

# Asheville African American Heritage Resource Survey

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Asheville, N. C., ca. 1897 (Buncombe County Special Collections, L473-8, Pack Memorial Library, Asheville, North Carolina).

## Introduction

The City of Asheville received a 2018 federal Historic Preservation Fund pass-through grant from the North Carolina State Historic Preservation Office (HPO) to help fund the Asheville African American Heritage Resource Survey. Administered by the City's Planning & Urban Design Department, the funds were used to hire a consultant team to conduct an architectural survey of historic resources and neighborhoods related to African American heritage in Asheville. The scope of the project included identifying and compiling existing documentation of the city's historic African American resources, archival research and oral interviews, a preliminary survey and planning report, intensive architectural survey of approximately 75 resources dating up to 1975, public presentations, and preparation of illustrated draft and final survey reports. Historic preservation consultants with the firm Owen & Eastlake conducted the preliminary research, architectural resources survey, and oral interviews, as well as prepared the draft survey report. Acme Preservation Services completed the final survey report.

Historic resources in Asheville have been documented over the course of several survey projects, beginning in the late 1970s and continuing through the most recent survey updates occurring from 2007-2012. These efforts have only nominally documented historic resources significant to the city's African American community, most notably in the Southside, South Asheville, and Burton Street neighborhoods. Few resources had been recorded across the city's other historically African American neighborhoods, including the East End, Hill Street, Shiloh,

and Stumptown. Personal and institutional efforts have also documented the history and resources related to African American heritage in Asheville, but these projects have not been incorporated into the body of documentation maintained by the HPO and the City. The total number of yet to be surveyed extant historic resources related to African American heritage in Asheville is estimated to be roughly 650 based on city staff's analysis of GIS data and aerial imagery.

The goal of this survey is to synthesize existing research on African American heritage-related resources in Asheville, review the existing survey documentation, conduct additional in-depth archival documentation and oral interviews, conduct a preliminary windshield survey and prioritize neighborhoods and resources for survey, record newly identified extant resources, and identify potential future phases and/or projects relating to the documentation of African American heritage in the city.

Alex Cole, Historic Preservation Planner with the City of Asheville, and Stacy Merten, Long Range Planning Manager, administered the project with state-level assistance from Annie McDonald, Preservation Specialist in the HPO's Western Office in Asheville, and Elizabeth King, the HPO's Architectural Survey Coordinator. The work of the project managers was augmented by an advisory council composed of Brenda Mills, City of Asheville Neighborhood and Community Engagement Manager; Antanette Mosley, African American Heritage Resource Commission of Asheville and Buncombe County; Valeria Watson, Historic Resources Commission of Asheville and Buncombe County; Billie Buie, City of Asheville Neighborhood Advisory Committee; Jack Thomson, Director, Preservation Society of Asheville and Buncombe County; and Josi Ward, Preservation Society of Asheville and Buncombe County.

Additionally, the consultants and city staff worked with a small group of community members to prioritize historic resources for survey. This focus group concentrated on identifying extant commercial and institutional buildings in six Asheville neighborhoods: Burton Street (BN6282), East End/Valley Street (BN6464), Heart of Chestnut (BN6460), Stumptown (BN6875), Southside (BN6431), and Shiloh (BN1850). Many, but not all, of these neighborhoods have experienced the destructive effects of urban renewal or highway construction, and the aim of the survey was to identify surviving historic properties.

Invaluable assistance for the project was provided by Zoe Rhine and Katherine Calhoun Cutshall at Pack Memorial Library's Buncombe County Special Collections and by Gene Hyde, curator of Special Collections at University of North Carolina Asheville (UNCA)'s D. H. Ramsey Library. Lisa Withers of the North Carolina African American Heritage Commission's North Carolina Green Book project, along with focus group members Rasheeda McDaniels, Catherine Mitchell, Roy Harris, Sekou Coleman, and Zoe Rhine shared information and support. Owen & Eastlake would like to thank the many people we met while conducting the survey whose help and hospitality were greatly appreciated.

The survey is meant to be a starting place to illustrate the wide variety of buildings and resources associated with African American life in Asheville from 1900 to 1975. It is also meant to highlight the communities, new and old, that make for such a rich African American heritage in Asheville.

## **Methodology**

The City of Asheville contracted with Owen & Eastlake, a historic preservation consulting firm based in Columbus, Ohio, in 2019 to conduct the Asheville African American Heritage Resource Survey. The firm, composed of historian Rory Krupp and architectural historian Roy Hampton, specializes in history and architectural history with an emphasis on African American and ethnic history and the Civil Rights Movement. The initial phase of survey work included contextual research and documentation, oral interviews, identification and prioritization of areas for survey, documentation of approximately 75 newly identified resources, and identification of future survey phases and/or other related projects.

The City's Planning & Urban Design Department began by conducting two public meetings in March 2019 in order to engage the community in the survey project. Both City staff and the consultant shared presentations that highlighted historic preservation efforts in Asheville, architectural survey methodology, and the City's vision for forming a more complex narrative of Asheville's history, as well as the consultant's qualifications and past work in documenting African American history. Following the presentations, attendees worked with staff to identify places of importance using GIS maps.

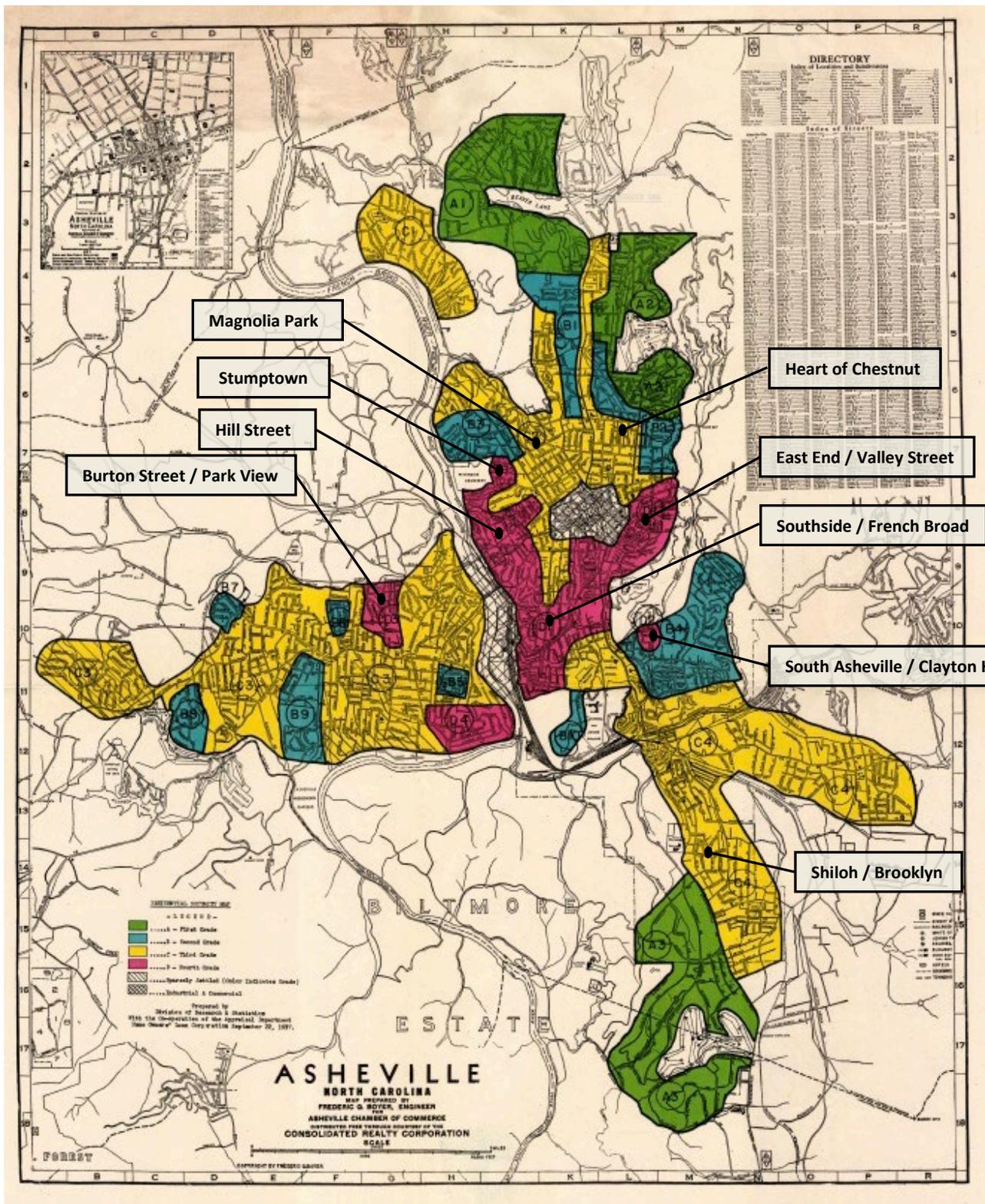
As part of the scope of work for the project, the City asked community members to share their personal stories about African American history via oral interviews with the consultant team. In May 2019, Owen & Eastlake conducted interviews with Cissy Dendy, resident of the Heart of Chestnut neighborhood; Viola Spells Jones, a member of the African American Heritage Commission; and Anita White Carter, resident of the Shiloh neighborhood. Audio recordings of these interviews were donated to Buncombe County Special Collections at Pack Memorial Library.

In-depth archival research was conducted by the consultant team in order to form a more thorough context of African American history in Asheville. The city's African American neighborhoods were identified in a number of ways including city directories, newspaper accounts, and government records. Ultimately, nine historic African American neighborhoods were identified using these resources: East End/Valley Street (BN6464), Southside (BN6431), Hill Street (BN6874), Stumptown (BN6875), Magnolia Park (BN6462), Heart of Chestnut (BN6460), South Asheville (BN6456), Shiloh (BN1850), and Burton Street (BN6282).

The consultant team conducted fieldwork to photograph and make notes and observations regarding the condition and appearance of individual properties selected for survey. All required information was then entered into the HPO database and hard copies of the new survey files were transmitted to the HPO's Western Office in Asheville. Since it was anticipated that multiple cycles of survey would be necessary to capture all resources related to African American history within the city, the research phase also helped to inform prioritization of resources surveyed during this grant cycle. Staff and the consultant team worked with a small focus group comprised of community members to further prioritize historic resources for survey.

Following the submission of a draft survey report by Owen & Eastlake, additional research and text revisions were deemed necessary to complete the survey project. The City engaged Acme Preservation Services to supplement the work of Owen & Eastlake in preparing the final survey document. The final report draws from the draft submitted by Owen & Eastlake and augments the firm's work with additional historic context and discussion of specific architectural resources.

Historic preservation consultants Owen & Eastlake and Acme Preservation Services meet the Secretary of the Interior's Professional Qualification Standards as set forth in 36 CFR Part 61. The methodology for the survey project adhered to the North Carolina HPO's *Practical Advice for Recording Historic Resources* (2008 edition); *Manual for Data Entry—Historic Properties and Districts Survey Forms* (revised October 2009); *Digital Photography for Historic Property Surveys and National Register Nominations* (revised May 2017); and any supplementary policies and instructions from the HPO, where applicable.



Asheville, North Carolina, Home Owners' Loan Corporation Map, 1937

(<https://dsl.richmond.edu/panorama/redlining/#loc=12/35.583/-82.685&city=asheville-nc&area=B2>, accessed July 12, 2019).

## Historic Overview

Writing in 1914 in his expansive *Western North Carolina, A History (1790-1913)*, John Preston Arthur proclaimed, while quoting historian John H. Wheeler, that there were few slaveholders in the mountains of western North Carolina. In fact, Arthur states, there were so few slave owners “that the institution of slavery may be said, practically, to have had no existence.”<sup>1</sup> Along with the oft repeated claim that there were few mountain slave owners is the implication that there were few African Americans in western North Carolina, either free or enslaved. Population figures from 1850, however, indicate that Black residents constituted roughly 42 percent of the population statewide.<sup>2</sup> Certainly some mountain counties had significantly lower percentages of Black residents than the eastern part of the state, where plantation farming depended heavily on enslaved labor. African Americans, both free and enslaved, comprised approximately 14 percent of the population of Buncombe County in 1850, which was less than Burke County (32 percent) but higher than Cherokee and Watauga counties (5 percent).<sup>3</sup> Nevertheless, the idea that there were few Black residents living in the mountain region endured and became the pervasive narrative. Just a year before Arthur’s history of western North Carolina was published, librarian-turned-outdoorsman Horace Kephart similarly claimed that “there were, practically, no mountain negroes.”<sup>4</sup> Until recently the history of Asheville and its Black residents has been most often viewed through this distorted lens.

African Americans have lived in western North Carolina for at least as long as their Euro-American counterparts. Although Black residents made up only 6 percent of the county population in 1800, their numbers increased to account for 16 percent of Buncombe County residents in 1860.<sup>5</sup> Given Asheville’s unique position as the commercial and cultural center of the region, the number of African Americans within the city represented a substantially higher proportion than in rural parts of the county. In 1870, when 2,303 Black residents in Buncombe County constituted up to 15 percent of the population, approximately 40 percent of Asheville’s

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<sup>1</sup> John Preston Arthur, *Western North Carolina, A History (1730-1913)* (Asheville, NC: The Edward Buncombe Chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution, 1914), 636.

<sup>2</sup> Arthur, *Western North Carolina*, 658; John H. Wheeler, *Historical Sketches of North Carolina from 1584 to 1851*, Vol. II (Philadelphia: Lippincott, Grambo and Co., 1851), 5.

<sup>3</sup> Wheeler, *Historical Sketches*, 52 and 56; Arthur, *Western North Carolina*, 658.

<sup>4</sup> Horace Kephart, *Our Southern Highlanders*, 1913, Reprint (Knoxville, TN: University of Tennessee Press, 1990), 429.

<sup>5</sup> “Return of the Whole Number of Persons with the Several Districts of the United States” (*Second Census of the United States*), 1801, United States Census Bureau, <https://www.census.gov/library/publications/1801/dec/return.html> (accessed May 31, 2022); Darin J. Waters, “Life Beneath the Veneer: The Black Community in Asheville, North Carolina from 1793 to 1900” (Ph.D. Dissertation, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 2012), 233.

1,400 residents were African Americans.<sup>6</sup> In the late nineteenth century, following Emancipation and the arrival of the railroad in Asheville in 1880, the city's Black population remained proportionally higher than the surrounding county but was outpaced by white population growth to the point that African Americans generally comprised between 15 percent and 20 percent of the city's total population.

Despite their longstanding presence in the region and contributions to the development of Asheville, African American stories have long been ignored or overlooked. Historian David Whisnant remarked that "[The] many times told and widely agreed-upon story of Asheville history is all true, and all of it is important. But it is far from the whole story. African Americans (enslaved and free) figure little in most accounts, for example, though they were there from the beginning...."<sup>7</sup> The African American experience in Asheville is rich and complex, with a narrative that is both tightly interwoven into the fabric of the city and kept at arm's length. This exclusionary pattern began in the late nineteenth century by civic and business leaders wishing to attract a growing number of tourists and health seekers by creating an image of Asheville as a city with good race relations. Historian Darin J. Waters has described how "the city's white leaders were successful in constructing a veneer that suggested the city was peaceful and progressive in all areas of life" and they did so, in large part, because it was economically beneficial.<sup>8</sup> This veneer of racial harmony also masked other issues, including racist attitudes that marginalized African Americans in Asheville, and "hampered the ability of Blacks to fully participate in the city's social, political, and economic structure after the war."<sup>9</sup>

The result of the artifice that presented Asheville as a progressive and peaceful city was the minimization and marginalization of the African American community: physically, socially, and economically. The African American neighborhoods that developed in Asheville essentially represented a separate city, with parallel institutions and organizations, created by decades of de jure and de facto segregation. The central Black neighborhood of Asheville, East End (which began to develop in the late nineteenth century around the former slave quarters of the Patton family) and its thriving business district on Eagle and Market streets existed just one block from Pack Square in plain view of the courthouse and city hall. Despite their proximity, the development and activity of the Black business district and neighborhood has figured little in the telling of Asheville's history. The largely self-contained East End neighborhood had homes, churches, schools, institutions, and commercial areas that provided a wide range of businesses and services for the African American community and fostered a positive sense of identity.

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<sup>6</sup> Levi Branson, ed., *The North Carolina Business Directory* (Raleigh, NC: L. Branson, 1872), 36. Asheville's population of 1,400 consisted of 829 whites and 571 Blacks.

<sup>7</sup> David Whisnant, "A One-Minute History of Asheville and 'The Land of the Sky,'" Asheville Junction: A Blog by David E. Whisnant, March 31, 2014, <https://ashevillejunction.com/> (accessed June 28, 2021)

<sup>8</sup> Waters, "Life Beneath the Veneer," 6-7.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

Ultimately, public improvement and renewal projects in the twentieth century irreparably damaged these enclaves and undermined the fundamental structure of the community.<sup>10</sup> While the East End, Valley Street, and Southside formed the physical core of the Black community adjacent to downtown Asheville, other scattered neighborhoods grew out of settlements where former slaves established themselves as free Blacks in the late nineteenth century. The disparate African American neighborhoods across Asheville bear developmental similarities and share conditions that contribute to their distinct sense of place.

Since the 1970s, many parts of the city have been covered by historic architectural resource surveys. Doug Swaim conducted a comprehensive survey of Asheville and Buncombe County in the late 1970s, which resulted in the publication of *Cabins & Castles* in 1981. Although Swaim's survey covered both the city and county, a significant number of surveyed resources were located within the city limits. Prior to the commencement of Swaim's project David Black completed a survey of downtown Asheville that resulted in a National Register historic district and eleven individually-listed properties. Black published his findings in *Historic Architectural Resources of Downtown Asheville, North Carolina* (1979), which cataloged approximately 170 resources in the downtown area. A survey of more than 400 resources in the Hillside-Mount Clare neighborhood was completed in 1995 in response to proposed improvements along the Broadway corridor north of Interstate 240 (I-240) by the North Carolina Department of Transportation (NCDOT). In 1998, a grant-funded survey sponsored by the Historic Resources Commission of Asheville and Buncombe County (HRC) documented approximately 1,600 resources in parts of north Asheville, West Asheville, and Shiloh. Between 2010 and 2012, further survey work was undertaken to update Asheville's historic architectural inventory as a mitigation measure for the redesign of Pack Square. The Asheville Survey Update project updated records for more than 4,000 previously recorded properties within the city limits of Asheville and documented an additional 400 newly identified properties.<sup>11</sup> While none of these previous survey projects intentionally ignored the historic architectural resources of Asheville's Black community, neither did they expressly seek to identify resources associated with African American heritage.

The present survey was undertaken with the goal of specifically identifying resources associated with the African American experience in Asheville. It joins a number of other recent and ongoing projects to identify, explore, and document resources and topics that contribute to the city's African American heritage. David Whisnant noted that "Asheville's full and

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<sup>10</sup> Sarah Judson, "'I Am A Nasty Branch Kid': A Woman's Memories of Place in the Era of Asheville's Urban Renewal," *The North Carolina Historical Review*, Vol. 91, no. 3 (2014): 333-332 and 347-349; J. Rosie Tighe and Timothy Opelt, "Collective Memory and Planning: The Continuing Legacy of Urban Renewal in Asheville, NC," *Journal of Planning History* (November 2014), 11-16.

<sup>11</sup> Acme Preservation Services, *Asheville Survey Update Phase II Summary Report*, 2012.

complicated history must be (and is slowly being) written by many hands.”<sup>12</sup> This project intersects with other research efforts including the African American Heritage Trail Project, African American Communities Oral History Project, Stephens-Lee High School Museum, and Equity Loop Trail, to name but a few, as well as work done by Dr. Dwight Mullen’s State of Black Asheville project, the Black Asheville History Project at Pack Library, Hood Huggers International, the River Front Development Group, and the Buncombe County Tourism Development Authority. The cumulative effect of this recent attention will not change the past, but it will help make the story of Asheville’s history more inclusive and more accurate.

## **Black Roots in Asheville**

The Black presence in western North Carolina is believed to trace back to African slaves brought by Spanish expeditions through the region in the 1500s. A small number of those first Africans escaped the Spanish and dispersed throughout the region with the Cherokee.<sup>13</sup> African Americans arrived in western North Carolina in greater numbers with some of the first white settlers to the area. Samuel Davidson, his twin brother William, sister Rachel, other relatives, and associates established the first white settlement west of the Blue Ridge in 1784, and they brought with them enslaved people of African descent.<sup>14</sup> While the mountain region of the state did not support plantations and a slave-labor system at the same scale as the eastern and coastal regions, a number of landowners brought enslaved Blacks to the area, including the Baird, Vance, Chunn, Patton, and Swain families. Eight of the 50 largest enslavers in western North Carolina resided in Buncombe County, including James W. and John E. Patton, who together enslaved more than 140 people, Nicholas Woodfin, who enslaved 122 people, and William W. McDowell, who enslaved 40 people. In the 1820s, James Patton opened the Eagle Hotel in downtown Asheville, which was staffed by people whom he enslaved. The people enslaved by Patton generally quartered in a settlement to the east of downtown in an area that came to be known as East End. By the late nineteenth century, the East End neighborhood became the center of African American life in Asheville.<sup>15</sup>

Another wealthy Asheville businessman and slave owner, James McConnell Smith, is believed to have been the first white child born west of the Blue Ridge in North Carolina. Smith married Mary “Polly” Patton, daughter of Col. John Patton, and built an extensive business and

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<sup>12</sup> Whisnant, “A One Minute History.”

<sup>13</sup> Theda Perdue, “Red and Black in the Southern Appalachians,” *Southern Exposure*, Vol. 12 (November-December 1984), 56; Milton Ready, *The Tar Heel State: A History of North Carolina* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 2005), 70.

<sup>14</sup> F. A. Sondley, *A History of Buncombe County, North Carolina* (Asheville, NC: The Advocate Printing Co., 1930), 398.

<sup>15</sup> John C. Inscoe, *Mountain Masters: Slavery and the Sectional Crisis in Western North Carolina* (Knoxville, TN: University of Tennessee Press, 1989), 265-266.

real estate empire through the first half of the nineteenth century. In 1833 Smith received a license to build and operate a toll bridge over the French Broad River. The profitable bridge operation helped to fund his general mercantile business, tannery, lumber yard, and farmland. Smith also owned and operated the popular Buck Hotel on Main Street in Asheville. At one time Smith owned more than 30,000 acres in Buncombe County and a gold mine in north Georgia. He enslaved at least 67 people.<sup>16</sup>

Like the majority of wealthy mountain slave owners, Smith's financial prosperity was not derived primarily from agriculture. Frederick Law Olmsted commented on this phenomenon in the 1850s, while traveling through the region as a journalist and social critic for the *New York Times*. During his 1854 visit, Olmsted noted that many wealthy mountain slave owners gave limited attention to farming. Many of the mountain masters practiced law or medicine, owned hotels, were merchants, or oversaw industrial operations.<sup>17</sup> James Smith earned income from his bridge tolls, mercantile business, and the Buck Hotel. James W. Patton ran hotels, built roads, and owned a tanyard. Nicholas Woodfin, the largest slave holder in Buncombe County, was a renowned lawyer and five-term state senator, in addition to overseeing a substantial agricultural operation.

William Wallis McDowell, born to a prominent western North Carolina family, moved to Asheville in 1845 and married Sarah Lucinda Smith, daughter of James M. Smith. McDowell joined his father-in-law's mercantile business, located across the street from the Buck Hotel.<sup>18</sup> William McDowell additionally served as an officer in the Asheville branch of the Bank of Cape Fear. In addition to expanding his business opportunities, McDowell's marriage greatly increased his personal wealth and established him as a slave owner on a large scale, who eventually enslaved 40 people and accumulated personal and real property valued at \$70,000 in 1860.<sup>19</sup>

The conditions of slave ownership in Asheville and Buncombe County affected the relationship between the slave owners and their enslaved laborers. While the mountain region did not support plantation agriculture dependent on a large workforce of slave labor, enslaved African Americans in Asheville were much more likely to be employed in small-scale manufacturing or mining, mercantile trade, transportation, or domestic service positions,

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<sup>16</sup> "If These Walls Could Talk: A Smith-McDowell House History," Western North Carolina Historical Association, <https://www.wnchistory.org/smith-mcdowell-house/history/> (accessed March 31, 2020); U.S. Census Bureau (1850), Schedule 2 – Slave inhabitants.

<sup>17</sup> Frederick Law Olmsted, *A Journey in the Back County in the Winter of 1853-1858* (New York: Mason Brothers, 1860), 226; Inscoc, *Mountain Masters*, 62.

<sup>18</sup> Robert M. Topkins, "McDowell, William Wallis," *Dictionary of North Carolina Biography*, William S. Powell, ed. (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1991), <https://www.ncpedia.org/biography/mcdowell-william-wallis> (accessed August 2020).

<sup>19</sup> U.S. Census Bureau (1860), Schedule 1 (Free Inhabitants) and Schedule 2 (Slave Inhabitants).

especially at the city's many hotels, resorts, and boarding houses. The diversity of jobs filled by enslaved Blacks helped create the impression that African Americans around Asheville had more autonomy, responsibility, and opportunities for advancement under their mountain masters.<sup>20</sup> Slavery remained, however, the unethical practice of human bondage fraught with violence, extreme prejudice, family separations, threat of sale, and the lack of basic human rights. Sarah Gudger, a former slave living on Dalton Street in South Asheville in the early twentieth century, recounted the exhausting work, meager provisions, and lashings at the hands of white slaveowners. She recalled feeling that the family's animals were treated better than her.<sup>21</sup>

President Abraham Lincoln issued the Emancipation Proclamation in 1863, in theory freeing enslaved people throughout the South, but the practical consequences of the president's order were slow in coming to western North Carolina and did not begin to take effect until after the war ended in 1865. With this sector of the area's labor force now free, the social and economic dynamics shifted to some degree, although wealthy white families were eager to retain the hierarchical structure that had favored them for so long. West Asheville resident Cornelia Henry's diary described the days in the immediate aftermath of the war. Henry's family had depended on slave labor, and after Emancipation a few of their enslaved workers stayed on with the Henry family, while others went to neighboring farms. Henry was dismayed when the newly freed African Americans refused to work without pay.<sup>22</sup>

Many freed slaves separated from their former enslavers and left the region altogether, often in search of family members separated during slavery, while others moved into Asheville seeking employment in the tourism and resort industries as cooks, waiters, chambermaids, drivers, and gardeners.<sup>23</sup> Freed African Americans moving into Asheville began to settle in the area known as East End, located to the east and southeast of the courthouse and city hall and encompassing Eagle, Market, and College streets, as well as Valley, Dixon, Pine, and Beaumont streets. Sufficient numbers of Black residents moved to the East End to establish a growing sense of community and collective identity that discouraged whites from moving into the area.

J. P. Davison, in his introduction to the city's first directory, published in 1883, supplied a few glimpses into the early settlements that eventually coalesced into Black neighborhoods. He noted that the area lying near the Asheville Male Academy, encompassing present-day

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<sup>20</sup> Richard D. Starnes, *Creating Land of the Sky: Tourism and Society in Western North Carolina* (Tuscaloosa, AL: University of Alabama Press, 2005), 19-22.

<sup>21</sup> Federal Writers' Project, *Slave Narratives: A Folk History of Slavery in the United States from Interviews with Former Slaves, Volume XI, North Carolina Narratives, Part 1* (Washington, DC: Works Progress Administration, 1941), 350-358.

<sup>22</sup> Cornelia Henry, *Fear in North Carolina: The Civil War Journals and letters of the Henry Family*, eds. Karen Clinard and Richard Russell (Asheville, NC: Reminiscing Books, 2008), 282.

<sup>23</sup> Waters, "Life Beneath the Veneer," 42-49, 56-59.

Montford, had a considerable population, including many African American residents. Davison described “Beaucatcher,” or East End, as an area with “a great number of people, principally colored, ...scattered all over the [west] face of the mountain,” and “very little of the space they occupy has been laid out in streets.”<sup>24</sup> The Acre, “a polite abbreviation of Hell’s Half Acre, [is] situated on the S E corner of Valley and Sycamore streets.... Its denizens are entirely of the African race.”<sup>25</sup> Davison appears to have made a concerted effort to accurately document and index Asheville’s 3,874 residents, but he made little effort to disguise his racial prejudices. He noted,

“The number of negroes, also, without settled homes or occupations, gave [the author] a world of trouble in trying to discover their haunts, and he was often obliged, at last, to give up, in despair of finding them. From the above cause, no doubt the names of many of this class will fail to appear in the Directory. Happily, however, it is a small loss.”<sup>26</sup>

In discussing the forces of social and urban change following Emancipation it should be noted that patterns of segregation by income and by race, which certainly began in the nineteenth century, only became well defined in the twentieth century as governmental policies, economic factors, and real estate practices increasingly codified segregation. In his study of the development of urban Charlotte, North Carolina, Tom Hanchett describes nineteenth century land use patterns as resembling spilled salt and pepper, with upper-income whites, lower-income whites, and Blacks often living and working side by side, typically as a function of convenience. Proximity between Blacks and whites was often determined by employment and transportation. Laborers and domestic service workers typically lived near where they worked, especially in the absence of dependable transportation. Eventually the city’s residential and commercial sections became increasingly compartmentalized by race and by income. These divisions only grew under the Jim Crow policies of the segregated South.<sup>27</sup>

Similar patterns appear to have been true in Asheville, where African Americans comprised roughly 40 percent of the population in 1870.<sup>28</sup> Following Emancipation, Black residents were drawn to urban areas like Asheville in pursuit of greater employment opportunities, as well as exploring their newly gained freedom both physically and psychologically.<sup>29</sup> In Asheville, African

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<sup>24</sup> J. P. Davison, *The Asheville City Directory and Gazetteer of Buncombe County for 1883-’84* (Richmond, VA: Baugham Brothers, Printers, 1883), 14.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 10 and 126. Davison recorded 2,408 white and 1,466 Black citizens of Asheville in April 1883. Blacks made up 38 percent of city residents.

<sup>27</sup> Thomas W. Hanchett, *Sorting Out The New South City: Race, Class, and Urban Development in Charlotte, 1875-1975* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1998), 3-10.

<sup>28</sup> Branson, *North Carolina Business Directory*, 36.

<sup>29</sup> Waters, “Life Beneath the Veneer,” 58-59.

American settlements tended to occur around the margins of town, growing out of areas where enslaved people were quartered in the antebellum period and where they were employed. The prominent East End neighborhood, which emerged as the center of African American life in Asheville around the turn of the twentieth century, appears to have blossomed from the community of 78 people enslaved by James W. Patton. A number of Patton's slaves worked at the Eagle Hotel, which he owned; at his home on South Main Street (present-day Biltmore Avenue); or at his summer house on Beaucatcher Mountain just east of downtown. The people formerly enslaved by the Smith and McDowell families likely formed the nucleus of the South Asheville community and established themselves in the area, which was located on the fringes of the McDowell property and outside the city limits. Likewise, the early Shiloh community appears to have evolved from settlements on the south side of the Swannanoa River occupied by the freed slaves of the Patton, Stevens, and other families living in the area.<sup>30</sup>

In the period immediately following the Civil War, both Black and white residents in Asheville benefitted from the steady return of tourism to the area. African Americans quickly capitalized on the availability of service jobs in the city, taking positions in the numerous hotels, boarding houses, and resorts. The jobs, while typically menial and low-paying, provided for individuals and families and afforded opportunities to Black entrepreneurs to form their own businesses to serve their community. The tourism industry received a boost initially from the development of health resorts in the late 1860s and 1870s, with local business leaders promoting the region's pleasant climate and restorative seasons. Ohio physician Dr. Horatio Gatchell and his brother, Dr. Edwin Gatchell, became convinced that western North Carolina's environment possessed medical benefits and healing qualities, which led them to open a sanitarium and to promote the city to other medical professionals. As Asheville's popularity as a health resort swelled, Black residents found jobs as orderlies, chambermaids, janitors, drivers, and coachmen. By the mid-1880s, nearly half of the city's Black population held service positions at hotels, hospitals, health resorts, and boarding houses.<sup>31</sup>

In addition to being a popular health resort, Asheville's position as a thriving tourist destination expanded significantly in 1880 with the completion of the Western North Carolina Railroad (WNCRR) from Salisbury to Asheville. The railroad connection opened the area to tourists and solidified Asheville's position as the social and economic hub of western North Carolina. The Asheville & Spartanburg Railroad completed a second rail connection in 1886, linking the city with Hendersonville, Tryon, and points south. Asheville's population nearly

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<sup>30</sup> Clay Griffith, "South Asheville Cemetery and St. John 'A' Baptist Church" National Register of Historic Places Nomination, Acme Preservation Services, Asheville, NC, 2020, and "Shiloh A.M.E. Zion Church" National Register of Historic Places Nomination, Acme Preservation Services, Asheville, NC, 2021.

<sup>31</sup> Waters, "Life Beneath the Veneer," 69-72.

quadrupled over the following decade, eclipsing 10,000 residents in 1890, with thousands more annual visitors passing through.<sup>32</sup>



**Swannanoa Tunnel, ca. 1890** (Buncombe County Special Collections, Pack Memorial Library, Asheville, North Carolina).

The coming of the railroad, which radically changed Asheville's trajectory in the late nineteenth century, came at a price paid disproportionately by African Americans. Construction of the WNCRR between Salisbury and Asheville began in the 1850s but stalled at Morganton during the Civil War. The line was completed to Old Fort by 1873, where financial and engineering challenges slowed progress over the Blue Ridge into Buncombe County. The final 22 miles of track to Asheville, including the 1,832-foot-long Swannanoa Tunnel, were constructed by convict labor leased to the state. The implementation of codes specifically targeting Black constituents following Emancipation restricted the rights and movement of

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<sup>32</sup> Nan K. Chase, *Asheville: A History* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, Inc., 2007), 29-30.

African Americans, often criminalizing mundane activities and enacting stiff punishments. As a result, crowded state penitentiaries housed a nearly 90 percent Black population. In 1877, after purchasing the WNCRR, the state legislature agreed to lease Black convicts to complete the construction work with hand tools and crude explosives. Cresting the Blue Ridge and completing the Swannanoa Tunnel in 1879 took the lives of more than 120 convict laborers, and the line eventually reached the village of Best (present-day Biltmore) south of Asheville in 1880. The WNCRR continued to lease convicts from the state, which amounted in practice to government-sanctioned slavery, for another nine years while completing the 123-mile western branch of the railroad from Asheville to Murphy.<sup>33</sup>

Railroad access to Asheville ushered in nearly 50 years of tremendous growth and development that contributed to the expansion and advancement of the Black community, although its population gains were outpaced and overshadowed by white population growth. Governor Zebulon Vance, a former Confederate officer, returned to office in 1876, having previously served two terms as governor, from 1862 to May 1865, when the Confederacy surrendered. Vance's election in 1876 ended federal Reconstruction efforts and the state began a slow return to the white supremacy that would be codified in Jim Crow laws of the 1890s. Vance ran on a civil rights platform, although he was careful to distinguish civil rights from "social rights," which would be tantamount to total integration. Vance was utterly opposed to putting African Americans on an even footing with whites.<sup>34</sup> Vance's civil rights campaign was designed to attract poor whites who perceived their oppression coming from wealthy citizens, stock trusts, and laws.<sup>35</sup> Civil rights were for those who had already achieved social rights and this pointedly did not include African Americans. Vance instead promoted the paternalistic view that Black residents required whites to care for them through a society based on overt white supremacy.<sup>36</sup>

Historian Darin Waters has identified how Black elites and the white establishment focused on race relations with an eye toward economic stability in the late nineteenth century. The many opportunities for domestic labor in Asheville's tourism-based economy brought an influx of

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<sup>33</sup> Rudy Abramson and Jean Haskell, eds., *Encyclopedia of Appalachia* (Knoxville, TN: University of Tennessee Press, 2006), 567-568; Lou Harshaw, *Asheville: Mountain Majesty* (Fairview, NC: Bright Mountain Books, 2007), 84-89; John Gilbert, *Crossties Through Carolina: The Story of North Carolina's Early Day Railroads* (Raleigh, NC: The Helios Press, 1969), 6; Catherine W. Bishir, Michael T. Southern, and Jennifer F. Martin, *A Guide to the Historic Architecture of Western North Carolina* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1999), 32-36.

<sup>34</sup> Paul Yandle, "Different Colored Currents of the Sea: Reconstruction North Carolina, Mutuality and the Political Roots of Jim Crow," in *North Carolinians in the Era of the Civil War and Reconstruction*, ed. Paul D. Escott (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2008), 229.

<sup>35</sup> Steven E. Nash, "The Immortal Vance: The Political Commemoration of North Carolina's War Governor," in *North Carolinians in the Era of the Civil War and Reconstruction*, ed. Paul D. Escott (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2008), 284.

<sup>36</sup> Yandle, "Different Colored Currents of the Sea," 229.

people, but their power was severely curbed by their lack of education, which, in turn, limited economic mobility. Moreover, poor whites refused the domestic roles typically accepted by African Americans since they thought this would place them on the same social level.<sup>37</sup> The complicated state of race relations in Asheville, as Waters points out, evolved from the early reliance on tourism, which hinged on at least the appearance of friendly race relations. White city leaders advertised and promoted an image of racial comity in Asheville. Unfortunately, this veneer was just that—a façade that made whites and tourists comfortable while masking the political and economic marginalization of Asheville’s African American community.<sup>38</sup>

## **Community Pillars: Religion and Education**

Historian Henry Louis Gates Jr. has described the Black church as a “cultural cauldron that Black people created to combat a system designed in every way to crush their spirit.”<sup>39</sup> The Black church, encompassing a wide spectrum of faiths and denominations, evolved from the religion of slave owners into a subversive system of belief that allowed African Americans to endure unspeakable injustices. Born in the period of slavery, the notion of the Black church typically adapted the traditional Christian teachings imparted from white slave owners, which were meant to encourage submissiveness and subservience, and added elements of African spirituality to create resonant forms of worship and expression. Although unintended by the oppressors who tried to convert them, enslaved Africans found comfort in, and connection to, the persecution and salvation of Jesus Christ and the promise of redemption afforded to Christian believers.<sup>40</sup>

African Americans, while enslaved, typically practiced their religion surreptitiously, at night or in a secluded brush arbor, away from the watchful eyes of whites. For slaves who had been denied the opportunity to learn to read and write, the messages of the Bible were memorized and retold or voiced in song. In the period following Emancipation, African Americans quickly split from white congregations and established their own churches. The creation of these independent churches instilled, perhaps more than anything, a sense of freedom among the Black population. The church became not only a house of worship but also places of refuge separate from whites. The separation allowed churches to encompass the full expression of Black life and culture. The church, in the general sense, nurtured music, oratory, dance, and poetry. The church endorsed teaching and learning. Churches were a place of affirmation and

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<sup>37</sup> Waters, “Life Beneath the Veneer,” 74-75.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 229.

<sup>39</sup> Henry Louis Gates Jr., *The Black Church* (New York: Penguin Press, 2021), xxiii.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, xx-xxiii and 32-36.

welcome; social centers; and engines of social transformation. For Black people, the church fostered “the hope for a better today and a much better tomorrow.”<sup>41</sup>

The creation of new Black churches in Asheville after the Civil War reflected a trend occurring across the South as newly freed African Americans formed their own congregations and independent churches. Rev. Jarvis Buxton organized a congregation of freed slaves in 1865 that is believed to be the oldest Black congregation in western North Carolina. Begun as Trinity Chapel, or the Freedmen’s Church, an off-shoot of Trinity Episcopal, the church changed its name to St. Matthias when it began construction on a new building in 1894 to house a growing congregation. The brick sanctuary of St. Matthias Episcopal Church (BN0015, NR 1979), completed in 1896, is one of the best examples of Gothic Revival-style church architecture in Asheville. Architect Arthur J. Wills designed the expressive brick building, which was built by brick mason James Vester Miller, a former slave and church member. The interior is notable for its richly carved, dark stained woodwork, which is among the finest in the city.<sup>42</sup>

One of the earliest African Methodist Episcopal Zion (A.M.E. Zion) congregations in Asheville began in 1868, after splitting from Central Methodist Church when the white pastor refused to allow a Black minister to preach to Black members of the congregation. Tired of their treatment by white members at Central Methodist Church, Black worshippers staged a protest march, gathering in front of the church one Sunday and walking across town to the East End neighborhood where they worshipped in a brush arbor at the foot of Beaucatcher Mountain. Led by Rev. F. A. Hopkins, the congregation affiliated with the fast-growing A.M.E. Zion denomination, which had been founded in the early nineteenth century not on theological differences with the Methodist church, but on racial differences. The A.M.E. and A.M.E. Zion churches were organized to allow African Americans a place to worship with dignity. The congregation erected a frame building that burned in 1907 and was replaced by a handsome Gothic Revival-style brick church designed by prominent local architect Richard Sharp Smith. James V. Miller, a leading local builder and brick mason, constructed the church.<sup>43</sup> Completed in 1910, Hopkins Chapel A.M.E. Zion Church (BN0433, SL 1996) features a boldly asymmetrical façade with three Gothic-arched entrances on the central gable-front façade and flanking towers of unequal height. The church is richly detailed with layered brickwork, Gothic accents, and traceried windows on the façade and transepts.

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 1-4, 78.

<sup>42</sup> Bishir, et al, 276; Michael Southern and Jim Sumner, “St. Matthias Episcopal Church” National Register of Historic Places Nomination Form, North Carolina Division of Archives and History, Raleigh, NC, 1979; Dale Neal, “Founded by Freed Slaves, St. Matthias Marks 150 Years,” *Asheville Citizen-Times*, July 17, 2016.

<sup>43</sup> “Our History,” Hopkins Chapel A.M.E. Zion Church, <https://hopkinschapelamezion.org/our-history/> (accessed July 2021); Henry Robinson, “Hopkins Chapel Has Distinguished History,” *Asheville Times*, September 24, 1968; Bishir, et al., *Guide to Historic Architecture*, 276; Gates, *The Black Church*, 48-49.

Another East End congregation organized in 1887 initially met in an abandoned streetcar barn on South Main Street before relocating to Hildebrand Street. Originally known as Levy's Chapel, the congregation joined the African Methodist Episcopal denomination in 1889 as St. James A.M.E. Church (BN0680).<sup>44</sup> The present Gothic Revival-style brick sanctuary, constructed in 1930 by James V. Miller, features decorative brick banding and corbelling, Gothic arch windows, and two crenelated towers flanking the recessed entrance bay.

As the foremost Black section of Asheville during the second half of the nineteenth century, East End encompassed many of the early Black churches within its boundaries. Nazareth First Missionary Baptist Church (BN6452), Mt. Zion Missionary Baptist Church (BN2159), and Calvary Presbyterian Church (BN6453) all grew out of East End's Black community. Other Black settlements around the city formed their own congregations including the Shiloh community on the south side of the Swannanoa River. Composed primarily of African Americans formerly enslaved by the Patton and Stevens families, the Shiloh community organized an A.M.E. Zion congregation around 1871 and purchased one acre from Montraville and Catherine Patton for a church building. When George Vanderbilt began acquiring vast tracts of land for his estate in Asheville, he purchased the property from the congregation but arranged for the church and its cemetery to be moved to a new site approximately one mile east. Around 1890, another A.M.E. Zion congregation organized in the South Asheville area, just outside the city limits and on the fringes of land owned by W. W. and Sarah McDowell. The congregation changed its name to St. Mark A.M.E. Zion Church (BN1342) when it erected a new sanctuary on Wyoming Road in the 1910s.

Black churches formed a vital part of community life and identity. As historian Henry Louis Gates Jr. notes, "By the end of the nineteenth century...Black houses of worship would shelter a nation within a nation, gradually becoming the political and spiritual centers of local Black communities."<sup>45</sup> Approximately 90 percent of all African Americans lived in the former Confederate states at the end of the nineteenth century, and their churches played a crucial role in the social fabric of their lives. Religious institutions were among the first organizations to educate African Americans. Black churches saw education and literacy as critical to the long-term success of the community, and many of the earliest historically Black colleges and universities were begun as seminaries affiliated with Black denominations.<sup>46</sup>

Trinity Chapel is believed to have opened the first school for Black students beginning around 1870. Classes met in the basement of the church building. Rev. Jarvis Buxton, the white

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<sup>44</sup> Johnnie N. Grant, "Historic African American Churches and Affiliates – Asheville, N.C.," *The Urban News*, September 12, 2015, <https://theurbannews.com/our-town/2015/historic-african-american-churches-and-affiliates-asheville-nc/comment-page-1/> (accessed November 16, 2020).

<sup>45</sup> Gates, *The Black Church*, 64.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 84-85.

rector of Trinity Church, established the school, which taught religion and literacy. The school reported 120 students attending Sunday school in 1872, with 71 students enrolled in the parochial day school.<sup>47</sup> Presbyterian minister Rev. and Mrs. L. M. Pease of New York came to Asheville in 1875 with plans to retire, but after noting the lack of educational opportunities for African Americans, purchased a lot near town in 1885 and converted a small cottage and livery stable into a small boarding and day school called the Pease Home and Industrial School. In 1887, the Peases donated the property, valued at \$5,000, to the Women's Home Missionary Society of the Methodist Episcopal Church, under whose direction it became the Allen School.<sup>48</sup> The county government operated Beaumont Academy for Black students in East End, where just over 100 students enrolled in 1886.

Asheville residents approved the creation of a public school system by referendum in 1887. The school tax referendum passed by four votes, and Blacks represented the crucial difference in its approval. To reward Black voters for their support, city aldermen appointed Isaac Dickson, a former slave and resourceful businessman, to the six-member school board. Dickson worked with the five white school board members to acquire the former Asheville Male Academy on Academy Street (now Montford Avenue) for the first white school and the abandoned Beaumont Academy on Beaumont Street for the first Black school. When the schools opened in January 1888, more than 600 Black students tried to enroll at the Beaumont Street School, twice the number that could be accommodated. The school began with five teachers: Hester Ford and Mary Dickson, daughter of Isaac Dickson, taught 85 first grade students; Harrison B. Brown taught second grade; Edward H. Lipscombe had third grade; and Daniel C. Suggs taught the combined fourth and fifth grades. To relieve overcrowded conditions at the poorly equipped school, some students were moved to another substandard East End building in 1890, likely a frame dwelling that was converted into the Mountain Street School.<sup>49</sup>

In 1892, a stately two-story brick school building designed by Richard Sharp Smith opened on a hill in East End near the Catholic mission church. The Catholic Hill School proved a point of pride in the community for many years and offered classes for first through ninth grades. Edward S. Stephens, a Black man born in British Guiana and raised in England, became the first principal at Catholic Hill School and established a solid foundation for its success. Stephens came to Asheville in 1890 and won a mid-year appointment as principal of the Beaumont

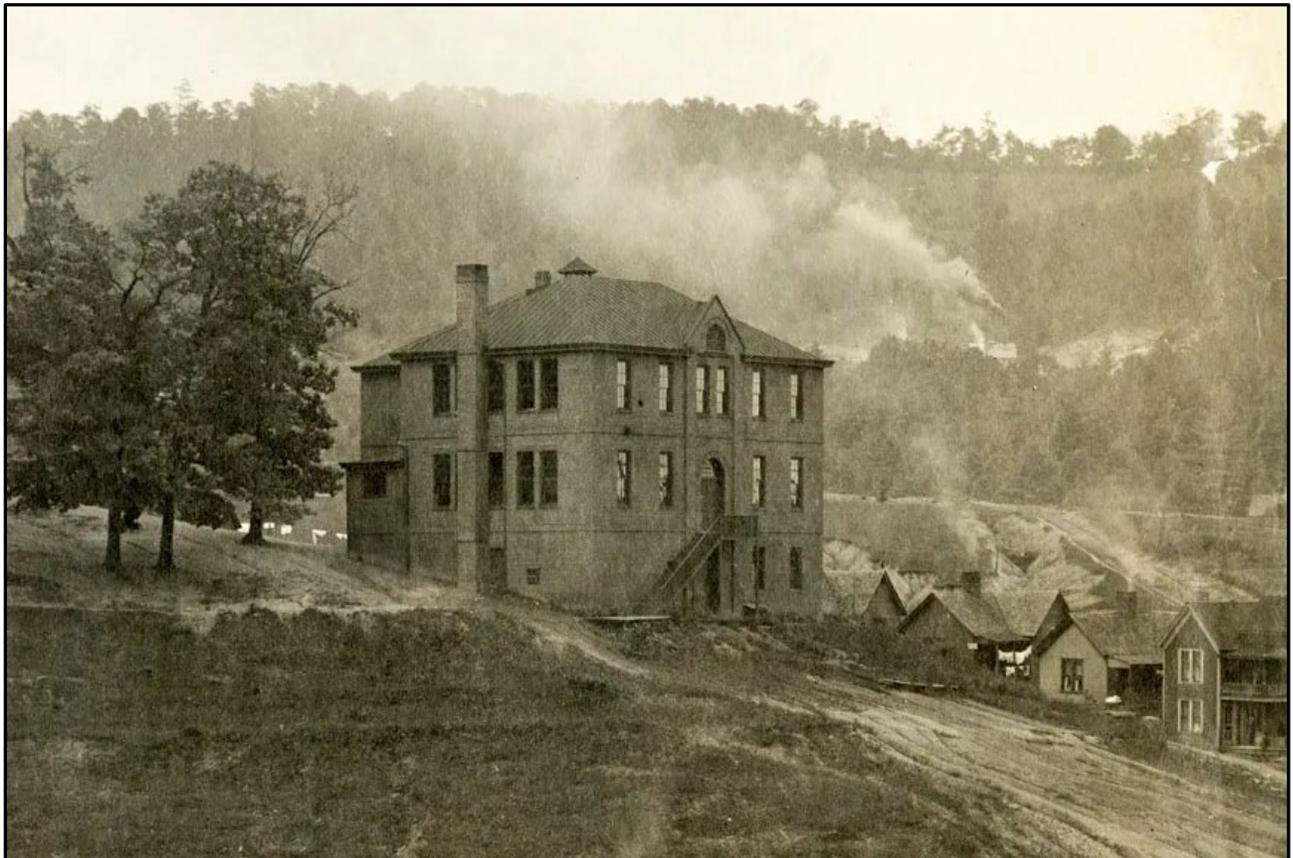
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<sup>47</sup> Lenwood Davis, *The Black Heritage of Western North Carolina* (Asheville, NC: D. H. Ramsey Collection, 1983), 56.

<sup>48</sup> Chase, *Asheville*, 151; Jamie Butcher, "Religion, Race, Gender, and Education: The Allen School, Asheville, North Carolina, 1885 to 1974," *Appalachian Journal* 33, no. 1 (Fall 2005), 78-79, 87-88.

<sup>49</sup> Joe Newman, "Asheville's First City Schools for Black Students," *HeardTell* Blog, September 5, 2019, <https://specialcollections.buncombecounty.org/2019/09/05/ashevilles-first-city-schools-for-black-students/> (accessed October 8, 2021);

Street School. Stephens advocated for raising teacher pay for Black educators, supervised the Mountain Street faculty, and helped facilitate the construction of the new Catholic Hill School. During the same period, Stephens collaborated with Isaac Dickson to organize a Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA) for African Americans in Asheville, holding an open meeting one Sunday afternoon in 1890 at Dickson's house to discuss the possibilities. Stephens later presented the idea to, and won approval from, George Vanderbilt, who supported the construction of the Young Men's Institute (YMI) with a \$15,000 loan; Stephens was named the first general secretary of the organization.<sup>50</sup> Stephens soon left his positions at the school and the YMI in the face of growing resistance, including violent threats, from various factions opposed to the improvement of Black people.<sup>51</sup>



**Catholic Hill School, 1904** (Buncombe County Special Collections, Pack Memorial Library, Asheville, North Carolina).

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<sup>50</sup> "A Well Informed Negro," *Asheville Citizen*, August 30, 1890, 4; Joe Newman, "A Most Exceptional Man: The Edward S. Stephens Story (Part One)," *HeardTell* Blog, February 19, 2020, <https://specialcollections.buncombecounty.org/2020/02/19/a-most-exceptional-man-edward-s-stephens-part-one/> (accessed February 9, 2022).

<sup>51</sup> Joe Newman, "A Most Exceptional Man: The Edward S. Stephens Story (Part Two)," *HeardTell* Blog, March 5, 2020, <https://specialcollections.buncombecounty.org/2020/03/05/a-most-exceptional-man-the-edward-s-stephens-story-part-two/> (accessed February 9, 2022).

Catholic Hill School continued with E. E. Smith as principal in 1894 and grew in reputation over the next decades. Overcrowding at the school became so burdensome that the school board reopened the Mountain Street School in 1910 to relieve some of the strain on the facility. Both the Beaumont Street and Mountain Street schools closed in 1892 with the opening of the new building. Tragedy struck swiftly in November 1917, when a fire started in the furnace room of the Catholic Hill School and, aided by strong northerly wind, quickly spread through the building. Seven students were killed in the blaze and several others injured. More than 300 students and teachers, who were commended for efficiently evacuating the school, were able to reach safety beyond the flames, which engulfed at least one nearby residence. Following the somber incident, the school board leased the Odd Fellows' Hall on Catholic Hill and classes resumed the following term.<sup>52</sup>

A few years after the tragic fire at the Catholic Hill School, public calls for a new school building resulted in the approval of plans for an 18-room Collegiate Gothic-style building to be erected on the site of the earlier edifice. Local architect Ronald Greene designed the \$100,000 building.<sup>53</sup> In the spring of 1922, with construction of "the splendid new structure" advancing, the school board elected to rename the school in honor of Edward S. Stephens, first principal of Catholic Hill School, and Hester Ford Lee (1861-1922), one of the first Black teachers in the city schools.<sup>54</sup> Lee's husband, Walter S. Lee, served as the first principal of the new school after continuing classes at four rented, makeshift buildings around town in the aftermath of the Catholic Hill School fire.<sup>55</sup>

Stephens-Lee High School opened in 1923 to Black students from Asheville, as well as surrounding counties. Designed for a capacity of 900 students, the building opened with 856 students and served as the only high school for African Americans in western North Carolina. At the time, Stephens-Lee teachers earned a salary of \$933, while the principal received \$1,550. By comparison, the principal of the white high school was paid \$4,000 and white teachers earned a salary of \$1,783.<sup>56</sup> Despite the startling inequity and difficulties imposed by segregation, Stephens-Lee High School thrived and emerged as a significant point of community pride. The school became renowned across the region for its outstanding faculty, strong educational curriculum, and excellent music and athletic programs. "The Castle on the Hill," as

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<sup>52</sup> "Colored School Is Destroyed by Fire and Pupils Hurt," *Asheville Times*, November 16, 1917, 1; "Death Toll at Catholic Hill School May Be Eight Children," *Asheville Citizen*, November 17, 1917, 1; "City School Will Open on January 7," *Asheville Citizen*, December 31, 1917, 12.

<sup>53</sup> "Complete Architect Plans for Catholic Hill School," *Asheville Citizen*, November 6, 1921, 12.

<sup>54</sup> "Board Adopts Name New High School," *Asheville Citizen*, April 26, 1922, 2.

<sup>55</sup> Henry Robinson, "Stephens-Lee High School Joins City's Old History," *Asheville Citizen-Times*, August 29, 1975, 16B.

<sup>56</sup> "Salaries for Colored Teachers," *Asheville Citizen*, May 24, 1925, 4.

it was known, became more than just a school. Presiding over the landscape of Asheville's East End, Stephens-Lee High School stood as a monument to Black independence and achievement.



**First graduating class of Stephens-Lee High School, 1924** (*Heritage of Black Highlanders Collection*, D. H. Ramsey Library Special Collections, University of North Carolina at Asheville).

Teaching was an important and highly regarded profession among African Americans from the end of the Civil War until the 1960s, and Asheville's schools attracted and fostered some of the best and most qualified educators. John Henry Michael, principal of the Hill Street School, established a summer training program for teachers from Buncombe and Henderson counties to come to Asheville and earn college credit and renewed teaching credentials in partnership with Winston-Salem Teachers College. The principals of Stephens-Lee placed expectations on the educational training of their faculty that exceeded the requirements of the city school board. Teaching as a profession among Blacks generally attracted college graduates and intellectually capable individuals, who were overqualified for most jobs available to them in the segregated South. The fields of education and religion offered the greatest opportunity to apply their intellectual gifts. Unsurprisingly, the largest class of professionals among Blacks in North Carolina were public school teachers, who numbered over 5,600 in 1930. At the same time, the state had 1,575 Black preachers. By comparison, other African American professional

groups counted just 327 registered nurses, 246 college professors and administrators, 164 physicians and surgeons, 65 dentists, and 27 lawyers.<sup>57</sup> An unintended and unfortunate consequence of school integration in the wake of *Brown v. Board of Education* was the dramatic loss of Black educators. The integration of school faculties disproportionately affected African Americans and often resulted in discriminatory employment practices that caused Black teachers to leave the profession in far greater numbers than their white counterparts.<sup>58</sup>

## Creating African American Life in Asheville

The Black population of Asheville, as a percentage of overall population, declined gradually through the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries despite gains in the total number of Black citizens. As a result of these gains, the Black neighborhoods around the city evolved into bustling, mostly self-sufficient communities that operated largely outside the realm of white Asheville. The growing city remained a popular health resort and tourist destination, which provided a steady source of service jobs for African Americans. Increasingly though, Black residents were carving out their own unique sphere of influence and developing businesses, institutions, and social networks within the community.

Newton Shepherd (1840-1924), a Black man, was elected to the town's Board of Aldermen in 1882, a precursor to the present City Council. A resident of Hill Street, Shepherd worked as a street foreman for the city and, as an alderman, joined with the mayor to propose creating bonded debt for the permanent improvement of streets and a city water system. Shepherd served two terms on the Board of Aldermen under Mayor Virgil S. Lusk, before later working as janitor of the Park Avenue School. Shepherd and his wife, Lucinda, raised seven children and resided on Hill Street until his death in 1924. During Shepherd's tenure in office, the Board of Aldermen addressed basic infrastructure and amenities to serve the city and its growing tourism industry, including new hotels. The actions of the Aldermen at the time did little to better the lives and conditions of Black residents but instead brought improvements to areas of the city frequented by tourists.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> Federal Writers' Project, *North Carolina: A Guide to the Old North State* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1939), 55.

<sup>58</sup> James E. Haney, "The Effects of the Brown Decision on Black Educators," *The Journal of Negro Education*, Vol. 47, no. 1 (1978), 88-95, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2967104> (accessed May 11, 2022); Mallory Lutz, "The Hidden Cost of Brown v. Board: African American Educators' Resistance to Desegregating Schools," *Online Journal of Rural Research & Policy*, Vol. 12: Iss. 4 (2017), <https://doi.org/10.4148/1936-0487.1085> (accessed May 11, 2022).

<sup>59</sup> "A Proposition," *Asheville News*, June 28, 1882, 3; Davison, *Asheville City Directory*, 56 and 67; "What Commissioners Did Way Back Yonder," *Asheville Citizen*, May 10, 1916, 12; Douglas Eller, "First Water Supply of City Is Recalled," *Asheville Citizen*, September 8, 1929, 9; Waters, "Life Beneath the Veneer," 205-208.

Historian Lenwood Davis has noted that during the 1870s and 1880s “Blacks saw themselves as first class citizens with all of the rights and obligations of any other citizen,” and Shepherd laid the groundwork for two other African Americans to follow in public service.<sup>60</sup> Henry Saxton, an African American blacksmith, was appointed to the city’s three-man police force in 1882 under Mayor Lusk and Chief of Police H. S. Harkins. Isaac Dickson (1839-1919), a prominent African American businessman, was appointed to the city’s first Board of Education in 1887. A firm believer in the importance of education for the Black community, Dickson rallied support among Black voters for the school tax referendum in 1887 that created the city’s public school system. After the referendum passed by only four votes, Dickson was appointed to the school board in apparent appreciation for his work to secure Black votes. Unfortunately, no other African Americans served in city government during the late nineteenth century, an indication of the growing racist sentiment that imbued the 1890s and led to a rise of white supremacy and segregationist policies.<sup>61</sup>

Born into slavery in Cleveland County to a white father and an enslaved mother, Isaac Dickson came to Asheville around 1870 with his family and tirelessly pursued business opportunities and social improvement. He worked as a janitor and as a domestic at the Ravenscroft School (BN0012), serving as butler to principal Rev. D. H. Buel. An active member of Trinity Episcopal, Dickson and his family were among the first members of the Freedmen’s Chapel formed by Rev. Jarvis Buxton. Dickson purchased property on Valley Street in East End that included some of the Patton family’s former slave quarters, which he rented to freedmen. After living on the campus of Ravenscroft, Dickson and his family moved to Valley Street, where he operated a grocery store, coal yard, and taxi service. He helped organize the first Black Masonic lodge in Asheville, Venus Lodge No. 62, served as its treasurer for 25 years, and arranged for the purchase of a building on Market Street to house the lodge.<sup>62</sup>

Working with other Black leaders in the 1890s, Dickson was instrumental in creating one of Asheville’s most enduring institutions for African Americans. The Young Men’s Institute (YMI) (BN0020, NR 1977), built at the corner of Eagle and Market streets, complemented the African American schools as a community and cultural center. The idea for the YMI appears to have originated with Edward S. Stephens, principal of the Catholic Hill School. Prior to his arrival in Asheville in 1890, Stephens helped organize a YMCA for Black citizens in St. Louis, Missouri, and brought the idea to Asheville. He arranged a Sunday meeting in August 1890 at the home of

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<sup>60</sup> Davis, *Black Heritage*, 20.

<sup>61</sup> Newman, “Asheville’s First City Schools for Black Students”; Waters, “Life Beneath the Veneer,” 207-209.

<sup>62</sup> Newman, “Asheville’s First City Schools for Black Students”; Davis, *Black Heritage*, 20; Tom Burnet, “Up From Slavery: Isaac Dickson, Asheville Pioneer,” *Mountain Xpress*, February 14, 2012, <https://mountainx.com/news/community-news/021512up-from-slavery-isaac-dickson-asheville-pioneer/> (accessed February 10, 2022).

Isaac Dickson “to organize a Y.M.C.A. for colored men and women.”<sup>63</sup> Thirty young men and women, including several pastors, attended the meeting and enthusiastically received Stephen’s proposal. Stephens was selected to be president of the nascent association, along with officers Harrison Brown, secretary; Isaac Dickson, treasurer; and Hattie High, musical director.<sup>64</sup> A few years earlier, the city’s white population organized a YMCA and Black leaders, like their white counterparts, hoped that such an organization would provide a wholesome alternative to Asheville’s vice establishments.<sup>65</sup>



**Young Men’s Institute (BN0020), 1904** (Buncombe County Special Collections, Pack Memorial Library, Asheville, North Carolina).

Despite a seemingly positive response from the Black community, the initial effort failed due largely to a lack of financial resources. Stephens kept advocating and eventually presented his idea for a YMCA-like program to George Vanderbilt, who agreed to support the organization with a \$15,000 loan for the construction of an attractive community building containing an

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<sup>63</sup> “Colored Y.M.C.A. Meeting,” *Asheville Citizen*, August 30, 1890, 4.

<sup>64</sup> “Colored Y.M.C.A.,” *Asheville Citizen*, September 1, 1890, 4.

<sup>65</sup> Waters, “Life Beneath the Veneer,” 145-146.

assembly hall, reading room, bathrooms, and rooms for a school. Stephens maintained close communication with Charles McNamee, Vanderbilt's agent and estate manager, on questions of building design, programming, and operations. Richard Sharp Smith, supervising architect of the Biltmore House, designed the two-story 18,000-square-foot masonry building with rough pebbledash stucco on the exterior, brick accents, and a tile roof similar to many of the buildings at Biltmore. Black laborers, including stone masons, brick masons, and carpenters from Biltmore, constructed the building. Completed in 1892, the YMI became a cornerstone of the Black community, nurturing its social, cultural, and economic interests.<sup>66</sup>

The YMI Building offered office space for Black professionals and meeting spaces for organizations, boxing and wrestling in the unfinished basement, and an auditorium.<sup>67</sup> A well-stocked drug store occupied the prominent corner retail space. Programs included a chorus, a band, classes, dramatic performances, and monthly lectures on a range of topics. Gifford Pinchot, employed for a short time as Biltmore's forester and later the first director of the U.S. Forest Service, gave a well-received presentation on botany in 1896.<sup>68</sup> Edward J. Harding, the former *Chicago Tribune* literary editor, who had moved to Asheville, gave a reading of popular writers.<sup>69</sup> In 1895, an "Old Time Songs and Ways" concert featured some of the oldest people in Asheville, while at another event local talent performed the operetta "Zanle the Gypsy Queen" to benefit St. Matthias Church.<sup>70</sup> The Women's Christian Temperance Union held fundraising events at the YMI.<sup>71</sup> By 1900, when many of YMI's members were no longer working for Vanderbilt, revenue began to wane and the association struggled. In 1905, Vanderbilt decided to divest himself of the property and gave the directors six months to raise \$10,000 to purchase the building. In 1906 a committee raised sufficient funds to assume the mortgage and retain the YMI as a community center.<sup>72</sup>

While the YMI closely modeled itself on the mission and programs of the YMCA, the founders chose the name Young Men's Institute to differentiate the two organizations. The YMI further distinguished itself by serving as a home for small businesses and professional offices in order to create economic opportunity for the Black community. The design of the building included four retail spaces on the first story: two storefronts facing Eagle Street and two facing Market Street. Beginning in January 1893, Charles McNamee was advertising the four stores for rent, "with cellars

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<sup>66</sup> Waters, "Life Beneath the Veneer," 149-153; Chase, *Asheville*, 139-140.

<sup>67</sup> Davis, *Black Heritage*, 34.

<sup>68</sup> Waters, "Life Beneath the Veneer," 159-163.

<sup>69</sup> "At the Y.M.I.," *Asheville Citizen*, February 10, 1894, 4.

<sup>70</sup> "Around Town," *Asheville Citizen*, January 12, 1897, 4.

<sup>71</sup> "Carnival of the Holidays," *Asheville Citizen*, November 23, 1896, 1.

<sup>72</sup> Bishir, Catherine W., Betty Betz, and Johnnie Baxter, "Young Men's Institute," National Register of Historic Places Nomination Form, North Carolina Division of Archives and History, Raleigh, NC, 1977; Waters, "Life Beneath the Veneer," 157-158.

or store rooms underneath.”<sup>73</sup> Dr. Marcus Alston, a Black physician, appears to have been one of the first professionals to rent space in the new building. Over time, the YMI became a hub for business in the Black community, anchoring a densely populated commercial district with real estate and insurance agents, cafes, pool halls, a Masonic Lodge, a movie theater, and more. The area around the building became known as “The Block,” since it was considered that everything anyone might need could be found within a block of the YMI.<sup>74</sup>

The commercial district on Eagle and Market streets fostered a number of other Black-owned businesses and organizations as well. B. J. Jackson, a grocer, was one of the first African Americans to open a downtown business, and his vegetable market sold produce to area hotels, boarding houses, and cafes.<sup>75</sup> Noah Murrough, born in 1862, operated the Woodlawn Café at 36 South Main Street in the 1890s and later became the city’s first licensed Black undertaker in 1910. Murrough, who also worked as an insurance and real estate agent, encouraged home ownership among African Americans. Thomas Oglesby (1860-1923), born into slavery on a plantation in South Carolina, arrived in Asheville around 1891. He worked as a janitor and a caretaker of the Elks’ Club. Like Murrough, he assisted many Black families in purchasing homes.<sup>76</sup> Noted contractor and brick mason James Vester Miller (1860-1940) owned a successful construction company with his sons and was responsible for building or executing the brick work at many of the city’s prominent Black churches. His son, Lee O. Miller (1888-1960), went on to study medicine and became a physician with an office in the Wilson Building (BN2157) on Eagle Street. James Wilson built the handsome two-story brick commercial building in 1924 for his barber shop with additional space for insurance and real estate agents, doctors’ offices, a music teacher, and a beauty shop. Edward W. Pearson, who developed the Park View subdivision and ran a store in West Asheville, kept an office on Eagle Street for some of his many business interests. The Block was home to a number of barbers, grocers, the YMI Drug Store, a couple of sweet shops, and a host of other businesses.<sup>77</sup>

In the civic sphere, Pack Square was still open to all; however, this would soon be regulated. State Democrats ran on a white supremacy platform in 1898, claiming that only white men were fit for political office.<sup>78</sup> Once elected, Democrats moved quickly to codify Jim Crow laws that legally separated the races in marriage, public schools, fire companies, fraternal

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<sup>73</sup> “Want Column,” *Asheville Citizen*, January 3, 1893, 3.

<sup>74</sup> Waters, “Life Beneath the Veneer,” 165-166.

<sup>75</sup> Chase, *Asheville*, 143.

<sup>76</sup> Zoe Rhine, “A Who’s Who List of Prominent Black Asheville Businessmen in 1922,” *HeardTell* Blog, August 8, 2019, <https://specialcollections.buncombecounty.org/2019/08/08/a-whos-who-list-of-prominent-black-asheville-businessmen-in-1922/> (accessed February 10, 2022).

<sup>77</sup> “Colored Race Prospers in Asheville as the Result of Attitude of White Citizens,” *Asheville Citizen*, December 3, 1922, 3.

<sup>78</sup> Nicholas Graham, “The Election of 1898 in North Carolina: An Introduction,” <https://exhibits.lib.unc.edu/show/1898/history> (accessed June 1, 2019).

organizations, hospitals, prisons, and the state library. In addition, the state disenfranchised black voters through a grandfather clause, a poll tax, a literacy test, and a property requirement. The laws decimated black suffrage, and white registrars held the key to the ballot box. The tests were inconsistently applied and were often arbitrary in their questions and difficulty.<sup>79</sup> Threats, violence, and intimidation by whites further affected the voting. In 1896, 1,157 African Americans were registered to vote but that number had dropped to 690 by the 1898 election despite steady gains in population.<sup>80</sup>

White supremacy extended beyond the law and the ballot box: it entered the civic arena and public spaces and began to dictate memory. The United Daughters of the Confederacy (UDC) worked vigorously to project its version of the antebellum past, which it hoped would guide the near future. The organization worked to uphold what it saw as “Confederate culture”—a hierarchical white patrician system.<sup>81</sup> The system focused on “Lost Cause” mythology, presented as fact in schools and civic life. Part of this myth sought to portray the antebellum south as a place where slaves were happy with their lot and patrician planters knew best. Asheville’s white elite became quick adherents to the myth, which served to preserve a hierarchical social system based on white paternalism and Black deference. Originally meeting at members’ homes, the Asheville UDC’s popularity increased to the point that the association was meeting at the YWCA on College Avenue in the 1920s or at the county courthouse.<sup>82</sup> As historian Ty Seidule has observed, the erection of monuments and assignation of names associated with the Confederacy in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries typically served to glorify white supremacy and the Lost Cause myth or followed periods of increased integration or equal rights for African Americans.<sup>83</sup>

In 1904, a group of African American men attended a meeting at the YMI called “Solve the Problem,” referring to the expansion of segregation laws. Hill Street School principal L. T. Jackson encouraged Blacks to create their own organizations.<sup>84</sup> Another speaker, Rev. D.

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<sup>79</sup> Jerry Gershenhorn, *Louis Austin and the Carolina Times: A Life in the Long Black Freedom Struggle* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2018), 169.

<sup>80</sup> Seth Edward David Epstein, “Tolerance, Governance and Surveillance in the Jim Crow South: Asheville, North Carolina, 1876–1946” (Ph.D. diss., University of Minnesota, 2013), 108.

<sup>81</sup> Karen L. Cox, *Dixie’s Daughters: The United Daughters of the Confederacy and the Preservation of Confederate Culture* (Gainesville, FL: University of Florida Press, 2003), 2.

<sup>82</sup> “UDC Meeting,” *Asheville Citizen*, February 9, 1930, 9.

<sup>83</sup> Ty Seidule, *Robert E. Lee and Me: A Southerner’s Reckoning with the Myth of the Lost Cause* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 2020), 160-162, 192-194, 245-247. The Vance Monument (BN2339), a 75-foot-tall stone obelisk dedicated in 1898, was erected in Pack Square to commemorate North Carolina’s Civil War governor and Buncombe County native Zebulon B. Vance. The sponsoring Vance Memorial Association consisted of Asheville’s white elites and, when the monument was dedicated, the only inscriptions were the name Vance on the four sides of the plinth and a small Masonic inscription. The Asheville chapter of the UDC added to the monument a bronze plaque honoring Vance in 1938.

<sup>84</sup> Patrick Shane Parker, “Appalachian Activists: The Civil Rights Movement in Asheville, NC” (Master’s thesis, Appalachian State University, 2016), 31.

Samuel Orner of First Baptist Church, suggested bringing their plight to whites' attention. The year before Orner had written a column for the *Asheville Citizen* outlining his position. He did not want "social rights;" he claimed "the intelligent negro has as much horror to amalgamation as the most refined white man."<sup>85</sup> Orner stated that Blacks wanted civil rights—an equal footing in the legal, business, and political systems. Mentioning Booker T. Washington as an influence, Orner was happy to postpone integration if all else was equal. Rev. Charles Dusenbury, pastor at Calvary Presbyterian Church, became the de facto leader of the group, which sought to negotiate with the white establishment on the segregation issue.<sup>86</sup>



**View of Asheville from Beaucatcher Mountain, ca. 1910** (D. H. Ramsey Library Special Collections, University of North Carolina at Asheville).

Although manufacturing and agriculture remained important components of the local economy, Asheville's tourism industry grew exponentially in the early twentieth century. Health-seeking visitors crowded the city's sanitariums, and other wealthy tourists came for the pleasant climate and to enjoy the natural scenery.<sup>87</sup> Tourism continued to provide employment opportunities for Blacks, whose population roughly doubled from 1890 to 1920, growing from 3,567 to 7,145 people. Asheville's overall population also doubled in this period, climbing to 28,504 residents, of which African Americans made up approximately a quarter.

Following the creation of a Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA) in 1906 for white women, a group of Black women calling themselves the Employment Club began meeting on Sunday afternoons in 1913 to help find work and recreational opportunities for its members. Operating as an auxiliary to the YMI, the group evolved into a segregated branch of the YWCA.

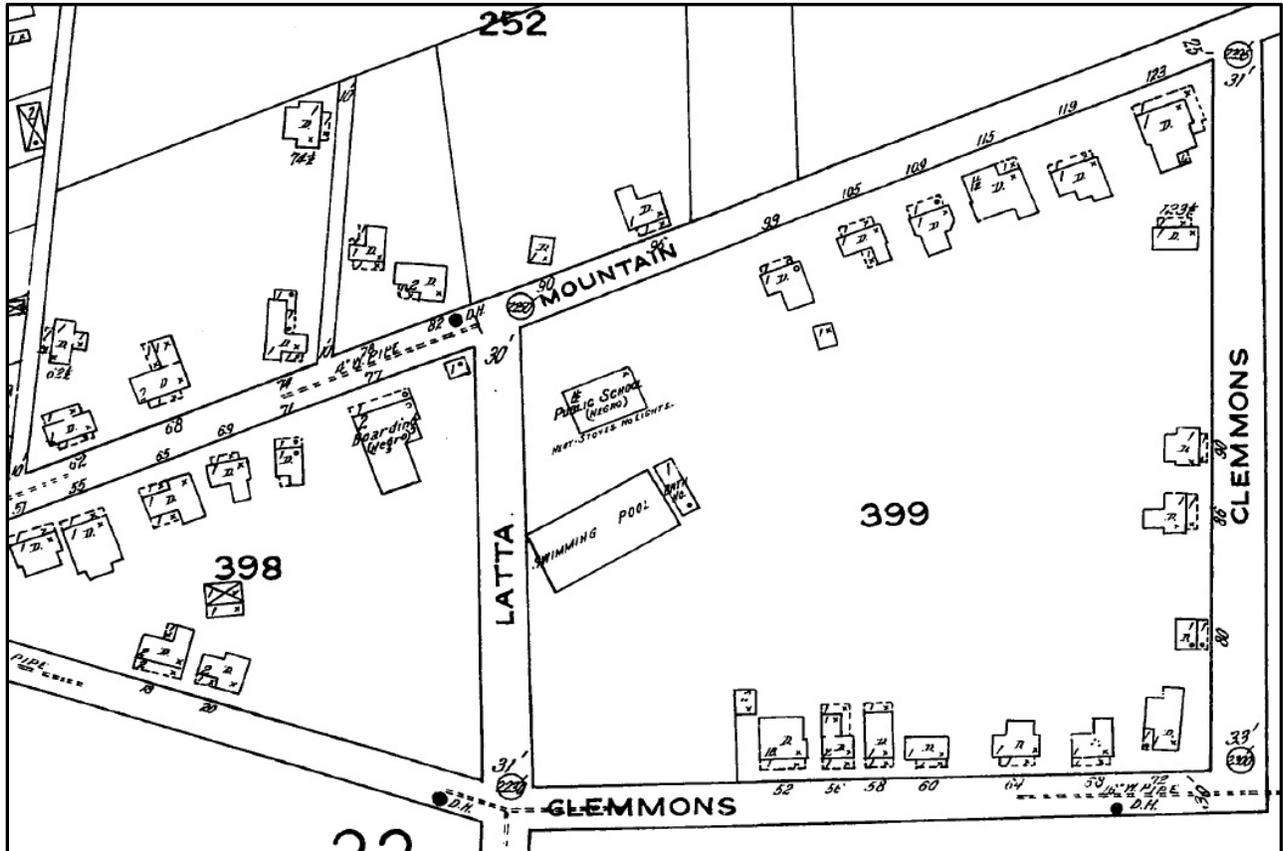
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<sup>85</sup> Samuel Orner, "Among the Colored People," *Asheville Citizen*, October 18, 1903, 10.

<sup>86</sup> Parker, "Appalachian Activists," 33.

<sup>87</sup> Starnes, *Creating Land of the Sky*, 67.

Under the leadership of Maggie Jones, the Employment Club purchased a building on Market Street for their meetings. Following World War I, the group purchased a house on College Street near Hopkins Chapel and the Allen School and, in 1921, organized the Phyllis Wheatley branch of the YWCA. Named for the first African American author to publish a book of poetry, the Phyllis Wheatley YWCA had offices and meeting rooms for classes, quarters for the Executive Secretary, and boarding accommodations for African American women. The facility was renovated in 1938, and a gymnasium that served all of the Black schools in the city and accommodated community recreation was built.<sup>88</sup>



**Mountain Street Pool shown on Asheville, N.C., Nov. 1917 Sanborn Map** (Library of Congress Geography and Map Division Washington, D.C.).

In June 1915, city officials instituted racially separated seating in Pack Square. The Aston Park pool, for whites, opened in August 1914 and quickly became one of the city’s major attractions. The success of Asheville’s municipal pool reportedly influenced the city of Charlotte to build a similar facility.<sup>89</sup> Black citizens also sought a municipal pool but objected to the

<sup>88</sup> Holly Jones, “A Century of Empowerment: The History of the YWCA,” YWCA of Asheville, 2007, <https://www.ywcaofasheville.org/about/history/> (accessed February 9, 2022).

<sup>89</sup> “The Swimming Pool,” *Asheville Citizen*, July 29, 1915, 4; “City Swimming Pool Is Now A Reality,” *Asheville Gazette-News*, August 18, 1914, 5; “The Swimming Pool,” *Asheville Citizen*, September 6, 1914, 4.

originally proposed site near the Hill Street School, arguing that a pool in the East End neighborhood would be more centrally located.<sup>90</sup> A pool for African Americans opened on Latta Street in 1916, adjacent to the Mountain Street School.

In the face of Jim Crow laws and segregationist policies, African Americans increasingly turned inward, forming their own institutions and creating their own sphere.<sup>91</sup> At the same time, a class of African American leaders emerged to mediate race relations. The rise of Asheville's Black elite, who understood the appearance of racial harmony in maintaining the Black-white power structure, caused a fair amount of tension among lower-class African Americans, but Black leaders relied on continued racial harmony as a negotiating tool.<sup>92</sup> Black ministers, such as Rev. Charles Dusenbury, expertly navigated these relationships. Dusenbury illustrated that power in the white community was contingent on control over the Black community, and over time he would extract gradual concessions for the Black community.<sup>93</sup> As historian Richard Starnes points out, both Black and white residents had an interest in good race relations; their livelihoods, based on tourism, depended on it.<sup>94</sup>

Dusenbury formed the Colored Betterment League in 1916, motivated by the tightening of racial restrictions that affected Black residents' movement in civic spaces. The League encouraged "peace and prosperity" and fostered the "law and order of the colored community."<sup>95</sup> Dusenbury's group responded to a new brand of subtle racism that included polite interracial forums, education, and an absence of overt violence.<sup>96</sup> The City formed an Interracial Commission in 1917, part of a broad movement organized by the Southern Methodist Church that established hundreds of similar commissions in southern towns. The denomination's General Missionary Conference condemned a recent surge in mob violence and hoped the commissions could encourage "mutual understanding, frank conference, and co-operation for the correction of wrong conditions."<sup>97</sup> The commissions were designed to maintain the status quo without political violence and to make economic, but not social ties,

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<sup>90</sup> "Negroes Want Pool In East Asheville," *Asheville Citizen*, November 2, 1916, 12.

<sup>91</sup> Parker, "Appalachian Activists," 29.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*, 30.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*, 33.

<sup>94</sup> Richard D. Starnes, "'A Conspicuous Example of What is Termed the New South': Tourism and Urban Development in Asheville, 1880-1925," *The North Carolina Historical Review* 80, no.1 (2003): 76.

<sup>95</sup> "Colored Betterment League is Organized," *Asheville Citizen*, November 18, 1916, 3.

<sup>96</sup> Glenda Elizabeth Gilmore, *Gender and Jim Crow: Women and Politics of White Supremacy* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996), epilogue, passim.

<sup>97</sup> "Mob Violence Condemned and Justice and Better Housing Urged for Negroes in South," *Asheville Citizen*, August, 8, 1921, 8.

with the African American community. The church accepted segregation, “not as a matter of race discrimination, but as a means of protection to both races.”<sup>98</sup>

The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), founded in 1909, established an Asheville branch and encouraged Blacks to vote in response to a school bond issue for better buildings.<sup>99</sup> The Asheville branch claimed 71 members in 1918, more than every other city in North Carolina with the exception of Winston-Salem, which had 80 members.<sup>100</sup> The impetus for the voter drive was to fully exercise Black citizens’ rights. Voters made laws; they did not just follow them.<sup>101</sup> White-owned newspapers, like many newspapers at the time, featured story after story of alleged African American criminal behavior but few stories about Black accomplishments. The *Pittsburgh Courier*, a nationally circulated Black-owned newspaper, and *The Colored Enterprise*, an Asheville-based newspaper, provided a more sympathetic and realistic portrayal of Black life.<sup>102</sup> *The Colored Enterprise* advertised NAACP events and promoted their material through the newspaper.<sup>103</sup>

Marcus Garvey’s United Negro Improvement Association (UNIA) urged Black empowerment and made great inroads in Asheville’s Black community in the 1920s. The first meeting recruited 111 members gathered at the YMI Building. Local businessman and developer E. W. Pearson became a state director for the organization and traveled widely, renting theaters to promote the organization and its freight shipping business, the Black Star Line.<sup>104</sup> Pearson’s popularity with North Carolinians, however, turned out to be a liability with Garvey. Pearson, along with Rev. James W. H. Eason, appear to have run afoul of Garvey through no fault of their own. Both Pearson and Eason were charismatic and drew large crowds to UNIA events in North Carolina. Their popularity appears to have been too much for Garvey, who accused both men of financial malfeasance and effectively expelled them from the organization in January 1922.<sup>105</sup>

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<sup>98</sup> Ibid.

<sup>99</sup> NAACP, *Tenth Annual Report of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People for the Year 1919* (New York: National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, 1920), 72.

<sup>100</sup> NAACP, *Report of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People for the Years 1917 and 1918: Eighth and Ninth Annual Reports* (New York: National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, 1919), 85. Asheville residents organized a number of NAACP branches: the 1910s Asheville branch; a second Asheville branch started by E. W. Pearson in the 1930s; an Allen School branch in the 1940s; and a West Asheville branch in the 1950s.

<sup>101</sup> NAACP, *Tenth Annual Report*, 11.

<sup>102</sup> Only one copy of *The Colored Enterprise* is known to exist, recovered from the time capsule in the base of the Vance Monument. The discovery of additional copies would open a new window into African American life in Asheville.

<sup>103</sup> NAACP, *Fifteenth Annual Report of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People for the Year 1924* (New York: National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, 1925), 53.

<sup>104</sup> Mary Rolinson, *Grassroots Garveyism* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007), 61.

<sup>105</sup> “Warning to the Colored People of North Carolina,” *Negro World*, January 28, 1922, 8.

The early 1920s also brought an influx of African Americans from South Carolina, exacerbating Asheville's delicate racial climate. As cotton harvests suffered from boll weevil infestations, many tenant farmers moved to Asheville. The real estate and construction boom, in addition to tourism and domestic positions, offered ready employment for new Black residents.<sup>106</sup> The population increases alarmed white residents, who attempted to delineate the city by renaming streets to serve as color lines or racial boundaries, a common practice during this period. In 1922, white residents of Buffalo Street in West Asheville, rattled by E. W. Pearson's expanding Park View subdivision, successfully petitioned the city to change the name of their portion of Buffalo Street to Burton Street after John Burton, Asheville's white founder.<sup>107</sup> A city plan prepared for Asheville in 1922 by noted planner John Nolen reinforced segregationist policy. Nolen claimed it was advantageous for races to be separated, provided there were suitable schools, homes, stores, and recreational facilities for each, and advocated working with Black leaders to solve any shortcomings.<sup>108</sup> Nolen's anodyne plan placed the burden on the private market to solve any problems, which only served to further minimize the political power of the Black community. Racial disquietude in the 1920s remained problematic for political leaders, who tried to maintain the appearance of harmonious race relations while acknowledging and implementing a racist agenda that risked alienating northern tourists.<sup>109</sup>

Among the separate facilities serving the Black community, Black leaders organized a hospital to provide care for Black patients administered by Black physicians and to train Black nurses. Previously, a clinic run by Dr. William G. Torrence, known as Torrence Hospital, had opened in 1910, but closed after his untimely death in 1915. To fill the void, the Blue Ridge Hospital and Training School was established at 186 Fayetteville Street in E. W. Pearson's Park View subdivision. In addition to being able to treat 30 patients, the hospital had a sun parlor, a maternity ward, and on-site training for Black nurses. The staff included Dr. Reuben H. Bryant, Dr. J. W. Walker, Dr. L. O. Miller, and Dr. John P. Holt. The facility moved from West Asheville to 18 Clingman Avenue by 1925, when the first three graduates of the nursing program completed their training. The hospital carried on with its admirable work for much of the 1920s, treating more than 1,800 patients in its first five years. Blue Ridge Hospital closed in 1929 as it struggled financially at the onset of the Great Depression.<sup>110</sup>

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<sup>106</sup> Kevin W. Young, "The Largest Manhunt in North Carolina's History: The Story of Broadus Miller," in *Blood in the Hills: A History of Violence in Appalachia*, ed. Bruce E. Stewart (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 2012), 343.

<sup>107</sup> "Desire Street to be Named in Honor of City's Founder," *Asheville Citizen*, April 10, 1922, 2.

<sup>108</sup> John Nolen, *The Asheville City Plan* (1925), 43-44.

<sup>109</sup> Steven Michael Nickollof, "Urban Renewal in Asheville: A History of Racial Segregation and Black Activism" (Master's thesis, Western Carolina University, 2015), 26-29; Starnes, *Creating the Land of the Sky*, 83-85.

<sup>110</sup> Davis, *Black Heritage*, 30-31; Theodore Harris, "Awarding of Degrees to the Graduating Class of the Blue Ridge Hospital Training of Nurses More than Incident, Epoch," *Asheville Citizen*, May 21, 1925, 4; Thomas Calder, "Asheville Archives: Blue Ridge Hospital Provides Medical Treatment to the City's Black Residents, 1922,"

To further develop cultural and intellectual opportunities, African American residents requested the creation of a library accessible to Black community members, since they were not allowed to use the segregated Pack Memorial Library. In 1926, the City rented and fixed up space in the YMI Building for use as a library and hired Irene O. Hendrick to organize it and serve as librarian. The decision to open the Colored Library stemmed not only from a desire to help Black citizens “improve their individual conditions and raise the standards of their race,” but also from a “disturbed” conscience that “saw the handsome Pack Memorial Library rise in all its chaste beauty, and could not forget that no negro could cross its entrance. It told visiting tourists of its friendship for its colored wards, its determination to do the right thing by them...and stammered a bit when asked what facilities it offered



**Flossie Metz, Lula Long, and Kathleen Wills (L to R), first nursing graduates, 1925, Blue Ridge Hospital, 18 Clingman Avenue** (*Heritage of Black Highlanders Collection*, D. H. Ramsey Library Special Collections, University of North Carolina at Asheville).

them for reading matter.”<sup>111</sup> A city-wide plea for book donations to stock the new library assured white residents, rather chillingly, that their contributions would be appreciated by those “who want Asheville to be able to tell its Northern tourists that its interest in the black man is not confined solely to keeping his neck out of a noose.”<sup>112</sup>

Irene Hendrick (1899-1992), a native of Florida, graduated from Florida A&M University before earning a certificate in library science from Spelman College in Atlanta. Hendrick, who was married to Dr. Robert Hendrick, a dentist, also studied at Winston-Salem Teachers College, Atlanta University, Howard University, and Teachers College of Columbia University. She helped dedicate the new Colored Library on April 7, 1927, along with Mayor John H. Cathey, Mrs.

*Mountain Xpress*, October 18, 2020, <https://mountainx.com/news/asheville-archives-blue-ridge-hospital-opens-for-the-citys-black-residents-1922/> (accessed February 15, 2022); “Blue Ridge Hospital and School of Nursing,” North Carolina Nursing History, Appalachian State University, <https://nursinghistory.appstate.edu/institution/blue-ridge-hospital-and-school-nursing> (accessed February 15, 2022).

<sup>111</sup> Theodore Harris, “Negro Library Depending Upon Book Donations,” *Asheville Citizen*, December 12, 1926, 1C; Davis, *Black Heritage*, 33-34.

<sup>112</sup> Harris, “Negro Library Depending Upon Book Donations,” 1C.

Glenn and Mrs. Irvin from Pack Memorial Library, and Dr. J. W. Walker. Mrs. Hendrick devotedly served the library and sought to highlight the lives and achievements of African Americans through its collection and exhibits. The library became fully part of the city's library system in 1951, and was renamed the Market Street Branch. Following integration of the library system in 1961, the branch closed in 1966 when Hendrick retired after 40 years of service to the community.<sup>113</sup>



**Three girls in line to check out books from librarian Irene Hendrick at the Market Street Branch, ca. 1946** (Buncombe County Special Collections, Pack Memorial Library, Asheville, North Carolina).

The tourism boom and real estate bubble of the early 1920s ultimately collapsed. Rampant land speculation and a plethora of municipal bonds saddled Asheville's public and private sectors with crippling debt. The City spent freely during the boom years, and when the Citizens

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<sup>113</sup> Davis, *Black Heritage*, 33-34; "Colored Library to Open Thursday," *Asheville Citizen*, April 3, 1927, 2B; "Head of Asheville's First 'Black Library' Dies," *Asheville Citizen-Times*, March 29, 1992, 19A.

Bank and Trust Company failed in November 1930, it erased more than \$8 million of city, county, and public school funds.<sup>114</sup>

The New Deal-era relief programs established under President Franklin D. Roosevelt helped assuage some of the economic strain in the 1930s, but programs and projects available for African Americans were not plentiful. The Works Progress Administration (WPA) operated a women's sewing room in Asheville, where Black women were employed to sew or patch clothing. The Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) accepted African American enrollees, but their number was limited by quotas set by CCC policy. Many of the segregated CCC camps for Black enrollees were located in the Piedmont region of the state, although three camps for African Americans were assigned to the U.S. Forest Service in Clay and Macon counties.<sup>115</sup>

The locally administered Negro Welfare Council assisted Asheville's Black community during the Depression with funds from the city's Community Chest. In actuality, the "Council" consisted of one social worker, Leander G. Blackus, and additional volunteers whose goals were simply "moral, physical, and economic betterment."<sup>116</sup> Born in Philadelphia and educated at Tuskegee Institute and Temple University, Blackus organized a free clinic in the Odd Fellows Hall on Eagle Street where six doctors, two dentists, and a pharmacist were expected to serve between 3,000 and 5,000 African Americans in Asheville who had no other medical care.<sup>117</sup> The Council sponsored a baseball league with teams from South Asheville, East End, Southside, and Shiloh; a vacant lot at the corner of Eagle and Biltmore Avenue was converted into a baseball field. Blackus, who coached athletics and taught physical education before joining the Welfare Council, encouraged a range of recreational activities. A marble tournament at the baseball field, won by Harold Smith from Shiloh, brought out a crowd of players and spectators.<sup>118</sup> Theater programs were a feature in 1934 as New York actor Charles Wells ran a workshop for young African Americans at the YMI.<sup>119</sup>

In 1931, the Negro Welfare Council started the Negro Music Festival at the Carolina Tobacco Warehouse on Valley Street. The festival was wildly popular with everyone and, in 1932 and 1933, it was held at McCormick Field.<sup>120</sup> When it returned to the tobacco warehouse in 1934,

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<sup>114</sup> Chase, *Asheville*, 111-113.

<sup>115</sup> Harley E. Jolley, *"That Magnificent Army of Youth and Peace": The Civilian Conservation Corps in North Carolina, 1933-1942* (Raleigh, NC: Office of Archives and History, North Carolina Department of Cultural Resources, 2007), 102-120.

<sup>116</sup> "Negro Welfare Council Activity Far Reaching," Community Chest Section, *Asheville Citizen*, October 25, 1935, 5.

<sup>117</sup> Margaret Long Leonard, "Negro Social Worker is Improving Lot of Colored People Here," *Asheville Citizen-Times*, February 18, 1934, 7.

<sup>118</sup> "Many Activities Occupy Negroes," *Asheville Citizen*, September 17, 1933, 22.

<sup>119</sup> "Little Theater for Negroes is Organized Here," *Asheville Citizen*, July 20, 1934, 6.

<sup>120</sup> "Negro Music Festival is Well Received by Audience of 800 Here," *Asheville Citizen*, July 28, 1934, 14.

800 people, nearly evenly split between Blacks and whites, formed a standing-room-only crowd for the festival. Soloists included local dentist and community leader Robert Hendrick, who sang “Chloe,” and other singers backed by choruses and choral groups. The Community Glee Club, a group of 20 men and women, sang “Swinging on the Golden Gates,” which brought the house down and resulted in an encore of “Who Built the Ark.” Proceeds from the festival went towards buying playground equipment, including see-saws, sand pits, and horseshoe courts at Hill Street School; a playground at the Mountain Street School; and a sand pit at the Asheland Avenue School.<sup>121</sup> The 1937 Negro Music Festival featured the North Carolina Symphony Orchestra accompanying local singers. White residents were invited but sat in a special section reserved for them.<sup>122</sup>

Working in conjunction with the WPA and the National Youth Administration, the Negro Welfare Council worked with transient Black youths who were on court probation. Events included picnics, hikes and other outdoor activities, and the observance of national holidays. During the 1938 holiday season, the Council distributed 400 baskets of food, 1,500 toys, and a large quantity of fruits and nuts. The Council operated recreational facilities, organized ten clubs, and ran four musical organizations.<sup>123</sup> While the programs of the Negro Welfare Council served many Black residents, the facilities available were too small to effectively serve the 14,000 African American residents of Asheville, who constituted approximately one-fourth of the city’s population.<sup>124</sup>

White residents continued to use the city’s municipal parks, pool, and country clubs for recreation during the Depression. In 1933, Magnolia Park was set aside for African American use. The Mountain Street Pool remained open for Black swimmers. Black citizens also had access to a number of small playgrounds, usually less than a half-acre in size, located on Gudger Street in the Hill Street neighborhood, Madison Avenue in Chestnut Hill (Millard Playground), and on the Southside at the location of the former Oates Park. Shiloh Park, a privately owned facility adjoining the Shiloh School, opened in 1932, when hundreds attended a doubleheader baseball game and a barbecue. Prominent Black businessman E. W. Pearson managed the park, which included a baseball diamond, swimming pool, and a large pavilion.<sup>125</sup>

Health care in the Black community had been scarce since the Blue Ridge Hospital closed in 1929. Asheville had five hospitals in 1939, but Black patients were banned from all of them

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<sup>121</sup> Ibid.

<sup>122</sup> “Audience Thrilled by Negro Sprituals at Music Festival Here,” *Asheville Citizen*, September 24, 1937, 15.

<sup>123</sup> “Welfare Council Has Fine Record,” *Asheville Citizen*, March 25, 1939, 24.

<sup>124</sup> “Negro welfare Council Activity Far Reaching,” Community Chest Section, *Asheville Citizen*, October 25, 1935, 5

<sup>125</sup> “Negro Park to Open,” *Asheville Citizen-Times*, July 31, 1932, 8A; “Negro Recreation Park Opens Today,” *Asheville Citizen*, August 4, 1932, 16; “New Negro Recreation Park Attracts Crowds,” *Asheville Citizen-Times*, August, 6, 1932, 6.

except Mission Hospital, which had 18 beds for Black patients in a segregated wing.<sup>126</sup> In order for an expectant African American mother to be admitted to Mission Hospital's maternity department, she had to have at least two pre-existing conditions that threatened the pregnancy. The mother was then confined to the segregated ward. Dr. Mary Frances Shuford, who was white, treated African American patients at her downtown office until white tenants in her office building complained about Black patients waiting to see the doctor.<sup>127</sup>



**Asheville Colored Hospital, ca. 1944** (Buncombe County Special Collections, Pack Memorial Library, Asheville, North Carolina).

Because few beds were allotted for the treatment of African Americans at Mission Hospital, Dr. Shuford opened a clinic for Black residents in an eight-room house on College Street in 1941. Between the 12 beds at Dr. Shuford's clinic and the 18 beds at Mission Hospital, 30 beds were available for Black patients in the entire city, roughly half as many needed to adequately serve the community. The following year, the clinic, which was endorsed by the Buncombe County Medical Society, incorporated as the Asheville Colored Hospital with a board of directors comprised of white and Black citizens, including Drs. Shuford and Catherine Carr as well as Black physicians Drs. John Holt, L. O. Miller, and E. B. Thompson. The medical society began to petition city and county authorities for a facility where Black doctors could treat Black patients and train Black nurses. A campaign was launched to acquire the two-story, ten-room

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<sup>126</sup> "\$12,000 Sought For Colored Hospital," *Asheville Citizen-Times*, December 27, 1942, 1; "Colored Hospital Provides Vital Service," *Asheville Citizen*, October 9 1945, 11.

<sup>127</sup> Thomas Calder, "Asheville Archives: Asheville Colored Hospital opens, 1943," *Mountain Xpress*, September 11, 2018, <https://mountainx.com/news/asheville-archives-asheville-colored-hospital-opens-1943> (accessed July 22, 2019).

residence of the late Dr. R. H. Bryant, a Black physician, at the corner of Biltmore and Southside avenues. The fundraising drive exceeded its goal by \$7,000, which was placed in reserve for hospital operations. The new hospital facility opened in October 1943, and remained active until the Asheville Colored Hospital was consolidated with Mission Hospital in 1951.<sup>128</sup>

The Asheville Colored Hospital, while a great improvement, did not serve all of the Black community's health care needs. In 1947, leading African American citizens formed and staffed the City Negro Health Council. The council encouraged Black residents to participate in various health drives such as a mass x-ray survey sponsored by the U.S. Board of Public Health, in which everyone over the age of 15 would receive a chest x-ray to screen for tuberculosis. In 1949, Biltmore Hospital agreed to accept and treat premature African American babies. As the *Asheville Citizen-Times* noted, the move was expected to bring about a "marked drop in the number of premature infants that die."<sup>129</sup> Other services remained nonexistent or in short supply, including a shortage of beds for African American tuberculosis patients. Reports estimated that the City had one hospital bed for every 100 white residents, while there was one bed for every 1,000 Black residents before the number of beds added by Dr. Shuford brought that number down to one bed for every 450 Black residents. Even so, the 31 hospital beds available to Black patients in 1949 remained insufficient to properly serve the city's Black population.<sup>130</sup>

World War II brought a range of opportunities for African Americans, including military service and employment in war-related industries. American Enka, a rayon factory outside Asheville, produced uniforms, bomber tires, and bandages, among other products. The federal government moved the General Accounting Office's Postal Accounts Division and the U.S. Army Flight Control Command to Asheville. Asheville's hotels, which often served as demobilization and disbursement centers, operated at capacity during the war.<sup>131</sup> African American nurses were assigned to the Veteran's hospital at Oteen.<sup>132</sup>

More than 80 Black residents from Buncombe County volunteered for World War II. James S. Latham Jr. from the Southside neighborhood served in New Guinea as a technical sergeant in Army intelligence. Latham graduated from Johnson C. Smith College in Charlotte and earned a

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<sup>128</sup> Dr. Mary Frances Shuford, interviewed by Louis Silveri, August 12, 1975, Southern Highlands Research Center Oral History Collection, D. H. Ramsey Library Special Collections, University of North Carolina at Asheville; Mrs. William F. Taylor, ed., *One Hundred Years of Service: Memorial Mission Hospital 1885-1985* (Asheville, NC: Memorial Mission Hospital, 1985), 37-39.

<sup>129</sup> "Negro Health Week Focuses on Attention to Services Here," *Asheville Citizen-Times*, April 3, 1949, 10C.

<sup>130</sup> "\$12,000 Sought For Colored Hospital," *Asheville Citizen-Times*, December 27, 1942, 1.

<sup>131</sup> Pamela Mitchem, "Wonder Team of the Carolinas: C. L. Moore, the Asheville Blues, and Minor League Baseball in the South," *Black Ball: A Negro Leagues Journal* 5, no. 1 (Spring 2012), 39.

<sup>132</sup> "9 Negro Nurses Are Assigned to Oteen Hospital," *Asheville Citizen*, November 20, 1942, 12.

Master's degree from the University of Chicago.<sup>133</sup> Asheville native Dr. Robert Hendrick Jr. joined the service as a lieutenant. Dr. Hendrick, who graduated from Northwestern University in dentistry, got involved in community affairs and civil rights activities after the war. Robert C. Robinson of the Heart of Chestnut area served as a Tuskegee airman and participated in the "Raid on Berlin" in March 1945. His plane was reported missing on the return flight and believed to have crashed in the Udine region of Italy after running out of fuel. Robinson is buried at Arlington National Cemetery.<sup>134</sup>

After the war, returning veterans faced an immediate housing shortage. "Red tape" and limited building materials were blamed as complicating factors when Black veterans attempted unsuccessfully to use the G.I. Bill to acquire housing.<sup>135</sup> While these issues were relevant, racist federal policies often went unmentioned. In Asheville, the 1920s real estate collapse caused some investors to abandon their properties and stop paying taxes. Years of deferred maintenance meant absentee landlords thought their holdings were not worth additional investment and stopped maintaining their properties altogether. Returning veterans were often forced to share housing in segregated areas. In 1946, the *Asheville Citizen-Times*, focusing especially on the East End and Southside, pointed out that these areas gave a grim view of Asheville to tourists, "a first impression that is far from favorable."<sup>136</sup> The message was a harbinger of urban renewal under the guise of promoting and supporting tourism.

Federal money available through New Deal relief programs played a significant role in reconfiguring the city. Newly available mortgage insurance provided by the Federal Housing Administration (FHA) and Veterans Administration (VA) made it possible for developers to build houses for middle-income buyers. Before these policies were in place, most loans were for five years only, and required at least 50 percent down at the time of purchase, which made them accessible only to the wealthy. Federal mortgage insurance made it feasible for banks to loan veterans 30-year mortgages sizable enough to purchase single-family homes as well as automobiles.

The terms of FHA and VA loans also dictated the forms of development. Both types of federal loans followed the precedent set by the Home Owners' Loan Corporation (HOLC), which assessed credit risk on a neighborhood-by-neighborhood basis nationwide. HOLC loans were biased toward new neighborhoods populated by white residents, which received the coveted A-rating while older, mixed-use neighborhoods and those with African American residents were given lower grades. FHA and VA programs reinforced the segregation and homogeneity begun

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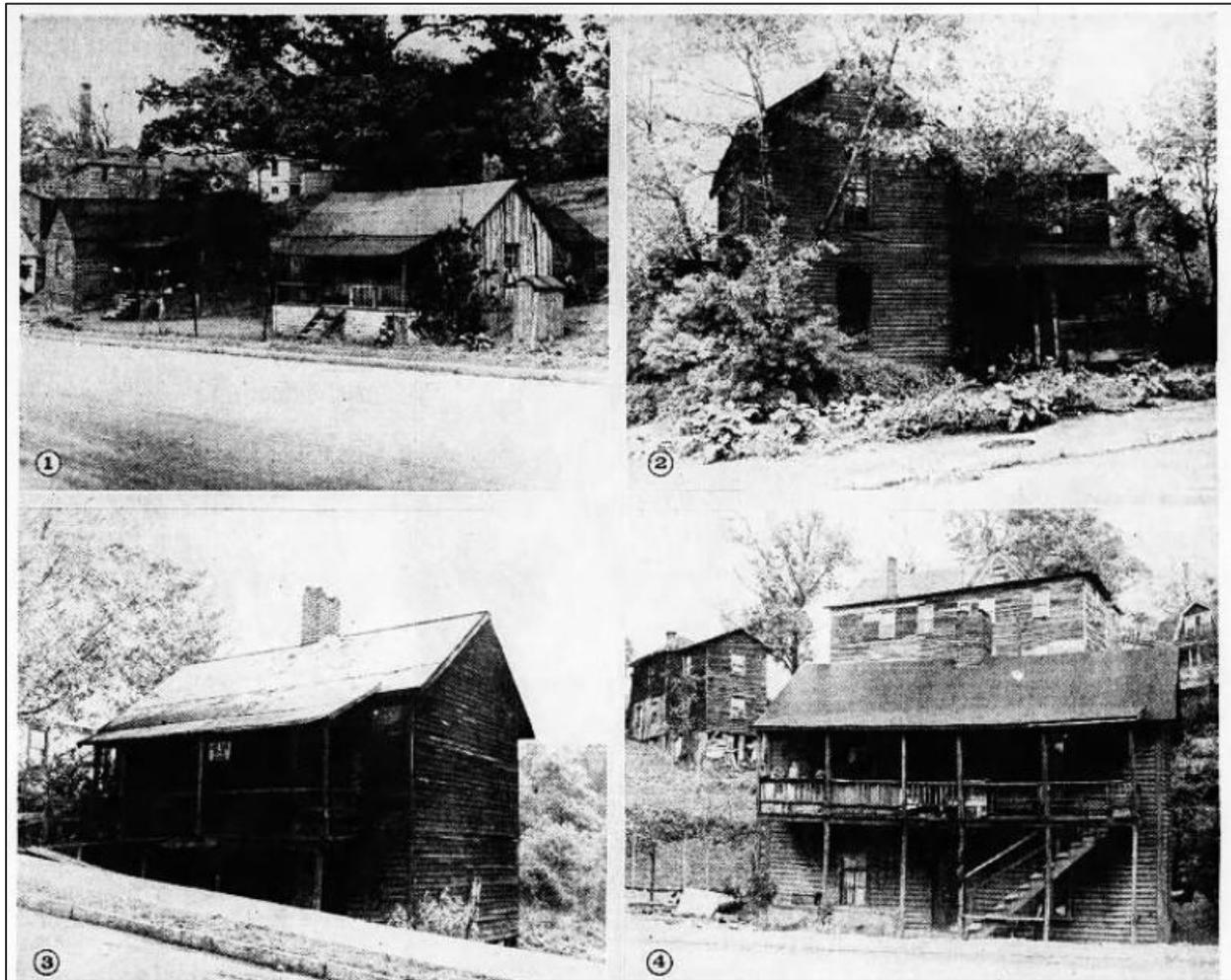
<sup>133</sup> "Asheville Negro is Serving in New Guinea Area," *Asheville Citizen*, January 9, 1943, 5.

<sup>134</sup> "Robert C. Robinson Jr.," CAF Rise Above, March 21, 2019, <https://cafriseabove.org/robert-c-robinson-jr/> (accessed June 16, 2022).

<sup>135</sup> James M. Rogers, "Negro Housing Problem Here Extremely Grave," *Asheville Citizen-Times*, May 5, 1946, 1.

<sup>136</sup> *Ibid.*

by the HOLC. The FHA Underwriting Manual explicitly preferred segregation by race and income level and called for subdivision design that ensured separation through winding streets that limited outside access by not connecting to existing, dominant thoroughfares.<sup>137</sup>



**East End and Southside housing in 1946; photos 1 and 4 of Poplar Street, number 2 on Asheland Avenue, and number 3 on McDowell Street, *Asheville Citizen-Times*, May 5, 1946.**

The 1937 HOLC map of Asheville, which helped determine mortgage lending decisions, provides an interesting look at the prejudices inherent in the system. The map divided Asheville into four categories: Best (blue), Still Desirable (green), Definitely Declining (yellow) and Hazardous (red). Marking the undesirable areas in red eventually led to the term “redlining” and made it extremely difficult, if not impossible, to get a loan for properties in these areas. Redlining resulted in large-scale disinvestment in those neighborhoods considered hazardous by the HOLC. In Asheville, Burton Street, Southside, East End/Valley Street, and Stumptown

<sup>137</sup> Hanchett, *Sorting Out*, 229-233; Richard Rothstein, *The Color of Law* (New York: Liveright Publishing Corporation, 2017), 63-66.

were all labeled hazardous. Shiloh and the small African American enclaves around Montford were considered declining.

In 1948, the City initiated a “clean-up drive” that immediately ran into opposition, in which city workers were hampered by a pronounced lack of citizen cooperation. Already in the midst of the post-war housing crisis, residents were hesitant to complain about housing conditions lest they be put out on the street. Real estate agents, who owned many of the decrepit properties, balked at residents’ requests and refused to do any repairs or cleaning.<sup>138</sup> Nonetheless, a majority of Black residents supported the effort, which aimed to mitigate poor and overcrowded housing conditions. The effort helped in limited ways but did not address the principal causes: racist government policies and code enforcement.<sup>139</sup>

Federal housing programs in Asheville began in 1940 with the formation of the Asheville Housing Authority (AHA). Due to a lack of funding and World War II, the AHA remained inactive until 1949. The City’s first public housing project, Lee-Walker Heights (BN6450), was constructed near downtown in 1951. The complex consisted of barracks-style apartment buildings containing 96 units. Hillcrest Apartments (BN6446), which opened in 1958 in the Hill Street neighborhood, was larger with 264 units. Physical isolation was a mark of both complexes. Situated between Biltmore and Southside avenues, Lee-Walker occupied a hilltop site accessed by a single entrance road. Hillcrest became isolated following the construction of interstate highways on three sides and because of the French Broad River on the fourth. Hillcrest also had only one entrance as well as a footbridge that was eventually gated off, forcing residents to cross the highways on foot. In the 1960s, both public housing projects were encircled by seven-foot fences, while Pisgah View, a public housing complex for white residents, was surrounded by a four-foot fence.

Soon after the opening of Lee-Walker Heights, it was evident the public housing complex would not meet the needs of the Black community. In 1951, the Asheville and Buncombe County Citizens’ Organization (ABCCO), an African American community group, asked the AHA for more units, but many realtors, who considered public housing “socialistic,” opposed the effort.<sup>140</sup> A letter to the newspaper mocked the Asheville realtors, stating, “I assume the realtors in Asheville in their courageous campaign for sponsoring privately owned houses for Negroes anticipate providing respectable comfortable standard dwellings in lieu of the frequently over-priced jerry-built units which are being continuously provided.”<sup>141</sup> New public housing units were proposed in 1955 but once again ran into opposition from the Asheville Board of Realtors. Instead of building additional units, they urged strict code enforcement “to

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<sup>138</sup> “Workers In Clean-up Drive Hit Some Snags,” *Asheville Citizen-Times*, August 19, 1948, 15.

<sup>139</sup> “City Clean-Up Drive is Gaining Momentum,” *Asheville Citizen*, August 15, 1948, 12.

<sup>140</sup> “Housing Authority Urged to Construct More Negro Units,” *Asheville Citizen*, February 29, 1952, 17.

<sup>141</sup> “Letters to the Editor – Why Public Housing is Needed,” *Asheville Citizen*, April 14, 1952, 4.

meet the slum problem.”<sup>142</sup> The City hired a code enforcement officer, but enforcement remained inconsistent.<sup>143</sup>

Life could be exceedingly difficult for both Black and white residents living in poverty, but segregation severely limited the options and opportunities available to Black residents. Segregationist policies, which curtailed movement to white neighborhoods, meant that African Americans in the urban core had no option but to pay for often substandard and overcrowded living conditions. The lack of code enforcement led to subdivided houses and extra dwelling units on parcels that increased residential density. Welfare lien laws further inhibited improvements and property maintenance. Homeowners resisted applying for state welfare benefits because a lien was put against their property for the amount of the benefits received. Renters receiving welfare payments, as in many other states at the time, endured every manner of humiliation at the hands of their caseworkers, who could drop by at any time. Welfare recipients were discouraged from having useful household items such as telephones.<sup>144</sup>

Code enforcement continued to be virtually nonexistent, and residents got little relief from the City when dealing with landlords who took advantage of the fact that African Americans were barred from legally owning property or residing in sections of the city socially reserved for whites. In the 1950s, when local realtors recommended serial offenders be taken to court, the city building inspector replied that it was office policy to give “friendly cooperation first, then take them to court.”<sup>145</sup> Even this low standard appears to have failed by the early 1960s, when code enforcement actions were taken only in cases of serious emergency or after the completion of a citizen petition to the city. In 1963, the Housing and Home Finance Agency cut off federal funding to Asheville due to its virtual non-enforcement of the housing code.<sup>146</sup> Lack of code enforcement significantly undermined wealth creation in African American neighborhoods. White investors and landlords could charge exorbitant rents because of neighborhood segregation and limited housing supply, but Black homeowners were unable to increase the value of their homes when white investors refused to maintain their properties.

Following World War II, suburban development increased in Asheville, as it did across the country, and accelerated through the 1950s and 1960s. Spurred by rising automobile ownership and access to low-entry FHA and VA loans, urban populations fled decaying city centers for newly constructed subdivisions. Asheville followed this trend and began spreading outward

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<sup>142</sup> Doug Reed, “Housing Unit Erection is Studied,” *Asheville Citizen*, December 30, 1955, 1.

<sup>143</sup> Council Urged To Adopt State Construction Code,” *Asheville Citizen*, April 3, 1959, 9; Philip Clark, “Housing, Building Codes Taken Up,” *Asheville Citizen*, December 11, 1959, 1.

<sup>144</sup> Model Cities Application, Asheville Model Cities Commission and Associated Papers, D. H. Ramsey Library, Special Collections, University of North Carolina Asheville.

<sup>145</sup> “Housing Code Enforcement is Discussed,” *Asheville-Citizen Times*, August 24, 1954, 11.

<sup>146</sup> “Stiffer Housing Code Proposed,” *Asheville Citizen-Times*, July 4, 1963, 21.

along its principal highways and thoroughfares. For the most part, segregationist policies limited the mobility of Blacks to the point that outmigration further shifted city demographics. As community historian Henry Robinson notes, returning Black veterans were met with the “stiff salute of racial segregation” and often went North for jobs or to college out of state; many did not come back to Asheville.<sup>147</sup> In Asheville, some African American families were moving from the urban neighborhoods to the suburbs by choice and others by necessity.

Suburbanization in Shiloh, a traditionally Black neighborhood approximately four miles south of downtown, jumped in the 1950s. New subdivisions within Shiloh were platted and advertised, including Whitehurst Park (BN6466), Lincoln Park (BN6426), and Lincoln Park Extension. Roosevelt Park (BN6424), a subdivision planned for African American residents in the 1920s, revived its lot sales and home construction. The Asheville Redevelopment Commission (ARC), created in 1958, worked with the North Carolina Department of Transportation (NCDOT) to construct the Crosstown Expressway and targeted the Hill Street neighborhood for part of its route. The ARC declared the neighborhood blighted to diminish its value and secure the necessary right-of-way. Concurrently, the FHA approved Section 221 loans for people displaced by highway construction, and Hill Street residents were able to take advantage of these new home loans. The first house in North Carolina built under this program was erected on West Chapel Road in Shiloh (BN6422).<sup>148</sup> Suburbanization continued into the 1970s and beyond, even as urban renewal projects of the period attempted to draw residents back to the city.

## **Integrating the City: Civil Rights in Asheville**

World War II provided a catalyst for the Civil Rights Movement across the country. Black and white Americans had come together to defeat a common enemy. In the process, they had integrated the military and industries supporting the war effort—a pressing need for manpower temporarily eclipsed most racial biases. After the war, the NAACP responded to the shamefully unequal treatment of Black veterans returning from service by calling for a broader effort to integrate businesses and institutions in cities throughout the nation.

The Asheville branch of the NAACP established in 1918 appears to have disbanded or gone dormant at some point, because greater fanfare and newspaper coverage surrounded the organization of a new Asheville branch by E. W. Pearson in 1933. In July, the NAACP held a mass meeting at Pearson Park in West Asheville, and within a year, the branch was up and running

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<sup>147</sup> Henry Robinson, “A Historical Perspective on the East End,” in *Andrea Clark: East End Photographs Circa 1968* (Asheville: Buncombe County Library, 2009), 13.

<sup>148</sup> “First House is Started for Displaced Families,” *Asheville Citizen-Times*, March 5, 1958, 9.

with G. W. Byrd serving as president and Pearson as secretary.<sup>149</sup> The Asheville branch held open meetings to recruit and inform, and sponsored speakers such as Oscar DePriest, a Black congressman from Illinois, who addressed a meeting held at the Carolina Tobacco Warehouse on Valley Street.<sup>150</sup> Although the local branch initially engaged in voter registration drives and educational meetings, white leaders warned of the group's influence elsewhere in the state. An editorial in the *Asheville Citizen* cautioned against the efforts of Walter White, executive secretary of the NAACP, to encourage equal pay for Black teachers in North Carolina. The newspaper described White as "smart, militant, and, at times, effective."<sup>151</sup> The editors argued, in an obvious attempt to downplay the merits of his complaint, that White was stoking racial division despite what they claimed to be an admirable track record for improvements in Black education in North Carolina.

The NAACP grew in influence and membership during World War II and, in addition to working with the local branch, Black residents sometimes contacted the national organization where Thurgood Marshall served as special counsel. On several occasions, Marshall advised the Asheville branch on legal strategy, including the matter of Lawrence Sigmon, who was summoned for jury duty and then beaten and arrested when he reported to the courthouse. He was sentenced to three months on the road crews. Following an investigation by the Department of Justice, Sigmon's sentence was reversed.<sup>152</sup>

The Asheville branch joined with others across the state in organizing the North Carolina State Conference in 1943. West Asheville resident Hattie H. Love, principal of the Burton Street School, served as secretary of the state conference and attended the national NAACP convention.<sup>153</sup> Hill Street resident Leila Michael, a teacher at the Hill Street School, worked as a NAACP state organizer.<sup>154</sup> The intrepid Asheville branch became involved in a number of local matters including the case of Charlie Hopkins, a Black man accused of killing a postal worker in Rutherfordton in 1943, and a complaint against Arthur Patton, a white voting registrar who refused registration to three Black men in 1940. Thurgood Marshall again intervened on behalf of the Asheville branch. Patton was later tried in court but acquitted.<sup>155</sup> By the end of 1945, the

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<sup>149</sup> "Colored Group to Hold Meet This Afternoon," *Asheville Citizen-Times*, July 16, 1933, 6A; Ernest H. Miller, ed., *Miller's Asheville, North Carolina City Directory 1935* (Asheville, NC: Piedmont Directory Co., 1935), 117.

<sup>150</sup> "Will Meet Tuesday," *Asheville Citizen-Times*, July 1, 1934, 6A; "DePriest Is Coming To Speak Here Sunday," *Asheville Citizen*, June 22, 1934, 20.

<sup>151</sup> "Blundering Gravely," editorial, *Asheville Citizen*, November 1, 1933, 4.

<sup>152</sup> Memorandum for Secretary's Report, February 1940—Legal Department, NAACP Records Collection, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.; "Negro, Called as Juror, Quarrels with Officers, Is Given Road Sentence," *Asheville Citizen*, June 27, 1939, 9; "Negro Charged With Perjury," *Asheville Citizen*, July 1, 1939, 11.

<sup>153</sup> *Miller's Asheville City Directory 1943*, Vol. XL (Richmond, VA: Piedmont Co., 1943), 312.

<sup>154</sup> *Miller's Asheville City Directory 1943*, 345.

<sup>155</sup> Seth Kotch, *Lethal State: A History of the Death Penalty in North Carolina* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2019), 144–45.

NAACP tallied 50 branches across North Carolina with a total membership of 9,799 individuals, including 409 members in Asheville.<sup>156</sup>



**West Asheville resident Hattie Love (fifth from left) at NAACP national conference in Detroit** (*Heritage of Black Highlanders Collection*, D. H. Ramsey Library Special Collections, University of North Carolina at Asheville).

During the 1950s, the Black community began to split, or at least showed signs of splintering, over social and political activism. The 1953 municipal election exposed fault lines in the support for the system of Black elites representing the community to the white power structure. Two African American candidates ran for city council. Victor McDowell, a barber, ran on the Republican ticket, while dentist Dr. Robert Hendrick ran as a Democrat.<sup>157</sup> Members of the Black community began to question the political status quo and how much the community should push back in pursuit of civil rights. In April 1953, Hugh Johnson, secretary of the Market Street YMCA, was dismissed from his job. Johnson claimed he was fired “because of his militant attitude on the matter of racial segregation and discrimination in the

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<sup>156</sup> Raymond Gavins, “The NAACP in North Carolina During the Age of Segregation,” in *New Directions in Civil Rights Studies*, eds. Armstead L. Robinson and Patricia Sullivan (Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia Press, 1991), 110.

<sup>157</sup> “Political Tension Tightens in Race for City Council,” *Asheville Citizen*, April 14, 1953, 1B.

community.”<sup>158</sup> Johnson came to Asheville in January 1952, after a stint working at the Chestnut Street YMCA in Louisville, Kentucky.<sup>159</sup> The Chestnut Street YMCA was aligned with Louisville’s Quinn Chapel A.M.E. Church, which was historically outspoken and organized on the issue of civil rights. The congregation integrated Louisville’s streetcars in 1870 and financially supported the NAACP’s *Buchanan v. Warley* segregation ordinance case in 1914–15. In this context, Johnson’s militancy was not surprising. Johnson felt that his attitude offended certain powerful whites, who pressured the management committee to release him, claiming he had placed outside interests before his YMCA work, which led to criticism of the organization. Johnson believed it was his protest of the dismissal of African American nurses from Victoria Hospital in the fall of 1952 and his complaints about Mission Hospital’s refusal to treat Thomas W. Simpson, a Black man who was shot in the face by an ex-policeman.<sup>160</sup> While a petition was started to reinstate the “outspoken” Johnson, it does not appear to have been successful.<sup>161</sup>

The loss at the ballot box and apparent community fissures did not slow civil rights activities in Asheville. Attorney Harold Epps organized the Buncombe County Committee for Negroes in 1953, while Tabernacle Baptist Church formed a committee to “wage an all out community campaign” to get restroom facilities for African Americans in the downtown shopping district.<sup>162</sup> Employment opportunities and access to recreation facilities became two major issues for the Black community. The *Carolina Times*, a Black-owned newspaper based in Durham, chastised Asheville because the City and local industry refused to hire African Americans. City and county officials responded by parroting their masquerade of harmonious race relations.<sup>163</sup>

Proposed integration of the city’s recreation facilities in the wake of the Supreme Court’s *Brown v. Board of Education* decision prohibiting the segregation of public facilities, including parks and playgrounds, led to conflicts about the sale of city-owned facilities to private parties. The sale of public property to private entities became a common way to avoid integration, as these sales frequently led to private club rules and the exclusion of African Americans. Local attorney Ruben Dailey and the ABCCO protested when the City closed the deteriorating Recreation Park pool and prepared to sell it to the Asheville Junior Chamber of Commerce (Jaycees), claiming it was too expensive to refurbish. Following the sale of the pool in 1957, the Jaycees reopened the facility in 1958 “by membership only.”<sup>164</sup>

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<sup>158</sup> “Fire YMCA Secretary,” *Pittsburgh Courier*, April 11, 1953, 1.

<sup>159</sup> “Johnson Named Secretary of YMCA Branch,” *Asheville Citizen*, January 16, 1952, 10.

<sup>160</sup> “Fire YMCA Secretary,” 4.

<sup>161</sup> “See Foster as Tuskegee’s Next President,” *Pittsburgh Courier*, April 18, 1953, 13.

<sup>162</sup> “Protest Against City Stores is Organized,” *Carolina Times*, July 25, 1953, 1.

<sup>163</sup> Gershenhorn, *Louis Austin and the Carolina Times*, 129.

<sup>164</sup> “Jaycees Get Title to Pool at Rec Park,” *Asheville Citizen*, January 28, 1958, 1.

Similar tactics occurred at the Municipal Golf Course, a highly regarded layout designed by renowned golf course architect Donald Ross in 1927. When “Muni” opened, Asheville became the first city in North and South Carolina to have a municipal golf course, but despite its apparent prestige, the course struggled financially. As a municipal course, it was the first golf course in the state to be racially integrated, albeit on a limited basis. Members of Asheville’s Black community, many of whom caddied at the city’s other private country clubs, were allowed to play the course on designated days, but Muni became fully integrated beginning in 1954. Following the Supreme Court decision desegregating public facilities, the newly incorporated Haw Creek Community Club offered to purchase the golf course and clubhouse from the City. Black attorneys Ruben Dailey and Harold Epps, speaking on behalf of the Black community, strongly protested the proposed sale.<sup>165</sup> Due to public opposition, the City withdrew legal advertisements for the sale, and the issue was dropped. Black golfers continued to have use of the club two days a week. A second proposal to purchase the club in 1956 again met with resistance from neighborhood residents, the Haw Creek Lions Club, the American Legion at Oteen, the Beverly Hills Community Club, and the Haw Creek Parent Teacher Association. During the second proposed sale, an *Asheville Citizen* editorial called for renewing the city’s Interracial Committee, which had disbanded in the 1940s, noting, “Both races have too much to lose to let racial tensions and frictions destroy their heretofore good relations.”<sup>166</sup> Officials ultimately decided against selling the integrated course, which began hosting the Skyview Golf Association Tournament in 1960. Organizers for the tournament hoped to promote the game of golf among African Americans, and the first year’s field consisted of 50 Black golfers. Over the years, the Skyview Tournament grew into one of the largest tournaments in the southeast and contributed to Muni’s full integration.<sup>167</sup>

As the movement to protest segregation in public accommodations started around the country, the protesters were predominantly college students, often from historically Black colleges and universities. In Asheville, where there was no college to fill this role, Black high school students led efforts to integrate downtown restaurants and businesses. A small group of Stephens-Lee students formed the Asheville Student Committee on Racial Equality (ASCORE) around 1960. The students modeled their group and the use of nonviolent direct action on the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE), a national civil rights organization founded in 1942. The Asheville students found a capable and willing advisor in William E. Roland, an East End jeweler active in numerous local organizations and committees. The students met at Roland’s store, in

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<sup>165</sup> Karl Fleming, “Municipal Course: It May Still Be Sold!” *Asheville Citizen*, February 15, 1954, 14; Karl Fleming, “Negro Group Protests ‘Move’ to Sell Municipal Golf Course,” *Asheville Citizen*, May 7, 1954, 31; “City Offered \$75,000 for Municipal Golf Course,” *Asheville Citizen*, June 25, 1954, 1; Sybil Argintar Bowers, “Municipal Golf Course” National Register of Historic Places Nomination Form (2004), 11-12, 15-16.

<sup>166</sup> “We Need the Municipal Golf Course,” editorial, *Asheville Citizen*, May 18, 1956, 4.

<sup>167</sup> Bowers, “Municipal Golf Course,” 11-12, 15-16.

an office at the back, and planned civil rights actions with the intent of “bringing about a oneness of community.”<sup>168</sup>



**William E. Roland, Asheville jeweler and ASCORE advisor** (*Heritage of Black Highlanders Collection*, D. H. Ramsey Library Special Collections, University of North Carolina at Asheville).

James Ferguson, Charles Bates, Marvin Chambers, James Burton, and Burnell Freeman were the initial founders of ASCORE. Ferguson and Chambers initially wanted to address school integration issues, advocating for a new school for Black students. The young men surveyed the Black and white high schools in Asheville, Stephens-Lee and Lee Edwards, and cataloged the condition of facilities and educational materials at the two schools. Finding that Stephens-Lee failed to meet state requirements, they presented their report to the city school board, where James Ferguson warned officials that he would lead a march to Lee Edwards High School if they did not provide a new school building for Black students. By threatening to upset the public perception of racial harmony, the students’ presentation led to the decision to build South French Broad High School, which was completed in 1965.<sup>169</sup> The youth movement’s threat to publicly protest altered the power dynamic. Rather than engage in the polite negotiations that Black leaders had employed since the advent of the Colored Betterment League and the Interracial Commission, ASCORE took its activities into the streets. As Patrick

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<sup>168</sup> William Roland autobiography, *Heritage of Black Highlanders Collection*, D. H. Ramsey Library Special Collections, University of North Carolina Asheville, [http://toto.lib.unca.edu/findingaids/mss/blackhigh/biography/roland\\_w.html](http://toto.lib.unca.edu/findingaids/mss/blackhigh/biography/roland_w.html) (accessed July 6, 2019).

<sup>169</sup> Bruce Gourlay, “New High School Will Be Built,” *Asheville Citizen*, July 19, 1963, 1; “Chambers: A Long and Successful Career,” *Asheville Citizen-Times*, January 16, 2011, 37.

Parker points out, Asheville's early-twentieth-century Black elite strove for equal, if separate, facilities; ASCORE aimed to integrate them.<sup>170</sup>

William Roland put the students in touch with people from the American Friends Service Committee (Quakers), who trained the students in the nonviolent direct action tactics they would use during protests and sit-ins. While Roland was a leading figure advising the group, other mentors included Lloyd McCord, Leah Butler, Rosetta Hill, Rosa Davis, Rev. Nilous Avery from Hill Street Baptist Church, and local civil rights attorneys Ruben Dailey and Harold Epps. Students from Warren Wilson College, the only integrated college in the South at the time, also supported the group. The Quaker organizers instructed the students to leave an open seat between them during the lunch counter sit-ins so that a white person from the Friends group could sit in the open seats. The students and organizers recognized that the businesses did not want to cause any kind of scene or disturbance that would deter tourists and customers, but students were required to get their parents' permission to participate.<sup>171</sup>

Deploying new tactics, ASCORE members were instrumental in integrating downtown businesses, restaurants, and movie theaters. The group, which now included students from the Allen School and Asheville Catholic School, organized sit-ins at the Kress and Woolworth lunch counters, as well as Fain's and Newberry's. In response to a sit-in at the Woolworth's store in downtown Asheville, white students painted a large Confederate flag on the sidewalk in front of the store. An attempt to conduct a sit-in at the Kenilworth Drug Store on Biltmore Avenue resulted in the owner removing all the stools from the soda counter and offering take out service only.<sup>172</sup>

After their success in restaurants, ASCORE shifted its focus to the public library. Prior to 1960, Black residents could only use the branch library at the YMI. Viola Jones Spells, an Allen School student, led the committee and, along with Oralene Simmons, met with the director to discuss integrating the library. The director was amenable and, after the board agreed, the library was integrated. Not all the staff were welcoming, but the students and the community were now able to use the main library and felt they had to continue to go despite the inhospitable treatment.<sup>173</sup> The YMI branch remained open until 1966, when its librarian, Irene Hendricks, retired.

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<sup>170</sup> Parker, "Appalachian Activists," 61-62.

<sup>171</sup> Viola Jones Spells, interviewed by Rory Kupp, May 15, 2019, "MS406.001D: AAAHS interview with Viola Jones Spells," Asheville African American Heritage Survey Oral History Interview Collection, Buncombe County Special Collections, Pack Memorial Library, Asheville, NC; *With All Deliberate Speed: School Desegregation in Buncombe County*, Digital exhibit, 2005, Center for Diversity Education, University of North Carolina Asheville, <https://diversityed.unca.edu/> (accessed February 8, 2022).

<sup>172</sup> Betty Jamerson Reed, *School Segregation in Western North Carolina: A History, 1860s-1970s* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland Publishing, 2011), 45; *With All Deliberate Speed*.

<sup>173</sup> Parker, "Appalachian Activists," 83.

ASCORE tackled discrimination and unfair hiring practices at local stores and businesses, including Sears, Southern Bell, A&P, and Ingles. In 1961, ASCORE supported a boycott of the Winn-Dixie on College Street across from the courthouse. The group objected to the grocery store only hiring whites as bag boys. ASCORE members carried signs and walked the picket line, but the store refused to yield. Anita White Carter and Viola Jones Spells recall being hassled and spit on by whites during the protests.<sup>174</sup> Rev. Nilous Avery of Hill Street Baptist and Rev. Pearly Smith of Hopkins Chapel lent their support and persuaded their congregations to shop elsewhere during the boycott. Eventually, after nearly a year of picketing, the company acquiesced to the students' demands.<sup>175</sup>

The Asheville NAACP chapter also challenged employment discrimination in the early 1960s. Lloyd McCord, an ASCORE advisor, detailed to the national office how only one industrial plant in Asheville hired African Americans in non-janitorial positions, and then only one person per shift. McCord claimed the employment situation for Blacks in Asheville was so dire it was causing high school students to drop out. He noted the only jobs available were "the very lowest of work that can be had."<sup>176</sup> McCord sent affidavits from people who had applied to Square D, an electrical equipment company, but received no response. Additional complaints were lodged against Ball Glass and the C. P. Clare Company.<sup>177</sup> Perseverance and protest paid off when, in 1963, Marvin Chambers, a former ASCORE member, became the first African American hired in the engineering department at American Enka. Chambers went on to have a long and successful career as a mechanical engineer in Asheville.<sup>178</sup>

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<sup>174</sup> Ibid., 89.

<sup>175</sup> "Negroes Picket Supermarket," *Asheville Citizen-Times*, July 1, 1962, 2; *With All Deliberate Speed*.

<sup>176</sup> Lloyd McCord to Herbert Hill, letter, March 15, 1962, NAACP Records Collection, Library of Congress, Washington, DC.

<sup>177</sup> General Office File, NAACP Administration 1956-1965, Labor Complaints – North Carolina, NAACP Records Collection, Library of Congress, Washington, DC.

<sup>178</sup> Barbara Blake, "The Education of Marvin Chambers," *Asheville Citizen-Times*, January 16, 2011, 1D.



**Marvin Chambers became the first African American to work in American Enka's engineering department in 1963** (*Asheville Citizen-Times*, January 16, 2011).

In other fields, Black community members continued to make inroads. Henry Robinson became the first African American journalist in western North Carolina and worked as a reporter for the *Citizen-Times* from 1967 to 1999.<sup>179</sup> Dr. John P. Holt was elected to the Board of Education in 1967 and served for 20 years. Holt, whose father began working as a doctor in Asheville in 1918, opened his medical office on Southside Avenue in 1961, after nearly 20 years of practice in other states. Holt also served on the Asheville Housing Authority and on the executive board of the Chamber of Commerce.<sup>180</sup> Attorney Ruben J. Dailey was the first African

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<sup>179</sup> Rob Neufeld, "Black History Month: Henry Robinson," *Asheville Citizen-Times*, February 17, 2016, <https://www.citizen-times.com/story/news/local/2016/02/17/black-history-month-henry-robinson/80531590/> (accessed February 8, 2022).

<sup>180</sup> Dr. John P. Holt interview, Southern Highlands Research Center Oral History Collection, D. H. Ramsey Library Special Collections, University of North Carolina at Asheville.

American elected to Asheville City Council in 1969. Known for his work to integrate schools across the region, Dailey was re-elected in 1971.<sup>181</sup>

ASCORE's activities began to wane in the mid-1960s as its leadership and student members graduated from high school and went to college. More than 100 students passed through the organization, nearly all of whom went on to college.<sup>182</sup> William Roland closed his jewelry store prior to his death in 1973. School integration and urban renewal became the pressing issues of the day, as did the interplay between the goals of Asheville's Black elite and the rest of the community. ASCORE began by wanting to integrate the social sphere of Asheville, not its schools.<sup>183</sup> ASCORE advisor Ruben Dailey, who had already assisted in integrating the Municipal Golf Course and Yancey County Schools, helped lead the movement to integrate the Asheville schools.

The presentation by ASCORE members James Ferguson and Marvin Chambers to the city school board regarding conditions at Stephens-Lee set in motion a tumultuous period that left the city deeply unsettled. Title VI of the 1964 Civil Rights Act, which prohibited discrimination based on race, color, and national origin by any educational institution receiving federal funding, which also applied to the state's university system, drove the issue of school integration in North Carolina.<sup>184</sup> The Asheville school board had previously approved the construction of a new high school for Black students. Located on South French Broad Avenue and completed in 1965, the school served as a stop-gap measure on the way to full integration four years later. In many ways the integration of Asheville's schools represented an opportunity gained and a world lost for the Black community.

When South French Broad High School opened, all of the students at Stephens-Lee moved to the new school. Only two-thirds of the faculty—22 of the 33 teachers—went to the new school with the students. After Stephens-Lee closed, the school board sold the building to the Parks and Recreation Department for \$10. The Livingston Street and Shiloh schools (BN5662 and BN6873) were similarly closed and their students sent to predominantly white schools, while the buildings were sold to the City for use as community centers. At a contentious meeting to decide the fate of the Shiloh School, community members commented on the pattern of Black students being sent to white schools and not the other way around. It was a widely held belief that the reason for closing the school boiled down to "white people unwilling to send their children to Shiloh."<sup>185</sup> The Mountain Street School was also closed and subsequently converted into the school system's

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<sup>181</sup> Kevan D. Frazier, *Legendary Locals of Asheville* (Charleston, SC: Arcadia Publishing, 2014), 29.

<sup>182</sup> Lisa Watters, "Peaceful Warriors," *Mountain Xpress*, October 26, 2005, <https://mountainx.com/news/community-news/1026ascorphp/> (accessed February 8, 2022).

<sup>183</sup> Parker, "Appalachian Activists," 92.

<sup>184</sup> Reed, *School Segregation*, 52.

<sup>185</sup> Mary Cowles, "Shiloh School Closed," *Asheville Citizen*, May 7, 1971, 1.

administrative offices. Asheville's school integration signified a suppression of Black pride and achievement. Available school facilities may have been better, but the drive for excellence that characterized Stephens-Lee was not always present at the integrated schools.

The integration of Asheville's schools was not complete until 1969 when the two high schools—South French Broad and Lee Edwards—were consolidated. To signal the new beginning, the school board renamed the system's one secondary school "Asheville High School" and promised a fresh start for all students. The building, erected in 1927-1929 as Asheville Senior High School and familiar to white students, still bore all the outward signs and appearances of its previous incarnation, Lee Edwards High, renamed for its popular white principal who died in 1935.<sup>186</sup> While the first day of classes, August 23, 1969, appeared to have gone smoothly, the peace was deceiving. The number of Black teachers was again reduced when the two faculties merged, and their absence was palpable among former Stephens-Lee students. Black students felt unwelcomed and complained that white students were treated more leniently than Black students for the same disciplinary offenses. They objected to a white teacher instructing a class on Black history and the lack of a Black teacher in the cosmetology class. None of the trophies from Stephens-Lee had been brought over to the high school for display. The loss of identity overwhelmed students and fueled resentment. Tensions finally erupted on September 29, 1969.<sup>187</sup>

Black student Leo Gaines arrived at school on Friday not wearing socks, a dress code violation, and was expelled. Students claimed Gaines was singled out for punishment because of past offenses; Principal Clark Pennell said Gaines had repeatedly shown defiance of school authorities. Student activists Shirley Brown and James McDowell circulated word within the Black community of a protest on Monday.<sup>188</sup> Approximately 200 Black students, including Gaines, staged a walk out on Monday morning, gathering in front of the school and refusing to return to classes. Pennell engaged the students in discussions to hear their grievances and encouraged them to select a representative spokesperson. Pennell reported, "As individuals, none of the children were rude to me. They were rude as a group."<sup>189</sup> After attempts at calm discussion, Pennell asked the students to return to class or leave campus. When the students did not disperse, the principal called the police, who arrived in force along with City Manager Phineas Horton and other city officials. Police officers entered through the rear of the school and emerged through the front doors. As the police advanced on students gathered on the grass in front of the school, the students threw rocks and

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<sup>186</sup> Lee H. Edwards served as principal of Asheville High School from its opening in February 1929 until his sudden death in May 1935. The week following Edwards' death, the Asheville Board of Education elected to rename the school in his honor. "Lee Edwards' Funeral Will Be Held Today," *Asheville Citizen*, May 9, 1935, 1; "Senior High School Re-Named in Honor of Lee H. Edwards," *Asheville Citizen*, May 15, 1935, 9.

<sup>187</sup> Mary Cowles, "Call for Changes Aired at Meeting of School Board," *Asheville Citizen*, October 1, 1969, 15.

<sup>188</sup> Reed, *School Segregation*, 47.

<sup>189</sup> Ed Seitz, "Open Meeting Is Scheduled in High School Disturbance," *Asheville Citizen*, September 30, 1969, 15.

bricks at the police and the melee escalated. While some students fled from police, others stormed the recently opened Vocational Training Building, causing broken windows and other damage. A small car near the entrance to the school was overturned and others suffered broken glass. Fifteen individuals were taken to the hospital and treated for injuries.<sup>190</sup>



**Student protest turned violent at Asheville High School, *Asheville Citizen-Times*, September 30, 1969.**

In the wake of the riot, Mayor Wayne Montgomery issued a state of emergency and placed the city under a nighttime curfew that remained in effect for six months. The school remained closed for a week. A court injunction prohibited student gatherings and effectively cancelled a number of student activities, including prom. Leo Gaines was permanently dismissed from the school.<sup>191</sup> In the follow up investigations, City Council placed most of the blame on the students, absolving school administrators and law enforcement of any responsibility. City Manager Horton insisted that no police officers had initiated contact with any student unless the student willfully resisted,

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<sup>190</sup> Ed Seitz, "Curfew Called After Clash," *Asheville Citizen*, September 30, 1969, 1; *With All Deliberate Speed*.

<sup>191</sup> Mary Cowles, "Asheville Schools Open as Police Stand Guard," *Asheville Citizen*, October 3, 1969, 13; Mary Cowles, "Reinstatement to School Sought by Expelled Youth," *Asheville Citizen*, September 1, 1970, 13; *With All Deliberate Speed*.

but Police Chief J. C. Hall later admitted some officers had in fact struck students with their batons.<sup>192</sup>

Following the incident, the school board implemented most of the changes the students requested, but racial tensions simmered for much of the school year. A white minister at a meeting of the Community Relations Council (CRC) warned members that whites represented a wide majority in Asheville and accepting the students' demands "uncritically" would surely provoke a "white reaction response at the polls."<sup>193</sup> That same night, following the CRC meeting, Asheville police arrested two "black militants," Victor Chalk Jr. and Preston Dobbins, at a police checkpoint during the city-wide curfew.<sup>194</sup> Chalk explained they were out because he had received death threats from Klan members concerning his mother and was going to check on her. Chalk and Dobbins had been advisors to the student organizers at the high school. Chalk, a Navy veteran and civic activist, worked at American Enka in Asheville and was well-known to city officials.<sup>195</sup> Dobbins, a Chicago native, graduated from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, where he had co-founded the UNC Chapel Hill Black Student Movement (BSM) in 1967. Dobbins also worked as a research analyst for Asheville-born, Charlotte-based civil rights attorney and former ASCORE member James Ferguson. When students returned to school the following week, Rev. Wesley Grant Sr. sat on Asheville High School's steps as a reminder of the Black community's expectations for behavior.<sup>196</sup> Grant's presence on the steps exemplified the thinking of an older generation in which good behavior was paramount to getting along and getting ahead. Chalk and Dobbins, as well as Gaines and younger students, were all in the mold of the Black Power movement and deeply affected by the assassinations of civil rights leaders Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. and Robert F. Kennedy in 1968.

City leaders sought to quell tensions and maintain community peace, but integration protests continued through the spring. The board voted to close the Livingston (BN5662) and Mountain Street schools as part of their plan to bus African American children to white schools.<sup>197</sup> Demonstrators at a Board of Education meeting became so agitated that board

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<sup>192</sup> Brian Gordon, "In 1969, Black Students Protested for Change," *Asheville Citizen-Times*, September 29, 2019, 1. Student photographer Roger Ball, who had been asked by Principal Pennell to document the morning's events, recalled that after asking the students to leave campus, police officers lined up shoulder to shoulder and approached the crowd. "When they did not disperse, wooden batons came out and the officers started swinging," Ball recounted. Thomas Calder, "Tuesday History: The 1969 Asheville High School Walkout, as Recalled by Roger Ball," *Mountain Xpress*, August 22, 2017, <https://mountainx.com/news/tuesday-history-roger-ball-recalls-the-asheville-high-school-walkout-1969/> (accessed February 8, 2022).

<sup>193</sup> "Curfew Remains in Effect," *Asheville Citizen*, October 1, 1969, 2.

<sup>194</sup> Jay Hensley, "City Police Arrest Two Militant Leaders," *Asheville Citizen*, October 1, 1969, 1. (Some sources say Dobbins was from Durham.)

<sup>195</sup> Hensley, "City Police Arrest Two Militant Leaders," 2.

<sup>196</sup> Reed, *School Segregation*, 48.

<sup>197</sup> *With All Deliberate Speed*.

members hid in back offices of the Department of Public Works Building.<sup>198</sup> Meetings to consider closing Shiloh School (BN6873) were contentious and fraught with charges that Black students were being bussed all over the city because white students would not attend Black schools or schools in Black neighborhoods.<sup>199</sup> Another incident at Asheville High School in 1972 turned violent. A fight broke out among students over a white boy dating a Black girl that resulted in eight students being taken to the hospital. School was closed and a curfew put in place. A third disturbance in 1975 concerned the selection of members of the National Honor Society.<sup>200</sup>

In retrospect, the school board's handling of integration created additional friction between whites and Blacks and salted wounds. The failure to recognize and appreciate the Black community's pride in their schools despite the outward appearance of run-down buildings and secondhand textbooks and equipment stirred the underlying tensions that boiled over on September 29, 1969. For Black students and their families, the issues ran much deeper than Leo Gaines' socks. The fact that his socks, or lack thereof, could result in expulsion only pointed to the misperceptions and misunderstandings hampering integration. A power structure that put its faith in appearances could never understand the emotional and psychological damage it had inflicted.

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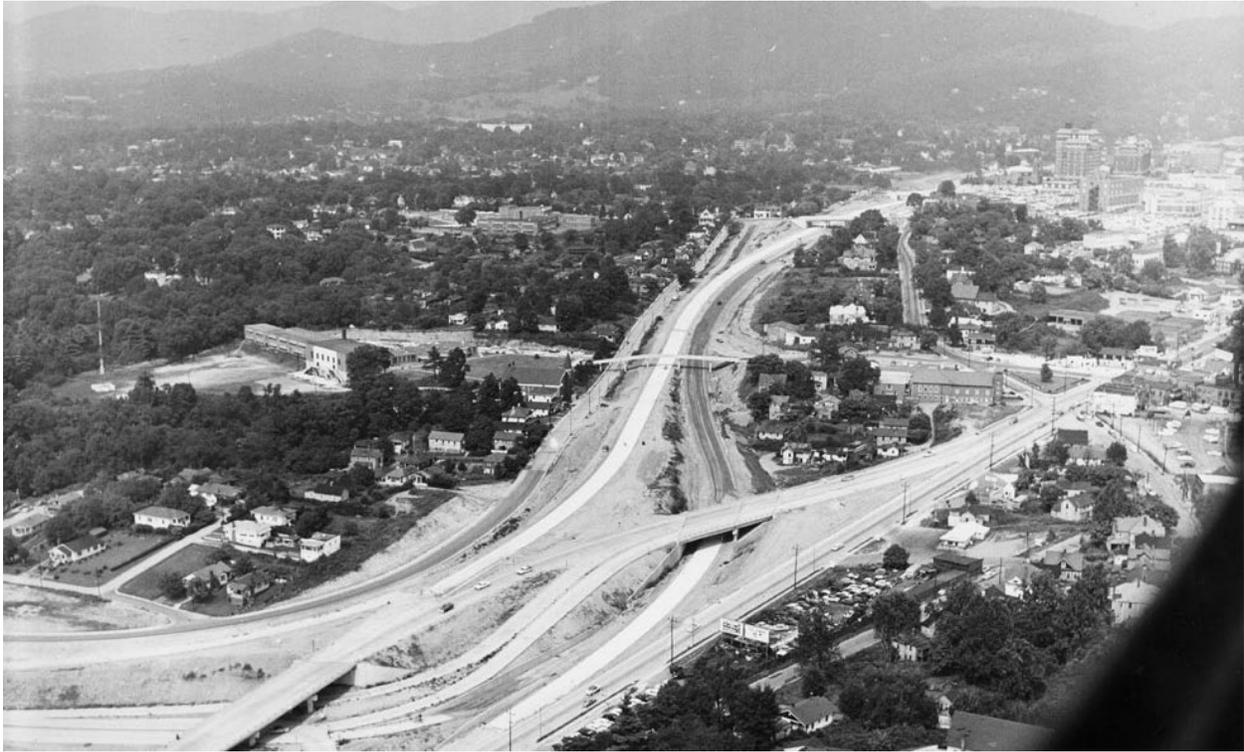
<sup>198</sup> Reed, *School Segregation*, 48.

<sup>199</sup> Mary Cowles, "Shiloh School Closed," *Asheville Citizen*, May 7, 1971, 1.

<sup>200</sup> *With All Deliberate Speed*.

## Urban Renewal: Displaced and Dispossessed

*N.B. The effects of highway construction and urban renewal are discussed more specifically in relevant neighborhood sections.*



**Crosstown Expressway under construction through the Hill Street neighborhood, August 1960**  
(Buncombe County Special Collections, Pack Memorial Library, Asheville, North Carolina).

Highway construction, urban renewal, and integration contributed to the seismic events that shook Asheville’s Black neighborhoods in the 1960s and 1970s. Social relationships were sundered as people moved into public housing or out to the suburbs; economic relationships were destroyed as the neighborhoods that once fostered small businesses and informal economies were leveled; and familiar, physical landscapes were altered beyond recognition. Historian Sarah Judson has described the effects of urban renewal on Asheville’s Black neighborhoods as “root shock,” applying a term from Mindy Thompson Fullilove, a social psychiatrist.<sup>201</sup> The disruption imposed on the Black community reached to the very core of African American life in Asheville. The cost of urban progress significantly eroded the social fabric, businesses, and institutions that contributed to the Black community’s identity and sense of place.

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<sup>201</sup> Sarah M. Judson, “Twilight of a Neighborhood,” *Crossroads* (Summer-Fall 2010), 2.

The early concepts of urban renewal evolved in response to the post-war housing shortage and a desire to improve and increase the national housing supply. The Housing Act of 1949 provided a framework for the use of federal funds to rehabilitate the country's badly decaying housing stock and encourage urban redevelopment and investment in the face of growing suburbanization. In addition to rehabilitation, the program financed slum removal that resulted in cleared land available to real estate developers at reduced costs. Municipal authorities relished the prospects of redevelopment assistance since cities were only required to shoulder one-third of the costs and, on a few occasions, city governments effectively replaced crumbling tenements with complexes of well-built apartments for low-income residents. All too often, however, the effort to remake the urban core, clear blighted areas, and attract investment to spur economic growth came at the expense of African American communities.<sup>202</sup>

The decay of Black neighborhoods decried by white political and business leaders resulted from segregationist policies stretching back to the 1930s. Federal housing programs intended to assist homeowners during the Great Depression ultimately reinforced racial segregation and restricted investment in a way that compounded the deterioration of Black neighborhoods. Discriminatory real estate practices further exacerbated neighborhood decline. By perpetuating the policies and practices that fueled the physical deterioration of segregated Black neighborhoods, many white leaders contributed to the conditions they now deemed blighted, unsightly, and in need of renewal.<sup>203</sup>

The 1954 Housing Act, which amended the original act of 1949, shifted the priorities of urban renewal away from residential rehabilitation to a broader application of redevelopment and reinvestment in downtown areas. At the behest of lobbying from downtown merchant coalitions and the National Association of Real Estate Boards, the amendment granted more leeway to cities to define a blighted area as any area of an inappropriate or incongruous land use. Up to 10 percent of allocations could now be applied to nonresidential uses, which allowed cities to focus on using urban renewal to help increase the municipal tax base and shore up downtown property values.<sup>204</sup>

While early attempts to rehabilitate and revitalize parts of Asheville through urban renewal may have contained a genuine concern for improving the lives, health, and safety of city residents, later projects placed economic factors and the desire to attract tourists at the fore. An editorial in the *Asheville Citizen* ahead of a bond issue vote claimed that urban renewal was

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<sup>202</sup> Hanchett, *Sorting Out*, 248-249; Andy Grim, "The Changes May Look Good, But The Pain Will Be Hard to Erase": Urban Renewal and Community Response in Asheville, North Carolina," Senior thesis, University of North Carolina Asheville, 2011, 2-5.

<sup>203</sup> Kenneth T. Jackson, *Crabgrass Frontier* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), 219, 224-227; Nikoloff, "Urban Renewal," 6-10

<sup>204</sup> Hanchett, *Sorting Out*, 248-249; Grim, "The Changes May Look Good'," 2-5.

vital to future prosperity and “The *Citizen* would defend it as documentable fact.”<sup>205</sup> The editorial supported its position by referencing a report prepared by consultants that described the belt around downtown Asheville as “a major eyesore to the visitor” that repelled tourists, deflated property values, and contributed little in the way of local tax revenues.<sup>206</sup> The report declared the unsightly areas to be unbecoming for a city that wanted to position itself as the capital of “Vacation Paradise U.S.A.”<sup>207</sup> The newspaper railed against critics of the plan, who it considered misguided for “attempting to inject the racial question,” despite the disproportionate impacts on Black neighborhoods.<sup>208</sup>



**Proposed area of Asheville Redevelopment Project No. 1, *Asheville Citizen*, July 10, 1959.**

Plans for the first urban renewal project in Asheville earned approval from the Metropolitan Planning Board and the Planning and Zoning Commission in October 1959. The project known as Asheville Redevelopment Project No. 1 called for clearing a 77-acre section of downtown and reselling the land for appropriate public or private uses. Deemed obsolete as a residential area, the project considered a civic arts center, a new YMCA, facilities for the health department, and possible office, retail, or apartment units as potential new occupants of the land. A survey of

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<sup>205</sup> “The Future of a City Nears One Major Test,” editorial, *Asheville Citizen*, May 9, 1963, 4.

<sup>206</sup> Ibid.

<sup>207</sup> Ibid.

<sup>208</sup> Ibid.

the project area identified 108 existing structures, including 91 qualifying as substandard. The \$1.5 million redevelopment project covered the area from City-County Plaza north to the new Crosstown Expressway. The Asheville Redevelopment Commission (ARC), working in tandem with the North Carolina Department of Transportation (NCDOT) to coordinate the construction of the expressway, designated portions of the historically Black neighborhood of Hill Street as blighted. Completed in 1960, the new highway destroyed much of the Hill Street neighborhood and constituted Asheville's first instance of urban displacement at the hands of civic progress.<sup>209</sup>

Planning for Asheville Redevelopment Project No. 2, better known as the East Riverside Urban Renewal Project, began in 1964. The City's early urban renewal projects appear to have evolved from economic development studies and plans that posited metropolitan Asheville's long-term economic success was linked to downtown development, which, in turn, was linked to bringing tourists to Asheville at night for social and cultural activities, ceding daytime entertainment and outdoor recreation to areas outside the city. An April 1966 presentation stated that if the downtown core is "modern, lively and pulsating it is likely the Metropolitan Asheville area will be too."<sup>210</sup> The following month a presentation by planners Barbour, Cooper and Associates discussed the need for a "Fringe Area Plan," stating that the surrounding neighborhood "has contributed to the decay around the fringe of the Central Business District, to the outmigration of higher income groups and the in-migration of lower income groups...[and] this trend towards fringe area decay...further reduces its attractiveness as a business, social and cultural center. Without attention and correction these conditions will spread."<sup>211</sup>

The East Riverside Urban Renewal Project encompassed a major rehabilitation and redevelopment plan for approximately 425 acres situated immediately southwest of downtown. The project's boundaries roughly corresponded to the African American neighborhood of Southside. The 4,000 area residents, which represented 6 percent of the total population, occupied "some of the city's worst housing units."<sup>212</sup> The AHA labeled the neighborhood, which extended from Coxe and Southside avenues all way to Depot Street, as largely a slum of "Negro residences [that] could be expected to continue in that category" after it was redeveloped for "upgraded residential use."<sup>213</sup> Planners chose the area primarily

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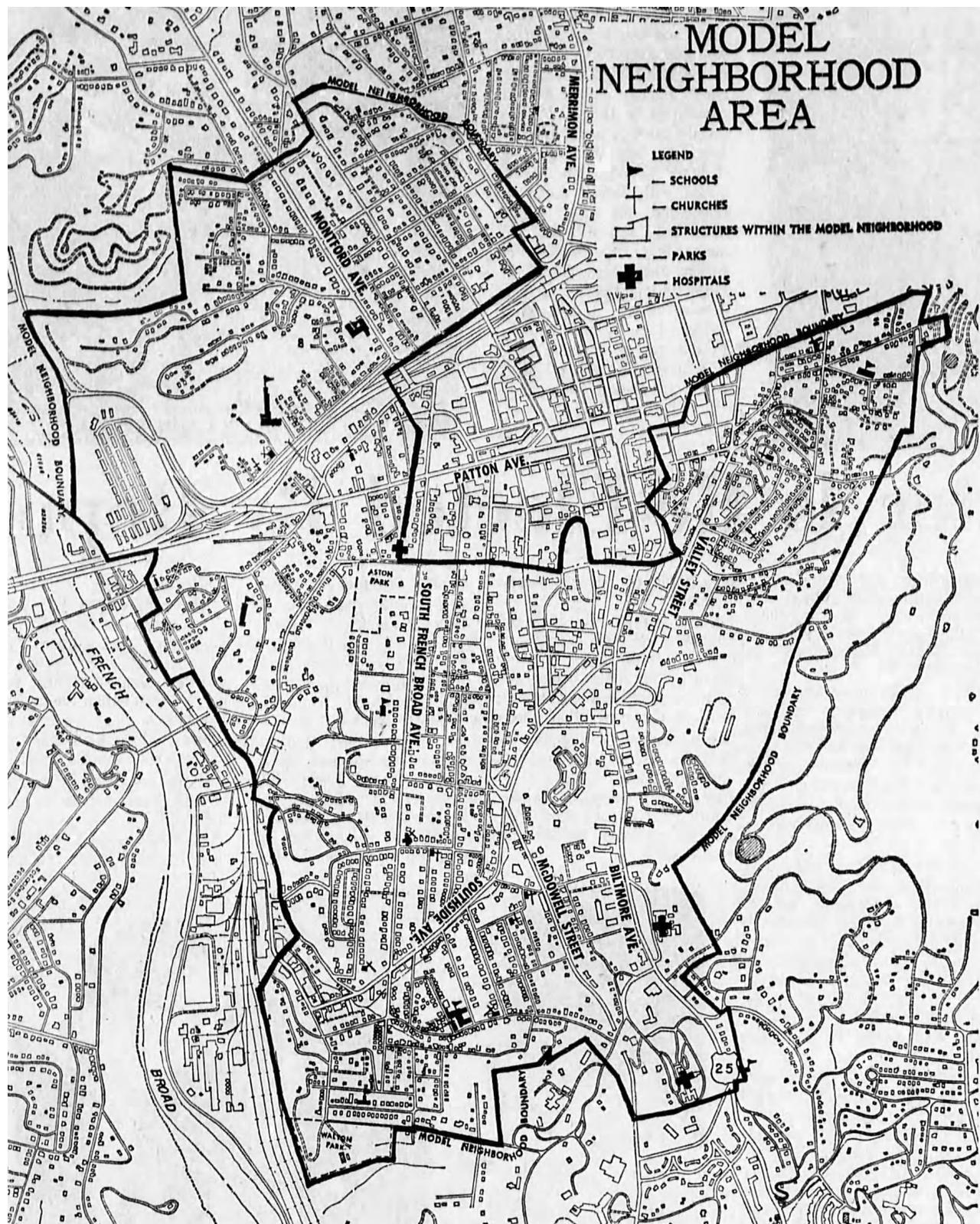
<sup>209</sup> Philip Clark, "City Redevelopment Plan Backed" *Asheville Citizen*, October 8, 1959, 1.

<sup>210</sup> Metropolitan Planning Board minutes, April 13, 1966, City of Asheville Historic Resource Commission Records M2010.16, D. H. Ramsey Library Special Collections, University of North Carolina Asheville.

<sup>211</sup> Metropolitan Planning Board, "Commercial Area Study, Summary and Recommendations," May 15, 1966, 2, City of Asheville Historic Resource Commission Records M2010.16, D. H. Ramsey Library Special Collections, University of North Carolina Asheville.

<sup>212</sup> Philip Clark, "Second Renewal Project Recommended in Asheville," *Asheville Citizen*, July 2, 1964, 1.

<sup>213</sup> *Ibid.*



Model Neighborhood Area map, Asheville Citizen-Times, October 31, 1971.

because the cost of the recently completed South French Broad High School could be counted toward the City's one-third share of the project's estimated \$3.3 million budget.

After a bond referendum to fund the remainder of the project failed, city officials grew concerned as a second vote approached, and the ARC turned to Black community leaders and Black churches for support.<sup>214</sup> Thirty-five churches participated, including Hopkins Chapel and Berry Temple. Influential community members like attorney Ruben Dailey and Livingston Street School principal Authur Edington promoted the project, although Dailey expressed reservations about potential displacement. One-third of the acquired property from the project would be available for redevelopment, one-third would be used for streets and parks, and the remaining third would be dedicated to public housing. Approximately half of the area's 1,300 houses were slated for demolition.<sup>215</sup> In December 1967, the bond issue passed, and the project commenced.

One of the major effects (and failings) of the East Riverside project, like other urban renewal projects in Asheville, was dispossession. At the time, 58 percent of Southside residents owned their homes; others owned businesses. The project nominally offered a rehabilitation option, but few homeowners were able to take advantage of it, either for lack of interest or lack of finances. Black residents found it difficult to secure loans or locate homes to buy, and as a result, they were steered into the planned low-rent housing units including a 10-story tower on South French Broad Avenue or low-density complexes such as the Erskine-Walton Apartments (BN6434) on Erskine Street. Either outcome culminated in loss of ownership and unfamiliar surroundings that left Black residents displaced and dispossessed.

The East Riverside Urban Renewal Project resulted in wide-ranging physical, emotional, and economic upheaval within the Black community. Families lost homes and businesses, as well as a sense of community. Reducing neighborhood density dispersed Black residents or piled them into public housing. Cleared land was redeveloped for professional offices and medical facilities. Street improvements and widenings rearranged the very landscape into something barely recognizable to long-time residents. In 1978, Rev. Wesley Grant, pastor of the Worldwide Missionary Baptist Tabernacle (BN6428) on Choctaw Street, tried to catalog the loss caused by the East Riverside project. Addressing city officials, who saw only wider streets and newly built housing units, Rev. Grant identified the untold price paid by the Black community in terms of the demolished homes, closed businesses, and displaced families.<sup>216</sup>

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<sup>214</sup> Laurens Irby, "2<sup>nd</sup> Chance to Remove E. Riverside Blight," *Asheville Citizen*, December 1, 1967, 20.

<sup>215</sup> Laurens Irby, "Dailey Fears Exodus Will Harm Purpose of Riverside Project," *Asheville Citizen-Times*, February 21, 1967.

<sup>216</sup> Rob Neufeld, "Stories from the South Side from Before Urban Renewal," *The Read on WNC*, August 2, 2013, <http://thereadonwnc.ning.com/forum/topics/stories-from-southside-from-before-urban-renewal> (accessed July 1, 2019).

Unlike earlier urban renewal projects, the Model Cities program experimented with social action to rehabilitate depressed and distressed urban areas. Begun in 1966 as a facet of President Lyndon B. Johnson's War on Poverty, the program sought new ways to address poverty, racial injustice, urban violence, and other issues plaguing cities and towns across the country. Asheville applied to the program in 1968 and was accepted as one of 150 participating municipalities. The area chosen as Asheville's Model Neighborhood encompassed "a badly depressed area lying roughly east, south, west and northwest of the central business district," which represented a vast swath of the city.<sup>217</sup> An estimated 10,000 people lived within the Model Neighborhood's boundaries, and African Americans comprised approximately 85 percent of that number. The area represented a little more than 18 percent of Asheville's total population but accounted for a disproportionately high percentage of "the city's economic, physical and social ills."<sup>218</sup> More than half the families in the program area fell below the federal poverty line. Health concerns included unusually high rates of infant mortality, tuberculosis, and venereal disease. Nearly half of the city's overcrowded housing units, dilapidated housing, and substandard housing was located within the project boundaries.

United States Department of Housing and Urban Development guidelines called for a Model Cities Commission consisting of six appointed and six elected commissioners to administer the program. J. W. Byers, a white banker appointed to the commission, served as the first chairman; the elected commissioners were all Black. The commission proposed 22 projects during the first year of the program, but not all were feasible under the \$4.2 million budget. The approved projects included an after-school program, comprehensive child development program and day care, consolidated health care program, an employment project, and a citizen's participation project. On the heels of unpopular urban renewal projects, citizen participation was one of the biggest challenges for program officials in Asheville.

Beginning in 1974, the City took over the Model Cities and urban renewal programs as the Nixon administration largely dismantled or redefined the programs. The City also assumed responsibility for planning from the Metropolitan Planning Board. The Assistant City Manager of Planning and Development was placed over the Model Cities, data processing, planning, inspections and demolitions, and housing and urban renewal divisions of city government. Federal funding for the Model Cities and urban renewal programs expired in June 1974, and it was believed that the private sector would finance future urban renewal goals. Funding for the Montford Recreation Center came from the final allotment of financing from the Model Cities program. Planned and approved in 1975, the community center building, designed by Moore-Woodard Associates, opened in 1978 as part of a complex extending from Pearson Drive to

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<sup>217</sup> Philip Clark, "Model Cities Program Strives To Help Asheville Poor Gain Rewarding Lives," *Asheville Citizen-Times*, October 31, 1971, 6.

<sup>218</sup> *Ibid.*

Riverside Cemetery through a small African American neighborhood known as Stumptown. The facility, which included a youth baseball field, two tennis courts, two playgrounds, two picnic shelters, an amphitheater, and parking areas, decimated the adjacent Stumptown neighborhood and displaced a number of Black families.<sup>219</sup>

The East End/Valley Street Redevelopment Plan was the last urban renewal project, starting in the late 1970s. The East End-Valley Street Community Improvement Committee held public meetings during the first half of 1978 and urged the project's approval.<sup>220</sup> Residents in the 250-acre project area acknowledged problems in the neighborhood and the need for improvements but wanted to avoid the destructive and disruptive effects of urban renewal experienced in other parts of the city. Initial plans called for standard improvements like water and sewer system upgrades and street widening but described the houses as almost completely blighted. A project survey identified 430 structures in the neighborhood, including more than 200 classified as dilapidated.<sup>221</sup> Only 29 dwellings met city housing codes. Despite the citizen input, the project placed significant emphasis on rehabilitation and demolition to reduce overcrowded conditions. The AHA, who oversaw the project, anticipated the loss of more than 100 structures, or roughly 25 percent, to reduce neighborhood density.

Two other civic improvement projects supplemented the East End/Valley Street Redevelopment Plan and contributed to the overall impacts on the neighborhood. An economic development plan for the Eagle and Market Street business district was intended to clear substandard residential structures, to close Velvet Street and Dixon Alley, to improve water and sewer lines, and to attract additional private development.<sup>222</sup> Concurrently, NCDOT prepared to bypass downtown by widening Valley Street to a five-lane, 60-foot-wide roadway connecting I-240 with Biltmore Avenue. Although technically a state project, the widening of Valley Street became a visible reminder of the physical damage to the neighborhood. The urban renewal and road construction projects combined to remove wide swaths of residential and commercial buildings, eradicate blighted housing, and sever street connections between commercial and residential areas of the neighborhood. The loss was immense and the physical effects devastating. Once again, the cost of improvements was borne disproportionately by Black

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<sup>219</sup> Jody Meacham, "Council Sets Federal Fund Priorities," *Asheville Citizen*, February 21, 1975, 19; Jody Meacham, "Mayor Backs City Funding For Parks," *Asheville Citizen*, February 26, 1975, 15; Jody Meacham, "Council Schedules Development Program Hearings," *Asheville Citizen*, December 19, 1975, 21; Dahleen Glanton, "Montford Center Is Dedicated," *Asheville Citizen-Times*, September 3, 1978, 15A.

<sup>220</sup> Dahleen Glanton, "Street, Sewer Improvements Promised for East End Area," *Asheville Citizen*, March 1, 1978, 25.

<sup>221</sup> Harlow W. Brown, "East End/Valley Street Redevelopment Plan, 1978," Butler & Associates, P.A., Asheville, NC, March 2014, 5-6.

<sup>222</sup> Rodney Brooks, "Housing Authority OKs Redevelopment," *Asheville Citizen*, July 12, 1978, 1.

residents. The new street improved the experience of passing motorists more than it did area residents, whose history was largely erased in the process.

### ***Asheville since Urban Renewal***

It is important to remember that urban renewal was not a single phenomenon that affected the Black community of Asheville, but only one component of the social, political, and economic conditions affecting the city as a whole in the 1960s and 1970s.<sup>223</sup> Urban renewal, the Civil Rights movement, integration, and gentrification occurred simultaneously as systems of change, along with the retirement of the municipal debt incurred at the beginning of the Depression. While the tangible effects of urban renewal should not be minimized, the upheaval felt across Asheville conflates multilayered social and economic issues whose repercussions have been felt over the past 50 years.

The physical landscapes of Black neighborhoods around the city were transformed by urban renewal projects, and their populations fragmented and dispersed. As a percentage of total population, the number of African American residents in Asheville continued to decline. During the first half of the twentieth century, the number of Black residents hovered around 25 percent of the city's total population. By 1990 it accounted for just 19 percent and recently dropped below 15 percent. The proportional loss has been due, in part, to an exodus based on limited opportunity, as well as population gains within other minority groups; the percentage of white residents has remained around 84 percent. Historically, the majority of jobs for African Americans in Asheville have been low-paying service, domestic, or industrial positions with limited opportunity for advancement. As a consequence, outmigration has resulted from Black residents leaving for college, military service, and employment opportunities in larger middle-class communities.

Symbolically, the demolition of Stephens-Lee High School in 1975 reflected the state of community relations. Once a great source of pride, the school board sold the "Castle on the Hill" to the city for \$10. School board chairman John Schell described the sale with a sense of relief, "unloading something that has been a liability," and noted that it would cost an estimated \$25,000 to demolish the building.<sup>224</sup> As the building was razed, Henry Robinson mourned the passing of an era and lamented that "only the tearing sound of destruction is audible."<sup>225</sup> Demolition of the school and auditorium spared the WPA-era gymnasium (BN0838), which was repurposed as a community recreation center.

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<sup>223</sup> Tighe and Opelt, "Collective Memory and Planning," 15-16.

<sup>224</sup> Mary Cowles, "Newton School Decision Promised by March," *Asheville Citizen*, February 4, 1975, 2.

<sup>225</sup> Henry Robinson, "Stephens-Lee High School Joins City's Old History," *Asheville Citizen-Times*, April 20, 1975, 16B.



**Residents of Klondyke Homes (BN6459) in 1975** (D. H. Ramsey Library Special Collections, University of North Carolina Asheville).

The construction of low-density public housing begun with the Erskine-Walton Apartments (BN6434) in the Southside neighborhood continued to earn favor, although problems with public housing persisted. Low-density proposals for housing in Shiloh from Peter Feistmann and Max Polansky were considered by the AHA, along with developments located outside the city. The construction of Klondyke Homes (BN6459) in 1974 at the north end of the Montford neighborhood sparked concern among neighbors. When planning for the new development began in 1970, the neighborhood association, which was regularly confronting city leaders about utilities and services, school overcrowding, and density, felt that the additional public housing would undermine their attempts to gain neighborhood stability. Vacancy rates varied across the system and exposed ongoing, fundamental problems. Public housing close to the city center had extremely low vacancy rates, while the suburban complexes struggled to find and keep tenants. Residents at Kirkwood and Bingham Heights outside the city often deemed the units to be located too far from their jobs with too little public transportation available.<sup>226</sup>

Asheville, like many cities and towns, experienced the drug epidemic and accompanying violence of the 1980s and 1990s. Public housing complexes often became battlegrounds for

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<sup>226</sup> Mary Cowles, "AHA Receiving Proposals for Leased Housing Project," *Asheville Citizen*, September 13, 1972, 17; Warren Nye, "Community Airs Grips to City Hall," *Asheville Citizen*, July 30, 1974, 11; Mary Cowles, "Public Housing Paradox: Vacancies Exist, Yet 800 Wait," *Asheville Citizen*, February 17, 1976, 9; Montford Community Club meeting minutes, 1970-1975, Buncombe County Special Collections, Pack Memorial Library, Asheville, North Carolina.

drug dealers and gangs. A guard house was erected at the entrance to the Hillcrest apartments and a private security service was hired to help control people entering the housing complex.<sup>227</sup> Traffic barriers were installed at the Erskine-Walton Apartments (BN6434) to eliminate through traffic. The Burton Street and Shiloh neighborhoods experienced the social turmoil wrought by the drug epidemic. As neighborhood residents and community members grew increasingly frustrated with conditions, they worked with the city to launch various initiatives aimed at driving out undesirable elements. In the Burton Street area, this included renovating the former school (BN4790) into a community center and making improvements to its grounds.

Despite these tensions and challenges, the city has slowly awakened to a part of its history that was previously swept aside. Increased representation in the public arena, including the election of Asheville's first African American mayor, Terry Bellamy, in 2005, shows signs of progress, while some of the old problems persist. Home ownership rates among Black residents lag and remain below their pre-urban renewal levels. More than 70 percent of families in public housing are African American.<sup>228</sup> School outcomes are worse for Black students than white students, including an achievement gap that is the fifth largest in the nation. Disciplinary actions at schools affect Black students at a far higher rate than whites.<sup>229</sup> The Black community remains relatively close-knit although not to the degree that it was in the past. A number of the student leaders of the Civil Rights Movement in the 1960s remained, or returned, to Asheville and continue to advocate on behalf of the Black community.

Another remarkable period of growth and development in Asheville began in the 1990s with the revitalization of downtown, preservation of historic white neighborhoods, and new types of tourism. While the economic rebirth has been generally positive, it has not affected all parts of the city equally. The tourism economy has increased employment options in Asheville, but these options tend to be lower-wage, service industry jobs. Another by-product of this resurgence is gentrification as new arrivals and second-home buyers price out long-time residents, both Black and white. Once again, though, Black residents bear the brunt of these changes as lower property values and surplus vacant lots from urban renewal attract new property owners bringing infill construction to traditionally Black neighborhoods. The result of

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<sup>227</sup> Paul Clark, "Hillcrest Security Re-Thought," *Asheville Citizen-Times*, May 16, 1993, 1; David Jones Jr., "Hillcrest Residents Have Many Reasons to Hold Their Heads High," *Asheville Citizen-Times*, April 14, 1998, A5.

<sup>228</sup> "Housing," *The State of Black Asheville*, n.d., <https://stateofblackasheville.com/housing/> (accessed September 9, 2019).

<sup>229</sup> Virginia Daffron, "Asheville City Schools' Worst-in-NC Achievement, Discipline Gaps Widen," *Mountain Xpress*, January 31, 2019, <https://mountainx.com/news/asheville-city-schools-worst-in-nc-achievement-discipline-gaps-widen/> (accessed March 2, 2022); Brian Gordon, "What Students Want Teachers to Know About Asheville's Achievement Gap," *Asheville Citizen-Times*, January 23, 2020, <https://www.citizen-times.com/story/news/local/2020/01/23/asheville-achievement-gap-student-views-discipline-housing/2848082001/> (accessed March 2, 2022); "Education," *The State of Black Asheville*, n.d., <https://stateofblackasheville.com/education/> (accessed September 9, 2019).

these intrusions has been increased density, which is not necessarily a negative for the city, and continued fragmentation of the Black community. Examples of infill in the East End and Burton Street areas do not always mesh well architecturally with the existing buildings and further impose on the character of the neighborhood.

In July 2020, Asheville became one of the first cities in the country to create a framework for providing reparations to its Black residents. At the heart of the resolution approved by City Council is an acknowledgment of the public policies and systems that have discriminated against Black people and contributed to protracted disparities in home and business ownership, employment and pay, generational wealth and equity, health care, education, neighborhood safety, and fairness within the criminal justice system.<sup>230</sup> The opportunity to bridge these gaps underscores the need to reclaim the place of African Americans in the full narrative of the city's history. The strength of Asheville's Black community is reflected in its resiliency, and the history described in this brief survey attests to the deep roots and proud heritage of African Americans in Asheville.

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<sup>230</sup> Joel Burgess, "Reparations for Black Residents Approved," *Asheville Citizen-Times*, July 16, 2020, 1A; Virgil L. Smith, "Asheville Challenging Systemic Racism," *Asheville Citizen-Times*, July 26, 2020, 4E.

## Neighborhood Histories and Descriptions

### East End / Valley Street (BN6464)

Survey Site No.	Property Name	Address	Date
BN2157	J. A. Wilson Building	13-15 Eagle Street	1924
BN0680	St. James A.M.E. Church (Haith Education Building)	44 Hildebrand Street	1970
BN6451	Stephens-Lee Shop Class House	55 Hazzard Street	ca. 1954
BN6452	Nazareth First Missionary Baptist Church	146 Pine Street	1961
BN6453	Calvary Presbyterian Church	44 Circle Street	1926
BN6454	John Mattison Boarding House	30 Ridge Street	1915
BN6455	Allen High School Dormitory	27-31 College Place	1950s
BN6464	East End/Valley Street		

The East End neighborhood, tucked to the east and southeast of City-County Plaza and Biltmore Avenue downtown, was the heart and soul of African American life in Asheville from the late nineteenth through mid-twentieth century. Originally centered on Valley Street and an area known as “The Block” at the intersection of Eagle and Market streets, the East End neighborhood expanded organically from its early center onto the sides of Beaucatcher Mountain. The extension of South Charlotte Street in the early 1980s effectively destroyed Valley Street and physically divided the neighborhood. Today, East End generally describes the area lying on the lower slopes of Beaucatcher Mountain east of South Charlotte Street and south of I-240, while “The Block” and the remaining portion of Eagle Street have been separated on the west side of South Charlotte Street.

In the nineteenth century, the area included a large portion of land owned by James Patton, a Scots-Irish immigrant who arrived in Asheville in the 1810s. Patton, his descendants, and a workforce of enslaved laborers substantially contributed to development of the small mountain town, building the hotels, roads, and railroads that encouraged subsequent growth. The Patton home and Eagle Hotel sat on the east side of South Main Street (present-day Biltmore Avenue), while the Pattons’ enslaved black laborers and hotel staff and their families lived in a small settlement around Valley Street. In the aftermath of the Civil War, this became the area where

newly freed African Americans settled and laid the foundations of a vibrant and largely self-sufficient community.<sup>231</sup>

Beginning in the late 1800s, the East End neighborhood developed with a wide variety of African American businesses, churches, schools, and other institutions. The many wood-frame churches erected after the Civil War were later replaced by the solid brick churches that remain today. Churches also provided the first schools for Black students, including Trinity Chapel in 1870, which opened the first school for Black children in its basement. Founded as the Freedman's Church by Trinity Episcopal Church, Trinity Chapel later became St. Matthias Church. Rev. Charles Dusenbury established the Calvary Presbyterian Church Parochial School in 1894.<sup>232</sup>

St. Matthias Episcopal Church (BN0015), thought to be the oldest African American congregation in Asheville and listed in the National Register of Historic Places in 1979, opened in its current location in 1898. James Vester Miller, a prominent contractor of mixed-race whose mother was formerly enslaved in Rutherford County, constructed the handsome Gothic Revival-style brick building with elaborate interior woodwork. Miller Construction erected a number of important buildings in Asheville's Black community, and Miller's family helped develop a rural community around the Violet Hill Cemetery for African Americans.<sup>233</sup>

Hopkins Chapel A.M.E. Zion Church (BN0433) formed when black congregants tired of their treatment at the white Central Methodist Church and organized their own church. The "Hopkins Message"—"a commitment to cooperation, dignity and respect"—became a hallmark for its ministers.<sup>234</sup> In 1907, the wood-frame Hopkins Chapel church built by formerly enslaved people burned, and the congregation hired Richard Sharp Smith, the supervising architect at George Vanderbilt's palatial Biltmore Estate south of town, to design a new sanctuary.<sup>235</sup> James Vester Miller oversaw construction of Hopkins Chapel, which started in 1907 and was completed in 1910.

Nazareth First Missionary Baptist Church began in the 1860s with Sunday School classes taught by Mary Patton, daughter of Thomas Patton. Following the Civil War, the classes moved downtown to First Baptist Church. Soon thereafter the white congregants decided they wanted the Black worshipers to have their own church. Thomas Patton donated land on a ridge in the area where people enslaved by the Pattons lived. The present brick edifice (BN6452) at 146

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<sup>231</sup> Henry Robinson, "The Patton Family," *Crossroads* (Summer-Fall 2010), 6; Judson, "I Am A Nasty Branch Kid," 333.

<sup>232</sup> Walter Conser Jr. and Robert J. Cain, *Presbyterians in North Carolina: Race, Politics, and Religious Identity in Historical Perspective* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2012), 148.

<sup>233</sup> Grant, "Historic African American Churches and Affiliates."

<sup>234</sup> Davis, *Black Heritage*, 36.

<sup>235</sup> Grant, "Historic African American Churches and Affiliates."

Pine Street was dedicated in April 1961, the last in a series of buildings to occupy the site and serve the congregation.<sup>236</sup>

Mt. Zion Missionary Baptist Church organized in 1880, and the congregation first met in a building on the west side of downtown. A talented young minister, Rev. J. R. Nelson succeeded founder Rev. Robert P. Rumley after 17 years of ministry and subsequently moved the church into the heart of the African American commercial district. James Vester Miller constructed the imposing Victorian Gothic-style church building (BN2159) at 47 Eagle Street in 1919. The massive brick building rises two-and-a-half stories from a stone foundation and features three square corner towers with ornamental sheet-metal finials, large art glass windows in the façade and transepts, and a tin shingle roof.

The roots of public education for Black residents in Asheville began in the East End. Following approval of a school committee in 1887, which included African American businessman Isaac Dickson, the city acquired the former Beaumont Academy on Beaumont Street for the first public school for Black students in the city. In desperate need of repairs, the building closed after three years and students moved into another substandard building, likely a frame dwelling that was converted into the Mountain Street School and opened in 1890. Finally, in 1892, the stately two-story brick Catholic Hill School opened in East End. Designed by Richard Sharp Smith, the school proved a point of pride in the community for many years before a tragic fire in 1917 took the lives of seven students.

Another institution began in 1892 at the urging of Edward S. Stephens, principal of the Catholic Hill School, to provide housing and recreation for Black laborers at George Vanderbilt's Biltmore Estate. Vanderbilt funded the organization of Young Men's Institute (YMI) (BN0020) and had Richard Sharp Smith design a handsome, two-story, brick and pebbledash stucco building at the corner of Eagle and Market streets, which opened in April 1893. Black workers and artisans constructed the building at a cost of \$15,000, which was to be repaid through dues and rents. The YMI Building became the center of social, cultural, civic, and business life for African Americans in Asheville. It served as a community center and meeting place and included a kindergarten, gymnasium, bathing facilities, offices, and shops. Among its tenants were a realty company, undertaker, cabinet shop, beauty parlor, barbershop, shoe shop, medical offices, and a drug store. The YMI opened its facilities to Black congregations, schools, and civic groups. A spacious auditorium was used for concerts, dances, and banquets. Boxing and

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<sup>236</sup> "Nazareth First Baptist Church Observes 100<sup>th</sup> Anniversary," *Asheville Citizen-Times*, October 1, 1967, 11B; Ami Worthen, "Nazareth First Missionary Baptist Church Celebrates 150<sup>th</sup> Year," *Mountain Xpress*, October 23, 2017, <https://mountainx.com/news/nazareth-first-missionary-baptist-church-celebrates-150th-year/> (accessed February 3, 2022).

wrestling were allowed in the dirt-floor basement. In 1906, a group of Black businessmen bought the YMI from Vanderbilt.<sup>237</sup>

The YMI Building anchored the commercial section of East End, which had a thriving business district on Eagle Street situated just one block south of the courthouse and one block off downtown's principal commercial street, South Main Street (present-day Biltmore Avenue). Eagle Street was lined with restaurants, cafes, barbershops, and pool halls. Several buildings housed professional offices. The Savoy Hotel & Café, Club Del Cardo, Ritz Restaurant, and Esquire Barbershop made a lively setting on Market Street. Albert's Steak and Chicken Shop and Mrs. Breeland's Sandwich Shop were located on Eagle Street. The Star Theater opened in 1917 as a movie theater for Black patrons. The Asheville Supply and Foundry had its facility on Eagle Street. Mt. Zion Baptist and Calvary Presbyterian churches' sanctuaries (BN2159 and BN6453) were also located on Eagle Street. In 1924 James Wilson built a handsome two-story brick commercial building (BN2157) near the intersection of Eagle Street and Biltmore Avenue that was occupied by an insurance company, a music teacher, and a beauty shop. Dr. F. A. Evans had his dental office in the Wilson Building, along with Dr. L. O. Miller's medical office, and C. C. Lipscombe's realty company. For much of the twentieth century the Black business district in the East End was almost completely self-contained and offered nearly all the goods and services the Black community needed.

A few years after the tragic fire at Catholic Hill School, public requests for a new school became manifest with the passing of a \$550,000 bond issue for new facilities at four schools. In 1921, the City approved plans for an 18-room Collegiate Gothic-style building to be erected on the city-owned Catholic Hill site. Local architect Ronald Greene designed the \$100,000 building, which was constructed by local contractor Z. V. Creasman.<sup>238</sup> In the spring of 1922, with construction of "the splendid new structure" advancing, the school board elected to rename the school in honor of Prof. Edward S. Stephens, first principal of Catholic Hill School, and Hester Lee (1861-1922), who taught in Asheville's Black schools for more than 30 years.<sup>239</sup> Born in eastern North Carolina, Lee came to Asheville after graduating from Livingstone College in Salisbury and began teaching at the Mountain Street School. Her husband, Walter S. Lee (1867-1934), served as principal at Catholic Hill School and subsequently at Stephens-Lee High School. Lee, who was deeply moved by the recognition, wrote a letter of appreciation expressing her "sincere prayer...that the work of the school will prove an enduring blessing and benediction to

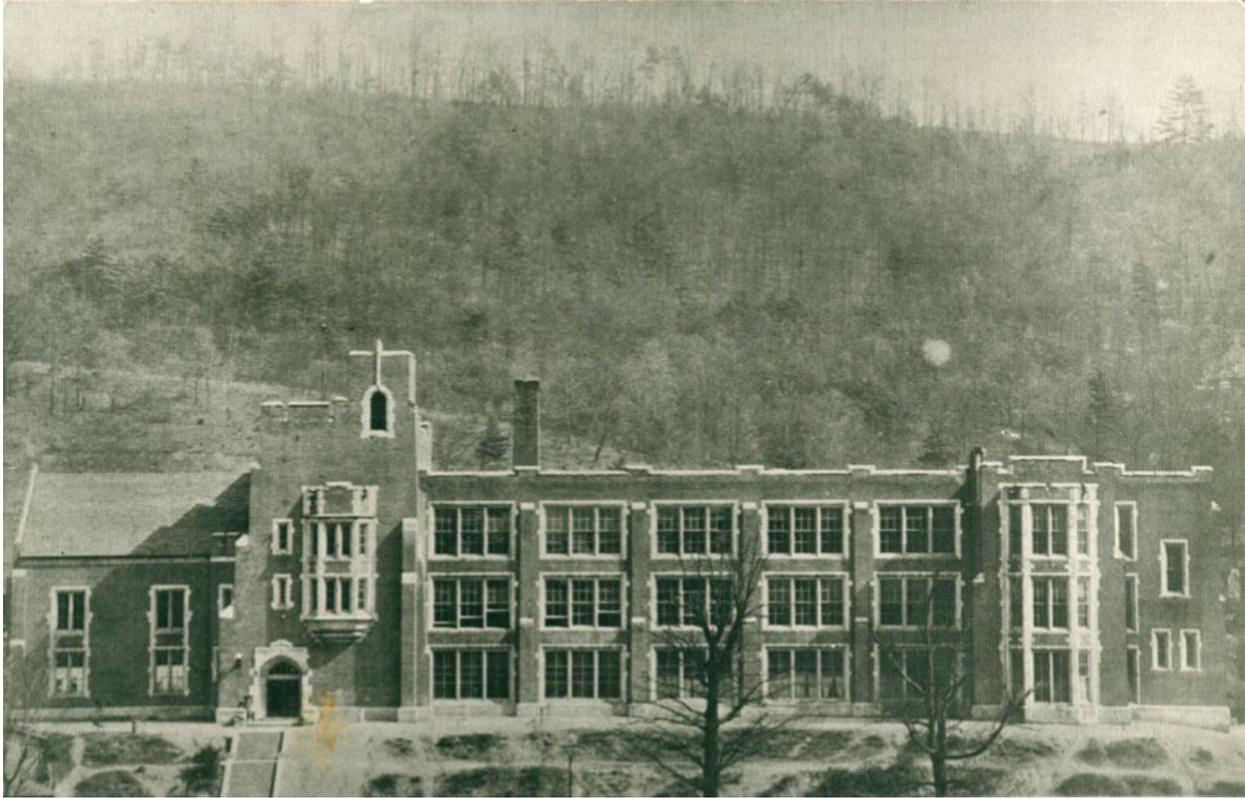
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<sup>237</sup> Bishir, et al, "Young Men's Institute"; Davis, *Black Heritage*, 66-69; "Formal Opening," *Asheville Citizen*, April 7, 1893, 4.

<sup>238</sup> "Education System in Asheville is One of South's Very Best," *Asheville Citizen*, November 30, 1921, 7B; "Complete Architect Plans for Catholic Hill School," *Asheville Citizen*, November 6, 1921, 12; "Work on Catholic Hill School House to Begin Tuesday," *Asheville Citizen*, December 23, 1921, 1.

<sup>239</sup> "Board Adopts Name New High School," *Asheville Citizen*, April 26, 1922.

the community which we love and labor to make the most delightful spot in all the world.”<sup>240</sup> Lee died just months before the school opened, but Stephens-Lee High School formed a cornerstone of the African American community for more than 40 years.



**Stephens-Lee High School** (Buncombe County Special Collections, L940-DS, Pack Memorial Library, Asheville, NC).

The importance of Stephens-Lee High School to the Black community cannot be overemphasized. According to community leader Phyllis Sherrill, the school offered courses in music, drama, carpentry, radio repair, cosmetology, and home economics beyond its core academic curriculum. Principal W. S. Lee “emphasized a curriculum built around Shakespeare, dignity, and self-help.”<sup>241</sup> The school became known for its music program, drama productions, and, in the 1930s, its marching band. Competitive athletics were added later, making the school’s plays, concert performances, and sporting events an integral part of the community’s

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<sup>240</sup> Hester Lee, Letter to the Editor, *Asheville Citizen*, April 29, 1922, 4; “Hester A. Lee Dies After Brief Illness,” *Asheville Citizen*, August 15, 1922, 16.

<sup>241</sup> Pat Fitzpatrick, “Growing Up in Stumptown,” in *May We All Remember Well: A Journal of the History & Cultures of Western North Carolina*, Volume II, ed. Robert S. Brunk (Asheville, NC: Robert S. Brunk Auction Services Inc., 2001), 150.

social activities. During its existence, Stephens-Lee High School effectively “stood as a symbol of Black achievement, independence, and culture.”<sup>242</sup>



**Stephens-Lee Marching Band, view north on Valley Street** (*Lest We Forget*, 1952 yearbook).

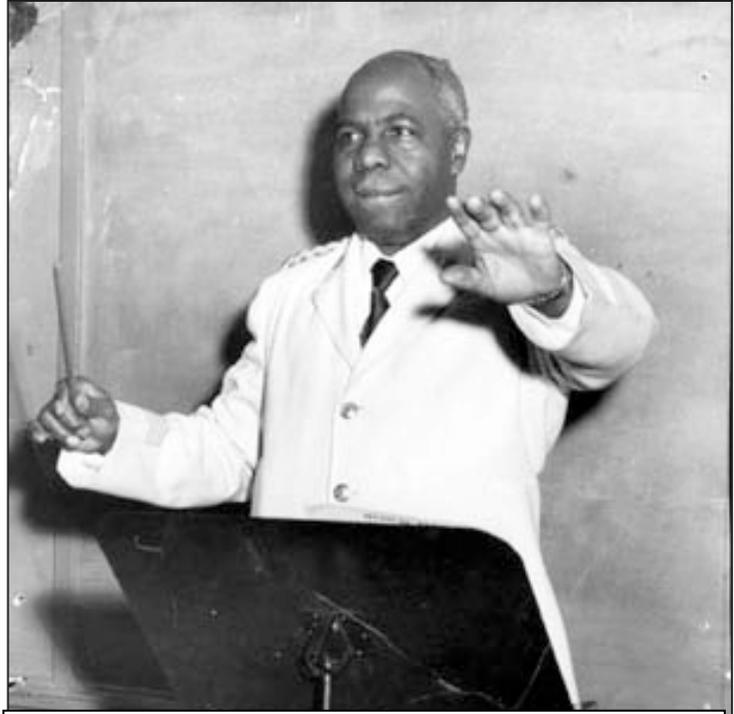
Stephens-Lee attracted highly qualified teachers, and most had graduate degrees. Due to racial segregation across the South, many Black individuals with advanced degrees were limited to employment in African American schools. As a result, Stephens-Lee students benefited from highly trained teachers who were invested in their students and created a climate of success. The school principals set high expectations for teachers. Stephens-Lee teachers often spent summers taking graduate courses out of state, due, once again, to the effects of segregation. Many of the teachers earned their master’s degrees at northern schools including the University of Michigan, Ohio State University, the University of Illinois, and Columbia University. Black students sometimes remarked that their Stephens-Lee teachers were better educated than the teachers at the all-white high school.<sup>243</sup>

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<sup>242</sup> Davis, *Black Heritage*, 60-64.

<sup>243</sup> Judson, “I Am A Nasty Branch Kid,” 333; Joe Newman, “The Highly Qualified Teachers of Stephens-Lee,” *HeardTell* Blog, March 9, 2018, <https://specialcollections.buncombecounty.org/2018/03/09/the-highly-qualified-teachers-of-stephens-lee/> (accessed March 10, 2020).

The faculty of Stephens-Lee High School factored significantly in the school's stellar reputation and contributed to the betterment of the East End community in particular and the city as a whole. Elynora Foster Dargan spent part of her childhood with her parents in a rented house on Valley Street, but after receiving degrees from Howard University and Columbia University, she returned to teach at Stephens-Lee. She is credited as the first Black woman in Asheville to receive a master's degree. Gladys Forney came to Asheville as a history and sociology teacher after earning degrees at Shaw University and the University of Illinois. She played a key role during integration of the two high



**Madison C. Lennon, Stephens-Lee High School Band and Music Teacher** (D. H. Ramsey Library Special Collections, University of North Carolina at Asheville).

schools in Asheville. Madison C. Lennon served as the band director at Stephens-Lee for 25 years after earning degrees at Wilberforce and Ohio State universities. Along with Paul Dusenbury, Lennon took the marching band throughout the southeast and compiled an impressive list of honors and awards. Earning degrees from Shaw University, North Carolina A&T, and the University of Wisconsin, Clarence Moore taught science and successfully coached the school's football, baseball, and basketball teams. During the 1940s, Moore was the owner and manager of the Asheville Blues, a Black professional baseball team.<sup>244</sup> Oliver W. H. McCorkle served as the school's athletics director and fielded teams despite not having access to a gymnasium until 1940, when an addition was constructed through a WPA project. Some of the material for the \$46,500 structure was reused from the recently razed Orange Street School.<sup>245</sup> According to historian Milton Ready, McCorkle and Moore encouraged athletics and community programs for recreation, "never as a system to promote the gifted few."<sup>246</sup>

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<sup>244</sup> Zoe Rhine, "The Faculty of Stephens-Lee High School: A Tribute," *HeardTell* Blog, February 20, 2018, <https://specialcollections.buncombecounty.org/2018/02/20/the-faculty-of-stephens-lee-high-school-a-tribute/> (accessed March 10, 2020); Davis, *Black Heritage*, 61-62.

<sup>245</sup> "Six WPA Projects Costing \$169,722 Receive Approval," *Asheville Citizen*, May 21, 1940, 6; "Stephens-Lee Gymnasium," *Asheville Citizen*, December 1, 1940, 7B.

<sup>246</sup> Milton Ready, "A History of Pride," *Asheville Citizen-Times*, February 13, 1983, 1D.



**House (BN6451), 55 Hazzard Street, constructed by the 1952-53 Stephens-Lee High School shop class taught by Lacy Haith (Rory Krupp, 2019).**

Lacy T. Haith (1909-1994) came to Asheville in 1937 after graduating from North Carolina A & T State University. He earned a master's degree in Industrial Education from the University of Michigan in 1943 and did further graduate studies at Ohio State and Columbia universities. Haith taught carpentry and other vocational skills at Stephens-Lee for 35 years. Known as a demanding teacher, Haith felt that he taught his students philosophy and values as much as he did vocational skills. He built a home for his family during the summers over a three-and-a-half-year period and used the house as a model for his carpentry students. During the 1952-1953 school year his shop class built a house (BN6451) on Hazzard Street near the school. He owned and operated a furniture store on Valley Street, developed a subdivision behind his home, and emerged as a Civil Rights advocate. After retiring from education in 1972 as one of Stephens-Lee's most influential teachers, Haith was ordained as a minister in the African Methodist Episcopal Church, taught Sunday School classes at Craggy Prison, and, along with one other

individual, constructed the education building at St. James A.M.E. Church (BN0680) known as the Haith Education Center.<sup>247</sup>

The Allen School, a private school founded in 1887, filled a valuable role in the community. Operated under the direction of the Woman's Home Missionary Society of the Methodist Episcopal Church, the school began with a mission to teach African Americans to read and write, serving children during the day and adults in the evening. By the end of its first month in operation, enrollment topped 100 students; by the end of its first year, the school had 200 students. Within a few years, the Allen School added a high school curriculum and a boarding program for female students. It became an accredited high school in 1924. The school employed mostly white female teachers who were Christian missionaries and gradually increased its focus on college preparatory work. The school's early frame buildings stood until the 1950s, when they were razed and replaced with modern two-story masonry structures (BN6455). Known primarily as a single-gender boarding school for Black female students, Allen High School closed in 1974, after graduating nearly 1,200 students.<sup>248</sup>



**Allen High School Dormitory (BN6455), architect's rendering, *Asheville Citizen*, February 28, 1952.**

The East End was a thriving community through the mid-twentieth century. Like other African American neighborhoods in Asheville, it was close-knit. As historian Sarah Judson points out, an ethic of reciprocity ensured mutual assistance; everyone helped everyone out. The neighborhood fostered a strong sense of community through both its physical and conceptual boundaries, which created an insulated world for African Americans “removed from white

<sup>247</sup> Lacy and Harriett Haith, interviewed by Dorothy Joynes, March 23, 1994, Voices of Asheville Project, D. H. Ramsey Library Special Collections, University of North Carolina Asheville; Rob Neufeld, “The Reverend Lacy Thomas Haith is Given Award,” *Asheville Citizen-Times*, January 16, 1994, 25.

<sup>248</sup> “Allen High School to Close as Private Black Girls’ School,” *Asheville Citizen*, May 23, 1974, 32; Henry Robinson, “Allen High Alumnae Plan Reunion Here,” *Asheville Citizen-Times*, August 13, 1978, 1C.

domination” and free from the impositions of segregation.<sup>249</sup> While the neighborhood was not without its problems, residents generally remember its positive qualities and characteristics— aspects of East End not defined by its buildings and physical resources.

After serving for several decades as western North Carolina’s only secondary school for African Americans, the City’s all-white school board closed Stephens-Lee in 1965 as part of its desegregation plan. Students were reassigned to the recently completed South French Broad School on South French Broad Avenue. Many in the Black community objected to the move on the basis that the all-Black South French Broad School only perpetuated a segregated system. A group of concerned citizens supported making Lee Edwards High School (present-day Asheville High School) the city’s only high school. The Stephens-Lee building, after it ceased being used as a school, housed several non-profit organizations while slowly deteriorating. In 1975, the building was sold to the Asheville Parks and Recreation Department, which demolished the school buildings except for the gymnasium (BN0838).<sup>250</sup>

The City of Asheville applied to the Model Cities Program in 1971 for an urban renewal project in the East End/Valley Street neighborhood. The City reduced the proposed project area to keep costs down and avoid voting on a bond issue to finance its one-third share of the estimated \$450,000 price tag. Much of the money was earmarked for the preparation of detailed plans, administrative costs, surveys, and acquisition appraisals. Not all City Council members were enamored of the project because of the cost and wondered if more vigorous code enforcement might be more effective. The city manager noted that no amount of code enforcement could create salable sections of land for redevelopment and that approximately two-thirds of the existing structures in the Valley Street area were considered “dilapidated, not just deteriorated.”<sup>251</sup> The city manager was also aware of the personal costs associated with the project, saying, “It would be ‘folly and misleading’ to even suggest that some people in the proposed Urban Renewal area wouldn’t be hurt by the project, ... some families wouldn’t want to sell their property or move from the neighborhood.”<sup>252</sup>

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<sup>249</sup> Judson, “I Am A Nasty Branch Kid’,” 331-332 and 334-335.

<sup>250</sup> Jay Hensley, “School Board Declines Integration Initiative,” *Asheville Citizen*, July 7, 1965, 1; “Deadline Set for Negroes Reassignment,” *Asheville Citizen*, August 4, 1965, 6; Bob Queen, “Schools Say Letter Hurt Vocation Plans,” *Asheville Citizen*, August 11, 1965, 1; Bob Queen, “County School Board Cites Letter For Delay In Funds,” *Asheville Citizen*, August 18, 1965, 1; Henry Robinson, “Stephens-Lee High School Joins City’s Old History,” *Asheville Citizen-Times*, April 20, 1975, 16B.

<sup>251</sup> Ed Seitz, “Council OKs Project Survey Funds,” *Asheville Citizen*, April 2, 1971, 1-2

<sup>252</sup> *Ibid.*



**Valley and Eagle Streets, photo by Anthony Lord, ca. 1964** (Buncombe County Special Collections, K712-5, Pack Memorial Library, Asheville, North Carolina)

In 1978, Asheville received a community development grant that was primarily allotted for improvements in the East End through the East End/Valley Street Redevelopment Plan.<sup>253</sup> The Asheville Housing Authority (AHA) oversaw the project, which covered 250 acres, but sought to utilize “a strategy of maximum citizen participation” due to “past neglect and ‘charges of broken promises’.”<sup>254</sup> Despite the approach, it seems the different stakeholders were never fully in agreement. Jesse Ray Jr., who served on the citizens’ advisory committee, stated that the residents hoped to “generally improve the physical condition and appearance of the area with the least amount of disruption to the present community” and that they were not in favor of the “demolition of all existing facilities and completely replacing them.”<sup>255</sup> The authors of the plan, however, described the project area “as almost a totally blighted area.”<sup>256</sup> Of the 430 structures in the neighborhood, only 29 met city housing codes and more than 200 were

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<sup>253</sup> John Robinson, “Funds May Go To Valley Street, East End Projects,” *Asheville Citizen*, January 11, 1978, 21; “Acceptable Risk on Valley Street,” *Asheville Citizen*, January 13, 1978, 4.

<sup>254</sup> Brown, “East End/Valley Street Redevelopment Plan,” 3.

<sup>255</sup> Dahleen Glanton, “Street, Sewer Improvements Promised for East End Area,” *Asheville Citizen*, March 1, 1978, 25.

<sup>256</sup> Brown, “East End/Valley Street Redevelopment Plan,” 1.

classified as dilapidated. During the first year of the project, AHA proposed grading several streets, water and sewer system improvements, and property acquisition typically limited to vacant parcels. Nonetheless, a significant emphasis was placed on housing rehabilitation and demolition. Larry Holt, deputy director of AHA, stated that 100 of the houses would never be replaced since “the overcrowded conditions constitute one of the major reasons for blight in the area.”<sup>257</sup>

On the heels of the nearly \$12 million allotted for the East End/Valley Street Redevelopment Plan, the AHA approved a \$16 million redevelopment plan for the Eagle and Market streets area of the city. Encompassing approximately 28 acres directly south of City-County Plaza, the Eagle-Market Street Neighborhood and Economic Development Plan was intended to augment the East End project and attract additional private development. More than 80 percent of the housing in the project area was rental, and only four structures were considered to meet city housing codes. Businesses remaining in the area were expected to upgrade their facilities. The project called for repaving all streets in the area; closing Velvet Street and Dixon Alley, along with sections of several other streets; and installing new water and sewer lines.<sup>258</sup>

By 1981, the AHA had demolished 41 homes and relocated 21 families, 23 individuals, and one business through redevelopment projects. Twenty-five additional vacant structures were targeted for demolition. Money had been disbursed to finance the renovation of 44 buildings; six other structures were being rehabilitated. “Citizen response was as enthusiastic as city officials had hoped,” read a measured statement from the *Asheville Citizen-Times*.<sup>259</sup> NCDOT prepared plans to widen Valley Street from two lanes to five lanes, which would “force the demolition of a ragged row of buildings along the thoroughfare.”<sup>260</sup>

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<sup>257</sup> John Robinson, “East End-Valley Street Project Receives Approval,” *Asheville Citizen*, April 6, 1978, 9; Rodney Brooks, “East End-Valley Street Project Approved,” *Asheville Citizen*, March 15, 1978, 19; Dahleen Glanton, “Valley Street Work Schedule Outlined,” *Asheville Citizen*, August 30, 1978, 21.

<sup>258</sup> Rodney Brooks, “Housing Authority OKs Redevelopment,” *Asheville Citizen*, July 12, 1978, 1.

<sup>259</sup> John Campbell Jr., “East End’s Renovation Progressing,” *Asheville Citizen-Times*, December 13, 1981, 1.

<sup>260</sup> *Ibid.*



**View down Valley Street**, *Asheville Citizen-Times*, August 14, 1983.

Although it was a state project, the widening of Valley Street by NCDOT was intertwined with the East End/Valley Street Redevelopment Plan and left the most visible scars in the neighborhood. The new five-lane, 60-foot roadway required demolishing nearly 60 “time-worn buildings” including “rows of old houses and stores, some traditional and some notorious.”<sup>261</sup> Designed to bypass downtown while connecting I-240 with Biltmore Avenue, the new street cut a swath through the East End neighborhood, severing connections between the residential sections to the east and the business district on Eagle and Market streets. A pedestrian bridge at the former intersection of Eagle and Valley streets was erected ostensibly to provide a safe crossing between downtown and East End but only served to reinforce the isolation of neighborhood residents. Completed in August 1984, the improved Valley Street was declared to be “pleasantly unfamiliar to most Asheville motorists” now that it was “free of much of the old scenery.”<sup>262</sup> The improvements not only destroyed Valley Street physically, but also largely attempted to erase it from memory by renaming the new road South Charlotte Street.<sup>263</sup>

While the East End redevelopment project began with some optimism, it ended, as usual, with regret. Residents generally acknowledged that the area needed help, but the plan’s

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<sup>261</sup> John Campbell Jr., “Valley Street Ready for Upgrade,” *Asheville Citizen-Times*, August 29, 1982, 1D.

<sup>262</sup> John Campbell Jr., “Old Valley Street Project Running Ahead of Plans,” *Asheville Citizen-Times*, August 14, 1983, 1D; “South Charlotte Street Opens,” *Asheville Citizen*, August 24, 1984, 18.

<sup>263</sup> John Campbell Jr., “Name Game: Panel Hits Roadblock in Effort to Identify City Streets,” *Asheville Citizen*, July 13, 1983, 29.

implementation failed to engage the community in a meaningful way and its execution undermined the neighborhood's social and family institutions. Approximately 300 houses were rehabilitated, new infrastructure was built, and streets were improved. Cleared or vacant lots were offered to displaced residents for \$1, but many individuals and families could not buy the lots because they could not afford to build new houses. As a result, many community members left the East End, scattered to other areas, and did not return.<sup>264</sup> Despite the physical changes, the remaining East End neighborhood continues to hold a place of prominence within the Black community. The East End/Valley Street Neighborhood Association advocates on behalf of residents and for preservation of the area's history.<sup>265</sup>

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<sup>264</sup> Paul Clark, "East End Community Breakup Still Smarts 3 Decades Later," *Asheville Citizen-Times*, February 1, 2008, 1; Christopher Silver and John V. Moser, *The Separate City: Black Communities in the Urban South, 1940-1968* (Lexington, KY: The University Press of Kentucky, 1995), 1.

<sup>265</sup> Nizarah Caddick, "Q&A: Renee White Discusses the Ongoing Legacy of the East End/Valley Street Neighborhood," *Mountain Xpress*, March 25, 2022, <https://mountainx.com/news/qa-renee-white-discusses-the-ongoing-legacy-of-the-east-end-valley-street-neighborhood/> (accessed May 10, 2022).

## Southside (BN6431) / French Broad

Survey Site No.	Property Name	Address	Date
BN3766	Elks Fawndale Lodge #363	382 South French Broad Avenue	1920
BN3813	S. Foster Tourist Home	88 Clingman Avenue	1920s
BN5181	Jade Club	101 Biltmore Avenue	1946
BN5662	Livingston Street School	133 Livingston Street	1953
BN5664	Walton Street Pool (Study List 2019)	570 Walton Street	1948
BN5887	Oliver W. H. and J. Mae McCorkle House	87 Blanton Street	ca. 1925
BN5925	Commercial Building	32 Banks Avenue	1920s
BN6428	Worldwide Missionary Baptist Tabernacle	85 Choctaw Street	ca. 1958
BN6431	Southside		
BN6432	Oakland Forest	Haith Drive	1968
BN6433	Livingston Apartments	344 Livingston Street	1979
BN6434	Erskine-Walton Apartments	62 Erskine Street	ca. 1975
BN6435	Ellsworth House	85 Ora Street	1975
BN6436	Moore House	87 Ora Street	1975
BN6437	Rabbit's Motel	107 McDowell Street	1948
BN6438	New Bethel Baptist Church	508 South French Broad Avenue	1942
BN6439	Beulah Chapel Fire Baptized Holiness Church	102 South French Broad Avenue	1970s
BN6440	Pine Grove Missionary Baptist Church	11 Pine Grove Avenue	1965
BN6450	Lee-Walker Heights [Demolished 2019]	50 Wilbar Avenue	1951
BN6467	Church of Christ Gaston Street	30 Gaston Street	ca. 1955

The Southside neighborhood encompasses a broad swath of land southwest of downtown Asheville, extending west from Biltmore Avenue to the rail yards and industrial areas along the French Broad River. Covering more than 400 acres, it generally stretches from Hilliard Avenue on the north to Victoria Road on the south. While the neighborhood began as an area of predominantly white residents, it later transformed through the mid-twentieth century into the city's largest residential area for Black citizens and became "a melting pot of people with varying backgrounds and lifestyles."<sup>266</sup>

Industrial development occurred just south of downtown and along the river and railroad corridor to the west. Working class white residents occupied the northern section near Clingman Avenue in the early twentieth century, while Black workers lived farther south near the railroad depot. African American occupancy spread northward during the 1910s and 1920s until it was no longer limited to the areas closest to industry and the railroad. The construction boom of the 1920s helped fuel the neighborhood's growth.<sup>267</sup>

Early businesses were typically located close to the bustling railroad depot area and along Southside Avenue, which originally extended from Depot Street to Biltmore Avenue. The area around Depot Street contained hotels, restaurants, and cafes in addition to warehouses and wholesale enterprises. A variety of commercial activities were also scattered throughout the neighborhood.

The Booker T. Washington Hotel opened on Southside Avenue in 1928. The four-story building contained a theater, a ballroom, and 20 guest rooms. Its painted sign overlooking Death Alley proclaimed it to be a "Hotel – Dance Hall – Theatre – For Colored." The hotel and ballroom were a popular stop for prominent Black entertainers including James Brown, Bill Doggett, Nat King Cole, Billie Holiday, Count Basie, Duke Ellington, Aretha Franklin, and Moms Mabley. In the 1950s, it became the James-Keys Hotel, managed in part by Mason James, a talent agent, and was advertised in *The Negro Motorist Green Book* for African American travelers.<sup>268</sup>

After losing his savings in the bank failures of 1930, Jesse G. Ray Sr. scraped together enough money to attend the Worsham College of Mortuary Science in Chicago, where he was one of seven African Americans to graduate in a class of 47 students. Returning to Asheville in 1932, he began working at the McCoy Funeral Home on Eagle Street. Ray married Julia Greenlee in 1935 and partnered with Gaither Henry for two years before Ray and his wife

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<sup>266</sup> Henry Robinson, "Looking for Answers in Memories of a Southside Boyhood," *Asheville Citizen-Times*, May 25, 1992, 7A.

<sup>267</sup> Sybil Argintar Bowers, "Clingman Avenue Historic District," National Register of Historic Places Nomination Form, Bowers Southeastern Preservation, Asheville, NC, 2003.

<sup>268</sup> Dan Kochakian, "Rewinding Asheville's Black History," *The Urban News*, February 10, 2016, <https://theurbannews.com/our-town/2016/rewinding-ashevilles-black-history/> (accessed February 3, 2022).

established a funeral home in 1938. Because of other more established Black-owned funeral homes in town—Allen, Asheville, and McCoy-Wilkins—it was a risky decision. After operating from College Street, the Rays purchased the former Asheville Colored Hospital in 1951 and moved their funeral home to 185 Biltmore Avenue, where it remained until around 2000. Ray also partnered with his brother, William H. Ray, to open Ray’s Cleaners, which stood at the corner of Eagle and Velvet streets in the 1940s and 1950s. The business thrived through the twentieth century and, after the death of Jesse Ray Sr. in 1994, the funeral home continued to be operated by the family.<sup>269</sup>

Two public schools were located in the Southside neighborhood and served as elementary schools. The Ashland Avenue School, built around the turn of the twentieth century, served white students, while the Livingston Street School was erected in 1920 for Black students. Rachel Battle served as principal of the Livingston Street School from 1921 until 1942. Students from the school went on to attend Stephens-Lee High School. The Livingston Street School was replaced in 1952 by a new facility designed by local architecture firm Six Associates Inc. Prior to demolition, the original structure was the last frame school building used by the city.<sup>270</sup> The new building (BN5662) was not quite ready for the start of school in 1953, and students began the year meeting at Mt. Olive Baptist Church adjacent to the school.<sup>271</sup>

In 1936, Father Ronald Scott, a Franciscan friar, began construction of a school on Walton Street to be operated by the Franciscan Sisters of Allegany. Father Scott had come to Asheville a year or two earlier to establish St. Anthony’s Parish and Church for the New York-based Franciscans and took up residence in the Southside neighborhood. Well known in the local community, he organized the St. Anthony of Padua Parochial School on Walton Street, which served African American students in first through eighth grade. The school operated for more than 30 years but closed in 1969, when the sisters withdrew due to a teacher shortage.<sup>272</sup>

Recreation facilities remained a rarity for African Americans in Asheville. The few parks and playgrounds that existed for Blacks were typically private and located near schools. Oates Park opened on Southside Avenue in 1913 to provide a playing field for the Asheville Baseball Club. The white businessmen who owned the club financed the field, which was named for fellow

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<sup>269</sup> “Our Founder,” Ray Funeral & Cremation Service, <https://www.rayfuneralcremation.com/about-us> (accessed February 2, 2022); Jesse Ray Sr., interviewed by Dorothy Joynes, December 9, 1993, Voices of Asheville Project, D. H. Ramsey Library Special Collections, University of North Carolina Asheville. In addition to a successful family business, Julia Ray’s trailblazing life includes being the first Black woman to serve on the Asheville YWCA Board of Directors, the first Black woman to serve on the UNC Asheville Board of Trustees, and the first Black woman to serve on the Board of Mission Hospital. John Boyle, “Julia Ray Day: African American Business Pioneer Gets Birthday Present in Form of Own Day,” *Asheville Citizen-Times*, October 28, 2021.

<sup>270</sup> “Board OKs Plan for 2 City Schools,” *Asheville Citizen*, June 19, 1952, 17.

<sup>271</sup> “Schools of City Will Open Today,” *Asheville Citizen*, August 31, 1953, 2.

<sup>272</sup> “Teacher Shortage May Close Parochial School,” *Asheville Citizen*, February 21, 1969, 12; “Efforts Made To Keep Parochial School Open,” *Asheville Citizen*, February 22, 1969, 22.

businessman J. Rush Oates.<sup>273</sup> Although it appears to have been originally a segregated facility, by 1917, the field included a small grandstand and section of bleachers in right field for African Americans.<sup>274</sup> Despite baseball's popularity in Asheville, the club appears to have struggled financially. The owners of the park announced plans to convert the site for commercial use and subdivided the property.<sup>275</sup> City officials began looking at sites for a new stadium in 1922 after Oates Park was leased to the Asheville Royal Giants, a Black baseball team, for the summer. Black businessman and developer E. W. Pearson organized the Royal Giants in 1916, and they played their first games at Pearson Park in the Burton Street neighborhood.<sup>276</sup> Organized baseball moved to McCormick Field when it opened in 1924, and the grandstands and bleachers at Oates Park were removed. Although a few commercial buildings were constructed on the site, the property continued to function as a park through the mid-twentieth century, hosting fairs, circuses, and other gatherings. The Buncombe County District Colored Agricultural Fair, also organized by Pearson, operated yearly from 1914 until 1947, and was held at Oates Park for many years.

Planning a segregated municipal park for Black residents involved navigating two nearly insurmountable obstacles: money and white opposition. Funding available in the 1930s through the federal relief programs of the New Deal provided a solution to one part of the equation, and in 1937, the City, in conjunction with the WPA, began to plan for a municipal African American park. Initial plans were made to acquire property in Campbell's Woods and build a park in the Hill Street neighborhood, but the objections of Montford residents scuttled the proposal.<sup>277</sup> White residents complained that the park would lower their property values and argued that the Hill Street location was not central to most of the city's Black population.<sup>278</sup>

Like many Depression-era public works projects, plans changed frequently. The early proposals called for a park, wading pool, pavilion, office building, outdoor fireplaces, tennis courts, and general landscaping.<sup>279</sup> Still looking for a park location in 1938, the City purchased five and a half acres on Walton Street for \$750. Initial plans for the proposed Walton Street park included the construction of a pavilion, wading pools, tennis courts, horseshoe pits, and walking paths. The WPA approved \$13,500 for the project to be supplemented by city funds—

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<sup>273</sup> "New Ball Ground Called Oates Park," *Asheville Gazette-News*, February 12, 1913, 4; "Deeds Received for Land in Oates Park," *Asheville Citizen*, February 27, 1913, 6.

<sup>274</sup> "Baseball Suggestions," *Asheville Citizen*, April 10, 1913, 4; "Asheville, N.C., Nov. 1917" Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps, sheet 25, Library of Congress Geography and Map Division Washington, D.C.

<sup>275</sup> Buncombe County Register of Deeds plat book 1, page 39.

<sup>276</sup> "School Board Plans Athletic Field – Form City Wrestling Commission," *Asheville Citizen*, February 10, 1922, 12.

<sup>277</sup> "City to Buy 22 Acre Tract for Negro Park," *Asheville Citizen*, December 2, 1937, 11.

<sup>278</sup> "Council Seeks New Location of Negro Park," *Asheville Citizen*, December 10, 1937, 1; "Council to Pave Way for Curb Market, Negro Park," *Asheville Citizen*, January 13, 1938, 1.

<sup>279</sup> "Seek WPA Funds for Developing Negro Park Here," *Asheville Citizen-Times*, January 9, 1938, 5A.

approximately \$1,500.<sup>280</sup> Construction began in July 1938 and employed African American workers.<sup>281</sup>



**Walton Street Pool (BN5664) in the 1950s** (Isaiah Rice Photograph Collection, D. H. Ramsey Library Special Collections, University of North Carolina Asheville).

Located on Walton Street, Riverview Park, as it was originally known, formally opened in June 1939 and included a wading pool, tennis courts, horseshoe pits, and a small playground. A swimming pool and pool house were planned but not yet funded. Dr. C. B. Chapin and two other ministers argued vigorously for a swimming pool to be built at the park.<sup>282</sup> Construction of the pool and pool house began in 1947, after World War II. The rectangular, poured-concrete, in-ground swimming pool (BN5664) measured 40 feet by 100 feet. The one-story

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<sup>280</sup> “13,439 to Be Spent by WPA on Negro Park,” *Asheville Citizen-Times*, June 19, 1938, 8C.

<sup>281</sup> “Work to Start on Negro Park this Morning,” *Asheville Citizen*, July 22, 1938, 20; “150 Persons Are at Ground-Breaking for Negro Park,” *Asheville Citizen*, July 23, 1938, 3.

<sup>282</sup> “New Negro Park Here is Officially Opened,” *Asheville Citizen-Times*, June 4, 1938, 3A; “Mountain Air,” *Asheville Citizen-Times*, September 25, 1938, 5B.

concrete block bath house was constructed in 1948.<sup>283</sup> The park proved to be immensely popular and within a few years, a proposal to expand the facilities was brought before the city council. The park served approximately 15,000 Black citizens with its limited facilities, which consisted of the swimming pool and wading pool, along with two tennis courts, eight swings, six see-saws, one slide, and two shuffleboard courts. More than 2,000 youth used the pool during its first year. Advocates proposed grading the site to include playing fields. In 1953, Black residents in Asheville did not have regular access to a football field, baseball diamond, running track, or lighted recreation areas for nighttime use. A city engineer estimated the cost of grading and improvements for an athletic field and playground equipment to be \$25,000.<sup>284</sup> The measure apparently failed to pass.

Southside was a vibrant, social community with plenty of gathering places, both formal and informal. Children played in, or traveled to, the East End along Nasty Branch, a creek that connected both neighborhoods to the French Broad River. The creek provided a natural corridor and oasis interwoven with the urban fabric.<sup>285</sup> As home to nearly half of Asheville's Black population, Southside became a haven for the Black community within the segregated city. Mrs. S. Foster operated a tourist home at 88 Clingman Avenue (BN3813) from the late 1920s until 1965. It was advertised in the *Negro Motorist Green Book* between 1957 and 1967. Families and neighbors gathered at the houses of relatives, neighborhood stores, cafes, beer parlors, and nightclubs. Beer parlors were subject to frequent inspections and license revocations. In 1949, the former owner of Zula's Dinette on Ralph Street was convicted on a liquor charge, the Cozy Corner Café at 393 Southside Avenue had several violations, Lewis' Place at 60 Clingman Avenue was shuttered because the back porch was deemed "not a suitable place to sell beer," and C. D. Beatty at 181 Southside Avenue was cited for an inadequate building and "untidy place."<sup>286</sup>

In 1948, Fred "Rabbit" Simpson opened Rabbit's Motel and Café (BN6437) on McDowell Street. The tourist court, which catered to automobile-oriented visitors, consisted of two buildings, including the restaurant and a six-room motel building. The motel provided lodging to Blacks traveling through Asheville at a time when accommodations were scarce. Guests included sports figures, especially baseball players, and musicians touring the South on the

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<sup>283</sup> "Site on Walton Street Chosen for Negro Pool," *Asheville Citizen*, June 20, 1947, 1; "Negro Park Expansion Under Way," *Asheville Citizen*, July 9, 1948, 13. The Walton Street Pool (BN5664) was added to the North Carolina Study List in 2019.

<sup>284</sup> "Riverview: A Community Challenge," *Asheville Citizen*, May 28, 1953, 16; "Group Seeks Negro Park Improvements," *Asheville Citizen*, June 12, 1953, 15.

<sup>285</sup> Judson, "I Am A Nasty Branch Kid," 324-325.

<sup>286</sup> "Buncombe 6<sup>th</sup> In Beer Licenses; WNC Revocations Listed," *Asheville Citizen*, July 12, 1949, 9; "Chez Paul Beer License is Among Four Revoked," *Asheville Citizen*, July 21, 1949, 13.

“Chitlin’ Circuit” of Black-owned venues and clubs. Musicians and bands sometimes performed in the second-floor lounge above the restaurant.<sup>287</sup>

In the 1950s a number of restaurants, small groceries, corner markets, barbershops, and beauty parlors were scattered throughout the Southside neighborhood. The majority of businesses, however, were located along the major streets. The Blue Velvet Grill, Clover Leaf Café, and Pullman Porter’s Restaurant were all located on Southside Avenue. The Pullman Porter’s Restaurant became Iola’s Place in the 1960s. Southside also boasted the Six Points Drive-In at Southside and Asheland avenues, which hired Black cooks and servers, during the 1960s. The drive-in served as a starting point for drag races as drivers raced each other to Rabbit’s Motel on McDowell Street.<sup>288</sup>



**Rabbit’s Motel (BN6437), 107 McDowell Street, 2009** (Buncombe County Special Collections, Pack Memorial Library, Asheville, North Carolina).

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<sup>287</sup> C. Brandon Chapman, “Asheville Celebrates Connections with Negro Baseball League,” *The Urban News*, March 14, 2008, <https://theurbannews.com/our-town/2008/asheville-celebrates-connections-with-negro-baseball-league> (accessed July 20, 2019).

<sup>288</sup> Neufeld, “Stories from the South Side.”

Music was an important part of the Southside neighborhood. Asheville provided strong community support for musicians passing through and performing around town.<sup>289</sup> The Jade Club (BN5181), now the Orange Peel, opened as a segregated roller skating rink in 1946. Located at 101 Biltmore Avenue on the edge between downtown and Southside, it became a nightclub and concert venue in the mid-1960s. The Jade Club featured soul singers like Chuck Jackson from the Del Vikings, Percy Sledge, and Garnett Mims. Jake Rusher operated the club along with the Royal Pines Casino and Swimming Pool in Arden, which featured bands such as The Supremes, The Coasters, The Shirelles, and Bo Diddley.<sup>290</sup> Owl's Lounge on Southside Avenue and the Cage on Depot Street also featured live music.<sup>291</sup> Located in a converted bowling alley at 105 Southside Avenue, Owl's Lounge was owned by George Hemphill, father of Shirley Hemphill, comedian and star of the television show "What's Happening!!"



Jade Club advertisements, 1966, Asheville Citizen-Times.

Social lives also revolved around fraternal organizations. The Improved Benevolent Protective Order of Elks of the World Fawndale Lodge (BN3766) was located at 382 South French Broad. The organization purchased a ca. 1920 two-story house in 1958 and

<sup>289</sup> Rob Neufeld, "Visiting Our Past: African American Music in Asheville was a rich node" *Asheville Citizen-Times*, Nov. 26, 2018, <https://www.citizen-times.com/story/news/local/2017/11/26/visiting-our-past-african-american-music-asheville-rich-node/894684001/> (accessed September 7, 2019).

<sup>290</sup> Tula Andonares, "Royal Pines Pool Open for 49<sup>th</sup> Season," *Asheville Citizen-Times*, June 22, 1996, C8; Jake A. Rusher obituary, *Asheville Citizen-Times*, October 17, 2003, B4.

<sup>291</sup> Rob Neufeld, "Street scene defined local community," *Asheville Citizen-Times*, January 21, 2019, A3.

subsequently converted it into to a clubhouse for their organization activities. Many of the lodge members participated in civil rights activities at the district level. Black Elks in North Carolina engaged in voter registration drives, and because the Elks had more members than the NAACP, their efforts had a powerful effect.<sup>292</sup>

As journalist and local historian Henry Robinson recalled, Southside, like other segregated neighborhoods, included a wide variety of people and professions living in close proximity to one another. Professionals and laborers, business owners and students, teachers and bootleggers all shared a community. Because of racist real estate practices, Blacks had few choices regarding what real estate was available to them for purchase; as a result, the middle class and the poor lived side by side in segregated neighborhoods like Southside. High paying jobs remained limited, and service jobs predominated, so Black-owned businesses frequently extended credit to neighborhood residents, and home businesses were an important part of the community.<sup>293</sup>

In addition to providing income to operators, beauty parlors and barbershops served as important social and political hubs for the wider community. Mae McCorkle, who operated a beauty parlor at 87 Blanton Street (BN5887), was an active member and recruiter for the NAACP Asheville branch. A variety of other types of home businesses operated in the Southside neighborhood, including grocers. The Congress Street Grocery, located in a house at 66 Congress Street, not only functioned as a grocery store but also promoted NAACP membership.<sup>294</sup>

To address a housing shortage post-World War II, the Asheville Housing Authority began planning Lee-Walker Heights (BN6450), a 96-unit apartment complex for African American occupancy. Designed by the firm Six Associates, the public housing project occupied a 12-acre hilltop site bounded by Biltmore and Southside avenues and was greeted affirmatively by white and Black community leaders.<sup>295</sup> The AHA initially received more than 140 applications for the 96 apartments.<sup>296</sup> The \$700,000 complex opened in May 1951. The dedication included a flag raising and a rendition of the “Star-Spangled Banner” by the Stephens-Lee High School Band.<sup>297</sup>

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<sup>292</sup> Theda Skocpol, Ariane Liazos, and Marshall Ganz, *What a Mighty Power We Can Be: African American Fraternal Groups and the Struggle for Racial Equality* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2006), 17–18.

<sup>293</sup> Henry Robinson, “Looking for answers in memories of a Southside boyhood,” *Asheville Citizen-Times*, May 25, 1992, 7.

<sup>294</sup> NAACP Advertisement, *The Southland Advocate*, April 15, 1950, 3.

<sup>295</sup> “Location Is Sought for First Public Housing Project,” *Asheville Citizen*, January 28, 1950, 9; “Action Taken For Acquiring Housing Tract,” *Asheville Citizen*, February 24, 1950, 21; “Contracts Will Be Awarded Soon on Asheville’s First Housing Project,” *Asheville Citizen*, April 9, 1950, 9.

<sup>296</sup> “AHA To Accept Applications For Lee-Walker Units,” *Asheville Citizen*, January 10, 1951, 16; “Many Apply For Units in Apartments,” *Asheville Citizen*, January 11, 1951, 13.

<sup>297</sup> “Lee-Walker Housing Units Dedicated,” *Asheville Citizen*, May 26, 1951, 9.

A group of student activists formed ASCORE, the Asheville Student Committee on Racial Equality, in the early 1960s. The student organizers, all graduates of Stephens-Lee High School, initially reported on the inadequate facilities at Stephens-Lee and addressed inequities between the white and Black high schools. The student report influenced the proposed construction of a new high school for Black students in the Southside neighborhood when the school board began planning a new facility on South French Broad Avenue. The school board, which initially proposed to continue using Stephens-Lee as a junior high school, selected the architectural firm of Gudger, Baber and Wood to design the new building. The building opened for the 1965-66 school year with 26 classrooms and a gymnasium, followed by the construction of an auditorium, music building, and workshop.<sup>298</sup>

The Southside neighborhood underwent a significant transformation due to urban renewal programs beginning in the mid-1960s and continuing until the late 1970s. Supporters of urban renewal argued that the private market and city code enforcement had failed to maintain an adequate supply of safe, affordable housing. Following a smaller redevelopment project north of City-County Plaza in 1963, the Asheville Redevelopment Commission proposed the East Riverside Urban Renewal Project, a massive rehabilitation and redevelopment project encompassing more than 400 acres southwest of downtown. City officials began pursuing federal urban renewal money, making the case that Asheville's share could be lost to Atlanta or other large cities.<sup>299</sup>

The 425-acre project area was bounded by Hillard Avenue to the north, Coxe and Southside avenues to the east, Oakland Road and Walton Street Park to the south, and Clingman Avenue and Depot Street to the west.<sup>300</sup> The East Riverside area was chosen largely because the city could receive credit for the cost of South French Broad School (no longer standing) without having to use city funds for actual renewal activities. The City promoted the project as an improvement for current residents, who numbered more than 4,000 people living in 1,300 structures, but residents recalled the project as mainly a benefit for the city.<sup>301</sup> At the time, 58 percent of Southside residents owned their homes. The project offered a housing rehabilitation option, but only for those who were able to afford it. For those unable to afford or obtain a loan for rehabilitation, the City would acquire their property and demolish any structures on it. Relocation, for those who could afford it, was complicated by the fact it was difficult for Black

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<sup>298</sup> Philip Clark, "Stephens-Lee Building Plan Is Criticized," *Asheville Citizen*, January 27, 1960, 1; Phillip Clark, "Steps Taken to Relieve Junior High Space Crisis," *Asheville Citizen*, April 5, 1961, 1B; Bruce Gourlay, "\$1.2 Million Looms As Price Tag On New City Senior High School," *Asheville Citizen*, June 23, 1963, 1; Bruce Gourlay, "New High School Will Be Built," *Asheville Citizen*, July 19, 1963, 1.

<sup>299</sup> Laurens Irby, "Bond Issue Defeat Would Be Big Blow," *Asheville Citizen-Times*, February 26, 1967, 41.

<sup>300</sup> Henry Robinson, "Giant Earth Movers Giving East Riverside Terrain a New Look," *Asheville Citizen-Times*, August 24, 1975, 51.

<sup>301</sup> Nickollof, "Urban Renewal in Asheville," 66-67.

residents to get a loan and find a real estate agent willing to sell them a house in a predominantly white neighborhood.<sup>302</sup>



**Aerial photographs of Southside in 1963 (left) and 1975 (right) showing areas following the removal of houses and landscape changes (City of Asheville).**

After some initial setbacks, the East Riverside Urban Renewal Project, which was the largest urban renewal project in the South, began in 1967. Out of approximately 1,300 structures, primarily houses, in the redevelopment area, 712 structures were slated for demolition. One-third of the acquired property would be made available for redevelopment, one-third would be used for street and park expansion, and the remaining property would be set aside for public housing.<sup>303</sup> To accommodate displaced residents, the AHA planned 625 low-rent housing units spread throughout the neighborhood. These included a complex of 200 apartments on South French Broad Avenue designed by the firm of Sappenfield, Wiegman, Hall Architects. The plan consisted of a 10-story tower containing 108 apartments, along with two separate two-story buildings containing an additional 92 apartments.<sup>304</sup>

Other public housing complexes in Southside attempted to remake the community, as well as assuage white fears about blight, through their design. The AHA sought to integrate public housing into the neighborhood by placing apartments on large lots with reduced density relative to other public housing projects and to the density of the neighborhood prior to the

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<sup>302</sup> Ibid., 87. Reported homeownership percentages vary widely. While Nickollof reports 50 percent home ownership, the *Asheville Citizen-Times* reported a 35 percent home ownership rate in the East Riverside project area (Irby, February 26, 1967, 41).

<sup>303</sup> Laurens Irby, "Dailey Fears Exodus Will Harm Purpose of Riverside Project," *Asheville Citizen*, February 21, 1967, 25.

<sup>304</sup> "A New Look in Public Housing," *Asheville Citizen-Times*, February 26, 1967, 41.

construction of public housing. The Erskine-Walton and Livingston apartments (BN6434 and BN6433) conveyed a middle-class sensibility promoted by planners in the 1960s and provided space for tenants' gardens. Dr. John Holt worked to ensure that the new public housing complexes would not have the barracks-like appearance of Hillcrest or Lee-Walker Heights.<sup>305</sup>



**Livingston Apartments (BN6433)** (Rory Krupp, 2019).

A small number of development projects continued in the neighborhood concurrent with urban renewal and afterwards, but the scale of these projects could not match the loss that had already occurred in the neighborhood. In 1968, former Stephens-Lee vocational teacher Lacy Haith developed Oakland Forest (BN6432), a suburban-style subdivision at the southern end of the neighborhood. The houses are Ranch and split-level dwellings with Colonial Revival-style details on large lots. Haith built at least two infill houses on Ora Street in 1975. These modest dwellings are one-story side-gable houses with brick veneer facades, which are typical of the 1970s infill houses built throughout Southside. Many of the plain infill houses were built on sloping lots with basement garages. Southside houses rehabilitated during urban renewal frequently had their porches and chimneys removed or had replacement porches with metal supports and railings attached to them.

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<sup>305</sup> “Racial Pioneer Holt Dies at 85,” *Asheville Citizen-Times*, October 7, 2007, 2.



**Oakland Forest (BN6432), subdivision developed by Lacy Haith in 1968** (Rory Krupp, 2019).

In addition to significantly altering the built environment of Southside, the East Riverside Urban Renewal Project resulted in large-scale changes to the landscape itself. Livingston and Depot streets were regraded and steep hills removed. The southern portion of Southside Avenue was removed, and Livingston Street was extended to Depot Street. Herrman, Beech, Black, Tiernan, and Nelson streets were eliminated entirely. Similarly, the combining of parcels wrought significant changes to the landscape by reducing the area's density. The AHA further reduced density by allowing homeowners to purchase adjacent lots. Planners pushed for reduced density as a way to increase safety, equating high density with a host of social problems and associating safety with a more suburban-type zoning. By 1978, Southside was noticeably "safer" by these planning standards. The area included 50 acres of parks and wider, straighter roads with gentle grades. The project radically altered the landscape and built environment from a dense, urban neighborhood to a relatively bland suburban landscape.



**Intersection of South French Broad Avenue and Livingston Street in 1975** (Housing Authority of City of Asheville Records, D. H. Ramsey Library Special Collections, University of North Carolina at Asheville).

The Asheville Housing Authority branded the project a success, but urban renewal combined with integration in schools and public accommodations turned nearly every facet of African American life upside down. The East Riverside project removed 757 of the 1,275 structures that existed at the beginning of the program.<sup>306</sup> The project relocated 483 families, 241 individuals, and 66 businesses. AHA director Larry Holt described the area as “a brand new subdivision.”<sup>307</sup> Conaria Booker, a resident of DeWitt Street, criticized the results, writing “The changes may look good, but the pain will be hard to erase.”<sup>308</sup> For Black residents it felt as if every stable institution and place of refuge in Asheville disappeared within a decade.<sup>309</sup>

Asheville schools were integrated by 1972. The Black student population from South French Broad High School began attending Lee Edwards High School in 1969, which was renamed Asheville High School to represent its integrated new beginning, though the transition was far from smooth. The facility on South French Broad Avenue was enlarged and became the city’s junior high school. After the Livingston Street School closed, the building (BN5662) served the

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<sup>306</sup> Rodney Brooks, “East Riverside,” *Asheville Citizen-Times*, July 2, 1978, 47.

<sup>307</sup> Ibid.

<sup>308</sup> Grim, “‘The Changes May Look Good,’” 25-26.

<sup>309</sup> Tighe and Opelt, “Collective Memory and Planning,” 16.

Asheville and Buncombe County Opportunity Corporation. Like Stephens-Lee High School and Shiloh Elementary, the school board sold the building to the city for use as a recreation center. Former student advisor Victor Chalk Jr. opened a student tutoring center here in the mid-1990s, but the building was rededicated in 2014 as the Arthur R. Edington Education and Career Center, named in honor of the Livingston Street School's former principal.<sup>310</sup>

In 1978, Rev. Wesley Grant addressed City Council and tallied the buildings lost in the neighborhood. The price paid for urban renewal in Southside included 1,100 homes, six beauty parlors, five barbershops, five filling stations, 14 grocery stores, three laundromats, eight apartments, seven churches, three shoe shops, two cabinet shops, two auto body shops, one hotel, five funeral homes, one hospital, and three doctor's offices.<sup>311</sup>

The project also marked another milestone: the end of the perception that the Black community spoke with one voice. White city officials and Black community leaders worked together to initiate the East Riverside project, but in hindsight, many Black residents felt they were misinformed or did not understand the total ramifications of the project when they voted for the bond issue. Many complained that they were unaware of the plan until the bulldozers arrived.<sup>312</sup> In some quarters this led to a stark sense of betrayal. Journalist Henry Robinson wrote of loss, not only due to urban renewal, but also from gains. He noted that integration was the death knell of neighborhood stores that used to provide credit to local Blacks and instead, "We scurried to spend our money at stores that, a few years earlier, had refused our money unless we went to the back door."<sup>313</sup> He lamented the loss of community and the solace it provided: "Steeped in the rich tradition of the family, the Southside was our place of shelter from the harsh realities of racist society, bent on keeping us in our place."<sup>314</sup>

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<sup>310</sup> Reed, *School Segregation*. 92.

<sup>311</sup> Neufeld, "Stories from the South Side."

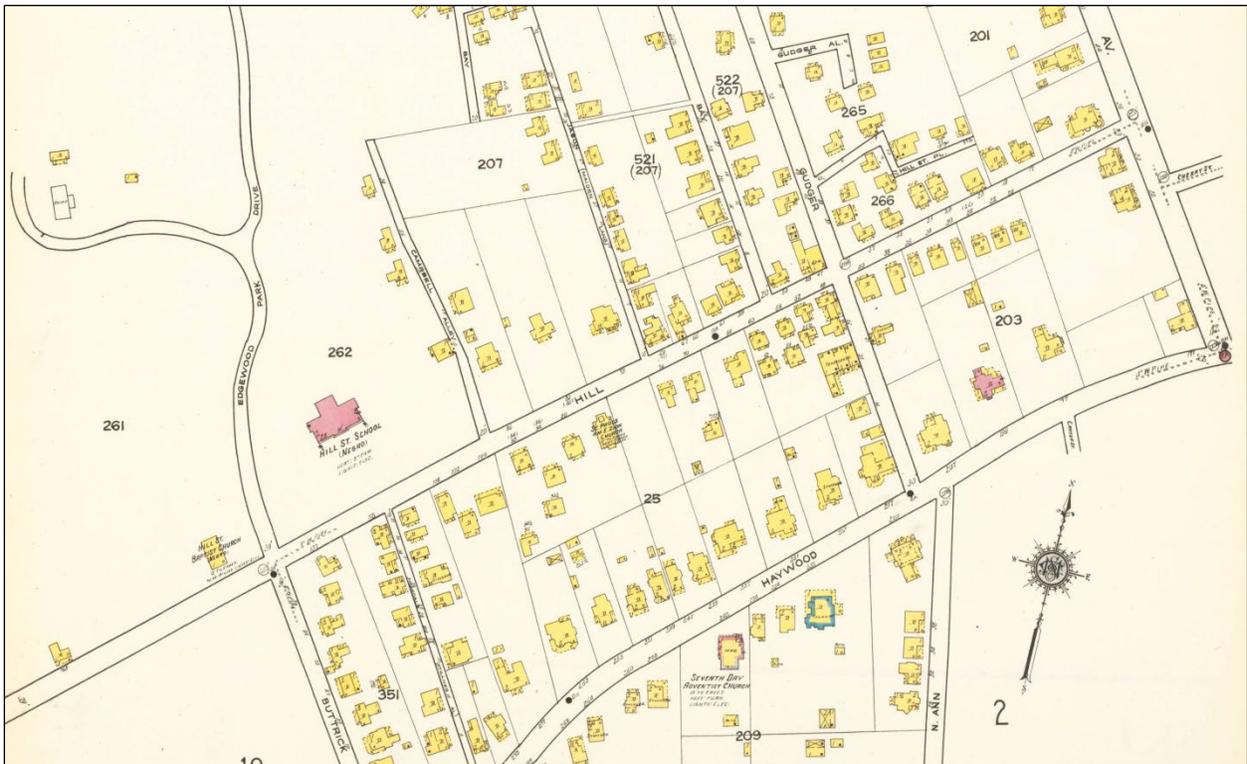
<sup>312</sup> Tighe and Opelt, "Collective Memory and Planning," 11.

<sup>313</sup> Henry Robinson, "Looking for Answers in the Memory of a Southside Boyhood," *Asheville Citizen-Times*, May 25, 1992, 7.

<sup>314</sup> Robinson, "Looking for Answers."

## Hill Street (BN6874)

Survey Site No.	Property Name	Address	Date
BN6445	Hill Street Baptist Church	135 Hill Street	1958
BN6446	Hillcrest Apartments	100 Atkinson Street	1958
BN6447	Fruit of the Spirit Church of God in Christ	1 Roosevelt Street	1920s
BN6448	Sycamore Temple Church of God in Christ	11 N. Ann Street	ca. 1955



**Hill Street neighborhood, Asheville, N.C., Nov. 1917, Sanborn Map** (Library of Congress Geography and Map Division Washington, D.C.).

The Hill Street neighborhood (BN6874) lies just northwest of downtown Asheville along Hill Street, which begins at Montford Avenue and extends southwest toward the French Broad River. The densely populated area was historically centered on the straight-running Hill Street with Campbell’s Woods lying to the north and the sinuous route of Haywood Street forming the southern edge. Several short cross streets, including Gudger, Bay, Jason, Michael, Buttrick, and Greenlee, intersected the upper part of Hill Street, while several long streets—Hall, Williams, and Atkinson—turned to the north parallel to the river at the foot of Hill Street.

Although Hill Street is shown on maps of Asheville dating back to the 1880s, the area began to develop in the first decades of the twentieth century. Following the issuance of \$10,000 in bonds in 1901, the first Hill Street School for Black students was erected.<sup>315</sup> One of the area's prominent early residents was Dr. William G. Torrence. Born in York, South Carolina, Torrence graduated from Shaw University and studied medicine at Dearborn Medical College in Chicago. He came to Asheville in 1906 and established Torrence Hospital in 1910, the first clinic for Black residents in the city, on the second floor of his home on Eagle Street. In 1911, Torrence moved his family and the clinic to a two-story house at 95 Hill Street and opened a medical office in the YMI Building. Torrence died in 1915 from tuberculosis, a disease for which, ironically, he had pioneered treatments for African Americans.<sup>316</sup> The children and grandchildren of Dr. Torrence continued to live in the house on Hill Street until the late twentieth century.

African American educator and architect John Henry Michael (1867-1940) came to Asheville in 1911 to serve as principal of the Hill Street School and teach fourth and fifth grades.<sup>317</sup> Born in Alabama, Michael graduated from Tuskegee Institute with a teaching certificate and pursued further studies at Hampton Institute in Virginia. In 1895, he married Alabama native Lelia Bell Walker, a teacher and a field organizer for the NAACP. The couple, along with their growing family, subsequently held a number of teaching positions, including a brief stint as principal of Asheville's Catholic Hill School, where Michael also taught sixth through eighth grades. After additional positions in Alabama, Arkansas, and Knoxville, Tennessee, the Michaels returned to Asheville.

Beginning in 1915, Michael conducted the first summer institute for African American teachers from Buncombe and Henderson counties at the newly completed Hill Street School. The new school building, situated on an elevated site on the north side of Hill Street, was designed by local architect William H. Lord. Michael's "Summer School for Colored Teachers" ran for 20 years, attracting an impressive range of instructors and attendees and growing in size and prominence each year. Michael secured an agreement with Winston-Salem Teachers College for the summer institute to count toward college degrees and renewing teaching certificates.<sup>318</sup>

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<sup>315</sup> Bernard Smith, "Public School System Established Here in 1888," *Asheville Citizen-Times*, March 26, 1950.

<sup>316</sup> Frazier, *Legendary Locals*, 2014, 21; Thomas Calder, "Asheville Archives: The Short Life of Dr. William Green Torrence," *Mountain Xpress*, February 20, 2018, <https://mountainx.com/news/asheville-archives-the-short-life-of-dr-william-green-torrence/> (accessed March 10, 2020).

<sup>317</sup> Dreck Spurlock Wilson, ed., *African American Architects: A Biographical Dictionary 1865-1945* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 285-287.

<sup>318</sup> Zoe Rhine, "Professor J. H. Michael's Early Work to Further the Education of Black Teachers, Asheville 1915-1921," *HeardTell* Blog, April 2, 2018, <https://specialcollections.buncombecounty.org/2018/04/02/professor-j-h-michaels-early-work-to-further-the-education-of-black-teachers-asheville-1915-1921/> (accessed March 10, 2020).

John Henry Michael held a long and prosperous tenure as principal of Hill Street School, serving in that capacity until his death in 1940. He remodeled the original Hill Street School for his family home and designed houses in the neighborhood for Mamie Howell and other family members. He was elected president of the YMI in 1917 and elected vice-chairman of the state's first Negro Recreational Council in the 1930s. Michael helped secure 18 acres of Campbell's Woods to develop as a recreation center for the school and offered the school's gymnasium, which he had designed, as part of the recreation program. He took special pride in his design for the landscaping around the school, and the grounds of the school were considered a model for other schools.<sup>319</sup>

Hill Street Baptist Church, another important institution in the community, opened its doors adjacent to the school in the mid-1910s. The congregation organized after a meeting among Rev. D. D. Moore, Richard Mills, Peter Porter, Joseph Wilson, and Matthew Peterson in 1916. The tireless Rev. E. W. Dixon was called as pastor in 1933, and under his leadership membership grew to 600 within a few years. Dixon was publisher and editor of a highly regarded weekly newspaper, *The Church Advocate*, established in 1932, as well as the owner of a taxi service, grocery store, and real estate company. He was elected moderator of the Mud Creek Baptist Association in 1935, and quickly set about the creation of a Baptist assembly in East Flat Rock, North Carolina. In the mid-1940s, the congregation began work on a new church facility. The lower auditorium of the building was completed in 1949, before Rev. Dixon's death in 1950, but the modern gable-front brick sanctuary was not completed until 1958 (BN6445).<sup>320</sup>

Hill Street Baptist Church earned a reputation for the strong community leaders it counted among its members. In addition to Rev. Dixon, who supported voter registration drives, his successor, Rev. Nilous Avery, was active in the Civil Rights movement and was an early supporter of ASCORE, the high school student group that worked to integrate restaurants, parks, libraries, and stores in Asheville in the early 1960s. Other members included Asheville businessman and civil rights activist William Roland and District Court Judge Robert Harrell, the first Black judge in western North Carolina.<sup>321</sup>

By 1925, Sanborn maps show the Hill Street neighborhood to be densely developed with one- and two-story frame houses, several tenements, and churches. The Hill Street School was the largest and most prominent building in the neighborhood. The H. S. Haskell Bottling Works on Gudger Street, as shown on the 1913 Sanborn map, was replaced with a tenement house by 1917. Though much of the housing stock in the Hill Street neighborhood has been lost, there

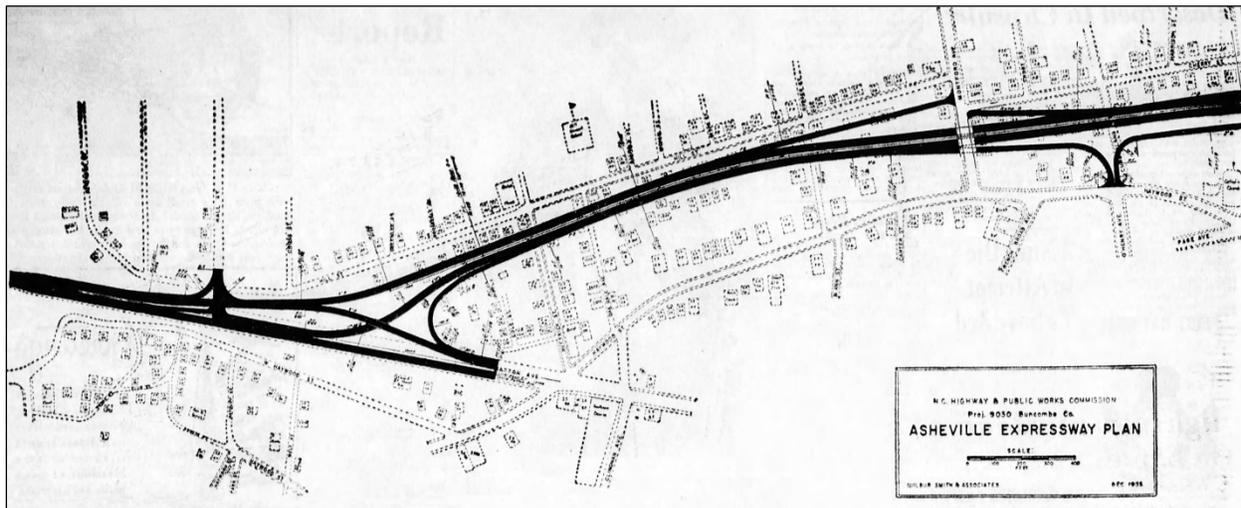
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<sup>319</sup> Rhine, "Professor J. H. Michael's Early Work"; Wilson, *African American Architects*, 287; "Prof. Michael, Negro School Principal, Dies," *Asheville Citizen*, December 28, 1940.

<sup>320</sup> Henry Robinson, "Hill Street Baptist Church: The Citadel of Leadership," *Asheville Citizen-Times*, February 22, 1985.

<sup>321</sup> *Ibid.*

remains a small group of houses on Bay and Jason streets that retain elements of the early-twentieth-century neighborhood. The few surviving houses are typically vernacular in form and appearance and have pyramidal and side-gable roofs, weatherboard siding, and attached front porches. Another cluster of early houses are located on Greenlee Street and Cross Place. The one-story Craftsman-influenced front-gable houses are interspersed with twentieth-first-century infill construction built with traditional two-story forms and massing.



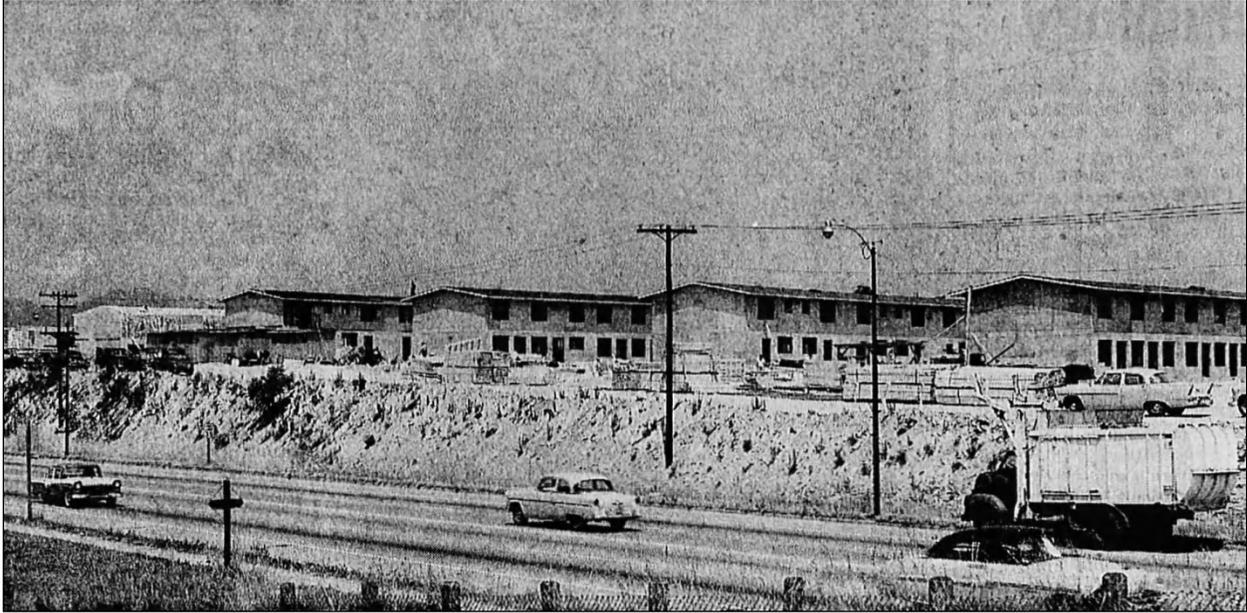
**Asheville Expressway Plan (west end),** *Asheville Citizen-Times*, December 25, 1955.

The Hill Street neighborhood was deeply affected by the Crosstown Expressway that cut through the city north of downtown. Planned in 1955 and completed in 1960, the new road extended from Beaucatcher Tunnel to the Smoky Park Bridge over the French Broad River.<sup>322</sup> On the west side of town, the route threaded between Hill Street to the north and Haywood Street to the south, taking a large swath of houses from the south side of Hill Street. Buttrick Street, Oakdale Avenue, and Gudger Street were severed between Haywood and Hill streets. City officials “expedited” work on the project, noting that settlements for taken property could be completed later.<sup>323</sup> Hill Street residents were the first in North Carolina to be eligible for FHA Part 221 home loans, which enabled residents displaced by highway construction to purchase replacement homes.

Further destruction of the community by the Crosstown Expressway occurred at the west end of Hill Street, where a network of interchange ramps isolated Hall, Williams, and Atkinson streets, effectively creating an island. The Asheville Housing Authority erected Hillcrest Apartments (BN6446), a public housing project, in 1958 on this isolated hilltop. The physical separation created by the highways and topography sent a not-so-subtle message about the City’s handling of racial affairs.

<sup>322</sup> Pete Gilpin, “\$6-Million Expressway Will Be Opened Today,” *Asheville Citizen*, December 15, 1960, 23.

<sup>323</sup> Philip Clark, “Expressway Plans Completed; Work to be ‘Expedited,’” *Asheville Citizen*, December 23, 1955, 1.



**Hillcrest Apartments (BN6446), ca. 1959, *Asheville Citizen-Times*, October 6, 1991.**

Due to its physical isolation, Hillcrest Apartments has long struggled with issues of crime and maintenance. Residents initiated a rent strike in 1967. Tenants complained that utility bills were exorbitant and claimed that maintenance employees ordered materials for repairs but then sold them.<sup>324</sup> Hillcrest resident and community leader Carl Johnson formed the Hillcrest Community Organization in 1966 to work with the housing authority. The organization sought to resolve undocumented utility bills and a lease where they had few rights, and to remove the housing authority director, Carl Vaughn.<sup>325</sup> When racial conflict, once again, threatened the city's image as a safe tourist destination, city officials and the housing authority moved to a resolution that included a new housing director.<sup>326</sup>

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<sup>324</sup> Robert Brunk, interviewed by Dorothy Joynes, February 9, 1993. Voices of Asheville Project, D. H. Ramsey Library Special Collections, University of North Carolina Asheville.

<sup>325</sup> Nickollof, "Urban Renewal in Asheville," 101-103.

<sup>326</sup> *Ibid.*, 117-118.



**Shirley Hemphill in her ABC television series “One in a Million”** (*Ebony Magazine*, 1980).

Popular comedian and television star Shirley Hemphill (1947-1999) lived in the Hill Street neighborhood as a child and was a student at Hill Street School before attending Stephens-Lee High School. Hemphill’s mother, Mozelle, worked as a maid and lived on Ocala Street in the Magnolia Park area when Hemphill was born. The Hemphills lived on Buttrick Street in the 1950s but were forced to move for construction of the Crosstown Expressway. The family resided on Blanton Street in the 1960s, while Hemphill attended Morristown College in Tennessee for two years before returning to Asheville. Shirley Hemphill worked as a nurse’s aide and at American Enka in the early 1970s, while sharing comedy sketches with family and friends. She sent a cassette tape of her act to comedian Flip Wilson, who replied with a dozen roses, a tape recorder, and a letter of encouragement. She moved to Los Angeles in 1973, and began doing stand-up comedy before landing a role on the popular television series, *What’s Happening!!* (1976-1979). She starred in two other series during the 1980s. Hemphill died at her home in California in 1999.<sup>327</sup>

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<sup>327</sup> “Shirley Hemphill: A Star is Born,” *Ebony*, May 1980, 93-96; “Today in Asheville History,” *Asheville Citizen-Times*, December 10, 2015.

## Stumptown (BN6875)

Survey Site No.	Property Name	Address	Date
BN6458	Welfare Baptist Church	27 Madison Street	1931

Only a small portion of the original Stumptown neighborhood (BN6875) remains between Montford and the boundary of Riverside Cemetery. Never formally surveyed, Stumptown covered roughly 30 acres and was home to approximately 200 families.<sup>328</sup> Bordered on the east by Pearson Drive, the Montford neighborhood's color line, Stumptown was named for the stumps people found when they moved to the area at the beginning of the twentieth century.<sup>329</sup> Other sources suggest the area was settled by African Americans as early as 1880.<sup>330</sup> Today a small cluster of streets—Madison, Gray, Gay, and Richie—comprise the surviving portions of Stumptown.

Residents remember the Stumptown community as tight-knit and familial, where the children were watched over by everyone.<sup>331</sup> As with many segregated communities a variety of occupations were represented among residents of the neighborhood. Business owners and black professionals lived on Gray Street. Many women worked in the service industry as domestics and cooks at the Battery Park Hotel or for families in Montford. Men worked at a number of jobs: “the railroad, newspaper, elevator operator, janitor, grocer, barber, and carpenter.”<sup>332</sup> Residents operated businesses in the neighborhood, including small groceries, beauty shops, a coal yard, and Mr. Howard's Snack Shop (or Sweet Shop) at 86 Gay Street, where the Recreation Center parking lot is currently located.<sup>333</sup>

Community life centered on Welfare Baptist Church, which opened in 1931. The congregation originally organized as Taylor's Chapel Baptist Church, which stood between Gray and Richie streets. As the community grew, trustees for the church—W. K. Knight, Joe Calhoon, and Hattie Jones—purchased a lot at 27 Madison Street for a new structure (BN6458). The community effort to raise funds for the new church fared so well under the leadership of Deacon William Howard that the name of the church was changed to Welfare Baptist Church. The dynamic church grew in the 1940s, expanding its facility with plumbing and restrooms. Rev. E. W. Posey oversaw a period of stability as pastor from 1950 to 1969, but the church

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<sup>328</sup> Pat Fitzpatrick, “Growing Up in Stumptown,” in *May We All Remember Well: A Journal of the History & Cultures of Western North Carolina*, Volume II, ed. Robert S. Brunk (Asheville, NC: Robert S. Brunk Auction Services Inc., 2001), 141-142.

<sup>329</sup> Henry Robinson, “Stumptown to hold reunion,” *Asheville Citizen-Times*, August 22, 1997, 17.

<sup>330</sup> “Tempe Alley Folks Fight For a Way Out,” *Asheville Citizen*, November 2, 1909, 5.

<sup>331</sup> Susan Dryman, “Memories of Stumptown,” *Asheville Citizen-Times*, August 24, 1997, 13.

<sup>332</sup> Fitzpatrick, “Growing Up in Stumptown,” 144.

<sup>333</sup> *Ibid.*, 148.

membership declined in the 1970s as physical upheaval in the Stumptown area drove many residents out of the neighborhood.<sup>334</sup>



**Undated photograph of Welfare Baptist Church (BN6458)** (Stumptown Reunion Collection, Buncombe County Special Collections, Pack Memorial Library, Asheville, North Carolina) (left) and **current view following conversion to a single-family residence** (Rory Kupp, 2019) (right).

In 1969, resident Phyllis Sherrill asked the Asheville City Council to remove cars that people had brought to Stumptown and abandoned on the streets. She argued the cars were dangerous for children, unsightly, and blocking the streets, but the City Council was less than sympathetic. While the council noted that the City was supposed to clear streets, the streets in Stumptown were not official city streets, so there was nothing the council could do. One resident complained that questions of ownership did not prevent the City from tearing down perfectly good houses for urban renewal.<sup>335</sup>

Sherrill and the Stumptown delegation returned the next month even more incensed. The city had removed exactly one car from the neighborhood, the one in front of Sherrill's house.<sup>336</sup> Madder yet, elderly resident Lloyd McCord told the Council that "Asheville enjoyed good race relations because, 'the Negro here takes what is handed to him without complaint. One day it will end.'"<sup>337</sup> A Council member suggested coming back the next month when a new City Council was sworn in. Due to continued pressure from Stumptown residents through the fall of 1969, the campaign worked and, by January 1970, the city had removed the abandoned cars from the neighborhood.<sup>338</sup>

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<sup>334</sup> "About Us," New Vision Baptist Church, <https://newvisioninfo.org/content/view/2/3/> (accessed January 13, 2020).

<sup>335</sup> Wally Avett, "Stumptown Delegation Requests Removal of Junk Cars and Litter," *Asheville Citizen-Times*, April 18, 1969, 15.

<sup>336</sup> Lewis W. Green, "Stumptown Group Presses Cleanup Issue with Movie," *Asheville Citizen*, May 2, 1969, 17.

<sup>337</sup> Ibid.

<sup>338</sup> "170 Cars Removed from Streets," *Asheville Citizen*, January 16, 1970, 13.

In 1970 and 1971 the Model Cities Program planned a park between Montford and Riverside Cemetery. Local residents had been trying to get a park for 15 years, and planning efforts during the late 1960s characterized the proposed recreational park as being for the residents of Stumptown. An editorial celebrating the approval of the park plan took a condescending tone in claiming that people of the neighborhood ought to be congratulated for their “happy combination of persistence and good luck,” while also suggesting that they change the name of their area.<sup>339</sup> The \$200,000 federally funded park plan destroyed a large portion of the neighborhood for the creation of recreational facilities. The Montford Recreation Center, built in 1975, was one of the last projects in Asheville sponsored by the Model Cities Program.

Urban renewal and eminent domain ultimately scattered many of the residents. Dorothy Wallace Ware remembers having a few months’ warning before their house was taken to build the park. The neighborhood largely dispersed. Some residents moved away from Asheville entirely. Some residents were able to buy houses in other areas of town, but most who stayed in Asheville ultimately moved into public housing.<sup>340</sup>

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<sup>339</sup> “Riverside Park Approval Is a Happy Decision,” *Asheville Citizen*, December 9, 1972, 4.

<sup>340</sup> “Stumptown,” *Asheville Citizen-Times*, August 24, 1997, 1-2.

## Magnolia Park (BN6462)

Survey Site No.	Property Name	Address	Date
BN2797	Ernest and Magnolia McKissick House	42 Magnolia Avenue	ca. 1905

Magnolia Park is a small neighborhood located on the eastern edge of Montford between Flint Street and Broadway Street. The residential neighborhood is primarily centered on Flint Street and Magnolia Avenue, and additional houses were constructed on Ocala Street, Short Flint Street, and Young Street, which was once known as Tin Can Alley. George W. Pack donated land for a recreational park, which he named Magnolia Park, in 1900.<sup>341</sup> Pack's gift, valued at \$2,000, provided about an acre of land at the corner of Flint Street and Magnolia Avenue. At the time the property contained a grove of mature oak trees.<sup>342</sup>

The 1901 *Maloney's Directory* shows that the area was integrated and that African Americans used the recreational area from the beginning.<sup>343</sup> A young African American entertainer, Charles W. H. Jordan, of Georgia, was scheduled to perform his snake-handling show in Magnolia Park during the first week of August 1901. A snake bite, however, thwarted Jordan's show, which was based on his trips to India, and left him hospitalized in Knoxville.<sup>344</sup> The area retained rural qualities and, in 1912, a complaint was made to the city that the park was being used as "a hitch lot and a cow pasture."<sup>345</sup> A few years later, commissioners discussed the issue of cutting the trees in Magnolia Park to supply the municipal yard with wood.<sup>346</sup>

By 1917 Magnolia Park was a predominantly African American middle class neighborhood. City commissioners discussed potential improvements to the recreational park in June 1920, following the announcement of improvements to Montford and Aston parks. Commissioner Sherrill expressed the sentiment that residents near the park would like to have the City clean up and fence the property, in addition to constructing a playground.<sup>347</sup>

<sup>341</sup> "Dr. Fletcher Sends In His Resignation," *The Asheville Daily Citizen*, May 19, 1900, 6.

<sup>342</sup> "Asheville Again Indebted to Geo. W. Pack," *The Asheville Daily Citizen*, May 12, 1900; "Ashevillians Will Attend Pack Funeral," *The Asheville Weekly Citizen*, September 4, 1906.

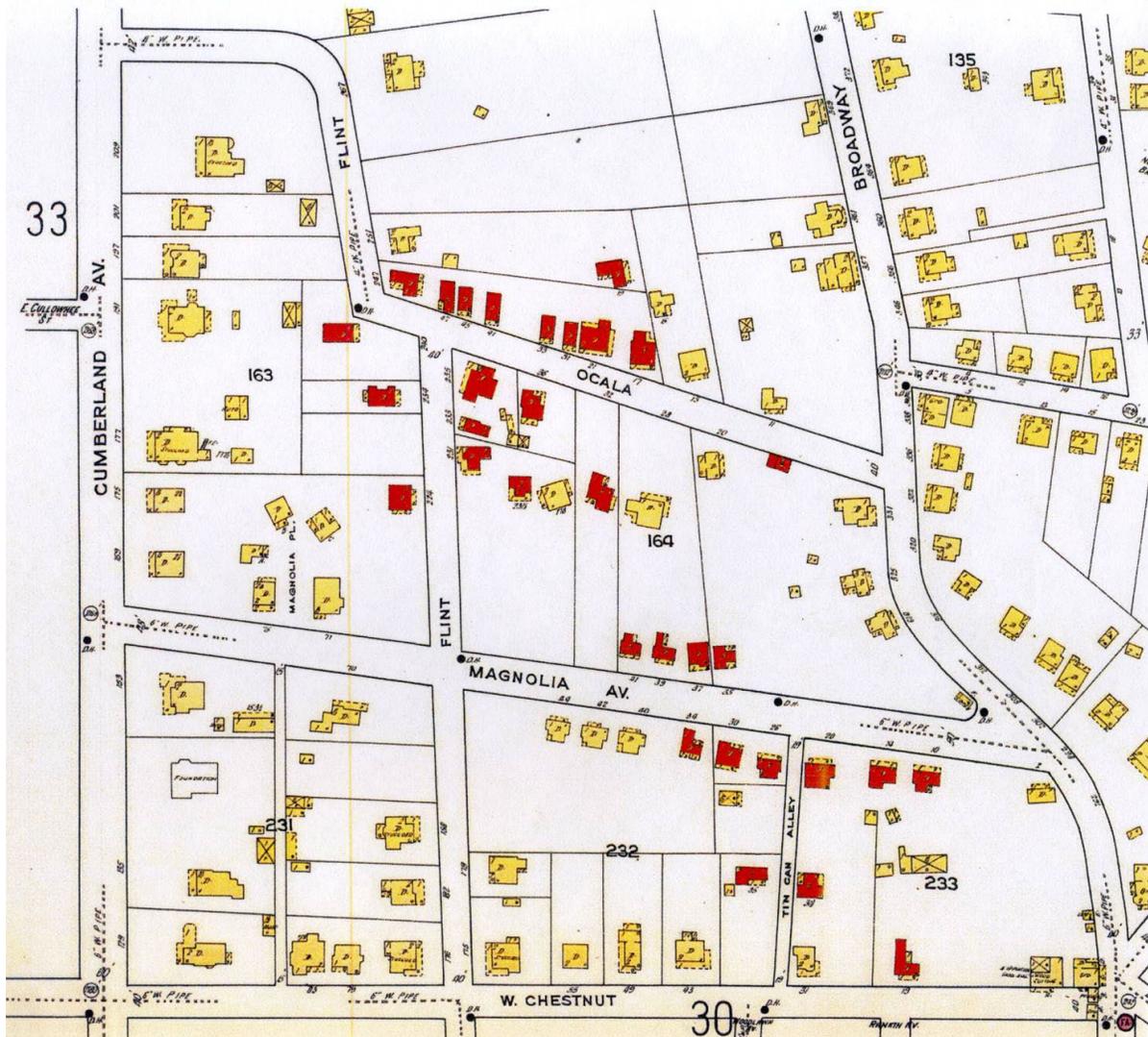
<sup>343</sup> *Maloney's Asheville City Directory* (Atlanta: Maloney Directory Company, 1901), 72.

<sup>344</sup> "Trials of a Snake Charmer," *Asheville Citizen*, August 21, 1901, 3.

<sup>345</sup> "Ordinance Forbids Driving Near Trucks," *Asheville Citizen*, May 25, 1912, 7.

<sup>346</sup> "Paving Assessments Ordered Advertised," *Asheville Citizen*, November 6, 1917, 10.

<sup>347</sup> "Montford Park To Be Improved Soon," *Asheville Citizen*, January 23, 1920.



**Magnolia Park neighborhood (BN6462), Asheville, N.C., Nov. 1917, Sanborn Fire Insurance map. Red houses denote African American occupancy (Library of Congress Geography and Map Division Washington, D.C.).**

In 1921, the City restricted the park's use by African Americans, using the police to clear the park of Black children. Neighborhood residents hired attorney Henry Austin, who noted that 45 African American families lived near the park and Black children had been playing there without incident for the past 11 years. Austin stated that since the park was established, there had been no rules distinguishing portions of the park for use by white or Black children.<sup>348</sup> The following year a group of 185 white residents petitioned the city commissioners "in a lively dispute" to make the park for whites only.<sup>349</sup> A committee representing Black residents led by attorney

<sup>348</sup> "Colored Children Ejected From Park," *Asheville Citizen*, June 4, 1921, 7.

<sup>349</sup> "Dispute Results Over Use of Park," *Asheville Citizen*, June 29, 1922, 2.

Austin again noted that African Americans owned property around the park, and some 200 Black children utilized the park for recreation. Since Walton Park was advertised as the first municipal park for African Americans when it opened in 1938, it appears the white residents were successful in restricting use of Magnolia Park in 1921.<sup>350</sup>

Ernest McKissick (1895-1980) and his wife Magnolia McKissick (1897-1989) bought the one-story frame house (BN2797) at 42 Magnolia Avenue in the mid-1920s. The McKissicks raised three daughters and a son in the house, which had been built around 1905. Ernest McKissick worked at hotels and as an agent for the fledgling North Carolina Mutual Insurance Company; Magnolia McKissick was a cashier and clerk for the company. Based in Durham, North Carolina Mutual was not only an insurance company, but also involved in civil rights and racial uplift through Black economic independence. The company supported a host of organizations, including the early NAACP. The influence of the NAACP was important to the McKissicks, whose son Floyd became closely affiliated with the group during his distinguished legal career.

Floyd B. McKissick (1922-1991) described his childhood on Magnolia Street as some very happy years with his family and his church. But he also noted times when racism suddenly intruded: "I think the struggle parts of my life were the fact that I was black, which oft time interfered with so much of the happiness that I might be enjoying when there's some abrupt change would come and tell you that you were black and not wanted."<sup>351</sup> The McKissicks moved to Madison Street in the Heart of Chestnut neighborhood in the mid-1930s.

In 1937, the HOLC labeled Magnolia Park as declining, along with Montford, and both neighborhoods were redlined, or labeled financially hazardous. The stated reason for redlining Magnolia Park was not because of its African American residents, but rather due to the large number of boarding houses used for tourists.<sup>352</sup> The park fell into disrepair. In 1936, city officials prepared plans to develop "the old Magnolia park," which was now reduced to 300 feet by 300 feet, as a playground for Black children.<sup>353</sup> By 1948, the *Asheville Citizen* lamented the park's condition as "hardly more than an overgrown lot."<sup>354</sup> The newspaper noted that some city parks were well equipped and operated while others, like Magnolia Park, suffered from neglect, but encouraged making Magnolia a community park.<sup>355</sup> At some point before 1968, Magnolia Park was upgraded with a wading pool, shelter house, and summer playground.<sup>356</sup>

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<sup>350</sup> Epstein, "Tolerance, Governance and Surveillance in the Jim Crow South," 260.

<sup>351</sup> Oral History Interview with Floyd B. McKissick Sr., May 31, 1989, Interview L-0040, Southern Oral History Program Collection (#4007), <https://docsouth.unc.edu/sohp/L-0040/L-0040.html> (accessed January 2020).

<sup>352</sup> "Proper Land Use and the Public Park," *Asheville Citizen*, June 24, 1948, 4.

<sup>353</sup> "Start Work On New Play Park," *Asheville Citizen*, September 1, 1936.

<sup>354</sup> "Proper Land Use and the Public Park," *Asheville Citizen*, June 24, 1948, 4.

<sup>355</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>356</sup> "Asheville Recreation Activities," Mountain Vacationland Issue, *Asheville Citizen-Times*, June 30, 1968.

The park was extensively renovated between 1996 and 1999 with a small playground, half-court basketball court, picnic shelter, and paved walking path. Landscape architect Mary Webber designed the renovations and incorporated community feedback. The park was rededicated in honor of longtime residents Walter and St. Ola Mapp, who lived on Ocala Street.<sup>357</sup>



**From left, Montford residents Tessie Woods, St. Ola Mapp, and Fairfax Arnold, Montford Resource Center, working on Magnolia Park renovation, *Asheville Citizen-Times*, October 29, 1996.**

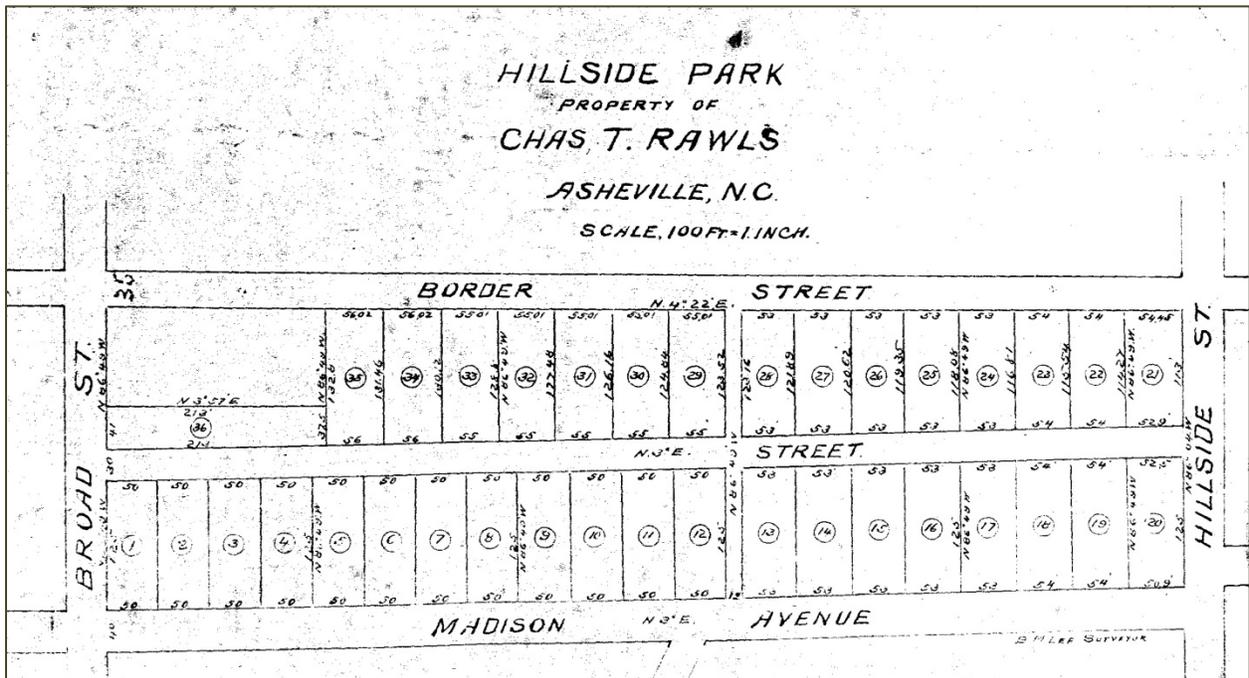
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<sup>357</sup> Tula Andonaras, "Magnolia Park is Montford's Focus," *Asheville Citizen Times*, October 29, 1996, 17.

## Heart of Chestnut (BN6460) / Chestnut Hill

Survey Site No.	Property Name	Address	Date
BN4296	McKissick House	48 Madison Avenue	ca. 1920
BN4304	John Brooks Dendy House	45 Madison Avenue	ca. 1920

The Heart of Chestnut neighborhood is a compact neighborhood adjoining the larger Chestnut Hill area that extends along East Chestnut and Liberty streets. Heart of Chestnut is neatly defined by Hillside Street to the north, Charlotte Street to the east, East Chestnut Street to the south, and Washington Road to the west.<sup>358</sup> Acme Preservation Services surveyed portions of the neighborhood as part of the Asheville Survey Update in 2007–2012.



**Plat of Hillside Park, 1906** (Buncombe County Register of Deeds).

One substantial section of the neighborhood was originally platted in 1906 as Hillside Park by Charles T. Rawls (PB 8:90), while a second area between Madison Avenue and Crescent Street was platted in 1909 by Dr. Carl V. Reynolds.<sup>359</sup> The area was a racially mixed neighborhood and largely built up by the mid-1920s at which time it was predominantly African American.<sup>360</sup> The HOLC notes indicate that African American occupancy began in the late 1920s

<sup>358</sup> Cissy Dendy, “The Heart of Chestnut Hill Presents Our Vision of the Road Ahead,” City of Asheville Department of Communication and Public Engagement, Asheville, NC, June 30, 2016, 1.

<sup>359</sup> Buncombe County Register of Deeds plat book 154, page 21.

<sup>360</sup> Dendy, “The Heart of Chestnut Hill,” 1.

with “a good Negro section on Crescent, Madison, and Lee.”<sup>361</sup> The HOLC declared that ten years earlier the area was occupied entirely by whites, although city directories indicate a significant presence of Black families by at least 1910.<sup>362</sup>

The neighborhood was home to many influential African American residents and was solidly middle class through the first half of the twentieth century. Asheville’s first Black policeman, Lehman Williams, lived on Madison Avenue, along with the second Black policeman, Harold Fields, who later became a judge. Fenton Harris, who owned the YMI Drug Store and a printing company, also lived on Madison Avenue. Dr. Herbert White, a Black physician, lived in the neighborhood, along with Dr. Frank Toliver, principal of Stephens-Lee High School. Lucy Herring, a well-known educator and superintendent at the Mountain Street School, lived on Broad Street. A young Floyd McKissick, future Civil Rights leader, moved into the neighborhood from Magnolia Park with his parents around 1936. Following World War II, McKissick returned to the neighborhood and lived at 73 Madison Avenue while working as a bellman at the Grove Park Inn.<sup>363</sup> McKissick integrated the University of North Carolina School of Law and took over leadership of the Congress for Racial Equality (CORE) in 1966.

Professional golfer John Brooks Dendy lived on Madison Avenue (BN4304). Born in 1913, Dendy won his first tournament, the Southern Open in Atlanta, at age 18. Buoyed by his success, he was encouraged to compete in the 1932 National Negro Open and won easily. Dendy won the tournament again in 1936 at Cobbs Creek Golf Course in Philadelphia and again in 1937. Overall, Dendy won fifty-two tournaments. The Professional Golfers Association (PGA) would not admit African Americans until 1961, so after making little headway financially by playing golf, Dendy took a job in 1940 as a locker room attendant at the Asheville Country Club. He later worked at the Biltmore Forest Country Club. Even after his retirement from the circuit, newspapers like the *Pittsburgh Courier* continued to laud “veteran stylist” Dendy when he played exhibitions such as the 1945 Joe Louis Tournament in Detroit.<sup>364</sup>

Tuskegee airman Robert C. Robinson grew up at 9 North Crescent Street, attended Hopkins Chapel A.M.E. Zion Church, and graduated from Stephens-Lee High School. He went on to graduate from the Tuskegee Institute in 1944. Second Lieutenant Robinson took part in the

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<sup>361</sup> Robert K. Nelson, LaDale Winling, Richard Marciano, Nathan Connolly, et al., “Mapping Inequality,” *American Panorama*, eds. Robert K. Nelson and Edward L. Ayers, <https://dsl.richmond.edu/panorama/redlining/#loc=15/35.602/-82.56&city=asheville-nc&area=C2&adview=full> (accessed July 12, 2019).

<sup>362</sup> Ernest H. Miller, *City Directory of Asheville, North Carolina*, Vol. IX (Asheville, NC: Piedmont Directory Co., 1910), 498.

<sup>363</sup> *Miller’s Asheville City Directory 1953*, Vol. XLVII (Richmond, VA: Piedmont Directory Co., 1953), 262.

<sup>364</sup> “Ranking Golfers in Joe Louis Tournament,” *Pittsburgh Courier*, July 14, 1945, 12; Michael Dean, “The Legend of John Brooks Dendy,” *L.A. Watts Times*, February 7, 2013, [http://lawattstimes.com/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=902:the-legend-of-john-brooks-dendy&catid=12&Itemid=110](http://lawattstimes.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=902:the-legend-of-john-brooks-dendy&catid=12&Itemid=110) (accessed July 6, 2019).

bombing of Berlin in March 1945. He was reported missing and subsequently buried in Arlington National Cemetery.<sup>365</sup>



**Tuskegee Airman 2<sup>nd</sup> Lt. Robert C. Robinson, ca. 1945, grew up on North Crescent Street**  
(cafriseabove.org, accessed June 16, 2022).

John and Ruth Cannon owned a commodious bungalow with an inset front porch at 43 Madison Avenue. John Cannon worked at a downtown hotel and later as the caddie master for Asheville Country Club. Ruth Cannon taught at the Livingston Street School. Their daughter Shirley became friends with Eunice Waymon, a gifted student and pianist from Tryon who attended Allen High School in Asheville, a private school for African American students. Before she became known as Nina Simone, Waymon would visit the Cannons and play piano and sing with her friend. Further along the street, John and Octavia Vance offered boarding in their small home for professional Black baseball players. Among their famous guests were Jackie Robinson

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<sup>365</sup> “Robert C. Robinson Jr.,” CAF Rise Above, March 21, 2019, <https://cafriseabove.org/robert-c-robinson-jr/> (accessed June 16, 2022).

and Roy Campanella. John Vance worked as a driver for Allen Transfer and Storage, while Octavia Vance was a cook at the Tour-O-Tel Motel on Merrimon Avenue.<sup>366</sup>

Urban renewal affected the Heart of Chestnut neighborhood differently than other areas of the city. Displaced people from urban renewal areas moved into the neighborhood and changed its character. The new residents were often more transient and of a lower economic class. In addition to the influx of new residents from other areas of the city, older residents died and younger residents moved on. In the twenty-first century, new residents in the neighborhood have tended to be white families looking for affordable houses close to downtown Asheville.<sup>367</sup>

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<sup>366</sup> Cissy Dendy, interviewed by Rory Kupp, May 9, 2019, “MS406.001C: AAAHS interview with Cissy Dendy,” Asheville African American Heritage Survey Oral History Interview Collection, Buncombe County Special Collections, Pack Memorial Library, Asheville, NC.

<sup>367</sup> Ibid.

## South Asheville (BN6456) / Clayton Hill

Survey Site No.	Property Name	Address	Date
BN1342	St. Mark A.M.E. Zion Church	104 Wyoming Road	ca. 1910
BN6457	Sherman Withers Grocery	86 Wyoming Road	1929

South Asheville is a historically African American neighborhood lying on the southern slopes of Beaucatcher Mountain just beyond the one-mile circular limits of the city established in 1849. The *Asheville Citizen* referred to the area as Clayton Hill beginning in the late 1890s.<sup>368</sup> It was still referred to as Clayton Hill in 1910 when the residents approached county school Superintendent A. C. Reynolds about building a new school for Black students.<sup>369</sup> Residents of the area, which was not yet annexed into the city, were eager for a new school and were considering the possibility of a vote for a special tax. Annexation had been a hotly debated topic in the late 1890s, when Republicans wanted to annex Clayton Hill and Bracket Town for their reliably supportive Black voters.<sup>370</sup>

Although its origins are unclear, the South Asheville community appears to have primarily developed around an African American cemetery on land given by W. W. and Sarah McDowell. The McDowells were slave owners and had set aside approximately two acres of land as a burial site for those they enslaved. McDowell placed George Avery (1844-1938), a blacksmith who had been enslaved in his youth, in charge of the cemetery. Avery assumed responsibility for digging graves, tending the grounds, and collecting the small fee paid by families for loved ones to be buried there. The informally arranged cemetery had no plan or maps, so Avery tracked burial locations primarily from memory. The South Asheville Colored Cemetery (BN0673) is the oldest semi-public cemetery for African Americans in western North Carolina and contains nearly 2,000 graves.<sup>371</sup>

According to family lore, McDowell encouraged Avery to enlist with the Union army near the end of the Civil War in order to receive a post-war pension. After his discharge in 1866, Avery returned to live in Asheville and, upon his return, the McDowells provided Avery with a

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<sup>368</sup> Descriptions of the South Asheville area sometimes overlap Clayton Hill and Bracket Town as precursors of what became known as the South Asheville neighborhood adjacent to the predominantly white suburb of Kenilworth. Frequent reference points for South Asheville and Clayton Hill in deeds and newspaper articles include being east of Beaumont, near Newton Cemetery, or along Ross Creek. Although relatively close in physical proximity, Bracket Town appears to have been located farther east nearer to present-day Kenilworth Lake or the Asheville Mall.

<sup>369</sup> "County School Matters," *Asheville Citizen*, May 1, 1910, 7.

<sup>370</sup> "Brackett Town To Be Annexed," *Asheville Citizen*, January 26, 1897; "No Bracket Town In Ours," *Asheville Citizen*, March 9, 1897.

<sup>371</sup> Clay Griffith, "South Asheville Cemetery and St. John 'A' Baptist Church" National Register of Historic Places Nomination Form, Acme Preservation Services, Asheville, NC, 2020, 17-22.

piece of land, lumber to construct a house, and his job as caretaker of the South Asheville Cemetery, which he maintained until his death in 1938.<sup>372</sup> Avery got involved with a number of political and social groups in the African American community and served as a trustee for St. Mark A.M.E. Zion Church (BN1342), one of two congregations in the South Asheville neighborhood. St. Mark A.M.E. Zion Church built a one-story gable-front sanctuary at 104 Wyoming Road. The church remained active into the late twentieth century before the building closed and was converted into a private residence.



**St. John 'A' Baptist Church (BN1338) in South Asheville (Rory Krupp, 2019).**

The congregation at St. John 'A' Baptist Church (BN1338) began with South Asheville residents joining others for prayer meetings in Haw Creek under a large oak tree. The church congregation organized under the auspices of Mt. Zion Missionary Baptist Church on Eagle Street and erected a wood frame church on property adjacent to the South Asheville Cemetery in 1914. After the first building was destroyed by fire, a second wooden church was built on the same site. It was replaced by the current one-story gable-front brick church in 1929, under the leadership of the first full-time pastor, Rev. W. A. Anderson. After Sarah McDowell's death in

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<sup>372</sup> Ibid., 22.

1905, management of the South Asheville Cemetery was administered jointly by the congregations of St. John 'A' and St. Mark churches.<sup>373</sup>

During the late 1910s and 1920s, the neighborhood came to be known as South Asheville. It was described in city directories as a residential section north of Wyoming Road and west of Kenilworth Avenue.<sup>374</sup> Exclusion from Kenilworth indicated a color line, a reality confirmed by longtime South Asheville resident George Gibson, who succinctly recalled: "Kenilworth was white; South Asheville was black."<sup>375</sup> A 1915 article about a house fire in Clayton Hill describes a blaze at Wade Kinch's eight-room house. The *Asheville Citizen* reported that when two firemen arrived on a motorcycle, the house was already collapsing but "hundreds of the colored residents" who lived in the 20 houses surrounding Kinch's formed a bucket brigade to stop the fire from spreading.<sup>376</sup>

In 1922, South Asheville residents petitioned the city for sewers, water, and streetlights.<sup>377</sup> The petition appears to have been successful, and by 1927, real estate advertisements appeared for lots with city services for African American occupancy.<sup>378</sup> In 1920, George Avery sold a small tract of land to the trustees of the Silver Leaf Lodge of Odd Fellows of South Asheville.<sup>379</sup> A wave of school construction at the time saw plans for nearly \$370,000 worth of new buildings, including South Asheville, North Asheville (present-day Claxton Elementary), Stephens-Lee, and West Asheville.<sup>380</sup> South Asheville Elementary was erected in 1922-1923 at a cost of \$95,000 on a site located directly behind St. John 'A' Baptist Church.<sup>381</sup> J. C. Nelson was principal of the school in 1930, and in an unusually complimentary article for the time, the *Asheville Citizen* lauded the South Asheville School for its role in the 1930 City Beautiful cleanup campaign.<sup>382</sup>

Following the contested annexation of Kenilworth and other suburbs in 1929, the South Asheville community became part of the city of Asheville. The 1937 Residential Security Map description of the area denotes a "very cheap Negro section all but the North end being in the

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<sup>373</sup> Ibid., 25-26.

<sup>374</sup> *Miller's Asheville City Directory 1955* (Richmond, VA: Piedmont Directory Co., 1954), 153.

<sup>375</sup> "Lifetimes of Service," *Asheville Citizen-Times*, August 16, 2008, 11.

<sup>376</sup> "House on Clayton Hill is Destroyed," *Asheville Citizen*, February 16, 1915, 6.

<sup>377</sup> "Colored Residents Ask for Improvements," *Asheville Citizen*, April 4, 1922, 3.

<sup>378</sup> "For Sale in South Asheville," *Asheville Citizen*, June 19, 1927, 39.

<sup>379</sup> Buncombe County Register of Deeds book 243, page 210.

<sup>380</sup> "Over Two Millions Involved in Actual Construction Work in Process Here Now," *Asheville Citizen*, September 10, 1922.

<sup>381</sup> "To Let Contract for New School Within Days," *Asheville Citizen*, April 9, 1922, 22.

<sup>382</sup> "Closing Cleanup Days Important," *Asheville Citizen*, May, 9, 1930.

valley,” a derogatory description typical for the time.<sup>383</sup> The description states that South Asheville was surrounded by whites on the east, south, and west. Like many of Asheville’s African American neighborhoods, the description notes that the streets were unpaved and transportation was inadequate.

The physical proximity of the school, cemetery, and two churches formed the nucleus of the small, active community, which was increasingly hemmed in by residential development in Kenilworth and adjacent subdivisions. Sherman Withers lived at 86 Wyoming Road and ran a small grocery in the basement of his house (BN6457). Entertainment, according to the 1943 *Miller’s Asheville City Directory*, was provided at Kanuga’s Beer Garden, located at 11 Dalton Street and owned by Buddy Hodges, although its license was revoked in 1949 for being “not a suitable place.”<sup>384</sup> The cemetery closed in 1943, and the school closed in 1948. South Asheville eventually lost a bit of its identity as it became affiliated with the Kenilworth neighborhood in the second half of the twentieth century; however, it has remained an African American enclave within the larger residential area.

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<sup>383</sup> “Mapping Inequality,” <https://dsl.richmond.edu/panorama/redlining/#loc=12/35.5159/-82.5702&opacity=0.8&city=asheville-nc&area=D2> (accessed July 12, 2019).

<sup>384</sup> “Buncombe 6<sup>th</sup> in Beer Licenses; WNC Revocations Listed,” *Asheville Citizen*, July 12, 1949, 9.

## Shiloh (BN1850) / Brooklyn (BN6411)

Survey Site No.	Property Name	Address	Date
BN1307	Roger's Grocery	941 W. Chapel Road	ca. 1935
BN1850	Shiloh		
BN6411	Brooklyn		
BN6412	Brooklyn Mission Fire Baptized Holiness Church	311 Brooklyn Road	1912
BN6413	Highland Meadows	High Meadow Road, Wyatt Street	1970
BN6414	Johnson House	129 Wyatt Street	ca. 1971
BN6415	Rucker House	99 Wyatt Street	ca. 1972
BN6416	Wilson House	24 High Meadow Road	1972
BN6417	Powell House	960 W. Chapel Road	1920
BN6418	Young's Rest Home	400 Caribou Road	ca. 1956
BN6419	Masonic Temple of Venus, Lodge No. 62, F.& A. M. Prince Hall Affiliation [ <b>Destroyed by fire June 2020</b> ]	535 Booker Street	1971
BN6420	Shiloh Community League Concession Stand Lot	59 Hampton Street	1938
BN6421	Whitehurst Model Home	980 W. Chapel Circle	ca. 1952
BN6422	Whitehurst FHA Home	5 W. Chapel Circle	ca. 1952
BN6423	Shiloh Park	121 Shiloh Road	1932
BN6424	Roosevelt Park		1926
BN6425	Love House	30 Taft Avenue	1958
BN6426	Lincoln Park		1938
BN6427	Washington House	86 Taft Avenue	1960
BN6429	Hicks House	32 Forest Street	1910
BN6430	Fairmont Baptist Church	4 Stoner Road	1966
BN6461	Roosevelt Park Sales Office	35 Jeffress Avenue	ca. 1926
BN6465	White House	6 White Avenue	1924
BN6873	Linwood Crump Shiloh Recreation Center	121 Shiloh Road	1952

Located along Hendersonville Road south of Asheville and southeast of the Biltmore Estate, the Shiloh community was founded after the Civil War by freed slaves on the south side of the Swannanoa River. The original settlement known as Shiloh stood near the present location of George Vanderbilt's Biltmore House. In the 1880s, as Vanderbilt acquired vast tracts of land for his estate, he bought the community members' property and helped relocate the entire community, including Shiloh Church and its cemetery, to its present location on the east side of Hendersonville Road. Older residents of Shiloh refer to the present-day neighborhood as new Shiloh.



**Shiloh A.M.E. Zion Church (BN1319), 95 Shiloh Road (Clay Griffith, 2020).**

Col. John Patton (1765-1831) and his descendants may have enslaved the original settlers of Shiloh. Patton's home on the Swannanoa River and six tracts of land totaling more than 900 acres passed to his sons Fidelio and Montraville upon his death. Montraville Patton (1806-1896) inherited three slaves from his father and by 1850 enslaved 14 people according to the United States Census.<sup>385</sup> Before the Civil War, he enslaved as many as 31 individuals.<sup>386</sup> Montraville Patton was a prominent merchant and businessman, represented Buncombe County in the

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<sup>385</sup> U.S. Census Bureau (1850), Schedule 2 (Slave Inhabitants).

<sup>386</sup> Insoe, *Mountain Masters*, 266.

North Carolina General Assembly, and served as postmaster for four years.<sup>387</sup> Patton's first wife, Maria Hackett, died in 1867, and he married Catherine Ann McDowell (1826-1898), sister of William W. McDowell, one of his business partners.<sup>388</sup>

Although he greedily acquired the property of old Shiloh residents, Vanderbilt proved to be a benefactor. He recruited Rev. William M. Logan to speak to community members and ask them to sell their property and relocate. On behalf of Vanderbilt, Charles McNamee paid \$1,000 to the trustees of the Shiloh A.M.E. Zion Church—Hardin Mallory, Boston Jenkins, and William Logan—for the one-acre lot containing the church building.<sup>389</sup> Moreover, McNamee placed the proceeds in an account at the Western Carolina Bank for the congregation, which was then paid out for the purchase of a new two-acre lot for the church, labor and materials costs, and the relocation of burials from the churchyard to a new cemetery. Fifteen dollars was spent to buy a suit of clothes for Rev. D. J. Young. When the account was closed in May 1890, the remaining balance of \$18 was given to the church.<sup>390</sup>

In addition to the purchase price, Vanderbilt and McNamee arranged for the congregation to receive a frame building that once belonged to a white Presbyterian congregation. McNamee paid church members to move the structure, which was located adjacent to B. J. Alexander's farm, and erect the church building on the new lot obtained from Joel and Hannah Bailey for \$180.<sup>391</sup> After the church was erected, Vanderbilt donated stained-glass windows, a bell, and pews for the new building.<sup>392</sup> Vanderbilt also saw to it that Shiloh Church would get a Christmas tree each year.<sup>393</sup>

New Shiloh has been inextricably linked with the Biltmore Estate ever since Vanderbilt uprooted the community. Vanderbilt appears to have been supportive of Asheville's Black community in general, providing employment on the estate and decent wages. A number of Shiloh families worked at Biltmore, including Rev. William Logan, who earned \$50 a month supervising Black work crews. As foreman, his crews maintained roads on the estate grounds, cleaned streets in Biltmore Village, and worked in the forests. Logan's son, Zeke, kept up the work after his father died in 1921. Frank Owens, a preacher, worked in the house, cleaning

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<sup>387</sup> "Montraville Patton," *Asheville Daily Citizen*, August 23, 1889.

<sup>388</sup> "Mrs. Mont. Patton Dead," *Asheville Daily Citizen*, May 13, 1898.

<sup>389</sup> Buncombe County Register of Deeds book 67, page 405.

<sup>390</sup> Biltmore Estate Land Records, Biltmore Company Archives, Asheville, NC.

<sup>391</sup> Buncombe County Register of Deeds book 68, page 420. The church lot adjoined the land of Robert White, who had just purchased six acres from the Baileys a few weeks earlier. White and his wife Harriet sold their ten-acre tract on Old Shiloh Road to Charles McNamee for \$100 in September 1889 (DB 76:254). In early October, the Whites paid \$600 to Joel and Hannah Bailey for six acres "about a quarter of a mile east of the Hendersonville Road and about two miles south of the Swannanoa River" (DB 67:586). The Whites' land adjoined parcels owned by William Logan and Hardin Mallory.

<sup>392</sup> Bob Terrell, "The Two Shilohs," *Asheville Citizen*, November 29, 1978.

<sup>393</sup> "Biltmore House Christmas," *Asheville Citizen-Times*, December 25, 1978.

windows, doors, and other areas.<sup>394</sup> At one point, an anonymous white employee sent a letter to Vanderbilt and McNamee threatening intervention from the Ku Klux Klan if they did not stop hiring Black workers.<sup>395</sup>

Vanderbilt also supplied a doctor for estate workers and to the Shiloh community. Dr. Algernon Sidney Whitaker (1835-1912) treated Biltmore's injured workers for a fee of \$100 per year. Shiloh residents often saw Dr. Whitaker to treat a wide range of injuries from burns to gunshot wounds. Having begun his medical career as a surgeon in the Confederate army, Whitaker's care often involved amputation.<sup>396</sup>

After the relocation, a school for Black children in the Shiloh community met at the church. Teacher Annie Brown reported good student progress in the early years of the school, although funding was a constant challenge. The Shiloh School eventually became a county-supported public school with its own site immediately east of the A.M.E. Zion church. In the 1910s, the school met in a one-room building, 36 feet by 24 feet, which was subdivided into two classrooms by a thin partition. By 1920, the building had become woefully inadequate. Education officials acknowledged that the building was not capable of serving the estimated 225 school-aged children in Shiloh, but there were neither plans nor funds to alleviate the situation.<sup>397</sup> Residents petitioned the school board for a new building, and plans began to progress in 1922 following contributions from the Biltmore school committee, county Board of Education, Rosenwald Fund, and residents of the community. Unfortunately, the \$4,200 raised did not cover the estimated \$5,000 cost of the proposed one-story, four-classroom building. Twice the Board of Education rejected bids for the new facility, citing costs and failure to comply with specifications of the Rosenwald Fund, which had been founded by Julius Rosenwald, president of Sears, Roebuck & Company, to improve the quality of education for African American children in the South.<sup>398</sup>

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<sup>394</sup> Terrell, "The Two Shilohs."

<sup>395</sup> Waters, "Life Beneath the Veneer," 85-86.

<sup>396</sup> Bill Alexander, *Around Biltmore Village* (Charleston, SC: Arcadia Press, 2008), 23; "Dr. A. S. Whitaker of Biltmore, Dead," *Asheville Citizen*, February 28, 1912, 7; Rom Reid, "Dr. Whitaker Served Asheville, Confederacy with Distinction," *Asheville Citizen-Times*, June 10, 1962, 1D.

<sup>397</sup> "May Build Colored School at Shiloh," *Asheville Citizen*, July 8, 1920, 7.

<sup>398</sup> "Consider Plans for New County Schools," *Asheville Citizen*, January 3, 1921; "Donation of Fund to Colored School is Made by Board," *Asheville Citizen*, April 4, 1922, 3; "Reject All Bids on Shiloh School," *Asheville Citizen*, May 9, 1922, 4; "All School Bids Rejected by Board," *Asheville Citizen*, July 11, 1923, 5.



**Shiloh School (BN6449), ca. 1928** (shilohnc.org, accessed June 12, 2020).

Construction of a new eight-teacher school began in 1927, after the existing school building was destroyed by fire the previous year. School superintendent A. C. Reynolds announced that the county's allotment of \$13,500 from the state Literary Fund would be applied to a new school in Shiloh (BN6449). These funds, combined with an insurance settlement of \$3,500 for the old structure, helped pay for the new building.<sup>399</sup> Following an inspection in December, William F. Credle, superintendent of the Rosenwald Fund, authorized the release of additional money to support construction of the one-story brick building with eight classrooms and an auditorium.<sup>400</sup>

The boundaries of the Shiloh neighborhood have changed over time, expanding as the city grew in the early twentieth century to encompass other small settlements of African American families. In addition to Shiloh, the Rock Hill Colored Village and Petersburg appear on late nineteenth century maps of Biltmore and the surrounding area. Rock Hill consisted of approximately 30 houses and Petersburg was made up of about 50 small dwellings. Located nearer to Sweeten Creek, to the east, it is believed that the two communities were established following Emancipation, in part, by former slaves of the Stevens family.<sup>401</sup> Henry and Nancy Stevens owned a farm covering more than 1,100 acres that extended from the edge of Biltmore property to Sweeten Creek. When Henry Stevens died in 1862 without a will, Montraville

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<sup>399</sup> "New School at Shiloh Planned," *Asheville Citizen*, October 2, 1927; Reed, *School Segregation*, 125-129.

<sup>400</sup> "Inspects Negro County Schools," *Asheville Citizen*, December 17, 1927.

<sup>401</sup> Virginia Daffron, "At Home in Shiloh: Venerable Community Fights Encroachment," *Mountain Xpress*, December 4, 2015, <https://mountainx.com/news/at-home-in-shiloh-venerable-community-fights-encroachment/> (accessed November 16, 2020).

Patton was appointed administrator of his estate. An inventory of the estate identified and valued at least 13 individuals enslaved by the family. Stevens' farm was divided among his wife and children, and family history indicates that they assisted their former slaves by providing land and helping them build houses in the area near Shiloh.<sup>402</sup>

In the first decades of the twentieth century, city directories described Shiloh as “a colored suburb” beyond South Biltmore.<sup>403</sup> Shiloh was centered around the Shiloh Church and Shiloh School site at the intersection of the east-west Shiloh Road and the north-south Brooklyn Road. Brooklyn was defined as a separate settlement of Black families north of West Chapel Road and east of Reed Street in South Biltmore.<sup>404</sup> The Brooklyn community was later bisected by the construction of Interstate 40 in the late 1960s; the southern portion of Brooklyn is now considered part of Shiloh. The Shiloh and Brooklyn neighborhoods were both tight-knit communities, which is consistent with generations of families living in one area. The neighborhoods were closely tied to land, a lifestyle held over from old Shiloh, and residents often recall memories of large gardens and fresh produce. Families kept chickens and occasionally a hog. Distant relatives of Shiloh families also resided in the smaller neighborhoods of Rock Hill and Petersburg.<sup>405</sup> Today, Shiloh has grown to encompass these various early communities and generally includes all of the intermediate area between Hendersonville Road, Interstate 40, Sweeten Creek Road, and Rock Hill Road.

Within the Shiloh neighborhood, Rev. L. W. Simpson organized a congregation in a log building on Rock Hill Road, founding the Rock Hill Missionary Baptist Church in 1898. As the congregation grew, the log building was replaced by a frame building that later burned. In 1925, the congregation moved to Caribou Road. The present building at 486 Caribou Road (BN1317), built at a cost of \$100,000, was dedicated in 1952. The Gothic Revival-style edifice is notable for its stone construction, round-arch metal-frame windows, and two crenellated towers on the façade. The towers flank a one-story entrance vestibule that is approached from a broad cascade of concrete steps.

In 1926, Asheville jeweler and businessman Max Polansky (1893-1973) platted a subdivision, Roosevelt Park (BN6424), just south of Shiloh Road. The subdivision was dense, containing lots measuring 40 feet by 100 feet. Polansky had sales offices on Eagle Street and in the YMI Building but erected a real estate office in 1953 (BN6461) at 35 Jeffress Avenue to

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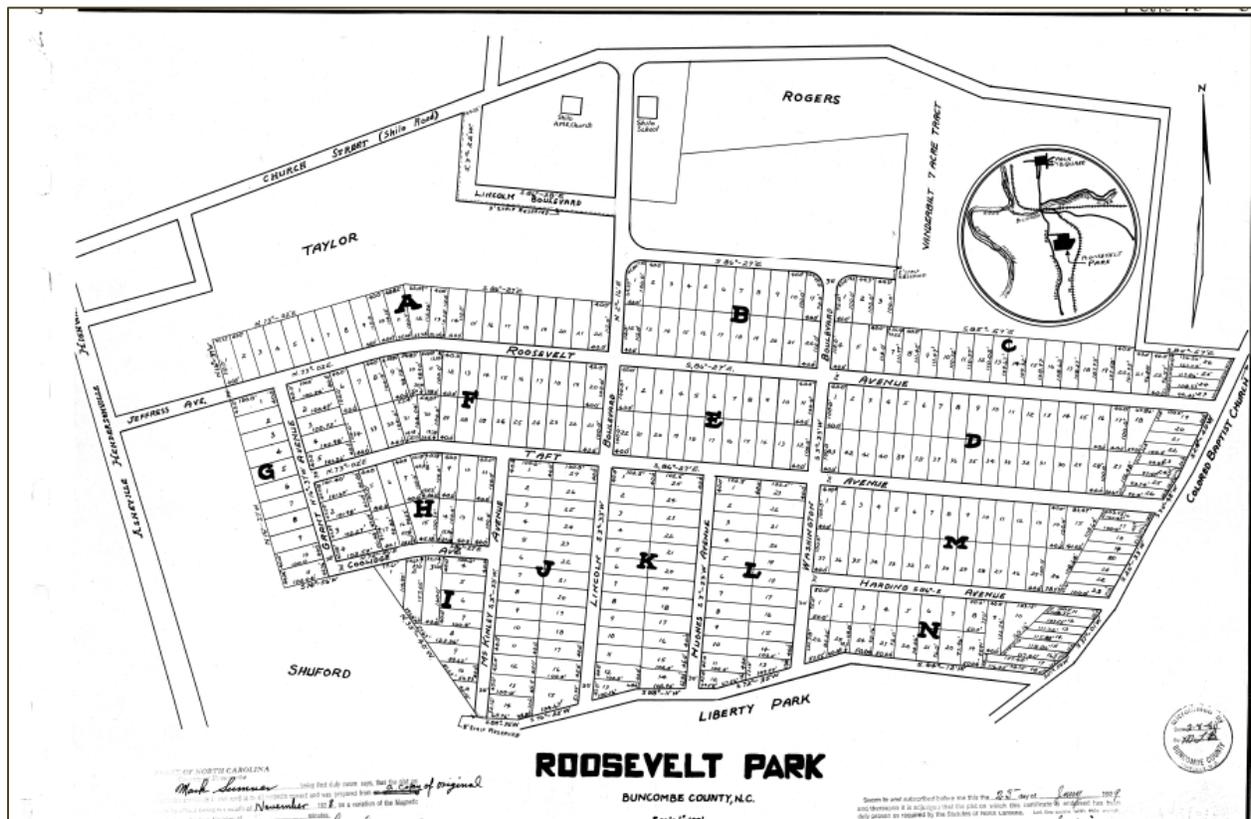
<sup>402</sup> Ella Reed Matthews, *The Genealogy of Henry and Nancy Foster Stevens* (Asheville, NC: published by author, 1957), 16-18.

<sup>403</sup> Ernest H. Miller, ed., *Asheville, North Carolina, City Directory 1921*, Vol. XX (Asheville, NC: Commercial Service Company, 1920), 636.

<sup>404</sup> Robert Morton Baldwin, ed., *Baldwin's and Advocate's Asheville City Directory 1935* (Asheville, NC: Baldwin Directory Company and Asheville Advocate, 1935), 589.

<sup>405</sup> Carroll Means, interviewed by Pat Fitzpatrick, November 29, 2017, “Means, Carroll P.,” African American Communities Oral History Project, North Carolina Room, Pack Memorial Library, Asheville, NC.

handle inquiries and sales. Roosevelt Park Properties heavily promoted the subdivision with advertisements in the newspaper describing its amenities, which included hard surface streets, electric lights, a large community house, and “a nice recreation park.”<sup>406</sup> Polansky declared the impetus for the subdivision was providing “a high-class, low-priced modern home section for the colored race.”<sup>407</sup> The plan received a number of endorsements, including one from Asheville’s Interracial Committee, and the developers expressed delight with initial sales, announcing that a total of ten lots had been sold to Professor Lee, Dr. Walker, and Dr. Miller.<sup>408</sup> Records in the Buncombe County Register of Deeds, however, reveal limited sales and no evidence that any lots were sold to the individuals named in the company’s advertisements.



**Plat of Roosevelt Park (BN6424), 1926 (Buncombe County Register of Deeds).**

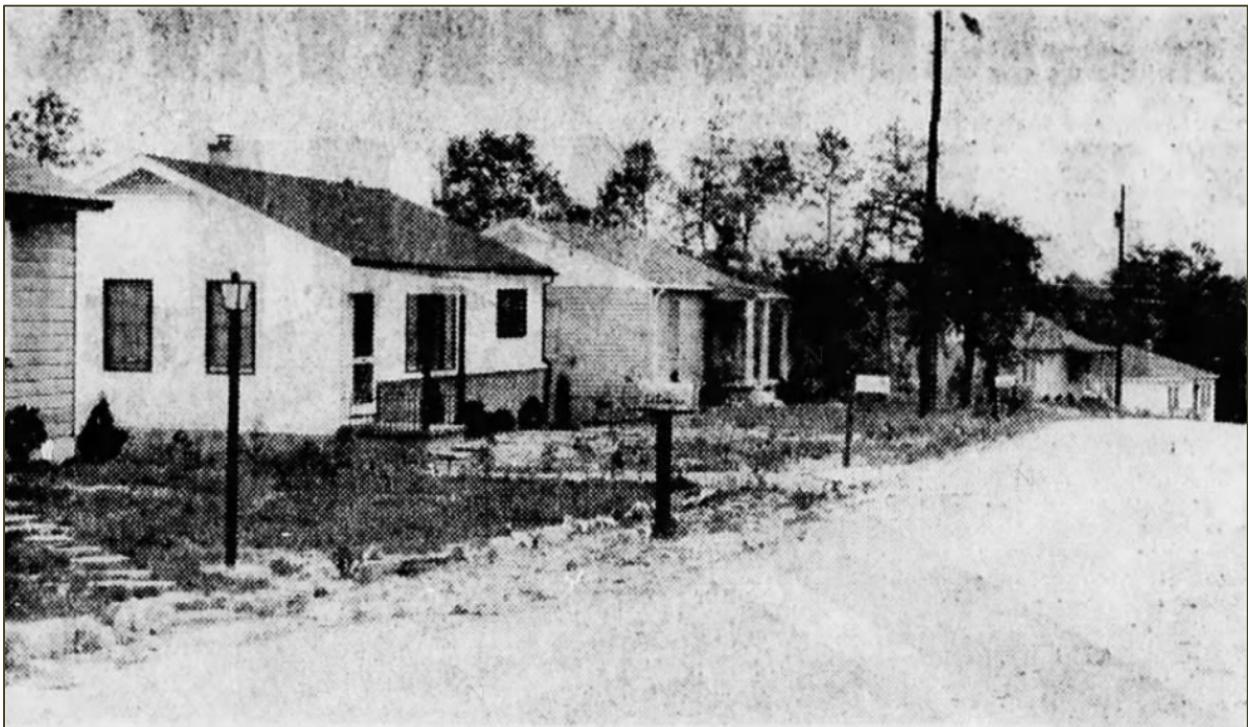
Shiloh Park (BN6423), adjoining the school lot, opened in 1932 with hundreds attending a doubleheader baseball game and a barbecue. Prominent Black businessman E. W. Pearson managed the park, which included a baseball diamond, swimming pool, and a large pavilion. Special programs and entertainment during the first week included a performance by the

<sup>406</sup> Advertisement, *Asheville Citizen*, August 15, 1926.

<sup>407</sup> Advertisement, *Asheville Citizen*, August 7, 1926.

<sup>408</sup> “Homes for Negroes,” *Asheville Citizen*, January 7, 1928; advertisement, *Asheville Citizen*, August 18, 1926; “Park Is Viewed As City Asset,” *Asheville Citizen*, August 13, 1926.

Pullman Porter band and a picnic held by the local Elks Lodge.<sup>409</sup> Rev. Elijah N. Manning formed the Shiloh Community League in 1936, which engaged in a wide range of activities, including advocating for better city services, road paving, and sidewalks. The group sought to foster a sense of community cohesiveness and promoted involvement. During World War II, the Shiloh Community League sponsored a war bond drive, and in 1946, it solicited funds and household goods for a local family whose house burned down.<sup>410</sup> Community members supported activities for neighborhood children, including scouting, church clubs, and sports teams. The Community League raised funds by selling concessions from a lot they owned across from Shiloh Park on Hampton Street (BN6420), which is now a community garden.<sup>411</sup>



**New houses in Roosevelt Park (BN6424), *Asheville Citizen-Times*, July 3, 1955.**

While the size of Shiloh and its physical distance from downtown helped insulate the community from the direct effects of urban renewal in the post-World War II period, the neighborhood was deeply changed by it. Of all the African American neighborhoods in Asheville, Shiloh contains the broadest range of housing and represents a wide spectrum of

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<sup>409</sup> “Negro Park to Open,” *Asheville Citizen-Times*, July 31, 1932, 8A; “Negro Recreation Park Opens Today,” *Asheville Citizen*, August 4, 1932, 16; “New Negro Recreation Park Attracts Crowds,” *Asheville Citizen-Times*, August 6, 1932, 6.

<sup>410</sup> “Shiloh Section Holding Bond Drive,” *Asheville Citizen*, October 8, 1943, 10; “Negro Community League to Meet,” *Asheville Citizen-Times*, May 1, 1946, 2.

<sup>411</sup> Anita White-Carter, “History,” Shiloh Community Association, <http://www.shilohnc.org/history-1> (accessed June 12, 2020).

twentieth century development due to the effects of highway construction, urban renewal, and African American suburbanization. In 1950, the State Highway Department, as part of a program to eliminate red clay roads, shaped, drained, and placed gravel on the streets of Roosevelt Park, which the *Asheville Citizen-Times* described as “a subdivision with few houses.”<sup>412</sup> Max Polansky, who still owned the unsold lots from the 1920s, established a new company to sell homes in the subdivision.<sup>413</sup> Building resumed in the 1950s, due in large part to the availability of FHA-insured loans. Touting its close proximity to two churches, Shiloh school, and Roosevelt Park, Polansky advertised the segregated neighborhood with greater success, promoting government-backed loans and houses built in 60 days. The newspaper reported in 1955 that twenty houses had been built in the past year.<sup>414</sup>

Corresponding to Shiloh’s steady growth following World War II, Buncombe County school officials approved the construction of an elementary wing at Shiloh School (BN6873), part of a county-wide building campaign. Construction began on the \$100,000 addition in 1951 and opened to students in September 1952. The architectural firm of Greene and Robelot supplied plans for the building, which included four classrooms and a multipurpose auditorium and recreation room.<sup>415</sup>

Bernice and John Young of Burnsville moved to Shiloh in 1956 and opened Young’s Rest Home (BN6418), the first such facility for African Americans in Asheville. The Youngs relocated for greater opportunities and to help their children avoid long bus rides from Burnsville to attend school in Asheville. Located at 400 Caribou Road, the family-run rest home served as a residence for infirm or disabled elderly residents for 40 years before closing in June 1996.<sup>416</sup>

As other African American neighborhoods in Asheville were disrupted by urban renewal, city residents often moved to Shiloh and developers platted new subdivisions within the Shiloh community targeted towards Black homeowners. Lincoln Park (BN6426) and Lincoln Park Extension were platted in 1948 and 1949, respectively, but do not appear to have been especially successful as only some of the streets were laid out and graded. Developer Eddie Feld planned another subdivision, Whitehurst Park (BN6466), in 1952, and constructed a small one-story side-gable model home at 980 West Chapel Road (BN6421). Occupying a portion of

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<sup>412</sup> C. R. Sumner, “Engineers Must Follow Two Rules In Handling Rural Roads Program,” *Asheville Citizen-Times*, January 15, 1950, 1.

<sup>413</sup> “Firms Get Charters in City,” *Asheville Citizen-Times*, January 5, 1950, 13.

<sup>414</sup> “Twenty New Residences,” *Asheville Citizen-Times*, July 3, 1955, 7B.

<sup>415</sup> Architect’s drawing, *Asheville Citizen*, May 25, 1951, 30; “County Schools Will Reopen on September 2,” *Asheville Citizen*, August 14, 1952, 21. The Greene & Robelot firm consisted of noted Asheville architect Ronald Greene and Milton Robelot of Kingsport, Tennessee. The architects began working together in 1948 and designed a number of public school buildings across western North Carolina, including eight new buildings in Macon County. See online entry for Ronald Greene in *North Carolina Architects & Builders: A Biographical Dictionary*, <https://ncarchitects.lib.ncsu.edu/people/P000058> (accessed July 2021).

<sup>416</sup> “Black History Month: John and Bernice Young” *Asheville Citizen-Times*, February 25, 2005, 9.

Lucious Williams' early-twentieth-century homeplace, Whitehurst Park boasted modest one-story side-gable houses, large lots, and FHA financing just two blocks from the school and churches. In an apparent response to Polansky's claim, Feld advertised new FHA houses completed in just 45 days.<sup>417</sup>



**Plat of Whitehurst Park (BN6466), 1952** (Buncombe County Register of Deeds).

Another round of suburbanization came to Shiloh in 1958, when Roosevelt Park became eligible for home loans through Section 221 of the Housing Act. This program was designed to help people displaced by highway construction. Residents of Asheville's Hill Street neighborhood became the first in North Carolina to participate in the program in 1958, coinciding with the construction of the Crosstown Expressway (present-day I-240). Displaced residents with weekly incomes were eligible for home loans with no down payment, moderate closing costs, and small monthly payments.<sup>418</sup>

In 1970 a young white developer named Peter Feistmann, president of Dwellings Ltd., began work on Highland Meadows (BN6413), a subdivision marketed to moderate-income buyers using FHA Section 235 loans. Created in 1968, Section 235 loans encouraged first-time

<sup>417</sup> Advertisement, *Asheville Citizen-Times*, August 16, 1953, 14D.

<sup>418</sup> "Twelve Homes are Started for Displaced Families," *Asheville Citizen-Times*, April 20, 1958, 4D.

homeowners and required no down payment for government-insured mortgages. Feistmann and his father Otto sold the lots, which included covenants that no houses were to be erected costing less than \$8,000.<sup>419</sup>

**FIRST NEW HOMEOWNERS  
Are Now Moving Into  
HIGHLAND MEADOWS  
A New Residential Community**

**dwelling. ltd.**  
In the Shiloh Section  
off Caribou Road



**OPEN  
HOUSE  
TODAY  
2 - 6 P.M.**

**DIRECTIONS:** Drive out Sweeten Creek Road out of Biltmore, turn right on London Road to Wyatt Street. Turn left up Wyatt Street to Highland Meadows. Look for our Open House Sign.

Shown above are Mr. & Mrs. Flavious Jackson receiving the deed to their new home in Highland Meadows from Mr. Peter Feistmann, President of Dwelling, Ltd., builders and developers of the area. The Jacksons are the first residents of this new community.

*For 'Your New Home In This  
Beautiful Residential Area Call:*

**LANDMARK REALTY**

293 New Leicester Hwy. Asheville, N. C. Phone 252-5353

Highland Meadows (BN6413) subdivision advertisement, *Asheville Citizen-Times*, May 2, 1971.

<sup>419</sup> Buncombe County Register of Deeds book 1021, page 579.

In many respects Shiloh represents the architectural history of African American displacement and suburbanization in Asheville through its wide range of housing. The area includes early houses constructed after the move from old Shiloh and later homes associated with residents displaced by highway construction. The earliest extant house forms are pyramidal- and hip-roof one-story frame houses on brick piers dating from the first decades of the twentieth century. Many of these houses now display modern materials including synthetic siding, replacement windows, and concrete block infill on the foundations. A small number of Craftsman-style bungalows are scattered throughout the neighborhood. The post-World War II period is represented by one- and one-and-a-half-story small house designs funded by FHA-insured loans. These houses are frequently brick veneered and occasionally display restrained Colonial Revival details or door surrounds on the façade. Again, many houses from this period exhibit synthetic siding and replacement windows but retain their original form and massing. Ranch house examples dating from the 1960s to the mid-1970s include a number of dwellings on Taft Avenue erected beginning in the late 1950s when the FHA Part 221 loan program was used by displaced Hill Street residents. Later iterations of Ranch houses with incorporated garages, including some that appear to be split levels, are located in the Roosevelt Park (BN6424) and Highland Meadows (BN6413) subdivisions.



**Love House (BN6425), 30 Taft Avenue, 2019** (Rory Krupp, 2019).

Despite protests from community residents, the county closed Shiloh School in 1971 and bussed its students to predominantly white schools in Biltmore and Oakley.<sup>420</sup> Nearly a decade later, the City demolished the original 1928 wing of the school (BN6449), leaving the 1952

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<sup>420</sup> Mary Cowles, "Shiloh School Closed," *Asheville Citizen*, May 7, 1971, 1.

addition and constructing a new building as part of a community center and recreation complex that still occupies the site (BN6873). Shiloh and its environs were the fastest growing areas of Asheville among African Americans between 2010 and 2015 with a population increase of more than 1,200 individuals.<sup>421</sup>

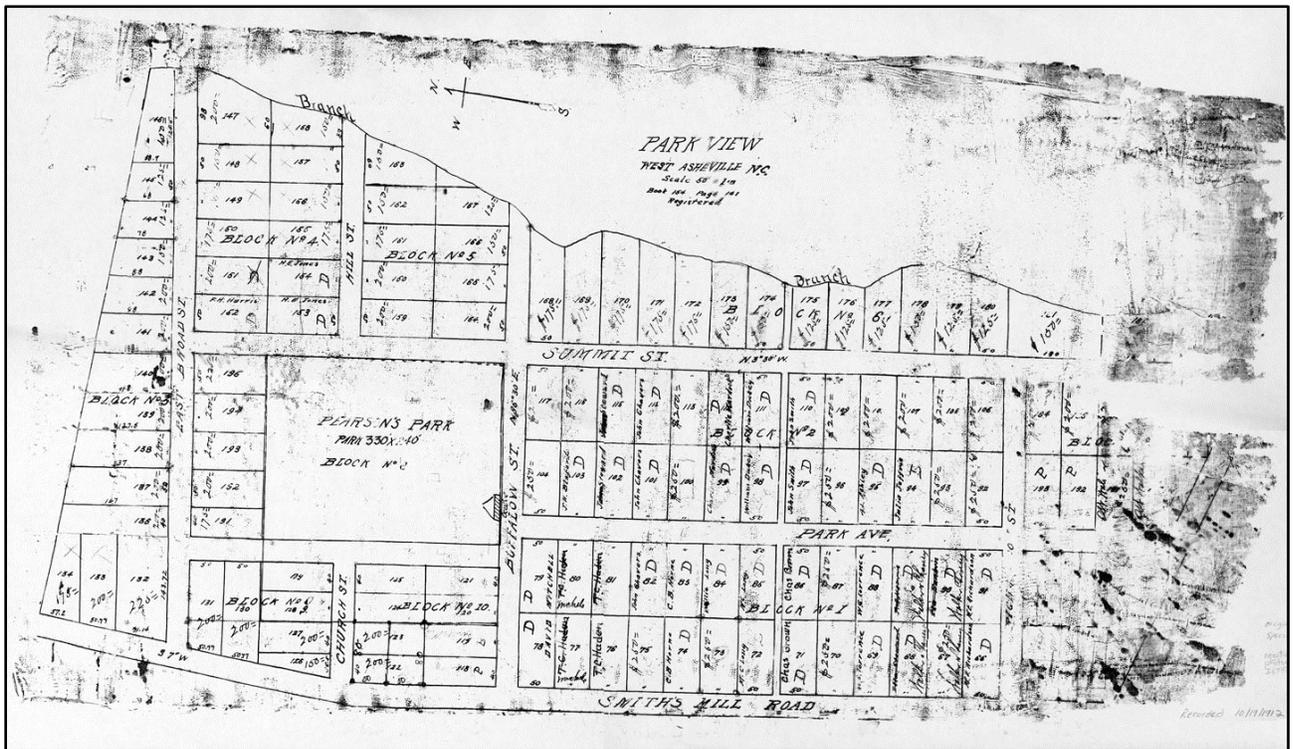
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<sup>421</sup> City of Asheville Information Technology Services, “Displacement of African Americans in Asheville, NC from 2010 to 2015,” *Mapping Racial Equity in Asheville, NC*, <https://www.arcgis.com/apps/Cascade/index.html?appid=10d222cb75854cba994b9a0083a40740> (accessed June 24, 2021).

## Burton Street (BN6282) / Park View

Survey Site No.	Property Name	Address	Date
BN6441	Herbert Friday Barbershop	212 Fayetteville Street	ca. 1925
BN6442	St. Paul's Missionary Baptist Church	170 Fayetteville Street	ca. 1975
BN6443	Dreamland Café	173 Burton Street	ca. 1945
BN6444	Mt. Carmel Baptist Church	26 Mardell Circle	ca. 1970

The Burton Street neighborhood is identified as an African American community that began to develop in the 1910s when Edward W. Pearson (1872-1946) began selling lots on Buffalo and Fayetteville streets for an exclusively Black community known as Park View. Located in West Asheville, the present-day Burton Street neighborhood is generally bounded by Patton Avenue on the north, I-240 to the east, and Haywood Road to the south. The western limits are generally formed by Burton Street, Downing Street, and Florida Avenue.



**Plat of Park View, 1912** (Buncombe County Register of Deeds).

In the early twentieth century, residential development spread slowly out from Asheville along the Haywood Road corridor. The road that became Burton Street (originally called Buffalo Street) was an old unpaved county road known as Smith's Mill Road (or Patterson's Mill Road).

The road extended beyond the city limits through rural and agricultural land, across Smith Mill Creek, and out into the Emma community.<sup>422</sup> The Burton Street neighborhood covers two small ridges extending north from Haywood Road, which were originally bordered to the north and east by creeks. After World War II the construction of Patton Avenue to the north and I-240 to the east superseded the original geographic boundaries as the modern limits of the neighborhood.

The majority of the neighborhood was platted in 1912 as Park View and had a grid street system and central park, measuring 300 feet by 240 feet, known as Pearson Park.<sup>423</sup> Although the recorded plats provide a useful starting point, it is unclear if there was any appreciable settlement in the area prior to 1910. The Burton Street School (BN4790), however, occupies a tract that dates to 1884, when E. Morgan transferred a half-acre parcel to the Buncombe County Public School Committee, District No. 3, “for a colored school.”<sup>424</sup> The land adjoined property owned by W. H. Jones and D. F. Gudger, who was a member of the Public School Committee. At the time, approximately half of Asheville’s population of 4,651 was African American.<sup>425</sup>

Edward W. Pearson Sr. (1872-1946) contributed significantly to the growth and development of the Burton Street neighborhood in the early twentieth century. Born in Burke County to a farming family, Pearson set off for the coal mines of Tennessee in 1892 in pursuit of new opportunities. He enlisted in the Army and served with the “Buffalo Soldiers” (9<sup>th</sup> Cavalry Division) during the Spanish-American War. Decorated and honorably discharged in 1898, Pearson lived in Chicago, where he studied law, insurance, real estate, merchandising, and fraternal Masonic organizations. He moved to Asheville in 1906, where he organized the Mountain City Mutual Life Insurance Company, a local arm of the Royal Benefit Society, and ran a mail order business (Piedmont Shoe Company). Pearson had an office on Eagle Street, in the heart of “The Block,” and he resided in the Montford neighborhood with his wife Clementine, who he divorced in 1914.<sup>426</sup>

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<sup>422</sup> Johnnie Grant, “I-26 and What’s Next for the Burton Street Community,” *The Urban News* (December 14, 2015).

<sup>423</sup> In addition to the Park View subdivision, the Burton Street neighborhood encompasses the Knob Circle section platted by Rutherford P. Hayes in 1920 (PB 2:29); the Rueben Jones property platted in 1925 (PB 6:82); Knollview, platted in 1925 (PB 9:44); the property of L. W. and T. S. Elias (PB 11:7); the Perry and Putnam property (PB 11:98); and the Rufus Willis property (PB 17:5).

<sup>424</sup> Buncombe County Register of Deeds book 45, page 450.

<sup>425</sup> *Asheville City Directory 1887* (Asheville, NC: Southern Directory Company, 1887), 4.

<sup>426</sup> Frazier, *Legendary Locals*, 22; *Asheville Gazette-News*, December 17, 1914 and January 26, 1915; E. W. Pearson obituary, *Asheville Citizen*, July 5, 1946; “Renaissance Man: Edward W. Pearson,” *The Urban News*, February 13, 2014, <http://theurbannews.com/lifestyles/2014/renaissance-man-edward-w-pearson/> (accessed May 6, 2016).

Pearson worked as an agent for Rutherford P. Hayes (1858-1927), third son of Rutherford B. Hayes, nineteenth president of the United States, selling lots on Knob Circle (present-day Mardell Circle). R. P. Hayes moved to Asheville from Chicago in the late 1890s and acquired a large farm and substantial land-holdings in West Asheville, particularly on the north side of Haywood Road. In addition to the Knob Circle lots, portions of Hayes' holdings were subdivided for Horneyhurst, a residential development situated north of Haywood Road between Florida Avenue and Louisiana Avenue, and the Falconhurst neighborhood, a residential development located between Louisiana Avenue and Mitchell Avenue.

By 1918, Pearson married Annis Bradshaw and moved to Park View, the residential subdivision he was developing. Pearson erected a two-story concrete block building at 3 Buffalo Street for a grocery store and office; his home stood at the rear (east) of the store. He organized North Carolina's first NAACP chapter in 1933, and was involved in a number of fraternal organizations, including the Odd Fellows, Knights of Pythias, Grand Order of Calantians, and the Order of the Eastern Star. Symbols of some of his fraternal associations adorned the façade of his store. Edward and Annis Pearson raised three children: Iola Pearson Byers, Edward W. Pearson, Jr., and Annette Pearson Cotton.<sup>427</sup>

Pearson's Park View subdivision attracted a range of African American families to West Asheville, including Henry E. Jones, proprietor of the YMI Drugstore; Rev. T. C. Haddon; and numerous other individuals who worked as cooks, laborers, embalmers, and waiters. As the neighborhood dates to the 1910s, the houses are typically one- and two-story frame dwellings common for the time, including numerous examples of Craftsman-style bungalows and a few examples of earlier hip-roof houses.



**E. W. Pearson Sr.** (Buncombe County Special Collections, Pack Memorial Library, Asheville, North Carolina).

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<sup>427</sup> Frazier, *Legendary Locals*, 22; "Renaissance Man: Edward W. Pearson"; Betsy Murray, "A Valentine for E. W. Pearson, Sr.," *HeardTell* Blog, February 27, 2014, <https://packlibraryncroom.wordpress.com/tag/park-view-subdivision/> (accessed May 6, 2016).



**Pearson's Store, 1924, interior** (Buncombe County Special Collections, Pack Memorial Library, Asheville, North Carolina).

Beginning in 1914, perhaps through his association with Rutherford P. Hayes, Pearson organized the Buncombe County District Colored Agricultural Fair, which was first held at Pearson Park. Hayes, an active promoter of the Western North Carolina Fair held in Asheville, practiced scientific farming on his Falconhurst property and frequently entered his farm products in competitions. Pearson's fair offered prizes in a variety of categories including agricultural products, canned fruits and vegetables, baking, sewing, handicrafts, and flowers. Farmers and exhibitors came from throughout the region, and attendance eventually grew to more than 10,000 individuals. Due to its popularity, the fair outgrew Pearson Park and moved to Oates Park in the Southside neighborhood and then to the larger Logan Show Grounds along

the French Broad River, but Pearson continued to manage the fair until his death in 1946. His son, E. W. Pearson Jr., oversaw the six-day event in 1947, the last year it operated.<sup>428</sup>



**Asheville Royal Giants, ca. 1918** (Buncombe County Special Collections, Pack Memorial Library, Asheville, North Carolina).

In addition to the fair, Pearson organized a semi-professional Black baseball team in 1916 so that he and his fellow African Americans could attend baseball games. The team, the Asheville Royal Giants, played their first games at Pearson Park. In 1921, Pearson established and became president of the Blue Ridge Colored Baseball League, composed of North Carolina teams from Charlotte, Gastonia, Concord, and Winston-Salem, as well as South Carolina teams from Rock Hill, Spartanburg, and Anderson. The team later played its games at Oates Park on Southside Avenue and established rivalries with teams from Atlanta, Georgia, and Greenville, South Carolina.<sup>429</sup> When not playing baseball, the players held jobs with the railroad and at local hotels such as the Vanderbilt, Grove Park Inn, and Battery Park.<sup>430</sup>

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<sup>428</sup> “The Buncombe County and District Agricultural Fair Premium List, September 15-20, 1947,” North Carolina Collection, Pack Memorial Library, Asheville, NC; “Negro District Fair to Open Tomorrow,” *Asheville Citizen*, September 14, 1947, 10.

<sup>429</sup> “Renaissance Man: Edward W. Pearson”; Bill Ballew, *Baseball in Asheville*. Images of Baseball Series. (Charleston, SC: Arcadia Publishing, 2001), n.p.

<sup>430</sup> Bijan C. Bayne, “Black Professional Baseball in North Carolina from World War I to the Depression,” in *Baseball in the Carolinas: 25 Essays on the State’s Hardball Heritage*, ed. Chris Holaday (Jefferson, NC: McFarland Publishing, 2002), 51.

Pearson sold his namesake park to Howard T. Toles in 1920. A newspaper notice of the sale described the four-acre park as “very popular with the colored people of the city as a place for picnics.”<sup>431</sup> Toles had plans to add a baseball diamond, tennis courts, and playgrounds. Toles, a barber, worked with George Justice, who had a shop on South Market Street; his son, James R. Toles, was a Pullman porter. In the early 1920s, city directories identified Toles Park as being located at the end of Fayetteville Street. The 1925 Sanborn map identifies the property as Groce Park, which included a two-story dwelling, a one-story dance hall with a long open porch, and a gazebo, but the park was soon subdivided for additional building lots in 1925.<sup>432</sup>

In February 1921, Pearson became the president of the Asheville chapter of the Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA), Marcus Garvey’s popular organization for racial uplift. An advertisement in the *Negro World* newspaper sponsored by Garvey later warned that “A man by the name of E. W. Pearson is operating in the State of North Carolina, claiming to be president of the Universal Negro Improvement Association. The public is now informed he is not authorized by the Universal Negro Improvement Association to represent its interests.”<sup>433</sup> Pearson was the second person that Garvey attacked in North Carolina. In both cases he seemed threatened by more charismatic leaders and lashed out, expelling them from the organization.<sup>434</sup>

The early Burton Street School was a two-teacher frame structure, and approximately 120 children attended the school, which went through sixth grade. The frame school building was replaced in 1928 with a one-story hip-roof brick building that still stands (BN4790). At the rear of the building, wide concrete steps descend a grassy slope to an athletic field. The Burton Street School started to host recreation programs in 1950. Supervised by Isaiah Rice and Mrs. C. W. James, the program offered group singing, dramatics, games, and table games for neighborhood youth.<sup>435</sup> The school became a community recreation center in 1977; Iola Byers, daughter of E. W. Pearson, served as director. The center underwent an extensive rehabilitation in 2009 to replace the kitchen, windows, doors, floors, and ceilings.<sup>436</sup>

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<sup>431</sup> “Colored Park Sold in West Asheville,” *Asheville Citizen*, March 26, 1920, 10.

<sup>432</sup> Buncombe County Register of Deeds plat book 9, page 35.

<sup>433</sup> “Warning to the Colored People of North Carolina,” *Negro World*, January 28, 1922, 8.

<sup>434</sup> Rolinson, *Grassroots Garveyism*, 63-67.

<sup>435</sup> “Burton Street Center Opens,” *Asheville Citizen-Times*, April 21, 1950, 23.

<sup>436</sup> Jason Sandford, “Burton Street Neighborhood Celebrates Reopening of Community Center,” *Mountain Xpress*, January 12, 2009, [https://mountainx.com/news/community-news/burton\\_street\\_neighborhood\\_celebrates\\_re\\_opening\\_of\\_community\\_center/](https://mountainx.com/news/community-news/burton_street_neighborhood_celebrates_re_opening_of_community_center/) (accessed May 6, 2016).



**Burton Street School, ca. 1925** (Buncombe County Special Collections, Pack Memorial Library, Asheville, North Carolina).

An influx of new residents caused the neighborhood to thrive during the 1920s. The southern portion of Buffalo Street, extending from the school to Haywood Road, was renamed Burton Street in 1922 for city founder John Burton.<sup>437</sup> From the school, Buffalo Street continued north into Pearson's Park View subdivision, while Burton Street turned to the northwest and extended to Florida Avenue on the edge of the Horneyhurst development. The newly formed Burton Street, which ran the full length of the neighborhood, became the primary through-street. Owners of the Asheville Knitting Mill erected a new plant at 53 Burton Street around 1923, relocating from the company's building on Haywood Road. Trustees for Wilson Chapel M.E. Church purchased a lot on the east side of Burton Street in 1925 and began erecting a new brick church building, relocating the congregation from its Haywood Road location.

Dating from around 1927, Wilson Chapel M.E. Church (BN5512) at 103 Burton Street is a one-story gable-front brick church with a square corner tower. The congregation organized in 1890 and met first in a building located on Haywood Road at its intersection with Virginia Avenue. Trustees for the church purchased this lot in 1925 from Wallace and Laura Kelly and

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<sup>437</sup> "No Asheville Street Bears Name of Burton, Its Founder," *Asheville Citizen*, March 19, 1922, 15; "Desire Street Named in Honor of City's Founder," *Asheville Citizen*, April 10, 1922, 2.

erected a new building.<sup>438</sup> A large Gothic-arch window opening containing a later glazed window with vinyl sash and tracery dominates the façade.

The Burton Street neighborhood, with its close relationship of residential areas and businesses, weathered the lean years of the Depression without extensive alteration to its physical character. During that period the neighborhood retained a sense of rural life that included large family gardens, some small farmsteads, and children playing in the surrounding woods and creeks. Local businesses extended credit or bartered with their regular customers. The neighborhood, particularly the northern portions, continued to exist in the mid-twentieth century as a close-knit community of primarily African American families. School participation was strong. Burton Street was the only paved street in the neighborhood at the time.

Black occupancy moved southward to Haywood Road through the 1930s as more African Americans moved to the neighborhood. White investors constructed houses in the area, which were described on the 1937 Residential Security map as homes “of a uniform construction built by white owners for investment purposes,” but it is unclear where these houses were located.<sup>439</sup> As in other African American neighborhoods in Asheville, the map points out inadequate transportation and unpaved streets. One of the largest projects of the period was the construction of the Mt. Carmel Baptist Church in the late 1930s. Located at 26 Mardell Circle, the original building was replaced with a new gable-front concrete block sanctuary in the 1970s (BN6444).

The neighborhood consisted of “116 houses, five churches, two grocery stores, a grammar school, two night clubs, a coal and ice company, and several beauty shops and barber shops.”<sup>440</sup> As in other Black neighborhoods, home businesses were popular, and consequently the outward appearance of a building might conceal the presence of commercial establishments. The residence at 173 Burton Street, for example, functioned as the Dreamland Café (BN6443) in the early 1950s. Willie and Avalee Glasby occupied the house, where Avalee ran the café. Willie worked as a stockman at Supreme Market on Patton Avenue.<sup>441</sup> Revocation of Glasby’s liquor license in 1949 suggests that the Dreamland Café may have been a nightclub or gathering spot, possibly a speakeasy. Authorities arrested the couple multiple times on illegal liquor and gambling charges.<sup>442</sup>

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<sup>438</sup> Buncombe County Register of Deeds book 297, page 294.

<sup>439</sup> “Mapping Inequality,” <https://dsl.richmond.edu/panorama/redlining/#loc=15/35.582/-82.596&city=asheville-nc&area=D3&adview=full> (accessed July 12, 2019).

<sup>440</sup> Darin J. Waters, Gene Hyde, and Kenneth Betsalel, “In-Between the Color Lines: The Appalachian Urban Folk Photography of Isaiah Rice,” *Southern Cultures* 23, no. 1 (2017): 92–113.

<sup>441</sup> *Miller’s Asheville City Directory 1950*, Vol. XLV (Richmond, VA: Piedmont Directory Co., 1950), 168-169.

<sup>442</sup> “Faces Liquor Charge,” *Asheville Citizen*, January 14, 1949, 2; “Three Arrested on Gambling Charges,” *Asheville Citizen*, February 21, 1949, 3; “Buncombe 6<sup>th</sup> in Beer Licenses; WNC Revocations Listed,” *Asheville Citizen*, July 12, 1949, 9.



**Former Dreamland Café (BN6443), 173 Burton Street** (Rory Krupp, 2019).

A two-story store and residence located at the northwest corner of Fayetteville and Ohio streets (BN6441) dates to around 1925. E. L. and Elizabeth Gregory, a white couple, occupied the building and operated a grocery in the 1930s. Frances R. Buckner ran the grocery in the early 1940s and lived upstairs with her husband. At the time, the Buckners were the only white residents on the block. The first story of the building is constructed with ashlar-faced concrete block, while the second story is clad with vinyl siding. The overhanging second story is supported on replacement metal posts. Herbert Friday's barbershop was located here during the 1950s. African American barbershops served as important community gathering spots, and Friday was actively involved with the Asheville NAACP branch in the 1950s.<sup>443</sup>

Increased automobile ownership and usage ultimately had significant effects on the Burton Street neighborhood. In the mid-1950s the Smokey Park Bridge was built high above the French Broad River and allowed Patton Avenue to extend west from downtown Asheville. Patton Avenue reached into West Asheville, running roughly parallel to Haywood Road one mile to the north, and became one of Asheville's new auto-oriented commercial strips. Construction of Patton Avenue took land from the north end of the Burton Street neighborhood and channeled sections of Smith's Mill Creek into culverts. The construction of I-240 in the 1960s left a wide gash on the east side of the neighborhood. Highway construction claimed fields and a creek,

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<sup>443</sup> "Friday Heads NAACP Unit," *Asheville Citizen*, May 10, 1954, 13.

severed connecting streets, displaced residents, and forced the relocation of several houses to new lots within the neighborhood.<sup>444</sup>



**Herbert Friday Barbershop (BN6441), 212 Fayetteville Street in late 1950s** (Isaiah Rice Photograph Collection, D. H. Ramsey Library Special Collections, University of North Carolina Asheville) **and in 2019** (Rory Krupp).

In the period following the construction of Patton Avenue and I-240, the school closed, and some of the older families died out or left the area. As properties were abandoned, sold, or rented, the turnover in residents resulted in a loss of community cohesion and an overall decline in neighborhood character. Patton Avenue construction divided the Burton Street neighborhood from the African American cemetery, Violet Hill, on the north side of the new thoroughfare. The highway project severed street connections and forced the displacement of families and relocation of houses to new lots to escape demolition. Beginning around 2000, community members launched several initiatives to revitalize the neighborhood, including renovations to the school, now owned by the City and operated as the Burton Street Community Center, and improvements to its grounds. In the 2000s and 2010s, the affordability of West Asheville’s historic properties presented attractive opportunities for rehabilitation and redevelopment. Revitalization efforts not only in the Burton Street neighborhood but also throughout West Asheville during the past two decades have made West Asheville attractive to a new generation of residents.<sup>445</sup>

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<sup>444</sup> Clay Griffith, *Historic Architectural Resources Survey Report – Intensive Evaluation: Burton Street Neighborhood, I-26 Connector in Asheville* (Report for North Carolina Department of Transportation, Raleigh, NC, June 2016), 22.

<sup>445</sup> Asheville Design Center and Western North Carolina Alliance, “Burton Street Community Plan,” Burton Street Community Association, Asheville, NC, Summer 2010, 11-12.

## **National Register Study List Recommendations**

Upon completion of the historic architectural resources survey related to African American heritage in Asheville, Owen & Eastlake recommended the following three individual properties for the National Register Study List. The North Carolina HPO employs the Study List as a screening mechanism to identify properties that are potentially eligible for the National Register of Historic Places. Properties approved for the Study List by HPO staff and the National Register Advisory Committee (NRAC) are generally considered to possess sufficient significance and integrity for National Register listing although it is not a guarantee of eligibility.

Only a small number of the 120 National Register listings in Asheville and Buncombe County are directly associated with the area's African American heritage. Four individually listed resources include St. Matthias Episcopal Church (BN0015) and Young Men's Institute (YMI Building) (BN0020) in East End, the South Asheville Cemetery and St. John 'A' Baptist Church (BN6497), and Thomas Chapel A.M.E. Zion Church (BN1687) in Black Mountain. Additional resources from the Black community are included as part of historic districts listed in the National Register of Historic Places. Resources within "The Block" are encompassed by the Downtown Asheville Historic District (BN0003). Parts of the Magnolia Park neighborhood are included within the boundaries of the Montford Area Historic District (BN0022), while a small section of the Heart of Chestnut neighborhood lies within the boundaries of the Chestnut Hill Historic District (BN0140).

Similarly, only a small number of properties associated with African American heritage are presently on the National Register Study List and considered potentially eligible for listing. Resources on the Study List include Hopkins Chapel A.M.E. Zion Church (BN0433) in East End, Shiloh Historic District (BN1850), and Shiloh A.M.E. Zion Church (BN1319). A draft nomination for the Shiloh Church has been reviewed by the HPO and awaits completion. Of the three properties identified by Owen & Eastlake and recommended for the Study List as a result of this survey, only Walton Street Pool (BN5664) was approved for the Study List in 2019 while the draft survey report was under review. The other two properties were not approved for the Study List based on their integrity and the information available to HPO staff and the NRAC at the time.

## **J. A. Wilson Building, 13-15 Eagle Street (BN2157)**

Built in 1924, the Wilson Building on Eagle Street was a professional building located in the heart of Asheville's African American business district. James Wilson's two-story brick commercial building was home to Dr. F. A. Evans' dental office, Dr. L. O. Miller's medical office, C. C. Lipscombe's real estate office, as well as an insurance company office, a music teacher, and a beauty parlor. In the late 1950s and early 1960s, civil right activists from ASCORE met regularly at the Wilson Building. As one of the rare surviving commercial buildings on Eagle Street, the Wilson Building is a tangible link to the bustling African American commercial district that existed here and retains a high degree of integrity. The Wilson Building is a contributing resource within the Downtown Asheville Historic District (BN0003), a property listed in the National Register in 1979.



## **Rabbit’s Motel, 107 McDowell Street (BN6437)**

Rabbit’s Motel and Café opened in 1948 on McDowell Street and soon became recognized as one of the finest tourist courts for African Americans in the South. Entrepreneur Fred “Rabbit” Simpson opened the business with an indoor dining room, curbside service, modern guest room furnishings, and a state-of-the-art boiler system. Located in the Southside neighborhood, the motel provided lodging and home cooking to Blacks traveling through Asheville in the post-World War II era. Guests included Black sports figures, members of the Negro Baseball League, and musicians touring on the Chitlin’ Circuit. The tourist court remained popular through the late 1960s, and as overnight stays dwindled, the café continued to be a favorite local eatery until it closed in 2003. The café was known for its home cooked meals, generous pork chops, fresh vegetables, and homemade cornbread.

Rabbit’s Motel consists of two buildings including the two-story restaurant at the front of the property. Constructed of concrete block with brick quoins, the structure retains its flat front and stepped side parapets, brick belt course, original three-over-one double-hung windows, and brick window and door surrounds. The one-story six-room motel building at the rear has a side-gable roof, stuccoed walls, and original brick window and door surrounds.



## Walton Street Pool, 570 Walton Street (BN5664)



In tandem with the WPA, the City established Walton Street Park in 1939 as a sanctioned recreational space for the city's Black population. Construction on the 5.7-acre park began in 1938, and it officially opened in June 1939. The original park contained a wading pool, tennis and horseshoe courts, and a small playground. A swimming pool and pool house were included in the WPA plan, but construction of those amenities was postponed until after World War II. Excavation for Walton Pool began in 1947, during a second round of construction; the pool house followed in 1948. The facility is a rectangular, poured-concrete, in-ground swimming pool with a concrete apron. The one-story concrete-block pool house with a parapet roof, brick frieze, metal-frame windows, and two changing rooms stands to the east of the pool. The interior retains original, green-glazed terra cotta block walls. A small concrete block shed-roof addition, built in 1971, contains the filtration and maintenance equipment for the pool. The park complex also contains a small, recently constructed wood picnic shelter and playground, grass baseball diamond, asphalt basketball court, and parking lot.

Although the property is often remembered as the first municipal pool to be established for the Black residents of Asheville, it is more accurately remembered as the longest standing of those parks. The earliest noted pool built for African Americans in Asheville was the Mountain Street Pool in the East End neighborhood, which was located near the Mountain Street School. Other early parks for African American children were also adjacent to segregated schools, such as those on Burton Street, Hill Street, and Shiloh. Walton Street Park stood on a much larger lot than any of the other parks for African Americans. During the decades of urban renewal

projects that followed, conditions at the park deteriorated such that the facility was frequently closed to the public, being deemed a risk for children to play in. Recent renovations, however, have stabilized and improved the condition of the park facilities.

## **Priorities for Future Surveys**

Given the rich cultural heritage and strong neighborhood identities found within the African American community in Asheville, all of the neighborhoods and areas discussed within this report deserve to be comprehensively surveyed in the near future. Areas such as Heart of Chestnut, Magnolia Park, and Burton Street to date have been the subject of more documentation than other neighborhoods discussed in this report. Priority for future African American Heritage Resource Surveys should be given to the extant historic neighborhoods. Survey priority should also consider which areas are under the most pressure from development, including Burton Street and Southside. Overlaying surveys of existing historic architectural resources with studies of the urban renewal projects in East End and Southside may provide a deeper understanding of the displacement caused by those projects and detail the resulting physical changes. Similarly, additional survey work in the Shiloh community may help chart how urban renewal has affected the neighborhood through the resettlement of African American residents displaced by projects in other parts of the city.

### **East End/Valley Street (BN6464)**

While the general history of East End, Valley Street, and “The Block” is relatively well known and documented, a comprehensive survey of historic architectural resources is needed to fully capture the cycles of development and decay that have affected this area of the city. Lying immediately east of downtown on the slopes of Beaucatcher Mountain overlooking the city, the East End neighborhood is an important understudied aspect of the architectural history of Asheville. Urban renewal has deeply damaged the historic fabric of the East End, and primary and secondary sources of the program’s legacy should be incorporated into future surveys to better understand and convey the physical effects of those programs on the surviving historic resources.

### **Southside (BN6431)**

The large, geographically diverse area of the city known as Southside needs a comprehensive survey of historic architectural resources to document the cycles of development and destruction that have affected, and continue to affect, the neighborhood. Southside is generally defined to include a broad swath of land southwest of downtown beginning with Southside Avenue and extending west from Asheland Avenue and McDowell Street. Urban renewal substantially altered portions of Southside, limiting cohesive development and creating opportunities for redevelopment and infill construction that have led to increased fragmentation. Several pockets of the neighborhood have been previously

recorded, but a comprehensive survey that documents the legacy of urban renewal projects would be useful in understanding the historical growth and development of the area, which was once home to approximately half of the city's Black population.

### **Shiloh (BN1850)**

Shiloh encapsulates the long architectural history of African Americans in Asheville from the neighborhood's settlement in 1889 to the present. Although a Shiloh Historic District (BN1850) was approved for the Study List after the 1998 survey update of Asheville, a comprehensive survey of historic architectural resources is needed to better document the neighborhood and grasp its rich history and growth. In addition to an architectural survey, research should include information on who developed various subdivisions within the larger neighborhood and whether houses were speculatively constructed or built by homeowners, the extent of commercial activity within the residential area, and the amalgamation of small surrounding settlements that are now part of Shiloh. The potential survey area for Shiloh is roughly bounded by Hendersonville Road, Interstate 40 (I-40), Sweeten Creek Road, and Rock Hill Road. Research indicates that the Brooklyn community was bisected by I-40 in the early 1970s, so additional areas on the north side of I-40 should also be surveyed to encompass the full extent of the Brooklyn section of Shiloh. Sunset Cemetery and the Rock Hill Baptist Church Cemetery on the east side of Sweeten Creek Road should also be documented.

### **Burton Street (BN6282) and Emma / Violet Hill**

Although the Burton Street and Park View neighborhood has been reasonably well represented and evaluated in past surveys, a comprehensive survey of historic architectural resources is needed in light of ongoing development pressure from highway projects and infill construction. The neighborhood is roughly bounded by Haywood Road, Florida Street, Patton Avenue, and I-240. Due to the destruction caused by the construction of Patton Avenue and I-240 in the mid-twentieth century, it would be beneficial to document additional areas north and east of those two roads to capture any resources separated by the loss of original street connections. The area north of Patton Avenue, in particular, includes the homestead of James Vester Miller and Violet Hill Cemetery, which Miller established in the 1930s for Black residents of Asheville. The area around the cemetery was more rural in character than the Burton Street and Park View neighborhood but was a natural extension of the community, nonetheless.

## Inventoried Properties

During the summer of 2019, project consultants from the firm Owen & Eastlake recorded approximately 75 newly identified properties to be added to the inventory of historic architectural resources in Asheville. The survey represents a small fraction of the potential resources associated with African American heritage in the city and collects information on areas deserving further study through comprehensive architectural surveys.

### *Note on Historic Integrity*

In her 2009 Master's thesis, Heather McDonald describes how conventional ideas about historic integrity are problematic in an African American context when emphasis is placed on the retention of historic fabric. Instead, as McDonalds argues, historic African American properties often exhibit cultural layering—different people and different uses through time.<sup>446</sup> As preservationist Taurean Merriweather points out, “Buildings reflect time and culture through people’s interaction and existence.”<sup>447</sup> This includes additional multilayered uses, such as when single-family residences are used for businesses or churches. Alterations to accommodate home-based businesses often change the basic mass and form of a dwelling in ways that challenge traditional notions of historic architectural integrity but represent good examples of the historic forces at play in the neighborhood. Asheville journalist and community historian Henry Robinson notes that during the Great Depression many people took in boarders or converted portions of their home to businesses, and the practice of home-based businesses continued into the 1940s and 1950s when both segregation and the informal neighborhood economy flourished. While many examples of this kind of work have been lost, a number of African American neighborhoods still exhibit the built environment of this period.

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<sup>446</sup> Heather Lynn McDonald, “The National Register of Historic Places and African American Heritage” (Master’s thesis, University of Georgia, 2009), 40.

<sup>447</sup> Taurean Merriweather, “Preservin’ Blackness: Assessing the Values and Perceptions of Historic Districts in Neighborhoods of Color” (Master’s thesis, University of Florida, 2018).

SSN	Name	Date	Type/Association	Neighborhood
BN0433	Hopkins Chapel A.M.E. Zion Church	1910	Church	East End
BN0680	St. James A.M.E. Church (Haith Education Building)	1970	Church	East End
BN1307	Roger's Grocery	ca. 1935	Grocery	Shiloh
BN1342	St. Mark A.M.E. Zion Church	ca. 1910	Church	South Asheville
BN1379	Commercial Building	ca. 1925	Commercial building	
BN1850	Shiloh		Neighborhood	Shiloh
BN2157	J. A. Wilson Building	1924	Professional building / Civil Rights Movement	East End
BN2403	Commercial Building (5 W. Walnut Street)	ca. 1900	Restaurant	Downtown
BN2404	Commercial Building (9 W. Walnut Street)	ca. 1900	Restaurant	Downtown
BN2797	Ernest and Magnolia McKissick House	ca. 1905	House / Civil Rights Movement	Magnolia Park
BN3766	Elks Fawndale Lodge #363	1920	Fraternal organization	Southside
BN3813	S. Foster Tourist Home	1920s	Tourist home / Green Book	Southside
BN4296	McKissick House	1920	House / Civil Rights Movement	Heart of Chestnut
BN4304	John Brooks Dendy House	1920	House / Sports	Heart of Chestnut
BN4926	Jesse Martin Real Estate Office	1915	Commercial building	West Asheville
BN5181	Jade Club	1946	Commercial / Entertainment	Downtown
BN5662	(former) Livingston Street School	1953	Recreation center / school	Southside
BN5664	Walton Street Pool	1948	Pool	Southside
BN5887	Oliver W. H. and J. Mae McCorkle House	ca. 1925	House / Commercial building	Southside
BN5925	Commercial Building	1920s	Commercial building	Southside
BN6282	Burton Street		Neighborhood	Burton Street
BN6411	Brooklyn		Neighborhood	Brooklyn
BN6412	Brooklyn Mission Fire Baptized Holiness Church	1912	Church	Brooklyn
BN6413	Highland Meadows	1971	Subdivision	Shiloh
BN6414	Johnson House	ca. 1971	FHA Part 235 program	Shiloh
BN6415	Rucker House	ca. 1972	FHA Part 235 program	Shiloh
BN6416	Wilson House	1972	FHA Part 235 program	Shiloh
BN6417	Powell House	1920	Early settlement	Shiloh
BN6418	Young's Rest Home	1956	Nursing home	Shiloh
BN6419	Masonic Temple of Venus, Lodge No. 62, F. & A.M. Prince Hall Affiliation	1971	Fraternal lodge	Shiloh
BN6420	Shiloh Community League	1938	Shiloh Community League	Shiloh

	Concession Stand Lot			
BN6421	Whitehurst Model Home (980 W. Chapel Rd.)	1952	Model home / FHA loan program	Shiloh
BN6422	Whitehurst FHA Home (5 W. Chapel Circle)	1952	Model home / FHA loan program	Shiloh
BN6423	Shiloh Park	1932	Park	Shiloh
BN6424	Roosevelt Park	1926	Subdivision	Shiloh
BN6425	Love House	1958	FHA Part 221 program	Shiloh
BN6426	Lincoln Park	1948	Subdivision	Shiloh
BN6427	Washington House	1960	House / Highway construction	Shiloh
BN6428	Worldwide Missionary Baptist Tabernacle	ca. 1958	Church	Southside
BN6429	Hicks House	1910	House	Shiloh
BN6430	Fairmont Baptist Church	1966	Church	Fairmont
BN6431	Southside		Neighborhood	Southside
BN6432	Oakland Forest	1968	Subdivision	Southside
BN6433	Livingston Apartments	1979	Public housing / Urban renewal	Southside
BN6434	Erskine-Walton Apartments	ca. 1975	Public housing / Urban renewal	Southside
BN6435	Ellsworth House	1975	House / Urban renewal infill	Southside
BN6436	Moore House	1975	House / Urban renewal infill	Southside
BN6437	Rabbit's Motel	1948	Recreation	Southside
BN6438	New Bethel Baptist Church	1942	Church	Southside
BN6439	Beulah Chapel Fire Baptized Holiness Church	1970s	Church	Southside
BN6440	Pine Grove Missionary Baptist Church	1965	Church	Southside
BN6441	Herbert Friday Barbershop	ca. 1925	House / Barbershop / Civil Rights Movement	Burton Street
BN6442	St. Paul's Missionary Baptist Church	1970s	Church	Burton Street
BN6443	Dreamland Cafe	ca. 1945	House / Commercial building	Burton Street
BN6444	Mt. Carmel Baptist Church	ca. 1970	Church	Burton Street
BN6445	Hill Street Baptist Church	1958	Church	Hill Street
BN6446	Hillcrest Apartments	1958	Public housing	Hill Street
BN6447	Fruit of the Spirit Church of God in Christ	ca. 1928	Church	Hill Street
BN6448	Sycamore Temple Church of God in Christ	ca. 1955	Church	Hill Street
BN6449	Shiloh School (GONE)	1928	Education	Shiloh
BN6450	Lee-Walker Heights (GONE)	1951	Public housing	Southside
BN6451	Stephens-Lee Shop Class House	ca. 1954	House / Stephens-Lee High School	East End
BN6452	Nazareth First Missionary Baptist Church	1961	Church	East End
BN6453	Calvary Presbyterian Church	1926	Church	East End

BN6454	John Mattison Boarding House	1915	House / Commercial building	East End
BN6455	Allen High School Dormitory	1950s	Education	East End
BN6456	South Asheville		Neighborhood	South Asheville
BN6457	Sherman Withers Grocery	1929	House / Commercial building	South Asheville
BN6458	(former) Welfare Baptist Church	ca. 1931	Church	Stumptown
BN6459	Klondyke Homes	1975	Public housing	Montford
BN6460	Heart of Chestnut		Neighborhood	Chestnut Hill
BN6461	Roosevelt Park Sales Office	ca. 1953	House / Commercial building	Shiloh
BN6462	Magnolia Park		Neighborhood	Magnolia Park
BN6464	East End / Valley Street		Neighborhood	East End
BN6465	White House	1925	House	Shiloh
BN6466	Whitehurst Park	1952	Subdivision	Shiloh
BN6467	Church of Christ Gaston Street	ca. 1955	Church	Southside
BN6873	Linwood Crump Shiloh Recreation Center	1952	School / Recreation center	Shiloh
BN6874	Hill Street		Neighborhood	Hill Street
BN6875	Stumptown		Neighborhood	Stumptown

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