

Home of Margarite & William T. Syphax

Early Life

Margarite (1923-2022) and William Thomas (“Tommy”) (1920-1989) Syphax were prominent entrepreneurs and business owners who made significant contributions to the Arlington community and lived in this home across the street at 1327 S. Queen Street.



Margarite & William T. Syphax, 1957

William T. grew up in both Arlington and Ithaca, New York. He attended Virginia State University (VSU), where he studied math and physics, earning his degree in 1942. He then studied at Rutgers University and George Washington University, where he earned an M.A. degree in engineering administration.

Margarite grew up in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, the oldest of seven siblings. After graduating high school in 1941, Margarite moved to Washington, D.C. in 1942 and then to Newark, New Jersey in 1943 to work for the federal government. While in



Newark, Margarite took dance courses. Her interest in dance inspired her to join a professional dance troupe and, eventually, the United Services Organization (U.S.O.) as an entertainer during World War II. On a trip to perform at the Tuskegee Institute in Alabama, which served as a training location for African American aviators in World War II, Margarite met William T., who was serving in the predecessor to the U.S. Air Force during the war. They wed in Ithaca, New York in 1945.

William T. & Margarite Syphax wedding day, 1945

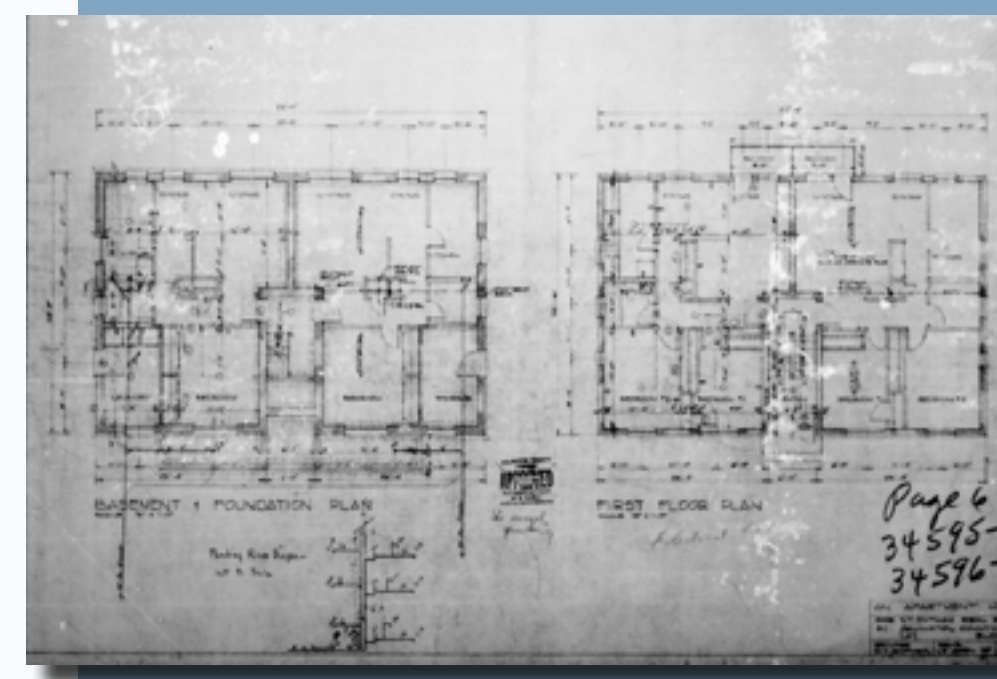
Arlington Careers

After 1947, Margarite and William T. relocated to this home in the Arlington View neighborhood. William T. worked as an engineer, but also explored his interest in real estate. At that time, prejudice and racism against African Americans made it a challenge for them to find decent, affordable housing in the area. In 1954, the Syphaxes founded the W.T. Syphax Real Estate Company, a property development, engineering, and construction firm. The company’s mission was to provide affordable housing options for African Americans in Northern Virginia. It constructed apartment complexes, commercial buildings, offices, and more than 100 houses. At least 25 houses were built in Arlington View alone, many of which were still standing at the time of erection of this marker. Others were constructed in two historically African American neighborhoods in Arlington: Green Valley and High View Park.



William T. & Margarite Syphax, 1960s

In the 1960s, the Syphaxes started a property management affiliate called the Syphax Management Company. Margarite oversaw this division. She was one of only two women, and one of the first African Americans, to hold a Certified Property Manager certificate in the U.S. In 1973, *Black Enterprise* magazine recognized the Syphaxes’ firm as one of the “Top 100 Black Firms” in the country, lending national recognition to their work. Their companies remained in business until 1979.



Architectural Drawings of 1407-1413 S. Rolfe Street (Arlington View Terrace) by W.T. Syphax Realty Co., 1960

Community Life

Supporting the community was a core tenant of Margarite and William T’s lives. Margarite participated in the Ladies Auxiliary, Jack and Jill of America, and National Links, Inc. She also served on the Arlington County Plumbing Board, Arlington County Tenant/Landlord Commission, Minority Contractors Resource Center, Inc., board, Marymount College board, Arlington’s Veteran’s Memorial Branch YMCA Board, and Metropolitan Board of Directors Health and Welfare Council. William T. was president of the Virginia Real Estate Brokers Association, chairman of the Arlington County Building Code Board of Appeals, rector of the board of VSU, and director of the Arlington County Red Cross. He earned his Ph.D. in behavioral philosophy from VSU in 1982. Both Margarite and William T. were active members of the Mt. Olive Baptist Church and the NAACP.



Margarite with a co-worker, n.d.

In addition to raising their two children, Carolyn and Jeff, Margarite and William T. were parental figures to many young Arlingtonians. The Syphax house, as Margarite once stated, was an “annex to the church, it’s the annex to the school, it’s the annex to the community.” The Syphaxes provided emotional and financial support to many children by helping them further their educational and career goals.



Margarite giving keys to new residents, n.d.