical center (1996).

28 Further detailed information regarding WHS’s current operations and its relationship with the District government, kindly supplied by Ms. Alison Putnam of WHS, is with the other material deposited in the Washingtoniana Division.
30 Free, “No Room”. All information from this point on was provided by WHS.
By the mid-1960s the facility clearly required updating and its neighborhood had greatly deteriorated. The District government proved uncooperative in the renovation project and then announced that it planned to take the property for a school playground. Although this last threat receded, the organization began a five-year search for larger quarters, taking it to a spacious and striking building at 71 Oglethorpe Street NW (at the very edge of the District) in 1977. The new shelter received a state-of-the-art renovation in 2005.32

In 2014 the WARL shelter took in 1,904 animals total (dogs – 1,244; cats – 660; about ¼ brought in by the public, ¾ from other humane organizations). Of these 1,563 were adopted, 37 returned to their owners, 54 transferred to other shelters, and 205 put down for health reasons. WARL had a paid staff of 53 (plus hundreds of volunteers) and annual budget of $5.4 million.33

Humane Education Society and the National Humane Education Society

Following the death of founder James Briggs in 1945 his widow Anna kept the Humane Education Society going but in a virtually non-existent way. During this time her great friends and supporters were her children and Virginia Sargent of the equally small APA. In the course of her humane work Briggs made the acquaintance of Alice Morgan Wright, “an heiress, an animal rights activist, an organizer of UNESCO, and a sculptress” who proposed that they reinvigorate the organization on a national basis – the National Humane Education Society, announced in 1948. As Sargent’s APA shelter faced closure, Wright funded purchase of a 145-acre farm in Sterling, Virginia, (1950) to take over the work, named Peace Plantation Animal Sanctuary. After a move to Lucketts, Virginia, (1965) the facility settled in Walton, New York, (about 1982); it closed in 2014. NHES continues its work at the Briggs Animal Adoption Center in Charles Town, West Virginia, inaugurated in 2000. Anna Briggs died in 2011 at the age of 101, leaving behind an extensive family also dedicated to the welfare of animals. The organization has definitely taken on a broader geographic scope of activities than the old HES and no longer functions as a specifically Washington DC group.34

Other Humane Organizations

Two authoritative directories of 2014 (for a broad geographical area, including Baltimore) listed: shelter/adoption organizations – about 140; rescue/adoption groups specializing in one breed of dog – about 100; pet enthusiast clubs, all specialized to some degree – 33 (including the Aquarium Society).35

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32 WARL New shelter dedication brochure; Monahan, Such Courage, Such Heart.
33 Information provided by Ms. Susan Strange of WARL, to whom I extend my thanks.
34 Briggs, For the Love of Animals, and information supplied by NHES. Anna Briggs remained spunky and dedicated to her cause to the end – for an account of her rescue of homeless cats from New York City subway tunnels see Wash. Post, 9 Sept 1984, p. A15. Her obituary, with photo, appeared in Wash. Post, 18 Feb 2011.
35 Pet Lovers Companion; the website: petfinder.com. There is probably a fair amount of duplication here, but the point is to show the explosion of such efforts since our study period.
Dead Animals

Responsibility for dead animal removal from public spaces had passed from the Engineer Department to the Environmental Services Department by 1973.  

In 2014 this work was handled by the Department of Public Works, Solid Waste Collections Division. The crew consists of two full-time men working six days a week and with two refrigerated vehicles in east/west territories. Carcasses are stored at a Department facility on Benning Road NE until picked up biweekly by a private contractor, which incinerates them at its plant in Virginia. Although the bulk of animals found are dogs and cats, smaller rodents (including rats) and minor wildlife (raccoons, opossums) also figure in the work; deer are common in the winter. The work is now recorded by poundage rather than count; unfortunately the District government cannot report the amount taken in the last year.

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37 Norton & Comp.’s (Alexandria VA) president reported receiving 400,000 pounds of dog carcasses in 1971 but it is not clear if this is only from the pound or District-wide collection (Wash. Post, 10 June 1974, p. C1).
The Facilities Today

Former pound on South Capitol St
Photo by author

Former WARL shelter on O Street
Photo by author

Current facility on New York Ave
Photo by author

Current HRA shelter on Oglethorpe St
Photo by author

Super-modern pens at the Oglethorpe St shelter
Photo by author

Staff at the New York Ave facility
HRA

Staff at the Oglethorpe St shelter
WARL archives