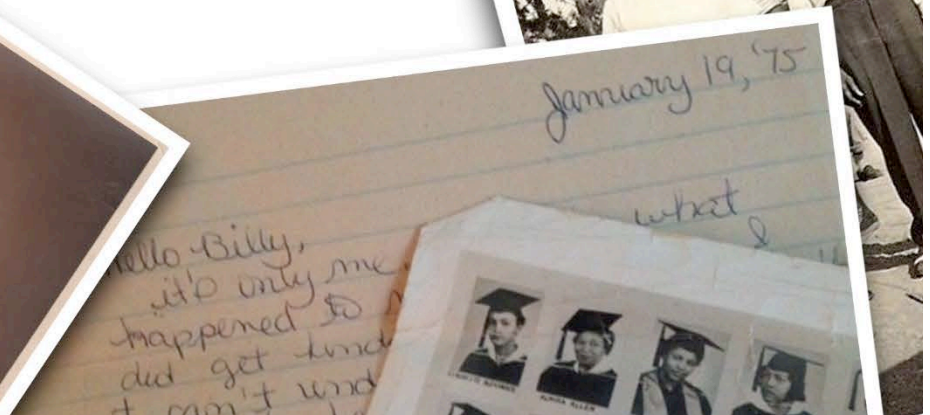
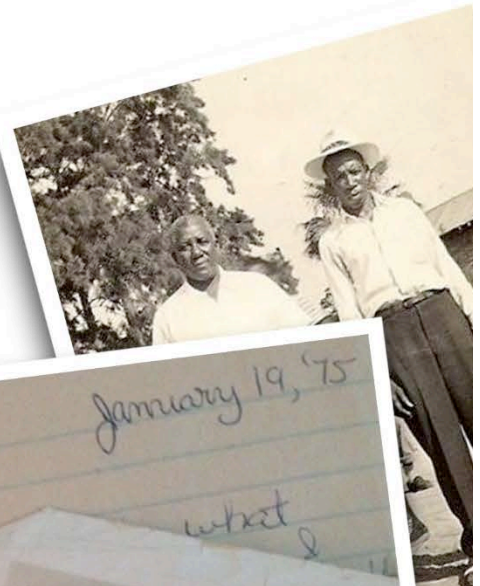




NEWTOWN ALIVE

COURAGE • DIGNITY • DETERMINATION



**NEWTOWN CONSERVATION HISTORIC
DISTRICT**

PHASE I

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NEWTOWN: PAST AND PRESENT: 1914-2014

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FOREWORD

For over 100 years, African American residents have assisted in the development of Sarasota's institutions, culture and social history. Black labor cleared snake infested land for real estate developers, laid railroad ties, planted citrus and celery fields, helped plat golf courses and labored in the homes of the town's most influential power brokers cooking, cleaning, ironing and rearing children.

The African American community valued education and practiced their religious traditions despite segregation. The churches and the Booker School triplex have been cornerstones. At the center of the self-contained town within a town with its distinctive neighborhoods was a thriving business district that offered goods and services when downtown shops in Sarasota were closed to African Americans.

Newtown has evolved over the last century. The timing of the Newtown Conservation Historic District Project is ideal, following the community's centennial celebration, which resulted in a greater awareness of Newtown's origins and development.

A comprehensive research study based on primary and secondary source documents and oral history interviews about the factors that led Blacks to Sarasota, their work, history, education, and social life has been available only in fragments here and there. We are proud that there is a companion document available to the public that compliments Annie M. McElroy's book, But Your World and My World. And we are confident that the information contained in this report will be transformative and contribute to Newtown's development in the next 100 years.

The Newtown Conservation Historic District Task Force

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Newtown Conservation Historic District research report is a collaborative effort between many Sarasota residents, city and county government leaders, higher education partners and small business executives. Fragments of the Newtown community's history were found in the collections of private residents, art galleries, historical repositories and research databases.

We gratefully acknowledge the contributions of the late Annie M. McElroy, author of But Your World and My World, published in 1986, the first history book focused on the African American experience in Sarasota County. This book provided a foundation by filling in many gaps in the historic record and included information about Newtown events, places and people that the NCHD team would never have been able to access were it not written.

Thanks to Newtown residents who opened their photo albums allowing access to powerful visual images and made time in their daily schedule to share unforgettable, life changing stories. Oral history interviews provided a window into the past and were an invaluable resource. Completion of the report was made possible through the City of Sarasota's Neighborhood and Development Office and generous in-kind contributions.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Newtown Conservation Historic District Project

NEWTOWN: AN AFRICAN AMERICAN ENCLAVE IN SARASOTA, FLORIDA

For many years, Newtown residents and leaders appealed to their government representatives for funding to complete a comprehensive study to document the history of their community. The significance of the contributions of the African American enclave to the people of Newtown and the broader community of Sarasota, Florida deserves to be prominently recorded for posterity. While there have been some well-written accounts of various aspects of this community, notably the 2014 series published by the *Herald Tribune* during Newtown's centennial year of 2014, there was more that its residents wanted to add to the story. Rich details about the lives of Newtown's residents over the course of a century have not been available in one place and some have not been publically accessible at all. They were widely dispersed and found in public collections, such as the Sarasota History Center, in private collections of photographs, letters and old newspaper articles stored away in homes, and in the oral tradition of the residents, a common practice among African American families. Stories passed down over the generations - memories of places, people and events - were spread by word of mouth, and not written down. This is one of the retentions of African cultural heritage in African American culture today.

The lack of written records, particularly in regard to the early histories of Overtown and Newtown are tied to the fact that education for African Americans was essentially non-existent during slavery and for decades after its abolition. This is why many of the early residents of Newtown could not read or write. The establishment of educational facilities for African Americans post slavery was slow to develop.

For decades after the doctrine of "Separate but Equal" was to have been abolished by the US Supreme Court's 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education* decision, unequal educational opportunities persisted, particularly in the South. This was definitely the case in Sarasota, Florida, a city that resisted school desegregation for eight years after the 1954 Supreme Court ruling. Details about the social history of Newtown are part of the wealth of information contained in the oral tradition and can be reclaimed by interviewing today's residents. Gathering and then weaving together the separate threads of the Newtown and Overtown stories that have been cast about in various places should result in a tapestry that reveals much more than any one thread could.

Our goal is that the NCHD Report will inspire Newtown’s residents: those who never left Newtown but want to help it improve, the exceptional young people who returned to Newtown after graduating from college and vocational schools or at the conclusion of athletic careers, the seasoned leaders who have accomplished so much and shown remarkable strength of character in fighting the battles of racism and discrimination, and the generations who, unfortunately, know little about the historical challenges as well as achievements of their ancestors and living relatives. The citizens of Newtown have risen to confront challenges on many occasions.

Societal circumstances have changed dramatically over this 100-year period, and so must the ideas and strategies designed to keep this community intact and prevent losing it to the encroaching development that some consider to be gentrification. Newtown has a rich legacy that can only be preserved if its people value it and are willing to fight for it. Their decades-long perseverance in pursuit of the funding to complete this study of their community demonstrates that they have the same strong will as their ancestors, who built a thriving community out of what once was empty land and through which dirt roads were carved and houses built by their own hands.

The occasion of Newtown’s centennial in 2014 represents an exceptionally appropriate time for the Newtown Conservation Historic District (NCHD) Project to occur. “Working on a Dream” is the phrase that resonated during the first meeting of the Project’s participants: City government representatives, the NCHD Project Team of researchers, and the Newtown Community Task Force in 2015. The phrase has been a motivational force in the effort to complete an exceptional report that reflects many of Newtown’s stories – ‘herstories’ and ‘histories.’ This is a “dream” that has finally come true, and we are working to ensure that it becomes an enduring reality to be celebrated for many years to come. Regarding the importance of this Project, Fredd Atkins, former mayor of Sarasota and City of Sarasota Commissioner, made this statement to a *Herald Tribune* reporter: “The community will not only learn more about their history and their forefathers’ history, they’ll also learn to respect the struggle and respect the opportunities they have now...A lot of the things going on today go contrary to this struggle. I think the project will help young people, and new people coming here, celebrate our history and our community.”¹

The City of Sarasota solicited written quotations for a Newtown Conservation Historic District Project that would establish the Newtown Conservation Historic District. The contract was awarded to Vickie Oldham as the consultant who would complete the defined “Scope of Work” described as including, but not limited to, the following:

- 1) Attending a series of five public meetings starting with the opening forum to introduce the consultant to the community and the Newtown Citizen Historic Task Force.
- 2) Reporting to city staff and submitting written project reports periodically.
- 3) Meeting and working with a Newtown Citizen Historic District Task Force to:
 - a. identify the Newtown Conservation Historic District area and map the district boundaries,
 - b. document the history and culture of Newtown over the last 100 years (1914-2014),
 - c. record Newtown’s oral tradition and complete the required narrative for a series of historic markers,

- d. develop a walking tour with an educational component as part of the project package, and
 - e. work with a graphic designer and web master to complete the final marker panels and integrated web pages.
- 4) Presenting their project map, report, and research to the Newtown community, the Historic Preservation Board, and the City Commission.

The NCHD Project Team completed all required elements of the project's "Scope of Work." In addition, the team provided supplemental research data and outreach efforts that were beyond the Scope of Work, but that the team was confident would add broader community access to and knowledge about the project. Two community events were held to assist residents in preserving family heirlooms. The following social media sites were launched: Facebook; YouTube; Flickr; and Twitter (#Newtown_Dream). The NCHD Project Team accomplished the critically important and challenging task of assembling, analyzing and producing a report that coalesced what were scattered details of the Newtown community's origins and development over the 100-year period from 1914-2014 into one document. Because the histories of the two communities are intricately interwoven, information about Overtown, the first African American enclave that arose in Sarasota, is included in this NCHD Report.

Parades and other commemorative events have been important in the celebration of Newtown's centennial. This document will provide an enduring tribute to the legacy of the community. Many African American neighborhoods in urban areas have been absorbed into the larger cities in which they are located. In most of these instances, the unfortunate fact is that all knowledge about those neighborhoods is lost. Thanks to the Newtown Conservation Historic District (NCHD) Project, this will not be the fate of Newtown. This Project Report establishes a permanent contribution toward the acknowledgment, commemoration, and preservation of Newtown's unique history by rediscovering, reassembling and preserving its scattered elements.

The story of Newtown is recorded using two sources of information: primary and secondary documents. Examples of these can include:

Primary Documents:

- Oral History interviews of current and former Newtown residents;
- Newtown Conservation Historic District area maps;
- Census records;
- Maps;
- City Directories;
- Historical and contemporary photographs depicting Newtown people, places, events and properties;
- Handwritten letters, diaries and journals, memorabilia;
- Video and film

Secondary Documents:

- Stories about Overtown and Newtown obtained from historical writings, newspaper and magazine articles, websites, and secondhand accounts;
- Drawings from photographs depicting Newtown people and properties;
- Biographies; and
- Museum and library exhibits

Using the information gathered from 42 oral history interviews, over 200 documents and photographs, and numerous Internet resources, the NCHD Final Report examines the following topics:

- The early settlers of Overtown and Newtown;
- How residents made a living (occupations, businesses);
- Education and schools;
- Impact of segregation, desegregation, and integration on their lives;
- The history of community churches;
- The history of medical treatment;
- Sports teams and athletes;
- Military service;
- Community organizations;
- Politics;
- Analysis of historical maps for the Overtown and Newtown neighborhoods, creation of new digital maps, and connecting maps to the historic resources;
- Identification and description of the historic resources of Newtown and Overtown;
- Vision for the future of Newtown; and
- Interview Transcripts

The NCHD Project Team recognizes that this study is based upon a limited sample of the total population of Newtown. In collaboration with the Newtown Community Task Force, the Project Team prioritized prospective interviewees from different generations, social backgrounds, and professions. This provides an interesting and diverse perspective. Numerous other sources of information have been used to create a comprehensive portrait of Newtown: 1914-2014.

The NCHD Project Research Team:

- **Vickie Oldham**, Consultant, is well known as a former Sarasota journalist and ‘daughter’ of Newtown. She has worked in higher education marketing and communications for nine years. Her responsibilities included branding and marketing three HBCUs (Historically Black Colleges and Universities). She completed a documentary short about Newtown’s history in 1992 and was one of the producers of a documentary about the history of Sarasota County in 2003. Oldham founded the “Looking for Angola” project in 2004 to identify archaeological evidence and historical documentation of the early 1800s Black Seminole settlement (Angola). Traces of cultural artifacts have been unearthed.

- **Dr. Rosalyn Howard** is a Cultural Anthropologist and Ethnohistorian who recently retired as a tenured, associate professor in the Department of Anthropology at the University of Central Florida (Orlando). Dr. Howard has conducted several extensive, in-residence ethnographic (community) studies in Jamaica, the Bahamas, and Bermuda and has taught students how to conduct and publish ethnographic research for more than 10 years.
- **Dave Baber** previously directed the Sarasota History Center and served as Administrator and Historic Preservation Officer in Broward County.
- **Christopher Wenzel** is an Architectural Preservationist.
- **Mark Jackson** is President and Finance Officer of the Manasota Association for the Study of African American Life and History (ASALH).
- **Jim Flynn** is the owner of Intermedia Productions, Inc.
- **Kacey Troupe** is photographer and social media strategist.
- **Volunteer Researchers and Reviewers**

¹ Lopez, Yadira. "Saving and celebrating Newtown's stories." *Herald Tribune*.

CHAPTER 1: BACKGROUND

This Report concerns a very special Sarasota, Florida African American community – Newtown – that grew out of another very special African American community – Overtown. Of paramount importance to the culture of these two communities were three things: church, school, and family. Most of the people who arrived came from small towns in Florida and surrounding southern states looking for ways to better their lives. They were ready and willing to work hard, to build their lives and to build the community. They faced stiff challenges: racism, segregation, menial jobs and poverty. Clearly, an indomitable spirit grew out of their struggle. Their faith in their God, to whom they looked for strength, hope and a way to cope with life's challenges, led them to congregate in individual homes until they could afford to construct churches. In those early days, churches were the foundation of the community. They provided a space for children to learn school lessons as well as Bible lessons, and provided a place where they could exercise some control over their lives, exercise some authority and build self-esteem. These essential elements of humanity were denied them in their daily working lives in segregated Sarasota. They did not sit and complain; they established self-help, benevolent organizations and created a nurturing environment where everybody was “family.” Many interviewees stated that Newtown was “a village” where everyone knew and cared for one another.

Circumstances in the Newtown “village” changed with time due to various factors, including: drugs; outside societal influences; loss of influential leaders; and the impacts of desegregation and integration. All of these factors substantially transformed Newtown's culture. Redevelopment and revitalization efforts are being pursued to raise the consciousness of this community, to tear down substandard housing and provide decent living conditions, and to rebuild bridges that were destroyed – for example, the relationship between the Booker Schools and the Newtown community that was negatively impacted by school desegregation policies.

This Report examines various areas of the Newtown community's history and details from the life stories of its members, spanning the 100-year period of its existence. The stories you will read may make you laugh, they may make you angry, they may make you question what you really know about the history of the City of Sarasota. Certainly, you will find details that were left out of mainstream historical accounts.

Newtown is a resilient community that is in the process of revitalization and redevelopment. Hopefully, the redevelopment will be beneficial to its residents and not only to outsiders whose interests, some believe, lie closer to gentrification than revitalization. Newtown needs all of its residents to participate in this process of revitalization. It will indeed take the efforts of “a village” to keep Newtown Alive!

As you read these oral history interviews, you will notice that not all of the persons interviewed speak in what is called “Standard English;” many of them, especially the elders, did not have the luxury of having a lengthy or formal education. They recall having to quit school, sometimes in the elementary grades, to care for younger brothers and sisters while their parents went to work. Or they had to go to work themselves as

children or teenagers in hot celery fields or snake-ridden turpentine camps or restaurants, or white people's houses as domestics, for example. Others traveled with their families as migrant farm workers for months at a time, missing many school days.

Speaking in "Standard English" has less to do with a person's level of intelligence than the opportunity they have had to learn it. As a Cultural Anthropology professor, I taught a course called Sociolinguistics, which is the study of how social factors, such as gender, occupation, region, social class, ethnic dialects, education, and bilingualism affect a person's language. How you speak also reflects the level of familiarity with the person to whom you are speaking and the situation (formal or informal) in which you are speaking. You speak differently with your friends, for example, rather than your boss, or in front of an audience. That ability to change the way you speak is called "code-switching." Vickie Oldham, who grew up in Newtown, has a great degree of familiarity with the interviewees, and they with her. She conducted the majority of the interviews for this Project. At times, the interviewer and interviewee are "gonna" code-switch, and "kinda" speak the way they would in a casual conversation with a friend. Enjoy reading the rich details of the history and culture of the people of Overtown and Newtown, as well as the rich textures of their language.

CHAPTER 2: METHODOLOGY

“A particular procedure or set of procedures”

- Merriam-Webster Dictionary

This research study consists of two distinct research methodologies. The details of these are addressed separately.

METHODOLOGY 1 is an ethnographic study. Ethnography is defined as the study of a particular community. This Project is primarily focused on the study of the history, society and culture of the Newtown community, an African American enclave within Sarasota, Florida that celebrated its centennial in 2014. Due to the historical interrelationship of Overtown - the first African American enclave within Sarasota - and Newtown, the information compiled about the two communities is interwoven throughout this Report.

The ethnographic study was completed using the following qualitative methods: 1.) Conducting oral histories; 2.) Collecting and reviewing primary source material (including archival documents, oral history interviews, and photographs), and secondary source materials including artwork, books, church history documents, community organization documents, and newspaper articles; 3.) Analyzing the collected data, and 4.) Constructing a narrative based upon the data obtained from the first three research methods. This ethnography incorporates information from 42 oral history interviews, and more than 200 primary and secondary source documents, including photographs. Dr. Rosalyn Howard combined the data collected and wrote 14 of the 19 chapters of the NCHD Project Final Report.

METHODOLOGY 2 involves the mapping, documentation, and analysis of the research area. The research was conducted and the chapters were written by Dave Baber, former Sarasota County Historical Resources Director and Broward County Historic Preservation Officer, and Architectural Preservationist Christopher Wenzel. The research area’s boundaries were determined by utilizing aerial graphic and written description. There are two separate but related parts of Methodology 2:

METHODOLOGY 2A (Baber) involves the process of identifying and describing the historic resources of Newtown and Overtown.

METHODOLOGY 2B (Wenzel) describes the process of analyzing the historical maps for the Overtown and Newtown neighborhood, creating new digital maps, and discussing the relationship of the maps to the resources.

Although the original proposal did not include a request for the study of Overtown, there was a consensus reached at the NCHD Project’s first community meeting that information about this historic neighborhood must be included, as Newtown’s history is directly interrelated with the history of Overtown.

METHODOLOGY 1: Ethnographic Study

The primary methodology employed for developing the ethnographic study of Newtown included the following qualitative research methods: Oral history interviews, collecting primary and secondary documents from archives, books and electronic web resources,

and collecting photographs from various sources (such as, personal collections, historical archives, newspapers, and books, etc.). With the information gleaned from these sources, a portrait of the historic and contemporary Newtown community emerges. Semi-structured interviews utilizing similar questions were conducted at various places including: Robert L. Taylor Community Center, the North Sarasota County Public Library, private homes; on the telephone; at an interviewee's business place; at an assisted living facility; and at Booker High School. The interviews were videotaped and still photographs were taken with the participants' permission.

The proposal required that 22 persons be interviewed for the study. Such a limitation on the number of interviewees required serious consideration and prioritization of which persons in the community should be interviewed. The list of persons was discussed, revised, and finalized at several meetings of the NCHD Project committee and the Newtown Community Task Force. From September through November 2015, Consultant Vickie Oldham recorded interviews and NCHD Project funding was allocated for the transcriptions of 22 of these. The Committee members' desire to present a more comprehensive perspective of Newtown led Oldham to conduct additional oral history interviews, for a total of 42. Included in this total are four interviews conducted by New College students in Dr. Erin Dean's class, and Dr. Rosalyn Howard conducted one new and two follow-up interviews. Three previously recorded and transcribed interviews that were conducted by New College students were accessed on the New College Oral History Program website and are not included in the total number of interviews conducted. (<http://www.sarasota.wateratlas.usf.edu/oral-history-project/>) Although not all of the 42 interviews were transcribed (due to funding constraints), some information from all of the interviewees is recorded in the Report. The additional 20 interviews will be transcribed and the accompanying DVDs will be shared when additional funding is secured at a later date. The interviewees' accounts represent multiple perspectives and illuminate various dimensions of the lives of African Americans in the Sarasota area, from their 1880s arrival and initial residence in Overtown, to their 1914-2014 period of residence in Newtown.

Over 200 primary and secondary documents were collected by an enthusiastic and dedicated group of volunteer researchers who scoured a large variety of resources searching for documentation of the 100-year history of the Newtown community. These resources include but are not limited to: Sarasota Historical Archives; the North Sarasota Public Library; the Cultural Resource Center; Booker High School; the *Tempo News*; the *Herald Tribune*; books; academic and newspaper articles; and electronic web resources. Vickie Oldham and Dr. Howard also contributed to the collection of research data. Dr. Rosalyn Howard is a cultural anthropologist who has extensive experience in conducting and writing ethnographies. She has completed community research studies while in residence in Jamaica, the Bahamas (with a significant Florida component), and Bermuda. Dr. Howard has written two ethnographic research books – Black Seminoles in the Bahamas and Recollection and Reconnection: Voices of the St. David's Islanders and their Native American Relatives – and has published numerous peer reviewed journal articles and book chapters. One of the many courses that she taught to undergraduate and

graduate students during her 15-year teaching career at UCF was “Ethnographic Research Methods.”

Ethnography is designed to discover the context within which the people of a community interpret their own lives and identities. Assembling the above mentioned resources that reveal the important stories of Newtown enables us to construct a knowledge base that is useful not only for the Newtown community, but also for the global community. In many ways, their stories mirror the struggle of many African Americans across the United States; after a loss of historical connection to our ancestors’ places of origin, and the legacy of enslavement in the Americas, the ability to survive and thrive in the face of social, political and economic inequality stemming from that legacy is remarkable. The struggle continues.

Following is an in-depth description, written by Project Consultant Vickie Oldham, about her process of conducting the oral history interviews with the people of Newtown.

The Oral History Process: Vickie Oldham

Vickie Oldham, the NCHD consultant, collected the majority of the oral history interviews. As a Sarasota native, born and reared in Newtown, her familiarity with the African American community was an asset. She is a former news reporter and host of a half hour, Sunday morning program on the Sarasota-based ABC affiliate television station. Her career as a broadcast journalist covering assignments in the market spanned over 10 years. A career transition from broadcast news to higher education marketing and communications caused a move to Georgia. Her return to Sarasota was in May 2015 when officials at the City of Sarasota distributed a “request for quote” to identify a consultant to complete Phase I of the Newtown Conservation Historic District project. Oldham’s proposal was approved.

Likability and credibility are two important components of a successful oral history initiative. Developing a rapport with community members is an essential element in obtaining reliable information during interviews. Oldham’s relationship with residents was important in securing a large number of interviews in a limited time frame.

Beginning the Oral History Interview Process

Oldham began the process of gathering historic information from Newtown residents by reviewing logs of her television program, *Common Ground*. Interviews with community leaders and residents about issues and events dating back to the 1980s were on the videotapes. The NCHD budget called for dubbing selected shows, transcribing them and using the content in the Final Report. However, dubbing costs for one inch and beta SP videotapes proved cost prohibitive.

Another method was to research the names of organizations and individuals that had videotaped interviews with Newtown residents. The consultant learned about oral history interviews conducted by well-respected Florida historian Dr. Jan Matthews, entrepreneur Ralph Barnett, Siesta Key Photographer Brad McCourtney and New College students in Dr. Erin Dean’s class. Professor Dean, an environmental anthropologist coordinates the

Sarasota Water Oral History Project in collaboration with Sarasota County Government and the Water Atlas. The project explores “how water resources are understood and remembered by local residents,” according to the New College website. Dean’s students participate by exploring theory and methodology of oral history, conducting in-depth oral history interviews with local residents, and creating narrative audio-visual presentations, which are archived and available online.

Dean enthusiastically embraced the NCHD project. She granted permission to use the materials on the website, attended the launch of the Newtown project and encouraged her students to conduct oral history interviews with Newtown residents for their final projects. Four interviews are included in the NCHD Phase I deliverables.

Oldham learned that Matthews had only notes with the interviewees. An approval to use Barnett’s materials could not be secured due to contractual challenges. McCourtney granted Oldham permission to listen to interviews he recorded on cassette tapes conducted with Juanita Hamilton who worked in the home of William and Marie Selby and with turpentine camp laborers Charlie Sanders and Rev. Earl Vencent Samuel Black, Sr. One of the men passed away. Oldham contacted the family of the other but was informed that short and long term memory loss would impede the gathering of reliable information.

On January 19, 1983, Sarasota historian Lillian Burns conducted an oral history interview with Ethel Reid Hayes, daughter of Leonard Reid. Reid, a respected Black pioneer worked for Colonel John Hamilton Gillespie and was his confidante. Gillespie was a Scottish-American soldier, land developer and entrepreneur who became Sarasota’s first mayor. The DVD of the recording between Burns and Hayes was found at the Sarasota History Center. Hayes describes the circumstances that led her father to Sarasota in 1900.

The Oral History Interviews List

A list of names was developed of Overtown and Newtown residents who were available, accessible and had the ability to recall locations, events and people. The NCHD Task Force and residents added more names and contact information to the list.

Oral History Interview Questions

Dr. Rosalyn Howard offered a tutorial about the elements of oral history interviews and sample questions. Questions Oldham asked were also derived from The Smithsonian Folklife and Oral History Interviewing Guide (<http://www.folklife.si.edu/resources/pdf/interviewingguide.pdf>).

Locations of Oral History Interview Tapings

When the first location for interviews was secured, a date was scheduled for the oral history session. The taping was held at the Robert L. Taylor Community Center. The facility was ideal for many reasons. Throughout history, it was a gathering place, first for Black soldiers, then later for residents and Newtown children. The center bears the name of NCHD Task Force member and retired director Robert Taylor.

A satellite branch of the Senior Friendship Center is housed at the center. It attracts retirees such as Dorothye Smith and Prevell Barber who arrive by van together to participate in exercise and art activities almost daily. The location was convenient for both the crew and interviewees.

A small studio adjacent to an audio booth is where some interviews were videotaped. Although challenging to maneuver with equipment, it was intimate. The facility's staff was helpful, even on short notice.

The Oral History Interview Production Team and Equipment

The consultant chose Intermedia Productions, Inc. because of previous work experiences with owner, Jim Flynn. His impressive client list includes major media corporations and companies such as NBC's "Dateline" program, Boar's Head and EMG Alarm Company. Film and television production flows more smoothly working with a crew of people who are knowledgeable and easy to work with. Film directors such as Spike Lee employ the same method. Lee most often trusts the look and feel of his films to director of photography Ernest Dickerson.

The equipment used by Flynn was a Sony FS-7 4K camera, an Arri lighting kit, a Sachtler tripod, Sennheiser lavalier microphones, and a Rode shotgun microphone. The shotgun was used for most interviews except in cases where ambient sound was an issue. In that case, Sennheiser lavaliers were clipped to the lapels of the interviewees and interviewer. Three-point lighting included a key, a fill and a headlight. In cases where there were low ceilings, a 1,000-watt light was used for bounce. Reflectors added fill light to certain subjects. A 2-person crew consisting of Flynn and grip Evan Matson helped to complete the interviews.

Matson, a Ringling graduate and an employee of Intermedia handled minor editing of the interviews, added title pages and dubbed DVD copies for inclusion in four reports required by the City of Sarasota.

Budget constraints necessitated a request for the help of student videographers from Ringling College of Art and Design and State College of Florida. Corin Grover, project manager of Ringling's The Collaboratory was contacted. Grover assigned Nikelle Mackey, a senior to shoot more oral history interviews. Mackey was a consummate young professional who understood the importance of the project.

Her equipment package consisted of a Canon DSLR 5D Mark II and Mark III with a 50 mm lenses, Sennheiser Lavalier 100-ENG G3, Zoom H4N, ear headphones, a reflector, available lighting equipment and a Sunpak Ultra 4stm tripod.

Mackey shot interviews at the North Sarasota Public Library mixing natural and manufactured lighting to create a softer look. She favored use of a narrow depth of field to give less detail to backgrounds and more detail to on-camera speakers. Austin Brown was her assistant.

Gary Oslin, a nontraditional student at SCF and a U.S Navy veteran also videotaped interviews at the library. He used an equipment package that included a Canon XA 20, one Rhodes lavalier microphone, Shadowbox lighting and a Styx tripod; and utilized natural light from nearby windows.

Oldham videotaped the interview with Civil Rights pioneer Sheila Sanders using equipment owned by the Sarasota County Education Channel. A JVC Pro HD camera, Sennheiser wireless microphone and a Manfrotto tripod made up the equipment package, which was assembled by a former ABC 7 colleague and producer Kimberly Stocker. The crew scouted public locations prior to the shoot, but did not review the settings in private homes. Interviews in private residences were shot similar to the method used by electronic newsgathering crews. Lighting, space, and electrical needs were dealt with on the spot.

A variety of props were borrowed from Oldham's personal collection and used. The items consisted of framed photographs, a shoe rack that doubled as shelves, vases, artificial flowers in fall hues, candles, and pottery with decorated African earth tones. Books in different sizes with muted colors of artwork on the cover worked better in background shots to keep the focus on speakers.

Scheduling, Booking Oral History Interviews

To remain on schedule and on budget, Oldham called ahead or visited nearby homes of the first guests to remind them about the time and location of interviews. The key to success in securing interviews was flexibility.

As the interviews were videotaped, Oldham also recorded audio with an iPhone 5 and a digital tape recorder for quick accessibility. The interviews were uploaded to a file sharing website. With a user name and password, the recordings were immediately accessible to NCHD cultural anthropologist Dr. Rosalyn Howard and University of Florida doctoral student Justin Dunnavant, a transcriptionist and the African American History Project coordinator of the Samuel Proctor Oral History Program.

METHODOLOGY 2A: The Process for Identifying and Describing the Historic Resources

Dave Baber and Christopher Wenzel began the assessment of buildings in the Newtown neighborhood by assembling existing information on known potential historic resources. Specifically, the Florida Master Site File (FMSF) was sorted to group all entries for the Newtown neighborhood.

Concurrently the team conducted research at the Sarasota County History Center to determine how the Newtown neighborhood first developed. The earliest plat maps were assembled, scanned and reviewed. City directories from Newtown's settlement period were reviewed to identify who the early residents were and where in the neighborhood they lived.

Each street in Newtown was driven to conduct a windshield survey to:

- Examine every building to determine potentially historic or architecturally significant structures.
- Review all sites included in the FMSF to identify demolished structures and to correct incorrect information such as wrong addresses.
- Determine the architectural style of identified resources.

The web site for the Sarasota County Property Appraiser was accessed to determine such information for each potential historic site such as plat name, block and lot number and approximate date of construction.

The team developed a table of the identified resources and populated it with the accumulated information on each site. The table was sorted by plat name so as to identify the sites.

Photographs were taken to present examples of historic buildings types and architectural styles within the neighborhood.

Maps were created of the Newtown and Overtown neighborhoods including every building and identified historic resources.

All documents and data were analyzed in order to develop a set of recommendations.

METHODOLOGY 2B:

- **Mapping, Documentation and Analysis of the historical maps for the neighborhood, Creation of new digital maps, and Discussion of the relationship of the maps to the resources.**
- **Overtown Historic District**

The research area was described by the City of Sarasota with an aerial graphic and written description. The Seaboard Coastline railroad tracks define the eastern and Western boundaries. The North bounded by Myrtle Street and the South by 17th Street. During the first community meeting, the land area known as Overtown was discussed with the conclusion that this historic neighborhood be included. Overtown was not included in the City's description of the Newtown research area and there is a distance of non-relevance between the two communities today.

Overtown was designated as a U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, National Register Historic District in 2002; the application described the area as "the first black community." Many historic resource treasures remain including the historic church, theater, grocery store and a key building, the Colson Hotel. An historic plaque marks the community on Boulevard for the Arts and the Leonard Reid House is a National Register designated property. A description of the community, taken from the National Register Nomination is included in this chapter.

CHAPTER 3: SYNOPSIS OF ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEWS

Eddie L. Rainey, Jr.



The smelly city dump was located on the north side near the African American community off North Washington Blvd. Eddie L. Rainey, Jr. remembers the long-legged, long-necked cranes hovering. He rummaged through trash to find other people's treasures. His enterprising dad, an expert carpenter, plumber and electrician owned land and constructed homes for Black residents off Highway 301 near the dump and along Pershing Avenue when no other builders would. His uncle, Lloyd Haisley, a Booker High School principal made him read afterschool, then explain passages. The Florida A&M University graduate enlisted in the army in 1952. Looking for work, he saw a flyer about the postal exam, took the test and passed. Rainey retired from the U. S. postal service. His house was located in the 1600 block of then 33rd Street. *"I was raised in this community. I can't say that I ever felt unsafe. Sarasota is a great little town. I will live here forever."*

Jesse Johnson



"This is a millionaire town. People come from all over the world here. My little area is heaven to me." Cement finisher Jesse Johnson came to Sarasota in 1963 to escape lynchings in Greenwood, Mississippi. Outspoken about the issues of the day there, he feared for his life. After living in Miami for a year, he came to Sarasota because *"the people showed outsiders love."*

Behind Town Hall, the Brass Rail and on the side of Can Major's store, he gambled and shot dice daily, sometimes earning \$3,000 to \$4,000. While standing on the corner after hustling for three years, a man came by in a truck asking for laborers who knew construction. Johnson was convinced he could quickly learn the trade and did. His new job was heading to work sites at 3 a.m. to pour cement, frame up buildings and tie steel in condominiums on the barrier islands of Siesta Key, Longboat and Bradenton Beach. *"I used to hate coming down from being 10 floors up."* By 3 p.m. Johnson was back on the corner socializing.

He helped to construct the Siesta Key Bridge, Sarasota commercial properties and public housing facilities. *"I found jobs just standing on the corner. Everybody ain't doing wrong that you see standing on the corner. I stood up on that corner and worked every day."*

Patrick Carter



Most summers as a kid, retired NFL player Patrick Carter played outside all day with neighbors' kids. *"We'd make up our own games playing dodge ball, stick ball, and football in the streets, sometimes with a pine cone."*

Carter was a wide receiver but became one of the best tail ends in the league. He played football at Florida State University and Riverview High School. The FSU Hall of Famer said his greatest moment happened in the freshman year at college. *"I had a great game. My grandma called the next day to say she saw me on TV and all of her friends saw me and called her. It was meaningful to me that she was so proud."* He credits Riverview High's

coach James Ward for having a hand in his choice to play for the FSU Seminoles. *"I only made him look at all of his options,"* said Ward. *"He did all the right things and it was my job to make sure that he saw everything that was out there for him."*

Sheila Sanders



Sheila Sanders has a sweet smile but don't mistake it for weakness. She organized a boycott of Sarasota Federal Bank as a third grader at Booker Elementary School. At that time, her class learned money management by filling out savings deposit slips for their pennies, dimes and nickels, but the students could not take tours of the bank as children from other schools. Sanders persuaded her classmates to send deposits to Palmer Bank where they could tour. Her actions foreshadowed future activism. The teenager proactively participated in the NAACP accompanying leaders John Rivers and Maxine Mays to local and state meetings. Sanders learned about the political process by reviewing the agenda of school board meetings and attended the meetings by taking the city bus.

“Some things won’t be said just because you’re sitting there. I learned I didn’t have to concern myself with ‘being as good as,’ by sitting and listening. I was already better.”

Rivers rode through town with a bullhorn, registering voters. William “Flick” Jackson was publisher of the African American newspaper, *The Weekly Bulletin*. *“Some people were leaders, but they weren’t obvious leaders. They were quiet leaders, people who were independent and didn’t have to depend on somebody for their income.”* Jackson and Rivers joined Sanders and Edward James, II as plaintiffs in a lawsuit against the City of Sarasota. They successfully pushed for single member district voting that opened the way for Black representation on the Sarasota City Commission.

Jetson Grimes



At some point, most little boys in Newtown sit in Jetson Grimes’ chair for a haircut. Grimes is an entrepreneur and a community organizer. He picked up activism from his mentor Robert “Bud” Thomas, also a barber. At the urging of her sister, Grimes’ mother left Georgia to find work in the homes of wealthy Sarasota families. She contracted tuberculosis and was placed in a treatment facility leaving her baby in the care of a godmother.

Grimes’ guardian, Lenora Madame Brooks, a midwife of Cuban descent delivered many of Newtown’s children because Sarasota Memorial

Hospital was inaccessible to African Americans. Brooks was considered a neighborhood physician. Her husband, also Cuban, made cigars in a nearby space on 35th Street. Newtown residents gathered around the radio at their house to hear boxing matches. At 11, Grimes was cared for by an aunt, another entrepreneur who operated a janitorial service in the early ‘50s. Business ownership is in his DNA. He can’t escape it; and after 37 years of entrepreneurship, he doesn’t plan to.

Rev. Jerome Dupree



Rev. Dupree slowly walked to the podium at Selby Gardens to memorialize a friend during a service. He eloquently recited *When the Earth’s Last Picture is Painted* by Rudyard Kipling from memory. His presence and presentation was a healing balm just as it has been for countless Newtown audiences at churches, schools and civic gatherings. The admired speaker has a repertoire of six more inspirational poems by famous authors: *The Creation* by James Weldon Johnson, *The Psalm of Life* by Henry Wordsworth Longfellow;

Invictus by William Earnest Henley; *If* by Kipling; *The House by the Side of the Road* by Sam Walton Foss; and Psalm 27. A 4th grade teacher, Marthenia Riley recited poetry and encouraged Dupree to appreciate the spoken word. Dupree listened. Other high school teachers Esther Dailey and Janie Poe were strong influences. “[Poe] said if you’re behind, you have to run twice as fast as the other person in order to catch up. And once you catch up, you have to run as fast to get ahead.”

Dupree began a teaching career at age 21. After 10 years, he left the profession and held several positions including neighborhood director of Metropolitan Insurance. A return to the school system occurred at age 34. He was fast tracked to school principal and was elected to the Sarasota City Commission in 1995 serving as mayor from 1998 – 1999.

The advice and wisdom of Koinonia Baptist Church’s pastor, former Booker High School principal and a veteran educator is sought by civic and non-profit organizations. He is known as “*Newtown’s prince, an awesome man of God with unwavering love and a precious human being.*” Courtesy: New College of Florida Oral History Program
Interviewer: Jessica Wopinski

Dr. Louis Robison



Dr. Louis Robison was age 13 when his family moved to Sarasota from Overtown, in inner city Miami. His community there was diverse. Not so much in his adopted hometown of Newtown. It was a predominantly Black and rural neighborhood with mostly unpaved streets. Robison entered 7th grade at Booker High School where Roland Rogers served as principal. “*Teachers required excellence in terms of academic expectations. It was difficult to get away with anything because the community was so small. Music was a contributor to my success in life,*” said Robison who played tuba in the BHS band, a crowd favorite at parades.

A transfer to Riverview High School from Booker during integration disrupted the lives of classmates but the mature teenager had already experienced transitions and knew how to navigate them. Robison attended college and rose through the ranks as a school administrator. He later became principal of RHS. Under his leadership, “*with the help of a great team*” the school went from a “C” school to an “A.”

Dr. Fannie McDugle



Young and fearless describes Dr. Fannie McDugle who moved to Sarasota's Overtown at age 15 from Atlanta with her family in 1947. She attended Booker High School from 7th to 8th grade, then left to attend a private boarding school in Cordele, Georgia. Profits from her mother's dress shop and her father's paycheck from Sarasota Memorial Hospital paid the tuition. McDugle went to school to become a nurse but didn't like it. Instead, she attended cosmetology school. She participated in Woolworth sit-ins and entered dress stores on Main Street to integrate them as a member of the NAACP. *"We'd all go in as a group. It felt good doing what was right."*

Helen Dixon



At age 17, Helen Dixon's father Charlie Jones came to Sarasota from Madison, Florida in 1921 after his father died. Her mother moved from Ocilla, Georgia. Dixon played in the yard on her family's four-acre property. She made toys out of a five-gallon syrup can, punched holes in it, filled it with dirt and attached a clothes hanger. One of her dad's employers gifted him with a "play house" equipped with electricity, a refrigerator and a stove. It was moved to their property and used to feed neighbors in need. When Newtown Day Nursery opened, she was

among its first students. *"My sister and I were the first two students to attend. We were really excited because it meant we would get to play with other kids during the day. We loved it."* Her father worked for Davis Lumber Company and was John Ringling North's chauffeur. The outspoken Newtown leader constantly advocated at City Hall on behalf of Black residents for street lights, mail delivery and Booker High School's teachers and students.

"The teachers would say, 'Miss Jones, please tell your daddy to come out to the school. We need more money.' He would go downtown and next thing you know; the teachers would get a little raise." After constructing many homes, the entrepreneur opened a plumbing and electrical business, Charlie Jones and Sons. He helped construct the historic Wright Bush house on Martin Luther King, Jr. Way.

Alberta Brown



Alberta Brown is known in the Newtown community for her sumptuous southern-style Sunday throw downs – a big roast seasoned to the bone, a large pot of collards, long pans of buttery yams, melt in your mouth mac-n-cheese and moist cornbread with crispy edges. It is as if a small army of people are dinner guests. Extended family members, church friends and drop-ins are part of the platoon stopping in for a plate. Brown's family members were sharecroppers from Alachua County.

They moved to Palmetto and found work picking tomatoes and green beans. Brown later worked as a live-in on Siesta Key for a physician's family. She took care of the couple's little girl. When help was no longer needed, she followed in her sister's

footsteps, training to become a cook.

The position at her next job evolved into more. Jane Bancroft Cook, heir to the Dow Jones & Company family enterprise was looking for a cook. Through a recommendation from a previous employer, Cook met a tall, soft-spoken woman and hired her on the spot. Brown recalls the interview that day. *"She looked at me and said, 'oh, you're beautiful.'"* What followed was a friendship with Cook until her death in 2002 and a lifelong kinship with the family that remains today.

Johnny Hunter, Sr.



The publisher of *Tempo News* enjoyed playing games such as horseshoes, marbles, hopscotch, ping-pong and baseball. He lived in Overtown. Better housing caused a family move to north Sarasota. Hunter recalls the prominent educators who taught at Amaryllis Park and Booker Elementary Schools; also Booker High School. The teachers lived near the schools where they worked. Prominent entrepreneurs such as funeral director Jerome Stephens, electrician and plumber Charlie Jones, and Neil Humphrey, owner of Humphries Drugstore all lived in Newtown.

The visible presence of community leaders made a tremendous difference in the lives of children and their parents. Hunter says the dismantling of the community began with integration and the migration of African American residents once their economic levels changed. *"People started moving out,*

instead of improving their own neighborhoods. I always felt we needed to improve our own neighborhoods.” After high school, the newly minted graduate enlisted in the U.S. Air Force. After fulfilling the commitment, he returned home to work, but always dreamed of owning a business. He opened several operations. A brush with the law almost cost him everything, but a vow made in prison changed his life forever.



Rev. Kelvin Lumpkin

Atlanta is a city that attracts African American professionals because of its economic opportunities; and the arts, music and cultural scene. It is the place where Rev. Kelvin Lumpkin planned to make a life after graduating from Bethune Cookman College. Stories told by his mother and father about African Americans ordering meals at the back door of the first McDonald's were distasteful.

He didn't have the same experience at the fast food chain, but was stopped by the police for "driving while Black" with two friends after football practice. The young man accepted the call to serve in ministry, similar to many in his family; then returned home to start a new church. His place of worship, among the fastest growing, most diverse in Sarasota is making a difference in the lives of parishioners.

Prevell Barber



Prevell Barber's birth mother passed away when the little girl was only three years old. She lived with her grandmother in Georgia until her mother's sister and husband took over as surrogate parents.

In the summer, Barber came to Sarasota to work in her uncle's grocery store. She sold cookies sometimes eating more than were sold. The high school graduate entered Florida A&M University to major in elementary education and minor in history. Years later, as a 2nd grade teacher, she reluctantly applied to the University of Chicago, was accepted and attended graduate school each summer for six years to earn a master's degree.

When local activists pushed to integrate Lido Beach, Barber was in the carload of freedom fighters with Neil Humphrey, Allease Suarez and her brother in law to take a stand in the sand amid name calling. “*Well God made the water. It wasn’t made by man so it should be exposed to everybody,*” Barber said. On weekdays, the group drove to Lido to step into the water and heard the “n-word” hurled. “*I had heard it so much; it didn’t bother me.*” Through many civic and social organizations such as the Royal SaraMana Club, Barber and a cadre of Newtown community women organized debutante cotillion balls to mentor and introduce young African American women to society.

Nathaniel Harvey



Born in 1924, Nathaniel Harvey is the soft-spoken, powerhouse patriarch of the Harvey family. He is the son of Lewis and Saphronia Harvey. His ancestry is Native American, specifically Seminole. His father worked on the celery farm located in east Sarasota.

Like his father, Harvey also found work harvesting celery. Other workers washed, packed and shipped the crop. The labor force lived close to the farm in a place called Johnson Camp and worked from “can’t to can’t” beginning before sunrise in the early mornings and ending the day

at sundown. Harvey’s teachers were Annie M. McElroy, author of *But Your World and My World* and legendary educator Emma E. Booker. “*She was a great lady. She was very strict, but was good. She meant what she said and said what she meant.*”

At age 16, the young man met his bride Mary Lee whose lineage was African American and Cherokee. The couple had seven children and enjoyed 73 years of marriage. Harvey says the lack of access to medical care caused the untimely death of his mother and brother. He praises the changes occurring in Newtown. Sarasota NAACP president Trevor Harvey is his grandson. Sunday meals with chicken, rice, lima beans and family time bring him joy.

Trevor D. Harvey



Trevor Harvey and his family survived the flames and smoke of a house fire. Windows had to be shattered to open a way for escape. They lost everything and started over. “*It was horrific. It impacted me, my mom and sisters because we didn’t know what would happen.*” He attended the Helen Payne Day Nursery. The young man came of age in the late 70’s and 80’s when Newtown’s business district was

busting with stores such as Can's, Jenkins's and Moore's Grocers, Joe's Bicycle Shop and Humphries Drugstore.

In its heyday, there were close to 100 shops along what is now known as Martin Luther King, Jr. Way. Harvey hopes the business corridor will thrive again. He put college on hold to manage a company, and then later sent a strong message to his children and mentees by becoming a college graduate. Harvey is president of the Sarasota NAACP and area director for the Florida State Conference overseeing seven NAACP branches. *"I started out with a desire to make a difference in the community."*

Betty Jean Johnson



Betty Jean Johnson is a voracious reader who loves traveling to faraway places through books. Her teacher Presell Barber stoked an appreciation for the written word. *"I always had to read something in her class or around her. The fact of it is when I read I could travel. We didn't have TV until later on."* Johnson thought her college education would lead to a career in social work.

Instead, a high school class in "library procedures" changed her trajectory after graduating from Gibbs Junior College in St. Petersburg. Back then, Manatee Community College, now known as State College of Florida was off limits to Blacks. Mary Emma Jones, a well-respected entrepreneur and community leader orchestrated the hiring of Mary Thomas at the Sarasota Public Library.

Thomas helped Johnson land a job there. The facility was not a welcoming place for African American patrons. Johnson understood what Blacks encountered. *"For a book report, I had to go to that library for a book because we didn't have it at the Booker library. There were 'closed stacks' closed to Blacks. The lady at the desk had to go to the stacks to get the book. When I started working there, those same people were there."*

For years, a perplexing question dogged Johnson. *"What can I do to get more Blacks to use the library?"* A solution to the conundrum came while preparing to work a split shift. She would ask the boss for use of an old book mobile the library was about to replace with a new one. The idea was nixed but administrators provided an outreach van that made books accessible to Black children.

From a van to a storefront library operating on a shoestring budget, Johnson and supporters kept pushing, even though for years their efforts seemed fruitless. Finally, the North Sarasota Public Library opened as a result of the seed of an idea that Johnson planted.



Wade Harvin

"Something happened to me at the Ace Theater," said Wade Harvin. *"Well, my first kiss!"* Harvin's favorite memories of Sarasota occurred when the family moved in June 1945 from Mother Jones' Rooming House in what was known as "Black Bottom" to Delson Quarters at 821 Grove Street in Overtown. He grew up surrounded by charming, caring neighbors and playmates whose eyes were always set on achieving what seemed impossible. Educator Janie Poe's two sons Cupid Reece and Booker T. became doctors; their brother, Spurgeon

was a principal. *"Janie Poe Goodwin prepared me not for business, not for 4-year college, she was getting me prepared for life."*

A bishop and 11 preachers are products of that loving incubator. As soon as the school year ended to jumpstart the summer, Harvin's dad packed the family car and took his sons north to pick beans, tomatoes and potatoes. For the first time, the boys, including nine-year-old Wade experienced life in the integrated town of Milton, Pennsylvania, unlike segregated Sarasota. Harvin longed to stay, but the allure of close-knit Overtown beckoned. Besides he had to return to meet the woman who would become his wife.

He married Carlene Jean. Her mother arranged a trip to Detroit for the summer to visit her father. *"When she got back to Sarasota, I said 'she'll never send my wife anywhere else. This is marrying material here.' She has never been back to Detroit like that, never for a whole summer away from me. No way. No way."* Harvin was married for 52 years until his life partner died in 2015. The first African American branch manager of Coast Federal Bank participated in 60's sit-ins to integrate Lido Beach. Today, he will not step foot on its sand as a result of a hateful act.

Mary Alice Simmons



It's early in the morning in 1955 and Mary Alice Simmons leaves her Orange Avenue apartment in public housing, on the way to school. At the bus stop is a line of African American women dressed in white uniforms heading to work in the homes of prominent, wealthy families.

At age eight, Mary's family moved to unit #10. The differences between conditions in Overtown where they lived before and the new complex were like night and day. The place had a bathroom, electricity, a yard with grass, and sidewalks. Before that, their shotgun house had no running water. They pumped water for bathing, washing dishes and

laundry. There were three tubs to wash, rinse garments, and rinse again. Before Clorox, a boil pot whitened clothes. An outhouse 15 feet from the house was used. A portable oil stove was the major kitchen appliance and kerosene lamps provided light. An imaginary boundary line kept community children from veering past 10th Street. Simmons only ventured across the line to grocery shop with her grandmother. *“We would walk down Main Street and smell peanuts in the five-and-dime store. I remember asking, ‘Granny can I have an ice cream cone.’ She said, ‘sit here.’ I sat on the curb. I never forgot the place, Oleander’s. Granny went in, got it, and brought it outside. I looked at her, looked at the cone, looked at the people sitting inside. But you didn’t ask adults questions, the end. You just did as you were told.”*



Dorothy Smith

Retired Sarasota County principal Dorothy Smith is revered by her students and colleagues. Smith, born in Clearwater, Florida is the first African American principal hired to lead Southside Elementary School located in an affluent Sarasota neighborhood. Her first job after completing studies at Bethune Cookman College was teaching African American fourth graders, first in the USO building until Booker’s two-story classroom structure from Overtown was moved to Newtown. In her class were students eager to learn such as Yvonne Brown and Edward James, II. *“Children are inquisitive. Ed always asked ‘why?’”* Back then, some young career climbers lived with families to make ends meet. The 20-year old’s monthly \$154 salary exceeded the public housing threshold. She lived in the home of Mary Jane Wilson.

She met Jacob Smith who managed the Blacks only Ace Theatre. *“One of my friends talked me into going to the movies with her. She wanted me to meet this cute little man.”* Smith visited on his days off and stayed until catching the 9 p.m. bus back to Overtown. That was bedtime at the Wilson house.

Smith taught at Booker for 15 years until she was assigned to a Venice school in 1957 during integration. She was promoted to county reading specialist and made friends along the way, then returned to run the school in Venice again before retirement. *“The most enjoyable time that a person can have is in the classroom with the children.”*

Julian Ross Moreland and Margaret Beverly Moreland Cherry Mitchell



Julian Ross Moreland and Margaret Beverly Mitchell Moreland are the grandchildren of Wright and Sarah Bush and the offspring of James Edward and Margaret Moreland. The Bush family used their influence to advocate for education, entrepreneurship and civic responsibility. Wright owned a general store on Main Street. *“He didn’t discriminate because hell, he looked like that man back there holding that camera. He tended to everybody,”* said Julian Ross.

His father James Edward ran a juke joint called the “Bamboo Club” on the corner of Links and then 33rd Street (now 29th Street); also a dance hall with live entertainment.

“I went to see James Brown. He learned how to skid across the floor from watching me and another guy. I could dance,” said Moreland who recounted how his dad was run out of town for *“smacking the sheriff on the head”* with a pistol after he was hit. Outspoken Grandma Bush had the reputation of correcting neighborhood children who acted out in public.

The historic Bush house located at Maple Avenue and Martin Luther King, Jr. Way was a popular meeting place because it had amenities such as electricity. Black soldiers stationed at a military base near the airport met their future spouses there.

Robert L. Taylor



Robert Taylor is a graduate of Morehouse College. Admittedly, his was a charmed life free of heavy chores at home. The goal set for the seven-year-old was to become the first college graduate in the family. That meant no hanging out with friends on the corner in Overtown. The neighborhood had a few restaurants, a barbershop, a hotel and Bethlehem Baptist Church on the corner of Central Avenue. There were no doctor’s offices. *“There was no medical care, no doctors. We used cobwebs, cotton balls and turpentine to treat everything. I went to the dentist as a 15-year-old, but*

the instruments were tarnished and disgusting. I didn’t go back to the dentist until I was 25.”

Studying hard, Taylor earned the title of salutatorian at Booker High School. An academic scholarship to attend college followed. He served in the military, finished college on the GI bill and returned home to work small part-time jobs at the recreation center, a furniture store, on a construction crew, and cleaning sewers (he pauses). *“It has only been recently that I could talk about some instances without bursting out crying. People don’t know what racism really is.”*

The part time job at the Rec eventually turned into full time employment. Some days, Taylor spent 15 – 20 hours making sure the pool and other facilities were ready for children. He was the manager, a certified swimming instructor and pool operator who planned all programs because the center was the *“only game in town.”*

Dr. Harriet Moore and Estella Moore-Thomas



Estella Moore-Thomas owned Moore's Grocers when Black residents couldn't shop at other grocery stores. The Newtown business that still bears the family's name supplied the community with groceries and fresh produce. Before Moore's, she rented a store in the building once occupied by Eddie's Fruit Stand. Harriet D. Moore, her daughter helped run the store. *“We were one of the few stores that gave credit to people,”* Moore chimed in.

Moore grew up in Sidell, Florida located 50 miles east of Sarasota in a turpentine camp. The home remedies used to treat illnesses consisted of turpentine, Epsom salt, castor oil and cobwebs.

“When I came here, we didn't have electricity. I opened the door of the refrigerator and the lamp fell and broke.

Right there, just cut it to the bone. They filled it up with cobwebs. No stitches or nothing. No doctors, but I lived through it.” The elder Moore didn't finish high school because the responsibility of helping at home as a teenager stood in the way, but she made sure her children received the best education. Harriet earned a doctorate degree and is principal of McIntosh Middle School. *“The way that it used to be, I miss that rallying around people who didn't have and making sure that nobody went hungry around here.”*



Dr. Rachel Shelley

Rachel Shelley has “*literally lived in every single public housing complex in Sarasota: Project Lane, Cohen Way, the ‘Old Project.’*” But her most treasured memories are the hours spent at 2924 Maple Avenue. Her grandmother’s wooden house was surrounded by a fence located less than 1 1/2 blocks from Booker High School where sounds of the BHS marching band permeated the community. Neighborhood children played games outside such as “red light, green light” kick ball, and “hide-n-seek.” They were free to venture through the neighborhood and run to Jenkins Grocery, Mr. Joe’s Bicycle Shop and Neil Humphrey’s Drugstore for errands.

The house rule was to be home before sundown. From kindergarten to second grade, she attended Booker Elementary then transitioned to Phillippi Shores Elementary School. An experience with a third grade teacher transformed her life forever. *“I graduated from Riverview High School when I was 16, but what I don’t recall is anyone explaining honor’s, advanced placement or dual enrollment classes for the chance to earn college credits. I am absolutely adamant that we have these conversations with the students at Booker High School.”* Shelley is principal of Booker High.



Dr. Thomas Clyburn

Dr. Thomas Clyburn can still hear the sound of his patent leather loafers on the floor of a Blue Bird bus, stepping out of his seat, walking down the aisle to the front, then down the steps on the first day of school in 11th grade in an unfamiliar setting. Earlier that day, Clyburn showed up for class at Booker High School where he was an honors student, but was asked to wait outside the main office. He didn’t know why. A bus pulled up. *“Are you Thomas Clyburn?”* driver Robert Graham asked. *“Yes I am,”*

the teenager replied. *“I’m here to take you to school, not here.”* The driver and passenger took the route from Myrtle Avenue to North Washington Boulevard to Sarasota High School. Students were everywhere. *“Good luck. I’ll come back to pick you up.”* The bus driver dropped him off in front of the gothic style building. When he stepped off the bus, the world in front of him froze.

“Everyone was looking at me. My pulse rate in my throat went to the roof.” He had walked to the administrative office. “It was really, really, really quiet. The principal [Gene Pilot] introduced himself. He asked a few questions.” Then a teacher escorted him to homeroom. Some students were silent. Some whispered. “That was my first day. It was a challenge. You would think those days would get better over time, but in many ways they got worse.”

Clyburn, no longer in Booker’s cocoon of nurturing teachers and classmates was left to navigate a place he entered for the first time. Clyburn was chosen for a pilot program to integrate Sarasota County schools in 1963. *“I was sitting in homeroom looking out of the window. A kid with a big German shepherd walked toward the building. I heard a loud pop. Six men racing toward me said ‘get in the center. Don’t say anything. Follow us.’ We went to the principal’s office. They locked down the school to look for the student.”* Willemina Thomas, a BHS classmate was also selected to participate in the SHS pilot program, but their paths never crossed. Clyburn’s specialty is behavioral psychology. He was university director of learner affairs at Capella University.

John Rivers



John Henry Rivers is the former president of the NAACP's Sarasota branch. He moved to Sarasota from Mobile, Alabama in 1951 in search of work to support his family. Instead, Rivers found himself in the midst of a struggle for racial equality.

In the 1950s and 1960s, Sarasota was a hotbed of segregation. Rivers accepted the challenge to fight for the integration of beaches, the school system and local politics as a leader of Sarasota’s Civil Rights Movement. He registered voters and announced poll

locations by riding through Newtown with a bullhorn. He fought battles for (but not limited to) equality in employment, pay, mail delivery, service at restaurants, and banking. Courtesy: New College of Florida Oral History Program Interviewer: Kortney Lapeyrolerie



Shelia Atkins

Shelia Cassandra Hammond Atkins was born in Manatee County in 1952, but grew up in Newtown. Her mother Delma Hammond was a cook in the Caples Mansion where the little girl scampered when allowed. Her father,

John Hammond was a butler. The Hammond family lived in the carriage house on the grounds situated along Sarasota Bay and traveled back and forth to Alabama every six months when Ralph and Ellen Caples returned home for the summer where they first met the couple.

Mrs. Caples named Sheila, according to stories shared by her mom. Atkins attended high school during integration and has lived in Sarasota for over six decades. She and her husband, former Sarasota Mayor Fredd Atkins are active in the community. The paraprofessional aide is employed at Alta Vista Elementary. Courtesy: New College of Florida Oral History Program. Interviewer: Kaylie Stokes.

Dr. Edward James, II



Newtown residents know Dr. Edward James, II as a community advocate and civil rights leader who stands in the gap insisting, resisting, refuting, and disrupting arcane systems that block equal opportunity. As producer and host of the ABC 7 television show, "Black Almanac" for 43 years, he covers issues that impact the African American community. The Sunday morning program is the longest airing, locally produced public affairs show in the southeast. He joined ABC 7 in 1972 as a weekend news anchor.

The Florida A&M University graduate served as a columnist and governmental reporter for the *Sarasota Journal* newspaper. He was a writer/associate producer of "Positively Black," a half-hour TV show on New York's WNBC-TV, and also worked as an editorial assistant for the *New York Post*.

With an extensive background in government and public relations, Dr. James served as the public information officer and deputy chief investigator for the State Attorney's office for the 12th Judicial Circuit of Florida; public relations director of the New York Urban Coalition, and Assistant Director of the first Urban Job Corps.

He is a recipient of the President's Award, a Lifetime Service Award and a Freedom Award from the Sarasota County NAACP, and was presented a Lifetime Achievement Award by the Sarasota African American Chamber of Commerce. Courtesy: New College of Florida Oral History Program Interviewer: Haley Jordan

James and Yvonne Brown



James Brown still owns the home on North Osprey Avenue that was built in 1928 by his father. The lot was purchased in 1926 for \$450. Brown and his wife Yvonne describe idyllic lives growing up in the Black community. Yvonne Brown's grandparents moved to Overtown in 1925 from Quitman, Georgia. She recalls hearing stories about the family starting out in makeshift housing that resembled a tent, then transitioning into a two-story building on 14th Street, later renamed 8th Street.

“We were happy and always had everything we needed. My friends and I enjoyed going to church, school, the movies and there was entertainment that came once a year. It was called ‘Silas Green’ from New Orleans. It was like a play, similar to Tyler Perry’s. They crafted a big tent in a community. That was a lot of fun,” she said. James Brown grew up in Newtown where the police substation sits on Martin Luther King, Jr. Way. Children played under the shade of two banyan trees. *“We were a happy generation. The beauty of it was that adults let us be children. As I grew older, I realized all they must have been going through,”* he said.

Teachers were motivators and had great expectations for Yvonne, James and their classmates. *“Boy, you are going to college. I don’t want to hear it. You are going to college,”* educator Esther Reed Dailey told him. Brown graduated with honors in the top ten percent of his Florida A&M University class and retired as associate dean of educational services at State College of Florida. His wife retired as pre-school coordinator for Sarasota County Schools.

Fredd Atkins



Fredd Atkins' story is a testament to the power that teenagers have to shake up institutional systems. He was reared in an Augustine Quarters “shotgun shack” located behind Horn’s Grocery Store on 6th Street in Overtown. For fun, Atkins played football and baseball on sandlots and dirt courts.

A bicycle tire was easily turned into a basketball rim. “Pop up” was played with part of a rubber hose, Chinaberries and a shaved palmetto limb. His aunt Ruby always kept a nice car. She participated in beach desegregation. *“I was a little boy. There was always some apprehension during the desegregation process. I have been in caravans when [the police] turned us*

around and sent us back to Newtown. Sometimes we'd get into the water. You stayed close to the shore.

The family built a new 3-bedroom house in Newtown for \$7,000 after his aunt hit the jackpot playing Bolita, a numbers game imported from Cuba. He came to Newtown in 1958 when there were few new homes. *"It was a weird kind of experience because the middle class of Newtown lived in public housing. Most of the working class lived in the projects, even some teachers before they built homes."* Atkins participated in the desegregation of Sarasota schools. During the Booker School boycott, he taught at the freedom school set up at Greater Hurst Chapel A.M.E. Church. Then came integration. *"Assimilation was tough. My mother used to make me go [to school]. She'd say, 'Boy, I'm not gonna feed you if you don't make some decent grades.' I'd say, 'This is just so rough. She said, 'but you better go.'"* At Sarasota High School, Fredd and his 1968 classmates Johnny Smith, Walter L. Gilbert, III and others boycotted, picketed, held protests, and took their complaints about inequitable treatment to Gene Pilot, the principal. Pilot established the "Pupil Interracial Council" to routinely address students' concerns.

A Booker High School teacher Rubin Mays, reassigned to SHS during integration was Atkins' lifesaver. *"Anytime I was on the edge, I could go to his classroom and just sit there. No one would question why I was there. I could go and cool out. I'd just sit in and listen to his math class."* Black SHS students successfully changed the lunch menu, added Black cheerleaders to the squad and pushed school administrators to recognize Black history for a week.

As a member of the NAACP's youth council, Atkins registered voters in high school, and attended school board meetings. Activism continued in college. He conducted research for the Miami attorney who filed a federal lawsuit against the City of Sarasota. Atkins' trajectory was established early. He is one of Sarasota's longest *servicing* city commissioners having spent 18 years in public service. He was Sarasota's mayor three times.

Carolyn Mason



School integration caused trauma and fear for Carolyn Mason and rightly so. She lived in Overtown's "Black Bottom" located at the corner of 8th Street and Central Avenue in segregated Sarasota. There was a dividing line at 3rd Street or present day Fruitville Road. *"I call it the Mason-Dixon line. North of Fruitville was the Black community; and south was downtown for the more affluent community."* The communities did not mix. *"My senior year in high school should be my best year, but it was full*

of apprehension. I couldn't think past the fear of being around people I had never been around before. I didn't know what I was afraid of, but I was afraid. Somebody should have talked to the children – all of the children – about what to expect. Somebody should have said, 'You don't have anything to worry about.'

Mason began a career in public service after viewing a theater production in Sarasota that lacked a diverse cast. Frustrated, she became the go between for talented Black artists and arts organizations. *"I offered myself as a bridge. I was probably on the board at one time of every arts organization in Sarasota County."* She was elected to the Sarasota City Commission and served from 1999 to 2003. She was Mayor of Sarasota from 2001 to 2003. Mason is the first African American elected to the Sarasota County Commission in 2008 and served as chair in 2013 and 2015. Social issues are the focus of her work.
Interviewer: Hope Black



Willie Charles Shaw

The memory of Sarasota Mayor Willie Charles Shaw is razor sharp. He was reared in “Black Bottom,” a swampy land in Newtown near Maple, Palmadelia and Goodrich Avenues. There were no streetlights or curbside mail delivery. Overtown had its own neighborhood with the same name because of its rich black soil. Shaw can quickly rattle off the locations of community landmarks, dirt paths, swimming holes, citrus trees and bus routes; and the names of neighbors. Newtown’s dusty roads were paved in 1968, but the first paved streets followed the route of the city transit bus. His grandmother and family

members owned land along Orange Avenue and 31st Street. *“There was a time when one of Rev. Herring’s cows got out and I was at my grandmother’s house that lived on the corner as you come around Palmadelia Avenue. I was on my tricycle and the cow came up behind me. I remember looking over my shoulder saying, ‘he got me.’”* When there was a death in the neighborhood, Mrs. Herring, Fannie McDugle, and Mrs. James formed an unofficial neighborhood association with Mrs. Viola Sanders at the helm. The women collected food and flowers for grieving families. Shaw’s mother sewed a heart or a ribbon on the right sleeve of the bereaved.


The retired letter carrier attended the Booker schools with teachers Barbara Wiggins, Mrs. McGreen, Prevell Carner Barber, Aravia Bennet Johnson, Foster Paulk, Esther Dailey, Coach Dailey, Janie Poe, and Turner Covington. *“I would have to say that the entire learning experience at Booker groomed me into a leader.”*

We were taught that you always had to be better, do better. You had to.” In high school, the teenager played the trumpet for a short time and was the “band boy” for Newtown’s pride and joy, the Booker High School band under the direction of Alexander Valentine.

Shaw was among the Black students who traveled on a bus across the Skyway Bridge to attend Gibbs Junior College. He served in the U.S. Air Force, then became a letter carrier following in the footsteps of Jerome Stephens, the first African American in Sarasota hired by the postal service.

The District 1 Sarasota City Commissioner was elected in 2011. He is serving a second term as mayor and continues the proud tradition of Black pioneers who advocate for the underserved, including veterans.

Verna Hall



Verna Hall lives in the house where she was born in 1932. The wood structure, constructed by Rev. J.H. Floyd is the second oldest house in Newtown. Built off the ground, the 84-year house is deteriorating. Its floorboards are rotting from years of rain and wind. Her father, Leo Purdy was assisting the police as a peace officer when he was killed in the line of duty while making an arrest on 8th Street in Overtown.

Sarah Ware, her mother cooked for John Ringling North, the nephew of circus magnate John Ringling. Hall was “boarded out” and lived on Links Avenue from age four to 10 because her mother was a live-in maid. Boarding the children of domestic workers was a way aging residents supplemented their incomes.

“There was nothing to do. When you were boarded out with families, it was usually older people that had grown kids that moved away from home. You played outside because the agreement was that there was a roof over my head with kind people. They kept me clean and fed. There wasn’t that much interaction because they were already old and there was no way to entertain a small child.”

Hall lives near the Robert L. Taylor Community Center. She watched as the barracks building was moved to the property from the airport army base. It once served as the USO building where Black soldiers socialized. *“I met the young man that I married at the Robert Taylor location. I danced in that building. We had community activities in that building also. It was during the time the “String of Pearls” was one of the instrumental tunes aired on the radio. They’d play those songs and we would go there and we would dance.”*

Edward James, III



A career climber with University of Chicago credentials and Google on his resume is a candidate for the Florida House of Representatives, District 72. Edward James, III hears the call of public service. The fourth generation Sarasota resident worked for two years in the legal department of the world's largest tech company handling data analysis for patent litigators. Edward's epiphany to return home occurred while watching the "Dream Defenders" stage a sit-in at Gov. Rick Scott's office during the Trayvon Martin controversy. That his family has a storied history of Civil Rights activism, which spans over 100 years, sealed the deal to continue the legacy of leadership.

"I'm proud to be of the lineage of people who fought to get us to where we are now. My great grandmother Mary Emma Jones who was a business owner in this community for well over 40 years helped desegregate Lido Public Beach. She, along with other concerned Newtown residents went out, waded in the water and dealt with physical and verbal abuse. I love Lido Beach. My great grandmother fought so that people like me could go and not be worried about anyone threatening or calling us names."

The actions of Edward's father, Dr. Edward James, II triggered the desegregation of the Sarasota County Public Library. His grandmother, educator Annie McElroy penned the book, *But Your World and My World* on the shelves of many Sarasota natives. It documents the Black community's history from an insider's point of view.

"I came back to be a change agent. Newtown is beaming with entrepreneurship. It has potential. It has tradition and is one of the oldest communities in Sarasota. Things are not as they could be, but we're working to make things better."



Gwendolyn Atkins, Henrietta Gayles Cunningham



Two retired African American public health nurses spent a lifetime healing bruises in the community. For nearly three decades, nurses Henrietta Gayles Cunningham and Gwen Atkins walked door to door in Newtown neighborhoods, public housing areas and in migrant camps teaching young mothers about child care, treating childhood diseases, monitoring the health of aging residents and making sure seasonal workers received medical services. They set up a makeshift clinic in the

garage of Stephens Funeral Home. *“We’d treat infantigo and ring worms. Remember setting up a card table with a white table cloth then immunizing children for polio and small pox?”* Atkins asked her former colleague during a visit at an Ocala assisted living facility where Cunningham resides. *“That was real public health,”* said Cunningham, the first African American nurse at the Sarasota County Health Department.

The women became extended family members of their patients. The line between work and play often blurred. Nursing and being on call, accessible and always available was a way of life. It still is for Atkins. Mary Emma Jones, Allease Suarez and Viola Sanders were extremely helpful to both of the caregivers. *“If I had to do it all over again, I would choose public health nursing and I would choose serving my community. That’s what I love more than anything else,”* Atkins said.

Etienne J. Porter



Producer Etienne J. Porter considers himself a 90’s child just beginning to explore life and develop an appetite for music of all genres - from Handel’s “Messiah,” to “Back on the Block” by Quincy Jones and releases by artists such as Michael Jackson, Guy, Salt and Pepper, Walter Hawkins and Hezekiah Walker. Born in 1979, an affinity for the arts occurred naturally. His father Bishop Henry L. Porter, pastor of the Westcoast Center writes songs, plays instruments and performs.

His mother, the late Cynthia Porter was an actor and singer. Etienne learned how to play drums at church, then studied music and jazz percussion in college. PJ Morton of Maroon 5, Frank McComb, Melba Moore, and the Westcoast Black Theater Troupe are a few of the entertainers he has accompanied. Sarasota is his hometown and the headquarters of Drummerboy Entertainment and Recording Studio. His mission is to ensure that aspiring artists, singers, dancers and actors have a launch pad that catapults their careers to a larger platform.

“I view the world differently than those who grew up at a time before me. I’ve never experienced someone telling me I couldn’t go somewhere. If I was denied entrance anywhere, it was because I wasn’t dressed appropriately but not based on skin tone. Etienne sees one Sarasota, not a divided city. “It’s just as much about outreach. Sarasota must reach into Newtown and at the same time Newtown has to reach outside of itself.”

Elder Willie Mays, Jr. Rosa Lee Thomas (his sister)



Elder Willie Mays is proud of the 78-year-old church he pastors, New Zion Primitive Baptist Church and the cement business he established 45 years ago. It is among the oldest Black owned enterprises in Sarasota.

At age 14, he stopped attending school to help his family make ends meet financially. Mays earned meager wages by working on a farm in Fruitville near where the family lived. Children in the settlement of approximately 50 residents attended school in a little church under the tutelage of Mrs. Washington and Altamese Cummings. The people walked a quarter of a mile to pump water for daily use. In 1944, the family moved to Newtown where Mango Avenue is situated between Highway 301 and the railroad tracks near the city dump. *“The smoke bothered us for years. We stayed in the house most of the time to escape that smoke. There were many white birds out there getting leftovers,”* Mays said. Thomas believes their neighbors on Mango died as a result of the fumes. She keeps a record of their names as a memorial. *“All of the people living on Mango Avenue, also Leonard Reid, most of them died,”* Thomas recalled.

Dorothea Smith was Thomas’ fourth grade teacher. An unforgettable moment in her life was being chosen the 10th grade attendant of Miss Booker High School with another attendant Willie Mae (Blake) Sheffield.

Walter L. Gilbert, III



Children imitate the actions of adults. Walter Gilbert’s boyhood experiences confirm what behavioral psychologists know. His mother attended community meetings with her son and daughter in tow. The children had no say in the matter as she headed out of the door. At the gatherings, the young man saw neighbors and friends of the family. Something happened while watching organizers articulate their vision for Newtown and neighborhood improvement strategies. *“That was the yard*

man, the roofer guy or the guy you knew down the street as the garbage man. But when they came to these meetings they changed. They became super people. They were talking about making things happen and how to do it, how we were going to go about it as a group and how we needed to form different committees. I’m sitting there looking. Wow!”

Men such as the late Neil Humphrey, a Newtown entrepreneur and the late John Rivers, then Sarasota NAACP president made an indelible impression on the young man who would hold the same position years later. “[Humphrey] was probably 5’5” and might’ve weighed 155 pounds. If he raised his voice you could hardly hear him. I thought he was a meek little man; but in these NAACP meetings he was fire and brimstone.” Gilbert participated in a federal lawsuit against the City of Sarasota for single member district voting. The court’s decision in favor of the plaintiffs opened the way for African American representation on the city commission.



Ethel Reid Hayes

Some Newtown residents drive past the Helen R. Payne Day Nursery on 33rd Street to spark memories of learning how to read and count during the most critical years of their lives. Ethel Reid Hayes and her sister Viola, the daughters of pioneer Leonard Reid and Eddie Coleman operated the pioneer preschool program.

Lifelong friendships formed among children who played in the sandbox and waited a turn on the seesaw, merry-go-round and swings. Both women were educated in Sarasota and went on to obtain college degrees. Hayes attended Florida A&M University for four years, acquired a teacher's certificate then began her career in education at Booker School in Sarasota. She also excelled in music, taught summer school during World War II and eventually married Roosevelt Hayes, a Navy man. The couple briefly moved to California but returned to Florida in 1951. She obtained a master's degree from her alma mater and taught for many years. After retiring from the Sarasota County school system, Ethel became the director of Helen P. Payne Day Nursery.

Viola also attended Florida A&M and went on to work as a substitute teacher in Sarasota County, as a teacher at the Newtown Day Nursery from 1953-1970, and later, a supervisor at Helen R. Payne Day Nursery where she was assistant director. Ethel and Viola were active in the community and lived in their childhood home built in 1926. The Leonard Reid Family House was locally designated by the City of Sarasota in 1999.

Courtesy: Sarasota History Center and www.sarasotahistoryalive.com. Interviewer: Historian Lillian Burns



Anthony B. Major

Theater students at the Booker Performing Arts High School know the name Anthony B. “Tony” Major because their rehearsal hall bears the moniker. Major is the first honoree of Booker High’s “Leaving a Legacy” Award. He

grew up in Newtown playing baseball in the Negro League with his brother and uncles. Negro Baseball League legend John “Buck” O’Neil and Major’s father were best friends. Major also played clarinet in the Booker High School band under the direction of Alexander Valentine. But switching majors from music to theater at Hofstra University changed his path.

His directing career spans decades and includes acting, teaching, producing Broadway and Off Broadway shows, and working with Academy Award winners Alan Pakula, Robert Mulligan, Robert DeNiro, Hal Ashby, Beau Bridges, Sidney Poitier, James Earl Jones, William Friedkin, Harry Belafonte, Eddie Murphy, Della Reese and Gil Lewis.

Major is program director of the Zora Neale Hurston Institute for Documentary Studies, and the Africana Studies Program in the College of Arts & Humanities; also associate professor in the Film School of Visual Art & Design at the University of Central Florida. His research at UCF led to the production of documentaries and exhibits, *Jesse L. Brown, the 1st African American Navy Fighter Pilot* (shot down during the Korean War), and *Goldsboro: An American Story*. He has produced and directed several theatre and film productions at UCF, in collaboration with the Zora Neale Hurston Festival of the Arts, in Eatonville, Florida.

Glossie Atkins



Glossie Atkins laughs easily and sometimes uncontrollably at the thought of fun times in Overtown. The daughter of Jay and Nettie Campbell was born in Ocala on December 3, 1917. With her sister Ruby Horton as the leader, she left central Florida to work on a farm in Sarasota picking beans and tomatoes. “*We filled a bushel basket of beans for two dollars each.*” The unrelenting heat and worms on the plants forced a transition from fieldwork to housework. Horton then operated a café. “*We had a good time,*” Atkins said, bursting into laughter without offering many details. She attended the oldest African American house of

worship in town, Bethlehem Baptist Church.

“*Oh goodness, we had good service and the choir, everything was good.*” The mother of Sarasota’s first African American mayor was a surrogate parent to neighbors’ children. For 35 years, she worked as a domestic sewing, cooking, cleaning and rearing other parents’ children. These days, she joins other mature women of Newtown to crochet scarves, quilts, and caps. “*God has been good to me. Yep. Oh my goodness. I’ve come a long way. He brought me and still’s got me going strong.*”

Alice Faye Jones



Mrs. Alice Faye Jones was born and reared in Sarasota. She spent much time at Lido Beach as a child. Her mother worked tirelessly as a maid on Longboat Key throughout Jones's childhood. Jones currently operates a free tutoring program called “Brothers and Sisters Doing The Right Thing” at the Robert Taylor Community Center in North Sarasota.

CHAPTER 4: OVERTOWN AND NEWTOWN: THE EARLY SETTLERS

Early African American Settlers In The Sarasota Bay Area

Although Lewis Colson and is widely considered to be the first black person to settle in Sarasota, there was, in fact, a community of African American settlers who lived in the Sarasota Bay area long before his 1884 arrival. When Florida was a sovereign territory of Spain it was seen by African Americans on the plantations of the Carolinas, Georgia, and Alabama as the southern route of the Underground Railroad; freedom had been promised by the Spanish King if they adopted Catholicism and fought against the Americans with them. A community called Sarrazota (also known as Angola) existed in the Tampa-Sarasota Bay area and its residents included a variety of people: free people of color, formerly enslaved Africans, some of who were called Black Seminoles, and Seminole Indians, all of who had been driven out of their villages and towns in various parts of Florida by American incursions into Florida.¹ From the late 17th century, Florida had been a place where freedom-seeking Africans who escaped from southern plantations found freedom among the Seminole Indians and the Spaniards. The Adams-Onis Treaty, signed in 1819, converted Florida from a territory of Spain to a territory of the US, thus eliminating it as a haven for freedom-seeking Africans. Now that Florida was established as a territory of the US, Provisional Governor Andrew Jackson was determined rid the territory of Seminole Indians and free people of color. He persuaded a band of Coweta Creek Indians, his allies, to destroy Angola in 1821.

In his journal article, “The Sarrazota or Runaway Negro Plantations: Tampa Bay’s First Black Community,” historian Canter Brown Jr. describes this community; it was later discovered to be named Angola, according to a land claim document filed by two Cuban fishermen in 1824. Brown Jr. explains that John Lee Williams, one of Florida’s early historians, drew a map of the location and published it in his book *The Territory of Florida*.² Williams personally observed the location in 1828, seven years after Angola’s destruction. He described Angola as a ‘Negro plantation’ located at the point between a stream entering the bay and the Oyster River - a place called Negro Point (he was referring to the point between the Braden and Manatee Rivers).³ Williams states that the plantation at one time had been cultivated “by 200 negroes.” The ruins of their cabins, and domestic utensils are still seen on the old fields.”⁴ According to Brown, “Once established, the ‘negro plantation’ at or near Sarasota Bay proved a magnet over the next several years for other black refugees. When the Negro Fort on the Apalachicola

River was destroyed by American forces in 1816, for example, the displaced blacks built villages all the way to Tampa Bay.”⁵

Most historical accounts of Sarasota Bay’s earliest residents omit reference to these earliest African and Native American populations. Before there was Overtown, before there was Newtown, a black community existed in the Sarasota area; it was called Sarrazota or Angola.⁶ Vickie Oldham, Director of the Newtown Conservation Historic District (NCHD) Project, became aware of Brown’s research while working on a Sarasota documentary film. This led her in 2004 to launch the multidisciplinary research project “Looking for Angola,” which began a scholarly investigation whose goal was to physically locate the community and add to Brown’s historical research. The destruction of Angola in 1821 effectively eliminated the presence of free African American people in the area until 20 years after the end of the Civil War.

SARASOTA’S EARLY SETTLERS:

OVERTOWN

Sarasota, Florida was a small fishing village in a swampy environment when the earliest white settlers arrived around 1842. “On maps dating back to the time that the area was controlled by the Spaniards it was known by its Spanish name, *Zara Zote*, which became [Anglicized to] Sara Sota.”⁷ Robert E. Paulson surveyed and platted the original town of Sara Sota for the Florida Mortgage and Investment Company in 1885. In an 1897 Sarasota Real Estate Agency advertisement designed to attract new residents described the town as:

A charming location, containing some 200 inhabitants on Sara Sota Bay, about midway of its length and 50 miles from Tampa. The town is exceptionally well favored by nature, standing as it does on a crescent shaped, land locked bay, affording the best anchorage for small vessels on the coast, with an unrivaled view of the Gulf and its islands. The streets and avenues are from 60 to 80 feet wide and the town is skillfully planted. Sarasota is justifiably celebrated for its fish, oysters, clams and the game, while the well-known fishing grounds of the Tarpon, or Silver King, are about two miles from the wharves.⁸

After the Civil War, this type of advertisement attracted not only whites to the area, but also African Americans seeking employment opportunities in this growing town. Only 20 years past the abolition of slavery, they began migrating to Sarasota from surrounding southern states as well as other parts of Florida. The first African American, after the destruction of Angola in 1812, to settle in Sarasota was Rev. Lewis Colson, a formerly enslaved man who arrived in Sarasota in 1884. He worked as an assistant to engineer Robert E. Paulson who surveyed and platted the original town for the Florida Mortgage and Investment Company.⁹

Rev. Colson was also a fisherman and landowner. Colson married his wife Irene and spent the remainder of his life in Sarasota. Irene Colson served as a midwife,

providing critical medical assistance to the African American community who, due to Jim Crow laws, were unable to obtain most medical services in Sarasota in those days.

The Colsons are celebrated for their numerous contributions to the African American community in the city. They are credited with the establishment of the Bethlehem Baptist Church, the first African American church in the Sarasota area. They sold their land to the church's trustees for the nominal sum of \$1; essentially, it was a gift. The original church was built on the corner of present day 7th Street and Central Avenue in Overtown. John Mays, a church trustee and founding member of Bethlehem Baptist Church, was a carpenter. He along with the help of others built the church. The church remained at that site until 1973 when a new building was constructed in Newtown at 1680 18th Street.¹⁰

Rev. Colson became the church's first minister and served in that capacity from 1899 to 1915. Colson Street, located between US 301 and Tuttle Avenue, was named in Lewis Colson's honor. Apparently, some Sarasota whites also revered the Colsons; he and his wife were the only African Americans buried in the segregated Rosemary Cemetery located in the 1800 block of Central Avenue.¹¹ The Florida Mortgage and Investment Company, for which he had worked, owned that cemetery and Rev. Colson had helped to survey this and other land holdings of the company.¹²

African American settlers were segregated from the white population, except while working, and lived in the first African American community created in Sarasota called Overtown or Black Bottom. It was bounded roughly on the north and south by today's 10th and 5th Streets and on the west and east by U.S. 41 and Orange Avenue. Its location near downtown made it easy for African American workers to get to their jobs, since most had no transportation.

By the mid 1920s, Overtown was a thriving residential and business district. The hub of the community was at the corner of Central Avenue and today's Sixth Street. It grew as businessmen, fishermen, physicians, contractors, carpenters, laborers, drivers, masons, blacksmiths, laundry workers and railroad workers made the area their home. Along today's Central Avenue were pressing clubs and lunch rooms, a movie theater, meat and fish markets, grocery and general merchandise stores, and a variety of other businesses that provided goods and services to the African American community. Residential architecture varied in size, but most houses were modest, one-story wood-frame structures incorporating front porches. From the time of the community's founding, the Black residents living and working there played a vital role in the development of both the City and the County of Sarasota.¹³

Jim Crow laws prohibited African Americans from lodging in white hotels. Therefore, African American entertainers who performed with multiracial troupes were not permitted to stay at the same hotels as their white counterparts. The Colson Hotel, named for but not owned by him, was built to accommodate the African Americans travelers. Colson hotel, 1425 8th Street and Central Avenue was built in 1925 opened in late 1926. It was described in a *Sarasota Herald* article dated Dec 15, 1926 as "a 28-room hotel for black tourists and residents, constructed of fine yellow stucco on hollow

tile, with a comfortable lobby with fireplace by E.O. Burns named after Lewis Colson.” The hotel was later renamed The Palms Hotel.

Another African American who became prominent in building the City of Sarasota was Leonard Reid. He and Rev. Colson both played large roles in the development of Overtown. An educated man, Reid arrived in Sarasota in 1900 at nineteen years old, after graduating from the Savannah (Georgia) Normal School as valedictorian of his class. Despite his education, however, Reid worked for a local fish merchant for several months until he was introduced to John Hamilton Gillespie.¹⁴



Leonard Reid driving Gillespie family in a coach.

Gillespie hired Reid as his coach driver, butler, and caretaker for his home. In 1901, Reid married Eddy Coleman who also worked for the Gillespies as a maid and cook. The Reids rented a small house in Overtown and the couple continued to work for Gillespie after their marriage. On the advice of Gillespie, Reid invested in land, purchasing four lots in Overtown from Gillespie. Reid played a vital role as a community leader by investing in land, being active in local fraternal organizations and using his collection of books in his home as a neighborhood library.¹⁵

Sarasota was incorporated in 1902 and Gillespie was elected as the first mayor. He held this office for six terms. Gillespie introduced the game of golf to Florida by building the first golf course. Reid assisted Gillespie in laying out the design for Sarasota’s first golf course and served as the first greens keeper.¹⁶

Reid and his wife were founding members of the Payne Chapel African Methodist Episcopal (A.M.E.) Church of Sarasota, along with community leaders Campbell Mitchell, F.H. Haynes, and C.H. Murphy. Payne Chapel A.M.E. Church was the second African American church built in Sarasota. In 1903, the congregation constructed a small

wood frame building on a lot donated by the Florida Mortgage and Investment Company at Central Avenue and present-day 5th Street. That original building was replaced with a new wood frame structure in 1914 to accommodate the growing congregation.¹⁷

Overtown also had active fraternal organizations. Reid was a member of several: International Order of Odd Fellows Gulf City Lodge #6403; Free and Accepted Masons, Sarasota Lodge #314; and Household of Ruth #3538.¹⁸ “In recognition of Leonard Reid as one of Sarasota’s early settlers and for his contributions to his community, Leonard Reid Avenue, about one block east of US 301 north of 27th Street, was named in his honor.”¹⁹

Other early families to settle Overtown included the Mays, Washington, Bush, Carmichael, Roberts, Joyner, Wilcox, Albright, Herring, Jackson, O’Neil, Wilson, McKenzie, and Conley families. Frank Williams was the town’s first blacksmith. The 1918 Sarasota Florida City Directory listed the names of all residents and business establishments. Written next to the residents’ names (wives names in parentheses) were the occupation and address with some abbreviations for these. An asterisk (*) preceded the names of African Americans, or Negroes as they were called at that time, as well as the names of any businesses they owned. Following is a sample of entries for African Americans, typed exactly as shown in the Directory. If the occupation was originally written as an abbreviation, the full title is shown next to it in brackets:

- *Alley Jeremiah (Alma), fisherman, h [home] 322 14th
- *Atkins Linda, dom [domestic], h 333 12th
- *Barnes Matthew (Julia), lab [laborer], h 203 s Orange av
- *Bellamy Leona, restaur [restaurant] 236 12th h same
- *Bethlehem Baptist Church, 417 Mango Av, Rev P R James pastor
- *Booker Emma E., prin [principal] Sarasota Col [Colored] Schl [School]
- *Brown Toll (Lizzie), waiter, h 306 11th
- *Carmichael Edwd J (Rosa), propr [proprietor] Royal Palm Pressing Club, h 208 12th
- *Clark Elbert (Hattie), janitor Bank of Sarasota Bldg., h 418 Lemon
- *Colson, Lewis Rev (Irene), h 305 Coconut av
- *Gadson Dora, cook, h 420 Grove av
- *Green Wm (Millie), restaurant 321 Mango av, h 319 same
- *James Pennie A., hair dresser, 419 Mango av, h same
- *Johnson, Lucy, laund [laundress], h 430 Grove av
- *Johnson Patrick K Rev (Fannie) pastor AME Church, h 318 Mango av
- *Keitt Elzona. Tchr [teacher] Sarasota Col [Colored] Schl [School]
- *Knights of Pythias Hall, 404 Coconut av (the entry listed immediately before this one was another Knights of Pythias Hall, which was located at 216 main, undoubtedly that one was for whites-only – no asterisk)
- *Lemon Av Base Ball Park, 501 Lemon av
- *Mack Jno (Lottie), barber 201 12th, h same
- *Mays Jno B (Sallie), carp [carpenter], h 316 13th
- *Morgan Sml M (Lillie), drayman, h 115 12th
- *Odd Fellows Hall, 428 Grove av [listed above this entry in the Directory is another Odd Fellows Hall at 216 Main – the same address as the whites-only Knights of Pythias Hall]

- *Public School, 404 Coconut av
- *Roberts Wm (Mary), chauffeur, h 422 Mango av
- *Reed [likely misspelled name of Leonard Reid] Leonard (Eddie) [Eddy], yard man,
h 321 Coconut av
- *Ross Thos (Sallie), propr [proprietor] Red Light Pressing Club, h 427 Grove av
- *Taylor Albert, porter City Barber Shop
- *Twelfth Street Pool Room, 319 12th, Jno Joyner mngr [manager]
- *Williams, Frank T (Madeline), blksmith, [black331 7th, h 313 Coconut av [he is the first
African American blacksmith in Sarasota]
- *Williams Jno (Sadie A), fireman, h 420 Mango Av
- *Williams Prentiss W (Jennie), fisherman, h 320 Mango av
- *Wilson Jettie, presser F H Meyer

The Directory indicates that the majority of African Americans were employed as laborers, or domestics; few of them were self-employed business persons.

Overtown had a variety of businesses, including a movie theater, pressing clubs, markets, lunchrooms, and grocery and general merchandise stores. Residences varied in size, but most were modest, one-story, wood frame structures with front porches. There was also a baseball park at 501 Lemon Avenue, according to the 1916 City Directory.

African Americans referred to Sarasota's 'first Black community' as "over-town," which meant that it was near to the downtown area where most African Americans worked. It was an approximately 20 acre district located about five city blocks north of downtown Sarasota at the intersection of Central Avenue and Sixth Street, bordered by: 10th street to the north, Orange Avenue to the east. Fourth Street to the south and Coconut Avenue to the west.²⁰ The name eventually transformed into "Overtown." It was also known as "Black Bottom" due to the segregated nature of the community. Rather than migrate to the northern states, as many African Americans did during the 1920s, many of Overtown's residents remained in the South. The majority of them had migrated from other Florida cities and towns beginning in the 1880s. By the 1920s there were even more job opportunities due to what had become a thriving residential and business district. "The 1910s and 1920s clearly show a thriving black community along today's Sixth Street and Central Avenue. The 1920s Florida land boom saw much development in the Overtown area, new churches, business blocks, hotels, an outside movie theater, many of them black owned and made possible by the Boom Time prosperity which trickled down to the laborers in Overtown."²¹ Overtown's registration form for the National Register of Historic Places stated that:

One of the most successful enterprises in Overtown was the Hudson-Essex Automobile Dealership. In one month during the peak of the Florida real estate boom, the Hudson-Essex dealership in Overtown sold more automobiles from that dealership than from any other dealership in the country. Local businesses including the White Star Pressing Club, Willis Mays grocery, Royal Palm Pressing Club, Elite Pressing Club, Hurrikleen Pressing Club, the outside movie theater called the Airdome Theater on

5th Street, Superior Printing Company, the Sarasota Ice Cream Company, lunch counters such as one owned by Samuel Albright, Community Service Filling Station, Kluver & Cladin Billiards, Rolfe's Dry Goods, and the Leader Department Store, provided work for local residents during the 1920s.²²

In 2002, Overtown gained recognition on the National Register of Historic Places. Excerpts from the application described it as follows:

The Overtown Historic District lies several blocks north of downtown and east of the Tamiami Trail. Much of its residential building stock has been lost through attrition and through urban redevelopment west of Coconut Avenue. Many residents of the community began leaving Overtown during the 1960s, with the decline of segregation laws and as Urban Renewal led to the development of ever more remote suburban developments. The decline of the area, however, has been stopped—and even reversed to a degree—by revitalization efforts undertaken by city government and private agencies during the 1990s.

The Overtown community once featured a notable mixture of single-family dwellings, commercial buildings, churches, schools, and clubhouses. A great many of these have been demolished, but several notable buildings remain. One of these, the former Payne Chapel A.M.E. Church, constructed c.1927, has been rehabilitated for use as commercial offices, but it still remains a visual symbol of the focus of spiritual life in the African American neighborhood. Another historic resource is the Colson Hotel Building, constructed c.1925, which was a major hostelry that catered to African American travelers in Sarasota during the Segregation Era. It is now used as apartments.

Agents traveled throughout the rural South to recruit laborers and skilled workmen to come build new cities in Florida. As a result, African Americans were instrumental in the construction of buildings, bridges, and the Seaboard Air Line Railway in Sarasota.

Although the black residents provided much needed workers for building Sarasota, their proximity to downtown prompted some anxiety in the white population of Sarasota. In 1911, an article in the Sarasota Times suggesting that Rosemary Cemetery be moved stated that, “The location [of the cemetery], having to pass through the colored quarters to reach the cemetery, is not desirable.” As early as 1915 some Sarasota residents encouraged the African American population to move north of the Overtown area.

Sarasota developer Charles N. Thompson and his son Russell opened a subdivision of four acres named Newtown, three-quarters of a mile north

of town out of the city limits, “not to make money but to provide the Negroes with better places in which to live.” The subdivision had 240 lots, several of which were dedicated for a Methodist church, a Baptist church, and a school. The developers intended to donate the deeds when the buildings were constructed.

Despite the opening of Newtown, Overtown continued to operate as the center of African American life in Sarasota. The 1913 Sanborn Fire Insurance map of Sarasota depicts wood frame stores and residences in the vicinity of present day Central Avenue (then Mango Avenue), 6th Street (then 12th Street), and Coconut Avenue. Businesses in the area included a drugstore, a general merchandise store, a tailor, a barbershop, grocer, a fish market, a lunch counter, a boarding house, and an artificial stone manufacturer. In the 1916 Sarasota City Directory, residents were listed as cooks, fisherman, porter, laborer, laundress, gardener, driver, cement worker, domestic, fireman, stoneworker, brewer, teacher, janitor, proprietor, and drayman. Businesses such as the Royal Palm Pressing Club, William Green's restaurant, the Sarasota Shoe Shop, Wright Bush's general merchandise and grocery, Toney Colson's Fish Market, the White Star Pressing Club, Washington & Roberts Cold Drinks, McQueen's Grocery, Tom and Annie Mason's Cafe, and the Sarasota Ice and Electric Company provided work for local residents. Frank Williams, with a residence on Coconut Avenue, served as Sarasota's blacksmith.

The 1920s Florida real estate boom led to an increase in the permanent African American population in Sarasota. As a result, the neighborhood expanded during the 1920s to roughly cover the area bounded on the north and south by present-day 10th and 4th Streets and on the east and west by Orange Avenue and U.S. 41. The 1925 Sanborn map reveals that a number of small one- and two-story, wood frame houses and stores covered the area. The 1921-22 Sarasota City Directory listed a variety of occupations for the residents, including teachers, domestics, laundry, farmer, laborer, waiter, fisherman, soft drink salesman, wood cutter, cook, carpenter, clerks, butler, drayman, blacksmith, gardener, tie cutter, and manager. Local resident, Thomas "Mott" Washington, acquired major holdings of land in Overtown and Newtown and built rental houses in which many African Americans lived. Most of the commercial establishments, owned by both whites and blacks, were located along Central Avenue and present-day 6th Street (then 12th Street).²³

Establishing a variety of businesses was done out of necessity since Jim Crow laws were in full effect in this southern city and African Americans could not be served in white-owned restaurants, and could not shop in white-owned stores. As stated by Glossie Atkins, “We couldn’t get into any of the places downtown. There was a dress store on Main Street. We weren’t allowed to go in there. And if we did try to go in there, they would ‘ig’ us. They would pay us no attention.”²⁴

Eventually, African Americans were permitted limited shopping privileges in some of the downtown stores, particularly the larger chain stores, such as J.C. Penney and Sears Roebuck. Most often, however, they were served at the rear door and could not try on clothing, as white customers could. Out of these discriminatory circumstances, a strong entrepreneurial spirit was born. It carried into Newtown, as the African American population began to move there from Overtown.

The development of Newtown led to the eventual abandonment of Overtown as a segregated African American residential area. There is disagreement about what led to the migration of the African American community to Newtown: Was there a 'push' factor from white residents who wanted to develop the land near downtown Sarasota, which was closer to the beaches? Was it a matter of African Americans seizing the opportunity to move into better housing than they had in Overtown? Several differing opinions are expressed on this issue. According to Jeff Lahurd:

As the black population increased, the area previously called Black Bottom, just north of downtown Sarasota where the black population was segregated, was renamed Overtown ... The blacks were encouraged to move farther north. Developer C.N. Thompson and his son, Russell, facilitated the move by opening a subdivision of forty acres for "colored quarters" with 240 lots that could be bought 'on easy payments.' The subdivision, platted in 1914, was called Newtown and was 'exclusive for colored people.'²⁵

In the 1997 documentary short film "The Triumphant Struggle" - written, produced and directed by Vickie Oldham²⁶ - interviewee Fannie Bacon remembered that, "A rich, white man named Mr. Warren developed this part. He had a big picnic there selling lots. And I came out there with my daddy. And that's when he bought his land." Harmie Baker recalled that, "Mrs. C.N. Thompson had also some land in Newtown. And she let me sell lots for her. When I sold a lot for her, she gave me ten dollars. That ten dollars went to my home to help pay for my lot." Mary Mack stated recently that the rate for a new house was \$69.00 down and \$69.00 per month.²⁷

A recent article on a Sarasota-Manatee business website called *94ICEO*, confirms the final dissolution of Overtown as an African American enclave:

... The Rosemary District was originally called Black Bottom, then Overtown, and served as the then segregated city's first African-American community. In the 1930s and '40s, the city encouraged black residents to move north into the newer community of Newtown, and then demolished many homes and buildings in Rosemary.²⁸

The City of Sarasota went beyond 'encouraging' them to move further north, according to J. Whitcomb Rylee:

The 1920s Florida Land Boom also saw Overtown encircled with 'Caucasian race only' developments, with smaller subdivisions in today's Gillespie Park area along Orange Avenue to the east and Hillcrest and

Valencia Terrace to the north. This effectively prevented the natural growth of the Overtown area, forcing the growth of the black population to head to the Newtown area ... The 1930s and 1940s saw the city encouraging the development of the more isolated Newtown area with the establishment of a housing project along north Orange Avenue and increased housing standards for the Overtown area ... In the 1950s under the auspices of its “Slum Clearance Program” the City actively began to remove the housing stock of the Overtown area ... By August of [1957] the Slum Clearance Program was responsible for the removal of about 200 buildings in the Overtown and Newtown areas ... The City estimated that “Blackbotton,” as Overtown was being referred to by the local White population, had 70 of the houses in need for repair and that 100 more should be demolished. There were people living in all of them ... With the exception of the Cohen Way Housing Project in the mid-1960s, the city had pushed most of the black population north to Newtown by the early 1970s.²⁹

Newtown resident James Brown offered an alternative point of view about whether African Americans were pushed out of Overtown. Brown believes that there were reasons for moving from Overtown to Newtown other than, what he terms, the myth that African Americans were forced out. Brown stated that:

I think it was a matter of opportunity, upgrade. It also had something to do with land mass topography. The area from 4th Street, south to 10th Street, north between Coconut and Lemon Avenue (where the Railroad track used to be), it was sand. [There were] very few lawns. In Newtown, there was a larger area, different topography; lawns, palm trees, and more houses were painted than in Overtown. It was a self-contained neighborhood; there was no need to leave the area. There was much more space between houses. A lot of Overtown homes were rentals. In Newtown, people could own their homes, and there is a pride in home ownership.³⁰

Although many families were uprooted, the Newtown community did provide improved living circumstances, especially much better quality housing – concrete block houses were a great improvement over the dilapidated wooden structures of Overtown. Wealthy white Sarasota families who owned those houses were no better than slumlords. “Most of the shacks had only unsanitary, open privies and not until Dr. John R. Scully became health officer ... was any move made to provide better sanitation facilities.”³¹

While Newtown offered more land and better housing, it lacked some important amenities, such as access to electricity and paved streets that were present in Overtown. So there were some trade-offs, but those would be remedied eventually. James Brown still has the original 1928 receipt from when the electric lights were turned on in his home! His family was among the first in his neighborhood to get electricity.

The author of “Rosemary Rising” states that:

Community leaders have repeatedly described the former Overtown neighborhood as ripe for gentrification, but progress has been uneven. The furniture stores Home Resource and Sarasota Home Collection have succeeded on Central Avenue for more than 10 years, and Planned Parenthood of Southwest and Central Florida and Sarasota School of Arts and Sciences have built impressive campuses on the same street, but many businesses—coffee shops, restaurants, boutiques—have come and gone. So have condo projects. When the recession hit, last decade’s ambitious crop of Rosemary developers walked away from their investments or just put their projects on hold. But today, partly due to the city’s recent decision to allow developers to build denser projects, developers are coming forward again.

Vanguard Lofts, CitySide and Valencia are three of at least eight new residential and commercial developments being considered or built in Rosemary. Ranging from dense apartment complexes to upscale townhomes, from performing arts rehearsal spaces to retail shops, the projects are giving business owners and residents hope that Rosemary’s potential as a lively, downtown-adjacent, mixed-use urban community will at last be used.³²

During the 1990s, Overtown was renamed Rosemary District when the city began to attract private investors to redevelop the area by renovating structures. What were once homes and commercial structures became revitalized as offices and other businesses.

NEWTOWN

Newtown is the second historic core of Sarasota’s African-American community. As downtown Sarasota grew at the turn of the century and through the booming 20s, development pressure on the area that was home to most African Americans - Overtown - created a demand for growth farther north, into Overtown. Another pressure on Overtown community was the discontent expressed by white Sarasotans because they had to travel through the African American community in order to visit the cemetery. Dr. Uzi Baram, Professor of Anthropology at New College in Sarasota, conducted a Historical Archaeology course that brought his students to the Rosemary Cemetery, established in the 1880s. “Beyond the town founders buried in the Rosemary Cemetery, the surrounding area is the Overtown Historic District, the first documented African American settlement in Sarasota. Starting in the 1990s, but developing a more steady flow since the beginning of the new century, the Rosemary District (formerly called Overtown) has been gentrifying as downtown Sarasota has grown over the last few years.”³³

According to Baram,

While the Rosemary District became a traditionally poor and African American section of Sarasota, students were challenged to look at the surrounding gentrification and how it is displacing a community. The African American community had become marginalized and silenced in the memory of a place. The politics of gentrification became a powerful and eye-opening experience for many of the students ... Race haunts Sarasota. Segregation is a concern from the past and for the present, with community groups whose names indicate their anxieties about the present [2009] social situation: Sarasota Openly Addressing Racism, Coalition for Inclusion and Diversity, Embracing Our Differences, and Sarasota County Openly Plans for Excellence. One of the locations for civic attention is the Rosemary District, whose gentrification is part of a transformation of an African American neighborhood into a trendy, wealthy, diverse area.”³⁴

Newtown was advertised as a desirable settlement for Sarasota’s African American community, complete with much nicer houses than the ones that they lived in at Overtown. This resettlement led to the decline of Overtown, which was a place of fond memories for many of the early settlers and their descendants. For some, Newtown was a great opportunity to better their living circumstances. The cement block houses of Newtown were a real step up from the dilapidated structures that many resided in in Overtown. However, there was a trade-off. While the houses were nicer and there was lots of open space for children to play, Newtown’s infrastructure – electricity, running water, indoor plumbing, roads, etcetera – was severely lacking in comparison to Overtown.

From the early years through the 1940s, the street now known as Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Way was the thriving heart of the then segregated enclave of Newtown. Decades of disinvestment and capital flight, along with a concentration of government subsidized housing and social services, have caused blighted conditions in areas next to a thriving area of single family homes. Much of the neighborhood’s multifamily housing has not received maintenance, which has resulted in substantial deterioration.

Transportation improvements to U.S. 301 and U.S. 41 to the east and west of the area have enabled those roadways to evolve into major auto-oriented corridors, making travel around the neighborhood easier. However, businesses that were located along the Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Way corridor have moved to where the traffic is, as has happened all over the U.S. in the past 50 years. Over time, a substantial concentration of industrial and social service uses have been located between the neighborhood and downtown to the south. Half of the northern boundary of the community is bound by industrial uses. These adjacent land uses surround Newtown, further isolating it from the larger community.³⁵

Willie McKenzie arrived in Newtown in 1926 with a Savannah construction firm. He and worked on Charles Ringling’s ten story Terrace Hotel as well as John Ringling’s Causeway. As families like the McKenzies followed the work to Sarasota, the city became home for generations of African-Americans. In addition to skilled labor jobs,

Newtown residents came to be landowners, preachers, real estate developers, and teachers.³⁶

Development in Newtown began in earnest in 1914 by Charles Thompson, a well-known circus manager who desired to make the quality of life better for Sarasota's African-American community. One of the development's original parcels lay on the east side of Orange Avenue with side streets Washington, Lee, Douglas, Dunbar, and Higel (present day 21st through 25th Streets). During the boom the subdivision expanded a few streets south and then to Washington Boulevard, then eventually north along both sides of present day U.S. 301.

As Sarasota's Downtown grew, the African-American community was edged northward and Newtown replaced the original municipal residential area that once included Black Bottom. Later known as Overtown, it was bounded roughly on the north and south by 10th and 5th Streets and on the west and east by U.S. 41 and Orange Avenue. Overtown had constituted a complete community with small shops, social facilities, and religious centers such as the first church, the Bethlehem Baptist Church.

Prior to 1925, when the County built Booker Grammar School, the first public school for black students, African-Americans in Sarasota County were schooled at home or in churches. A high school was later added and in 1935 the first class four seniors graduated. Later, Amaryllis Park was added for first, second, and third-graders and Booker Junior High for seventh and eighth graders.³⁷

“AN AIRPLANE COMES TO SARASOTA”

Excerpts from the article:

No old time resident of Sarasota ever will forget Thursday, April 9, 1914. Because on that day, many Sarasota Evans saw their first airplane – a weird contraption which defies all the laws of gravity and actually flew! That is, providing bad winds weren't blowing. Anyhow, it was a marvelous ship, the first airplane which flew over Sarasota, bringing everyone outdoors to stare up at the sky with mouth agape. That history making airplane was flown by Tony Jannus, star pilot of the Benoist Company, which sure leave before Head established the first commercial airline in the country, between St. Petersburg and Tampa.

Several of the passengers requested that Janice take them over Bird Key so they could get a good look at the glistening white home just being built by Thomas W. Worcester, of Cincinnati. This was the first expensive homes built on any island in the Sarasota Bay region. It was named New Edzell

Castle after the ancestral home of Mrs. Worcester in Scotland...It is now the home of Mrs. Ida Ringling North.

Flying inland, the passengers were given the opportunity to observe another type of habitation. Out on 33rd St. they could see tiny homes being erected by Negroes in the colored community of Newtown, then being opened by Charles N. Thompson, not to make money but to provide the Negroes with better places in which to live. Previously their principal living quarters have been at black bottom, in the vicinity of 12th and lemon. The dilapidated buildings, owned by prominent Sarasota, were a disgrace to Sarasota. Most of the shacks had only unsanitary, open privies and not until Dr. John R. Scully became health officer, years later, was any move made to provide better sanitation facilities.³⁸

In Newtown's early days, there was a lot of open space, few houses, and most roads were unpaved, as we learn from Dorothy Smith³⁹

(Oldham: What did Sarasota look like when you came [in 1948]? Would you describe what you remember?)

Well, Newtown had just a minimum of paved streets, mainly the north portion of Orange Avenue leading up to present Martin Luther King, and a part of Osprey bus route. That was it.



Newtown Dirt Road
Photo: Courtesy of Patrick Carter

(O: How many houses do you remember?)

Well, mainly all of the people out in this area, own their own homes. And they were scattered because the lower part of Orange Avenue was all bushes, ditches, and children coming from over in this area sometimes walked across the ditch on a board to get to school. And teachers walked too because there were a minimum of cars in the community. Everybody knew everybody who had a car in Newtown.

Eddie Rainey, who began a postal service career as a clerk at the Suarez station in 1963, questions the rosy image of the “good old days,” as they are sometimes evoked. “I was here,” Rainey said. “I was here when it was dirt roads, and broken down buildings that they used as schools. When I think back, I didn’t realize I was deep in poverty.”⁴⁰

Estella Thomas⁴¹

(O: Paint a picture of the area for those of us who did not live during your time. What did it look like?)

Well we had dirt road. We didn’t have paved streets when I came here.

Well there wasn’t street signs or anything. Nothing but 33rd Street, and that was a dirt road back in my time... That was in the ...late 40s.

By 1960, Newtown was home to about six percent of the County’s population, or about 7,000 people. In the 1960s, Newtown flourished with several restaurants, grocery stores, service stations, a drug store, repair shops, beauty parlors, barbershops, and a doctor’s and a dentist’s office.⁴²

Decades of disinvestment and capital flight, along with a concentration of government subsidized housing and social services, have caused blighted conditions in areas next to a thriving area of single family homes. Much of the neighborhood’s multifamily housing has not received maintenance, which has resulted in substantial deterioration.

Gentrification is often threatening Newtown, according to some residents, and is causing great concern. One of the reasons that this NCHD Project has such critical importance to the residents is that, despite their best efforts, development in the City of Sarasota has already swallowed Overtown, renaming it The Rosemary District, and may one day swallow Newtown. Newtown residents do not want their proud heritage to be lost forever, should that occur. Change is an inevitable element of life, but the history of Newtown should be recorded for posterity in the event that it dissolves into greater Sarasota, as have so many other African American urban enclaves in US cities.

As confirmed by Yvonne Brown, school, church and home were core of community.⁴³ Despite the lack of adequate books, supplies, facilities and salaries, Overtown and later Newtown schools had one invaluable asset – its dedicated teachers. Without clamoring for services they no doubt would have been denied by a discriminatory system, they instead placed their energies into providing the very best education possible for their students.

Prior to 1925, when the County built Booker Grammar School, the first public school for black students, African-Americans in Sarasota County were taught at home or in churches. A high school was later added and in 1935 the first class four seniors

graduated. Later, Amaryllis Park (Principal Jerome Dupree) was added for first, second, and third-graders and Booker Junior High for seventh and eighth graders.

In 1954 Chief Justice Earl Warren wrote his landmark Supreme Court decision in the *Brown v. Board of Education* case, which prohibited racial segregation in U.S. public schools. Three years after the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision, schools were still segregated in Sarasota. The NAACP asked the Sarasota County School Board to voluntarily desegregate. In 1961, after four more years of inactivity, the NAACP and several plaintiffs filed a desegregation lawsuit in federal court. In the 1962-63 school year, the first African-American students enrolled in previously all-white Sarasota Schools, the first school integrated was Bay Haven Elementary.

In 1964, Roland Rogers, who had been Principal of Booker through twenty years of progress and change, was appointed to the administrative staff of the County schools. By 1965, the U.S. Government had tied federal dollars to compliance with the 1964 Civil Rights Act. The federal government ordered all schools to integrate by 1967. The Sarasota County School Board came up with a plan to comply, consistent with most school district approaches, by closing the black schools and busing black students to white schools. In 1967 Booker High School was closed, in 1968 Booker Junior High School followed.

Originally, the community supported busing as a step forward however, eventually; many felt that closing the schools had taken away community pride and identity. On May 4, 1969, a total of 2,353 African-American students (85% of the County's African-American students) boycotted the Sarasota County public schools in protest over the proposed closing of Amaryllis Elementary School. Instead, students attended freedom schools in local churches taught by New College and high school students.

Individual homes served as the incubators of the schools and churches for African Americans in Sarasota. In the early days, school was taught by Josie Washington in her home and in 1912 a public school was established. Wright Bush, Henry Clark, Elbert Clark, J.P. Carter, Campbell Mitchell, John Mays, John Woods, Ed Carmichael, and J.H. Glover served as trustees and Emma Booker was the principal of this school for many years. The Knights of Pythias Hall was where African American children attended school using second hand books and other materials. However, the students were nurtured by dedicated teachers such as Mrs. Emma E. Booker (also principal), Mrs. Aravia Benton Johnson, Mrs. Lucinda P. Wiggins (grandmother of Annie Blue McElroy), and Mrs. Mayme Williams Faulk. The school graduated its first class in 1923. Commencement exercises were held at Bethlehem Baptist Church.⁴⁴

One graduate, Miss Quessie M. Hall was in the first graduating class, went on to high school at Florida Normal Institute in St. Augustine, Florida, and graduated from high school in May 1927. She was the first grammar school graduate to return to teach at Sarasota Grammar School, often referred to as the Rosenwald School because it was built with Rosenwald funds, opened in 1925. Located on 7th Street east of Central Avenue. It was renamed Booker Grammar School in honor of its first principal, Emma E. Booker.

There was opposition to increase the level of schooling for African American students beyond grammar school. However, James Robert Dixon, fought against the odds to add a high school component. In 1935, Booker High School's first graduating

class consisted of four students, three females and one male: Marthena Riley, Nacomi Williams (Carter), Annie Mae Blue (McElroy) and A.L. Williams.⁴⁵

Lucinda P. Wiggins (grandmother of Annie Blue McElroy) operated a private kindergarten in her home.⁴⁶ As the kindergarten grew, it was relocated to Payne Chapel A.M.E. church to which she was a devoted member as Sunday School teacher, deaconess, stewardess and missionary. The Lucinda P. Wiggins Missionary Society at the church is named in her honor.⁴⁷

Mamie Baker Young who migrated to Sarasota from Quincy Florida, established Sarasota's first Special Education Department in 1954. Later she created an Adult Night Program to assist people in obtaining their G.E.D. The first graduation was held in 1955.⁴⁸ Ms. Young also taught in the un-graded school called Laurel-Nokomis. She was also politically involved as president of the local FTP/NEA, member of the NAACP and worked with other organizations as well as local, state and national political campaigns.⁴⁹

While segregation created severe challenges for African Americans in Sarasota, desegregation brought new ones. Orders to desegregate the schools led to the closing of schools in Newtown, including Booker High School, and the busing of Newtown children to white schools. "Originally, the community supported busing as a step forward however, eventually; many felt that closing the schools had taken away community pride and identity.

The effect on students, teachers and families was tremendous, as described by several interviewees. Many who were forced to be bussed to all-white schools dropped out rather than take the verbal abuse, being spit upon by other students. White teachers were products of segregated upbringing also and exhibited some of the same racist behaviors and language as students. There are many details about this in the Education Chapter.

Newtown residents have endured many types of racism: environmental (the town dump was located adjacent to family housing and, allegedly, caused illnesses among nearby residents), social and residential (African Americans could only live and walk within circumscribed boundaries, were refused lodging at white-owned hotels, had to pick up their restaurant purchases at the back door). Yet these degrading experiences did not extinguish their pride and self-confidence. They stood strong, demanded their rights, ensured that their children got good educations and had teachers who cared about them and nurtured them; Newtown was a "village" in every sense.⁵⁰ There are some who want things to go back to that same sense of community. There are many ongoing efforts to rid the community of its negative elements. Redevelopment is proceeding and the community is physically looking better. Now, the social elements need more work. Suggestions by some interviewees include mentoring of the young leaders by the elder statesmen. Others are looking toward the churches to make a stronger stance

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¹⁴ "The 'Father of Sarasota,' John Hamilton Gillespie, was born in 1852 in Edinburgh, Scotland. He arrived here in 1886 to assist the failing Florida Mortgage and Investment Company, a development company partially owned by his father in Edinburgh. The company had enticed a group of Scottish colonists to Sarasota in 1885 to help settle its 50,000-acre holdings, which included most of the land constituting the present city of Sarasota.

The settlers arrived to find most of the company's promises unfulfilled. Gillespie was dispatched to improve the situation. Many disillusioned colonists left, however, and the company entered liquidation proceedings. Gillespie remained in Sarasota after the court appointed him to manage the assets of the company there. He organized the clearing of three miles of Main Street, the building of a substantial wharf on the waterfront, and the beginning of a 40-acre experimental farm.

In 1902, he was elected the first mayor of Sarasota when the town was incorporated and held this office for six terms. He also served his community as Justice of Peace four years and Notary Public ten years. He was affectionately known as "Colonel" in this community." <https://www.scgov.net/History/Pages/JohnHamiltonGillespie.aspx>

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³⁹ Interview with Vickie Oldham, August 2015.

⁴⁰ "Looking Back and Ahead." <http://newtown100.heraldtribune.com/looking-back-ahead/>

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⁴² <http://www.sarasotagov.com/Newtown/history.html>

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⁴⁵ 39-41

⁴⁶ But Your World and My World, 47.

⁴⁷ But Your World and My World, 49

⁴⁸ But Your World and My World, 50.

⁴⁹ But Your World and My World, 50)

⁵⁰ "Newtown History."

CHAPTER 5: MAKING A LIVING

After the Civil War, many formerly enslaved people became subsistence farmers, producing food for their own survival, and/or worked as sharecroppers who were taken advantage of by the landlords. Most sharecroppers owed their landlords more money for food and other goods they had received on ‘credit’ from the company stores than they would get paid at the end of the harvest or paid weekly for their hard labor in the cotton and celery fields and turpentine camps of the South. This left the sharecroppers in a constantly negative financial bind; it was a hopeless situation in which they would never get ahead in life. Many African Americans left these miserable conditions to seek better life opportunities in the cities of the northern, mid-western and western U.S.¹ They became part of the Great Migration in which more than six million African Americans left the South between 1910 and 1970. Often, a ‘chain migration’ occurred; when one family member or friend moved to and got settled in a city, other family members and friends would later follow to that same city. A migration also occurred between cities in the South.

Migration to Sarasota

Most of the people who settled in Overtown and Newtown migrated there from other southern cities including many from other cities and towns in Florida. Neil Humphrey stated that: “My daddy and my mother lived in Plant City. And they heard about Sarasota. It seemed to have quite some prospects for a wonderful place to live. And so, they decided to move to Sarasota. They had the soda fountain, tables and chairs and some patent medicine.”²

Sometimes they came alone, looking for and finding jobs, before sending for other family members to follow in their footsteps.

Near the turn of the century, only about ten families lived in the vicinity. The African-American population swelled as laborers and skilled workmen were hired by special agents who combed rural areas of Georgia and the Carolinas recruiting workers to fill the demand in Florida’s boom cities. Men and women came to be dockworkers, fishermen, chauffeurs, maids, laundresses, and cooks. They came to work the rails, the citrus farms, and the circus.”³

The proposal to connect Sarasota to Tampa via railroad resulted in a wave of railroad worker who continued employment, laying rails as the tracks were extended in subsequent years to Fruitville, Bee Ridge, Laurel and Venice.⁴ Sarasota was a growing city where there were a variety of unskilled and skilled jobs available, including: seasonal laborers picking fruits and vegetables; domestic workers, both male and female; celery and turpentine camp workers, and persons with fishing and maritime skills. Most of the people interviewed for this NCHD Project agreed that the vision of a brighter future and the availability of jobs were the primary reasons that their families migrated to and settled in Sarasota.

Even though their lives were filled with hard work, that work was now paying dividends for them as free people, some more than others. Working on the turpentine camps, celery and citrus farms, and sharecropping did not. Those jobs placed African Americans in much the same circumstances as enslavement. Essentially, that occupation was a new version of bondage because workers were never able financially to get ahead; whatever amount they got paid at the end of a harvest, they owed to the “company store,” and sometimes they owed more than they got paid and were left in debt to the company store. This led to more borrowing against the next year’s harvest. It was extremely hard work that did not yield good results for the workers. That was an important reason why parents who worked in these occupations were very serious about providing their children with an education that would lift them out of those circumstances.

Throughout this chapter about how Newtown residents worked, the voices of the interviewees – current or former residents of Newtown and Overtown – are prominent. Their oral histories shed light on the many ways that they and their families lived, laughed, labored and survived, often under very difficult circumstances. Providing a space for them to tell their stories of “How I Got Over,” as the gospel hymn goes, is essential to demonstrating that they play very important roles in the process of celebrating the 100-year history of the Newtown community.

Alberta Brown⁵

(Oldham: Where were you born?)

In Alachua County.

(O: ...Tell me about your life in Alachua. The earliest memories.)

After my father died, we didn't have anybody to do the plowing. My mom had to get other mens to come in and work on the farm for her...she had to pay those mens to work because my brother was too young to try to do anything like that. And so my mother, she would try to do the plowing, she would try to get people to do it. And it was very hard. We couldn't really do too much. He was only about twelve when my father died...She called her brother, here in Sarasota, Florida, and she had a brother in Palmetto...So she was trying to ask them what could they do to help her, and some way of getting her children to work...

(O: You lived on a farm way out in Alachua County?)

Yeah...sharecropping. So after she did not have a husband to do the plowing and everything, we had to move...and come to Palmetto where we could get work.

Anthony “Tony” Major⁶

My grand uncle, who passed away at 100 years old, and my grandmother, who raised me, says that they all left North Florida due to the Klan. And my great grandfather, who sent my grandmother to Sarasota, never made it. So the story is that the Klan finally got to him before he could get out. And they all come from Washington County, in...Mill’s Ferry...Just west of Quincy. Between Pensacola and Tallahassee ...Quincy’s right outside Tallahassee. So a little further west, that is the area that that side of my family came from...my mother and grandmother...

(Howard: And how did your family come to leave Quincy and wind up in Newtown? Did they know people there...?)

Well I think that's where the work was – my understanding. And so they ended up at that time coming to Sarasota and...help settling Sarasota...I think some of the family members had moved to the area, because back then the family stuck together and stayed together. So... some of them, like my grand uncle who lived to be 100, [came to Sarasota]. Eventually he moved to Tampa. But initially he was in Sarasota... I would say it was due to the type of work and stuff involved in Sarasota at the time, and other family members that were there, cause everybody...was related to everybody pretty much.

(H: Okay. One of the interviews that I read mentioned someone named Suit Major...who was involved with the circus. Is he related to you?)

That's my father...His name was Benjamin Major, like my middle name is Benjamin... and my father was known as Suit Major 'cause he always wore a blue suit.

Betty Johnson⁷

My parents were Mr. and Mrs. Saul Johnson. My mother's name is Blanche Johnson. They were born in what was known as West Florida, but Quincy, Florida is the name... My father came to Sarasota as a young teenager ... to find work. And in those days you grew up real fast, and you want to leave home. My father worked, when he first came to Sarasota, at what was called the Dolomite Plant ... up on 301... and then he worked in the orange groves, he picked oranges ... Then ... he worked construction ... for George Higgins construction company. And the fond memory I have of my father is that he was – that construction company was responsible for laying the water lines in Newtown – instrumental in the piping that brought the water into Newtown ... [My mom] worked as a domestic housekeeper for a little while.

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African American laborers' farming and artisan skills, endurance, and dedicated work ethic played a large role in building Sarasota into the city it is today. Yet, their contributions to its economic growth have been underemphasized in the pages of Sarasota history. Regrettably, this void of information about African Americans' roles in "American" History is not uncommon across the U.S. In Sarasota, men and women worked in a variety of positions to provide for their families and their hard work was the foundation of the Sarasota County economy.

### **Carolyn Mason**<sup>8</sup>

My father drove a cement mixer ... right over at Central and 10th Street. It was R. C. Martin Concrete, then. And my mother was a maid ... The two families that I remember lived on, I believe it was 47th Street. Just off of the North Trail. And they actually lived across the street from each other. And in the summer, when there was no school, I would go to work with her ... Actually I played with the kids [Laughter].

*Both women and men worked on farms, as we learn from Alberta Brown.*

### **Alberta Brown**<sup>9</sup>

*(Oldham: What kind of fruits or vegetables were you helping to harvest?)*

Tomatoes, green beans, just anything that would work on a farm ... The fields had to be picked, so we would go out, work daily ... Even ... Saturdays, if they wanted us for Saturdays. So it was hard, but we had learned how to like it ...

You fall in love with things when you got to do it. [Laughter] And like I said, if you don't like something, you not gonna do a good job and we did good jobs ...

We did all kinds of things and we met so many different peoples ... a lot. On the farm, sometimes we had fifty or sixty people to pick ... I really liked it ... And we had a good time. We start to ... singing. We do different things ... sometimes the mens would help us do it and, if they like you, they did most of your work anyway. [Laughter] So, we got to the place we had relationships. Find you ... a new boyfriend, you didn't have to work as hard. He would do double duty, yours and his. So it was fun after a while.

*(O: Were there more women out there than men, or more men than women?)*

Oh much more womens than there was men, because mens could get a job.

Womens, we really couldn't get a job. I mean, probably you could if you was working in a home, because we did find it when we got to Sarasota after a while. About two years after I was here ... my sister stopped working [in a home] and she put me to work. She wanted me to cook. So I start the cooking and so that's how I got my jobs and everything that we had.

## **The Celery Fields**



Audubon Society/scgov.net

The Celery Fields Park, Palmer Avenue, Sarasota

(Except as noted, there are several sources for following text. See Endnote<sup>10</sup>)

Many African Americans in Sarasota did farm work, harvesting citrus crops and celery. Some worked in the dolomite mine. However, the Celery Fields of Sarasota and Manatee counties, in particular, were an important source of income for African Americans who lived in Newtown and Overtown.

Agriculture was a major industry in Florida and played an important role in the development and growth of Sarasota and the region. Both citrus and celery were major

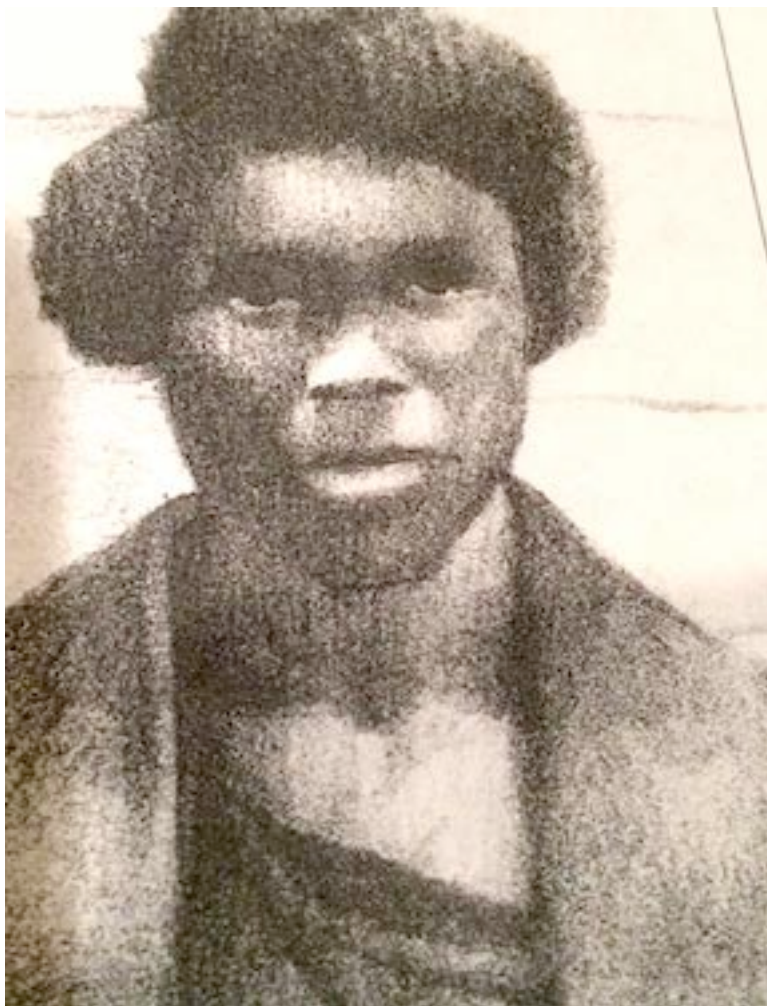
crops. Fancee Farms used the fields to grow celery after the land was drained to make it available for agriculture in the late 1880s, early 1900s, and the 1920s, (see photo above).

During slavery, the cultivation and harvesting of crops was done by African Americans. After Emancipation, their experience with crop cultivation was used to their own benefit; it was an important source of income for them. There is a good deal of information on the history of the celery industry in Sarasota, but, not surprisingly, little or no documentation on the contributions of the workers in the fields, especially the African American workers. The information that is available has come primarily from the personal stories of the celery workers, the writing of Newtown history by a Newtown resident (Annie M. McElroy)<sup>11</sup> and the archiving of photos in the History Center. The research involved in creating a Panel Exhibit (seen below) at the Sarasota County History Center (SCHC) fills some of the gaps in the literature about the history of Newtown and the role[s] played and contributions made by Celery Field workers who lived there.

Although not located in either Overtown or Newtown, the Celery Fields played an important role in the growth and development of these communities. Recruiters, both African American and white, traveled throughout Florida and other southern states to contract workers for the industries in Sarasota, including the Celery Fields, the turpentine camps, the railroad and lumber yards, and building of state parks.

Following the Civil War, agriculture became a major activity from the earliest settlements. "Vegetable crops were especially concentrated in the Fruitville area with the development of the Palmer Farms and in Venice with the construction of the city by the Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers."<sup>12</sup>





Lily Lacy. Linda Black Turner's grandmother.<sup>13</sup>

Lily Lacy, pictured above, was a pioneer among the African Americans who settled in Sarasota, where she moved in 1938 with her husband. While her husband worked as a stiller at the Bee Ridge Turpentine Camp, Lily worked in the Celery Fields owned by the Palmers. She also started a laundry business. With no running water, she would have family members pump water from the community well. She would wash and iron clothes using an open fire to heat the irons and palmetto leaves to coat the iron giving clothes a starched look.<sup>14</sup>

Linda Black Turner recalls that her: [Granny worked at] "the Palmer Farms and she would walk on the railroad tracks ... and she would walk on the railroad track. They had to take their food with 'em. She would always ... keep her head tied up and she would put a pan on top of her head and tie it and she would walk down the tracks (from her home in Bee Ridge.) She'd walk to Fruitville and Palmer Boulevard...in that area where they had all the farms ... She worked on the muletrain."<sup>15</sup>



The mule train was a moving packinghouse on the celery fields in Fruitville. c. 1949.  
Photo: Chamber of Commerce Collection.

According to Turner:

She had to wear those real tall rubber boots because that soil that gets on you. She was allergic to it. It would break you all out. She had an ulcer on her leg all this time, but she still worked out there on that farm. I think it was in the early '50s that she stopped. She got in so much pain that she just couldn't do the walking.<sup>16</sup> [Lacy's ulcer may have indeed resulted from allergic reaction to the "muck" or it could have been because the muck contained a lot of acid.]<sup>17</sup>

### **Work: Recruitment**

"Elmo Newtown, father of community activist Lillian, was the first African American to contract celery in this county. He came from Sanford, Florida, bringing around 300 people from all over the state and other places. Later he leased three motels and rented rooms. The three were the Old Elk building, Osprey Avenue; Central Hotel, Central Avenue, and Colson Hotel. He was active until a few months before his death in 1936.

Other farming contractors to follow were his brother Johnny Newtown, Eddie Williams, Nathan Coons, Abe Jones, Mack James, Edward “Grand Pa” Gordon and Wade Thomas. All of these contractors acquired property and operated some kind of business during their lifetime.”<sup>18</sup>

“It seems everyone was related to each other or was from the same geographical area some place other than Sarasota. When one person would relocate, if there were family members, they would all relocate there. They would invite others to come and some would help family and friends by either helping to find work or giving them a place to live until they could find their own...Many came from the same regions such as West Florida, Georgia, Alabama, Mississippi. They relocated to this area because of the work available. Many from the Village worked as in turpentine fields, farmer’s hands on celery farms, tomato pickers, fruit growers and harvesters.<sup>19</sup> “Rip Ward from Tallevast recruited seasonal people...and transported them.”<sup>20</sup>

## The Workers

“The history of the celery industry in Sarasota is [filled] with stories, photos, agricultural reports, scientific breakthroughs and business reports. The owners of the fields, all white, were profiled in local, state and some national publications for producing the best celery in the nation.

There were three major celery farms in Sarasota proper: On Bee Ridge Road, on Fruitville Road and on Palmer Boulevard. There was also a major celery farm in Venice.”



Workers on the Venice Farms installed a wrapping to help blanch the celery stalks.

Photo: Venice Archives and Area Historical Collection

“Johnson Camp was a community built for the workers on Fruitville Road Farm because it was too far for them to walk every day from Newtown. It was started around 1930. The workers there were paid approximately \$3-5/day, the average being \$2/day, for back-breaking work.”<sup>21</sup> It was, however, paid work. A number of Newtown families lived in Johnson Camp before they relocated to Newtown proper; some of the family members are still in Newtown.

According to James Brown, “My sixth grade teacher, Mrs. Hattie Johnson drove the school bus, brought the kids in from Johnson Camp to school. And there was Mrs. Goins who drove the bus from Laurel area, bringing kids up ... It was a settlement, and my teacher, Mrs. Johnson, owned her own home. That building is still there.”<sup>22</sup>

“The Thacker & Pearce celery Farms are Hives of Activity ... (comprised of) 800 acres ... The Farm Home of Frank Pearce produced the finest to be found anywhere ... At one time Pearce had 50 families working on his farm ... There was a settlement created, ‘New Pearce’ named after the owner of the big farm.”<sup>23</sup> The Chapman celery farm consisted of 25 acres situated three miles north of Sarasota on the Sarasota-Bradenton Road.

“Mr. C.W. Chapman ... was a New Yorker who came to Florida in 1872 ... Says he is a genuine Florida cracker ... He has at present 30 hands but as season progresses he has to employ more. Most of his help is white and only in a dearth of white labor will he hire colored help as he claims ‘they are too hard to keep at work.’”<sup>24</sup> There is no doubt that if Chapman hired “colored” help he would have paid them less than he paid white workers and the workers would have known that. They also would have known they would be the first fired when the season was over. There is little mention of the nature of the actual work demanded of the workers in the celery fields. The little we know is from oral histories held in the Black communities by the workers. A few were captured and preserved.”<sup>25</sup>

“Because the area had been swampland, the low-lying soil was extremely fertile. The fertile soil was perfect for growing crops, especially celery. In 1927 it was decided to grow celery. The soil was called “Muk” or “Muck” and celery grown there was branded in that way, “Muk-Grown Celery,” in the owners’ marketing and advertising materials. However, very little thought seems to have been given to the workers who had to walk and put their hands in the muk while planting and harvesting. As seen from the story above, Lilly Lacy was allergic to the “muk” and had to eventually stop working in it because of the physical toll it took on her and no doubt other celery field workers.”<sup>26</sup>

“Pictures speak a thousand words. The following photos tell a bit of the stories of the workers in the celery fields of Sarasota who made the growth and development of Newtown as well as the wider community possible. It is interesting to note that the Audubon Society’s web page on the history of the celery fields identifies the workers as “migrant.” At the time of the photo (shown below), given the similarity of other photos of the celery workers, they were more likely residents of Sarasota, both permanent and seasonal.”<sup>27</sup>





Celery farm on Palm Avenue, c. 1910  
Cultural Resource Center/NSPL courtesy of the SCHC



Bell Celery Packing House c. 1940  
Courtesy of Sarasota County Historical Resources, Bell Brothers Collection.

The Celery Fields, in which many African Americans toiled for years, are now a Sarasota County park that is popular for various recreational activities, such as biking, walking, and bird watching. According to the park's website:

The location of the site and the large number of diverse bird species make the Celery Fields an ideal location for wildlife watching and passive recreational use. The Celery Fields is on the Great Florida Birding Trail and is a popular destination for Sarasota Audubon field trips and outings.<sup>28</sup>



No longer used for farming, the Celery Fields are still part of the Sarasota economy. [In 2010], “tourists and residents spent over \$1.3 billion watching Florida wildlife.”<sup>29</sup> They were purchased by Sarasota County in 1994 and construction was begun to establish a drainage system to prevent flooding along the Phillip Creek.

“Historically the area was a sawgrass marsh and evidence of early native settlement has been found. During the construction, evidence of the first occupants of the land was revealed: well-preserved prehistoric animal bones, such as teeth from mammoths, mastodons and sharks were recovered.”<sup>30</sup>



## A BRIEF HISTORY OF FLORIDA TURPENTINE CAMPS

Another major industry in the Sarasota region where African Americans found jobs was in the turpentine camps. Turpentine leases for land within what is now Sarasota County can be found as early as 1905, perhaps earlier. By 1910 there was a large camp in the community of Fruitville, and it was common for the camps to move as trees were exhausted or as the businesses expanded into new areas. By 1911 the turpentine industry was in the Bee Ridge area, and into areas further south such as Laurel (north of Nokomis and Venice).<sup>31</sup>

Cultural anthropologist and novelist Zora Neale Hurston<sup>32</sup> traveled to many southern towns and “she mastered the craft of slipping into the skin of her subjects and immersing herself in the communal spirit, while offering credible justification for her presence.”<sup>33</sup> Hurston visited turpentine camps while writing for the Works Progress Administration in the 1930s. Here, she talks about her experiences:

Well, I put on my shoes and I started. Going up some roads and down some others to see what Negroes do for a living. Going down one road I smelt hot rosin and looked and saw a “gum patch.” That’s a turpentine still to the outsider, but gum path (sic) to those who work them.<sup>34</sup>

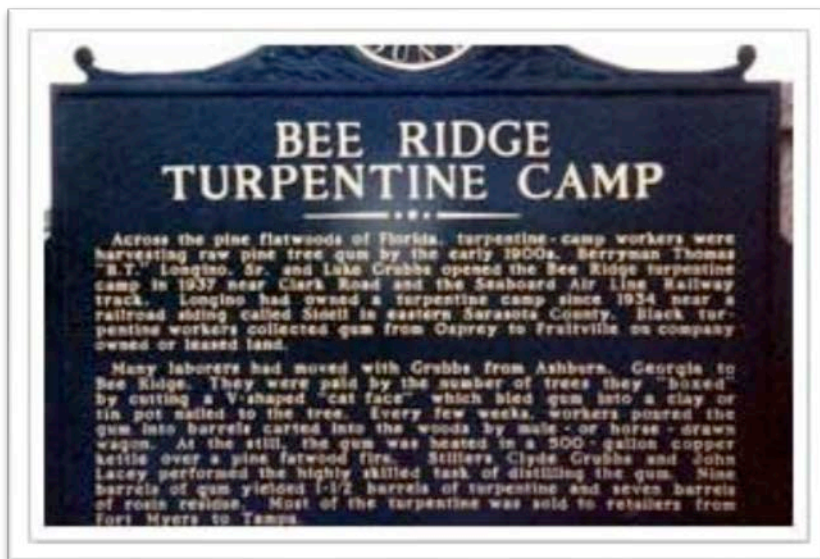
Turpentine is one of the oldest industries and was very hard work. The collection of turpentine, also known by its more formal name “naval stores,” started during the Colonial Era.<sup>35</sup>

The extraction and distillation of pinesap for the naval stores industry reached its apex of production in the early decades of the twentieth century. Post-emancipation, the industry employed African American labor in the long leaf pine forests of the southeastern United States under a system of debt peonage, a practice that gave employers complete control over their laborers [and] practically reinstated slavery... The turpentine areas of northern Florida, southern Georgia, Alabama, and Mississippi furnished numerous peonage complaints.<sup>36</sup>

Over time, the extensive production of turpentine in the Carolinas and Georgia led to the destruction of the pine forests. Seeking new virgin timber, the industry turned south into Florida with its vast pine forests. This southward movement occurred in the 1900s. During this time the demand for labor led Florida to lease prisoners to the turpentine companies. Approximately 10 percent of the force in Florida was comprised of convict forced labor.<sup>37</sup>

Laborers rented company housing and were paid in scrip, a system [of pay] that limited their purchase of the basic goods ...[only to] the company commissary at inflated prices, resulting in an endless cycle of debt. African Americans were particularly susceptible to the exploitation of debt peonage, [which is defined as a system of forced labor based on debts accumulated by workers], following the conclusion of the Civil War. The so-called “Black Codes” legislated by southern states during Reconstruction ensured African Americans remained

under the close scrutiny and control of whites. These state laws restricted employment options for the newly-emancipated Americans, and aided [the continuation of] their exploitation.<sup>38</sup>



The Sarasota County Historical Commission erected an historical marker for the Bee Ridge Turpentine Camp in 1994.

The Bee Ridge Turpentine Camp, opened in 1937. The laborers were paid by the number of trees they “boxed” by cutting a V-shaped “cat face,” which bled gum into a clay or tin pot nailed to the tree. The workers’ camp houses had two to four rooms. A camp commissary stocked soap, salt and basic staples for purchase (or on credit). The camp truck delivered workers to and from for shopping and recreation on weekends...When the camp closed in 1952, it marked the end of an era. The market for turpentine was weak and the supply of pine trees small. Many of the residents moved to Pinkney Avenue<sup>39</sup> or Newtown, and some of the families are still in Sarasota. One of those former turpentine camp workers was Rev. Earl Vencent Samuel Black, Sr. who, on September 2, 2015, turned 100 years old. He left Bee Ridge Turpentine Camp when it closed in 1952 and moved to Newtown. Rev. Black related the story of his time working there to a reporter who wrote the following about their conversation:

Felling and chipping pine trees for an industry that once spread throughout the South. And the rattlesnakes. Oh the rattlesnakes. Turpentine work was notoriously hard and often dangerous. The men, almost exclusively black, spent hours in the forest surrounded by heat and wild animals. More than just work at the camps, workers lived, shopped and raised families there.<sup>40</sup>

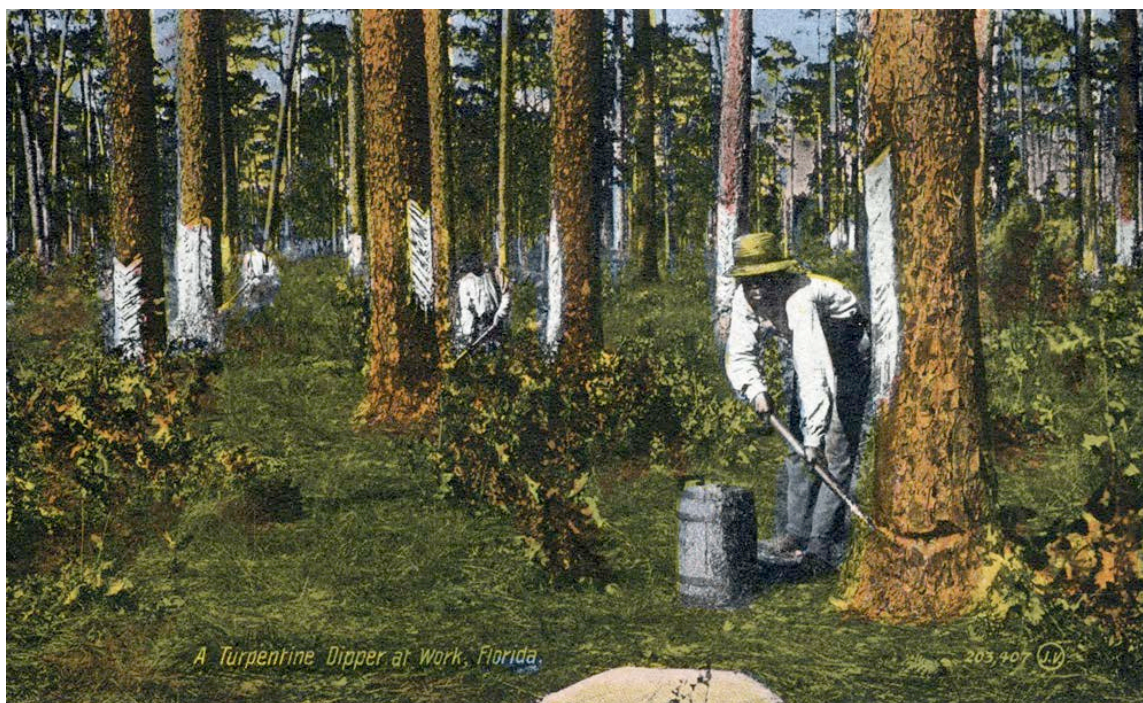
Rev. Black was raised at the Bee Ridge Camp. As dangerous as it was to work in the camps, there could be even more danger lurking in everyday social settings. His

mother always warned him to, “Stay in your color, stay in your place.” Just looking at a white woman in 1926, when he first came to Sarasota, could be deadly. “A black man couldn’t even look at a white lady. I’m telling the truth,” Rev. Black said.<sup>41</sup>

As Lahurd stated, “the ‘Roaring 20s’ [the same period that Rev. Black arrived] were among the hardest times for Sarasota’s African American community. The Ku Klux Klan was often a visible presence here, with cross burnings and other forms of intimidation, both physical and psychological.”<sup>42</sup>

Turpentine camps were “part of an industry that moved southward from Georgia through Florida during the 19th and early 20th centuries. Gum resin was harvested from Florida’s pine forests and distilled into turpentine. The rosin residue was also of commercial value.

In the late 1930s, Berryman Thomas “B.T.” Longino Sr., and Luther Franklin “Luke” Grubbs opened a turpentine camp in the Bee Ridge area...The number of trees “boxed” determined a worker’s wages. To “box” a tree, a worker made a v-shaped cut in the tree, from which the gum would flow into a cup or a “box” cut into the base of the tree. Periodically a worker collected the accumulated gum in barrels and took it to the still for processing. There the “stiller” heated the gum in a large cooker and, when the sound was right, poured off the turpentine, leaving a residue of rosin. One and half barrels of turpentine and seven barrels of rosin were the yield from nine barrels of gum.”<sup>43</sup>



Source: SarasotaHistoryAlive.com. “Bee Ridge Turpentine Camp.”

Albert Jones was an African American woods rider, a supervisor [similar to the overseer position during slavery] of the turpentine camp workers. Jones “supervised the Sidell and Bee Ridge camps. T. W. Myers, another black woods rider, worked under

Jones at the Bee Ridge camp. A short distance to the west [of the camp], the Mount Moriah Baptist Church was school and social center as well as church.”<sup>44</sup>

Below are excerpts from an article written by Dan Hughes for the *Herald-Tribune* that detailed the history of Florida turpentine camps:

The use of slave labor expanded the naval stores [turpentine] industry throughout the south. Large areas in North Carolina, South Carolina, and Georgia were put into turpentine production. Next to cotton and rice, turpentine became one of the South’s greatest exports. Slaves were organized into small camps and assigned sections of trees to work. Once trees in the section had been worked and died, the trees were cut to board. This pattern continued until the Civil War, when abolition of slavery forced changes in the turpentine industry.

In the 1830s, the distillation process was improved and new products were developed. By the 1840s, the increased demand for naval stores in the United States made the process attractive to large southern plantation owners.

No longer forced to work, many former slaves practiced subsistence farming and took jobs in the turpentine camps to supplement their incomes. Over time, this lead [sic] to the development of African-American communities within the turpentine camps. Large camps could have as many as 100 workers. The workers and their families would live at, or near, a main camp.

In the 1900s, the average worker in the turpentine camps relied on the company for most of his goods and services. The camp provided small shacks or shanties for the workers and their families. In addition to housing, the worker was paid monthly. In the early 1900s, the average wage was based on the amount of trees worked. Workers could earn \$15-25 a month; however, in many camps the pay was often in the form of specie, scrip, or tokens usable in the company stores.

By 1910, there were five working turpentine camps in Manatee County (Sarasota County 1921). Near Fruitville was the Hall and Cheney Camp. The R.T. Hall & Company Prison Camp was near Sandy and the Williams Camp was near Venice. The Hall and Harrison Camp was west of Cow Pen Slough, and there was an unnamed camp in the present Carlton [Reserve] area. Of these five camps, three are known to have used convict labor in addition to their paid workforce to harvest gum.

In the 1920s, many of the turpentine camps were closing. The trees had been in production for ten years and the camps were being converted into timber mills. In 1923, the state prohibited the practice of leasing convict labor to private companies. This had a direct impact on at least three of the



camps in Sarasota County and raised the cost of production. In the 1930s, two new camps were created at Sidell and Bee Ridge. Both camps provided housing and a commissary for the workers and their families. By the 1940s, production was in decline and by 1951 both camps were closed.<sup>45</sup>

The camp at Sidell was established by B.T. Longino, Sr. on 12,000 acres of land on the Atlantic Coast Line Railroad about a mile south of State Road 72 (then it was called Sugar Bowl Road). “In addition to 30 houses for workers and the still, there was a cooper’s [barrel maker’s] shed, commissary, school and church. The Sarasota County Board of Public Instruction sent a teacher out to the school and [the woodsrider] Jones or his brother preached in the church.”<sup>46</sup>



B. T. LONGINO RELIVES TURPENTINE OPERATION

During that same time, Longino and Luke Grubbs established another camp at Bee Ridge located south of Clark Road and east of the Seaboard Air Line Railway. “Near the still were two to four room houses for the workers, a cooper’s shed and commissary.”<sup>47</sup> There was also a camp at Laurel, located between Sarasota and Venice that opened in the 1920s.<sup>48</sup>

Historian and retired State College of Florida Associate Dean, James Brown remembered that on Saturdays bus loads of workers from Johnson Camp (Celery Fields) and Laurel Camp (turpentine camp) would be driven into Newtown to shop for things that were not available at the camp commissary, and they would “promenade up and down Central Avenue, just walking, talking, and socializing.”<sup>49</sup> He offered additional comments about Johnson Camp during his interview with Vickie Oldham, August 24, 2015:

Well this is going on Fruitville Road, past the Interstate, where Ackerman

Park is now. There's still a settlement there and these people who lived there, African Americans, basically worked the Celery Fields. It was right there in the middle of the Celery Fields and it was called Johnson Camp. There were homes there, [and a] combination...restaurant and adult place for libations. But it didn't have the other kinds of things that they would need, so they would drive in [to Newtown to shop].

## The Juke Joint

On her research trips among African Americans in the South, made on behalf of the Works Progress Administration in the 1930s, Zora Neale Hurston “would go with her new acquaintances to a jook and drink, dance, and tell stories.”<sup>50</sup> “Charlie Pinkney’s ‘juke joint’ on Pinkney Avenue was available to transport residents to Sarasota for a Saturday afternoon to Sunday afternoon break from camp life. It was also the place for weekend recreation for some of Sarasota’s turpentine camp workers. According to Gorman, Zora Neale Hurston considered the jook joint to be an integral part of black culture. In her 1934 essay “Characteristics of Negro Expression,” Hurston stated that:

Jook is a word for a Negro pleasure house. It may mean a bawdy house. It may mean the house set apart on public works where the men and women dance, drink and gamble. Often, it is a combination of all these. The Negro ‘jooks,’ [are] primitive rural counterparts of resort night clubs, where turpentine workers take their evening relaxation deep in the pine forests.<sup>51</sup>

Gorman also writes that: “Similar to night clubs, jook joints acquired a particular flavor through their association with work camp culture in the South. The Federal Writers’ Project’s Florida state guide linked jook joints in Florida to Negro labor in turpentine camps in the north of the state.”<sup>52</sup>

Archaeologist Deborah Ziel excavated artifacts from a juke joint at the site of a former turpentine camp named Nalaka in Polk County. The camp closed in 1928. Ziel viewed the jook joint culture an act of resistance by African Americans. As she explained:

In the twentieth century, thousands of African Americans, especially those residing in the southern states, experienced a new frontier of enslavement and oppression, debt peonage. African Americans expressed their agency through engaging in leisure activities that asserted their resistance to this new form of slavery.<sup>53</sup> The term “agency” is often associated with freedom or resistance.<sup>54</sup>

“In the isolation of company camps such as Nalaka ... Leisure activities were enjoyed on weekend nights, especially upon receipt of a Saturday paycheck. African Americans stilled or [acquired] their moonshine and gathered ... to drink, gamble, court, and dance to the entertainment of ...blues artists [at what was commonly] referred to as a “jook” joint.”<sup>55</sup> “When the working class in Florida went jookin’ it submitted to no



authority other than its own. Interpersonal skirmishes aside, jookin' provided an antidote to daily life."<sup>56</sup>

## Domestic Work

Domestic work was not only for women. Employment records in the History Center Archives, designated as "colored help," provide this description of a male domestic worker:

One example is an African American workman named Joe Gilleson: Domestic work, cutting wood, cleaning lumber for new house (several days at this), cleaning speed boat, helping on Flying Fish, hoeing in fertilizer, cleaning carpets and rugs, helping on old Cadillac, unloading Phantom, cleaning eaves, troughs on Oaks and leaves off of roof, watering, raking, spraying, wheeling sand for chimney of new house... African American workers were given the menial tasks; they slept, ate and spent their non-working time in segregated quarters. They were referred to by the white staff as "colored work hands" and, by Mrs. [Bertha Honore] Palmer as "my Negroes." There is no indication that any possibility for advancement in wages or type of work existed. If, when they went into town on their nights off, there were any reports of carousing, they would be dismissed.<sup>57</sup>

For women, employment opportunities outside the home were limited in the early days of Newtown and Overtown. While some found work in the celery fields, vegetable farms and turpentine camps, larger numbers were domestic workers, performing jobs such as laundresses, child-caretakers and cooks. Their experiences were varied; several interviewees indicated that they actually had very good experiences and were treated well. Teaching was practically the only other occupation open to women.

### Alberta Brown<sup>58</sup>

... My sister [Viola Sanders] stopped working and she put me to work. She wanted me to cook. So I start the cooking and so that's how I got my jobs and everything that we had...I was already taking care of the little girl and my sister just stopped her job. And, in fact, she started to train me...I would help her with the food and everything. I would take the little girl out to different places and do things with her, and it was a good job and we had a good time. Just cooking and everything. That's how I learned to cook... my sister taught me...On Siesta Key. (*Alberta Brown's brother-in-law [Shelly Sanders] worked on Siesta Key*) He cleaned yards, cut trees down, he did all kinds of work for outside. He had so many families that he was taking care of on Siesta Key. So he did a whole lot of work out there. He did whatever they needed him to do...He would even plant a garden if they needed one.

*(Oldham: There were a lot of rattlesnakes out there and a lot of wild foliage. Talk about that.)*

Yes, well we had to be very careful and especially at night...Every night we had to come out there to get to our room. We had a room... onto the carport; you didn't go home...When you fixed dinner it was around seven o'clock... After you cook and cleaned up everything and put it back just like it was. Then you'd go into your room.

*(O: So...you would stay out there all week on Siesta Key?)*

Yes...weekends...we would like to go to church... So I stayed there for...a long time. Maybe seven or eight years.

*(O: ...What was that like taking care of the little girl?)*

Well, I take her to the beach. We go places...in the car, because I could drive and I could take her wherever I need to go. If she wants to go with me, fine. So it was just a nice job. Really it was. And I took care of her and she loved me, just so sweet. That whole family, though, was a beautiful family.

*(O: Did you become a part of the family?)*

I think so, because [if not,] I don't think they would have paid me the rest of my life.

*(Brown later worked for another family)*

I worked for a doctor and his wife. And they...had a son that was retarded. And I took care of him, even at my house...if they went out of town. And so, they got a divorce and they moved...After the divorce, she came back here...and she came by...to see me...I wasn't working. And she said, "How are you doing?" and I said, "Fine," and we were talking and she said, "Do you want a job?" And I said, "Yeah. I'm... ready to go back to work." And she said her cook had just died and she's looking for a cook. And now she said, "Oh Alberta," she said, "Please take the job"

Morton's that's where we got our groceries from...If I wanted them, I'd just go down there, say what I need, and they would deliver them. Or either I call. It's up to me whatever I did.

*(O: Did you have a car Alberta?)*

Yes, I did. It was just a regular car...I think it was a Ford...My husband had gotten a car for me.

### **Eddie L. Rainey**<sup>59</sup>

Most of the adult females worked in private homes and they took care of the kids. They did the diapers, they cleaned the house. Some of our women even mowed the yards. They would wash the windows; they did everything. And I knew it was a hard life, but it was their only means of survival. In some cases, maybe the man wasn't there, the husband was not there. Well, they were able to survive by taking the role of the husband and the wife by going to these maid jobs. They were cooks, they were— you name it; they were a little of everything. And they raised us in the afternoons.

...When I was a young man, [living in] what is now known as the 'black areas,'

there were two separate communities, and I'll give you the names of them. One was cited as being Overtown...And the reason was that area was so close to downtown. Main Street is where the jobs were. So a lot of blacks located right there on about 4<sup>th</sup> or 5<sup>th</sup> Street and you had a lot of little houses in there. Then they could walk to Main Street to get their jobs...And this area was called over town [eventually the name became 'Overtown']...Mostly the jobs were maids, butler, cooks, things of that nature.

### **Estella Thomas** <sup>60</sup>

Well my mother's family, they were what you would call migrant workers. They worked on farms, going different places working on farms and turpentine. So they migrated down in Myakka City. So that's where we were. And then from there we went to this place called Sidell...And then later my father passed away; my mother moved here to Sarasota. So that's how I got to Sarasota. I was thirteen... I started working when I was sixteen, I didn't go through high school. Things happened - between my mom and my sister coming along...I just got frustrated... I was out of school quite a bit because she [my mom] was working and then I would be out of school. Because back in that time, there wasn't day nurseries and kindergartens...like they have now... If some older person didn't take care of the babies...I had to stay home to care of them, two or three days out the week and I just couldn't get no education doing that. So I just said, "Well, I guess the best thing for me to do is go to work." I went to work at Morrison's Cafeteria. I was working in the kitchen...department [not cooking]. Veggies cleaning, getting the food ready for the cooks and then...take it out on the line. I would go in about ten and then get off about 2:30... [then] I would go home and be there...pretty simple.

*(O: What sort of other jobs did you do...?)*

I worked in the laundry and dry cleaner. That's when we started the business because he was in concrete...and I was in the laundry.

It was on Washington Boulevard...that one...Bayview Laundry Cleaners. That's where I started. Then went from there to the one on Main Street...washing, and drying, and folding. And they did...dry cleaning.

*(O: Did you do some ironing?)*

No I did the folding...Two of us would fold the sheets. That's what I was doing.

*(O: Tell us about how you met your husband.)*

My first husband? Well we grew up together out here in this place where I told you, Sidell. About 50 miles from here...we all was a family out there, maybe twenty houses... That was a turpentine [camp]. My father had a stroke working out there in the turpentine.

...You know the pine straw that's around the trees? The women would rake around the trees, then the men would come along and cut the pine. And they put a bucket down there and the resin would come down there. And that's what made the turpentine.

*(O: You didn't work in the turpentine camp though?)*

Oh no. I was too young for that. [But] I remembered.

## ENTREPRENEURS

Both women and men demonstrated creativity in finding ways to provide for their families. When they saw an unfulfilled need for services, they started businesses, inside and outside the home. Since Jim Crow laws were in full effect in this southern city, African American residents were prevented from obtaining basic services and were often treated as second-class citizens. One interviewee told the heartbreaking story of his most embarrassing moment in life. He was in downtown Sarasota and wet himself because there was no restroom that he was allowed to use. The only restroom for “colored” people was located at the distant railroad station.

Overtown residents had some African American entrepreneurs, but they also had access to downtown stores, which lessened the need for some them to provide their own goods and services. According to most of the interviewees, they had little problem being served at department stores such as J.C. Penney, McCrory’s, and Sears and Roebuck, but were often not welcome in other stores unless they were doing errands for their bosses.

Becoming an entrepreneur in Newtown was a matter of survival because of the distance from downtown. Residents created a practically self-sustained community that had all of the services they needed to live their lives without having to subject themselves to degrading and unsanitary “colored-only” facilities, if those were provided at all, and receiving service only at the back doors of white-owned establishments.

At one time, Newtown had a vibrant business district, from the 1940s to the 1970s, which many people recalled during their interviews. The list below includes the businesses, in both Overtown and Newtown, that were mentioned during oral history interviews and in the book written by Annie M. McElroy, But Your World and My World: The Struggle for Survival, A Partial History of Blacks in Sarasota County 1884-1986. This book contains a wealth of information about the communities of Overtown and Newtown during that time period.

## BUSINESSES

Locations: (O) = Overtown (N) = Newtown

- Ace Theater (O)
- Airdome Theater – 1376 5<sup>th</sup> St. (O)
- Hudson Essex Showroom (many old time residents remember this place as a movie house where one could see movies for 10 cents.) – 1419 Fifth Street (O)
- New West Florida Ice Company Ice House – Central Avenue. (O)
- Neil Humphrey’s Sundries (N)
- Colson Hotel (later named Palms Hotel) (O)

## Rooming/Guest Houses and Motels

- Edith Olave Major (O) then moved to (N)
- Elmo Newton (O) then moved to (N)

- Chicago Flats – 256 W. 6th St. (run by Sarah Robinson)
- Mary Emma Jones (Barbeque, Cab Stand, Guest House) (N)
- Annie Carmichael (O) then moved to Church Street (N)

### **Barber Shops, Beauty Salons (also located in homes and on porches)**

- Budd's Barber Shop (N)
- Timmon's Barber Shop (N)
- Jetson's Creative Trend (Barber Shop and Salon) (N)
- Jones Beauty Parlor (N)
- Josephine Green Beauty Parlor (N)
- Dorothy and Florence Thomas (O)

### **Builders, Contractors, Plumbers, Electricians**

- Charlie Jones, Sr. (N)
- J.E. Rainey (N)
- James W. King (N)
- John H. Floyd (N)
- Tom DeLaughter (N)
- Calvin Bryant (N)

### **Farming Contractors**

- Elmo Newton (first to contract celery in the county) (N)
- Johnny Newton (N)
- Eddie Williams (N)
- Nathan Coons (N)
- Abe Jones (N)
- Mack James (N)
- Edward "Grand Pa" Gordon (N)
- Wade Thomas (N)

### **Corner food stands; Grocery stores**

- Moore's (N)
- Cann's (John Major's) (N)
- Jenkins' (N)
- Orange Avenue (N)
- Carner's (at the corner of MLK and Pershing Avenue) (N)
- Eurkhart's (N)
- Britt's (N)
- Mays Family (O)
- Henry and Birdie Solomon's (N)

- Ella Garrett's (N)
- O'Neil's Pool Hall (N)
- Brockston's (N)
- Eddie's Fruit Stand (N)
- Josie's (N)
- Wright Bush merchandise and grocery (O)
- Fish sold from home of Katie Frazier (N)
- Helen Payne Day Nursery (formerly Newtown Day Nursery) - renamed for white benefactor Helen Payne (N)
- Lenora "Madame" Brooks, midwife (delivery room set up in her home) and day care (N)

### **Pressing Clubs and Dry Cleaners**

- James Major – Osprey Avenue (N)
- Walter Percy, Sr. – Osprey Avenue (N)
- Joe Jackson & Plezzie Davis (N)
- Frank Davis and Ed Payne – 33<sup>rd</sup> Street (N)
- Royal Palm 12<sup>th</sup> Street (O)
- Red Light Pressing Club (O)

### **Restaurants, Entertainment**

- Luella O'Neil Restaurant (N)
- Mary Emma Jones Barbecue Stand (N)
- J&L Bar-B-Que (N)
- Lunchrooms
- Manhattan restaurant and bar/lounge on Central Avenue – Johnny "Buddy" Abnar (Father of Booker High School Principal Dr. Rachel Shelley, among first African American lifeguards at "the Rec") (O)
- Bill Bryant – Hatter – Osprey Avenue
- Town Hall Restaurant (owned by Louis Robison's mother) (N)
- Sam "Major" Brook's Cigar Factory (N)
- John "Buck" O'Neil – poolroom and recreational activities – baseball team 'hang-out' (N)
- Clyburn's Bar (O)
- Miss Suzy's Social Club (N)
- Savoy bar and hotel – Central Avenue, Early 1950s
- Twelfth Street Pool Room (O)
- Bamboo Club (N)
- Danceland (N)
- Capricorn Lounge II (O)
- Savoy Lounge (O)
- Gaslight Lounge (white-owned, 3<sup>rd</sup> Street)



### **Taxicab Companies** (1908-1985)<sup>61</sup>

- Seniors Cabs: Herbert Seniors and Jimmie Howard (N)
- Elam Cabs: Arthur and Richard Elam (O)
- Texas Cabs: Luther Aldridge (O)
- Brantley Cabs: Arthur Brantley (N)
- Cooper Cabs: Isaac Cooper (N)
- Jones Cabs: Jack and Mary Emma Jones (N)
- Huffman Cabs: John, Willie “Bo” and Nathaniel Huffman (N)
- Black Hawk Cabs: Frank Woodard (N)
- Thomas Cabs: Wade Thomas, Sr. (N)
- Brown Cabs: Jack Brown (N)
- Johnson Cabs: James Johnson (N)

### **Newspapers**

- Bulletin (N)
- Tempo News (N)

### **Medical**

- Dentist - Dr. Charles McAllister (N)
- Physician – Dr. Chenault (N)
- J.H. Floyd Nursing facility (18<sup>th</sup> Street) (N)

### **Gas Stations**

- Jenkins’ Service Station –The late Asa Jenkins’ “Union 76 Station.” (N)
- Johnny’s Auto Repair (N)
- Baker’s Gas Station (N)
- Suarez’s Gas Station and Post Office (N)

### **Funeral Homes**

- Stevens Funeral Home (N)
- Holton’s Funeral Home (O)
- Jones Funeral Home (N)

## Additional Businesses

- Cleaning businesses (Various office buildings, Van Sky building, Terrace Hotel, Ritz Theater, private homes) (O)
- Sewage Removal: Mr. Ledbetter (N)
- Garbage Disposal: Jack “Deacon” Harris (N)
- Mr. Joe’s Bike Shop (N)
- Malcom’s Seamstress Shop (Fannie McDugle’s mother) (O)

There were many reasons that people became business owners. A few of them tell us their stories:

### **Estella Thomas (T) and Dr. Harriet Moore (M)** <sup>62</sup>

*(Oldham: What made you think to start a business?)*

T: Because I just realized I wasn’t getting anywhere. You know, I didn’t have the education that I should’ve had, but I just was gonna try the business.

[My husband and I] talked about it and we got a bank loan...So then we started the business...Well the first one, we weren’t there very long. Eddie’s Fruit Stand. Everybody knows about Eddie’s Fruit Stand. He came down one day and told me that we could rent his place because...he just wanted to go out of business...And we were there nine years in his place before we came, got the money, and remodeled...Moore’s Grocery...301 and 27<sup>th</sup> Street.

Wow, you name it we had it. We had all kind of fruits and vegetables, just everything...Fresh cheese, cracklings that you’d have to weigh, the two-for-a-penny cookies that you had – everything.

*(O: Did the community...have many choices of grocery stores?)*

T: No. Just a few because some of these stores that they have here, the Walmarts and all these Seven Elevens, they weren’t here during the time that I started out. So if they didn’t go to Publix, they would come to Moore’s...I had walk-ins everyday. Everyday I had people coming [to] Moore’s.

M: But before that, when they were renting Eddie’s Fruit Stand, there were a number of black businesses along the 27<sup>th</sup> Street corridor, which is now MLK. Besides Eddie’s Fruit Stand, which they took on, there was Cann’s Groceries, Jenkins’ Grocery, Budd’s Barbershop, Jim’s...bicycle shop. There was Orange Grocery – Ms. Helen and Lee Clark on Orange Avenue, and there was Mr. McAllister, which was a dentist, right in the plaza where Cann’s was. We had Carbo’s. And the Suarez’s – a gas station and the post office – They started the post office there.

M: The first store [that my parents started was] across the railroad track... one side was the store. The other side was a game room. And so when the kids would get off the school bus – I was real little, I was in pre-K or somewhere back there – [they] would...come in. We had a jukebox in there and they’d come in and shoot pool and play the music and then they’d go on home. And when we rented Eddie’s Fruit Stand, one side was a store and the other side was a little area where the kids would come in, and they’d play records after school when they’d get off the bus at Pershing and 27<sup>th</sup>. And they’d have pickles and pig feet and hot

sausages and hot dogs. Gloria used to have hot dogs for them... So I'd sneak out and go over to that side so I could see what the teenagers were doing. But I just thought that was really, really very unique. So when people see those things out there now, that's not new. That's something we had in this community because really we couldn't go to Publix and Winn-Dixie and all of that. We were not welcome in those places. So all of those businesses that were established on the corridor really, really sufficed for us... And then you have the businesses [in] Overtown too... Orange Grocery was [in] Overtown... where the movie theatre used to be, and the bar - Gaslight Lounge.

And so it was a flourishing community that was truly a community. That's what I grew up in...

*(O: ...Did you travel to Tampa with your husband to get the fresh fruits and vegetables?)*

T: No. But then after a while, I was going over by myself. Three o'clock in the morning picking up the fruits and the vegetables, and then we'd go over to the Payless Grocery and pick up the groceries. The dry goods. So you'd make several different stops on the way. But then you gotta come back and unload everything, and price everything, and put it on the shelves. It was a long day... different ones would come by and help you know. My mother, she would help, and my sister. They were there all the time.

*(O: why [did you sell] the business?)*

T: Well my husband I divorced so the business went to me because she [Harriet] was in school at the time. She was in college. So my attorney gave me the business... I was there a long time. I didn't sell it until '87... It was getting too hard for me. I just got tired 'cause that was a seven-day-a-week thing... tired... I was getting older. From... 6:00 am to 11:00 pm, seven days a week.

M: Except on Sundays it was ten. We closed at ten on Sundays I think. That was the earliest.

### **Rev. Jerome Dupree** <sup>63</sup>

...My wife... used to run a fishing market for her dad. And she knows all about how to clean fish, and how to cut it, and filet it, and whatnot... I think, she was in her early teens when she worked in the fish market. Her daddy would have her [work there], 'cause she could count. She was always able to count quickly. But her daddy would let her do all of the selling of the fish, because by the time the people finished picking out the fish that she had, she already had figured it up in her mind how much it costs. She has a good mind for figures, for counting and whatnot... The fish market was right there on the northeast corner of Central Avenue and 6<sup>th</sup> Street. It's not 6<sup>th</sup> Street anymore; it's called the Boulevard of the Arts. So it's a little building right on that corner there. I don't think anything is in it right now, but it's right on the northeast corner. So that was where they had their fish market.

### **Carolyn Mason** <sup>64</sup>

My grandfather was a barber, had a barbershop on Central Avenue, and everybody knew everybody.

### Verna Hall <sup>65</sup>

There were two grocery stores in this area. One was Wynn's Store on the corner of Links and then 27<sup>th</sup> St. There was a Perry's Store on the end of Osprey, the east side of the street. And there was a pool hall on the right side of the street, owned by Mr. and Mrs. O'Neil, Buck O'Neil's parents. They lived on Links, just in the second block south of me.

### Jetson Grimes <sup>66</sup>

...My aunt, I lived with her, after eleven years old. So I was able to work with her when she went to work for a lot of the families. In fact, my aunt was one of my inspirations for what I do now. She was truly an entrepreneur. By working for a lot of the families here in Sarasota, she was able to start her own business. She started a cleaning business as she cleaned eight or nine businesses downtown during that period...She was truly an entrepreneur. She had a staff of people that worked for her and I was...working with her when I was twelve, thirteen years old. So that always was something in my history. I was able to see African Americans working for themselves. And it just kinda carried over to where I'm at now.

...I remember the Van Sky Building, that was a famous building...She cleaned the Terrace Hotel. She had a couple of insurance offices that she cleaned. She had a couple of restaurants during that period that she cleaned, and most of them are occupied by other businesses out there. They don't exist anymore. But that was during the early '50s when she had a business for cleaning the office complexes downtown...

My godmother was a midwife and my godmother raised me until I was eleven years old... But [she] was another entrepreneur...At that time midwives was the equivalent to a doctor in the African American community, because during that period, we didn't have the ability to go to... the Memorial Hospital or the white hospital at that particular time.

(O: How did she learn how to be a mid-wife?)

That's a good question. I don't know if she had a book or any kind of trainer or anything...She was a black Cuban. And she grew up in the community when she came to Sarasota. And her husband...both of them being from Cuba...He made cigars and he had a business right in...the same house where she was, and that like on 35<sup>th</sup> Street...And that's where I really [developed] a strong incentive for entrepreneurship in our community and in my rearing.

I know my ambition wasn't being a teacher. So I wanted to do something that was a little more independent of being in the classroom. So that's how I decided to become a barber. But to go back a little bit, I was able to go to one of the shops. In fact, Robert Boyd Thomas, one of my classmates, he had already went to school and came back. I remember asking him how much money he made a week. And he told me, "I made \$50." So I thought that was a lot of money 'cause I had a

job making \$35 a week. So that's what really kinda motivated me to say, "Okay maybe this is what I really like to do." So that's...the direction I went, to barber school. And I came back and I worked for Timmon's Barbershop right across the street there for three years. And then I moved down to Budd, and I stayed there for sixteen years. And after that, I opened my own business and I've been here 37 years now.

### **Ed James, II** <sup>67</sup>

My grandparents, had several businesses. They had a restaurant. They had a taxi service. They became entrepreneurs, after early years in their lives as domestic workers. [They] owned the first telephone in the black community and it was in their business... My grandparents also ran a Western Union substation ...a regular Western Union office. And during those early years, there was a lack of paved streets and addresses...When a telegram would come for someone in the community, it would usually be addressed to [X] Newtown. And my grandparents knew almost if not everybody in the community. Sometimes in those early days when people whose families were in other states and other cities, and there was a death in the family or emergency and they were trying to reach somebody, they knew the family was a black family. And if they knew the relative lived in Sarasota, sometime they would call the Sarasota Sheriff's Office. The Sheriff's Office at the time was located in the original county office building on Ringling and Bird. And they would send an officer out to my grandparents' restaurant and ask them. They would say "there's a family called the [Name]. They live in Colorado and they have a daughter whose name is [X] who lives in Newtown and we have this phone number. It's very important that [X] call her mother or father in Colorado. Can you help us?" And they would say "sure, I know [Name]. I can tell you where she lives or we will get the number to her." They performed that kind of service. And every driver's license... renewed...for convenience you could come to my grandparents' restaurant and get your drivers license renewed.

### **Fannie McDugle** <sup>68</sup>

*Fannie knows a lot about the Newtown business sector; she owned a busy beauty parlor and probably heard lots "news" while the women got the hair done!*

Fifth Street, it had the Palms Hotel. You remember the Palm Hotel off of Fifth Street there, Overtown?

*(O: Was it Black owned?)*

Yeah. Frank Davis. Well, he didn't own it, but he rented it from some guy downtown and I can't remember his name either. But he was there for a long, long many years, Frank Davis was.

A little further from Bethlehem [Baptist Church] there was a fish market and what we call a neighborhood fish market; everybody bought their fish there. And then down from the fish market there was Savoy Bar, it was a big bar here in town. And everybody come from Tampa, St. Pete, Arcadia, Fort Myers to that bar. If you said,

Savoy Bar in Sarasota, Florida – Bill Johnson was there owner – everybody knew, out of town and in town.

Well, in the day...my parents made money. My mother, she was a seamstress, she had a dress shop. [In] Overtown, um-hm...

She would make clothes and she would make curtains and the bed spreads to match. And she made church robes...

*(O: What was the name of her shop?)*

Malcolm's. She was Brenda Malcolm. She named it Malcolm's Shop, Seamstress Shop.

*(O: What did your dad do?)*

My dad...worked at the hospital. Sarasota Memorial...He rolled these sick peoples in and out the operating room, to the recovering room.

...After I graduated, I thought I wanted to be a RN nurse. I went back to Atlanta, Georgia to...nursing school...And I got my RN license. I stayed with my aunt...there. In fact, all my family, practically, was there in Atlanta anyway. And after I got my degree, I came to Sarasota and I started to work. I think I worked out there in Wilhelm Nursing Home. I was a nurse there for a good, good while. Then I decided I wanted to be a cosmetologist.

*(O: So, you changed to be a hairstylist?)*

As a hairstylist, I had a friend and we always liked to do what one another do. And she was going to St. Pete...taking it up and I'd say, "Well, I think I'll take it up too." And they had a nurse's degree too... I think it was a cosmetology and the nursing. Those right together. So I went on over, she was there before I was. I think she was there maybe about three or four months...I think she was out like about three months before I got out. And then we decided we would come back to Sarasota and work. That's when I opened up my salon...My shop was Goodrich Avenue, where I'm at now.

*(O: Okay, so tell me about some of the ladies whose hair you did.)*

The whole community...They'd come down from Bradenton... and they'd come from Palmetto, Florida...which I think about ten or fifteen miles from here. And then...they came out of Rubonia, Florida. Rubonia and Bradenton, Palmetto, they sit right together. And they would drive, carpool...Maybe four or five would come in a car and get their hair did like on a Wednesday or Thursday. Weekend, I didn't have nothing but customers from Bradenton and Sarasota.

I just had one bowl and I had...you know the beauty mirrors, and the dressers where you keep your supplies and keep your working tools, and then you had a chair for your customer to sit down in. And you had a chair so when you got tired you could sit on a stool and still work and do hair. [Laughter]

*(O: I'm sure you had customers backed up.)*

I had them backed...sitting on the porch...sitting in the beauty shop. I think I had two big long sofas...And I had, you know how them old fashioned straight chairs? I had about five or six of those sitting around. [Laughter]

*(O: Tell me what you would do to black women's hair back then.)*

Well, back in the day we used the hot comb...the straightening comb. And you had some ...curling irons. They was hot! And you have a stove... for heating up your tools enough to work. So I would plug it in and I would shampoo the hair, then I'd



comb it out and kind of twist it up and put them under the dryer. Then we started doing the blow dryer, which was the hand dryer. You blow it and you press with the brush. Brush it out real good. And it's almost straight, because the heat from the hand dryer. And then after that, you had heat up your stove, you put your straightening combs in there and you press it [the hair]. You press it real had and it be looking like my now, like I'm wearing mine....Straight like yours too. But back in the day, most people, they wanted curl. They would get it curl all over and then you would comb out the curls and set finger waves. Finger waves was beautiful.

[Laughter]

*(O: You did finger waves?)*

I did finger waves, uh-huh. And I did the hair cutting back in the day.

Yeah, I had the whole community there. The school, Booker High School, all the community up in there. We had them all up past 27<sup>th</sup> Street. And we had what we call Newtown and Overtown...All those customers.

*(O: Who was your competition?)*

Well...back in the day, the beauty shop was in the houses, and we had a Dr. Margerie and Florence Fold, they had a beauty shop on they porch, Overtown. You remember that? And then it was another...I can't remember her name, but it was about two more—I would say...over there doing hair. And then Newtown, where I lived... Then Ms. Mary Emma Jones... she had beauty parlor, she had two operators.

Ms. Mary Emma Jones, you remember the taxi drivers? She owned three taxi drivers and she was famous in barbequing, remember? You use to call them "Two Jone Bone." [Laughter] They wouldn't give you but two bones or three bones for a barbecue sandwich. And we named them Two Bone Jone. [Laughter]. And she had a taxicab, I think she had two taxis of her own too... Well, we've had businesses all over town.

I can remember Can Major Grocery Store. I can remember the Mary Emma Jones Barbecue Stand. Then they had taxi stands...they had about four or five taxis on line...And...they had a dry cleaners there too.

*(O: I see. Do you remember Catherine and Herbert Jenkins' grocery store?)*

Oh yeah. That was one of the biggest, largest, nicest store out here in Newtown. And he had a truck, and all the older peoples who didn't have cars or didn't have a way to get around to shop... and we had a big grocery store called the...A&P. That was the, I would say, the closest store here in the black section. And I think they had Winn Dixie...right over town there by...the coffee-cigar shop over there.

*(O: So Jenkins had a big truck and he would—)*

...He would take the orders. They would call in and tell him what they want and he'd take orders. And then he would take the orders to them, from door to door, because the older people didn't have cars to get out to shop to buy their food.

*(O:... also I remember milk delivery.)*

Yeah. We call it the milk man. So nothing but milk, and it went from door to door. And then they had a ice company right there 12<sup>th</sup> Street. They had what you call ice truck. Peoples call in their orders, and if they didn't call in a order the driver would go from door to door. Didn't have a refrigerator. We had what you call ice boxes and you open that box and it had the big space like the freezer part up there. That's

where you would put that big block of ice and keep it. And you had what you call a ice pick and you pick that ice when you wanted to put it in a glass or make something cold. You take that ice pick and pick off as much ice as you wanted to. And sometime that block of ice would last you like about four or five days. If we didn't go in the refrigerator, keep opening the door, open it and open it up. And it kept all your food cold just like we're keeping it cold now. Um-hm, electricity.

**Mary Alice Simmons** Interview with Vickie Oldham (O) and Hope Black (B), August 31, 2015.

*(B: Did any women in your community back then work for white people.)*

Oh absolutely, sure a lot of them were maids, yes. The women were lined in white uniforms, catching that bus to go to work... Bus driver named Hank.

*(B: Sounds like the movie [The] Help.*

That's exactly what it was.

*(O: Where were they going?)*

All over Longboat, Siesta...[My mom,] she would take us to work and we would play while she's vacuuming and cleaning and all. And then we got to the age where we could help her clean and we did...We lived in the projects. Number ten, which fronts Orange Avenue. Every morning there was a city transit bus, I never forget, they were green and white, and the ladies would be lined up to catch that bus to go to work. All of them in white uniforms, so you knew where they were going to work...that's what they were doing, domestic work...Every morning, including Sundays, the buses were there...Mom was always at home. Sometimes dad worked three jobs, but he also had his shop. Always worked... he was a housing inspector one time for the city. My grandpa Mays worked for the city of Sarasota. He worked on the garbage truck for the city.

*People did what they had to do to survive in the early days of African American settlement in Sarasota. Their descendants can follow very different paths, such as **Fredd Atkins, three-time Mayor of Sarasota and a former Commissioner**, who told Vickie Oldham that, "My Aunt Ruby was a gambler, and she owned a restaurant and a juke joint."<sup>69</sup>*

**Dr. Louis Robison's**<sup>70</sup> family moved to Sarasota from Miami...

...and the circumstances that got us here were...that she wanted to open a restaurant here, which she did, at the corner of Pershing Avenue and 27<sup>th</sup> Street. ...I think it still is called...the Town Hall Restaurant. My mother owned that for a little while.

*(Oldham: Did she come here specifically as a restaurateur or did she have to do some work before she was able to set up a restaurant?)*

My mother was actually in food service in Miami and she worked at the Veterans' Hospital in Miami, Florida, in Coral Gables, but always wanted to be a restaurateur, wanted to own her own business. Actually, the way she found out about it was through some guys that used to come to Miami that were selling fish out of the back of a truck on the street. I don't know of the exact circumstances as

to how she met them, but there was a connection there and they told her about this business, or the opportunity. And we moved here in 1963 from inner city Miami to Sarasota, Florida.

*(O: What do you remember about this place? Can you compare it Miami?)*

Well there's little comparison because, as I said, I grew up inner city Miami, and I can remember Miami being pretty busy, pretty metropolitan even then. We would do things like go to the movies and go downtown. And I remember how I had a shoeshine box, and I used to shine shoes for some of the gentlemen in the downtown Miami area. Sarasota, I can remember living on Dixie Avenue when we got here...And Dixie was a dirt road...In fact, most of the streets in that area were dirt at the time.

*Dr. Robison attended Riverview High School during that first year of forced school desegregation. Many years later, Dr. Robison served as interim principal at Riverview High School for eighteen months.*

I can remember being the only black student in many of my classes at Riverview...And that was difficult, particularly during the first year of desegregation, because we knew, for the most part, that they didn't really want us out there. And we didn't really want to be there. So that made it difficult in a sense. I left there and went to Florida A&M.

*(O: ...I'm thinking about what it must have been like when you were named principal of that very school that you were a student at. That must have been amazing.)*

That was quite amazing actually...being named the interim principal at Riverview High School. The way that happened was that Kevin Flynn, the principal at the time, was retiring. And the superintendent of schools at the time was Wilma Hamilton...Wilma came to me and asked me if I would consider taking on the interim principalship at Riverview High School until they found a replacement. And I told her that I really wasn't interested, but because...she was the one asking I said, "Okay I'll do it. How long...?" She said, "Oh maybe only about six months." I said, "Okay." Well, six months ended up being eighteen months and I finally said to her, "Wilma you need to find somebody for this job because it's not something I want to get back into..." In the eighteen months that we were there, the staff was so accommodating and so open...This was the beginning of school grades coming out. School grades meaning schools were assigned A, B, C, Ds and Fs. And Riverview High School was a "C" school at the time... And in the eighteen months that I served as the interim principal, we moved that school – with the help of teachers, parents and students – from a "C" school to an "A" school...

*(O: ...You moved from school principal to administrator in Manatee County. [And now] You are retired... What are you encouraged by as you look at education today?)*

I'm encouraged that I heard the President say that we... do less testing. And I think a lot of teachers will be encouraged by that...I spent ten years in Manatee County. A portion of that time, [I] was the Director of Middle Schools and the

other portion, [I] was the Executive Director for School Improvement and Accountability...I was responsible for all the testing and assessment of all the students in Manatee County. So when we talk testing, I have a pretty good idea of the amount of testing being done, how it's being done and whether or not it needs to continue to go in that direction. What needs to happen is that we need to cut back...on the amount of testing. I think...that we've gone way too far overboard with the amount of testing that we're doing, and also some of the requirements that we're putting on teachers. That gets in the way of teaching.

### **Eddie L. Rainey** <sup>71</sup>

My grandfather, J.E. Rainey...was a homebuilder. He was a carpenter. He came in and purchased quite a bit of land in Sarasota and on that property he developed houses...He made a living building houses. Back in those days, they were wood houses. Predominately the homes were built all over what we call the Newtown area. Just across the street, he owned quite a bit of property over there. So that's where he built some homes and down through - Down Mango, I think it is. He owned property there. He built houses there. He built houses all around. And actually, back in those days...everything was wood... and he was an expert carpenter. I think it [carpentry] was something he picked up at an early age. To do things on his own. To build on his own. Because for the most part, he was a farmer. And so that was his trade. He just knew how to do things with wood.

*(O: ...What did he do to earn money to enable him to buy that land?)*

My grandfather owned quite a bit of property in Georgia, Ocilla, in that area. He sold that property and got a tidy sum. So he came to Sarasota and, long before there was a 301...he bought quite a bit of property on this side. And it was undeveloped, nothing but trees, squirrels, bears and etcetera. So he purchased quite a bit of property and from that point he began to build houses. He was just jack-of-all-trades; he could plum; he could [do] carpenter work; he could [do] electrical work, everything.

*(O: ...Did you help your dad at all?)*

Did I ever. Yeah. That's why I have the shoulders that I have, because back in those days, we couldn't go out and buy what you now call rafters. We had to saw our own. And you just put them on the horse and you just would saw them. Okay, just to the east of us, there was a railroad track. He purchased all of that land. And to the west of that it was...the Sarasota dump. That's where everyone would bring their garbage and just dump it there, not to be picked up, to lay there until it rot. And that's less than 150 yards away from here. On the other land...he built duplexes and homes and things. He purchased property over there on 301 and eventually sold it when I was just a teenager.

That's the area of the old Sarasota dump and it remained the area of the dump until they moved it down further to what is now Georgetown sub-division.

*(O: ...The dump was in the black community?)*

Oh yes. I think you gonna find that most communities, that's where most dumps gonna [be] located... near the black community. Because back in those days, nothing personal, but it was cheap land for the city.

In an interview with Robert Eckhart of the *Herald Tribune*, **James Brown** recalled that “Neil Humphrey's drug store [was] a community hub when he was a teenager. He ran a very neat place where you could buy your patented medicines, your sundries, your ice cream cones and what have you. Very polite, always presentable and well dressed, as all of the black merchants up and down MLK were. It was a gathering place, a central location.”<sup>72</sup>

*Newtown's entrepreneurs opened diverse types of businesses, all meeting the needs of the community whether clearing undeveloped land and building houses, running a grocery store with a game room on one side to attract young customers, a restaurant, a beauty salon, a barbershop, a Western Union substation and taxicab service. And a place was definitely needed to wind down, have a drink, and listen to some music after a long, hard day of work...a good juke joint!*

## OTHER WAYS OF MAKING A LIVING

The majority of Newtown and Overtown residents were not entrepreneurs; they worked for others. Some did both; they worked for someone else and had a small business of their own. A few found jobs in the African American business sector, but most worked for white Sarasotans, in their homes as domestic workers, outside their homes as groundskeepers or drivers, as general laborers or in other commercial businesses. For example, they worked with contractors who helped build the city's infrastructure – the homes, buildings, roads, highways, railroads, and bridges; a few worked for the US government. Some did difficult and sometimes dangerous labor in the turpentine fields and the Celery Fields located on the outskirts of Newtown. The African Americans who settled in Overtown and Newtown arrived possessing many skills, which made them capable of adapting to many different types of work. Here, they tell the stories of how they and their families found numerous ways of making a living.

### **Sarasota Mayor, Willie Charles Shaw** <sup>73</sup>

I'm Minister, Reverend, I am Commissioner - District One the City of Sarasota, and I'm presently the Mayor of the City of Sarasota.

My great-grandfather and his brothers were railroad men and they came through here about 1903, bringing the Seaboard Railroad in here. They were Gandy dancers... the people who built the tracks, laid the tracks...

I'm born in Black Bottom. I'm raised in Black Bottom. I'm raised here in Newtown...From what is today 32<sup>nd</sup> Street, right in front of Booker, is where I was born and raised.

Right after Gibbs [now St. Petersburg College], I joined the Air Force, on August the 24<sup>th</sup> 1967...My dad was a veteran, family members had been veterans, served the country, and I, too, wanted to serve. I volunteered.

I came into the US Postal Service coming back from the military. I was at the hospital first, and then I came back into the hospital where I left while I attended J.C. [Junior College, Gibbs in St. Petersburg]. I was a carrier for eighteen years or more. I'm a "T6"; I had five different routes that I carried...While in the postal service, I was a steward, chief steward, vice president and president of the local branch of the NALC [National Association of Letter Carriers]. But I followed people like Jerome Stephens, who was the first black hired in the postal service here in Sarasota. Joe McKenzie, Jean Underwoods, Mr. Eddie Rainey...Glen Pinkston. I followed a series of very, very strong black men at that time.

### **Prevell Barber** <sup>74</sup>

Well my uncle was running the grocery store and I would come during the summer [from my home in Georgia] and spend the time there.

*(Oldham: Did you make any money from the Carner grocery store too?)*

No, I that was my uncle's store. I just worked there—I got my food from there. ... we had the meat counter and all kinds of canned goods.

*(O: And cookies.)*



Oh, and cookies... up near the front. That's what I first started selling, cookies [for]... one cent, a penny.

*(O: Okay now tell me the story that you shared about those cookies being your favorite kind of cookie...)*

... Oatmeal cookies. And, finally, I ate more than I sold. [Carner's] was at the corner of MLK and Persian Avenue. We had the sub-post office... a part of the grocery store...

*(O: ...working at the grocery store, did you meet a man and marry him and have any kids or what?)*

Well, eventually I did... He came in to get his mail and he kept coming back. [Laughter]... When my husband was living, he was a chef cook. So I had plenty good food. Last job he had was at Bradenton Country Club. I didn't come here full-time until after I had finished high school. I came and worked for a while and then I went to college... Florida A & M... I majored in Elementary Education and minored in History.... At that time, [teaching] was the only thing that the black girls could do, other than working in somebody's house. I did two years and I taught a little while, and then I went back to get the other two years. I taught in a little county called Archer, Florida, but I didn't stay there long... I was hired as a second grade teacher there, and only had two years [of college].... Later on, I went and got my Master's... at the University of Chicago...

... My first job was at Booker Elementary [teaching] Second grade.

Well at first it was kinda hard because everything you got to work with, you had to buy. I bought the chalk to write on the board, all the construction paper... The county was supposed to do that, but at that time they didn't.

*(O: Why?)*

Well we was supposed to collect... \$3 from each student to help buy the supplies. And ... out of thirty... children, you might have three children that paid their \$3. They couldn't afford it...

I just enjoyed the children... only black. And at that time the parents would work here part of the season, and then they would go away and come back.

Celery was prevalent then. The parents worked in the celery and then they'd go somewhere else, do other kind of work, and then they'd come back.

You'd always have some [students] because some parents never left. We started at 7:30 and went to 4:00. It was a long day. I was twenty something.

*(O: How much money did you make as a teacher? Do you remember?)*

Oh my first paycheck... wasn't \$100. It looked like it was \$80 something.

*(O: ... So how long did you stay at the University of Chicago?)*

Well... I'd teach in the winter and go [to Chicago] in the summer.

It took me about six years [to finish], just going in the summer...

*(O: ... With your Master's degree, what kind of job did you come back to Sarasota to get?)*

Well, I developed a reading program for Booker schools... I had a lot of help from the teachers working with me...

*(O: ... Now from Booker school where did you go to teach?)*

I went to Fruitvale.

*(O: You were working with white students now. Were there any differences?)*

Well some of them, they didn't know how to take me. And I had to warm up to the...they want to call me some names. I said, "We don't use that name."

(O: *Would it be the "N word"?*)

Yeah, Nigger.

(O: *Oh my goodness, little kids?*)

Yeah, that's what they heard at home.

(O: *How long did you stay there?*)

Seven or eight years...They transferred me to Tuttle Elementary...I had received my Master's degree and that meant the government was paying my salary.

So they put me with the very small children.

(O: *Did you make a little bit more money?*)

Sure.

### **Fannie McDugle** <sup>75</sup>

One uncle was a chef cook in the...Jones Golf course....And the other uncle was a chef cook... in Bradenton, Florida...I think it was a Marriott hotel where he was chef cook at.

### **Wendell Patrick Carter** <sup>76</sup>

(*Oldham: ...I remember in your family was Solomon's grocery store. I remember just going there and getting snacks and two-for-a-penny cookies and little candy and everything. I don't know that people will realize that this was in your family, this store.*)

Well, yes. It was actually Henry Solomon, which is actually my grandmother's uncle. But he was the proprietor of the place. And by the time I came along in the '60s though, I think he died thereabouts, right when I was born. So, I don't really remember him. But I remember "Birdie,"...Ms. Solomon, which is what a lot of ... people call her.

My mother taught school and she also worked for HRS...Children's Services at that time...She was a high school teacher...then elementary...She retired [as a] sixth grade teacher.

My grandfather...that man was a jack-of-trades. He was the guy that people would call ten o'clock at night, and if they had an issue with their plumbing, he would get up out of his bed and go and help them. He was a very generous, very patient, very kind man. I could always think about all the times he would go and do that and never complain, not one time. My grandmother, what I do recall, she worked for some of the people out on the beach, so like she was their maid or something along that line.

(O: *Who were your greatest influences?*)

I would actually have to say my grandparents. Taking me in as a baby and raising [me]. Obviously my mother was in my life, but the majority of it was my grandparents... their influence on me and the stuff they instilled, as far as I could be anything I wanted to be if I put my mind to it... You know, living in Newtown, you're really kind of around blacks, but they also instilled in me...life skills.

When you're in the job or the workforce, you might have a peer, but if he's white, you're gonna have to be twice as good as he is in order to keep [your] job. ...I

wish they were lying, but all of those things were actually true. You know you had to be twice as good in order just to be recognized.

*(O: ... Was it your goal to go through athletics like you did and play for the NFL?... When did you really start pushing yourself athletically pushing your body, following the conditioning and lifting, starting along that road?)*

I believe it came along right about in high school where Coach John Sprig and Jim Moore...both...were pushing, instilling in us, "If you want to play on the next level, these are some of the things..." Matter of fact, we also had a coach...Bob Smithers, and he was really hard. And in retrospect, he just wanted me to be the best that I could be.

*(O: But it doesn't sound like, Patrick, that you really had aspirations on playing professional football in high school yet.)*

Oh no, no, no. Don't get me wrong...I wanted to play, but that was something that was instilled in me in at home. "... You may be able to play, but you can blow your knee out, and you want to make sure you have something to fall back on." And that was why obviously I did well enough in high school as well as in college to graduate. 'Cause...that was the big thing my grandmother made me promise before she died, that I graduated from college. She was like, "Well they getting that football out of you, you better get something out of them. So you promise me you gonna graduate." "Yes ma'am I will." And so...I was actually playing professional football, but I had to go back two off-seasons to finish, and I did. Unfortunately, I didn't play on any great [teams] – Well, my second year in the league I played for the – goes to show how old I am – the Los Angeles Rams. That was when the Rams were in LA, Los Angeles. But they've since moved to St. Louis. But my second year with them, we went to the NFC championship game. We lost to the '49ers. And that's the closest I ever been to the playoffs, to the Superbowl.

*(O: What was that like? I'm not ever gonna have that experience of playing under those big lights to all of those crowds and all of that...)*

Oh it was obviously a great feeling, especially if anyone plays football. Especially if you get to the professional level. I mean, everyone aspires to win a Superbowl. And obviously that was my closest moment I would have ever gotten to that opportunity ever happening.

*(O: What do you tell kids that you might talk to who look up to you and want to hear from you about the NFL? ...I know you've had some training summer camps for kids.)*

Well the biggest thing is, IF it happens. I tell them just like I spoke to you earlier, you have to have a "Plan B." There are a lot of guys that want to play on a professional level, but everyone doesn't get that opportunity. So you have to have a backup plan. And that's why...I always instill in the young kids... their academics are important... You have to at least get a high school diploma. College degree is also almost equivalent of a high school diploma in some aspects now.

*(O: ... You had some clinics here for little kids.)*

Mhm-hm that was while played...It was giving back...to the community. Stress getting education. I played for 10 [years] and then I coached another five, so it's 15 [years in the NFL].

**Helen Dixon**<sup>77</sup>

My father came to Sarasota [from Madison, Florida] in 1921 when he was seventeen years old.

*(Oldham: What did [he] do for work?)*

Well that I can remember, I was a little girl, he worked at Davis Lumber Company, and then...he was a chauffeur for John Ringling North...one of the sons of Henry North of the Museum. Before he went there, he worked at what they called "The Airbase," where we have the airport now. It was for the soldiers...And he was a supervisor there and several of the Afro-American men worked there at the time.

I can remember we only lived about five minutes from the school. And so, my daddy had decided to do a yard business. And he would get us up at five o'clock in the morning, especially myself because I was the youngest, and go mow yards before I went to school. And he would allow the teachers to let us come in fifteen minutes later so that we could come home and change clothes and get dressed for school. We made...money that morning doing yards and that was my money for school. And I remember us growing up, he said, "Well you need to have more than one profession. So always have two careers. So if they don't want you in one, you can do another." He said, "Always take the "T" off of "can't" and say "I can do better. I'm going to do better." He said, "You were born free." He said, "So you don't have to worry about anything else."

*Parents who were not too distant from the era of slavery, or who perhaps had once been enslaved themselves, had a sharp sense of what it meant to be free, and often reminded their children that this was one of THE most important things about their lives...they were born free, and they should always appreciate that fact. It meant they could do anything in the world with this freedom... taking the "T" off of "can't." That positive attitude helped them all to weather the storms of the segregated reality they faced daily...It gave them hope for a brighter future.*

And then he started doing more in his business. And he started doing more mechanical stuff. And then he started working at the Ace Theater and the Ritz Theater downtown. We would clean the Ritz Theater and we used to have so much fun because all the money that I would find, I could keep that. Anything else, I could turn in. But that was our little extra change for school. So then finally, when he went to talk to the manager, he had just got a brand new 1950 Chevrolet. I'll never forget this. The owner said he was going to be fired because his car was better than his. And that was back in the day, '49 and '50s, where you didn't have a good car. And then so he decided, "Well, if I'm gonna do all this, I'm gonna go into my own business." And that's when he decided to do his electrical and plumbing business.

*(O: What did your mom do?)*

My mother was a maid in different homes and she used to work for William's Stationary. I never forget. Downtown...I used to go with her into the house when she would cook and clean, take care of the children while they went to work. And

it was like, you were happy. You weren't sad because your parents was doing that, because they took you everywhere they went. And you met the little kids, just like they were like your sister or brother. And we really had fun; we didn't have sadness at that time because they took us around. We did everything with them.

[My grandmother], she rented to people in her house, because all the property where Salvation Army is now, my daddy owned all of that.

Well, it was called 921 – at their house, where they were living at that time – 921 Lemon Avenue. But he owned all the land over there and they used to call it “Charlie Jones Quarters.” And it went from Lemon Avenue almost to the corner of Cornway.

*(O: How did he get all of that?)*

Well see, when he came here in 1921, he lived with his great uncle. And his great uncle had the property. And my grandmother, who we call Grannie, she was the midwife. And so as time would grow, they would build more houses onto that property. And he must have had about five or six houses on that property. And so, he would eventually rent to a lot of people on that property. And that's why they call it “Charlie Jones Quarters,” because he had several duplexes and a big house and all of that. So after my grandmother passed, then the property went to him.

*(O: Okay and he sounds so entrepreneurial.)*

Oh yes definitely so. Because when he became Charlie Jones and Sons with his plumbing, electric business he only had a third grade education, but he could talk more than you business-wise. He couldn't even write his name. My second sister taught him how to write ‘Charlie Jones’... And the people would say, “Charlie, if you had an education I don't know what I could do with you.” Because he could count better in his head than you could on paper. And as I grew older, I was one of the ones that was teaching him and guiding him and driving, taking him around to do all the business. And he would say to me, “Go back and check your figures, I think you're wrong.” And sure enough, I be one or two... pennies off of what he would say. But he was so sharp, what we call at time “mother-wit.” And he knew just what to do. He could count up a figure quicker than you and add up a job and tell the people, “Well I want this and I want that.” He said, “My daughter's gonna take care of this and my daughter's gonna take care of that.” So he taught us how to be an entrepreneur at an early age.

*(O: Did he install the electrical and plumbing in houses in Newtown?)*

Yes, yes. He was the first licensed electrician and plumber with a dual license here in Sarasota. Because he couldn't read or write, they gave him an oral test. And they grandfathered him in with his license.

*(O: So I bet some of the residences that still stand today...probably...have his handy work in them.)*

Yes, yes. And some of them still owe me money from when they didn't pay at that particular time. But that was okay. Because at that time, people did things for somebody. If he would be at church and he'll get a call and say somebody need a plumbing...he would leave and change his clothes and go their house. And he was the type of person that whatever you needed, “I'm gonna be there.” And then he trained two of his sons to do the plumbing and the electrical work. So that's how

he got the name Charlie Jones and Sons. Because downtown at the bank, [the banker] says, "Charlie put it in your sons' name; you can get more money by having a family situation than just one person." And that's when he changed it to Charlie Jones and Sons.

*(O:... After he died there was a street named after him. Why and how did that come about?)*

Well in 1980...they declared January 22, which was his birthday, Charlie Jones Day. And they had a big party at Bobby Jones Golf Course for him and gave him the Keys to the City... So it was already [known] downtown what Charlie did. So in 1983, when he died, the family got together and made a plea to the city to put it on the docket that we could have the street named after him. So we had to go get names of the people on the street around town to sign a petition and they did. And when we went before the court, everybody downtown knew daddy...sheriff, the city manager, everybody knew him. And they said, "Oh yes, for Charlie? Oh yes we gonna give it." But it was honorary. They didn't do it through the post office so they had two names up there: Charlie Jones and 34<sup>th</sup> Street. So when you wrote mail, you had to put both addresses on there...it was there for over 23 years.

### **Nathaniel Harvey and son Leo** <sup>78</sup>

*(Nathaniel)* My mother didn't work, but my father worked on the farms. Celery farms...the Johnson Camp. I worked out on the farms, yes I did. I don't have many memories [as a kid] because I was married at sixteen, so I didn't have time to do nothing but go to work, take care of my family.

... The Johnson Camp...That's a place they had put farmers, or people to work on a farm. There was a two-house shack: kitchen and a gearing room...We had to be to work about six o'clock. We leave home around 5:30, 6:00. Time to get out is right as the sun come up. We worked from "can't to can't." I'll put it that way.

*(Leo):* From can't see to you can't see.

We had a school to go to...In Johnson Camp...There was a little church there. We'd go to school in the church building.

Later years I worked on the farm and back in them days you had to work because you made...ten cents an hour...A dollar a day. And you had to work the day to get it, too. You had to work them ten hours, ten cents an hour... You got paid once a week, on Friday... Bring it home give it momma.

*(Oldham: Now what was celery farming like? Describe how you did that. How did it grow?)*

... On top of the ground. And when it get ready to harvest, you had to do a thing called cutting it, put it in the packing house, wash it, pack it and ship it. It was quite a job. I just mostly done one job...work on the farm, to grow the celery. I didn't have anything to do with the packing of it. I just helped grow it... tend the fields, fertilize... spray and whatever you had to do it.

Most of it was it done in the summertime, both winter and summer...Working on the farm is hard. Back in the [time] when I was out there, mostly everything you done, you done by hand. You didn't have no equipment. But in later years, you begin to have more of things to work with.

*(O:...Were there any creatures, insects out there...?)*



You had to spray. We sprayed.

*(O: ...Do you remember what kind of insects? Were there snakes out there?)*

Oh yeah, rattle snakes... lot of rattlesnakes out there. When you cleared up a spot, rattlesnakes was bad. But we all was lucky. Nobody never got bit.

When I was on the tractor, I stayed on it till I got to where it was clear at...I just don't know how many I'd run over...On the tractor...

We'd socialize in the barn at noon time. We sit down and talk about different things like ordinary people do...on our lunch break. We only had thirty minutes to do that.

You brought your own food...Whatever my wife put in the bucket. [Laughter]

*(O: Did you do ever any other kind of work?)*

Oh Lord, yeah...I worked for Sarasota Concrete. I worked Intra-State Terrazzo. I worked for Culligan's...water, purified water, and all that soft stuff. My last job was a correctional officer.

*(O: Did your wife work?)*

Yes, she worked everyday...She was a maid...house work.

(Leo): She did work for different people, in different houses. She had certain people....The only one stretch...she had was Nickels and Ms. Wino. She worked for them for thirty something years.

### **Johnny Hunter**<sup>79</sup>

...My mother] came to Sarasota, Florida with her sister-in-law, the late Ruby Hunter. [After]..they moved here, they were doing domestic work at the Terrace Hotel at the time the Boston Red Sox were spring training here in Sarasota, Florida, and they lived in the Terrace Hotel.

...When I got out [of the Air Force ] - well first of all, I took the postal examination before I got out...a project called "Project Transition." ...it was on the Air Force Base there, MacDill in Tampa. So we would have classes on the base and then when we got ready to take the postal exam, we would go downtown to the post office in Tampa.. they had a great need for firemen. They had a great need for policemen. I almost considered being a policeman at that particular time, when I was 22 years old. And I decided, well, I didn't want to be a policeman and didn't want to be a fireman. So I was gonna work for the Post Office. But at the time, the only thing they could guarantee was during the Christmas holidays ...after the eight or nine days, they couldn't guarantee that they would give you anything. By this time, I was married and my wife had two kids prior to our marriage and she had twin children from me. So we facing four kids, myself and her and I didn't need a part-time job, I needed a full-time regular job...So I decided that [at] the Post Office I could never get a full-time regular job...

So...I went to Manatee Vo Tech. I wanted to be a plumber...So we went to Manatee Tech to be a plumber. That class was filled up. So I said, my friend and I Pete Gillman ...went to Manatee Tech to be auto mechanics. So we enrolled in that class there and finished the automotive class. And then I worked for the late Willie Williams. The Williams Shell Station was a Shell station where the Sunoco Station is at now. And I was his manager...He had three businesses at that time: he had the Shell station, [and] he was first black to have a car lot right downtown

on Ringling Boulevard next to what was called at that time Gulf Coast Auto Repair. Richmond Construction was the big construction company back then. And...his wife and them had a contract with Richmond Construction to clean up, to finish new houses to get them ready for occupancy. And so I told him if he gave me a raise I'd stay with him, if not I was gonna have to leave. So at the time he said he couldn't give me a raise, I said, "Well nice working for ya."

And at the time, Henry Jones [their mechanic] had passed away and I used to work at Asa's. My senior in high school...I was on the basketball team at Booker. And then I decided I didn't want to play basketball anymore. And so in twelfth grade I got a part-time job working after school, working at Asa's Service Station, Jenkins' Service Station...The late Asa Jenkins owned a service station called "Union 76 Station." The Jenkins family brother, Herbert Jenkins, they had the grocery store next door and...brother Lawrence was the butcher back there. And then they had the service station next door, and they had a garage, an auto repair garage that the late Henry Jones used to be back there.

So in 1973 the Post Office finally called me and offered me a full-time clerk job if I would move to Ft. Lauderdale because that was one of the areas I told them I would move. [My wife] asked me what did I want to do. I said, "The truth of the matter, I always wanted to be self-employed, ever since I was ten years old. I knew I wanted to be self-employed so I'm living my dream." And so I said, "No, I don't want to take it." I said, "If I ever wanted a government job, I could have stayed in the Air Force, 'cause that's the government." So I turned it down and she said, "Okay if you don't want to go, don't go." So I didn't... So I went on and... opened up that garage, it was called "Johnny's Auto Repair." And I had a towing service, 'cause Williams had two tow trucks at the time and he sold me one of the tow trucks. And I had a very good business at the time from '73 to '75. *(Oldham: Tell me about at what time did you have that brush with the law.)* This guy was a heroin dealer and he was telling about it and I told him, "No I don't want to do that man." I said, "They'll give you a hundred years for that." [Laughter]. So... he kept hanging around...As the scripture said, "Bad association corrupts good morals." If you hang around the kitchen long enough, you gonna start eating the food. So I shouldn't have...hung around the kitchen.

I had a small business loan through the SBA. It wasn't about for \$10,000. at that time. This was back in '73. And of course I was still legally married; I was separated, but was still legally married...So the guy told me that, because I was still legally married, my wife had to sign off on the deal. I said, "Well she not gonna sign off on the deal because we's legally married, but we separated and pending divorce" ...We ultimately did get a divorce. And so he say he couldn't help me. So I really got upset about that.

And then I thought about what the [drug dealer] guy had told me [about making fast money] and I went ahead. Now I was advised by several guys that said, "Man you too nice a guy, this is not for you." But I was looking at the opportunity to get

funding to expand my business because I was turned down, because of the fact that I was still legally married but separated. So that's how I got started with that. ...They didn't really catch me. They said that I sold drugs to an informant...They told me that what they wanted [to know] was where I was getting my supply of drugs from, and if I cooperated with them they would give me ten years. And I told them they had brought the weakest game to the strongest man. They said, "Well if you don't cooperate, we gonna give you 105 years." They gave me 105 years! They charged me with seven counts of possession and sales of heroin, which each one of those terms carries fifteen years and by me not cooperating ... I took it to trial and I lost the trial and they gave me seven, fifteen year sentences, running consecutive, which...totaled 105 years.

*(O: How long did you serve though?)*

Eight and a half years of that.... I got sentenced March 14<sup>th</sup>, 1975 to 105 years. I left and went to prison March 17<sup>th</sup>. It's ironic. I was honored this past March the 14<sup>th</sup> at Bishop Porter as one of the Hearts of Gold recipients. Forty years to that day. You know that was a very monumental thing there.

*(O: Well Johnny your story proves, though, that your past doesn't have to really dictate what your future is, because you went into the newspaper business after you got out. Talk about that transition.)*

...How I got in the newspaper business. When I was in prison I studied three things: I studied the Bible; I studied Psychology; and I studied the Law. Bishop Porter and I grew up as kids, neighbors. I've been knowing him since we was little boys. He was also a teacher's aide in Ms. Janie J. Poe [']s class when we were students. Although he's a grade ahead of me, he graduated in the Booker High School class of [19]65, I graduated in the Booker High School class of [19]66. So when he started his ministry, I remember him practicing right there at the corner [SR 301].

And so, it used to be a lady out of Jacksonville called "The First of Gospel" named the late Esther Banister. And so she used to bring a group of women into the prison system. I was at Florida State Prison. That's where your death row inmates are and the so-called hardcore criminals...They would come once a month and we would go to the gymnasium where they would conduct the religious services... guys would just come you know 'cause you gonna see some females. You don't see females. They didn't have women working prisons back hardly when I was there...

...My mother had me in church from the time I was a little boy until I was seventeen years old. I didn't miss no Bethlehem Church okay? [Laughter]. And so as a result of that, I told [God], I said, "If you give me knowledge, wisdom, and understanding and patience, as you gave King Solomon," I said, "I will serve you for the rest of my life." So that was my thing. And so when I went to prison, I stayed eight and a half years in there.

...When I was incarcerated, I used to write a column for the paper, "Behind Prison Walls." I wrote that monthly for the paper... Just talking about experiences...

You know what the average education or grade level was at the time when I was in prison? It was sixth grade. I'm talking about from '75 'til '83. We are the majority in prison, but we the minority in the state population...See, I finished high school. They thought I was a professor in prison. And everything I knew, I thought everybody knew it. You know, for me, it was just common. But it wasn't. They just had sixth grade education.

So when I got out, he [William Fred "Flick" Jackson] wanted me to come work for him... See Jackson started *Tempo*, I didn't...I contact [him] in August of '86. I said, "We need to talk." And I met him at Amlee Diner, which is where Subway now is at and Metro PCS, in that same building there on 301. I said, "Flick you've been trying to get me to come work for you." I said, "Let's talk. I'm ready to change careers." And we talked and we talked for about four hours and I shook his hand and I said, "I'm your man." We shook hands and then I started. So I closed up my garage business in August of '86, that was 29 years ago.

I sold ads first. I didn't do any writing at that time. I sold the advertising, he took care of the writing parts... and I was doing such a great job because whatever I commit to, imma be the best at what I do. See, I got a personal formula that you call "3 D's equal success: Desire, Determination, and Discipline." You'll be successful at anything you do...And then...Fredd Atkins recommended [me] and Kerry Kirschner appointed me to be on the Civil Service Board for the City of Sarasota. This was in September '90...Actually, Ed James and Charles Benton forced Jackson out of their paper and that's when he started this paper. See Jackson started *Tempo*, I didn't. So I got in the newspaper business and that's what I've been doing since I took it over in...September '90. Just last month was my 25<sup>th</sup> year of doing this. [*Tempo* Newspaper.]

### **Kelvin Lumpkin** <sup>80</sup>

(*Lumpkin*): My mother has been a nurse for most of her life, my dad owned a cleaning business and was a custodian at Sarasota High School. Both had to drop out of school at some point. Being the oldest, both were the oldest in their families, and had to drop out, support their siblings, help work for the family.

### **Wade Harvin** <sup>81</sup> (Part 1)

My mother went to work, began working with...a home laundromat, and she stayed with the home laundromat until such time as she was able to find other jobs. And from there she went to Ms. Bisbum...My mother worked for the week. And following that, she began working at another home laundromat and worked there until she was able to find more suitable...labor. And she continued there until, as best I can remember from that date and time.

[My] granddaddy lost all the money out there tryin' to keep the [black baseball] team going...He didn't have any money in the bank. But by the same token, it didn't stop him from doin' it. So folk look, they really watch the people who don't quit. I mean...it gets bad, but don't quit. There's just something about a

person who will do it in spite of, when others would quit. So...had that in me. Our family made us believe in ourselves. You...just try. And you never know what you can do until you try. And that was actually the truth.

I went to Florida Business and Vocational College...started a banking career...Having less [while growing up] made us more ambitious...and when my cousins and my aunts in Crescent City heard that I was branch manager of the seventh largest branch of 35, they couldn't-- some came here just to see it. Just, to see it. They said, "Well how'd you do that?" I said "I just tried. I just tried." And I tried to live a clean life. And that's...what did it.

There was a time when the four of us slept in the same bed. And I don't mind sayin' that because when that youngest brother who was at the foot of the bed, when he retired he was director of housing- West Palm Beach. That's one of the richest counties in the state. Well when he retired he had bought four houses and had a trailer that I used to love to go down to Okeechobee and fish and I could stay in his trailer. And everything was in that trailer. But he never, never thought that he couldn't do what he set out to do.

We lost my sister she was 23 years old. And, and, and each of us had pledged something to her. And my brother in Oakland was the worst student in our family. The worst. And he said I'm gonna get my doctorate degree. I'm gonna dedicate it to our sister. My brother...retired as principal of Oakland Middle School. He had a home in Oakland, he had money. He had four cars and a motorcycle. They wasn't exactly poor.

### **Wade Harvin**<sup>82</sup> (Part 2)

We would go North in the summer and work in the fields ... it was exciting and it's another instance that proves that God made the world large, but he also made it small. We stopped in a place called Milton, Pennsylvania. We picked beans, we picked tomatoes, and we picked potatoes. We came away with nice clothing for school, and so forth, that we bought. As soon as school was out, late May, we'd hop on the car and we'd head to Milton, Pennsylvania. [I was nine.] when coming from a poverty stricken background is you learn to work, parents teach you to work with your hands. And a lot of folk didn't believe the amount of bushels of beans that I could pick, bushels of tomatoes, bags of potatoes. The bags were always too heavy that we couldn't lift them so once we filled a bag, we waived to our dad and he'd come over and he'd stand them up, because you had to stand them up in a row. But it worked and there's nothing wrong with learning hard work.

I have never been out of a job since I've been old enough to work. I didn't ask Coast Federal for job, the president called me and offered the job to me. I didn't become office manager at the Rent-It-All, the owner called me and asked me would I consider it. I've worked at Sara- Bay Country Club and I had never cooked in my life, but my dad's philosophy was, "If another human being can do

it, you can do it, just tell him to show you what he wants done.” And I learned to do short orders. I learned how to do food decoration at the Sara Bay Country Club. And I didn’t know how good I had become at doing that—I’m not being boastful—I’m just saying how good God has been to me work-wise.

Being manager of the Longboat Key Club, black man, Longboat Key Club. They called me... “I understand that you can do food decoration.” I said, “Well, some.” He said, “Well, we have a lady here who have two hams and two turkeys. And she want them decorated and with a Christmas background, Christmas setting.” I said, “Okay, when would you like to have them done?” He said, “Well, when can you do them?” I said, “Wednesday.” I came by and it took me all of forty-five minutes and I’m embarrassed to tell you what he paid me [Laughter]. And I wish my daddy could have been there to see me receive that kind of money. Forty-five minutes of having fun and I enjoyed that... He offered me the job, the only reason I didn’t take it, it’s a job that’s a split shift. You have to work during the day and then parties at night you have to work. I said no, I want to be with my kids.

*(Oldham: So you’d go there for the summer at age nine and then come back to Sarasota to go to school, where you lived?)*

Delson’s Quarters.

*(O: ...How did you get to Coast Bank? I know that there probably were some [other] jobs.*

Yes, in between I was also the first black insurance salesman for Independent Life Insurance Company in this area. I didn’t ask them, they asked me. What I’m saying is things have just been as if God has set steps on a ladder. All I had to do was live it...

...One of the superintendents who had been on the ground for years and years and we knew him, he knew us... He knew everyone [in] Overtown. And he started telling folk that they were interested in me, and some of the people called me. Said well, “I understand that Mr. Ford worked for Independent. He’s been out here for years, he’s a good man. It’s a good company. You ought to consider them.” I was working, I was doing fine. But he came back with one of his guys and sat down and talked to me and told me what they could do; “You’re gonna be the first black.” And we thought about this a long time... I just said to myself, okay... The main thing you need to talk to me about it how much am I gonna make. And they told me what I can make and I said, “Well that sounds pretty good against what I’m making now.” But then when Bill Overton, the president of Coast Federal called me and offered me whatever my average sale had been for the last three years, he said, “I’ll start you at that.” And I was holding on to the chair just to keep from falling out of it, but I controlled myself long enough to say well, that sounds good, that sounds good. But I never make a decision without talking it over with my wife. And he said, “Okay, well talk to her and let me know. Can you let me know in the next couple days?” I’m saying, “Well I know now. But, yeah, a couple of days, I’ll reach a decision.” So I left and I stood up and jumped and clicked my heels together. I walked down Main Street. I walked all the way.

*(O:...the first African American bank manager?...Did customers come or did they stop?)*

...Some looked at me a little strange...I went through teller training and I went through saving counselor training and finally they said, "Okay let's try it." And they threw me out in the office by myself. And I wasn't really nervous about it because the first office was not that large. But when they put me in the fifth largest office out of thirty-seven, I said, "Lord this is for real. This is for real." ... I knew all the big accounts were not the same color as I. But I had one white came to me and said, "You know, they told me you were coming. Some folks had some thoughts about you coming over. You know what I told them Mr. Harvin? I said if they send him over to the fifth largest office of a billion-dollar corporation, he must know how to count" [Laughter]. And we laughed about that...and they told the staff that I had inherited, "If you ever say anything to make him feel in any way unease..." Because some had voiced opinions that, "we rarely keep the one that we have." And they said, "You don't have any choice in this matter. That's what the director of Coastal Federal had said, Wade Harvin is gonna be your next branch manager." And that was it.

I had my office audited once...over break, as scheduled. But this particular time, when you finished, the head of the auditing department always would come over in the office and sit down and talk to you...He said to me, "Harvin you know I haven't found a person that work for you that doesn't like you..." "But," he said, "I noticed something different..." He said, "You have withdrawal slips that's signed that's over \$400,000." I said, "Yes, I know." He said, "But you understand that they're signed?" I said, "Yes." Because a number of my folk would go to Europe in the summer...So what happens if your CD drops while you're there? Because if you don't tell me what to do with it, I assume that you want me to put it in a regular passbook until you come back. I can put it in a passbook without your authorization, but I can't move it into a CD, not that sizeable money. So they had left those signed withdrawal slips with me. And he said, "Now we know you don't think that way, but if you wanted to, you could walk away with close to half a million dollars." And when he said that I started laughing. He said, "Now I know you hadn't thought about that." He said, "Now let's tear those up. I trust you, but let's tear them up. So that if something happened, your mind went a little awry, we know nothing could happen to them." That's the kind of trust that they had in me and Mr. Overton never told me "No" about anything. And he would take me to lunch every now and then, so that folk would see. If he's eating lunch with the president, he must be all right. But that's kind of the relationship we had.

*(O: Let's talk about...Janie Poe Goodwin. You mentioned what a wonderful mathematician she was.)*

She's the best...I didn't really get the total picture of what she was doing until later but that's exactly what she was doing, getting me prepared not for business college, not for four-year college, she was getting me prepared for life. What people expect of you. And once a person recommends you or give that word about you or something, try to live up to that...she tried make me understand that



everything is important...when folk put their trust in you. I felt good the first three or four loans for homes that I got at that time, maybe \$70,000 or \$80,000. But I look at some [customers] who've sat at my desk and I said, "You know I never would have guessed that they would have trusted me." Because you have to tell me what your income is, and so you have to tell me a lot of things you normally wouldn't tell. But when I saw those people sitting at my desk, I said, "Lord they got my trust." I didn't discuss, and a lot of them thought I would discuss it, with [my wife] Carlene. And she said, "Don't ask me anything because he don't tell me anything..." So that's where I was and I thank God for the people who he sent in my office...even today we're still friends.

**Rev. Jerome Dupree<sup>83</sup> (Former Mayor of Sarasota) (Part 1)**

[When I was young], I worked in a barber shop [in St. Armand's Circle] keeping the floor clean after the owner cut the hair of people.... and we used to caddy, also, at the Bobby Jones Golf Course ...When I got out of school, I worked at the Ringling Museum...because they had a man, an architect who had been in the class of 1901 or something from Cornell. But he was to draw up a...plan of the whole Ringling Estate. He used to draw up a plan, and so my friend and I that graduated from school together, [D. C. Bird], who is now deceased...got a job out at the school doing measurements and what not. Measuring the buildings and bringing the measurements back to the Dean, that's what his name was.

And that man, he was a smoker. He ...would have a cigarette this long, the ash on the cigarette is from here to here...and he'd hold that cigarette in his mouth, and he'd be working. And I'd be looking for that ash to drop off. (Laughs) It wouldn't drop; I said, "My goodness," I said, "Mr. Dean, you need to get rid of your ash." "Hmm?" (Laughs) Then you'd put an ashtray in front of him and he'd put that little cigarette, and the ash falls in the tray... (Laughs) Oh boy. Yeah we've had some interesting times.

I worked at a place called Smacks. It was right there...Right there on Main Street and Osprey. What do you call that...Sun Trust. Yeah. It was right there over further from the road. Smacks, it was a place where people went to eat and whatnot, and when I first got out, I went there and the only job I could get was from five in the evening until twelve o'clock at night. I had to wash all the big pans, and pots, and all that stuff. I did that for a couple of weeks, and when the third week came I gave him my notice. (Laughs) I said, "This is my last week working," They said, "Yeah? Where are you going?" I said, "I don't know."

*(Wopinski: Anywhere but here?)*

Yeah. And so before that week was up, my friend D. C. Bird and his uncle said they had some work available for us out in Ringling. And so we went out to Ringling and got that job with the architect. It was easy. We could go at seven in the morning and we were off by three o'clock during the day, and we didn't have to work on Saturdays and Sundays. That was a peach of a job. (Laughs)

*(W: I read that you were a part of the Coastal Recovery...what was your inspiration to join that effort?)*

My motivation for joining Coastal Recovery is that I had just retired from the school system [Dupree was formerly principal of Booker High School], and I was counting on the retirement plan to be able to keep me in good shape. But when I looked at having to take care of my own life insurance, driving and car insurance, ... I looked at it and I said, "I can't make it on this money that I'm going to have coming in" ... It was about half as much as I had been getting when I was still in the school system. I said, "I've got to do something." So I knew the guy that was in charge of [Coastal Recovery], and one day I went to him and I said, "I need a job." He said, "You're joking." I said, "No, I'm serious. I need a job." He said, "Well, the only thing I have is a community outreach job where you would go out and you would show people different films and whatnot, showing them how to avoid becoming AIDS infected and that kind of thing. You would do that and, of course, you would work in the office." The office was right there on Central Avenue, right there near Fifth Street. You would work in the office because Coastal Recovery and First Step...working together on that. So some of the staff in that office from First Step, and the other staff was from Coastal Recovery. But we worked that, and we went all the way out Clark Road. Well actually, just about as far as the International Cemetery. I don't know if you've ever been out there, but we'd go out there. They had a boys' home out there. We would go out there and we would show them...those movies that we had so that they could have a good concept of how they could protect themselves. And so I enjoyed that... I worked at Coastal Recovery for two or three years, I think. After Coastal Recovery... I sought to get back into the school system. I couldn't get back into the school system at that time, so what I did, I just went ahead and did some substituting, working one-on-one, doing that kind of thing. Then the time came after I had been with Coastal Recovery... when I said, "You know, I think I'll run for public office." A young man, Reverend Eckles, that was at the church where he is now, [New Day Christian Church] had been here a pretty long time, and he was working on getting that place right over there, that they tore down, and building again right on Maple and Dr. Martin Luther King Way. He was working on getting that set up in such a way for retired people and that kind of thing. Just at that time, one of the two of us was going to run for office, and the Bishop called Reverend Eckles. I guess you know who had to take that up, and go ahead and follow through with it. So I did run for office.

... Let me give you the background, the one who had served in that office was Delores Dry. She had worked for thirty-some years with... Housing and Urban Development, HUD...and if you go over there on 17<sup>th</sup> street near where the United Postal Service is, you can go and look at one of the buildings and see her name on it. But she was only six months in office and she died...Reverend Eckles and I had worked with her, and since we had worked with her, we agreed that one of us would run for that seat. So when the Bishop called him to move, that left it to me. So I ran for the seat and I won. I won the race with 73% of the votes. I had said to God, "You know, I'll run for this office, but I'll tell ya, if I don't get at least half of the votes, I'm not going to accept it." So I got 73% of the votes, and I stayed in office until 1999. When I left office, I left as the Mayor of the city. And being the

Mayor of the city was an exciting thing to me. Because when I became a commissioner, I went to all of the departments within the city and asked the heads of those departments how they felt about the City of Sarasota, and how could we improve things, and that kind of thing. I got permission to talk with the heads of the department, and their employees and they told me how they felt. All that information was confidential, and it was for my use later on. So getting all that information, I put down about 89 things that I wanted to accomplish before I left office, and I think I accomplished all of them except about three.

*(W: Was there any particular one that you still wished that you could have gotten to?)*

There was a lot of flooding over around Children First, where Children First is located right there on Orange Avenue. There was a lot of flooding, so I told them they had to find out what was causing that flooding, and they did. They went and looked at some of those culverts and ditches, and they were just clogged with a bunch of junk and whatnot. They cleaned all that out, and they cleaned those ditches out, and the water could flow, and it really cut down. 'Cause people would try to go through water right there between Orange Avenue and 19<sup>th</sup> Street, and Orange Avenue and 12<sup>th</sup> Street, and that water rose high. They had to go very slowly, that water rose high. And if you had a low car, it would come into the car. So that was one of the things. Another thing was there on 18<sup>th</sup> Street where J.H. Floyd Nursing facility is, they had one of those culverts there, and they had no sidewalks. And yet, there was a store, Orange Avenue Grocery Store, where they had people in wheelchairs and in these little things they drive. Well, they always had to come down, but they would be along the side of the road and then there's a ditch right here. So I got the city to go ahead to put culverts in there, to cover that up, to put sidewalks there, and they did all of that. I had seven neighborhoods in District 1; I had seven different communities that I had to work with. I worked with all of them, and communities outside of the Newtown community as far as Land's End, which is the end of Longboat Key. I worked with those people out there, just working all over the city. I focused mainly with, we had a good deal of crime then, so I focused mainly on getting the city and the county of Sarasota to work together to get the problems of lighting dealt with. Because they were complaining about a lot of stores broken into and things of that sort. I said, "The reason they break into them is because you don't have any light there." At that time the city manager was Mr. Sollenberger, and I told him, "Let's go out in the evening. I just want you to see what it looks like." And he went out several times, and he said, "Man, it's dark out here!" I said, "Yes, is it that way in your neighborhood?" He said, "No, we've got lights in our neighborhood." I said, "Okay, that's my point exactly." So we worked on that, and we had lighting, a lot of lighting. But I looked at the lights the other night, and I said, "It looks like they've reduced the amount of lighting around the area." And yet, they complain about the activity that goes on, the drug dealing and things of that sort. But if they had more lighting, I sincerely believe that there would not have been crime, as much crime then, and I believe that is true now...All of those things were very important there at that time. That's something that I worked on basically as a city commissioner, vice mayor, and mayor. I worked on making communities,

developing friendship among the communities. All of the neighborhoods in the communities, all of the communities in the city or county, we worked on making them look at things together instead of looking at things separately. Looking at what their needs were as well as looking at what pluses that they had in terms of the things that they needed. The communities are still working together, and they're still coming together...

But there were times that some people would do things wrong. But when we took a look at it, we found out that it was maybe five or ten percent of the same people committing crimes over and over again. So when I got into another group...known as S.U.R.E., Sarasota United for Responsibility and Equity. We took a look at it and we worked with the police department. By agreeing to work with them... if we saw anything that looked like crime, we'd call it in, and that kind of thing. So we worked with the police department, we worked with the school system; we're still working with [both]. We work with a bus group, because we wanted to have not only buses running during the day, but we wanted to have buses running and to make them available to second and third shift workers who had to go out on the beaches, or had to go to someplace that operated until late at night. We worked on getting that, and we were successful in doing that.

#### **Jerome Dupree<sup>84</sup> (Part 2)**

*(Wopinski): In our last interview, you were telling me about fishing at the old Ringling Bridge; could you tell me a little bit more about that?)*

Oh yeah. That was one of the joys of our lives. Because...fishing at the old Ringling Bridge was not only a hobby... it was a means of making a living... We would get together and go down together, and we would see other people there fishing... A lot of people within our community depended on fishing for some of their meals. Many times we would go with friends of ours. I had very close friends...Walter Mays, Raymond Mays, and Daniel Mays... a big Mays family. And we used to hang out together a lot of times, especially when we wanted to go fishing. We were going fishing because we loved fishing, and we was going fishing because we were good at catching crabs, and scallops, and shrimp, and things of that sort...because that was a meal. But the thing about it is, when we came here in 1939, this was...very much a fishing area... Sarasota County's only, one hundred and some years old, and I've been here 73 of those hundred and some years. So it was more of a fishing area, and many people would do fishing, would go on Ringling Bridge...and catch fish. Some of them would sell it, and others would eat it (laughs). So that's what we did during that time.

#### **Fredd Atkins<sup>85</sup> (Three-time Mayor of Sarasota and Commissioner)**

...I was still going to Manatee Junior College. So Fred [Bacon] told me... this was like the summer of '79. He said, "Hey Fred! You get your degree from Manatee Junior College, we're gone have position for you." I said, "What kind of position?" He said, "Well, we putting together a grant for this counseling program, the Family Life Intervention Program." So I said, "Okay." So I went and finished my degree, and I joined the Union of Concerned Parents that January of 1980. Or was that January of 1979? One of them, because I know Ronald Reagan

fired all of us because Ronald Reagan got elected in—before he took office, the federal government cut all the programs: CETA, all the grants, everything. So I really just worked with them one year before I was fired by Ronald Reagan. That's one of my claims to fame.

...While I'm at the Union of Concerned Parents, this is the same time the lawsuit for the NAACP – the Jacksons, Sanders, James and who's the other person on that lawsuit? Rivers – They had filed a lawsuit in the name of the NAACP against the City of Sarasota for its method of at-large voting. While I'm at the Union for Concerned Parents, one of my jobs, other than counseling first offenders, was to do the legal research for the attorney, David Littman, out of Miami, to make sure that we got all of the information. So, I became ... decreed by the federal government ... an expert on the City of Sarasota's process. I was ... an expert witness, because I was the person that did all of the research on the microfiche and all the documents of the City of Sarasota history, from its beginning until 1979.

### **Shelia Cassandra Hammond Atkins** <sup>86</sup>

My mother and father lived in Alabama, and the Caples<sup>87</sup> ... was traveling North, and they stopped in this restaurant my mother worked in. And my mother was a great cook, so Mrs. Caples asked my mother if she would like to come to Florida and be her cook. And so that's the reason my parents moved to Florida at some time later. My dad, my mother — who were very stylish people — they didn't have a high school education, or even a middle school education. My dad, you know, back in the day, he didn't finish school, but my mother finished up to eighth grade. So, they both were domestic workers all their lives here in Sarasota.

When I was younger, I said I only would like to be a nurse or a teacher. I wanted to be a nurse at first, and I ... took some nursing classes, but I ended up teaching, because it gives me a sense of helping. I always knew I wanted to be a nurse or a teacher and so I am a teacher today ... I was an adult when I went off to college. Yeah, I had a child and I got married, and I started working in the school system and then I decided to go back to college.

...At Sarasota High, we was the first class that had nurses aid training at VoTech, which is now Polytech. So I worked in the hospital, in the nursing homes. I did that for a while until I started working for the school board, which I've been there for 40 years now. I like it, I do. It's almost near time for me to retire. I'll miss the children though, I will.

### **Eddie L. Rainey** <sup>88</sup>

We had guys working at the train station... At that time the train station was on Lemon Avenue. The trains, I think it was the Seaboard, directly in the middle of Lemon Avenue, North and South.

*(Oldham: Do you remember the circus and people working for the circus?)*

Of course I do. I remember that very, very well. Matter of fact, some of my friends worked on now what was called Ringling Circus and it was located over

on what is now Circus Avenue off Beneva. You had the training camp there. That's where they kept the animals.

*(O: What did your friends do with the circus?)*

... You take shovel and you follow the elephants [Laughter]. I mean what more can I say. I mean you feed them. Somebody's got to feed them. You feed the elephants and you cook. Back in those days, they had a train section, I think about eight or ten cars that they would travel [in] - porters and things like that. They were even feeding all the animals. Just the jobs that they could do. No lion tamers.

*(O: Okay did you know about anybody who worked for John Ringling?)*

Oh yes. We called him Toto. Let me see what was his real name? He took care of Gargantua. I knew quite a few. I know Haultan Banks. I knew Gable... I knew Suit Major - he stayed with the circus year in and year out... He traveled with us just like Snake Washington, back and forth. Suit, I mean all of these guys, there were about twenty or twenty-five of them... this was their permanent job. I mean they would come with a pocket full of money and go down and set the town up until it's time for them to go back on the train. And they would be gone like sometimes a year, six, seven months. There's one young man that's related to people here in the studio. We called him "Suit" because he made the statement that as long as he worked for the circus, he was gonna try to have as many suits as he could. So he had over 50 suits and shoes.

I came out [of the Army] and, after coming home... I accepted [track] meet jobs in Sarasota for a while, not for too long. But I began it in search of a teacher's job, which I did get up in Greenville, Florida, Madison County. It's been a long time. When I went there as coach, stayed up there a couple of years. And it was at that point that I realized, too, that the pay grade was very, very slim, very low. And later on I took the postal exam and went to the postal service... I went to visit a friend of mine in New York. And one day we were all out looking for work, we were looking for jobs. Went down on Fifth Avenue and I saw this sign, "Take the postal exam" And I did. I took it and I had the score transferred here. And I made a couple of calls first. They wrote me back and said I had passed the exam and that's how it all started.

"Rainey was a pioneer in being the first black employee to be promoted up through the area's postal service, serving as a station manager and an interim postmaster at various locations. He graduated from Florida A&M University at a time when many of his peers didn't have the means."<sup>89</sup>

### **Robert L. Taylor**<sup>90</sup>

[My mother] was pastry cook at a little café on Main, lower Main. Johnny's Cafeteria... I was groomed from the time I was six or seven, I was gonna be the first one that went to college in the family. So I didn't do anything really. Well a lot of time, while the kids out doing chores, I would be in there with my grandmother. She would be teaching me different things. And so I really lived the enchanted; I was really special to them. So all I had to do was make sure I got good grades from school... I was a salutatorian when I graduated from Booker

High...I got an academic scholarship to Morehouse and so that's how I went to Morehouse first, in the beginning. But I was only at Morehouse that time for the first semester. I didn't finish the first semester because, once I was drafted and was "1A," I knew it wouldn't be long before I go in the service. So I didn't go back.

*(Oldham: ...How did you make money in the early years, after you came back from the Army?)*

Well at first I didn't do any work at all because I was on the G.I. Bill and I went to college when I came back...I went back to Morehouse...

*(O: And then after graduating from Morehouse, did you come back to Sarasota?)*

Yes...By that time I had a young daughter, and I came back and...had to work. So I did whatever kind of work was available...I didn't start at the center. And, when I did start, it was part-time. It was supposed to be part-time, but it never was part-time because you had to do a lot of running around to get to the community, making contacts with the school and all them things.

*(O: You mean this Robert L. Taylor Center that's now named after you.)*

Yeah but it...was built for the USO, for the troops who were stationed in Sarasota. See where the airport is now, it was an airbase, and they had a lot of black soldiers there. And this building was built for their entertainment, so they would have a place to come for entertainment. The USO built it for them.

*(O: But tell me some more of those jobs that you had...working at the rec center with kids in the neighborhood. That was a part-time job. How did you make a living?)*

Anything that came along you did it...Well I had friends who worked at this Allied Furniture thing and they knew in the morning I didn't have anything to do. So if they had a job I could do in the morning, they would come get me and I would help them that way...I didn't do much mowing lawns, but I'd done construction, roofing...I had a job...cleaning sewers. Anything that you could come along to make money, you had to do it 'cause you had to feed your family. But even before that, my senior year [at Morehouse], I only needed one course to graduate and they didn't offer that until the second semester. So I stayed home in the first semester and I worked. The Florida Power Light ...built...a station there. And I worked there for that semester. And of course you would go down this ladder, because they had to build the story underground. When you build a building, not just up, you got to build the foundation. So that's what I was doing. So I spent the whole semester there. And I remember that job a lot because I laugh, looking back, how much they paid me. By the time they took out my social security and all that stuff, I had \$34.90 left for that week's work [Laughter]. But that \$34.95 is maybe ten times as much as it is now. You could go to the store with \$10 buy a whole big bag of groceries. Well now \$10 just will get you in the door...So...by today's standard, it was terrible. But by those standards there you could –

*(O: You could manage.)*

And so I worked there that summer and through that first semester and then I went back to Morehouse and finished. And I graduated in 1950...[with] a degree



in Business Administration and Economics, which I never used. It was my desire, when I first went to school, to be a CPA. I don't know why I chose that because I really wasn't into going to college when I graduated. I didn't know what I wanted to do. And I always wanted to be either a plumber or an electrician. That's what I wanted, but my parents had decided already what I was gonna do. And so anyway there wasn't no where to get a internship there anyway. Wasn't nowhere for me to learn to do it... But then, when I got my senior year, and I ran into business math, I know right then a CPA wasn't for me [Laughter]. That was the end of that. And so I was considering going back to school when the city manager called me, asked me would I try to start the recreation program here.

*(O: I remember when I was a kid, seeing the little children walk from the little Booker Elementary...they walked down, I guess it was 35<sup>th</sup>, to the swimming program. You're very proud of this [Robert Taylor] Center. Talk to us about how it's grown through the years when you were here.)*

Well we had the little building, the USO building. We had two employees - me and the janitor. There was nothing outside at all, no facilities...I want to talk about the superintendent we had at the time. He was a wonderful person. Because the thing was, the program is new and you and the program would go together...He was there for three years, and then he died. After he died, things went and changed. Because when he came, he told me when it come to building the pool he said, "You know anything about chemistry?" I said, "No." He said, "Well you got to learn because they gonna building a pool, a swimming pool." He said, "I don't know nothing about it." He said, "But I'm gonna take you somewhere where you can learn." So we went to Tampa, where they had a pool, and we learned.

...As a swimming pool operator, they taught everything because there's a lot of chlorine and everything to keep the water in balance...They had a guy who came from Brooksville in charge of swimming pools...down to Fort Myers. But he came in at an unexpected time; the water had to be completely balanced. He would check. I remember he came to Sarasota once and somebody gave him a speeding ticket or a parking ticket or something. And he went out to Lido and closed the pool up, at the time they were supposed to have a meet. And so they couldn't have the swim meet. They had to go somewhere else before they called the county up. And so they was really afraid of him. So anytime I needed something, [and] I knew he was coming, I got it. Because they were afraid not to give it to him. He told me, he said when he first met me, he said, "I know I got [a] bad reputation down here"...He said, "I'm the only one in that whole state who can close that pool when I get ready." He said, "But you do like I say do it." So he came one morning and it wasn't ready and he said, "How long will it take to get ready?" I said, "Maybe about forty minutes." And we sat there and talked until it got ready and he accepted it. But he wasn't so bad...he was really understanding. Well soon after the pool [was] built, that's when they tore those first buildings down, in '69]. In '60 the pool was built, in '69 they built the next building before they had this one. So that was the first time we had a full staff to work when they got the new building... I know we had two outside janitors and one inside. And

then...we had about eight or ten assistants within different fields - arts and crafts and different stuff.

*(O: ... What kind of programs did you see that were so beneficial to the neighborhood kids?)*

Well, this was the only game in town. So we had a captive audience really, because there's nowhere for them to go. Which proved good for discipline because kids don't never want to be sent home when all their friends are down here. So they always behaved. You could always use that over them. But once we got that new building, I was the only one maintaining the water in the pool and everything. But most of the time I was programming, especially in the summer we would have three different age groups and they have to have a separate program, separate staff for each age group. So I spent the whole time planning what the programming would be. So if a parent came... I knew what group he was with and I knew exactly where he was 'cause it was all a set program. And so once the summer was over, we go to the winter. And all during the winter I'm programming for the summer again. So it was continuing programming.

*(O: Very busy. Only game in town. Yes, I remember this is where the teens would hang out and have a lot of dances.)*

And all the schools would have their after-game dances here.

*(O: This was a hopping place. How did you keep it all together?)*

Well spending eighteen, twenty hours a day sometimes [Laughter]. If the pool went bad at night and I knew it had to be ready in the morning, I couldn't go to bed until that pool was up where I knew it was ready for inspecting. So sometimes I have slept in my car at the pool waiting on the water to get back up so it can be caught up to be ready and all of that. So a lot of long hours. And it's not good for a family when you got to spend so much time away from the family.

It was rough sometimes.

*(O: When you look at this building now, and you remember what it was when you first started, and you see your name on that plaque and all, what does that feel like?)*

Well you can't really describe the feeling. You know I was talking to one of the guys outside, he said, "What would have happened if we'd a had this when we were coming along?" I said, "Y'all probably would have tore it up" [Laughter]. ... We had a rough program. We had a rough crew.

*(O: I see, but yes, you were describing the feeling of pride, I suppose, in seeing what it has become now.)*

You know it means a lot to me, but I think it means even more to my family 'cause they really pushed for it more than I did. Because they were the ones who really – I wouldn't say suffered – but when you can't be home with the family and they got to go without, and they complain sometimes, "Well you spend more time with other people kids than you do with us." Well that was my job and it's not good for a family situation really. I wouldn't advise anyone in full-time recreation to even get married [Laughter].

*(O: ...I see but you're happily retired now. What kind of things do you do in your retirement?)*

Well I didn't really retire. I think after I retired here I said I was tired of kids. But then I spent three years with Helen Payne Day Care. I had a group of about three and a half to five year olds for three years. Then when I rode to Bradenton, I was with the PAL Program, after-school program.

*(O: So you just can't NOT work with kids?)*

Now I can [Laughter].

The Robert L Taylor Community Complex, formerly known as 'The Rec,' has been a community anchor for more than 60 years.<sup>91</sup>

**James (JB) and Yvonne Brown (YB)** <sup>92</sup>

*(YB):* Both of us worked at an early age. So I worked at what was then "Maas Brothers." it's now Macy's...And earlier when we were in high school, we also worked...

*(JB):* I don't have time to tell you all the jobs that I did out in the hot sun anytime, every time, to get to the college...Construction work for \$1.25 an hour, road construction, paving, laying pipe, digging with a shovel all day. These are things I did. Then I finally got sense enough to move inside now and wait on tables at Morrison's Cafeteria, and Driftwood, and M&M Cafeteria. I always worked. I would get home from school and the next day, if it wasn't Sunday, I was up on the corner trying to catch what you call 'a hustle.' Whoever comes by wanting to hire somebody for the day, I'm gone. Working my way through college.

**Jesse Johnson** <sup>93</sup>

*Jesse Johnson is a cement finisher, painter, carpenter who also installs tile flooring. He has worked in the industry for 52 years. As a foreman, he supervises and trains construction crews; and is outspoken about equitable pay for construction workers.*

The people in the city and job force thing...they decide that they gonna fix this thing 'cause the contractor can't bring nobody in there if they ain't come through that system. Everybody got to be signed up to be able to go to work out there.

And I like that.

*(Oldham: So they can't bring their own crews.)*

No ma'am.

*(O: And pay them low wages. They... have to go through that agency and pay them a specific amount.)*

Yes, ma'am 'cause see what we did before, the two phases that I worked on out there in the garden, we made \$250 a day. We poured four units [of cement] there...a day...The company that was in there...I think it was Baker...21 men working in there. And when he find out what we can do, [he decreased the workers] to nine people. He started to taking his mens off. You hear me? That's what he started doing. When he find out what we could do...he say, "I talked to one of the gentlemen." I said, "What he want us to do?" He said, "Y'all over the cement." And I said, "We over the cement? You ain't paying us but a \$150 a day. He got to come up with some more money if he want us to be over the cement." And I couldn't tell the people what I hired up, because they'll go back and tell the

man, and I wouldn't tell him...Next day, and I sent a message to them, the first truck come, we didn't pour. The second truck come, we didn't pour. The third truck out there, the operator said, "What y'all wanna do?" I said, "We just waiting." The fourth truck come, we didn't pour. The fifth truck came, we didn't pour. The sixth truck - there was seven trucks out there. The man that we worked for come across the road running. "Why y'all ain't pouring?" They said, "Mr. Johnson want to talk to you." "What do Mr. Johnson have to say?" I said. "Yesterday, we have poured all this cement and ain't got nothing but \$150, and we won't pour no more cement for no \$150. I said we decided with the mens; all us sit there and talk. I told them that we could [get paid] \$250. a day. He said, "I can't pay y'all no \$250. What I can do, I'll give y'all \$200. and I'm a man." I said, "You didn't hear me. I told you \$250." And he said, "Y'all come on and go to work."

And I wasn't angry when I told him that...No ma'am. You have to tell people the truth. You got to be so happy when you tell people the truth, that you can feel it in the inside of ya. You feel good in the inside when you done told somebody the truth.

#### **NAACP President, Trevor D. Harvey** <sup>94</sup>

At the end of the year (in December) I finished high school. And I got a job. I had all of his time on my hands six or seven months 'til graduation, so I got a job... A friend of mine...was the manager of a local Rent-to-Own company called Champion TV...I was getting ready to go to...Florida A&M University in Tallahassee on an ROTC scholarship because I spent five years in ROTC in high school. So I started working for him, just until graduation, getting ready to go off to college... And I got into that business, and learned that business so fast that, even before I graduated from high school, they were promoting me to an account manager. You know, here it is, I'm at the age of 17,18 years old. I was the head Account Manager for this company. And when I graduated from high school, they wanted to promote me to a store manager. They were transferring my friend to a store up in Bradenton and they offered me the Sarasota Store? And I had to make a decision... Go off to college? or do I go into this management position...I'm a young man at the age of 18, making over \$30-35,000, without a college education. And ...I... stayed and ran the company. And it was very beneficial to me. And after leaving there, I got into the insurance industry. I'm a Workers Comp. specialist... But I always had a passion for college, always mentoring and speaking to young people about the importance of education, and preaching that to my own children. And I had the sense that I was missing something because I had not finished college. So...I made the decision that, if you're going to give this message, if you're going to preach and teach this message, you need to live this message. So, I finally decided to go back to college and completed my college degree at Eckerd in St. Pete[rsburg] in Business Administration.

*(Oldham: Now where does the NAACP come into your story? How did this happen? You're president!)*

Around the age of 20, 21 years old, me and a close friend of mine, Richard Redding, we kind of assessed the community and said, "Where are the young men

our age? Where were they? What were they doing?” Because we were looking up to the Mr. John Rivers, the Dr. Ed James, the Fredd Atkins, the Mr. Rainey’s. We were looking at those individuals. But that middle group was missing... So I decided at that point that I wanted to get involved with the community. I wanted to do something. I had no interest in the NAACP, only knew very little about the NAACP, by just what I studied... and the significant contributions it had made in our communities across the country. But I started off teaching and coaching T-ball at Newtown Little League... and from there it just took off. I ended up getting involved in Ringling Redskins. And then, all of a sudden, I got involved in the NAACP, got involved in the grassroots organization. I served up under Larry Lovejoy, I served up under Tony Cornish...As a matter of fact, I took over from Tony Cornish. Tony was in the middle of his term when him and his wife got a transfer to the Philadelphia area. And that’s how I became president, because I was the immediate vice president. And the way the structure works is the immediate vice president automatically becomes the president. And then from there...every two years we have an election cycle, I’ve been voted back into the office... And I’m an area director for the Florida state conference of the NAACP. I oversee seven other branches in the state of Florida for the NAACP.

*(O: How many terms have you been voted in?)*

I’m coming out of my fifth term, concluding about 10 years at the end of this year. But I have a succession plan in place, because I never wanted to be in the presidency for life. I just wanted to make a difference...I’m really laying the groundwork to make sure the work can continue. I’m gonna always work for the organization, but the mantle’s gonna be passed pretty soon.

*(O: What would you say are some great accomplishments under your leadership of the NAACP?)*

One of things that comes to mind is that, when I became President, I reactivated our Leadership Academy and our youth branch because our youth branch had sat dormant for a number of years. And by being involved in Youth activities and mentoring youth, I felt that that’s one of the things that NAACP can make a strong difference in is to continue to help develop our young people and give them a sense of why it’s important to be involved in the community. Our young people don’t understand what the NAACP is and what it does. What we have to get our young people to understand is that every civil liberty that we enjoy today came on the backs of the NAACP. So that was a very passionate initiative that I needed to get started back. And it has been very successful. And we’ve got some great youth workers doing some great things in the community...Ed James III is a product of the NAACP Youth Council. He was the Youth Council president. And look at what this young man has done...as a result of some of the training that he got through the NAACP Youth Council, this young man is going to be somebody that we need to watch out for. [He is currently running for state representative]. There’s others besides Ed the third, as we call him...Raven Coakley is another that I can think about. Just graduated from the University of Georgia with her Masters of Psychology degree, and now she’s teaching over at Booker Middle School. There’s many that have come through that Leadership Academy and are doing great things in our community now.

**Alice Faye Jones (AFJ) & son Randy Jones (RJ) <sup>95</sup>**

(AFJ): We're located right now at 1835 34th Street. This place is now called the Robert L. Taylor Community Complex. Years ago, it used to be called the Newtown Community Center. The Rec. is what we all called it. What I do here is that I offer a free after school homework assisting program, free of charge to students from seventh grade to high school in various studies and subject areas, based upon their need. It's a program called "Brothers and Sisters Doing the Right Thing." We've been established since 2002 and it runs on volunteers. We do not have any paid staff or anything like that. Hopefully, in the near future we will. Right now, everything is run strictly by volunteers.

(Manting-Brewer: *What did your mom do for a living?*)

She was a house cleaner. She was a maid. She worked out on Longboat Key. She was a hell of a maid, too... That's what I thought I was going to be. Because, you know, we have people we kind of mimic—or, our role models. A lot of times, your role models are those who are in your home. Well, in my home it was only my mom, there was no Dad in my home. And I respected and looked up to my mom, so I wanted to be like my mom. And I thought that's what I was supposed to [be]—was a maid. We didn't have table topics, or roundtables where you would [talk about] "What do you want to be when you grow up?" "Oh, you're a good dancer! I'm going to send you to dance school!" There was none of that going around the table. It was basically what you saw is what you got, and I saw my mom and she was a hell of a maid. And I thought that maybe one day that's what I was supposed to be because nobody ever asked me what I wanted. And one day, I didn't go to school. And ... one thing about not going to school was, you wasn't going to stay home. There was no staying home because you didn't go to school. You were going to go with your mom to the job, and my mom took me to the job with her. And that's when I can say she was honestly a hell of a maid. I watched that woman clean the house from top to bottom ... Never seen it done in my life from anybody else, but she did it. And I thought that was what I was supposed to do ... During my younger years, it wasn't often that we'd miss school, but when we did, it was an honor to go out there and travel on Longboat Key because it was a whole other world out there...

(RJ): Before my mom got a vehicle, we would catch the city bus to Longboat. When you'd leave one area and go into that area, everything became green. The grass, God, just evenly and everything—and the flowers. And it smelled different over there. It was just a whole different world. And so it was like, wow...where are we? We're on a different planet! But it was just across the bridge. But you see how other people live when you enter into a whole other area, which you're not exposed to... And my mom worked at a place called The Islander. And The Islander had, I guess you would say, security—where you have to stop at the front desk and let them know what apartment you are going to. These people were in uniforms. Even the lobby smelled different. It was so clean and spotless, and then you would go up the elevator to the owner's condo, I guess

you would call it a condo, and you would go inside the home. It was totally different from where I was raised. And I never knew if I wanted it because I was never asked what I wanted to do, where I wanted to go, what I wanted to be. But, I knew this world was totally different, and I was curious about it. Once we left the island and came back to the Newtown area, it was back to, “Okay, I’m back home. Now, I can get out of this fantasy world. I’m back home now.”

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African American settlers in Overtown and Newtown migrated to Sarasota seeking jobs. They hailed, primarily, from many small towns in Florida, and the neighboring states of Georgia, Alabama and Mississippi. Some followed the turpentine business; when they had taken all of the resin they could from the trees in Georgia, they had to move on to new pine forests. Florida was a prime location until 1952, when the trees’ production of resin was exhausted. Turpentine extraction was hard work in the blazing Florida sun during the summer, and the snakes were a danger to workers who were constantly on guard against them. The Celery Fields were another place that African American migrants found work to support themselves and their families. Some people lived on the farms and in the camps where a limited number of small houses were available as living quarters for workers. Others traveled back and forth from Newtown and Overtown to work there. The camps and fields also had “company stores” that made working in these places almost equivalent to slave labor; workers would get food and other items on “credit,” which they would pay back when they got paid. More often than not, their paycheck was not enough to cover the amount of credit, and they would wind up still owing money to the store.

Since Sarasota was the segregated South, Jim Crow laws were in full effect and African Americans were very limited in the places they could go to purchase goods and services. This led to the birth of innovation and creativity on the part of those who chose to start businesses - entrepreneurs – who were helping themselves but also helping others in the African American community by providing vital goods and services. A thriving business district formed and thrived in Newtown before desegregation. Newtown, established in 1914, grew from the influx of new people who heard about the availability of jobs in Sarasota, but also from the relocation of African Americans from Overtown. Newtown became a “village” as many of the interviewees described it. Everyone pitched in to help one another, whatever the need; fixing plumbing, clearing land, constructing houses, churches and schools, and even disciplining children.

People did whatever jobs they had to, no matter how unappealing (such as cleaning sewers, as Robert Taylor did) in order to make sure that they had money to support their families. They suffered under the oppression of racism and threats from the Ku Klux Klan, but met those challenges with a powerful faith in themselves and in God. Social conditions and the types of jobs changed dramatically over the years and a few Newtown residents became “firsts” in various occupations including the post office, college administration, public office holders, nursing, banking, and professional sports.

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- ⁸⁶ Interview with Kaylie Stokes (New College), October 20, 2015.
- ⁸⁷ “Ralph C. Caples and his wife, Ellen, first came to Sarasota in December 1899 by horse and buggy...Caples was convinced that Sarasota was going places and the time was ripe to invest in the area. He persuaded his friends, John and Charles Ringling, to come to Sarasota and take a look...In order to persuade John Ringling to become a permanent resident of Sarasota, he purchased the Thompson property at Shell Beach, adjacent to his estate in 1911. Ringling was convinced and purchased the Thompson property in 1911...[and] the adjoining property the next year.”
<https://www.sarasotamagazine.com/articles/2014/11/17/caples-ringlings-sarasota>
- ⁸⁸ Interview with Vickie Oldham, September 4, 2015.
- ⁸⁹ Cummings, Ian. “Looking back, and ahead.” April 17, 2014.
<http://newtown100.heraldtribune.com/looking-back-ahead/>
- ⁹⁰ Interview with Vickie Oldham, August 18, 2015.
- ⁹¹ Source: Newtown-North Sarasota Redevelopment Project Report.
- ⁹² Interview with Vickie Oldham, August 24, 2015.
- ⁹³ Interview with Vickie Oldham, September 4, 2015.
- ⁹⁴ Interview with Vickie Oldham, November 20, 2015.
- ⁹⁵ Interview at Robert Taylor Community Center with Nicholas Manting-Brewer a Florida Campus Compact AmeriCorps VISTA Volunteer Coordinator at New College of Florida, October 25, 2012.

CHAPTER 6: EDUCATION AND SCHOOLS

There are many reasons why the NCHD Project Report on the topic of Education is essential to the Newtown community. One major reason is given by Shelli Freeland Eddie, Booker High School's former facilitator of program development: "A lot of the students don't know about the legacy of Booker. People in Sarasota don't know the struggles and the accomplishments."¹ This goal of this chapter is to enlighten them.

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### **The Evolution of Education for African Americans in the Overtown and Newtown Communities of Sarasota, Florida**

African American families in Newtown and Overtown viewed education as the paramount means by which to improve their circumstances and enrich the lives of their children. During her interview with Vickie Oldham on September 4, 2015, Estella Thomas confirmed that this was her goal:

Oldham: Education was important to you and making sure that your children were educated. Why?

Thomas: Because I wasn't educated. So I made sure that they were educated so they could make it in the world. Gotta have education.

The schools were among the most deeply rooted cultural institutions in the Newtown and Overtown communities. Like many other African Americans recently freed from enslavement, the residents were no doubt influenced by W.E.B. Du Bois and Booker T. Washington who stressed that education -- from grammar school, to high school and to college or vocational school -- was the gateway to progress and upward mobility. Having been forbidden by slave owners from learning to read and write -- because of the threat that this would present to the persistence of the institution of slavery -- few formerly enslaved persons had those skills. After slavery ended, educational opportunities for African Americans were scarce, particularly in the South. Despite that, some did manage to learn to read and write, and used their knowledge to teach others.



1886-1939

Emma Edwina Booker was one such person. Although she was teaching school and holding the position of principal at the Knights of Pythias Hall School, and later at the Sarasota Grammar School, Emma E. Booker had not yet attained her bachelor's degree. She persevered for over 20 years, attending college during the summers to finally obtain her degree in 1937.<sup>2</sup> Genealogist Cindy Weatherby and a group of volunteers found Emma Booker's gravesite in Lincoln Cemetery in Gulfport, Florida. "Lincoln Cemetery was the only burial site for black residents of south Pinellas County during the Jim Crow Era."<sup>3</sup>



Photo: Used with permission of Cindy Weatherby.

In Overtown, the first African American community in Sarasota, "schooling" began in private homes. In 1910, the first kindergarten was started in the home of Josie Washington. Lucinda P. Wiggins also established a kindergarten. In addition to their roles as places of worship, churches became places of education (such as Bethlehem Baptist Church, Payne Chapel A.M.E. Church, and Mount Moriah Missionary Baptist Church). The number of students enrolled in Wiggins' kindergarten increased to the point that it had to move into the basement of the Payne Chapel A.M.E. Church.<sup>4</sup>

### **Knights of Pythias Hall School**

The Knights of Pythias Hall School functioned as one of the first formal schools and its principal was Emma E. Booker. In 1923, the school had its first graduating class and the ceremony was held at Bethlehem Baptist Church on Central Avenue. In addition to Emma E. Booker, the teachers at the Knights of Pythias Hall School included Aravia Benton Johnson, Lucinda P. Wiggins, and Mayme Williams Faulk.<sup>5</sup>

Interestingly, the Knights of Pythias is an international organization founded in Washington, D.C. by Justus Rathbone in 1864, one year after the Emancipation Proclamation was issued. According to the organization's official website, its guiding

principles<sup>6</sup> are: to promote cooperation and friendship between people of good will; to make benevolence, kindness, generosity and tolerance a reality in their lives; and to respect and honor the law of the land in which they live. In an apparent contradiction to these stated “principles,”

A Black lodge was denied a charter by the Knights of Pythias’ Supreme Lodge meeting in Richmond, Virginia on March 8, 1869... a number of African Americans who had been initiated into the order formed their own Pythian group, the Knights of Pythias of North and South America, Europe, Asia and Africa (KPNSAEAA). By 1897 the KPNSAEAA had 40,000 members with Grand Lodges in 20 states and other lodges in the West Indies and Central America.”<sup>7</sup>

Dr. Thomas W. Sringer organized Florida’s first African American (‘Negro’ at that time) lodge of the Order of Knights of Pythias in 1881 at Pensacola. However, it soon closed. A second, successful start was made at San Marco No. 1 in St. Augustine, Florida, organized by D. M. Pappy, Deputy Supreme Chancellor in 1886, under Dr. T. W. Sringer, Supreme Chancellor.<sup>8</sup>

### **Sarasota Grammar School (Booker Grammar School)**

In 1925, the first public school built specifically for African American children was constructed next to the railroad tracks at Lemon and (today’s) 7<sup>th</sup> Street and was named the Sarasota Grammar School. It opened with eight grade levels. Emma E. Booker led the children in a procession from the Knights of Pythias Hall to their new school. Jan Snyder Matthews described the occasion:

As the tall woman walked, she carried a wooden-handled school bell she always rang to convene classes. Some 70 children paraded behind her as they departed their make-do classrooms at Knights of Pythias Hall and headed towards Sarasota’s first school building for blacks.<sup>9</sup>

Some people referred to the Sarasota Grammar School as the Rosenwald School because it had been built with money supplied by the Rosenwald Fund. Julius Rosenwald, a German-Jewish businessman, formed a partnership with Booker T. Washington to build schools throughout the segregated South for African American children, and to build homes for their teachers. The Rosenwald Foundation provided what was called “seed money” and required the communities receiving funding to demonstrate their commitment to education by raising the remaining funds needed and to help in constructing the buildings.<sup>10</sup>

Sarasota Grammar School was renamed Booker Grammar School in honor of its first principal, Emma E. Booker. James Robert Dixon expanded it to include a high school component and became the first principal of Booker High School (BHS). In May 1935, the first high school graduating class from BHS was composed of four students: Marthena Riley, Nacomi Williams (Carter), Annie Mae Blue (McElroy), and A.L. Williams. Annie Mae Blue (McElroy), Marthena Riley, and James McElroy went on to



attend Bethune Cookman College. After graduation, they returned to teach at Booker High School.<sup>11</sup>



Booker Elementary School



### **Newtown Day Nursery (Helen R. Payne Day Nursery)**

Alice Turner, Luella O’Neil, Susie Reddick, Susie Newton, and Mary Emma Jones established the Newtown Day Nursery around 1930, not only in recognition of the need for early education, but also to enable women to go to work and be assured that their children would be cared for properly. It was grassroots-funded, receiving all types of donations from community members who were not wealthy monetarily, but were willing to donate their time, goods, and services to the Nursery. According to McElroy,<sup>12</sup> these donations that “made a difference” included: fresh milk from cows owned by Mrs. Paralee Wilson; food items and supplies from J.W. Carner and C.B. Britt Grocery and Southern Grocery and Table Supply; pastries from a bakery on Central Avenue; Winn’s grocery donated food and extended the credit to the school; and food from the kitchens of concerned citizens. Other community members donated their administrative, professional and organizational expertise: K.D. Reddick and Aravia Johnson, program development; R.T. Anderson, accounting; Mrs. Ethel R. Hayes, early childhood education; and Susie Howell Reddick, organization. Other supporters of the Newtown Day Nursery raised funds through appeals on radio programs at station WSPB, and from talent shows performed at tourist camps, trailer parks and the Municipal Auditorium (aka Exhibition Hall). In 1961, a new structure was built to house the day nursery with funds donated by benefactor Helen R. Payne. The school was renamed “Helen R. Payne Day Nursery” in her honor.<sup>13</sup>

### **The Booker Schools**

As the African American population of Overtown expanded into Newtown, the schools were moved there.

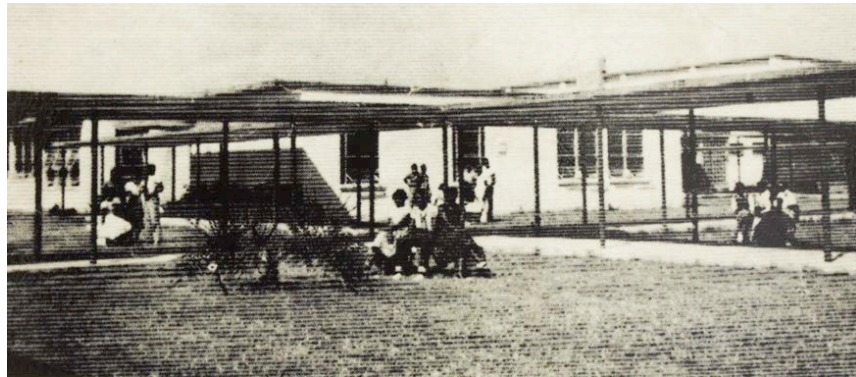
In 1939 Booker High School classes and the Rosenwald building [renamed Booker Grammar School] were relocated to a site near [Orange Avenue and 32<sup>nd</sup> Street] adjoining an elementary school...when Roland

Rogers was principal...The School Board of Sarasota County consolidated schools on the Newtown campus. Rogers led the way to academic accreditation and construction of modern buildings. Many graduates of the Booker schools returned to teach in the Sarasota County School system.<sup>14</sup>



Booker's First Educators - 1949

Emma E. Booker served the community for many years and was a role model to many of her students and teachers alike. In recognition of her major contributions to the education of African Americans in both Overtown and Newtown, three schools were named in her honor: Emma E. Booker Elementary, Booker Middle School, and Booker High School. Booker Elementary School was originally located in abandoned WWII barracks, but in 1958 a new school was built.<sup>15</sup>



Booker High School 1959

In addition to these three, there was another elementary school, Amaryllis Park School. It contained grades one through three and Rev. Jerome Dupree served as its principal from 1960-1964.<sup>16</sup>

Despite completely inadequate government funding for their schools, these dedicated teachers and principals pressed on, determined to deliver the very best education they possibly could. Teachers and students were housed in inadequate structures, and had to use textbooks that had been discarded by the well-supplied white schools - books that were worn, missing pages, and otherwise defaced. According to

former teacher Dorothy Smith:

They were secondhand books, very much so...secondhand. They come from other schools that had been used. For an example, in the Preface, you would see all the names of children who had previously used the books ... Well, I wasn't so concerned about the material because I had been prepared in school that this might happen. So you had to acquire as much knowledge as you possibly could to bring out here to the students that you were going to teach. So I wasn't upset about that part.<sup>17</sup>

In spite of their meager salaries, teachers often used their own money to purchase much-needed books and supplies for their students. Parents and teachers often collaborated on fundraising efforts to purchase school materials, sponsoring fish-fry's and other events. Teachers lived in the same community and sometimes the very same houses as their students, resulting in very close relationships. Dorothy Smith continues:

The superintendent and the School Board members worked with the county budget and they'd give you a budget at each school, according to personnel and the needs. But most of the things you use in the classroom, you bought it, because money was kind of slim during those days... You had a [housing] project leading into Newtown. It's on Orange Avenue. Well, that was already in operation when I came. But we couldn't stay there because I made too much money: \$154.00 a month. That was too much money to be making, living in the projects. So...we had to live in the house with families...There were not any duplexes or apartments or anything where you could live. I lived in a house with a family and then when that family became enlarged and had more children, then [I] moved to somebody else.<sup>18</sup>

Teachers visited students' homes to discuss their progress and problems directly with parents. According to many of the persons interviewed, teachers, parents, and students had a very personal connection and teachers were very well respected. Amazingly, most of the persons interviewed could recall the names of their teachers from their elementary, middle/junior, and senior high school classes, a testament to the extraordinary role that those teachers played in their lives! Following are a few examples of these relationships, excerpted from the oral history interviews:

**Dr. Louis Robison<sup>19</sup>**

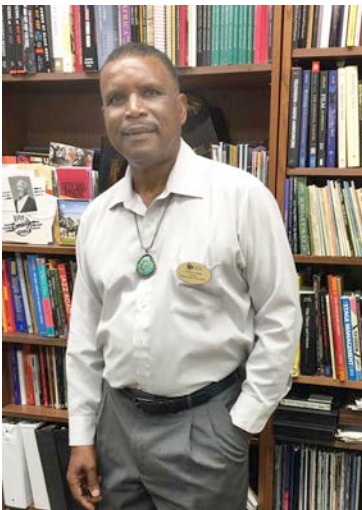
I think there was a certain amount of fear and respect at the same time for teachers at school...because, let's face it, we've always held teachers in high esteem. But the difference between my Booker experience and my one year at Riverview [High School] was that you had the opportunity to see teachers in the grocery store, see them at the Laundromat or just see them in general in the community. (Oldham: When you said that there was a lot of respect and fear for teachers, then I think about Roland Rogers with his big, booming voice.)  
Oh...I can remember that. In fact, I picked up a picture the other day of the

auditorium at Booker High School and it was an assembly of some kind, and students were dressed in suits and ties. So that was the kind of...decorum that you were expected [to demonstrate] at certain assemblies. I think that these were football players or athletes being recognized. Perhaps it was an awards program of some sort at the end of the year...Everybody remembers Mr. Rogers in assemblies and how he would come to the edge of the stage with those hard knob shoes on that were always polished to a "T," and they were turned up at the end. And he would always be impeccably dressed in a tie. And he'd stand there. And actually that's one of the things I took from Booker High School when I became a principal, in terms of addressing students in an auditorium. Because I thought it was always important for students to know who their leader was, who their principal was.<sup>20</sup>

When questioned by *Herald Tribune* reporter Eckhart, James Brown had strong recollections of Principal Rogers:<sup>21</sup>

What an impact. You will get a lot of mixed emotions about him, but overall I knew that for us as African-Americans to exist in a segregated world, we needed to understand the system and live within structure. I thought we needed structure. He may have been a little too structured. But on the positive side, talk about the expectations. He always said that there are no excuses, letting you know that the barriers are there but they don't have to be there for the rest of your life. ...A little bit of history. When Booker High School moved into the new building, which is now being torn down, in the fall of 1953 I was a 10th-grader. And I was elected president of the Student Council, which was unheard-of for a 10th grader. We had an accreditation team coming in, which always started on Sunday night. I was chewing gum outside the cafeteria on a Sunday night. Not even in a building. He passed by, saw it, and he made a big deal of it the next day in the cafeteria, which led a lot of people to think I was chewing gum inside the cafeteria. I was impeached. So, the first 10th grader to be elected Student Council President, also the first one of any grade to ever be impeached.

### Anthony "Tony" Major<sup>22</sup>



Our principal [Professor Roland Rogers] was like, very clean. He would teach us, "Cleanliness is next to Godliness." And so when you walk the campus, if there was a piece of paper on the ground, you had to pick it up, whether you put it there or not...So we had the cleanest school in Sarasota County, trust me. You couldn't lean back in the chair – "Boy, put them four legs on the floor!" And you couldn't touch the girls – "Get your hands off that girly, boy!" [Laughter]... So it was...a situation at Booker where everybody cared. If you did something, there was always, always some adult who saw you. I used to try to stop on the way to school at my girlfriend's, thinking nobody's looking. And I'll never

forget that morning when my name got called on the loudspeaker in the school. And the principal, Mr. Rogers, said, “Anthony Major!” ‘Cause he had a voice like Paul Robeson. “Bertha Mae Douglas! Come to my office, please.” [So when we got to his office he said,] “I understand you made a detour on the way to school. Don’t lie to me, boy.” So out comes that belt, which was a belt from a fan belt from a car that they cut in half. And you had a choice – you could take it in the hand or the butt. Of course, she got talked to instead, and got sent back to class. I’m the one who [Laughter] got those lashes. But, when you go home, your grandmother’s sitting there waiting on you with one of those oak limbs from across the street. So you didn’t do that again... So everybody was family...I was raised not only by my grandmother.

...The gymnasium is named after Howard Porter. They were getting ready to throw away the history of Booker High School. Someone brought [the matter] to Ed [James’ attention] and Ed said, “Oh no.” Because Booker High was named after a woman, Emma Booker, OK? And there’s a sign there that has that history. There’s another sign that has Rogers...[Booker High School] was all-black and all the principals were black, up until integration. So when the white folks came, they wanted a change. It’s the Booker High Tornadoes – they want to get rid of the nickname and the purple and gold [school colors]. They want to paint it blue and white...And Ed said, “No. You’re not going to change the name. You’re not going to change the colors.” If you go to that school now, you’ll see that the track is purple, the gym is purple and gold, and the name is the Booker High Tornadoes. So if you white folks [are] going to come to Booker High School, you’re not going to get rid of this history. Now, every principal’s picture is up on the wall. You’re white, so your picture goes up there, too. But [not] take down these black principals who preceded you and made this school what it is, just because it became a satellite school for [Visual Performing Arts].

### **Eddie Rainey<sup>23</sup>**

... When it comes down to our discipline, our schools, we had Lloyd Haisley, who was my uncle ... He was the principal at Booker. Booker, as I explained, was only a four-room situation and I know you've heard the name Roland Rogers, with a deep baritone voice ... Quite a disciplinarian. The teachers that I remember most were Elmira Johnson, she was an outstanding teacher, and Mrs. Solomon, who was the kindergarten teacher. She taught us our As, Bs, and Cs.



**Dorothea Smith (teacher)**<sup>24</sup>



At Booker I enjoyed working with the children because I was very familiar with the parents. You met the parents at church, shopping. You just knew everybody. And the principal did something that was unique. He had teachers visit the homes of each child that he or she planned to teach that year. If you had twenty-four students, you visit twenty-four homes. You knew the parents before the first day of school. You knew the children...[when they saw me on the street they would say] “that’s my teacher.”

**Helen Dixon**<sup>25</sup>



...Booker High was *the* school...Because even though we got hand-me-downs, the teachers cared about us. They loved us. They would go and call your parents. And we only had party lines at that time, and you only had three people on a party line. But they would get in touch with you by phone or by walking to your house. And my daddy didn’t play that. He said, “I send you out to educate you. If your teacher comes here, it’s too much.”...You would get a paddling. We didn’t get punishment we got paddling.

**Carolyn Mason**<sup>26</sup>



At Booker High School, my homeroom was in the typing room. The typing teacher was my homeroom teacher. And she said, “I’m going to make sure that each of you learns how to type, so that at a very minimum you can get a job typing if you can’t get a job doing anything else.” And I was fortunate enough to be placed into a program that was called “DCT,” Diversified Cooperative Training, going to school half a day and working the other half of the day... But the work was connected to the school, and vice versa. I got paid...They placed us in businesses. My first job was at Sarasota

Federal Savings and Loan Association.

**Rev. Jerome Dupree<sup>27</sup>**

(Former Principal of Booker High School and Amaryllis School)...I always like to work through the parents. When I was a teacher in school, I would call one of my parents every evening. I would call them from the school after the kids were gone...And when I first started I would find out that some of those parents had had some bad experiences, because every time someone called them from the school, it was bad news. So I made sure that when I called each one of those parents of the students I had, I called them to give them good news. So when some of them asked, they'd say, "What now? What now?" I said, "What does that mean?" "What kind of problem is it now with him?" I said, "No problem. I called you to tell you that your son or daughter did a marvelous job today, and I would appreciate it if you would kind of speak to them about it, and kind of give them a pat on the back, buy them a cold drink or something like that." I said, "And I wanted to just let you know, I mean I wanted to check with you, to see if you would be willing for me to call, because I'm not going to call you unless there's a big problem. I'm not going to call you to tell you anything about how they're acting unless I feel it's a big problem." I said, "But I am going to tell you when they are stubborn and obstinate, and they don't want to do work that we have for them to do." I said, "I'll call you then too, but I don't think we're going to have many things like that. Because when I call you to tell you the good that they're doing, they're going to try not to disappoint you."

I know some of the students would come back and say, "You called my mother!" I said, "Yes I did." "Daddy told us that we could go out to lunch yesterday, I mean to dinner." I'd say, "That's great, that's great. So it pays to do a good job doesn't it?" "That's right, that's right." That's the system that I used when I was in the school system, and it worked very effectively. If it got to the point that I needed to keep a couple of children after school to do a couple of things that they had not done as well as I would have liked to see them do, I would call those parents and ask them if it would be alright if they pick them up at such and such a time, because I'm working to move them up to the level. And they'd say, "Yes." And I did that, and they'd come and pick them up. And it was so effective that the State Commissioner of Education sent a letter, a congratulatory letter, for moving those kids from being in the low grades so that they could go into a regular group of people.

**James Brown<sup>28</sup>**

I tell people, I was number five in my class of 34. And you should have seen those other guys who were ahead of me. They were really, really sharp. And it goes on and on about successful people who came out of Newtown, from those same dirt streets. Some of them came from homes that did not have electricity. Some of them came from homes that did not have indoor plumbing and running water. But those were not hindrances. Those were bumps in the road. And the teachers. I pause here because of one, Esther Reed Dailey, an English



teacher...What a lady, who accepted no excuses. You had to speak standard English. None of the neighborhood [slang]. And she just demanded excellence and would not accept “No” for an answer. She would look at me and say, “Boy, you're going to do this.” “Boy, you're going to go to college.” How? My mama and my dad are both dead. How are you talking about me going to college? [She said, “You go. Don't worry about how you stay there. You go.” And she was helping me on the paperwork to go to college. That’s what I'm saying. You had a core of educators, a core of people in the community who encouraged people to do well.

As previously mentioned, parents and teachers had a close relationship, especially with regard to the welfare of the children. **Helen Dixon’s** father was very outspoken and, as she stated, never hesitated to go to City Hall to advocate on behalf of both the teachers and the children:

...Every day [my dad] would come out to Booker High School. I can remember that we didn’t have a bathroom. And then when we had the bathroom, it was a pull-chain bathroom. And my sister went in the bathroom and it had run over, and she had fell. And he came out to the school and said, “I want a janitor here, I pay taxes.” He said, “I don’t need them to scrub and wipe the floors, I teach them that at home.” And so he went downtown and we got the first janitor at Booker High School because my father pushed for that. The teachers would say, “Ms. Dixon please – or Ms. Jones at that time – please tell your daddy to come out to the school. We need a new raise; we need more money.” And he would come out and he would go downtown. And next thing you know, the teachers would get a little raise. But he was a person to talk about everything for his kids. My mother worked just like he did, but he went to the school every day.<sup>29</sup>

## School Desegregation:

### Students’ Experiences

For three years after the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision in 1954, schools remained segregated in Sarasota. The NAACP asked the Sarasota County School Board to voluntarily desegregate in 1957. After the Board’s persistent refusal to do so over the next few years, the NAACP filed a desegregation lawsuit in Federal Court in 1961. In the 1962-63 school year, the first African-American students were enrolled in previously all-white Sarasota Schools.

Part of the objection to school desegregation had nothing to do with the quality of education; it had more to do with the concern over “race-mixing.” John Rivers, President of the local chapter of the NAACP and a leader in the Civil Rights Movement stated:

...You know, when we integrated the school...that was a little more hassle, because going to school, there are a lot of people who couldn’t understand why we wanted to go, our children to go, to an all-white school. I said, “Well, why do white people want to go to an all-white

school?" You know, I said, "That don't make sense." And some of the people were serious, good people, you know, but they were saying, "We don't want that to happen because your boys will be going to school there and the girls and all, mingling and all." I said, "But they're doing that anyway" ... "They are going to be people, white girls and black boys, and black girls and white guys. People are going to be people." I said, "As long as they are having fun together...[getting] to know each other." So, I then organized a group that, and had a dance on Saturday night for them, white and black. All came up. Boy, that stirred up a whole different thing...Some black people were against that, you know. But, nevertheless, we kept it up for a while.<sup>30</sup>

The school desegregation order divided Newtown into four districts and closed the Newtown community's schools. The first school that became integrated was Bay Haven Elementary. Dr. Harriet Moore, who later became a school principal, attended Bay Haven and recalled her experiences there:<sup>31</sup>

... I was always an avid reader. I love to read, couldn't wait to start reading...So at Bay Haven I was reading and I'd get my work finished and I'd want to talk. Obviously, I'm a talker, and I want to talk and the other kids were not finished. So I would get in trouble because I wanted to talk...So I think they contacted my parents and said there's a new school that's been developed and we think that Harriet might be a fit for that. And so I was about nine years old and my mom and dad talked to me about it. And they said okay. So they did all the testing, which was another interesting story, but long story short, I did end up at Pineview in fifth grade...And I graduated from Pineview. So I stuck it out for eight years and it was a very interesting experience for me.

I think that people were not adequately prepared for integration. I think that the law came and people said, "Okay we got to integrate so we're going to draw a line, we're going to take kids from here, we're going to take kids from here, and we're going to send them to those schools." The teachers and the students who were already in those schools were not prepared to receive African American students, nor did they know the truth about African American people. They had perceptions of African Americans as not so bright, ignorant, and what they were seeing on television. And in the '60s, what were they seeing on television that's representative of African American people? It certainly wasn't the people who were leaders in our nation. It was kind of 'Steppin Fetch It,' and prostitutes and that kind of thing. That's all they knew, what they saw on television. The media was not painting us in a great light so they didn't know anything about us except what they read. So they were afraid and they had misperceptions and misconceptions of us.

So now you've got the other side: the African American children, who were now being bussed out in these communities with people who did not want them there, who also had real experiences with Caucasian people. For example, you couldn't go to the front doors for service; they had the right to refuse service to you. And they did in this community. And so that was real for us and now you want us to go to their schools? And then you want us to teach those kids? And so this is what we were thrust into. So was there an impact? Absolutely. Those people didn't want to teach African American children and African American children [didn't want] to be in those schools and be taught by them. Not because of hatred so much, but because, I believe, of misconceptions about who people are. And so they went from a community of teachers who looked like them, who understood the importance of education, even with inferior materials to teach them, who went above and beyond to make sure that they knew not only reading, writing, and arithmetic but life struggles and stories, and how to survive in this world given the injustices that existed for us as a people.

In 1964, Roland Rogers, who had been Principal of Booker through twenty years of progress and change, was appointed to the administrative staff of the County schools. By 1965, the U.S. Government had tied federal dollars to compliance with the 1964 Civil Rights Act and ordered all schools to integrate. The Sarasota County School Board came up with a plan to comply. Consistent with most school districts' approaches in the South, especially, they closed the black schools and bussed black students to previously all-white schools. Rev. Jerome Dupree was the principal of Booker High School from 1964-1966, succeeding Roland Rogers. His position was eliminated in 1967 when the Sarasota schools became desegregated and Booker High School was closed. In 1968, Booker Junior High School's closure followed. These school closures caused a major rupture in the fabric of the Newtown community. In this excerpt from a 2013 interview in the *Herald Tribune*, former principal Dupree stated that, "We felt we were being hijacked." Rev. Jerome Dupree [had been] the valedictorian of the Booker High School class of 1953. "Of all the schools in the county, and Booker being among the oldest, why would they close our school? That was a slap in the face in our community."<sup>32</sup>

Rivers explained some of the problems encountered when the schools became integrated:

When they went on to integrate the schools, we had some problems right off... Because we talked about closing out the school here and then transporting the kids... So, with that we, I, decided, at that time to call a boycott of the school system... The schools were receiving their funds based on attendance. And, therefore, they just decided that they didn't want that [the boycott] to work... So they sent the principal, assistant principal of Sarasota [High School] out here to talk to me. He said, "John, you are going to get your brain beat out, you know. You don't know what you are getting into." So, I just said, "Well, if anyone get close enough to beat my brains out, he's close enough to me to beat somebody's brains out, and that's exactly what will happen if you try to do something to me."

So, we called the boycott on a Sunday afternoon. Monday morning we had ninety-five percent of our students out of school. And we had organized the churches to open cafeterias, classrooms and everything in the churches out there. So, the kids were going to school and happy with it. A lot of New College students...teachers and assistants...So, everything was just working in our favor, ...And it did work. It did work, you know.<sup>33</sup>

## School Boycott

On May 5, 1969, a total of 2,353 African-American students (85% of the County's African-American students) boycotted the Sarasota County public schools in protest over the proposed closing of Amaryllis Elementary School and the unfair way that the schools had been integrated.<sup>34</sup> Even though a child might live directly across the street from Booker campus, she or he had to be bussed to an all-white school across town, a long distance from home, lifelong friends, and teachers who cared about them. John Rivers and the families were concerned about the children's safety, traveling so far away from home.

...It was tough...because here's this little old six-year-old getting up four [o'clock] in the morning to get a bus and ride twenty miles away to get to school. That was tough, and disgraceful really, and rude.



## Freedom Schools

During the boycott, Newtown students attended "Freedom Schools" hastily set up in local churches and taught by New College and high school students. The *Sarasota Herald Tribune* story about the event is reprinted here.

April 27, 2014

SUBJECTS:

Logan, James; Atkins, Fredd; MacKay, Charlie

National Association for the Advancement of Colored People  
*Sarasota Herald Tribune*

### **When Newtown Walked Out**

By Russon, Gabrielle

NEWTOWN100 SARASOTA

One morning in the spring of 1969, the children disappeared. Booker Elementary teacher Janet Standish sat at her classroom desk, alone, looking at the rows of empty desks before her. Perplexed by the scene, she busied herself with a stack of books and papers. About 2,300 black students were missing in Sarasota schools that day. There were more teachers than children at Booker Elementary, with more than 80 percent of the black student body absent. It was 1969, a time of upheaval across the nation. In Newtown, it was time for a revolt. The strong voice and the final straw. Something about James Logan commanded respect long before he took charge of the freedom schools. He was the hardest hitter on the football team, and he did it with one hand. His right arm had suffered muscle and nerve damage at birth, and his hand hung limp at his side. When he spoke, people paid attention to his deep, penetrating voice. "We're going to beat Cardinal Mooney!" Logan would say, leading his team's chants. They went undefeated that year. "I didn't like to lose," Logan said. He wasn't the tallest boy, but he was muscular beyond his years. "To see James Logan was to see a full-grown man," recalls Fredd Atkins, his classmate. The activities listed under his name in the high school yearbook read: Teenage Republican Club, Student Council, National Honor Society, JV football captain. He had the kind of experience needed to lead a movement. Tension was growing in the county's classrooms as the district attempted, unsuccessfully, to integrate the schools. In the fall of 1967, school leaders had closed Booker High, a school with deep roots in the black community, a school that had just celebrated winning a basketball state championship.

Now its students were being forced to attend all-white high schools. Integration was the new mandate and it was hitting Newtown hard. Before, the black children knew better than to cross the railroad tracks that separated Newtown from the white part of town, because doing so could end with a beating and police indifference. Now, they had to be bused there to go to school. "You have to understand, a lot of these young people, they had ideas of being homecoming queen, class president, cheerleader," said Ruben Mayes, an African-American teacher who was transferred with his students to teach math at Sarasota High. "Because of them being a minority, they would not receive enough votes for it. A lot of kids felt like they were deprived of a lot of things." At times, their teenage existence was filled with violence and tension.

Newspaper stories from the late 1960s tell of scuffles at Sarasota High or of a white boy turned over to police for sneaking an unloaded gun to school. Black girls barred white girls from entering a bathroom. There were bomb threats -- baseless, but threatening. Someone vandalized Sarasota High, painting swastikas and the words "no integration" that could be read from Tamiami Trail. During this time, Amaryllis Park Primary School remained open in Newtown. Children walked to school at 3400 N. Orange Ave., and

teachers lived in the same neighborhoods as their students. "We had ownership, as far as we were concerned," Logan said. "When you live in an area and people are forced to stay, you start to make accommodation. This is our school and we're proud of it. And that's the way we talked about it back then: This is our school." But Amaryllis Park was in jeopardy. School officials had announced plans to dismantle the school and relocate students to Southside Elementary, in a predominantly all-white neighborhood south of downtown. Black residents were convinced that integration had finally gone too far. It was, as Atkins said, "the straw that broke the camel's back." The fight and the young foot soldier Logan, who had just turned 18, became a community activist. ...

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Not all families sent their children to the Freedom schools, however. James Brown and wife Yvonne, both educators, were concerned about the quality of education their children would receive from non-certified teachers. Their position was that, "If closure of the schools was what it took to integrate, so be it."³⁵

According to Rivers, and confirmed by the percentage of students who boycotted classes, most of the people of Newtown, however, "were united. We'd do a project, and they were ready. That's very different today. It's hard to get people motivated to do the right thing and to do it as well as it should be...you all may recognize that, because there are a lot of things happening now in here that I think is very bad for us."³⁶

As Susan Burns explains, "for some of the participants, the boycott was a pivotal moment, the kind of defining event that shapes one's character and leaves a mark that lasts a lifetime. Of one fact there is no doubt: If the boycott of 1969 hadn't happened, Sarasota's Booker schools – Booker Elementary, Booker Middle and Booker High School – would not exist today."³⁷ It was believed that the reestablishment of the schools within the community was a critical step in reclaiming community identity. Things did not turn out the way many expected, however. The Booker High School that reopened was unrecognizable from the one that closed.

Researching Desegregation Problems

William Allan Byrd, Jr., a doctoral student in the College of Education at the University of Miami, was encouraged by the State Department of Education and the South Florida School Desegregation Consulting Center to conduct his dissertation research on the subject of school desegregation in Florida. The title of his 1969 dissertation is: "A Survey And Analysis of School Problems Associated with the Desegregation of Florida High Schools—1962-1966." There had been no previous research conducted on the issues facing students and administrators in regard to school desegregation in Florida. Therefore, the void that the information from this study would fill, it was hoped, might provide assistance in confronting some of the challenges people were experiencing.³⁸ As Byrd explained:

This study dealt with public high schools in Florida. It was designed to assess the degree of school desegregation, which had occurred, to determine the nature and seriousness of problems which had been

encountered, and to describe the programs which had been implemented while trying to solve the problems.³⁹

Originally, the African American community supported bussing as a step forward. Eventually, however, many felt that closing the schools had destroyed community pride and identity. Byrd's study confirmed that the relocation of students was a one-way process:

One of the primary indicators of community pressure, especially pressure from the white community, was the process of achieving desegregation by transferring black students to previously all-white schools. *There did not exist a single instance in which white youngsters were transferred to an all-Negro school* [emphasis added].⁴⁰

The adjustment from a school where you knew everyone, where you knew your teachers well, where you were valued and expected to succeed, to one where you were in what seemed like a parallel universe was too much for many students. This is one of the issues that former Sarasota Mayor Fredd Atkins complained about in his interview:⁴¹

The assimilation was tough. Like, let me tell you something, if you go back and look at the history of desegregation Sarasota County, my class, and I could almost account for the class of [19]69, class of [19]68—which was the senior class that moved from Booker to Sarasota High School and Riverview High School—each one of those classes lost at least fifty percent of their students just because they could not handle the adjustment to an environment that was so insensitive...[They] did not graduate. Just left for no apparent reason...It wasn't that they weren't capable, it's just they don't want to be bothered with the hassle of getting up 6:00 o'clock in the morning, catching a 7:00 o'clock bus to be to school at a quarter to eight, get a free breakfast, to have to put up with people that didn't want you there from the teachers down to the janitors...and so they just...You know, we used to beg classmates, friends, "C'mon man. C'mon, c'mon girl. Don't quit; don't quit. Who's going to be in this class with me?" I used to sit in classrooms with people that I'm saying, "Don't leave, don't leave... nobody left but me and you." They said, "I can't go anymore, Fred. I can't go anymore. I can't go anymore." It was about destroying a community and not being fair... in [implementing] the Supreme Court decision...After [Booker] closed the first year, then they opened up as a special education school, they put a six-foot fence with barbwire around the top of the fence, all the way around the Booker campus. It looked like a prison in the middle of our neighborhood.

The sight of that was an incredible insult to the Newtown community. Fredd Atkins' perceptions of non-acceptance at his new school were confirmed by the responses that Byrd received to the questions he posed during his research. He quotes one principal as stating that:

The morale factor of the Negro students who see so little progress in being

accepted by the group; and the reluctance of white friends to express their admiration for the courage of the Negro students who are trying to prove the worthiness of their race is critical. I fear this frustration is resulting in unhappiness and withdrawal from normal school involvement.⁴²

Another principal and a student demonstrated outright racism by his response. As Byrd notes:

There were evidences of extreme racial prejudice and outright hostility expressed by students and teachers statewide. A teacher in a north Florida school, proposing to speak for his fellow teachers, stated, "that niggers have a right to a white education but must be willing to stay in their proper place." A student...remarked that, "we should make their life so miserable that they won't stay here." Evidently such an attitude had been successful since four of the nine Negro students who chose to attend the white school had returned to their all-Negro school.⁴³

Unfortunately, the Newtown students did not have the option of returning to Booker High School. It had been closed. In addition, they no longer had their supportive group of teachers to promote their learning and bolster their self-worth. Byrd found that:

At the time of the study, faculty desegregation was practically non-existent. One school from Area I [north Florida] and one school from Area II [central Florida] had integrated staffs; Area III [south Florida] had ten schools with bi-racial staffs; the state as a whole had a total of 38 black teachers serving on a total of 12 desegregated faculties. *There were no reports of white teachers assigned to all Negro or predominately Negro schools* [emphasis added].⁴⁴

Pineview was another school to which former Booker students were bussed. It was, however, a very selective school at which students had to qualify for admission. Harriet Moore was one of the few Newtown students who attended Pineview. She had a very different school experience than Fredd Atkins, as she relates in her interview with Vickie Oldham:⁴⁵

Well first of all my friends from Pineview, we're all still very close and I think we all learned from each other...When I was tested for Pineview, the person from the school who tested me was ill, and she asked my parents if I could come to her house and she would test me there on whatever portion that was...I think she must have been a guidance counselor who did the testing part. I don't know what they call that then. So they said, "Yeah, sure, no problem." And she lived in Cherokee Park. And I remember going there and she sat me at a table in the dining room. And at the end of that table, what I looked into was a big picture window with very sheer curtains, which overlooked a pool. And while she was testing me, her children and whomever else were out in the pool...was what I was looking at while I was being tested. Even in my young mind I thought, "I

don't think this is right. I've had tests before and I don't think you're supposed to have all of these distractions." And I was really distracted because I wanted to get in the pool too. But I guess I stayed focused enough to do what I needed to do, and started at Pineview. There were five of us at Pineview then: myself, Ben Mickens, Gerald Rogers, Willie Bacon, and Toussaint Dupree. And Mr. Jackson who worked at the recreation center was our coach. And the next year Mr. Jackson left. He was still at the recreation center, but he was no longer at Pineview. And then one-by-one... Ben and I were in the same class, Ben Mickens and I. And the others were older. Professor Roger's son, Gerald Rogers, Willie Bacon, Toussaint Dupree. So slowly people left and Toussaint and I remained... People had different reasons for leaving. You know, you're there and you don't see anyone else that looks like you, very few. But I was okay with it because I had friends that looked different anyway. So it didn't matter to me. But I got in a lot of trouble there because I got picked on a lot... I would end up getting into fights. And so finally, one of those days, my mom came out [to speak to] the principal, Mr. Jack Woolever. He said, "Well maybe this isn't the right place for Harriet." And my mom looked at me and said, "Well Harriet what's going on?" Probably the first time any asked me. And I said, "Well mommy they backed me up into a corner, and they do things, and the only way I know how to come out of that corner is to come out fighting, and that's what I do." And that's what I did.

And I don't think Mr. Woolever ever called [me] out again after that. Except when there was a racist remark that was made by one of the teachers and the whole class ganged up about that... On him, the teacher. We were doing a piece on Civil Rights Movement and he got down in my face and said, "Don't all Blacks carry switch blades?" And I sat back and tears started running down my eyes and I didn't know why he was asking me that and my classmates were very upset and we all got up and left the class – we were nine, ten years old – and we walked out of the class and went to the office. And I'm in tears and they're all supportive and he had to write a very lengthy apology. And one of the teachers at Pineview still remembers this, we talk about it when I see her. And she was very sorry that that happened for me. But you know I stayed the course.

And there were other incidents but I was just determined. I liked the education and I enjoyed what I was doing... I went home every day to my community. So for me it was okay. It's just being able to balance it and I think having a good support system around you, which is what I had. Even the kids in my sister's class, who were four years older... I was a kid they were proud of... And they made me feel good about being there. And so that was great support from the community to stay there and stick it out.

Atkins attributed an ulterior motive to the way that students were assigned to

specific schools during the initial school desegregation period, and still today, stating:

One of the greatest caveats of desegregation was how...to divide the Black athletes. Even right now, districting is about spreading around the wealth of athletes. It is so simple. Some of the greatest battles—when you hear about how Riverview fought to get these two blocks over here [in Newtown] or how Sarasota fought to get these two blocks over there, it wasn't about the academic concerns of African American kids. It was about the athletic prowess...their potential.

Dr. [Ed] James and Al Abrams and Gene Carnegie and Fred Bacon...they got together and incorporated this not-for-profit around the Sam Shields Sr. incident. And they were able to—with us going, fighting the school board battle—to get Sam to be able to go less than one hundred yards from his house to school, when it'd been ten miles to Riverview. And so, that was part of the struggle.⁴⁶

Atkins' opinion is borne out by the fact that two young men from Newtown who became star athletes were forced to attend Riverview High School due to the closing of Booker High School. Tony Green and Wendell “Pat” Carter were inducted into the Riverview High School Hall of Fame in September 2015. It should have been Booker High School's Hall of Fame. Both eventually played professional football in the NFL: Green played for the Washington Redskins and the Seattle Seahawks; and Carter played for the Detroit Lions, the Los Angeles Rams, the Houston Oilers and the Arizona Cardinals.⁴⁷

Teachers' Experiences

The desegregation order proved to be a challenging experience for teachers as well as students. Byrd's study found that most African American teachers did not want to be transferred into such hostile environments. They had to be forced to do so, or quit, which some did. An exception to this was Dorothy Smith, who recalls that after teaching at Booker for fifteen years, she was transferred to the Venice schools and enjoyed it:

It was after *Brown v. Board of Education* and you had to integrate. So they had to integrate somebody, so they integrated me... [I was] the first one to go to Venice. 1967. It was like a reduction in salary...because you had to pay. I had a car. You had to buy gas to go that far, after having built a house right next door to the school [in Newtown]...In going to Venice, you would stay down there in the afternoon. Some days I stayed down there. PTA meeting nights...We'd go to school eight o'clock in the morning and I'd sit out on the campus, near the waterway on the bench until PTA meeting time. And after a while, some of the teachers invited me to go with them to their house on the way to PTA meeting because you couldn't go in the restaurants to buy anything. So later as they became familiar with my, I guess, experience and so forth, it was different. I couldn't have found a better place to work really.

Some of the children [had never had a black teacher before and they would] pass by me and would take the arms, pull them back. I said,

“it won't come off, it's there to stay.” And they would laugh. Everything was funny because I made it that way because they were inquisitive. They wanted to know and I answered questions. The children, that's what it was all about.

My most joyous moments about being at Venice...I had a good family relationship. I give you one experience. We had a student that had, I don't know what kind of disease he had, but I visited the family to let them know that I really cared. And we had a relationship that extended for years after that. We exchanged Christmas cards, we did all kinds of things together. And it made a long time relationship.

I stayed in Venice four years first time. Then I came back up here and worked as a county level region specialist. And then in 1971, I was appointed principal of Southside Elementary School. [Oldham: “The first African American principal of a [predominantly white]school?”] Yeah. Um-hm. I was surprised, but I just knew what I had to do. Somebody had to do it. Somebody had to pave the way because there were other people coming along. So I didn't want to make them think it was a task they couldn't perform. If you could do it, so can I.⁴⁸

According to Dr. Louis Robison, a Booker High School alumnus, a former principal in the Sarasota Schools, and an Administrator in the Manatee County schools,

The first year of desegregation was traumatic not only for students but for the teachers as well. While I can't remember all the teachers that ended up being transferred, I remember [several]. In many cases these teachers saw their earlier positions from Booker minimized; they were put into assistant coaching jobs from previously head coaching positions or given music teaching positions from previously-held band leader positions. Adding insult to injury was the Teacher Strike of 1968 in Florida. Making the adjustment to new teachers was difficult at best, but right on the heels of that adjustment came the strike. Some teachers walked out of Riverview and Sarasota High Schools...When this happened, they lost their jobs, adding more turmoil to the already difficult transition for Black students.⁴⁹

Dr. Robison was a student in the first class ordered to attend Riverview High School under the desegregation order. Ironically, in 1999 Dr. Robison served as interim principal at Riverview High School for 18 months.

The Union of Concerned Parents

The Union of Concerned Parents (U.C.P.), a Community Based Organization (CBO),⁵⁰ was formed in 1973 by a group parents who were outraged at the of the Sarasota County School Board's failure to take punitive action against a teacher who had committed a violent crime against an African American student. According to McElroy:

Dr. E.E. “Ed” James, II was present at a meeting to protest and seek justice in relationship to the fact that a white teacher had tied six black students to a motorcycle, dragging them around the football field. The Sarasota County School Board was refusing to take any action against the teacher (even though he admitted doing the act), and because there were more than 12 parents present at the meeting, a member of the school board asked what interest did the rest of the parents have in this issue. Dr. James II said, “We are all members of the Union of Concerned Parents, and that is the interest that we have in this issue.” The Sarasota County School Board did not end the teacher’s employment with them. The Union of Concerned Parents helped the parents of one of the physically abused students successfully sue the county Sarasota County School Board for money damages...⁵¹ The members of the Board of Directors of the UCP were Ms. Betty J. Braxton, Albert P. Abrams and Dr. E.E. “Ed” James II the second Dr. James served as chairman of the Board of Directors and would later become chairman emeritus of U.C.P. The organization of U.C.P.... was constructed deliberately to seek specific goals... in the case of UCP, and most other Black community based organizations across the country, their efficiency and performance would come to be perceived as a threat by the government that had deliberately sought to mass-produce Community Based Organizations (CBOs),⁵² as recommended by the Kerner Commission. The UCP adopted the motto, “Make It Happen,” following in the tradition of Malcolm X’s famous quote “By Any Means Necessary.”⁵³

The primary programs initiated by the U.C.P. were:

- 1) Employability Skills and Labor Market Orientation
- 2) Youth Offender Project
- 3) Broadcast Journalism Program
- 4) Theater Project
- 5) Young Adult Conservation Camp

Frankie Davis was among the first children to break the color barrier in 1962, the first year that the Sarasota School Board finally complied with the 1954 Supreme Court order for all schools to desegregate. She was assigned to Bay Haven School under a program called the New Pupil Placement Zone law. Davis joined the UCP staff in 1978 as the Broadcast Journalism Project Coordinator.

Although CBOs were established by the US government to address social inequities in the country, it is quite ironic that, they began to come under attack by various government agencies, including the FBI. In 1981, six Florida CBOs, including the Newtown U.C.P. were wrongly accused of mismanagement of government funds and other alleged malfeasance. Why? According to McElroy, it was because of their success. She defiantly expressed it as follows:

This country cannot add to the talent pool of trained black personnel without adding to the need for a new choice of weapons to be used in

dealing with how to keep a large labor force of skilled, unskilled, underemployed and unemployed from creating civil disorder. In the face of economic consideration, there are cheaper plans available to control this group than education, employment and cultural enrichment. Affirmative action is not under attack because it is being mismanaged.⁵⁴

In 2003, Donald F. Rainone, a doctoral student in the College of Education at the University of South Florida (USF), published his dissertation entitled: “The Role of the Sarasota Visual Performing Arts (VPA) Magnet in Desegregation and Resegregation of Booker Neighborhood Schools.” He conducted a research study whose goal was:

To assess how the Visual Performing Arts (VPA) magnet program, a desegregation tool intended to integrate all-black Booker neighborhood schools, affected the black community...[He] examined the role the VPA magnet program played in the effort to equalize educational opportunity for black students at the Booker schools and its effect on black community life in the Newtown area of Sarasota, Florida...[and he explored] the dilemma facing black families and communities, namely, whether it is desirous, under present day circumstances, to embrace a return to all-black neighborhood schools.”⁵⁵

Rainone’s goal in writing his dissertation was to focus on the African Americans’ perspectives, in spite of the fact that he was a white male researcher. This must have been quite a challenging task. He was led on what he called an “African American odyssey of discovery” in order to reveal the answer to his primary research question (also the title of his dissertation): “What was the Role of the Sarasota Visual Performing Arts (VPA) Magnet in Desegregation and Resegregation of Booker Neighborhood Schools.” Only three of Rainone’s 15 study participants were white individuals. They included: school administrators; teachers; students; parents; and community leaders who were actively involved in the desegregation of the Sarasota County Schools in the late 1960s to 2003. Rainone was in his words an “active participant in the events under study for 20 of the 35 years in the period being researched;” he had been a teacher, head football coach, athletic director, business manager and Director of the Sarasota Visual Performing Arts magnet program at the Booker High School. His study presents a vivid outline of events and actors that were intricately involved in the process of school desegregation in Sarasota.⁵⁶ Rainone vividly describes the effects on the Newtown community during the reopening of Booker High School as a magnet school. This new status brought both welcome changes and tough challenges to the school and to the Newtown community as well. Paved roads brought relief to Newtown students who, before white students were bussed into Newtown to attend the magnet school, had to wait until it stopped raining to go to school in order to avoid having to wade through the mud, as Fredd Atkins told Rainone:

We would have to wait until the water receded. It was like a swamp or a moat all around the school. The buses had to wait also. Or man, they’d get stuck” (p.199) Another of his interviewees stated: “Oh, I see, the old Booker with raggedy textbooks, falling-apart buildings, muddy roads, was

just fine for us black-folk. But as soon as your white folk move on, oh well, there goes the neighborhood, all right. We had to pretty-up for you guys, or else – or else we feared we would close down again” (p.212). The way that Jerry Strickland, principal of newly reopened Booker High School, believed that he could “save the Booker campus” (p.205) was to ensure the enrollment of many whites students who would be drawn to the magnet school to take advantage of the special curriculum and programs that the Visual and Performing Arts school offered. While Newtown resident were happy that the school reopened in September 1970, it came with a price. The school had few African American teachers and administrators and a majority white student population. Fearing that to protest the situation would mean that the school would once again close, one resident said that: “ We all felt like we could not let that happen. So, we sucked it up and went along to get along – right or wrong. Why is it that it is always we, the black folk, who compromise, give in? We only want a small piece. Just a taste. It’s you folks who want to eat the whole darn pie.”⁵⁷

Based upon the data he collected, Rainone concluded that:

Once the black Booker neighborhood schools were closed, the white power structure comprised of administrators, School Board members, teachers, and influential citizens assumed the management of a reopened Booker Campus, created an array of special programs and set racial quotas, at once integrating the Booker Campus and alienating, by lack of meaningful black inclusion, the Newtown community. Though significant physical changes that included the removal of barbed wire fences, paving of dirt roads, and the release from Federal Court control were achieved, white control was institutionalized on the Booker Campus. Desegregation effects including busing and the magnet program produced a present-day fractious community, unable to coordinate a unified movement to demand and receive an alternative to the results of years of white rule on the Booker Campus.⁵⁸

Maintaining Racial Quotas at Booker High School

According to Rainone, when Jan Gibbs was appointed the Principal/Director of the Booker Campus, succeeding Addison Gilbert, she:

Understood the white power structure had become a mixture of influential white businesspeople or “heavy hitters.” It was Gilbert’s fear, that if the school was allowed to drift towards a heavy or too-black population, prospective parents and those of children already attending a “special school” (a phrase coined during Strickland’s tenure), and of course, the School Board, would not be happy...The Newtown community had never heard of the “charge” made to Gibbs (until it was mentioned in interviews conducted for

this research), but suspected the Board of engaging in a tactical numbers game. Their concerns and fears of what role the VPA was going to play in the makeup of Booker Campus were ignored. A School Board meeting held on May 1, 1979 established that “Quotas in the Fine Arts Magnet Program will be maintained in the 20-50% range.”⁵⁹

This “charge” still haunts Booker High School today. When it reopened, Booker High School was no longer an all-black, community school; in fact it was a majority-white school. Rainone confirmed this in his 2003 dissertation; “Booker High School has a white population of 62% and a black population of 25%”⁶⁰

Principal Dr. Rachel Shelley reports that:

The school population statistics have changed significantly since that time. In 2015, under the leadership of Principal Dr. Rachel Shelley, the 1,163-student population consists of approximately 1/3 African American, 1/3 Latino, and 1/3 white students. In the state of Florida as well as in our county, there has been upward movement in the overall graduation rate. Across the board there is an increase. Booker High School is doing much better when considering the 5-year trend, compared to our state as well as our district.

Our graduation rate is a little lower than my colleagues,’ but we are working on getting the rate up. Of the five comprehensive high schools, Booker High doesn’t have the highest or the lowest. It’s exciting to know that at the time they become seniors, they are getting rigorous coursework. It’s directly tied to our mission and vision and how we align all of our resources. For instance, we offer classes in how to effectively score high on standardized tests, associated with course offerings at State College of Florida. “I take pride in knowing that we working diligently to make sure our students receive opportunities that will help them to have a great quality of life.”

Bridges Burned: The Newtown Community and Booker High School

The fractured relationship that exists between the school and the Newtown community, which was created by desegregation mandates and by the insensitive actions of former administrator Jan Gibbs, has not been totally mended. According to Dr. Shelley, there were two actions by former Principal/Director Gibbs that aggravated an already strained school-community relationship. First, when the old Booker auditorium was demolished and rebuilt, the new structure no longer bore the name of the highly respected, first principal of the school, Roland Rogers. Second, artifacts commemorating the school’s history, which had great significance to the Newtown community and to alumni, were callously tossed into the rubbish at Gibbs’ direction or permission. Newtown residents, current students, and alumni were outraged; they were able to salvage some of the precious items from the refuse. It seemed to them that Gibbs wanted to erase all traces of the African American legacy from the Booker Campus, and this created a huge divide. Alumni who graduated from Booker in the 1950s 1960s and 1970s

no longer wanted to be affiliated with Booker. They felt distraught because “the only thing we had was our school and they created an all white school.”⁶¹

Rebuilding the Bridges

In October 2015, *Tempo News* heralded the return of former Booker High School students from what would have been the class of 1968, had the school not been closed. The headline read: “Emotional Welcome Home for BHS Class of 1968.” The article described how:

A flood of memories and hugs turned into tears as the group listened to a surprise announcement made by BHS principal Dr. Rachel Shelley...Honorary high school diplomas and a proclamation were presented to class members who still hold their purple and gold traditions close to the heart...In 1967, the Booker students were uprooted from the comfortable cocoon of their community school. Lifelong friendships with classmates were tested; and the close bonds between their families and teachers who lived in the same neighborhood and worshipped together were torn apart”...Patricia Byrd-Blake recalled that, “We were split up. Some friends went to Sarasota High and I went to Riverview.” Glenda Williams also became a Riverview High student. “I remember getting off the bus and there were stairs where the busses parked. From the upper floor we were spit on,” she said. “We were top students in our Booker class but there, the criteria changed. There were things that happened to us that people don’t understand,” an emotional Williams recalled.⁶²

Changes in Education in Newtown

In a 2012 interview, former Booker principal Rev. Jerome Dupree stated, “Sarasota has changed most in the educational area, I mean in terms of facilities where you can go in order to study for school. There are a number of facilities...There are satellites, for instance [for online study]. [In the past] we didn’t have a lot of the colleges. When I came there was no New College, there was no University of South Florida here... So Sarasota has changed a great deal in its educational system.”⁶³ There are other educational options for students who do not wish to go to a traditional college, among them are: Sarasota Military Academy, Suncoast Polytechnic, and Westcoast School.

Now in her fifth year as principal of Booker High School, Dr. Rachel Shelley, a passionate educator, proudly exclaims that, “My vocation is my vacation! I love what I am doing! God gave me this calling.”⁶⁴ Dr. Shelley grew up in Sarasota public housing and rose to her current status as principal through a series of positions as teacher, assistant principal, and principal in both Newtown and North Port. Booker High School has made many changes and introduced a number of innovative programs under her leadership. These include:

- Aligned the vision and mission for Booker High School
- ACE program – students can receive a diploma from the University of Cambridge in addition to their high school diploma
- Students can graduate having taken more college level courses
- Reinstated the Law Academy

- Offer more career CTE classes: students graduate with a high school diploma and are also certified by Microsoft
- Offer a full time program where all students are offered SAT and ACT test-taking strategies during the day
- Scholarship profiles are created for students, identifying scholarships for which they are eligible
- Strict culture on campus culture: dress codes and behavior rules enforced.
- Mediations as alternatives to suspension: a program in partnership with New College
- Offer PERT postsecondary educational readiness test – taken in junior year - goal for kids to grad college or career ready – current tests are at 9th grade level – she can immediately tell whether they will need remedial courses in college.
- Refining community partnerships ASALH and Boule group – AA retired men with strong desire to mentor – focus on AA children nationwide but all students at Booker – Journey to Success.

Dr. Shelley is excited about the progress that she has been at the helm of during the past five years, including the fact that Booker High School has the district's lowest crime rate of any high school in Sarasota. Another important initiative has been her effort to refine community partnerships with the Association for the Study of African American Life and History (ASALH) and Sigma Pi Phi Fraternity, called Boulé, to mentor students at Booker High School.⁶⁵

As a part of the Newtown-North Sarasota Redevelopment Project, Booker's campus received \$60 million in renovations that allowed for new academic programs and educational experiences. These include: Advanced International Certificate in Education (AICE); International Baccalaureate (IB); The Visual Performing Arts (VPA); The Law Academy magnet; The STEM Academy; Leadership Training: JROTC; Advanced Placement; Dual Enrollment; Digital Design, Career and Technical Education; and Business Supervision and Management. The renovation project, completed in 2013, also provided employment opportunities for local residents; workers from Sarasota, Manatee, Desoto and Charlotte counties performed 70% of the labor.⁶⁶

In the earlier years, most of the graduates of the Booker Schools who were going to college attended Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) in Florida: Bethune Cookman College (now University), Edward Waters College and Florida A&M University (FAMU). That was largely due to the lack of opportunities for African American students to gain admission to other Florida institutions. For example, the state's flagship university lagged far behind other institutions of higher education across the country in desegregating its student body:

In 1958, Virgil Hawkins entered into a consent decree that ended nine years of litigation to desegregate the student body of the University of Florida. On Sept. 15, 1958, an Air Force veteran named George H. Starke registered for classes at the College of Law and became the [University of Florida's] first African American student.⁶⁷

African American graduates of Booker High School more recently have had the opportunity to attend a wider range of universities, both HBCUs and predominantly-white institutions (PWIs), including: the University of Chicago, Eckerd College, Sarasota Community College, University of Florida, Bowling Green State University (Ohio), State College of Florida, Manatee-Sarasota (formerly Manatee Community College), Florida State University, University of South Florida and others.

Newtown Residents' Focus on Education Remains Strong

There continues to be a focus on early childhood education in Newtown today. An important person involved in that effort is Dr. Harriet Moore, currently the principal of McIntosh Middle School. Although she had never intended to come back to Sarasota, she said, there was something telling her that 'it's time to go.' Upon her return to Sarasota from Los Angeles, she recalls that:

I had just started reintroducing myself into the community and some people were talking to me about some programs they wanted to get started and I did a lot of out of Los Angeles. Everywhere I live, I do a lot out in the community. And so the HIPPIY Program⁶⁸ kind of came up, the Home Instruction Program for Pre-school Youngsters, which was through the Washington Council of Jewish Women and the YMCA, that collaboration. And they asked me about it and I said, "Well, I'll go out to Arkansas to get the training, but I'm really not sure." And I went out and I absolutely loved it, teaching women how to be their child's first teacher. And HIPPIY is still going strong as you know and I started that sitting at the kitchen table on 17th and Orange, and the rest of that is history. But it's a great program and we've seen many kids benefit from it throughout the years. And from there [I went] to the Child Protection Center, working with what's now Children's First, which used to be Sarasota Day Nursery. And helping with the Head Start Program once it came out of the district and making sure that they have all of the federal pieces in order.⁶⁹

Dr. Rachel Shelley, Booker High School principal, recognizes that there is still a lot of work to be done toward mending the relationship between the Newtown community and Booker High School. That relationship may never be quite the same, however, she is very conscientious about building bridges between the community, current students and the alumni. That effort paid great dividends when she sponsored an event in October 2015 that honored former students who would have graduated from Booker High School in 1968, had it not been closed down due to the desegregation order. A 2014 film project by the Booker High School students is another bridge. Students, who live in different parts of Sarasota and come from various socioeconomic levels, made a documentary film of Newtown as a school project. Samuel Curtis, a recent college graduate and director of the film project, said that the goal was to make a film that highlighted the unexpected aspects of the community. As he told a *Herald Tribune* reporter, "The main characters cannot be the elected leaders or well-known community activists." According to the reporter, "[Curtis] wants the voices of the regular people

struggling to get by, the homeless, the people who have called Newtown home for years. Too often, the students agree, those are the stories that don't get told."⁷⁰

This is also the goal of the NCHD Project: to provide a portrait that provides broader and deeper insights into the Newtown community and its residents than the narrow, and often negative, one that people typically see on television news or read about in newspapers.

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CHAPTER 7: SEGREGATION, DESEGREGATION AND INTEGRATION

THE DILEMMA

In September 1895, Booker T. Washington, head of Tuskegee Institute in Alabama, stepped to the podium at the Atlanta Cotton States Exposition and implored white employers to “cast down your bucket where you are” and hire African Americans who had proven their loyalty even throughout the South’s darkest hours. In return, Washington declared, southerners would be able to enjoy the fruits of a docile work force that would not agitate for full civil rights. Instead, blacks would be “In all things that are purely social...as separate as the fingers.” Washington called for an accommodation to southern practices of racial segregation in the hope that African Americans would be allowed a measure of economic freedom and then, eventually, social and political equality.

For other prominent African Americans, like W. E. B. Du Bois who had just received his Ph.D. from Harvard, this was an unacceptable strategy; he felt that the only way African Americans would be able to improve their social standing would be to assimilate and demand full citizenship rights immediately.¹

These two opposing strategies divided African Americans about which path to follow. Washington’s intention to provide training in various trades for African Americans was a good one in some respects. Not all people are meant to go to college; society needs people with all types of skills. However, his suggestion that African Americans should accept second-class status, be a “docile work force that would not agitate for civil rights,” while waiting and hoping that they would eventually be “allowed” to assume their rightful places in society was unrealistic and counterproductive.

African Americans fervently sought release from the yoke of oppression and discrimination in US society. Washington’s statement that African Americans would be “In all things that are purely social...as separate as the fingers” certainly perpetuated the social status quo; nothing would change: African Americans would have to lower their eyes when speaking to white people and would have to ‘know and stay in their place’ until dominant white society decided they were worthy of acceptance. Washington’s stance was very controversial. On the other hand, while many may have agreed with Du Bois about demanding citizenship rights, assimilation required the availability of an education, which was inaccessible to most African Americans, especially in the southern U.S.: The rule of law was “separate but equal.” While the “separate” part was the norm in the South, the “equal” portion of that law was never attained. Even after the Brown v Board of Education decision in 1954, the city of Sarasota dragged its heels until, threatened by an economic backlash from the federal government, it had no other choice

except to make changes. Those changes were not beneficial for many African Americans, however, as is discussed in detail in the Education chapter of this Report.

Newtown: Building A Better Life

The early African Americans settlers of Sarasota established various businesses in Overtown, the first African American settlement in Sarasota, so the entrepreneurial spirit was already present when they made the transition to Newtown. That spirit came in large part from necessity. Residents did not have easy or dignified access to many businesses and services due to racial discrimination and Jim Crow laws. There were spoken and unspoken rules about African Americans' behavior in the presence of white people: indirect eye contact, what stores one could shop in, stepping off the sidewalk and into the street when a white person approached, and where the boundaries were around the African American community that should not be crossed. "Back then, in the days of segregation, black residents risked trouble almost any time they stepped outside the Newtown community. There were rules against walking downtown after dark, using certain water fountains, or trying on shoes in a Main Street shop."² According to Jeff Lahurd, "The Roaring '20s were among the hardest times for Sarasota's African American community. The Ku Klux Klan was often a visible presence here, with cross burnings and other forms of intimidation, both physical and psychological. Sarasota's branch of the Knights of the Ku Klux Klan, the Invisible Empire, was Klan Number 72."³

Several interviewees expressed how their parents shielded them from the worst of the discrimination and racist acts of violence; they did not feel oppressed in their childhood, and were allowed to be just children playing games and living without that constant awareness that someone would treat you unfairly because of your skin color, and what that, supposedly, said about you as a human being. Of course, that feeling was made possible by the sheltered atmosphere that a self-reliant African American community provided; they had very limited contact with whites.

The reality of racism was quite apparent, however, for the adults and therefore, they established businesses that were necessary to meet the community's needs. As a famous quote from an unknown author reads: "Necessity is the mother of invention." In Newtown, residents appeared to blend Booker T. Washington's and W.E.B. Du Bois' approaches for improvement in their lives. First, education was stressed and was provided at an early age, initially in private homes. Later, education was provided in a formal school environment, an effort led by teacher and principal Emma E. Booker, although students may have been attending classes in something other than a traditional school building. Sending their children to college was a goal for many families, but attending vocational and technical schools to gain specific skills - which sometimes led to establishing their own businesses or having a profession, such as nursing - was seen as a valuable alternative. The number of businesses in Newtown grew dramatically as more people moved there. That certainly followed Washington's philosophy of self-reliance and separation. But the residents of Newtown also strongly agitated for their full civil rights, as Du Bois had advocated, including demands for better schools and for political representation.

Schools

For many years, Sarasota's city and county government officials discriminated against students and teachers in Newtown by not providing the funding necessary to equip the schools for African American children with the same quality and quantity of learning materials and facilities that were provided to the all-white schools. Therefore, Newtown parents and teachers were forced to hold fundraisers in order to purchase the basic necessities that they needed for their children's schools, teachers often bought materials with their own money. One parent in particular voiced his opinions about these inequities publically. Helen Dixon's father was very outspoken and never hesitated to go to City Hall to advocate on behalf of both the teachers and the children:

...Every day he would come out to Booker High School. I can remember that we didn't have a bathroom and then when we had the bathroom, it was a pull-chain bathroom and my sister went in the bathroom and it had run over and she had fell. And he came out to the school and said, "I want a janitor here, I pay taxes." He says, "I don't need them to scrub and wipe the floors, I teach them that at home." And so he went downtown and we got the first janitor at Booker High School.⁴

What made **Walter Gilbert, III** want to get more involved in the civil rights movement was:

Neil Humphrey. Mr. Neil Humphrey. He owned the drug store; it was a little sundry store that sold some of everything, patent medicines, not a pharmacy type drug store. He had the only business like that in our community. Mr. Humphrey was probably 5'5" might've weighed 155 lbs., really soft spoken. If he raised his voice you could hardly hear him. I thought he was a meek little man.

But in these NAACP meetings he was fire and brimstone. He was telling us how we'd go down there, what we'd say, how we were to act. He wasn't having no troubles. I'm looking at all the other people saying, "Yes sir, Mr. Humphrey." It changed my perspective. His persona changed right in my face. I wanted to be like this guy, not only business-wise, I wanted to be a leader like him.

My first step in doing something in the leadership vein was at Sarasota High. My father said, "If you're going to be upfront, be upfront." At Sarasota High we didn't feel that we were being treated properly in the lunchroom. We were sitting there; everyone was talking about it. I said, "Let's get up, and we won't eat lunch in here anymore." Everybody said, "OK." I said, "OK, let's go." Everybody just came. We had a strike at the lunchroom for a week and ½ before they decided to bring us in and talk to us. They actually appointed Fredd Atkins and I to the Student Council. First of all, they didn't want us there. People [white staff] in lunchroom service treated us bad. It went on for a year or so. The other thing, we

didn't have any Black cheerleaders although the football team was black. We had a bunch of grievances.

We got the kids on the football team [I was a member of the team] to say they wouldn't play anymore. So what the Missouri team did [in their recently threatened boycott] was nothing new. They gave us two cheerleaders. They changed the process in the lunchroom. We had the meetings to talk about this at my mom's house. She encouraged us. In fact, while we were striking, she brought us lunch to the school because we wouldn't go into the lunchroom. That was my first action. We were empowered. We weren't afraid.

Teachers lived in the same communities and, in some cases, the same homes as their students in Overtown and Newtown, resulting in very close and nurturing relationships between them and the parents and students. When school desegregation was implemented, the African American children no longer had that sense of security and acceptance from teachers who cared about them, which led many to drop out of school, others to endure painful experiences, and, yet, others to thrive in the new environment. Teachers were also challenged with difficult choices: either adjust to the racism that they encountered from parents, students and fellow faculty when they were forced to teach in previously all-white schools, or quit their jobs.

Racial discrimination extended to higher education also, as demonstrated by Betty Johnson's personal experience: "After graduating from Booker, I attended [Gibbs Junior] College and Gibsonton [Gibbs Junior] College is in St. Petersburg. And the reason we travelled to St. Petersburg [was] because we were not allowed to attend Manatee Community College. So the school board provided us with a bus that took us to Gibbs."⁵

Access to Knowledge: The Library

Libraries are essential to expanding the horizons of children and adults alike. The Newtown community had no access to a real library, due to segregation, until the year 1957. That was the year that a remarkable incident involving Dr. Ed James, II occurred. As he recalled:

If a black wanted to get a book from the library you had to go to the Newtown Community Center to the town "Rec" center. Well, someone from the Newtown community center will call the library and say, "We have a student at the high school or just a citizen who wants a book on water conservation." So somebody from the library would take two or three books that they thought might answer what they were looking for and send it out three or four, five or six, seven, eight, - whenever the next trip was - days later to the rec. Well that changed. I'm happy to say I was part of that change. During the Christmas of 1957, during winter break from Florida A&M University, I came home. And three other people who were high school classmates - Booker High School class of 1957 - and one of them was Ralph Honor, who was also a student at Florida A&M. I said, "Let's go to the library and check out some books." And they said, "Why

you want to go, you know we can't get any books from library." I said, "Well let's go see" and they said, "Look, I don't want to do this." They would always say no. My friends and I would come up with these various kinds of ideas. "Now if they say we can't, we're going to leave right?" I said, "Right." "Now you promised now we not going to confront anybody." I said, "No, no, no." So Roosevelt Ball, A.W. Ball, Ralph Honor and myself, we went down...to the library. And we walked in. There was a counter just beyond the front door... information counter. We walked up and stood there for a minute, and then the librarian came out and said, "Can I help you?" I said, "Yes, we are going to check out some books." [I] proudly said, "We are college students. We need to do some research over the holidays." She said, "Have you tried the Newtown library? The Newtown Community Center, the library there?" I said, "That's not a library that's a joke." And my two partners were getting a little edgy and Ralph was the closest to me he kicked me on the leg behind the counter. And I said, "It is our plan to check out some books today and mam.' You should call whoever you need to call so that that can happen." And then she said, "Hold on just a minute," and she called a number. We didn't know where she was calling... One of my friends said she's probably calling the police and we need to go. We need to go right now. And I said, "Well I'm not going to go right now, just hold on for another bit." And they said that, "You promised, you promised us we would leave," and I just said, "Just hold on a minute maybe this is finally the day."

And then there some things like, "Yes, no, no," to whoever she was talking to and we later found that she was talking to the city manager at that time Ken Thompson. She handed the phone to me and said, "Mr. Thompson wants to talk to you," and so I said, "Hello?" He said, "Hi, I'm Ken Thompson who am I talking to?" I said, "I'm Ed James." He said, "Do I know you?" I say, "No, no, Mr. Thompson I don't think so and I don't know you." He said, "Well, I'm the city manager. I understand you want to check out some books from the library. I said "yes." "And I understand that you didn't go to the Newtown library." I said, "There is no Newtown library. You mean those two shelves of old magazines and books with torn pages in the community center?" He said, "Do your parents know that you were there?" I said no. "What would they say if they knew you were there demanding service?" I said, "They would probably say it's about time." He said "Well would you come down and talk to me? I'm at City Hall. Do you know where City Hall is?" I said, "no." He says, "Do you know where the old wooden city pier is?" I said, "yes." He said, "Well we are a building at the back of that pier and I'd like to have a conversation about that." I said, "OK I'll be right there." And the librarian looked to be relieved from what she was hearing when I gave her the phone back.

And then my friends say, “Where do you say we are going now?” I said, “We’re going to City Hall.” “Where [is] City Hall?” I said, “The City Hall [is] by the pier. You know.” A.W. said, “I’m not going.” He said, “They’re probably going to drown us there.” I said, “Oh come on that’s not what happens.” So he decided he wasn’t going to go, and he walked back to Newtown from what would be about 9th Street, where the library was, down on 41. Ralph said, “Well, tell you what. I’m going with A.W., so you can tell us what happens when you get back, if you get back.” And they walked, because I had the car and I was driving. I went, and that day I met Ken Thompson. For those who may be reading or listening to this, and not aware the first City Hall was where Marina Jacks is now and that was a wooden structure. Not the fancy concrete structure that rises out of Sarasota Bay now.

I sat down and talked with him and he said, “Where are your friends?” and I said, “Well some of them had something to do so they went on back.” And we had probably about a 15-minute talk and he says, “OK, go back to the library and get your books now.” And I guess he told her it was OK if we went back. So I thought, “Now I get to legitimately check out a book.” And she gave me the equivalent of a card and I told her what I was looking for. I don't even remember what it is at this point. And she went back in and helped me find it and I went on back to my friends and said, “Wer can go to the library now, no thanks to you.” And they said, “Why you always fussin’ with somebody about something. They’re going to kill you one day.” I said, “But it wasn't today.” And that's how the library system became integrated.⁶

Ed James, II’s remarkable story was history making in many respects. Thanks to his courageous act, the Newtown community now had permission to use the library. But it still required a car to transport them there. Librarian Betty Johnson came up with a creative solution. She started a ‘library in a van’ to improve Outreach efforts to the community. She tells her story below:

Betty Johnson

...I guess deep down, library was supposed to be my calling. [Laughter] I didn't know it but it evidently came out because my last year in high school, we had what was called Library Procedure classes. I did take those classes where we learned all about the processing of books and how books were processed for the shelves in the library. And I was more or less the last year, in high school—I guess you would say I was a library page. But at that time, I don't want to say I was the librarian, but I was more or less left in charge of the library for a while. And I had no intention for going to be a librarian. But what happened was, after we finished Gibbs...I didn't know what I was going to do and, like I told you, I always wanted to be a social worker. There I go again, I always like helping people to help themselves. It's something that I like doing. But...the job position came open at what was Gibbs-Sarasota Public Library. It wasn't called Selby at that time. Having had the library

procedure classes, the librarian there figured I could handle the job so she hired me at the library.

I was not the first black there. There was one other person before me but we just happened to be good friends. Her name was Mary Thomas. And when she was hired...The story behind that was Mrs. Mary Emma Jones. She was instrumental in them hiring blacks at the library. And the first black hired there was Mary Thomas. She was hired and then another position came open and then I was hired. And then it ended up that...Mary took another job and I was left there. So for the longest I was the only black in the library you might say. Mrs. Mary Emma pushed a lot...for the hiring of blacks...City Hall and the city government and so forth and so on. Yeah, she was really a trooper...[Oldham: It's no surprise that her son Ed James would come and be doing the same thing.] Right, no surprise...

I worked at that time what they call "split-shift." But even at that, I noticed the blacks were not using the library. And that's mostly because we were not welcomed in the library...The library was not open to black people in those days...It was just the attitude of the people that worked in the library. The way they treat you when you came into the library. You knew that you were not welcome.... My first experience of that was [when] I had to do a book report and I had to go to that library to get a book because we didn't have it at the Booker library. And they did not allow you to go into the stacks...what they called 'closed stacks.' But I supposed they were just closed to blacks. They weren't closed to everybody. And the lady that was at the desk had to go to the stacks to get the book for me. But when I got started working there, those same people were there. [Laughter]

...blacks were not using the library, I always pondered, "Well why do we not use the library? Why don't we?" But, eventually, there was a family that did start coming into the library and I looked forward to seeing them come into the library. They would come in every Friday evening, and this was Mr. Robinson. And he would come into the library and he would sit and read. And then on Friday evening he would bring his family into the library and they would choose their books and they would sit and read. And I'm going, "What can I do to get more blacks to come and use the library?" ...I had this vision of a reading room. And so at this particular time they were getting ready to purchase a new book mobile and the divine was spoken to me... "Go and ask for that old book mobile, and station that old book mobile on this spot right here....And turn it into what would be a reading room."

And when I got to work that afternoon I went in and asked the librarian. I said, "What about getting the old book mobile and using it as a reading room as the beginning of a library?" And Mrs. Hopkins said to me, "Where would you put it?" And I said, "I have a spot in Newtown, in the Newtown Estates, and we could put it there as a reading room." So she said okay. So she called down to ... the administrator. And she had a conversation with him about that and the thing that came out was, "Well the only problem is, the book mobile has been condemned so we can't use it anymore." So we couldn't use it even as a station because it had

been condemned.

So during this time, the Library Construction Act - a state project coming out of Tallahassee, the state library - had grants going for library services to what they were calling at that time "disadvantaged" [areas]. She said, "There is a grant that the state library has. Let me look into the possibilities of us getting that grant." And she did. And she said, "Now if I get the grant, will you be the coordinator of the outreach program? Meaning you'd be in charge if it?" I said, "Yeah, I'll take it." So she did get the grant and I became the outreach coordinator. And the [purpose] of the grant was to establish a library or to show the feasibility, the need for a library in the community where that grant was being used. And so the outreach program... started; there were five stops...the stops were: Newtown Recreation Center, Robert Taylor; we had a stop at Orange Avenue Projects; we had a stop at Project Lane; and we had a stop at Laurel. We tried to establish a stop here, under the Pavilion, and that one didn't work because there was no building here, so most of the kids were at Robert Taylor anyway. That van was equipped with books on moveable carts. So the kids could come in, select their books and take them home or they could sit at the stop and read the books...[in] a building...

So even the idea of the library, they did get to use it and...we did outdoor movies here in this area. So this was a way of introducing this community to library services. And this is what the outreach was all about, introducing the community to library services. So this is how we got started with the idea. Out of this project we would establish a library in this community. And that is when we started with the first branch library. It was supposed to be the first branch library of Selby Library. But ...at that time they [the county commissioners] did not see it feasible to make it a branch of Selby Library. But the Newtown Storefront Library was established under that Library Construction Act. We were almost there. They were almost ready to take it on and then we had the taxing situation that came about in the Longboat Key community and the library branch community taxing. They decided that the taxing should go to the Longboat Key rather than to establish the branch library. So that's what happened with that.

But we didn't stop. With friends, we kept working towards them and we kept that library open for about three or four years after we had started. So eventually... I had shown Mrs. Hopkins the spot for the portable library...During that time that I was doing the outreach program, the county purchased this property. That is where what is called, "Sarasota Public Library" came out of...Maple Avenue. That was the library established from the outreach program.

After the grant ran out...I had to go back into the library because there were no more funds to pay my salary. But the library was still there and we had to use volunteers to keep it open, but I was still overseeing it...The kids enjoyed coming into the library...we had what was called arts and crafts on Saturdays. They really liked the arts and crafts. I would have a room full of them Saturdays. They would come for arts and crafts. So this was a way of getting them introduced to what was going on in the library and I would occasionally do a story hour for them on

Saturday mornings. I would [do] the story hour for the kids over at daycare center across the street. I think they call it the extension of Helen Payne...I would do story hours for the headstart program. All of this was part of the outreach program. I believe in to help people to help themselves, to better themselves...the kids would catch on to using the library...and this was [a] way of them helping themselves. This was a way of adults also helping themselves... I guess the idea of self-education took a hold of me and I just [thought] if they had a library here, this would be the thing for them.

...The beginning of this was a dream because I just envisioned having a library here in Newtown, that was my dream, a full-service library... So this was a dream come true...under the leadership of Pauline [Hodges] and her group... the library really came into [being] but it came into [being] from the groundwork that I had laid... And then what is surprising to everybody is the fact that I had designated this spot. I had asked for the book mobile to be put on this spot.

The most exciting thing ...is that...the cultural center here, with history. That is very exciting because, as I told people, I never intended it to be... a black library, but a library with a collection of black history that everybody could use, that everybody could benefit from... So this is more or less what it is with that special collection here of black history and that's great. And for years to come, and I pray that it is still here, you can come in and research the history of Sarasota in this community. And it will be archived here in this library. Now that's very exciting to me!⁷

Segregation in Social Life

“World War II saw an end to tolerance of racism in Newtown and the surfacing of years of quiet anger. The African-American community felt as a whole that because African-Americans had fought and died for the Country, they deserved equal treatment. Throughout the 1950s, this emerging anger became the impetus for change across the country, including Sarasota.”⁸ This period in history was the beginning of the fight for the civil rights of every American, particularly those left out of the typical definition of “American citizen.”— African Americans.

According to Rev. Jerome Dupree and other interviewees who discussed what life was like in the days before desegregation, the rules for residents of Newtown resembled the “Pass Laws” of South Africa during the apartheid era.⁹ Dupree stated that:

After seven o'clock people from the Newtown community and the Overtown community were not allowed to be on the south side -- go across, go past 3rd Street, which is Fruitville Road -- at night. And if you did go south of Fruitville Road at night, you had to have some kind of credentials showing that you were supposed to be in that area during that time. And the police were always stationed at Five Points there. They're stationed at Five Points and they could see whether or not you were going. So when we started working at the bowling alleys -- we set up pins at the bowling alley,

that was before they got the automatic set-up -- we had to go to the little police station, it might have been half as big as this room here, but we went to the little police station that was on State Street. It was right next to a hardware store known as Adams and Houser Hardware Store. But we had to go there and get a permit.¹⁰

Carolyn Mason

...There was definitely a dividing line. And for me, I call it the Mason-Dixon line, and it was Fruitville Road. It was Third Street. That was the dividing line.

Because north of Fruitville or 3rd Street, was the black community. And south was Downtown, the more affluent community. And there were places downtown that I could not go in because of the color of my skin. [Black: The theatre – was that available?]

Not until sometime in the '60s. it was sometime before 1964...that we were able to go into the theatres downtown.

It was an exciting time, as a child. While I distinctly remember “Colored” and “White” bathrooms in the train station, on Lemon Avenue, or in the Five and Dime Store, both of them, on Main Street. And there were two theatres on Main Street that we couldn't go in, because of the color of our skin. We had a theatre, a black theatre, on Fifth Street, just east of Central Avenue. The building is still there, but it was – from a child's view – it was good! I remember riding at the back of the bus because I had to [on] the public transportation. Not being able to go to Lido Beach. And having to go to Caspersen Beach, which was located in South County, just a little south of Venice.

[Black: And how did you get there?]

Well my parents had a car, and so on a Sunday afternoon, it would be an all afternoon thing. Because there's the drive down there, and then the drive back. But in spite of all of that, to me, it was a good childhood.¹¹

CIVIL RIGHTS ERA: DESEGREGATING PUBLIC SPACES

Restaurants, Clothing Stores

Fannie McDugle

Well, I was one of the members of [the NAACP]...Mr. Rivers down the street there, he was our NAACP president...and we had a organization...Civil Rights Organization...When we got the members together we started at Morrison Cafeteria because that's where Blacks couldn't go and we would all just get together like 25 or 30 [of us]. They get scared when we walk in there... And they'd just look at you...And we would just sit down and look at them. And the waitress was scared to come over to the table, I guess, to take our order. So, they standing there

looking at us and we sitting at the table looking at them. [Laughter]. So we did it for a whole week...Everyday, everyday. It was eleven o'clock when we went down on our lunch; that was lunchtime. And then five o'clock, that was from five to nine; that was dinnertime... Morrison's Cafeteria and ...Woolworth... We would all sit, take up all the space, all the stools... And then the manager would come out and look at us and be scared to say something because [of] the NAACP. They knew we were strong and you have to be careful. So they would go back. We did it for a whole week... We wasn't served, but we would sit up and keep the other people from coming in. And they would cook up the food and ...nobody come in and buy it. They didn't serve us and we wouldn't let nobody come in.

After a week then the manager he came out, he said, "Please, please y'all." He said, "What y'all mean to do?" He said, "I done throw out my food a whole week." Well that's what we was making them do, throw it out... He walked in there he just looked at us, then would walk back. The waitress, they would stand back, they was scared to come to the table. They'd look at us and we'd look at them. And we maybe spent about a hour, sometime two hours, just sit there. And then we all get up and leave. And then the people that come in to order... food... they got tired too. They just stopped coming. They stayed home. [Laughter] So that's the part what was killing him. So he said "Please y'all, what you want me to do?" We said, "We want you to serve us." Our money spend just like anybody else's money. He said, "Well, just have a seat, just have a seat." So we had a seat and then the waitress came out and they give us the menu and we all sat just like anybody else and we ordered the food and they brought it out to us. And it started from that day and everybody could come in and eat. Just didn't matter what color you was. You just come in and eat.

... That was out there in Ringling shopping center... I think they had all white waitress and they had all white cooks. ... We would go in like lunchtime, because that's... when the tourist was here, the people from up North. They thought it was horrible, they thought it was so bad. Yeah, up North they serve Black people... You walked in, you got served. But here was different.

We integrated the restaurants and we integrated the clothing stores like J.C. Penney's, and there was a expensive store there on Main Street. I can't remember that name anyway... But when we start to integrating down that line down there, then we all went in and we stood there and we went looking like we do now, pulling out dresses. [Laughter]... waiting for them to say, "Well, you want go in and try on your clothes?" [but they didn't]. We just found us a spot, went in the bathroom, anywhere. Just so we were private, and then we would come out to the mirror and be looking around like we do now. [Laughter] And they would... be standing back looking. [Laughter] But we had fun doing it... , 'cause we was young and we didn't care. [Laughter] ... But the older people, they act like they was a

little afraid ...

When we found something we want, then we would walk up to them and say...“Who want to take my money? I like this dress.” [Laughter] And then they would look like they’re looking at the other one. And then she would go back there and said something to the manager. I guess she said, “They want to buy this dress.” So I guess he got tired of us come in taking them down, looking and talking to each other. Then they start to taking our money.

...During my time, we integrated [the beaches] too. They had one in between Sarasota and Bradenton Beach... Siesta Key. We integrated Siesta Key too...It felt good to us because we were doing something that was right...Opened the door for YOUR generation, that’s right... They tried to pass a law...that you couldn’t take the clothes off of the hanger and go back to trying on. But then the NAACP stepped in, and they said, well, if everybody else go in...trying on clothes, then anybody ought to be able to go in there and try on clothes if they want to...

Oh we were strong, we were strong...We got our rights. And then...[President John F. Kennedy]... he come and he opened the door. He passed a law that you had to wait on anybody. If they had the money.

...John Rivers was good, he was very good. And real strong and...he was a real good Christian too. And he would like to do things right. And just because he was the NAACP president, we didn’t try to buck against or start fights or nothing. We did everything the right way. And we either talked it out or just walked around and did whatever we wanted to do. You had to walk up to us and tell us, “Well you can’t do this and you can’t do that.” [And we would say,] “Well how come?” [After President Kennedy passed the law]...regardless of what color, if you had the money to buy it you bought it. If you want to buy a house on there on Bird Key, if you had the money you could buy it.

Neil Humphrey, he wasn’t like Mr. Rivers. Certain things he pushed and certain things he didn’t. And...I know why he didn’t push back selling to blacks or selling to whites, because he had that drug store up there. So he sort of stood back and he didn’t push nothing. But Mary Emma Jones, they kind of pushed stuff with the taxi cabs and stuff. But then when they [the white establishment] started pushing with the taxicabs. You had to have license, you had to have this, and you have to have that. Well then that [applied to] the whites too, because a lot of them didn’t have money to do all that...they want done before you could have a taxicab stand.

...Oh ...Morrison Cafeteria ...they wouldn’t have black waiters. They would hire all white waiters. And then we got it where they start to hiring the black waiters...Well, NAACP...There was a larger group then that went down there and sit down, took up tables. And they looked at us and we looked back at them...And then they tried to set up some kind of law where you couldn’t come in. If they

didn't want to serve you, they don't have to serve you. But they couldn't pass it, because, see, [Morrison's] wasn't private at that time. If you had a private restaurant you could kind of stand back and not serve if you didn't want to. But it wouldn't last too long cause the NAACP would step in there... The NAACP and the Lord, opened the doors... Nothing but the Lord... Dr. King said non-violence and that's what we did. You walk in and just look. You can't do nothing about it... And I thank the Lord and I thank Kennedy. And Robert, his brother, he was rough too. He straightened up a lot of stuff before he got killed.¹²

Desegregating The Beaches

In a *Herald Tribune* article, written in celebration of Newtown's 2014 centennial, Cummings writes that:

Newtown had no beaches. Only nine miles away, others enjoyed the best beach in America, as Siesta Key has sometimes been called. The white sands of Lido were even closer. But for the kids growing up in Newtown 60 years ago, those pretty places were off-limits. Black people weren't allowed on the beach. There were no signs posted, and no such laws on the books. It was simply "understood," say people who remember those times. Rising calls for desegregation were met with resistance from white residents and hand-wringing among local officials. On Oct. 3, 1955, about 100 black residents challenged the old order by piling into cars, driving to Lido and wading in the water. The simple act drew the attention of authorities and opened up an early front in the fight for civil rights here, years before the better-known victories of the 1960s.¹³

It was a time of challenges," said Ed James II, a community activist who was involved in the caravans as a high school student. "They didn't want to do anything to hurt the tourist trade. But that didn't mean they weren't malicious and ironclad in what they would do, like other Southern towns." When black swimmers broke the unwritten rules at Lido Beach, they made front-page news. Some whites were outraged. Police came out to monitor the scene, sometimes interfering with the visitors and sometimes defending them. The papers of the time called it a civic crisis, and described Sarasota as a "powder keg."¹⁴

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Anthony “Tony” Major

We could not go to Lido Beach. We could not go to Longboat Key. To go to the beach we either had to go to Venice or all the way up to the Sunshine Skyway and swim. I guess they thought we [were] going to make the sand black, or something. ‘Cause Lido had the whitest sand in the world. It was rated as one of the top beaches with the whitest sand in the world. But we couldn’t swim there.¹⁶

Walter L. Gilbert, III

The one guy that really, really made me want to be more involved was Neil Humphrey, Mr. Neil Humphrey. He owned a drug store; it was a little sundry store that sold some of everything, patent medicines, not a pharmacy type drug store. He had the only business like that in our community. Mr. Humphrey was probably 5’5” might’ve weighed 155 lbs., really soft spoken. If he raised his voice you could hardly hear him. I thought he was a meek little man.

But in these NAACP meetings he was fire and brimstone. He was telling us how we’d go down there, what we’d say, how we were to act. He wasn’t having no troubles. I’m looking at all the other people saying “yes sir, Mr. Humphrey.” It changed my perspective. His persona changed right in my face. I wanted to be like this guy, not only business-wise, I wanted to be a leader like him.

My first step in doing something in the leadership vein was at Sarasota High. My father said, “If you’re going to be upfront, be upfront.” At Sarasota High we didn’t feel that we were being treated properly in the lunchroom. We were sitting there; everyone was talking about it. I said, “Let’s get up, and we won’t eat lunch in here anymore.” Everybody said, “OK.” I said, “OK, let’s go.” Everybody just came. We had a strike at the lunchroom for a week and ½ before they decided to bring us in and talk to us. They actually appointed Fredd Atkins and I to the Student Council.

First of all, they didn’t want us there. People [white staff] in lunchroom service treated us bad. It went on for a year or so. The other thing, we didn’t have any black cheerleaders although the football team was black. We had a bunch of grievances. We got the kids on the football team [I was a member of the team] to say they wouldn’t play anymore. So what the Missouri team did was nothing new. They gave us two cheerleaders. They changed the process in the lunchroom. We had the meetings to talk about this at my mom’s house. She encouraged us. In fact, while we were striking, she brought us lunch to the school because we wouldn’t go into the lunchroom. That was my first action. We were empowered. We were never afraid.¹⁷

John Rivers (Former president of the Sarasota branch of the NAACP)

Well, everything was segregated at that time. And the beach was one of the top [places]. The schools were segregated...my kids were very small...when we came here and...I guess when my oldest daughter was about ten, twelve... we talked about integrating the school system, because it was so far away...we had students

coming all the way from Venice and Laurel, and that was a long distance for kids just starting to school. Some six-year-old, having to get up at four in the morning... to make it to school...and ride twenty miles or more to get to school. ...That was not what we wanted to see, and I didn't want that for my kids here. So, therefore, we took action against that. But we didn't get the school integrated at that time. So, we had to move on with other issues...we had good teachers...all Afro-American...It was very, very good for us. And once I got involved with the action in the city, especially the neighborhood, it was quite fun.

When I came here, the NAACP was already organized at that time...I went to a couple of meetings and they were talking about the things that I was concerned about... Therefore, I started attending... And ...I became an officer and from that to the president...

When we first started going to the beach, it was in Venice because we weren't allowed to go here in Sarasota. And going to the beaches in Venice, we had no problem at all...but...it's eighteen, twenty miles from here down there. And that was a long distance, unnecessary long distance. And we took issue with that. And after going there for a while, we then started to going to Lido Beach. And...we had some problems. The reporters came, and they identified the cars, took pictures of the cars... the tag number and all of that stuff. And from the tag numbers, the system could pick up the names of the people. And some of the people were fired just because they went to the beach...there. But we didn't stop at that time. We went into the water the first time. And then the next day, they cancelled out everything, closed the beach on us. And, at that time...I was leading the group. So, we... left Lido...headed back into town on the second day that we were there. Then, I decided, I said... "Let's go back." And we turned around and went back. And, sure enough, the beach was full of people. And the policemen came back, and say, "Oh, the beach is closing again." I said, "No, no, you go on to town. If we need you, we will call you. But other than that, we don't need you." But, by that time...with the photos that the reporters had taken...some of the people in the city... identified the people that was at the beach... their cars. And some of them was fired the next day because they was at the beach. And the remainder of us continued to go every week until it was a simple thing.

But there was a lot being done before that because when they first started talking about it, there was a group called John Birch Society. Now, who they are and what their activities, I'm not sure. But they was very outspoken against us going to the beach. So, they suggested that they go out in the water, out in the beach waters and then develop an island there, and then get a boat and take us out to the island, and then bring us back on the boat. Well, that didn't fly. So, we continued to work on going to the beach. And, later, a lot of people got involved...people of the school system got involved...talking about the opportunities by having your beach, going to the beach out there on this island...

So, sure enough, they finally came to the conclusion. They said, “Well, okay, we will build a pool in the Newtown area there if you all would accept that instead of the beach.” It was about August, late August or sometime around then. And that kind of angered the people, especially leaders at that time. You had ministers and all involved. And they decided, no, no, no. We don’t even want to talk about that. So, I looked at it. I said, “Look, look, wait a minute, let’s think.” I said, “We don’t have a beach. We don’t have a pool.” I said, “We wait. We don’t go to the beach that much in the wintertime anyway...Therefore... Let’s accept that, and then we’ll have a [pool]. And then when you all bring about the dedication of the pool, I will then take a group and we will go to the beach. And we’ll have both.” Then, that’s exactly what happened there.¹⁸

Just as Rivers stated, “In 1957, the county built a new swimming pool in Newtown, hoping to appease residents. The day it opened, another beach caravan set out for Lido Key.”¹⁹

...We got that one [Lido] under control. So, we wanted to go Siesta... And that was a...nicer beach. And we only had one incident. Some guy came up there with a pickup truck... He got out of the truck, got the bottles, and he put them under each one of the cars that we was there, that was ours...And I was out in the water at that time. And someone called out to me to “come, come, hurry...” So, when I came out, he was still putting his bottles under the tires of the cars. And I walked right up to him and, just nearly nose-to-nose, and I said, “Look, I want you to get every bottle you had out there...I want them out. And I want it out now.” So, he looked over and none of his people were there to support him. So, he started pulling the bottles out from under the cars. And that was a victory.

It was NAACP president Neil Humphrey, Sr. who organized the caravans. Humphrey’s, a successful Newtown businessman, possessed the necessary financial independence to challenge the establishment. Shortly after the fight for the integration of the beaches came about there was a young man, young at the time, Mr. John Henry Rivers. Moved his family from Mobile, Alabama to Sarasota looking for better opportunities. John passed away this past year. He was an ally and friend in most of the civil rights things that I did in this community. He was assistant to Mr. Humphrey during that time...when the beach caravans would go...The way the city would fight us, a police car would come and say the beach is closed everybody leave. Well our folk would leave and as soon as we got across the Ringling Bridge the beach mysteriously reopened again.

Though relatively short of stature, [Rivers] was respected, James said. “A real man. He meant what he said and said what he meant.” And when it came to actively defending the caravans, Rivers was crucial, James said. “He would sometimes demonstrate what he meant, if you didn’t understand it.”²⁰

One white objector to the African American beach-goers was a man who did business with the residents of Newtown. According to Rivers,

There [were] some people that didn't like what was going on, and one was an insurance [agent]. He...was out there on the beach. When he saw what was happening, he didn't like it either. But he was collecting the insurance fees throughout the black neighborhood. So, when he disagreed with that and kind of acted up, I called his headquarters the next day and told them, "We don't want him back in our neighborhood...collecting money, when he objects..." So, sure enough, they transferred him out of here, and we didn't see him no more. But, from then on, it was just, just fine. People go out to the beach for every little activity. We used to go there. Masons had an annual day... And we would go out there in the morning and round off an area. And then, go back there when all the people, two or three hundred people, would show up there. No problem at all.²¹

Shopping Experiences

Alberta Brown

[Oldham: talk to me about your life growing up here in the Newtown area. Did you shop in the shops along Twenty-seventh Street?]

No, they had shops more downtown. You could go downtown, anywhere downtown... J.C. Penney's and all of that was right downtown...They didn't bother us...

[Oldham: Fannie McDougal talks about not being able to go into Morrison's ...She was a part of the sit-ins.]

Yes. I was not...I don't know. I can't remember why I didn't go.

[Oldham: She said that she was fearless. She was younger.]

Yeah she was. [Laughter]²²

Anthony "Tony" Major

...People like, my mother, who...refused to be a maid...refused to ride at the back of the bus. So she was one of the first...pioneers...My grandmother knew she had to get her out of Sarasota in order for her to survive. So she eventually moved to New York when I was...four or five... And so that's why I say, my grandmother raised me.

[Howard: Did you ever go downtown to shop?]

Yeah, we went... You cross the street if a white woman's coming down the street. You knew to cross the street. But when we went downtown, you'd go in your shop... you couldn't try dresses on, you couldn't do this, you couldn't do that. But, like I said, my class of '57, were the renegades. We would go cause some fuss somewhere... We would go to Ringling Brothers circus and they would help out. They brought us a trampoline, showed us how to jump on it, and so forth...like I said, not all white folks [are bad]. We had some good ones who helped out and wanted to help...It was the system that was keeping them [from doing right], because the majority ruled and that's what it was. There was no integration; we didn't have it.²³

Evolution of the Sarasota Arts Scene

Artistic expression has always been a vibrant part of African American culture. In Sarasota there were limited outlets for that expression, except primarily in school and church plays and programs. The Heritage Players, The Black Theater Company of Florida was formed and active in Sarasota during the 1980s, with Fredd Atkins as its president. According to McElroy:

The Heritage Players, home-based in Sarasota, Florida, is comprised of both professionals and local members of the community who are dedicated to bringing the black American spirit, heritage and creativity to all mankind throughout the United States, and travel communities that never get a chance to see professional theater. The company is comprised of 18 individuals who do all of the acting, plus provide the technical expertise needed to operate such a first-class traveling theater... Besides the theater company, the Heritage players are also dedicated to educating and training the economically disadvantaged youth and adults in the appreciation of theatrical forms and heritage.²⁴

Anthony “Tony” Major, Booker High School class of 1957, is an accomplished professional actor of stage and screen, filmmaker, producer and director. He grew up in Newtown. After attending college in New York City, earning a Bachelor of Arts degree in Theatre Arts and a Master of Fine Arts degree, Major had the opportunity to know and work professionally with many famous actors (including an apprenticeship with Harry Belafonte), Academy Award winning directors and producers Bob Mulligan and Alan Pakula, work as Assistant Producer on “The Redd Foxx Show,” and direct and produce a film entitled “Super Spook.” According to Major, “That [film] got distributed nationally and internationally, all over. And now, finally, it’s on DVD and people can purchase it online. But it was the first black comedy during that whole ‘70s Blaxploitation period.”²⁵

Early in his career, Tony taught at NYU Graduate Film School. He currently teaches classes in and is the Director of both the Zora Neale Hurston Institute for Documentary Studies and the Africana Studies Program at the University of Central Florida in Orlando, Florida. Major returned to Sarasota for two years to direct of the Theater Workshop run by the Union of Concerned Parents organization from 1979-1981. As he recalls:

Ed [James] asked me to come back to Sarasota in 1979. And I did, from Hollywood. My career was just kicking, and he said, “I need you...to come home; I’m starting a theatre.” He was running the Union of Concerned Parents. “And I want to train these youngsters here about theatre. And you’re the only person that I know...” So I moved from California to Sarasota and stayed there the next two years. And sure enough, I taught them the specifics of what to do in each job in theatre.

Ed went to the Asolo and got the Asolo to take these students in and train them...Give them on-the-job training. So the first year we did it...they worked on all these shows, in costuming, and stage work, and building sets, and all kind of stuff behind the scenes. So one year...he took the whole group to New York. I knew friends in New York on Broadway, so we saw two plays. And afterwards, the cast would come out and talk to the students from Sarasota and tell them about theatre...They came back inspired to start their own theatre. So Ed...got that theatre on Third Street...And we set up the Spectrum Players... And we did a whole season... four shows. We brought in actors. I brought in Bill Jay to do, "Ceremonies in Dark Old Men." A friend of mine from L.A., she was a choreographer that worked with Motown. She came down to do "[For] Colored Girls" for me. And ...we did "Raisin in the Sun." And the final show was...an all gospel piece...And they...designed the sets, they lit it, [made] the costumes, everything...Because they had learned from me and learned working at the Asolo. Well, the [white] people [in Sarasota] got upset. They did. "Why you using this money, and taking them...to New York City?" And so, we went and got a copy of the Sarasota Herald [Tribune]. And the week before, a group of white folks had gone somewhere, okay?

You don't mess with Ed [James]...When black folks in that town needed something done, they came to him. He would get it done... Newtown Heights...those dugouts for the Little League are covered.... Why? The white ones are covered, so you...build the same dugouts for the black community that you built for the white community...He did it all like that...It was all for the good of the black folks in that community. [Ed James was in my Booker High School] class of 57!

The rehearsal hall at Booker Visual Performing Arts School is named "Anthony 'Tony' Major Rehearsal Hall"...The Herald Tribune published an article "From Booker to Broadway"...[about] a play called "We Interrupt This Program" that I did on Broadway.²⁶

Sarasota now has another creative outlet - the Westcoast Black Theater Troupe (WBTT). Etienne Porter, from Newtown, got involved through his connections with Nate Jacobs, head of the WBTT. Jacobs is Porter's former high school Arts teacher and gave him, at age 16, his first opportunity to play drums in a professional production.

considers WBTT to be the black cultural... hub in Sarasota.²⁷

The Sarasota theater scene is evolving. Jay Handelman, *Herald Tribune*, writes:

The mostly white theater scene that prompted Nate Jacobs to seek more diverse offerings in the late 1980s has changed a lot since he launched the Westcoast Black Theatre Troupe 15 years ago...Area theaters have diversified their offerings to attract a broader demographic and tell a wider variety of stories. "Our story is the same as a great many theaters across

the country. We want to reach an audience that is as diverse as the community in which we live and I think Nate feels the same way,” said Michael Donald Edwards, producing artistic director of Asolo Rep. “We want to reach as many people as possible and tell the story of what is really going on.” Asolo Rep worked with the Westcoast Troupe for a special reading of Lorraine Hansberry’s 1959 play “A Raisin in the Sun” in 2013... “We also did a community outreach program in Newtown, doing interviews with various members of the community, telling their stories.”

“We’re bringing the most contemporary issues to the consciousness of the audience,” said Kate Alexander, associate director of FST [Florida Studio Theater]... “But we’re also looking at casting opportunities. Look at our apprentice company who go into the schools. I want young people in all schools to see the races mixing together and to see ‘their kind’ on stage, whether it’s Hispanic or white or Asian or black.”

Alexander has put together an Audience Enrichment Group including Sarasota Mayor Willie Shaw, Public Defender Larry Eger, Circuit Court Judge Charles Williams and County Commissioner Carolyn Mason, who grew up in Sarasota. They have taken part in discussions and suggested topics for individual forums that have led to some revelations for panelists and audience members. “Last year, I remember how shocked audiences were to discover the subtle forms of racism that people in the African-American community face, when they’re followed around in a Home Depot or Walmart,” Alexander said. “Or that the NAACP hands out pamphlets on how black people should act if they’re stopped by police. These things are happening here, and we need to talk about them.”²⁸

Environmental Racism in Newtown

During their interview with Vickie Oldham, Elder Willie Mays Jr. and his sister Rosa Lee Thomas discussed the hazardous conditions in which they, and many others in the Newtown area, lived while growing up. The city dump was located on what became Mango Avenue and Leonard Reid. At the time that their family moved to the area, it was essentially overgrown land. Elder Mays and Rosa Thomas recalled that:

[Mays] We moved from Fruitville to... I hesitate because where we moved there was no Street. Mango wasn’t even there. What was in that area were nothing but palmettos, and they were the big ones. They were high. The city dump was right ‘cross the railroad. The street right next to the railroad tracks. [Today] if you leave Mango, as soon as you cross the railroad tracks. Very close to the African-American community. The smoke... It bothered us for years. But we stayed in the house most of the time to escape that.

Thomas: There were many white birds out there. They would get the leftover food. When [the family] moved from Fruitville, I was told this because I was two years old at the time, my dad and other people helped to dig a pathway from 33rd Street, now MLK. And they dug that so that they could make a pathway to the house and later they kept digging and it became a street. The city dump, well one thing I would like to say about it is, it was in Newtown between the RR tracks. And all of the people that lived on Mango Avenue, most of them died and also Leonard Reid, those streets. And I have names of all of the people that passed away, husbands and wives...

[Oldham: Do you think it was as result of the fumes?]

Oh yeah. Inhaled. Because we lived quite close to the Railroad track. It's called now Humphrey's subdivision. So we inhaled it. We'd walk past there as kids. We went to Booker High School. You could smell the fumes and see the all the birds flying. But they did a lot of burying things underground so that ground I believe even now is very contaminated.

Rosa Lee Thomas' conclusions about the hazardous health effects on people living near the dump are confirmed by scientific data reported in the City of Sarasota Newtown Community Redevelopment Area Plan. It states that in 2004, the City of Sarasota designated the site of the former city dump area as a 'brownfield.' The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) defines brownfield as: "real property, the expansion, redevelopment, or reuse of which may be complicated by the presence or potential presence of a hazardous substance, pollutant, or contaminant."²⁹ The Plan describes the property as follows:

The site, located at 2046 Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Way (**RESOLUTION NO. 04R-1739**), is a former community dumping ground that is owned by the City. The site was used as a dump-site by the community for unwanted appliances, equipment, trash, and debris, in lieu of taking it to an authorized landfill. The result was the deposit of various harmful chemicals and metals from the debris.

During attempts to develop the site, preliminary environmental testing indicated the presence of potentially harmful contaminants. To determine the extent of the contamination, the city received several assessment and pilot grants from the State of Florida and Federal Departments of Environmental Protection to collect and test soil and water samples from the site.

Analysis of the samples indicated contaminants were present at the site at concentrations exceeding the Florida Administrative Code, Chapter 62-777, Contaminant Cleanup Target Levels. The determination was made that adverse environmental conditions existed within the site based on the documented level of contamination in the site and would require monitoring and remediation in accordance with Florida Department of Environmental Protection (FDEP) guidelines.

(Source: Florida Administrative Code (Ch 62-777), PSI, Inc. Site Assessment Report, and Florida Brownfields Redevelopment Act (Sections 376.77 – 376.84, Florida Statutes, Brownfield Designation Staff Report)

The “Downside” Of Integration

Despite the positive changes that emerged from desegregation, there are some persons who believe that integration also led to serious negative outcomes. Zora Neale Hurston, a cultural anthropologist, novelist and playwright grew up in the small town of Eatonville, Florida. Eatonville is the first incorporated black town in the U.S. She was among those who opposed integration.

In a 1955 letter to the *Orlando Sentinel*, [Hurston] questioned the Supreme Court’s demand for forced integration, calling its decision in *Brown v. Board of Education* “insulting rather than honoring my race.” Residents now say that the desegregation of schools, while positive in some respects, diluted Eatonville’s cohesiveness and undermined the confidence of its youth.³⁰

Many of the people interviewed for this NCHD Project agree with Hurston, especially in regard to what happened in Newtown when the schools were desegregated and closed for a period of time. A rift was created between the newly organized magnet school and the Newtown community that persists today. Two of the interviewees presented their individual issues with integration. Anthony “Tony” Major, a university professor, professional actor, director, producer, and filmmaker shares these views about integration:

...There were no white folks owning anything in Newtown. Not at that time. It was all black owned. That’s why I say that integration was one of the worst things that ever happened to us. Because we didn’t integrate, we assimilated.³¹

Historian James C. Brown states that the Newtown community began to change when he was coming out of High School [in 1957] – the community took a shift in the historical pattern. He connects that to desegregation.

I understand the whole concept of integration, but when it came to our community, we lost a lot of stuff. Money went out of the community, businesses were boarded up. I understood the concept, but I don’t think they [the people of Newtown] were ready for integration. We are still trying to recover from it in 2015.³²

Just below the Surface...

Many people from the northern US make their winter homes in Sarasota. On the surface, it is a lovely city where most people get along nicely. But beneath that veneer is some deeply disturbing history and there are inequities lingering from that Jim Crow legacy that appear in various ways. There is a motivated spirit among many Newtown residents and friends of Newtown, however, to make Newtown a place that is safe, crime free, and beautified by the ongoing and planned redevelopment projects.

Residents, especially those who have made it their home for generations, want to maintain the integrity of this historic community and deny the encroaching developers who want to “improve” Sarasota at Newtown’s expense. The new group of aspiring young leaders of Newtown are learning valuable lessons from their elders who stood tall and strong in the faces of segregation and of people who devalued their humanity. They built homes and paved the streets, educated their children, started businesses, and carved out their own self-sustaining community under very difficult circumstances. Many of today’s challenges are different, but some remain the same; racism is still embedded in the institutions of everyday life and in the minds of some people.

There are people who are working hard to devise solutions that will re-create Newtown for this new age: self-sustaining, but no longer isolated. Bridges that were burned in the fires of racist policies and politics - especially with regard to severing the close ties between the community and the Booker Schools - need to be rebuilt. This will not be an easy task, but it a goal worth working toward because of its importance to the future of the Newtown community.

ENDNOTES

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- ¹⁷ Interview with Vickie Oldham, November 18, 2015.
- ¹⁸ Interview with Kortney Lapeyrolerie (L) (New College), October 29, 2010.
- ¹⁹ Cummings, Ian. Caravans to Lido.
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CHAPTER 8: POLITICS

VOTING RIGHTS

Historically, African Americans in many communities across the US were disenfranchised, unable to vote because of various policies and procedures put into operation by state officials with the intent to deny African Americans their rights under the Fifteenth Amendment to the US Constitution. This Amendment gave all US citizens the right to vote.¹ Although the Amendment was passed and should have eliminated them, unfair techniques such as requiring potential voters to correctly guess the number bubbles on a bar of soap, reading and writing tests, or charging an unaffordable fee (a poll tax) before being allowed to vote, and violence remained commonplace, particularly in the South. Upon returning from fighting in World War II, Medgar Evers, who became a famous civil rights activist, “decided to vote in a Mississippi election. But when he and some other black ex-servicemen attempted to vote, a white mob stopped them. “All we wanted to be was ordinary citizens,” Evers later related. “We fought during the war for America, Mississippi included. Now, after the Germans and Japanese hadn’t killed us, it looked as though the white Mississippians would. . . .”²

“The drive to win meaningful access to the [voting] was, therefore, among the civil rights movement’s top priorities, and first achieved major success with the enactment of the Voting Rights Act of 1965.”³ People from various ethnic backgrounds fought, and died in some cases, for the right to vote, for the Act’s passage, and related Civil Rights issues.

It is still quite difficult to believe that in 2014, the US Supreme Court practically wiped out the progress achieved over the past 50 years regarding access to voting. The Supreme Court ruled 5-4 to strike down Section 4, a key part of the Act, in a partisan attack on voting rights.

Section 4 of the Voting Rights Act [is] the key 1965 law meant to prevent disenfranchisement of minority voters. Section 4 says states and other jurisdictions that have sufficient histories of voting discrimination have to go through what’s called “preclearance” under Section 5 of the law whenever they redistrict or otherwise update their voting laws. Currently those jurisdictions cover most of the South but also Manhattan, Brooklyn, some counties in California and South Dakota, and towns in Michigan.⁴

Section 4 relies on historical tests - like “did this jurisdiction require a literacy test to vote in 1964?” - to determine if jurisdictions need preclearance. Most of the former Confederacy, for instance, was included because of Section 4. Now that Section 4 has been struck down, those states are free and clear.⁵

The unfortunate fact is that, due to this ruling, the states that previously were required to submit changes to voting policies before enacting them at the state level no

longer have to do so; there is no federal government oversight. That left the door open for states to revert to unfair tactics designed to prevent African Americans and other minorities from voting. Right after the Court's decision, there was a rush to make new rules with regard to who was eligible to vote and devise new, and often complicated, voter identification requirements in many of the states that were declared "free and clear" of the oversight of Section 4. Legislation was enacted to require specific types of identification for voting that some people - especially the very elderly who may not have a birth certificate because they were born at home and perhaps delivered by a midwife - cannot produce, even though they may have been voting for years prior to the new rules. Other roadblocks to voting were alterations, extreme in some cases, to the time period allotted to vote: the ability to vote on Sundays, decreasing the early voting period, and other hindrances, such as closing polls early. Many people believe that the changes, which were swiftly enacted after the US Supreme Court ruling, were implemented with the transparent intention of reducing the number of minority voters from participating in the elections.

A Time For Change

Newtown has a proud history of overcoming obstacles. In the early years, most of its African American settlers were primarily concerned with basic survival. They had moved to Overtown and to Newtown seeking jobs, finding ways to support themselves and their families. It was not until some of those basic survival needs were met, and the Civil Rights Movement of the 1950s added powerful inspiration, that the Newtown community began to agitate for better political representation and equity in treatment of their community by the City and County of Sarasota.

Anyone reading the transcripts of the interviews from this study of Newtown will clearly see that there were some highly intelligent and skilled "politicians" in Newtown, whether or not they ever became elected politicians. They were steadfast in advocating for just causes without fear or apology, whether it concerned equitable pay for teachers, getting a janitor in the schools,⁶ or equal access to public places. An example is the bold story of Dr. E.E. James, II who took it upon himself to integrate borrowing privileges at the Sarasota Public Library one day in 1957, while he was still a college student at FAMU. The complete story of this event is detailed in Chapter 7: Segregation, Desegregation and Integration. James stated that as a result of his actions:

Over the years I developed, from that day on, a very good relationship with City Manager [Ken] Thompson. When there are issues in the community, long after I'd come back to the community as an adult, when there were issues of things going on, I would come down to City Hall and ask to see him. And he was one of the longest serving city managers anywhere in the country at that time. And he was in a new building, which is located on First Street now. And I would go and I would say, "Mr. Thompson ... you got to get it straightened out." And he said, "Calm down, calm down." He'd say, "Let me get Mr. Jordan in here and Mr. Smith and Mr. Jones" or something like that. Then he would say, "Gentlemen do you know Ed James? Well Ed James this is Mr. Jordan, Mr. Smith, and Mr. Jones. And then, "This is not happening in Newtown

and the city has a responsibility to do it.” He’d say, “Ed says this, and I believe that this is correct. I want you to get a report on and come back to me and if what you are saying is true we will correct it.”

And then they would leave...and I would say, “Thank you Mr. Thompson.” And I would leave. Now, I had many such discussions with Mr. Thompson over the years and my position was always the same, I was pretty fiery during that period. I’d come and he’d have a meeting with the appropriate people and then I’d make my point and if it doesn't seem like it’s going the way I want it to go...he'd say, “OK, thank you for coming by.” And I’d say, “No, Mr. Thompson.” And he’d say, “Just remember the library. And that became our code. If he said “remember the library” in any of those discussions that meant he was going to take care of it, he was going to get it done. If he didn't say that, and we ended the discussion, that meant he was not going to do it and I would have to continue to fight with him about it. I believed he always had an open door and I would get a fair hearing.⁷

Other examples include actions that African Americans took to provide the services (businesses, schools, transportation) that they needed. Most elected government officials felt no obligation toward them and ignored the inequitable circumstances of African Americans in Sarasota. One exception was Sheila Sanders-Brown who was elected and served from 1980 to 1984 as the Democratic state committeewoman and as vice chairperson of the 13th Congressional District.⁸ She was also one of the plaintiffs in the 1979 lawsuit.

The NAACP Legal Challenge to an Unfair Electoral Process

Many African Americans did not or could not vote; when they did vote, their votes had little impact because of the unfair structure of the electoral system, another technique used by the white power structure to deny equal representation to African Americans and, therefore, access to ways to advocate for their community. Finally, the NAACP and Newtown citizens took legal action:

In 1982, through the local chapter of the NAACP, [Newtown] citizens legally challenged a system of representation that had historically prevented the election of blacks to City government.

Why was this legal action was taken? James explained that:

...At the time of the filing of the lawsuit in 1979... five different black folk had run nine times...for City Commission and could never get elected...It’s interesting that...every time, the black community always voted for their black candidate, but they could never get into...office because the city votes along racial lines. And while the City Commission was comprised of five districts...five people living on the same street

could just declare for a particular district and run. [In] our lawsuit, James versus Sarasota, we were asking for five single-member districts. And we had asked the city for that so that they could do it themselves, but never would. And this case rolled on for seven years. When we finally got to the point of having our day in court and the judge was setting a hearing the city wanted to file what they called an affirmative defense. [In it] they admit that the election system is flawed, but they could correct it and we said, “No we want our day in court.

The lawsuit stated in part that:

Four black residents⁹ of Sarasota, Florida, filed this action in 1979 to challenge the method by which Sarasota city commissioners are elected. The plaintiffs contended that the election of five at-large commissioners violated the Voting Rights Act of 1965, 42 U.S.C. § 1973 *et seq.* and the thirteenth, fourteenth and fifteenth amendments to the United States Constitution. The defendants are the five members of the city commission. The suit sought a declaratory judgment that the at-large system diluted black voting strength, an injunction barring the defendants from holding any other elections under the at-large system and an order requiring the commissioners be elected from single-member districts.¹⁰

James continued:

And we had our day in court. And the judge in his infinite wisdom decided we didn't need five single-member districts, but three single-member districts with one a majority-minority district, and we should be able to elect a commissioner: three single-member districts and two at-large. When we got ready for the first election, we decided that we may not be able to win this election because, while the district was 48% black, it was 52% white. The judge had said that most times when a black was on the ballot we would turnout in such high numbers we should be OK. So what we decided to do was, prior to that election, we [would] advertise within the black community. Anyone who wants to run for city commissioner in this coming election we want you to let it be known. And we developed a plan, [a] pledge that we are going to have a mock election within the black community and whoever the black community selected, this candidate will be the unity candidate from our community. And all those who said they would run, they agreed to that. Fredd Atkins...won the election and became our first black elected city official. Now it's important to know...he was our unity candidate...We had the election in a church with all the people who wanted to come and participate for the Newtown community and he was selected. One candidate decided that he was going to run anyway. We said, “But you signed the agreement. Why are you going to run anyway?” He said, “Well there's some people downtown who want me to run.” I said, “That's the problem. We're trying to have

representation from our community without dictates from downtown.” He said, “Well, I’m sorry but...I’m gonna run anyway.” And so... we found [it] necessary to expose the other candidate for what we believed he was, a traitor to the community. And Mr. Atkins won. And he served several terms as Mayor and City Commissioner...Since that time, District One has always been represented by a black person.

Some folk will come...here, and they’ll see a black commissioner or a black mayor and think that’s the way it’s always been. No. There was nothing without a fight. And we had to even threaten the city’s Federal Revenue Sharing Funds to get blacks in the fire department.¹¹

Three years after the suit was heard, Fredd Atkins was elected as the first African-American citizen to serve on the City of Sarasota Board of Commissioners in 1985. He also served three terms as Mayor of Sarasota: 1987-1988, 1991-1992, and 2006-2007. Since high school, former Mayor Atkins has had a clear trajectory of involvement in Newtown politics: the NAACP youth chapter, school desegregation, the district voting lawsuit, and launching this project, the Newtown Historic Conservation District Project (NCHD). His wife Sheila Atkins proudly commented about her husband’s elections:¹²

My husband was the first African American on the City Commission, so ...we still have to fight our way to get good jobs or to make a stand or statement in our community at large. Matter of fact... to get anyone elected on the City Commission...back in '79 they had to go to court and say, “...rename the districts so maybe somebody will have a chance of getting on the commission.” Which they did, and my husband won in 1985. [There has been] someone of color on the commission since then... time we have someone out of our district...that’s African American as well. But as you can still see, Sarasota is a tough place. We don’t have anybody on the school board still. So it’s still segregated in a sort of way. It is, a whole lot. But, you know...I like the changes [in our community]. You know, when my husband got on the commission, the aesthetics of Newtown changed a lot with him, and the commission itself saying, “Ok, let’s put some money here so we can beautify it...” So, you know...I see those changes...

He’s been mayor three times...He’s running now for the County Commissioner and, being a Democrat, that’s going to be hard to get into the County Commission as a Democrat. He will not change his party, and that’s fine...He ran [for County Commissioner back in ‘95... He got pretty good votes, but it wasn’t enough...And you know, what can you do except keep on trying to get people to [go out to] vote. And then you know, for felons, trying to get them reinstated as well.

Ed James, II and other Newtown community leaders demonstrated the power that can be generated by forming a unified voting block within the community in the 1980s and 1990s. This was a winning strategy that assisted in the election of other African American politicians from Newtown: Sarasota Mayor: Rev. Jerome Dupree (1998-1999),

and Carolyn Mason (2001-2003). Carolyn Mason became the first female African-American Mayor to serve in the City of Sarasota's history. In 2008, she was elected as the first African American to serve on the Sarasota County Board of County Commissioners.¹³ In 2015, Mason is in her second term on the Sarasota County Board of County Commissioners where she serves as Chair. Mason received the Lifetime Freedom Award from the Sarasota County Branch of the NAACP, having served on both the Sarasota City Commission (1999-2003) and the Sarasota County Commission. She spearheaded Sarasota Openly Addresses Racism (SOAR), an annual panel discussion on race that brought together representatives from many different segments of the community.¹⁴ Carolyn Mason, a Republican, began to interact with the white leadership of Sarasota through her involvement with:

The Sarasota County Arts Council. I went on to be a part of different boards where people would ask me to be on their boards, to try and reach the black community. And that was my goal – to be a bridge. And so I worked at City Hall from '83 to '93... And then in 1999 I was elected to the City Commission. In 2001, I was the vice-mayor. ...The mayor, who was Al Hogle - who is now the chief of police in Longboat - went to the city of Bradenton to be its police chief. And so by default, I became the mayor. And that was halfway into his term. And then my colleagues thought it was fair if they chose me to be the mayor for a full term. After that, I lost my re-election bid, so I worked in the community. And in 2008, I ran for the County Commission and was elected...It's been a real learning experience for me, because...growing up, I was on one side of the tracks, if you will. But as an adult, I had the opportunity to work and volunteer on the other side, and then bridge that with my black community. So it's been absolutely rewarding and educational for me.¹⁵

Rev. Willie Shaw is another successful, Newtown-raised politician; "I am Commissioner of District One, the City of Sarasota and I'm presently the Mayor of the City of Sarasota," he said, introducing himself during his interview. Mayor Shaw indicated that the Newtown unity, which was evident in the 1980s, is not so apparent today. According to Mayor Shaw:

I think that quite frequently we become distracted...And our priorities are very difficult to set because we have not yet as a community learned how to work together...We just celebrated a hundred years and...Did we have day or weekend where everybody born in Sarasota came back to Sarasota? Did we have a day for Newtown? No. Well why? Because this voice was speaking, that voice was speaking. Hopefully one of my visions is to work ...across the aisle or working with others to bring about a greater understanding. Some of our arguments are very, very frivolous and I want to see the landscape change...I want to see the benefits of a true CRA [Community Redevelopment Area] effort within this portion of the community.¹⁶

The NAACP

The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) had a turbulent beginning in Florida.

From 1939 to 1940, Florida formed 9 branches of the NAACP. The plan for the branches to work together was formulated in 1941. In a meeting on October 17-19, 1941, the first National Association of the Advancement of Colored People State Conference of Branches in the nation was formulated in Florida.

During the 1950s the process of building more local branches began. Unfortunately, the Florida State Legislature initiated actions against the NAACP and its growth in the state following the U. S. Supreme Court unanimous desegregation ruling in 1954, *Brown v Board of Education*. The State Conference of the NAACP was ordered by the state of Florida to disclose the membership of the NAACP (see: Supreme Court case *NAACP v State of Alabama*, 1958).¹⁷ However, in 1958, the US Supreme Court denied states access to the membership lists, arguing in part that:

We think that the production order, in the respects here drawn in question, must be regarded as entailing the likelihood of a substantial restraint upon the exercise by petitioner's [NAACP's] members of their right to freedom of association. Petitioner has made an uncontroverted showing that on past occasions revelation of the identity of its rank-and-file members has exposed these members to economic reprisal, loss of employment, threat of physical coercion, and other manifestations of public hostility.¹⁸

In Florida, sit-ins, protest marches and other non-violent actions took place throughout the state. The NAACP represented many of the protesters in court as cases stemming from protests, desegregation and voting rights made their way through the courts. The first Freedom Fund Banquet was held in Florida in 1975, and the first time Florida hosted the NAACP National Convention was the 71st Annual Convention in 1980 on Miami Beach.¹⁹

The NAACP has been a powerful force in the Newtown community. Its local chapter was heavily involved in the 1979 lawsuit that concluded in 1985 with a ruling requiring the to creation of a redistricting plan that paved the way for the election of African American political representatives in Sarasota. Before that, the NAACP led the battle to desegregate Sarasota's beaches and restaurants. During that time, the NAACP president was Neil Humphrey, Sr., an independent businessman who showed no reluctance in challenging the white establishment in Sarasota. Humphrey's Sundries was a well-established business in Newtown and he had no fear of being intimidated, for example, by the threat of being fired by an employer, as others did.²⁰ Ed James II

described Humphrey as “a little man in stature, but a very, very fiery, God-fearing, kind person. James said he believes that, “Mrs. Prevell Barber is the only person who’s alive today who was a member of the chartering branch of the NAACP in Sarasota County.”²¹

John Rivers was an assistant to Mr. Humphrey during the time of the beach desegregation efforts. Upon Rivers’ death in December 2014, civil rights activists in Newtown recounted his many triumphs, calling him one of the most important leaders of their generation. “He was one of the community’s original freedom fighters,” Ed James, II said. “He helped the black community, but also he helped make the white community better.”²² The Sarasota County NAACP honored Rivers with its Humanitarian Award, shortly before his death.

When he moved to Sarasota in 1951, Rivers noted that it was far behind the times as far as desegregating its public spaces; Jim Crow ruled and African Americans were underrepresented in positions of influence in Sarasota. During his interview, Rivers stated that:

I came here directly from Mobile, Alabama, which is a larger city than most other cities. And I was concerned once I came here, because we were so far behind in Sarasota. We came here, and...no minorities in any positions. No policemen...nothing but schoolteachers...in segregated schools. So, this was a very different thing than we were accustomed to...²³

...He set out to change that, embarking on a career of activism that reshaped Sarasota from City Hall to the sands of Lido Beach. Before he was finished, he had become a revered figure in Sarasota history. Among all the Newtown leaders of the turbulent 1960s, Rivers was remembered as a kind man who also could be tough. Ed James II, another Newtown activist involved in the 1985 case, recalled how Rivers faced down threats of violence in person at times, and took his share of late-night phone calls from anonymous enemies. And, as Rivers told a historian years later, he wasn’t afraid to pull aside a sheriff’s deputy at the courthouse and talk about “kicking his pants off” for using racial slurs.

... NAACP president Neil Humphrey, Sr. ...organized the caravans... And when it came to actively defending the caravans, Rivers was crucial, James said. “He would sometimes demonstrate what he meant, if you didn’t understand it.” John Rivers was a soldier on the front lines of the battle for civil rights in Sarasota²⁴

The current NAACP president, Trevor Harvey, is making plans for retirement from the position that he has held since January 2006, as he stated in his interview:

Our seasons come and go. I believe that my season will be up soon. I don’t know when that’s going to be. I have a succession plan. It could be in two, four years. I’m laying the groundwork because I want to make sure that the work continues. I will never leave the organization, even if I’m not the president because I’m passionate about the organization and what it stands for. The mantle will be passed pretty soon.

Ed James, III is a product of the NAACP youth council. Look what he has done. As a result of the training he received in the youth council, this young man is going to be somebody to watch. Raven Coakley is another, a teacher at Booker Middle.

[My] greatest accomplishment? One of the things that comes to mind, I reactivated our leadership academy, our youth branch that was dormant for a number of years. In mentoring youth, I felt that the NAACP could make a strong difference in continuing to help develop our young people and give them a sense of why it's important to be involved in the community. A lot of our young people don't understand what the NAACP is and what the NAACP does. A lot of the time we have to get them to understand that every civil liberty that we enjoy today came on the back of the NAACP. We have to teach that. It's been successful.

The NAACP and the determined residents of Newtown have conquered seemingly insurmountable obstacles on the road to political representation and power in Sarasota. Their courage to draw battle lines in the fight for justice and equality in Sarasota is remarkable, considering the entrenched Jim Crow laws, hate groups, lynching and other violent acts committed against African Americans throughout Florida's history. Take a look - the images in this photographic exhibit, "Racism and the Struggle for Civil Rights in Florida," speak a thousand words.

https://www.floridamemory.com/photographiccollection/photo_exhibits/civil-rights/civil-rights2.php

Much has been achieved and yet, there is still much to be done, both outwardly – in the public arena, and inwardly – within the African American community of Newtown. As NAACP President Harvey stated, "A lot of our young people don't understand what the NAACP is and what the NAACP does." They don't understand or, perhaps worse, they are not interested in the history of the organization and the importance of voting, a right often taken for granted now, for which many people were injured or killed. Many people - young, middle aged and elderly - don't understand how much their personal lives are impacted by politics, daily. It is time to become aware of that fact. Political involvement in Newtown and Sarasota, especially participation in local elections, is essential to making the changes that we desire become reality. Martin Luther King, Jr. had a "dream" and he understood that it took political power, gained through voting, to make that dream become reality. Whenever we see the sign "Martin Luther King, Jr. Way" in Newtown, we should be reminded of the "way" he took that led us to the gains in civil rights that we have today. We must also be aware that many of those gains can be reversed with every vote that we do not cast.

ENDNOTES

¹Amendment 15 (1870)

Section 1. The right of citizens of the United States to vote shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any State on account of race, color, or previous condition of servitude

Section 2. The Congress shall have power to enforce this article by appropriate legislation.

This amendment was designed to protect the right of African-Americans to vote and has served as the foundation for such legislation as the Voting Rights Act of 1965.

² Constitutional Rights Foundation. "Race and Voting in the Segregated South." <http://www.crf-usa.org/brown-v-board-50th-anniversary/race-and-voting.html>

³ "Civil Rights 101: Voting Rights."

<http://www.civilrights.org/resources/civilrights101/voting.html>

⁴ Matthews, Dylan. "Voting Rights Act ruling: Here's what you need to know".

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/wonk/wp/2013/06/25/voting-rights-act-ruling-heres-what-you-need-to-know/>

⁵ <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/wonk/wp/2014/01/16/the-supreme-court-gutted-the-voting-rights-act-now-a-bipartisan-gang-wants-to-put-it-back-together/>

⁶ Helen Dixon's father used to go to City Hall regularly to make demands for things that the schoolteachers needed (including raises) or a janitor to clean up the school restrooms after his daughter fell on a floor wet from an overflowed toilet. (Helen Dixon. Interview with Vickie Oldham October 19, 2015.

⁷ Interview with Haley L. Jordan (New College student) October 2015.

⁸ McElroy, Annie M. *But Your World and My World*. 1986, 171.

⁹ The African American plaintiffs in the lawsuit were: Ed James, William F. Jackson, John H. Rivers and Sheila E. Sanders.

¹⁰ *James v. City of Sarasota, Fla.*, 611 F. Supp. 25 (M.D. Fla. 1985).

<http://law.justia.com/cases/federal/district-courts/FSupp/611/25/2003811/>

¹¹ Interview with Haley L. Jordan (New College student) October 2015.

¹² Interview with Kaylie Stokes, October 20, 2015.

¹³ Newtown History." <http://www.sarasotagov.com/Newtown/history.html>

¹⁴ Herald Tribune. July 2, 2015.

¹⁵ Interview with Hope Black, Sept 22, 2015.

¹⁶ Interview with Vickie Oldham, August 18, 2015.

¹⁷ United States Supreme Court; N. A. A. C. P. v. ALABAMA, (1958) No. 91 Argued: Decided: June 30, 1958

¹⁸ United States Supreme Court; N. A. A. C. P. v. ALABAMA, (1958) No. 91 Argued: Decided: June 30, 1958

“We think that the production order, in the respects here drawn in question, must be regarded as entailing the likelihood of a substantial restraint upon the exercise by petitioner's members of their right to freedom of association. Petitioner has made an uncontroverted showing that on past occasions revelation of the identity of its rank-and-file members has exposed these members to economic reprisal, loss of employment, threat of physical coercion, and other manifestations of public hostility.

Under these circumstances, we think it apparent that compelled disclosure of petitioner's Alabama membership is likely to affect adversely the ability of petitioner and [357 U.S. 449, 463] its members to pursue their collective effort to foster beliefs which they admittedly have the right to advocate, in that it may induce members to withdraw from the Association and dissuade others from joining it because of fear of exposure of their beliefs shown through their associations and of the consequences of this exposure.

We hold that the immunity from state scrutiny of membership lists which the Association claims on behalf of its members is here so related to the right of the members to pursue their lawful private interests privately and to associate freely with others in so doing as to come within the protection of the Fourteenth Amendment. And we conclude that Alabama has fallen short of showing a controlling justification for the deterrent effect on the free enjoyment of the right to associate which disclosure of membership lists is likely to have. Accordingly, the judgment of civil contempt and the \$100,000 fine which resulted from petitioner's refusal to comply with the production order in this respect must fall.

For the reasons stated, the judgment of the Supreme Court of Alabama must be reversed and the case remanded for proceedings not inconsistent with this opinion.

– See more information at: <http://caselaw.findlaw.com/us-supreme-court/357/449.html#sthash.FbvBy637.dpuf>

¹⁹ “Sarasota County NAACP.” <http://sarasotacounty.naacp-fl.org>

²⁰ “60 years ago, blacks desegregated Florida beach” <http://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2014/jul/19/60-years-ago-blacks-desegregated-fla-beach/?page=all>

²¹ Interview with Haley L. Jordan (New College student), October 2015

²² “Civil rights pioneer led era of change in Sarasota.” <http://www.heraldtribune.com/article/20141205/ARTICLE/141209813>

²³ Interview with Kortney Lapeyrolerie (New College student), October 29, 2010. <http://www.sarasota.wateratlas.usf.edu/upload/documents/TranscriptRivers.pdf>

²⁴ “60 years ago, blacks desegregated Florida beach” <http://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2014/jul/19/60-years-ago-blacks-desegregated-fla-beach/?page=all>

CHAPTER 9: CHURCHES OF OVERTOWN AND NEWTOWN

Various forms of religion, spirituality, or belief in some kind of mysticism are integral to most cultures. Many practitioners will testify that their belief and faith in God or a higher power provides them with the strength they need to endure the challenges of everyday life. Certainly that was true for the enslaved African people who were forcibly brought to the U.S. The inhumane conditions under which they managed somehow to survive nurtured their belief that it could only have been accomplished with the intervention of a Supreme Being or God. Although their own traditional belief systems varied, many learned to accept the religion of their enslavers because it promised them salvation and equality in the eyes of God:

African Americans played a major role in their own conversion, and for their own reasons. Africans brought to America initially resisted giving up the religions of their forefathers,¹ but over the years, and with the birth of new generations on American soil, accepting Christianity became part of accepting America as home. Over time, large numbers of slaves found the Biblical message of spiritual equality before God appealing and found comfort in the biblical theme of deliverance.²

Religious belief systems among people of African descent in the U.S. vary greatly: Christianity; traditional African religions; Islam; Rastafarianism; Buddhism and others. Christianity, however, has been the foundation of religious belief among most African Americans in Newtown. At least, it is the most visibly practiced. There are differences in Christian worship practices, however, depending upon the specific denomination.

The Rev. Dr. DeForest “Buster” Soaries, Jr. is the senior pastor of First Baptist Church of Lincoln Gardens in Somerset, New Jersey. Rev. Soaries is a popular speaker at colleges, universities, conferences and churches around the world, as well as, a frequent advisor to major corporations in the areas of diversity, philanthropy and community relations. He was featured on CNN’s highly rated “Black in America” series.³

Rev. Soaries states that:

The worship styles, doctrinal distinctions and organizational structures are so diverse that it is really a misnomer to refer to “the” black church. Many black churches make up the black religious experience. What is irrefutable is that without a deep and authentic faith and a passion for the institutional development of that faith, African-Americans could have never sustained

the fortitude necessary to survive and succeed in the American experience.⁴

Historically, Baptists and Methodists have been the most accepting of all Christian denominations toward people of African descent.⁵ Bethlehem Baptist Church was the first church in the Sarasota area to be built by and for African Americans. It was constructed in Overtown in 1899. The second African American church built was Payne Chapel African Methodist Episcopal (A.M.E.) Church, in 1903.

Rev. Soaries offered these insights into the relationship between African Americans and the church:

Enslaved Africans were exposed to the literature of the Christian Bible, and they found comfort and direction in the same book that was used to justify their enslavement. Slaves met the indignities and injustices that denied them their humanity with the same resistance that humans throughout history have shown toward oppression.

Religion in general and Christianity in particular became an answer to the mysteries of the cosmos. Only a belief in an unseen power and faith in a divine advocate could sustain a people who faced such inhumane circumstances and give them a way to cope

When the highest court in the land relegates a person's race to a subhuman status as a matter of law - which the Supreme Court did in the Dred Scott decision of 1857. African Americans needed a source of authenticity for their identity. That source for African-Americans was God of the Bible, who had sent Moses to lead the slaves out of slavery and who had sent his son to preach, "good news to the poor and set the captives free."

The churches had to be more than places to learn about and worship God. In a segregated society, church was the place where people fulfilled their human potential, developed their God-given talents, made corporate decisions, voted for their officers, owned property, created benevolent societies, raised money for schools and scholarships, celebrated their marriages, blessed their babies, mourned their loved one in death and even learned how to read.⁶

He emphasized that, while the church has been a place of spiritual and psychological refuge, it has also been a place of empowerment, where African Americans could assume influential leadership roles. Pastor, Deacon, Bishop, Elder, Lay Leader and other designations bestowed upon them by their churches provided people who were persistently oppressed and denigrated in their everyday lives with an elevated sense of identity, dignity and pride. They could hold positions of authority that offered a level of respect and honor that they could not otherwise possess in a segregated, white-dominated society. Despite the end of slavery, African American adults continued to be disrespected; grown women were called "girls," and grown men were called "boys." Some whites acted as though slavery was still in effect and African Americans continued to be referred to as chattel or 'property.' In one example, Bertha Honoré Palmer, a

prominent white Sarasotan, referred to the African Americans who worked for her as, “my Negroes.”⁷

African Americans have suffered greatly, physically and psychologically, under the yokes of discrimination and racist stereotypes. Sadly, sometimes this toxicity has become internalized. The negative portrait of oneself, if accepted, contributes to the destructive internal violence present in African American communities today.⁸

The growth of a large number of African American churches in Sarasota – there are over 50 churches, ranging from services held in private homes, to large churches with a local and an international reach – stems from the motivation to meet the basic human needs for self-respect and “a way to cope,” as Rev. Soaries stated above. They also answered the desire to follow the “calling” from God to serve others, a passion expressed by several people interviewed for this project.

Building a Foundation

Churches formed the solid foundation upon which the African American communities of Overtown and Newtown were built. From the 1880s, their strong Christian faith led many African Americans in Sarasota and neighboring areas to attend interdenominational worship services held inside private homes; Baptist, Methodist, Holiness and other Christian denominations all worshipped together.⁹ As the number of African American settlers increased, they splintered away from the interdenominational worship services to establish separate churches for their own denominations. Between 1899 and 1928 at least ten churches were established in Overtown and Newtown. Currently, there are more than 20 African American churches serving the community.

During her interview, Fannie McDugle said that, “The best part growing up was the theater and let me see...churches! We had some nice churches. We had the C.M.E. Church, we had the Baptist Church...That’s the time when everybody get together and you would have your singing choirs, and you would have your Sunday school and different classes, all depending on how old you are. You start like about, I think it was the fifth or sixth grade. I think that’s when the classes started. And then you would go on up to the twelfth grade.”¹⁰

Jerome Dupree’s “grandmother was very religious. My grandmother, every time the church door opened, she was there. She would invite ministers to dinner on Sundays and whatnot. My grandmother was very steeped in worshipping God. My mother wasn’t as much that way, but she was a strong woman. She was a woman who, if she said do this or do that, you knew to do this or do that, and no lip, no talking back like some of the kids do today. No lip whatsoever.”¹¹

Church buildings were used not only for worship, but also for social activities, meeting places for organizations, and served as the earliest schools. Education and religion went hand in hand among the early African American settlers of Sarasota, as it still did for quite some time afterward among many of their descendants. During the

school desegregation period, the Freedom Schools emerged overnight in response to the 1969 school boycott, were held at many African American churches.¹² Although students no longer have to attend classes held in churches, in order to meet the desires and needs of their community today, some churches have opened private schools, and/or provide supplemental tutoring and other academically-oriented programs: Bethlehem Baptist Church founded the Horizons Unlimited Christian Academy preschool program on 2003, whose goal is to “prepare and motivate students to develop exemplary character and high achievement while empowering them to become God-fearing, law-abiding, productive citizens, community leaders, and entrepreneurs, within a culturally diverse global society;”¹³ Horizons also has a Parents, Teachers, and Friends Organization (P.T.F.O.) that, among other things, raises funds for the school. Greater Hurst Chapel African Methodist Episcopal (A.M.E.) Church created the Seed of Academic Resources Program (S.O.A.R.), which is a K-3 program employing “teachers who can provide a caring and nurturing environment for the students and also understand the cultural of poverty. The primary goal of S.O.A.R. is to improve the achievement level in reading and math of educationally disadvantaged students.”¹⁴ The Westcoast Center for Human Development church established the Westcoast School for Human Development (WSHD) “a private, inter-/non-denominational, K-12 school...With Christianity as its foundation, WSHD serves as a training ground for leaders of the 21st century. The curriculum, replete with college preparatory courses, consistently produces students who are prepared and confident to meet the challenges of the new millennium.”¹⁵

Over time, the number of African American churches grew rapidly. The list includes:

Bethlehem Baptist: 1899
 Payne Chapel African Methodist Episcopal (A.M.E.) Church: 1903
 Mt. Moriah Christian Church: 1913
 Truevine Missionary Christian Church: 1918
 The House of God: 1922
 Bethel Missionary Baptist Church: 1925
 Bethel Christian Methodist Episcopal (C.M.E.) Church: 1925
 Church of God in Christ: 1925
 Greater Hurst Chapel African Methodist Episcopal (A.M.E.) Church: 1928
 Shiloh Primitive Baptist Church: 1930
 Church of Christ: 1932
 Zion Primitive Baptist Church: 1937
 Community Bible Church
 Firstborn Church of the Living God
 Mount Calvary Missionary Baptist Church
 Newtown Gospel Chapel
 Society of Our Lady Mercy
 Trinity Christian Fellowship Center, Inc.
 Trinity M L Church
 Koinonia Missionary Baptist Church: 1980
 West Coast Center for Human Development: 1980
 Light of the World International Church: 2010

The oral history interviews conducted for this study of the Newtown community provided insights into the participants' personal feelings about their churches, their involvement in their churches, and memories of childhood experiences in their churches. Below are details about some of Newtown's churches and comments from some of their congregants.

Bethlehem Baptist Church – Established 1899

(originally the Colored Missionary Baptist Church of Sarasota; it is now known as Bethlehem Bible Church.)

The Baptists were the first to leave the interdenominational worship services that they had conducted in private homes and build a church. Bethlehem Baptist Church was constructed on the northeast corner of Mango Avenue and 13th Street (present day Central Avenue and 7th Street) in Overtown.¹⁶ It was the first African American church built in Sarasota. Louis Colson, the first African American settler in Sarasota (1884), and his wife Irene essentially donated the land to build it; they sold the deed to the church for \$1 in 1897 and the building was completed in 1899. Mr. and Mrs. Mott (Josie) Washington loaned the church money with which to purchase its first pews. "It is said that Bethlehem was the only Negro church for miles around, therefore, the group included people from Bradenton."¹⁷ John Mays, another early Sarasota settler who was a carpenter and builder, helped to construct the church. Mays became a "noted homebuilder...[and] when the first bank opened in Sarasota, Mays was one of its largest depositors."¹⁸

Louis Colson became an ordained minister in 1896 and served as pastor of Bethlehem Baptist Church from 1899-1915. Bethlehem was a center of activity for religious and educational activities in the community, having the only church building at that time. Bethlehem Baptist Church's history records state that:

During our church's early history the following pioneers gave freely of their time both to the church and community, but their primary concern was to meet the needs of the Bethlehem congregation: Mrs. Irene Colson, John Mays, Mrs. Sally Mays, Deacon Levi Atkins, Mrs. Malinda Atkins, Tony Colson, Robert Dailey, Robert Harris, Willis Washington, Mrs. Corrie W. Coleman, James Coles, Sam J. Coleman and Hillard Barnes. The small one story structure was expanded under the pastorate of Rev. Arthur Elam. After a period of time, the church and Sunday school population steadily increased, requiring additional space...it was during the Pastorate of Rev. Abraham Howell that property was purchased for the construction of a new church sanctuary on 18th Street. On Sunday, October 23, 1973, Bethlehem's pastor, Rev. James C. Collier, and the congregation officially opened its new edifice at 1680 18th Street in the Newtown area. Six pastors and their congregations shared in the church opening celebration services. They were: Rev. J.H. Floyd (Mt. Moriah), Rev. J.E. McCrary (Truevine), Rev. W.C. Grimsley (New Bethel), Rev. Richard Hammond (St. Mary), Rev. L.L. Ward (Bethel C.M.E.), and Rev. J.S. Bennett (Mt. Calvary).¹⁹

The attendance at the dedication of the new church building by such notable clergy and their congregations from so many different churches and denominations,

demonstrated the high level of respect and esteem in which Bethlehem Baptist Church was held. After the devastating hurricane of 1926 destroyed the original wood frame chapel of the Payne Chapel A.M.E. Church, the Payne Chapel congregation shared the Bethlehem Baptist Church sanctuary on alternate Sundays. Today, Bethlehem Baptist Church is led by Rev. Patrick A. Miller who has served the congregation since 1997 and is described in the Church History document as a “motivational task-master, who has provided his skills of leadership in the following areas and/or projects Monthly church newsletter; parsonage redecoration and renovation; a complete remodeling of the church sanctuary; enhanced discipleship population; youth public speaking projects; Annual Women’s Conference; Annual Women’s Retreat; Women’s Ministry; Church Council; and Founded Horizons Unlimited Christian Academy in 2003.”²⁰

Mary Alice Simmons

When I grew up all I knew was Bethlehem Baptist Church. There was also Payne Chapel but my aunt, my grandma, the family was Bethlehem Baptist Church. When I did research on John Mays, Bethlehem Baptist Church was built the same way as the church that was built in Madison, Florida, exactly like the church. Our poppa was carpenter as well as a fisherman. So an exact replica of Concordia Church in Madison, Florida.²¹

Wade Harvin

We attended **Bethlehem Baptist Church**, which was Overtown. And...our other classmates overtown [later referred to as ‘Overtown’] went to the Methodist Church. And I couldn’t quite understand as a kid why do we go to different churches? And no one could quite explain that to my satisfaction but I learned to live with it. Until later we moved to Newtown and there was three other churches in Newtown. For the most part most of us went to the same schools and the same churches.²²

It was the pastors...[who] were great ones in Overtown...Dr. Hughes is probably one of the greatest ones that came to the Overtown area. [He was pastor of] Bethlehem Baptist. Payne Chapel had Reverend Mack. Loud - almost as loud as some Baptist preachers. But Methodist, always kind of toned down. But it was a difficult thing for me to understand when I started school, first grade...why was the Cherry [family] going to a different church? I didn’t quite get that. I said, “We’re all going to church aren’t we?” “Yeah, but they don’t go to Bethlehem, they go to Payne Chapel.” And I really didn’t understand that one. I really didn’t because to me, church was just church.

...My youngest brother’s daughter is a pastor with A.M.E. in Palm Beach. And I went down and of course I went to her church. And she was a little bit concerned that [about me sitting] in the pulpit, because we don’t usually do that. ...but then God expects you to treat everyone as you wish you’d been treated. So I sat in the pulpit with her. Now, she didn’t ask me to preach, because we know what we believe, there is a little bit different. But some of the things, you have to use common sense with it. What would God do? What would Jesus do?²³

Shelia Cassandra Hammond Atkins

Bethlehem, that's the church I grew up in. It was a big church, which was Overtown. Then you had Payne Chapel, which was another African American church in the neighborhood. [We are] trying to help the community and our youth...that might need a little extra boost. Like working in our church, that's what we do as well. And I think, you know, churches around our community they still seem to be one of those avenues that helps youth as well and the community.²⁴

Yvonne Brown²⁵

Regarding church activities, Yvonne Brown stated:

Yes...[there were] a lot of gatherings all the time. And when I say that, it was during the week, it wasn't like now. During the week we would have--well of course Sunday church, then we'd go back to afternoon, BYPU [Baptist Young People's Union]. Then we'd have evening service and during the week we would have all kinds of activities at church. As far as having plays, we did a lot of plays during the holidays. So of course in order to do that we had to go and practice, and that was a lot of fun. And we also travelled back in the day to neighboring communities for church and that was a big experience. [I attended] Bethlehem Baptist. But we were baptized [at the beach] for my church. We would go down early in the morning...[to] Hog's Creek, back in the day. So that's where we were baptized for my church.²⁶

Payne Chapel African Methodist Episcopal (A.M.E.) Church – Established 1903

The second church built by and for African Americans in Overtown was Payne Chapel African Methodist Episcopal (A.M.E.) Church, located near Bethlehem Baptist. Payne Chapel was named after Daniel Alexander Payne who was elected A.M.E. bishop in 1852. A group of Methodists, who had been attending Bethlehem Baptist Church or the A.M.E. Church on the Manatee River in Bradenton, got together and decided it was time to organize an A.M.E. church in Sarasota. Members of the congregation given credit for organizing the church include: The Reverend T.H. Arnold, Leonard Reid, Jerry Allen, Richard Grice and the Reverend C. Conely.

In 1903, the Florida Mortgage & Investment Company transferred a deed for a lot at the corner of Mango Avenue and 11th Street [present day Central Avenue and 5th Street] for the church. By 1905, the church was active enough to host the A.M.E. Church of Florida Annual Convention of Sunday school Workers. Colonel John Hamilton Gillespie, mayor of Sarasota and representing the Florida Mortgage & Investment Company, was one of the speakers at the convention ... In 1926 a hurricane destroyed the original wood frame chapel, which was replaced by the prominent masonry and hollow-clay lime structure that still exists today on the original site.²⁷ By the late 1960s, the congregation was declining and the building was deteriorating. A new Payne Chapel was built in Newtown on 19th Street and Central Avenue, and the original building was abandoned in 1975. The former Payne Chapel was purchased and renovated by Pat Ball and was one of the first revitalization efforts in the Overtown/Rosemary District.²⁸ It now accommodates the offices of the Ball Construction Company.

Mount Moriah Christian Church - Established 1913

Mt. Moriah Christian Church was located near the Bee Ridge Turpentine Camp. It served the turpentine camp workers and their children as a school and a social center as well as a church.²⁹ Rev. E.W. Range was the first church leader. A prominent Newtown community member, Rev. J.H. Floyd, became pastor in 1957 (until his death in 1974) after a number of others had served in that capacity. After Rev. Floyd's death, Rev. Wesley Tunstall became the pastor. In 1976 Mt. Moriah left the Baptist denomination and became a part of the Universal Unity Christian Association. Later, the congregations of Mt. Moriah and Bethel C.M.E. merged. In 1978, under Rev. Tunstall's leadership, the Mt. Moriah Christian Traveling Ministry was born and a television ministry began in 1983. Rev. Tunstall was installed as a Bishop in the Southern District of the Universal Christian Association in 1984.³⁰

True Vine (Truvine) Missionary Baptist Church - Established 1918

The church was organized in the home of Deacon P.J. Johnson and services were held at Orange Avenue and 25th Street (Robinson's Cowpen). The congregation later moved to the Van Dame Subdivision near the Booker School Complex. J.H. Floyd constructed a church building in 1952. A new church building now stands at 1947 31st Street.

The House of God, Which Is the Church of the Living God, the Pillar and Ground of the Truth Without Controversy, Inc. – Established 1922 in Sarasota

Founded by Mother Magdalena Tate and her two sons who established churches from 1903-1913 in Alabama, Georgia and Illinois. The Sarasota House of God church was organized under the leadership of the late Bishop J.R. Lockley, who served as the first pastor. General Elder, M.E. Colvin was assistant pastor to Bishop Lockley; she was only the second female black pastor to serve in a Sarasota church. The first church was built in 1938, on the corner of 6th Street and Coconut, where they worshipped until a new church was constructed in 1984. Dr. J.W. Jenkins, a spiritual leader, educator and advocate of economic independence, was selected and ordained chief overseer.³¹

Bethel Christian Methodist Episcopal (C.M.E.) Church - Established 1924

(originally named New Bethel Colored Methodist Episcopal C.M.E. Church). Bethel C.M.E. Church originally shared bldg. with Payne Chapel until it was destroyed in the 1926 hurricane. John Walker, Jr., the current pastor of Bethel C.M.E. Church was the keynote speaker at the 2014 NAACP Martin Luther King Jr. Unity Worship Service. There, he described the state of affairs in Christian, making the following comments: "We still have discrimination going on in our churches...Many people guilty of discrimination call themselves Christian as they piously are separating the just from the unjust. The most segregated hour in the 21st century is the hour people go to their church...Those in the faith community should set an example by accepting all persons regardless of race, income, gender, sexual orientation...All humankind are made in the image of God."³²

Alberta Brown was very involved at Bethel C.M.E. church for many years. “Oh my goodness, I was over the Director of Youths, I sang in the choir, ran the kitchen...And right now, what we do now is pray. Three of us come here. We were doing it at the church, and when I got feeling kinda bad not so long ago I just asked the two girls if they could come to my house. So every Tuesday at eleven o'clock we're here with prayer, just the three of us.”³³

Willie Charles Shaw

I was between **New Bethel and Bethel CME** because not only was my great-grandmother a charter member of the Mount Tabor Missionary Baptist Church, and my grandmother, but they also came into New Bethel when it got its start. And my grandmother on my dad's side started over at Bethel CME so we shared services. And you had strong ministers. Preachers were strong. Remember the strongest people within our community at that time and the voices of the community were the funeral home directors, the undertakers and the preachers, and people like Neil Humphrey, Herbert Jenkins, and Asa Payne.³⁴

New Bethel Missionary Baptist Church – Established 1925

(Formerly the House of God (1924), but was dedicated as New Bethel in July 1925)
The church had its beginning on the undeveloped land that made up much of Newtown at that time. In 1925, under the leadership of Rev. Woodard, a lot was purchased across the street from where Truevine (Truvine) Baptist Church parsonage is now located. This move gave the church access to electrical services. Rev C. Preston became the first official pastor and served from 1925-1927.³⁵ Currently, Rev. Toby T. Philpart is the pastor.

Church of God in Christ - Pittman Church of God in Christ. Pittman Church of the Living God – Established 1925

Initially, services were held in home of Brother and Sister Paralee Wilson. They had been organized as a Church of God in Christ when they lived in Dublin, Georgia. The Newtown church was built on Church Street near 29th Street then moved to 33rd Street [MLK present day] near the corner of Osprey Avenue. The original building burned down. Elder Thomas Pittman changed the church's name to Rawson Temple Church of God in Christ. Upon his death, the name was changed again, to honor Elder Pittman.³⁶

Greater Hurst Chapel African Methodist Episcopal (A.M.E.) Church - Established 1928

(originally known as Bryant Chapel, named for the first pastor. Name changed in 1929.)
The current pastor of Greater Hurst Chapel is Rev. Keturah Drayton Pittman. The church's website declares that:

The mission of the African Methodist Episcopal Church is to minister to the spiritual, intellectual, physical, emotional, and environmental needs of all people by spreading Christ's liberating gospel through word and deed. At every level of the Connection and in every local church, the African Methodist Episcopal Church shall engage in carrying out the spirit of the original Free African Society, out of which the AME Church evolved: that is, to seek out and save the lost, and serve the needy.

Dorothee Smith, a former schoolteacher and principal who attended Greater Hurst Chapel A.M.E. Church, said, “You didn't have anywhere else to go [in Newtown] but church. So I worked in the church, teaching Sunday school...When I came here, I was an Episcopalian. They didn't have an Episcopal church here that we could attend... You had the Episcopal church downtown [The Church of the Redeemer]. I went a time or two, but the people weren't too satisfied having me take Communion before some of them took Communion. But The Church of the Redeemer...Father Fitzgerald, I taught with him, and he said it was fine with him...He welcomed me, and some of the other people [welcomed me]. See, in the church I went to [in Clearwater], we had one chalice and the priest would hand it down the aisle and then you would clean it with the cloth and just pass it on down...I didn't have any problem at The Church of the Redeemer [downtown], but [I] wasn't as comfortable with them [as I was in my church in Clearwater]. So I attended any church. I attended New Bethel, I taught Sunday school at New Bethel, and I had never been in a Baptist Church. But you learn a lot of things. I attended Hurst Chapel, which is the A.M.E. church. It didn't make any difference...And the children [from school] expected you to come to church. Everything they were in, they would invite you to come. So you were there to see them in Sunday school or whatever happened at church.”³⁷

According to **Betty Johnson**, “Most of us attended church in Newtown. That is, after the people started moving out from Overtown into Newtown...I attended **Greater Hurst Chapel A.M.E. Church**... Well, my memory of Hurst Chapel Church was we were like a beacon church, and we were the community gathering place because of all of the meetings that took place. They had no other place to go. Community civic meetings...were held at Greater Hurst Chapel. Greater Hurst Chapel is known for school [de]segregation. When they closed Booker, Hurst Chapel became the school [when] they were protesting. So Hurst Chapel doors were open...There were other churches involved...I'm not sure about New Bethel, but I know Truevine [Truvine] and Hurst Chapel were two of the churches that were involved...during the protest.”³⁸

Margaret Beverly Moreland Cherry Mitchell, another member of Greater Hurst Chapel, also discussed **Greater Hurst Chapel's** political involvement. “Greater Hurst Chapel has been a community meeting place for the NAACP and community discussions about schools, etcetera.”³⁹

Anthony “Tony” Major... “My family, along with a couple of others, built [**Hurst Chapel**]. The Humphreys, my family, Porters, you know, the Henry Porter who has the church there now [the Westcoast Center for Human Development]...and Buck O'Neil, the O'Neils...were members of that church.”⁴⁰

Prevell Barber

Vickie Oldham asked her, “You attended church?” She answered, “Right. **Greater Hurst Chapel A.M.E.**...Somebody invited me there. In fact, my uncle’s wife, she belonged to the Methodist church...I would go to Hurst Chapel for Sunday school...I could walk there...It was nearer.”⁴¹

Nathaniel Harvey

...Oh yeah, we went to church...My mother belongs to that church right there...**Hurst Chapel**. And we’d go to church. Every Sunday we’d go to church. Every Sunday you had to get up, get ready for church.⁴²

New Zion Primitive Baptist Church – Established 1937

Founded by Elder Rice and Moderator Miller in the Fruitville community with six members who held services in a small dwelling. The church remained in Fruitville for years before moving to the Humphrey’s subdivision on 27th Street where it was rebuilt. The church was relocated again to 22nd Street to a building with a seating capacity of 100 people. Since 1984, Elder Willie Mays, Jr. has served as pastor. The church celebrated its 78th church anniversary in November 2015.

West Coast Center for Human Development, Inc. - Established 1980

(Dr. Henry L. Porter Evangelistic Association, Inc.)

Dr. Henry L. Porter, who attended Greater Hurst Chapel while growing up in Newtown, is Bishop and Presiding Prelate of the Westcoast Centers, with Global Headquarters in Sarasota, Florida. Westcoast Center is Sarasota’s largest church, operates a private K-12 school, and has an international mission. Pastor Porter’s son Etienne, also interviewed for this study, is a professional musician who learned his craft in the church. Etienne says that his parents always stressed traveling as a way to meet people from other cultures.⁴³ Bishop Porter is an internationally known minister, author and singer.

Carolyn Mason

I went to high school with **Henry Porter**. He had started the church, I remember his first album that was called the “HLP Love Campaign,” and they actually walked through Newtown selling those albums, because I bought one! Churches were the center of most people’s lives.⁴⁴

The idea of the church as a place where you could find refuge, forgiveness, and support was instilled from childhood. That is what **Johnny Hunter** found in the prison ministry of Bishop Henry Porter. As Hunter recalls:⁴⁵

When I was in prison I studied three things: I studied the Bible; I studied Psychology; and I studied the law. **Bishop Porter** and I grew up as kids, neighbors. I’ve been knowing him since we was little boys. Although he’s a grade ahead of me, he graduated in the Booker High School class of ‘65, I graduated in the Booker High School class of ‘66. So when he started his ministry, I remember him practicing right there at the corner [of 301]...Used to be a lady out of

Jacksonville...named the late Esther Banister...She used to bring a group of women into the prison system. I was at Florida State Prison...They would come once a month and we would go to the gymnasium where they would conduct the religious services and stuff. And so guys would just come, you know, 'cause you gonna see some females...They didn't have women working prisons back...when I was there. And so I thought, "Henry." I said, "You know something? I need to contact Henry about bringing his prison ministry into this prison system." And, ironically, he told me his story...he had a dream that it was somebody behind a prison bar, he couldn't see the face, said, "I need somebody to help me carry this heavy load." And at that time he had that dream, he received my letter about bringing his ministry into the prison system. Simultaneously! And so he responded back and I told him how he could start the process...And so he started that in 1976 and he's been going in there now since 1976.

And so I made a commitment to God, I told him to fill me or kill me. I told him to fill me with the true meaning and essence of what life is all about because as an only child, I lived pretty good in Newtown all my life...I said, "Well fill me with the true essence what life's about, or take me out." Then I entered into recovery. Now, I start reading the Bible...

I went to church all the way 'til I was...seventeen years old... And my mother had me in church from the time I was a little boy until I was seventeen years old. I didn't miss Bethlehem Church, okay? [Laughter]. And so as a result of that, I told him, I said, "If you give me knowledge, wisdom, and understanding and patience as you gave King Solomon...I will serve you for the rest of my life."

Now I was part of Jim Russo Prison Ministry. He's dead now. I used to be on his ministry. I used to travel with him back to the prisons, sharing my testimony and did fundraisers for him. And also go with a guy named Willie Dixon, Reverend Willie Dixon out of Tampa...he goes to Zephyrhills with his ministry and I met him in prison. He was a former schoolteacher out of Tampa. We met initially in 1974 when I was over there Tampa having dope distributed and he was buying it from my distributors over there...

Koinonia Missionary Baptist Church, Inc. – Established 1980

The Bethlehem Baptist Church congregation became divided due to a serious internal dispute that resulted in the congregation voting the pastor, Rev. Rupert Paul, out of the church in 1980. A portion of Bethlehem's congregation left with Rev. Paul and started the Koinonia Missionary Baptist Church, Inc., under Rev. Paul's leadership. Rev. Paul resigned before his third anniversary as pastor the Rev. Jerome Dupree had previous experience, serving as assistant pastor to Rev. Paul at both Bethlehem Baptist and Koinonia Missionary Baptist churches. He was installed as pastor of Koinonia Missionary Baptist Church, Inc. in May 1983 where he continues to serve as pastor.⁴⁶

Rev. Jerome Dupree, current pastor of **Koinonia Missionary Baptist Church, Inc.** said, "I'm in my thirty-first year [as pastor]...I became a preacher in 1979, and I've been preaching ever since...I've always been involved in the church. I was teaching Sunday school class when I was in the seventh grade...to the junior classes in church. Then I taught the intermediates, and I taught the seniors. Then I taught the adult women, and then...the adult men. Then after I taught them, I became a trustee. And then [I]

became a deacon and... chairman of the deacon board...After that, I served as the clerk of the church...I wasn't even thinking about being a preacher. I wasn't thinking about being a pastor, but I think, later on, that it was God that set me up. I had served in just about every department of the church.⁴⁷

Light of the World International Church (LOTWIC) - Established 2010

(Abundant Life Christian Center (ALCC), that formed in 1999, merged with Bethesda Word of Faith Church and became LOTWIC in 2010.

A Senior Pastor of this church, Kelvin Lumpkin, recalled how he got involved in the ministry:

...The ministry is not something you choose; you're chosen for it. God kinda arrests you and you just don't have any choice. And I come from a family of preachers. Thought I could get away from it, but there was just no way. And I actually officially started preaching my senior year of college, started feeling the burden, the call, the pull, around my junior year of college. Fought and fought, but was sitting under a good ministry at that time, a great preacher, Bishop Derek Triplet. And others recognized it in me. I'll never forget when I called my grandfather, who was pastoring here at the time when he was alive. And I told him, "Hey I feel like God is calling me to preach." He was like, "I knew that, I was just waiting for you to realize that. I saw that a long time ago." And that was kinda the response I got. And so I started preaching and seeking God's plan for my life and I knew without a doubt I had to move back to Sarasota. He graduated from Bethune Cookman University with degree in accounting that he says, was his "rebellion against becoming a preacher."⁴⁸

Rev. Lumpkin recognizes that "his task - ministering to a community in turmoil - is not an easy one, [but] Lumpkin possesses a classic Type A personality, an erudite wit, and a hearty sense of humor."⁴⁹

Well you know our church, we want the down-and-outs. Of course, we have professional people who are members of our church; we've got lawyers, even a City Commissioner. But we really want the down-and-out and so a lot of the problems that some of our people have, and especially some of our young men, is just getting employment. Of course, being a preacher, I believe in the power of God to change lives and I believe in the difference that Jesus makes in our lives and so I've seen that happen. But you have a system that kinda perpetually punishes people for their past mistakes. We've got some former drug users and drug dealers in our church who are active in ministry, but are having a hard time moving up the economic ladder because their past transgressions are constantly held against them...They've paid the price, but still can't vote...I don't get that. You've paid your debt to society, but you can't even participate. And it's hard for them. It's hard for me to see it on them. And then one of the things, we've done - and we've got to do a better job of it at our church - we've done financial classes, which we need to do again. Because a lot of people in our community who are hardworking, they're not lazy, but

aren't financially literate. They didn't grow up knowing about how to invest. And so when we get money, just because we don't have financial literacy, we go buy things that really have no value. Things that depreciate immediately... Many of us didn't grow up in a family where we were taught those things. And so you have some starting off at a disadvantage in life... With our ministerial lanes, we work with the Sarasota Police Department trying to get drug dealers out of the game. And some of those drug dealers, I've had one drug dealer tell me, "Hey Pastor Lumpkin, I don't want to do this. I hate doing this, but I feel like I have to. I can't get a job. Maybe the churches can be a partner in helping some of these individuals transition within that life and encourage them. We've got one in our church now. Young man who was a drug dealer, we were just talking the other day, he's on his way to becoming a chef now."⁵⁰

U.S. Religious Landscape Surveys: The Pew Research Center

Traditionally, residents have looked to the churches for guidance and solutions to the challenges of crime and unemployment in the Newtown community. Some still are seeking the type of church involvement that occurred in the early settlement days and throughout the mid 20th Century. Is that reasonable or rational considering the fact that, statistically, church enrollment and attendance has been steadily decreasing across the U.S.? The story does differ among African Americans. Although there are an increasing number of them adopting traditional West African religious traditions and atheism there is still widespread attendance at Christian churches. That, of course, varies by region. African Americans have diverse beliefs and patterns of practices. The 2009 U.S. Religious Landscape Survey conducted by the Pew Research Center reported the following statistics for these three categories (there are many more categories)

“Among Protestant ‘historically black churches’”

2009

85% say religion is very important in their lives.

58% attended religious services at least once a week

80% percent said they prayed daily.

Nearly two-thirds of members of historically black Protestant churches are Baptists. Overall, not only are black Americans are most likely to report a formal religious affiliation, but they are also the most religiously committed racial or ethnic group in the nation, according to the survey.⁵¹

2014

The most recent Religious Landscape Survey, conducted by the Pew Research Center in 2014, two categories reported higher statistics for responses to these three categories than responses in the 2009 report:

91% say religion is very important in their lives.

54% attend religious services at least once a week

82% said they prayed daily.

The percentage increases could be due to a number of factors that have negatively affected many African American communities including Newtown – such as high unemployment, wage stagnation, and increased crime – during the years between 2009 and 2014.

In addition to the three categories shown above, the 2014 Pew Research Report on the Religious Landscape provides statistics on many different categories, including marital status, economic status, level of education, frequency of religious study, political views and party affiliation, gender, views on same-sex marriage, and views about human evolution. This is a fascinating study; the statistics can be compared by state, and to other religious affiliations.

Newtown Residents' Opinions on the Churches' Roles in Community Improvement

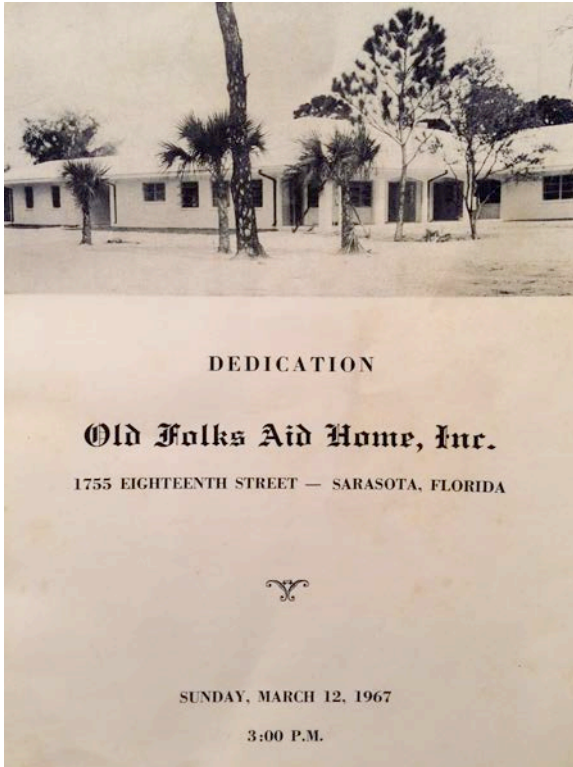
Among the responses to improving conditions in Newtown, some interviewees did recommend more involvement of church leaders, including City of Sarasota Mayor Shaw, who said, “The churches and the role that they play in this change or in this, has to be, has to be the place we go once again.”⁵² One repeated suggestion was that current and elder leaders in the church and the community should mentor young people and allow themselves to be educated about how the challenges they face differ from previous generations.

Young people want their mentors to take full consideration of their suggestions because they are the leaders of tomorrow. “Give them your wisdom and let them apply it to today’s challenges” was a request made by several interviewees. The younger generation must take responsibility, too, for learning the details of their community’s history and the strategies employed by their mentors to successfully confront the struggles of their eras. Strategies may need to be changed based upon societal changes (including the advent of the global village created by the internet). The determination and collaboration that it takes to devise new strategies and employ them is a requirement for the revitalization of Newtown.

The Choirs Union

In 1948, Mrs. Lisa Range, a long time resident of Newtown, organized the Choirs Union. The organization of nine church choirs from the African American community formed the Old Folk Aid Club in 1951, acting on a proposal made by Rev. J.H. Floyd. The Old Folk Aid Club helps to provide care for the community’s aging and infirm residents. On a motion made by Mrs. Flora Knowles, the club was established.

The choirs raised funds by selling fish and peanuts, beach barbecues, teas, concerts and ads in souvenir booklets. Benjamin McMillan and Forrest R. Freeman produced the dedication program booklet filled with ads from banks, such as First Federal Savings and Loan Association of Sarasota, and many other businesses, such as Jenkins Grocery, Humphreys Sundries, Suarez Service Station, Holton Seniors Funeral Home, and the 27th St. Pharmacy. Small donations also flowed in.



Choirs have continued to support the Old Folks Aid Home, which has been renamed the J.H. Floyd Nursing Home. The Home's policy was liberal in treating residents who could not afford to pay for care.

Participating choirs include:

Bethel C.M.E. Choir No.1;
 Bethlehem Baptist Choir No.2;
 Hurst Chapel A.M.E. Church Choir No.2;
 Mt. Moriah M.B. Church Choir No.1;
 New Bethel M.B. Church Choir No. 2;
 Payne Chapel A.M.E. Church Choir No.1;
 St. Paul M.B Church Choir No.1;
 Shiloh Primitive Baptist Church Choir No.1;

and True Vine M.B. Church Choir No.1.

ENDNOTES

¹ Long before Europeans conducted a slave trade on the continent of Africa, the Arabs had conquered a vast amount of territory there and converted the people from their indigenous belief systems to Islam. Later, Christian missionaries from Europe reached the continent and converted some people to Christianity, as a precursor of colonization. Therefore, before they were brought to the Americas, some of the Africans who became enslaved had already been converted to Islam and Christianity.

² "Africans in America: Religion and Slavery."

<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/aia/part2/2narr2.html>

³ Rev. Dr. Soaries earned a Bachelor of Arts Degree from Fordham University, a Master of Divinity Degree from Princeton Theological Seminary and a Doctor of Ministry Degree from United Theological Seminary. He has also received six honorary Doctorate degrees from institutions of higher learning.

He was recently recognized by the both houses of the New Jersey Legislature for his religious and community leadership. His work has been featured in several publications including the New York Times, The Wall Street Journal, Ebony Magazine, Black Enterprise and Government Executive Magazine. Rev. Soaries participated in the CNN documentary series titled "Black in America" for which Soledad O'Brien was the

correspondent. The series took a critical look at the modern realities of black life including how debt impacts lives. <http://www.cnn.com/linkto/opk/almighty.debt/>

⁴ On an Opinion page, Rev. Soaries, Jr. spoke about “Black churches and the role of empowerment.” CNN Opinion, Black in America. 1 August 2010.

(<http://www.cnn.com/2010/OPINION/08/01/soaries.black.church/>)

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⁶ Soaries, Rev. DeForest, Jr. “Black churches and the role of empowerment.”

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²² Interview with Flannery French (New College), November 5, 2015.

²³ Interview with Vickie Oldham, August 18, 2015.

²⁴ Interview with Kaylie Stokes, October 20, 2015.

²⁵ Interview with Vickie Oldham, August 24, 2015.

²⁶ Telephone interview with Dr. Rosalyn Howard on January 31, 2016,

²⁷ Email correspondence from John McCarthy. March 17, 2016.

²⁸ Email correspondence from John McCarthy. March 17, 2016.

²⁹ Shank, Ann A. “Bee Ridge Turpentine Camp.”

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³⁰ McElroy, Annie M. *But Your World and My World*, 84-85

³¹ McElroy, Annie M. *But Your World and My World*, 88-89.

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³³ Interview with Vickie Oldham, August 10, 2015.

³⁴ Interview with Vickie Oldham, August 18, 2015.

³⁵ *But Your World and My World*, 90.

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- ³⁹ Interview with Vickie Oldham, September 4, 2015
- ⁴⁰ Interview with Dr. Rosalyn Howard, December 20, 2015.
- ⁴¹ Interview with Vickie Oldham, August 10, 2015.
- ⁴² Interview with Vickie Oldham, August 18, 2015.
- ⁴³ Interview with Vickie Oldham, November 20, 2015.
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- ⁵⁰ Interview with Vickie Oldham, October 26, 2015.
- ⁵¹ “A Religious Portrait of African-Americans.” <http://www.pewforum.org/2009/01/30/a-religious-portrait-of-african-americans/>
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CHAPTER 10: MEDICAL CARE

Medical care for African Americans in Sarasota between Newtown's centennial years – 1914 to 2014 – began in a dismal state and remained that way for almost one-third of that 100-year period. Sarasota's early African American settlers in Overtown and Newtown, and African American migrant workers relied on self-care with homemade treatments or patent medicines, and the care of midwives. Helen Dixon stated in her interview that:

I was born August 8th, 1936 here in Sarasota. My grandmother, who was a midwife at that time, Lula Jones, she brought me into existence because at that time they wouldn't allow us to be at the Sarasota Memorial Hospital (SMH). So midwives would bring different babies into the world and she brought me into the world.¹

Jetson Grimes was also familiar with midwives:

My godmother was a midwife and my godmother raised me until I was eleven years old. In fact...my mother contracted tuberculosis when I was one years old, and during that period they didn't have a cure for it. So she had to go off to a sanitarium isolated from the public sphere. And the midwife that delivered me was Madam Brooks...I was in her care until I was eleven years old. So she raised me from a one-year-old to eleven years old, and then I moved in with my aunt.²

Nathaniel Harvey's mother used a midwife but, unfortunately, she and her baby died:

My mother died right there on Osprey, on the corner of 29th and Osprey.
...Childbirth.

(Oldham: Who was delivering the baby?)

I can't think of the name now...she was a midwife.

Oh! and the baby boy.

(O: Oh wow. How did that affect you when you found out? When you got word?)

Started hurting me pretty bad when my mother died. But you know I was a boy, so it didn't take me long to get over it. Because...when you're nine, ten years old, things don't affect you like they do when you're grown, like we is now.

I mostly raised myself. I was an only child. I had brother but he passed away. He swallowed a safety pin on the day and passed away.

(O: There was no healthcare or medical services?)

Not like that back in them days. They had doctors but you had to go to him, or he come to you. Back then people didn't know about no doctors. They knew about them but–

(O: No emergency, no ambulance could come?)

No, no ambulance back in them days.³

Turpentine, abundantly available because they lived close to the turpentine camps in the area, became a cure-all internal and external remedy for many people and it is becoming popular again as a health remedy for many ailments:

Turpentine and petroleum distillates similar to kerosene have been used medicinally since ancient times and are still being used as folk remedies up to the present. They were used in ancient Babylon to treat stomach problems, inflammations and ulcers.⁴ (See the footnote for details on websites that contain more information.)

Folk remedies, for example using cobwebs for cuts, were what most African American people resorted to out of necessity because segregation prevented them from seeking professional care. Robert Taylor recalls when cobwebs saved the day for his toe and when turpentine was used as a cure-all:

There was no medical care. Not only here. I remember up in Zellwood, you had no doctor. I remember when I was out in the yard playing and I ran into a shovel and my big toe was almost cut off. And they took it...with cobwebs and all this stuff, and wrapped it up, and it healed. And never saw a doctor...

... Like I said, there was no doctor that would treat black people mostly, so you learned to do your own treatments. Bandages was a standard thing or tapes and cotton balls and all that kind...I remember playing football, the coach, the only [thing] he had...was some tape and some turpentine. Everything was treated with turpentine. And so that was a big joke, get the turpentine [Laughter]. Turpentine was the main thing. Everything could be treated with turpentine, sprains, whatever.⁵

When Mary Alice Simmons got sick, she remembers that her mother or her grandmother took care of her. There was no trip to the doctor. They would cure whatever ailed her with:

Old remedies. Well, of course, Castor Oil, everybody knows Castor Oil. I remember something called salapatica. I don't know if they still make it. We were always given a laxative once a month. I don't remember having a headache as a kid. The colds: Father John. Everything was done at home. I don't remember seeing a doctor until, my goodness, I was grown.⁶

In the early days, if African Americans received treatment at all at the Sarasota Memorial Hospital (SMH), it was in a separate structure, former military barracks, at the rear of the hospital. Years later, a separate floor inside the SMH was dedicated only to the care of African American patients: 1-North.

As told by Mary Alice Simmons:

The hospital had an old building for black people. I used to have epileptic seizure...So my mom said my dad would just pick me, they had no transportation, and he'd run to the hospital... [with me] in his arms...On foot. That's what I hear...There was a section there they had for blacks...As we grew up, when it came to dental work, they had newer dentists that would see us after five o'clock.⁷

Good dental care was difficult to obtain as well as good medical care. Robert Taylor recalls a bad experience at the hands of a dentist:

Well the instruments they had ... you had to go at night after they close the office...I must have been fifteen or sixteen or something like that. I went there and...these utensils. This was disgusting. You know they wasn't sanitary. The silver tarnished and that kind of stuff. And so, I didn't go back to the dentist until I was twenty-five.⁸

There were few doctors who would treat African Americans. Most of the Project's interviewees only remembered being treated by Dr. Chenault, an African American physician. Others fondly remembered Dr. King. According to McCloud,

Primary or urgent care was provided by two white physicians, Dr. Weil King (unlicensed) and Dr. Patterson (first name unavailable), [were] conducting segregated practices with separate waiting rooms and entrances for African American and White patients. These two medical offices were located outside Newtown. The Sarasota Health Department provided healthcare (including treatment of communicable diseases and vaccinations) to Newtown residents through visiting Public Health Nurses. It [Sarasota Health Department] too, was strictly "whites only" during the Jim Crow period. It did not serve African Americans except through the visiting Public Health Nurses. Henrietta Gayles, RN and Nurse Nothage, RN ... were the first African American Public Health Nurses hired by the Sarasota Health Department in the 1950's to serve the African American community.⁹

Several interviewees mentioned another white doctor who treated African American Dr. Specht. Alberta Brown remembers being treated by him:

I had to have surgery for one thing and I was bleeding...to death almost. I didn't have a doctor...I finally found Dr. Specht...he waited on me, he took care of me. And then when I had to have surgery, he just said I had to have surgery. And they did it.

Most black people went to Dr. Specht's. He was really nice. He was a nice person. He treated everybody the same way. That's what I like about him.

His wife's mom, she was in that office. She was one of the people that was in that office...and she was not always nice. She'll have you wait longer than you should be waiting and she put someone else in there if she felt like it. And you got wait on when you could. But all that ended too.¹⁰

Two other doctors were mentioned who would treat African American patients only after regular office hours and they could only enter through the rear door.

LILY WHITE SECURITY BENEFIT ASSOCIATION #59

Two organizations that made valiant efforts to improve health care for African Americans in Newtown were: the **Lily White Security Benefit Association #59** in the 1940s, and the and the Colored Women's Civic Club in the 1950s. A saving grace for African Americans who needed health care in the Jim Crow days of Sarasota was the Lily White Security Benefit Association, a benevolent society organization run by black residents in Tampa. The Lily White group provided medical care to poor black people throughout Southwest Florida. Sarasota joined the Lily White Security Benefit Association (LWSBA), in the 1940s under the leadership of Deacon Jack Harris. According to its advertisements, LWSBA was the "Largest Benevolent Organization in Florida." Its Grand President, Cyril Blythe Andrews, an accomplished businessman, grew the organization from a 300-member fraternal organization known as the Lily White Pallbearers Union (mainly formed as a burial society because Blacks could not get insurance), into the Lily White Security Benefit Association, Inc. with assets of \$1 million.

If they required medical treatment, African American members of the LWSBA in Sarasota could be transported to the air-conditioned 33-bed Lily White Hospital in Tampa by a Lily White ambulance, where they could receive medical care. The LWSBA also had an air-conditioned 20-bed, full service nursing home for those who required long term care due to injury or age.

THE COLORED WOMEN'S CIVIC CLUB

The Colored Women's Civic Club (pictured below) was on the forefront of the battle for equal treatment and civil rights. Formed by women in Newtown, it achieved some major changes for the Newtown community.



A meeting of the Colored Women's Civic Club, at the home of Mamie Baker, pictured at center. In the 1950s, the club was influential in promoting civil rights, health and education for Newtown residents. The photo is undated but most likely was taken in that era.

(Photo provided by Dr. Ed James II, as printed in the book: 'But Your World And My World' By Annie McElroy.)

Mary Emma Jones (pictured on next page) is the grandmother of Dr. Ed James, II, a Newtown community leader. He stated that his:

Grandmother was a member of the Colored Women's Service Club. That club of ladies sought permission to get some barracks moved to the site of Sarasota Memorial Hospital because blacks could not go to the hospital or stay in the hospital because of the stupidity of segregation. So initially when blacks were allowed to go to Sarasota Memorial Hospital they stayed in a separate wing, which was the military barracks.¹¹



Mary Emma Jones, a leader of the Colored Women's Civic Club, cuts the ribbon on new medical facilities for black residents in Sarasota. In the 1950s, the group was influential in promoting civil rights, health and education for Newtown residents. (Photo courtesy of Ed James II.)

Through the efforts of the Colored Women's Service Club, African American patients finally would be admitted – indoors – to the Sarasota Memorial hospital. Many of the Club's members were involved with the Red Cross volunteer programs in the battle against tuberculosis, a disease that was killing many people in Newtown as well as other parts of Florida. According to Annie M. McElroy:

In the 1930s tuberculosis was a dread disease in the State of Florida. We were losing our friends, loved ones and acquaintances to this powerful invader of the human body. The state needed many kinds of resources to conquer this dreadful enemy... In the fall of 1939, a group of women and one man met with Mrs. Mary Emma Jones, a volunteer health worker, at Jones Barbecue to discuss the issue. As a result of this night of sharing ideas, the T.B. Health unit was organized. The group elected Mrs. Mary Emma Jones as their first president. They purchased a mobile x-ray unit.¹²

The Colored Women's Service Club did not take their responsibilities lightly, and in their Constitution and By-laws a strongly worded "Note" appeared at the bottom of the document. It spelled out clearly, and in 'loud' capital letters: "If you cannot be an ASSET don't block someone who CAN. These rules are for the best interest of the UNIT; if you do not agree, RESIGN."¹³

SARASOTA SICKLE CELL FOUNDATION

The Sarasota Sickle Cell Foundation was established in 1980 with Mrs. Clara Williams as President. The Foundation offered financial & medical assistance along with counseling and education. The Sarasota Sickle Cell Foundation was founded by Clara L. Williams in 1980. Sickle Cell anemia is an inherited, genetic blood disease (non-infectious) that primarily affects African American people, although is also prevalent in other ethnic groups from the Mediterranean region, India, and other places where Africans migrated. It is also prevalent in the regions where 85% of the total number of Africans ripped from their homes in Africa were landed and sold during the slave trade: parts of the Caribbean and South America. Sickle Cell anemia can be deadly if a person gets the ‘disease’ – requiring that both parents have the sickle cell ‘trait.’ The genetic trait is carried by a large number of people of African descent without any negative effects. The Sarasota Sickle Cell Foundation was founded with a goal “to insure that those persons afflicted with the disease the highest quality of life. To meet this goal, the organization provided financial and medical assistance along with counseling and education. Sarasotans who have sickle cell anemia and their families were sponsored to a weekend summer camp at St. Petersburg Eckerd College.”¹⁴ It is currently not listed as a functioning organization in Sarasota. Many doctors in the Sarasota and Tampa areas, however, offer screenings and treatment. Hopefully, this organization’s critical function in the African American community has been continued by another local organization or by the state of Florida. Many doctors in the Sarasota and Tampa areas do offer screenings and treatment. With the advent of a clinic opening in Newtown in 2017,¹⁵ the type of care begun by the Sarasota Sickle Cell Foundation will, hopefully, resume.

NURSING

African American nurses, at first, primarily Licensed Practical Nurses (LPNs), began working at Sarasota Memorial Hospital when it finally integrated its staff. Georgia Thomas started working there in 1945 and was congratulated in 1970 for her 25 years of service.¹⁶ Community volunteers provided additional medical assistance. According to McElroy:

Lay persons in the black community expressed their concern in various ways: volunteer services to local health organizations, enrollment in workshops, completion of first aid and survival courses are examples.¹⁷

Others took courses in school, like Sheila Atkins who was in “the first class that had nurses aid training at VoTech, which is now Polytech. So I worked in the hospital, in the nursing homes.”¹⁸

Gwendolyn Atkins graduated from Florida A&M University (FAMU) nursing school in 1964 and got a job that year at Sarasota Memorial Hospital (SMH). She was told that most of the African Americans in the hospital were on 1-North, but she never worked on 1-North. She left SMH after two years and chose to work in Public Health Nursing for the Sarasota County Health Department (SCHD). In addition to the hospital, healthcare was delivered to Newtown residents by visiting nurses from SCHD. Henrietta Gayles Cunningham was the first African American Public Health nurse in Newtown,

and she also treated people in the migrant camps. Gwendolyn Atkins became a Public Health nurse in the Newtown projects and spent most of her nursing career as a Public Health nurse.

Each visit, she said, she would set up a card table and put a white tablecloth on it in the parking lot at the projects, and “the kids would come running.” She treated children for ringworm, colds, abrasions, impetigo (sand sores from playing in the dirt), and gave many immunizations, such as DPT, tetanus, polio, and small pox. She was there to help the people in any way that she could.

Nurse Atkins told Vickie Oldham two emotional stories about her experiences as a visiting nurse:¹⁹

(Oldham: One story is about a man, an older man that you treated. And he had neglected himself. And you went in there and just...)

Yes. He lived alone, and he was lonely. And I never did see any family members. So when I walked in, his feet were filled with maggots, all around both of his feet. And a lot of people would have walked out, but I didn't want to leave him the way I found him. Because my motto was to go into a home and make it better for the patients than when I met them. So I went into the kitchen and I found a pan, a little dishpan. And he did have hot water. So I filled the pan with hot water and I came back, and I rolled up his pants legs and put his feet in the dishpan. I soaked his feet and the maggots just came out in the water. So I just threw out the [water in the] dishpan and kept filling it until his feet were nice and clean. And then I washed his feet with a cloth and some soap, and dried his feet. And then I made him feel better. And then I went into the kitchen and I washed the dishes. And there were maggots in the sink from old, dried, rotten food. But I was not alone at that time. There was another Public Health nurse with me by the name of Ann Anderson Wetherington. The two of us were working together. So we worked with him, cleaned up his bed, cleaned up his kitchen, and cleaned up his feet. And when we left there he felt so much better. And he looked better. And we felt better about what we had done to make him feel better.

Then Nurse Atkins told Oldham another, quite different story, but it, too, had a pleasant ending:

(Oldham: What about that story...you got a call that someone couldn't make it over to treat a lady that lived downtown?).

Oh. Mrs. B__ . Normally the African-American nurses' ...district was in Newtown. And at the time, we only treated the African American patients. We didn't do the white patients. Well, Mrs. B__ called...She was in a white area and her nurse, which was a white nurse, had already gone out into the field. And she needed help. So I was in the office, and whenever a patient called, from wherever, we had to drop the paperwork and go. So that particular day I went. So...I knocked on her door. She was an older white lady; she was 90 years old. And she was very surprised when I came. She said, “Oh why did they send__?” She didn't say “African American.” She used another word. She used the word “N.” And I said,

“Mrs. B__ , I am here to take care of you. And I’m qualified to take care of you. Otherwise, my supervisor would not have sent me.” And I went in and I did a nursing assessment, and I took her vital signs and took very good care of her. Took very good care of her. I recorded everything...She had to get used to me, being an African American nurse, which she was not used to. And I did everything I was supposed to do and was very professional in everything...And finally when it was over, and I’d finished working with her...I told her that I would make sure that I told her nurse that she had been ill, and I would report everything that I had done with her to the nurse. And so later on, about two weeks later, she called down to the office and she asked if they would send that Ms. Atkins back. So, I stopped by. And she had picked beautiful flowers, a bouquet of flowers from her garden and she said, “I would like for you to take these and put them on your table for Thanksgiving.” And I did. And she said, “Anytime in the future you would like to have flowers for your table, please stop by.” ...I never did stop by. But I felt like I had made inroads with this lady ...an older white lady who was not used to an African-American nurse coming into her home. I went in and I did what I was supposed to do and, more than anything, I established a relationship with her that would make it easier for the next African American nurses to go in. So I was real pleased with that.

Both of these stories are reminders that being in the company of a person who is not quite like you, and experiencing one another as fellow human beings, as children of God, is how we can change the way we see the world and the people in it. We may come from different cultures and different environments, but we all want to be treated in a dignified manner. Nurse Atkins has demonstrated such a wonderful example of that to all of us. As humans, we share more similarities than differences, and those differences are cultural, not racial.

“Sarasota’s Newtown Healthcare Iconoclasm”

i·con·o·clasm

īˈkänəˌklazəm/

noun

noun: **iconoclasm**

1. the action of attacking or assertively rejecting cherished beliefs and institutions or established values and practices.

The term “iconoclasm” is not typically used in everyday speech and, therefore, a definition would be useful to many readers. This word is totally appropriate for the topic of the 2009 White Paper²⁰ written by James E. McCloud about the Newtown healthcare situation at that time.

The complete title of the paper under discussion is:

A White Paper 2009, SARASOTA'S NEWTOWN HEALTHCARE ICONOCLASM©:

An Under-served and Ill-served African American Community Building Capacity To Meet their Basic Healthcare and Wellness Needs And

A Challenge To Sarasota County Health Department's , "Communities Putting Prevention To Work", Grant Application Process by

James E. McCloud, President/CEO

Genesis Health Services, Inc.

This White Paper published by James E. McCloud (a complete copy is provided in the Appendix), is a scathing indictment of the healthcare system in Sarasota for its inhumane neglect of Newtown's residents' healthcare. The paper outlines in great detail the institutionalized racism that pervades the history of healthcare services in Sarasota, Florida. According to McCloud's information, not a lot has changed in the system since the days of Jim Crow. Only the methods used to withhold care and ignore the health crises in the African American community of Newtown have changed. These are hidden in the fine print of grant 'deals' made between health care funders such as the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), the "middle man" – the Florida Department of Health, and the local healthcare provider - Sarasota County Health Department.

Many of the details in this report were mirrored in the stories told by Newtown residents to the NCHD Project's interviewers; the primary interviewer was Vickie Oldham, the NCHD Project's Consultant who was raised in Newtown. The disparities in health care that existed from the beginning of Newtown's existence – 1914 – still exist, according to McCloud. This iconoclastic paper argues that the inequities in healthcare delivery for Newtown residents have not improved much during Newtown's celebrated 100-year history. That is quite a "centennial moment" to reflect upon.

A few examples should encourage reading of the entire report (in the Appendix), in critically assessing the report, then beginning to investigate its findings:

1. In the last 85 years, there has only been approximately a dozen years when the Newtown community had minority private practice healthcare providers 'partially 1950's – 1960's). The Jim Crow character of Sarasota prior to the Civil Rights Act of 1964 ironically enabled this aberration. The end of legal segregation and the distribution of Great Society funding (Medicaid, Medicare) of the '60s made Newtown a viable market for exploitation. The availability of these "social dollars" is the attraction that keeps the offspring of the formerly segregated institutions in Sarasota as the main healthcare providers to Newtown residents.
2. Adding insult to injury, the mantra of Sarasota's funding community to Newtown healthcare initiatives is, "you are a duplication of services and thus not eligible for our support". Due to Newtown's health disparities, efforts rightly should be triplicated. Further, due to Sarasota's segregated healthcare past, any organization or institution other than the originally segregated ones (Sarasota Hospital and Health Department), would be duplicative. Maintaining the "duplication of services"

reasoning to not support Newtown's indigenous and start-up healthcare initiatives continues the residue of Sarasota's shameful bigotry.

3. Another continuation of an outdated and discriminatory practice is the current lack of inclusion of Newtown residents and providers at the planning table. Healthcare delivery is most often simply “provided” to Newtown in any way that outside organizations see fit. The most recent example of this practice was the Center for Disease Control and Prevention grant to fund nutrition and obesity initiatives written by the Sarasota County Health Department. Newtown's health and wellness community planning bodies were not invited to participate in the selection process of choosing providers to serve Newtown. There was only an email blast and a perfunctory community-wide meeting to give a veneer of inclusiveness without the actual act of effectively collaborating.
4. The most callous and odious characteristic of Newtown's healthcare continuum is that it is replete with outside providers that obtain funding and other resources by citing Newtown's vast disparity in deaths and diseases in numerous categories, i.e. hypertension, breast cancer, diabetes, HIV/AIDS, colon cancer, etc. Yet, the people living and dying in Newtown are refused support to build capacity within their institutions to assist themselves in collaboration and partnership with others. Teaching how to fish, rather than being given fish, should be the apt metaphor for Newtown's healthcare needs.
5. The application's total budget proposal of \$4.7 million included \$0 to be contracted with any indigenous Community-Based Organization (CBO) or Faith-Based Organization within the Newtown community.

If McCloud’s points can be validated, this is an outrage that has been hidden and must come into the light. The Newtown community’s legacy is one of people who worked hard, studied hard, and died believing they were working toward improvement of the life circumstances of their children and grandchildren and great-grand children, etcetera. They formed “grass roots” organizations to provide care for the Newtown residents in the days of Jim Crow segregation: benevolent societies such as Lily White, political and social activist groups such as the Colored Women’s Civic Club. Again, if this report’s allegations are true, it appears that Jim Crow is alive and well; he never left Newtown. He has been hiding behind the curtain of ‘civility,’ in this PC (Politically Correct) age, and the need for the influence of grass roots organizations remains strong.

The Multicultural Health Institute (MHI)

MHI was found in 1995 by Dr. Lisa Merritt as a way to “level the healthcare playing field by promoting, educating, and insuring equal healthcare access and treatment for individuals and communities who are traditionally uninsured and receive a poor quality of care.”²¹

We support programs that educate, identify, and test for diseases such as: Cancer, Diabetes, Obesity, Stroke, Cardiovascular Disease, Infant Mortality, HIV/AIDS, and other health issues affecting under-represented communities across the United States which also help reduce the costs of healthcare.” All of those are health issues that affect the people of Newtown, especially Heart Disease, Strokes, and Diabetes.

Dr. Merritt has a holistic approach to healing and combines “Western” medicine with alternative therapies such as healing circles, acupuncture, herbal and nutrition medicine, detoxification protocols, craniosacral therapy, and mesotherapy. Her approach to medicine and healing focuses on health disparities, their effect on our nation’s multicultural citizenry, and the economic impact of sickness prevention strategies. MHI initiated a study of healthcare services offered to Newtown residents. According to Merritt’s report, “Newtown lacks access to healthcare services, is marked by low health insurance coverage, and shows great disparities in health outcomes compared to surrounding areas, which are both whiter and wealthier than Newtown.”

The study objectives were to 1) Conduct a community health assessment of social determinants of health by eliciting responses from Newtown residents, 2) Compare changes in citizens’ appraisals of the health environment of Newtown between 2008 and 2014. It asks questions such as:

- What health problems are faced by Newtown residents?
- What factors cause minority health disparities in Newtown?
- What are possible solutions?

Paper surveys were circulated at several locations in the community and discussions were held with residents and transcribed at community meetings in 2008 and 2014. The data collected was consolidated, standardized, and used to compare thematic responses across the period 2008-2014.

Results of the survey showed that Newtown residents believe there is a lack of healthcare access. Teen pregnancy, and sexually transmitted diseases were areas of major concern. Many also mentioned lack of affordable housing and jobs. While residents cited progress made in these areas since 2008, they also identified many areas in need of improvement and proposed a variety of solutions.

Residents of North Sarasota continue to face significant structural barriers to achieving health equity across determinants of health such as mental health/safety, academic achievement gap, and economic limitations. Continued community advocacy, attentive government policy, and partnership with private and non-profit institutions are needed to address these issues.

Some event or someone finally induced the City of Sarasota and the Sarasota Memorial Hospital to take long overdue action with regard to improving healthcare for its citizens who happen to live in their most underserved neighborhood – Newtown. Could the action be possibly in response to the negative publicity from Dr. Merritt’s research, James McCloud’s White Paper and/or the documentary film? Hopefully, this new clinic, scheduled to open in 2017 will help to close the chasm of inequity in healthcare in Sarasota. “The \$2.2 million project is part of Sarasota Memorial Hospital’s new internal residency program, which it announced in April through a partnership with Florida State University College of Medicine. The first 10 residents are expected to arrive in the summer of 2017, and the clinic will serve as their training ground.” Hopefully, Newtown

patients using this clinic will not suffer from being their “training ground.” Many of us are aware of the history of using African Americans in experimental treatments (such as Tuskegee) not that this is what is intended. However, their use of the phrase “training ground” is insensitive at a minimum.

Dr. Merritt’s responses in a recent interview are directly on point:

As hospital leaders work to make the clinic a reality over the next year-and-a-half, they should also pay attention to delivering care that takes into account the life experiences of the patients they’re serving, said Dr. Lisa Merritt, founder of the Multicultural Health Institute in Sarasota and a longtime advocate and expert on racial health disparities.

Merritt said she hopes that officials realize that meeting patient needs often means thinking outside the doctor’s office.

“Will the residents speak Spanish? Will they look like the patients they’re serving? And will they understand what local resources are available to patients?” Merritt said.

She looks forward to the staff integrating their medical knowledge with the needs of the community.

“I hope the medical residents working there will have a good learning experience, while the population they’re learning from also gets proper clinical care,” Merritt said.²²

The personnel who will be greeting and treating Newtown patients are very consequential to the quality of care that patients will receive. A promising bit of news is that reportedly, “the hospital already has reached out to the neighborhood about its plans and will hold a workshop soon to solicit even more feedback.”²³ Dr. Merritt should be included in that discussion, sharing her expertise on the issues involved with multicultural healthcare. Sarasota Memorial Hospital has a dismal historical legacy in the Newtown community when it comes to that topic. Many of the people interviewed for this NCHD Project recalled numerous negative experiences with Sarasota Memorial Hospital. It has to gain the trust of a predominantly African American community that it has neglected longer than the centennial it now celebrates.

ENDNOTES

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³ Interview with Vickie Oldham, August 18, 2015

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- ⁵ Interview with Vickie Oldham, 18 August 2015.
- ⁶ Interview with Vickie Oldham, 31 August 2015.
- ⁷ Interview with Vickie Oldham, 31 August 2015.
- ⁸ Interview with Vickie Oldham, 20 November 2015.
- ⁹ McCloud, James E. A White Paper 2009, SARASOTA'S NEWTOWN HEALTHCARE ICONOCLASM©: An Under-served and Ill-served African American Community Building Capacity To Meet their Basic Healthcare and Wellness Needs And A Challenge To Sarasota County Health Department's , "Communities Putting Prevention To Work", Grant Application Process. Genesis Health Services, Inc.
- ¹⁰ Interview with Vickie Oldham, 10 August 2015.
- ¹¹ Interview with Haley Jordan, New College student, October 2015.
- ¹² McElroy, Annie M. *But Your World and My World.* 1986, 100, 112.
- ¹³ McElroy, Annie M. *But Your World and My World.* 1986, 113.
- ¹⁴ McElroy, Annie M. But Your World and My World 1986, 152.
- ¹⁵ LeCoz, Emily. "Sarasota Memorial to Open Clinic in Newtown." *Herald Tribune.* December 7, 2015.
- ¹⁶ McElroy, Annie M. *But Your World and My World.* 1986, 109.
- ¹⁷ McElroy, Annie M. *But Your World and My World.* 1986, 109.
- ¹⁸ Interview with Kaylie Stokes (New College student), 20 October 2015.
- ¹⁹ Interview with Vickie Oldham, 20 November 2015.
- ²⁰ "What is a White Paper? Originally, the term white paper was used as shorthand to refer to an official government report, indicating that the document is authoritative and informative in nature. Writers typically use this genre when they argue a specific position or propose a solution to a problem, addressing the audience outside of their organization. Typically, the purpose of a white paper is to advocate that a certain position is the best way to go or that a certain solution is best for a particular problem."
- "White Paper: Purpose and Audience." Purdue (University) OWL (Online Writing Lab). <https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/>
- ²¹ Multicultural Health Institute <http://www.the-mhi.org/#!the-history/a5k7e>
- ²² Clark, Maggie and Billy Cox. "New clinic will target adults New clinic will target adults." *Herald Tribune.* December 8, 2015. <http://www.heraldtribune.com/article/20151208/ARTICLE/151209650>
- ²³ "Sarasota Memorial to Open Clinic in Newtown."

CHAPTER 11: NEWTOWN AND OVERTOWN ORGANIZATIONS

BENEVOLENT SOCIETIES

Newtown, like many other African American Communities across the US, developed self-help organizations - benevolent societies and mutual aid societies – in order to meet various needs of its community members. After the Civil War, African Americans became free people of color. While they had their freedom they also had no safety nets, and segregationist policies prevented them from accessing the necessary medical and other facilities that were available solely to white citizens. Forming self-help organizations became a critical matter of self-preservation:

African American benevolent societies were first and foremost a product of exclusion from white organizations, hospitals, and schools. While the earliest African American benevolent society dates back to 1780, most were founded after the Civil War to meet the challenges of freedom during a time when the ability of African Americans to survive on their own was seriously debated.

The benevolent societies that Free People of Color created provided a sense of security, especially financially, to people in an uncertain position. ...The benevolent societies they created allowed for community bonding and financial security in the event of death or sickness. Free People of Color did not enjoy the civil liberties granted to white citizens¹

Free people of color began forming benevolent societies and other organizations before the end of slavery; their existence was required long after the end of slavery as a result of Jim Crow laws that legalized the segregation and exclusion of African Americans from access to basic human needs, such as health care and education:

Most societies were concerned with racial and community uplift, particularly after the abolition of slavery. Offering moral guidance, donating to charity, and building schools and hospitals are some of the primary functions that characterized the majority of benevolent societies, with a few solely dedicated to the purchase of freedom for promising slaves, including Frederick Douglass.

Though benevolent societies undoubtedly improved the quality of life for African Americans, it is imperative to recognize that many of them were not all-inclusive. The societies usually imposed age restrictions for new members, often between 21 and 50 years old. Members also had to prove that they were in good health and provide references from others in the community testifying to their good social standing.²

Although they had a variety of good purposes, some of these organizations also had some despicable exclusionary policies, as you will read below:

Some societies only granted membership to light or fair-skinned African Americans as a result of the often prevalent misconception that mixed-race African Americans were more intelligent, attractive, and civilized than their darker-skinned counterparts - a claim that was bolstered by white Americans as well. Exclusivity based on complexion allowed these associations to protect their status as more privileged members of a racially hierarchical society.³

In Newtown, there may have been some degree of organizational exclusivity. According to the available information, most of Newtown's benevolent organizations were led by the upper income, and educated members of the community such as: business owners, educators, and religious leaders and their wives. This does not necessarily mean that "ordinary" or non-elite community members were excluded from participating, nor from benefitting from their programs. Were the opportunities for leadership equal?

In the South especially, establishing these organizations could attract negative attention from people who wanted to prevent African Americans from bettering their lives. Some whites, especially, poor white people, held grudges against African Americans who appeared to be doing better financially than them. Despite their actual life circumstances, most whites still considered themselves to be superior to any African American. The formerly enslaved, African American scholar and graduate of Harvard University, W.E.B. Du Bois brought attention to this fact when he stated that the actual life circumstances of poor whites— lower wages, lower social and lower economic status in the white community – were supplemented by the "public and psychological wage" associated with being white.⁴ So no matter what, they considered themselves to be superior to any African American. Therefore when African Americans created organizations that outwardly gave the appearance of grandeur, such as the social events of the Free and Accepted Masons, the Eastern Star (women), the Elks Club etcetera, whites could be resentful, and sometimes dangerous. The people of Newtown, however, did not allow that possibility to deter them from pursuing all non-violent means necessary to improve the lives of their community members. Whether or not all community members were actually members of an organization, they could benefit from the works of that organization.

In Sarasota, African Americans created various types of mutual aid or benevolent societies that had civic as well as social functions. These organizations included: The Free and Accepted Masons (since 1916); Household of Ruth, Sarasota Lodge#3538T; Knights of Pythias, Pride of Sarasota Lodge#104 (since 1916); Knights of

Pythias St. Mary's Calathe Court #73 (since 1916); Elks Club (1949s); Organization of Seth; Northside Progressive Men's Club (1980s); North County Civic League (1980s); Old Folks Aid Home; Church Union; Organization of Seth; Choirs Union; Bingo Club; Old Folk Aid Club; Bingo Club; International Order of Odd Fellows; Lily White Security Benefit Association, Sarasota Sickle Cell Foundation; and the Colored Women's Service Club. The latter two organizations on this list will be highlighted below.

The women of the African American communities in Sarasota – Overtown and Newtown – took the lead in bringing aid to their community before the era of the Civil Rights Movement. One of the most prominent was the Colored Women's Service Club, and its remarkable history of political leadership and civic accomplishments in Newtown was revealed in an article written by Ian Cummings and in an interview with Ed James II:

Years before the more-famous triumphs of the civil rights era in the 1960s, the women of this club won some early victories in Sarasota.

The group began during World War II, successfully lobbying for a serviceman's club for black soldiers who weren't allowed to mix with other enlisted men. The club later became a recreation center, to be rebuilt as the Robert L. Taylor Community Complex.

Many of the women also led Red Cross volunteer programs and efforts to stop tuberculosis, a feared killer in Newtown in those times.

Through their efforts, black patients would be admitted to the hospital — indoors. The group also pushed state officials to open up Myakka River State Park to black residents, started voter registration drives and made possible the Booker High band.

No official records of the Women's Club exist. The club apparently did not keep minutes or a formal roster. But people in Newtown remember the regulars: Lessie Jackson, Allease Suarez, Mattie Kate McCoy, Mamie Baker, Lottie Humphrey, Maggie Phillips, and others. Each was an authority figure in her own right, and brought particular skills and resources to the group. Many also were involved in other civic clubs, such as the Elks and the Lily White Security Benefit Association, a nonprofit run by black residents in Tampa. The Lily White group provided medical care to poor black people throughout Southwest Florida.

Ed James, a prominent leader in the Newtown community, credits his own work, in part, to the guidance of his grandmother, Mary Emma Jones, who had been an influential member of the Women's Club.⁵

In his interview, Ed James II discusses some of the remarkable accomplishments of the Colored Women's Service Club that benefitted the Newtown community:

...What is now Sarasota Bradenton airport was Sarasota airfield. It was an army airfield in the days gone by. At the end of the war, the facility was

de-commissioned. That club of ladies sought permission to get some barracks [that were no longer in use] moved to the site of Sarasota Memorial Hospital, because blacks could not go to the hospital or stay in the hospital because of the stupidity of segregation. So initially when blacks were allowed to go to Sarasota Memorial Hospital they stayed in a separate wing, which was the military barracks.

After the base was decommissioned, after the war, they asked the Department of Defense if they could have that building, the one in service club, for a recreational center for black children. And that's how the first recreational center for black children in Newtown came about. On that site, same site now, is Robert L Taylor Community Center.⁶

SOCIAL AND COMMUNITY-ORIENTED CLUBS

The Elks

Other clubs had a more social function. As Fannie McDugle explained:

Yeah, the ...one what I love so, still do, the Elk's Club. I still like the Elks ... I could leave and go out of town right now, all I need to do is ask, "Where the Elk's Club? [The member were] black womens and ...there were black mens in there...They called them the 'Bills'It was the Elks for everything. That was a organization for the blacks...We travel from town or city to city. This year, we may have it here in Sarasota and everybody from Miami, St. Pete, all the whole state of Florida would join in one place and get together and have 'turn outs.' You would have meetings and you would have banquets. Just different things you would have... socialize and rendezvous and regulation - what you can do and what you couldn't do.

*(O: Was it a secret organization or no?) Yes.*⁷

The Charmettes

Another social club that also makes civic contributions is the Charmettes. Newtown businesswoman Allease Suarez was a member of this organization. The Charmette's stated mission is: "To work for the betterment of the community. The major objective of the group of ladies was to promote better and higher education."



Miss Susie's Social Club



Location: MLK, Jr. Way

Miss Susie was a no nonsense club owner. She also built a similar club on the corner of Dixie and Martin Luther King, Jr. Way. Rev. J.H. Floyd built both of them following the identical design. Miss Susie was also a philanthropist. She donated property, a bus and money to her church, New Bethel, when she died.

Following are comments from the NCHD Project Facebook page regarding Miss Susie's:

Jetson Grimes recalled visiting Miss Susie's place, at age 17 or 18, only twice dressed in suit and tie. It was a place to drink and chat for teachers (sometimes ministers). It was a private getaway to enjoy a drink. No one parked out front. Patrons parked in the back and on the street. Some entered from a side entrance.

Miss Susie's Social Club was a place where residents could enjoy laughs and liquid "spirits," but teachers couldn't be seen inside or Principal Rogers had strong words for them at work.

Loretta Lilly Mrs. Suzie back in the days you better not stop in front of her place, special children

Loretta Lilly She use to hollow at you, " move from in front of my place." remember my cousin and I just be left from Mr. Jenkins store, you know how children be walking talking and stop. and we stop in front of her place and hollow at I remember it like it happen yesterday

[Ronnie Phelps](#) I remember when she wouldn't let anyone just park in front of her restaurant or she would come outside with her pistol.

[Renard Mosley](#) My friends dared someone to order a dinner, so I jumped at it, she refused to serve me & told me to get the hell out, it was last time in her spot as she yelled out heathen & don't come back. I was in high School lol

[Ronnie Phelps](#) I went in With my father and he brought me a hamburger and he got a shot of liquor for himself I was 10yrs old

[Renard Mosley](#) She liked some old school people & hated our group because we liked Mrs Jones, Mr Neil & Mr Chapman to name a few.

[Leon Byrd](#) She gave New Bethel some property and a Bus, they may have some info.

[Renard Mosley](#) Oh we had block parties in the Day care parking lot RnB that made miss Susie mad as well. Debra Livingston might hav some shots of her or no whomever may hav some good luck

[Dale W. Savage](#) Oh YESSS! I definitely hava memory from the past about this place, I pulled up in front one day back in 1976 and Ms Susie let me know that under no circumstances could I park in front of her place..she didnt play.. It seems like she guarded that Front 24 hours a day because no matter what time anybody pulled up she was there peeking out that front door window..

[Yvette Williams](#) And it's still there. .the outside seems to be ok...Ms Susie was always sweeping and telling you where to stand and it was not in front of or even on her property. I wonder if we had more owners like her now would we have had the problems on 27th Street like we have had in the passijs

[Leon Byrd](#) Mrs Susie didnt play when i was coming up, but Albert Mccall and Carnel Hall could go in, the rest of us better keep it moving. i saw her at JH Floyd in the late 90s.

[Yvette Williams](#) So true they had her wrapped around there finger

[Vickie Victoria](#) If you did stop/Park in front of her place she would get after you with her broom

Amaryllis Park

Mrs. Viola Sanders, a resident of Amaryllis Park, organized the community in 1964. She was very concerned about her neighbors and those families who were sick or bereaved. She came up with the idea of sending cards, flowers and resolutions to the family of the deceased. This was done by going door to door, letting each neighbor know who the family was, and asking for donations. The residents were very receptive to the idea and they contributed willingly. This group also offers members the ability to collectively confront neighborhood challenges, such as: speeding cars, drug dealers, prostitution, noise and air pollution, disputes among neighbors, upkeep of public roads and sidewalks, and assisting with the Newtown Redevelopment Plan.

On June 6, 2000, the neighborhood was organized as the Amaryllis Park Neighborhood Association and elected Mr. Calvin Bryant as president. The organization is registered with the City of Sarasota Neighborhood Development Department and has designated boundaries. It is a member of the Coalition of City Neighborhood Associations (CCNA) with representatives attending the monthly meetings. The organization now has more than 75 active members. In November 2006, the association became a corporation and it is in the process of filing application for its 501(c)(3) status.

Join The Conversation

Additional organizations have developed in association with the ongoing redevelopment effort in Newtown. “Join The Conversation” is one of those. The organization’s leaders include Dr. Lorna Austin, Dr. Lisa Merritt, Mrs. Edward James, and Mr. McCloud; they took an eight-week course before creating the organization. One of the events the organization sponsored was a discussion with the Sarasota Police Department about the important issue of how to make the Newtown community safer.

The Newtown Front Porch Neighborhood Revitalization Council, Inc.

The Newtown Front Porch Neighborhood Revitalization Council, Inc. was a group of concerned citizens committed to the revitalization of the Newtown community, which was designated by the State of Florida as a ‘Governor’s Front Porch Neighborhood’ from 2002 - 2012.

In 1999, Governor Jeb Bush established the Front Porch program for the purpose of empowering and assisting communities with the revitalization of their neighborhoods. Governor Bush visited the community and presented a check in the amount of \$100,000. Public and private partnerships formed to complete community projects such as the rehabilitation of old homes, the renovation of Fredd Atkins Park, community clean ups and celebrations and programs to train youth about leadership and residents in the construction trade. The MLK Feasibility Study was commissioned to redevelopment Newtown’s central business district.

ENDNOTES

¹ Martin, Kimberly Martin. "Community and Place: A Study of Four African American Benevolent Societies and their Cemeteries." Master's Thesis. Clemson University and College of Charleston, 1-2.

² A Brief Historical Account of Early Benevolent Societies."

<http://www.100menhall.org/about-us/history-of-benevolent-associations>

³ "A Brief Historical Account of Early Benevolent Societies."

⁴ "The psychological wage of whiteness meant that: The white group of laborers, while they received a low wage, was compensated in part by a sort of public and psychological wage. They were given public deference and titles of courtesy because they were white. They were admitted freely with all classes of white people to public functions, public parks, and the best schools. The police were drawn from their ranks and the courts, dependent on their votes, treated them with leniency as to encourage lawlessness. Their vote selected public officials, and while this had small effect upon the economic situation, it had great effect upon their personal treatment and the deference shown them" (DuBois, W.E.B. [1935] 1969, 700-701). Found on website: <http://what-when-how.com/social-sciences/whites-social-science/>

⁵ Cummings, Ian. "Leading the way before civil rights era." Herald Tribune, February 1, 2015. <http://newtown100.heraldtribune.com/2015/02/01/leading-way-civil-rights-era/>

⁶ Interview with Haley Jordan, New College student, October 2015.

⁷ Interview with Vickie Oldham, August 10, 2015.

CHAPTER 12: MILITARY SERVICE

“Black Sarasotans have been answering the call to serve their country since the early 1900s.”

Annie M. McElroy. But Your World and My World. 1986.

AFRICAN AMERICAN MEN SERVING IN THE US MILITARY

In World War I, the US joined the battle against Germany in April 1917. Military Recruiting Officer Charles Ayler was stationed in Bradenton; his territory included Sarasota, where he visited on October 26, 1917. According to the *Sarasota Times*, Ayler was recruiting “both white and colored men from ages 18 to 40. White men able to handle colored men are much in demand for the army and will be made non-commissioned officers.”¹ African American men across the US saw joining the fighting ranks as:

... An opportunity to win the respect of their white neighbors. America was a segregated society and African Americans were considered, at best, second-class citizens. Yet despite that, there were many African American men willing to serve in the nation’s military ... They viewed the conflict as an opportunity to prove their loyalty, patriotism, and worthiness for equal treatment in the United States.

When World War I broke out, there were four all-black regiments: the 9th and 10th Cavalry and the 24th and 25th Infantry. The men in these units were considered heroes in their communities. Within one week of [President] Wilson’s declaration of war, the War Department had to stop accepting black volunteers because the quotas for African Americans were filled. While still discriminatory, the Army was far more progressive in race relations than the other branches of the military. Blacks could not serve in the Marines, and could only serve limited and menial positions in the Navy and the Coast Guard.²

On May 18, 1917, Congress passed the Selective Service Act that required all men from 21 to 31 years of age to register for the draft. Because of the large population of African Americans living in the South at that time, the majority of African American men who were ‘selected’ for military service came from the South:

If the unwritten custom of assigning men to the camps nearest the place from which they were drawn had been carried out to the letter, the camps in Mississippi, Alabama, Georgia, Louisiana, and South Carolina would have been made up in many cases almost exclusively of Negro soldiers. For this reason, and to prevent concentration of over-large contingents of

colored soldiers at any one camp...thousands of colored draftees found their way to the North in the fall of 1917, being stationed at Camps Grant, Illinois; Funston, Kansas; Dodge, Iowa; Zachary Taylor, Kentucky; Sherman, Ohio; Meade, Maryland; Custer, Michigan; **Dix, New Jersey**, Upton, New York, and **Devens, Massachusetts** – all of these classed as Northern States from the Southern soldiers' climatic standpoint. The climate of the North – with its long winter, unusually severe in 1917-18 – proved to be the source of much suffering, on account of its deadly effect upon colored soldiers bred and born amid the magnolia blossoms and in the balmy atmosphere of the “sunny South.” These colored soldiers faced the hard winter of 1917 with sinking hearts and grave apprehensions, and with equipment in many instances far from adequate, owing to the haste with which the preparations for war were made. There was great suffering among colored and white soldiers, and the mortality from pneumonia and like troubles was alarmingly heavy among the unacclimatized colored men from the South. Nevertheless, they bore their sufferings with a fortitude that approached the heroic.³

Like others mentioned above, African American men from Bradenton and Sarasota joined the military and were eager to demonstrate their bravery. McElroy lists over 100 “Colored Selects” who were sent by train to **Camp Devens, Massachusetts** on August 4, 1918. Another group (unspecified number) was supposed to have embarked for **Fort Dix, New Jersey** in February, however, “at the urgent recommendation of the Surgeon General of the Army, this was not done because it was considered dangerous to transfer southern Negroes to a northern camp during the winter months.”⁴ Based upon the details of their suffering in the text quoted above that appears to have been a wise and humane decision.

Much to their dismay, after serving their country, African American military men returned to an even more racist society than they had left, one that did not reward their contribution to the war effort. France, however, gave them the recognition that they never received from their own country. Several all-African American regiments, including the 369th Infantry nicknamed the “Harlem Hellfighters,” received France’s award for heroism in combat with the enemy, the *Croix de Guerre*. According to an article about their treatment:

Expecting to come home heroes, black soldiers received a rude awakening upon their return. Back home, many whites feared that African Americans would return demanding equality and would try to attain it by employing their military training. As the troops returned, there was an increase of racial tension. During the summer and fall of 1919, anti-black race riots erupted in twenty-six cities across America. The lynching of blacks also increased from fifty-eight in 1918 to seventy-seven in 1919. At least ten of those victims were war veterans, and some were lynched while in uniform.

Despite this treatment, African American men continued to enlist in the military, including veterans of World War I that came home to such violence and

ingratitude. They served their county in the brief period of peace after the World War I, and many went on to fight in World War II. It was not until 1948 that President Harry S Truman issued an executive order to desegregate the military, although it took the Korean War to fully integrate the Army. African Americans finally began to receive the equal treatment their predecessors had earned in combat in France during World War I, and as far back as the American Revolution.⁵

Several of the persons interviewed for this Report discussed their time in the military. Eddie Rainey was a paratrooper for two years. He trained at the United States Army Infantry School in Fort Benning, Georgia. Rainey recalls that:

... During my tenure [at FAMU] I was given deferments, and as soon as I graduated and returned, within three months I was given this beautiful envelope from Uncle Sam stating that my friends and my neighbors had invited me to join the US Army. So I had to go in and that's when I went in. I graduated in '52, went into the service in '52.

I went in with several guys from Sarasota ... John "BooBoo" Hegg, Herbert Waters' brother ... I forget his brother's name. And there's two or three other guys ... We were inducted in '52, so I can't remember all the names. Why did I come back to Sarasota? Well it's my home and at the time I had broken my leg. I was a paratrooper. So I made jump ...⁶

Anthony "Tony" Major never served in the military, but his father, "Suit" Major, and his mother's two brothers served in the Army and returned home to Newtown.⁷ Johnny Hunter served in the Air Force. He enlisted:

When I was eighteen years old. And I stayed there for four years. Honorably discharged from the Air Force. I was what they call a "70250" which was administrative, especially worked for the basic commanding squad and the commanders and all the folks that really run the Air Force. Administrative people run the Air Force. They give the orders for other folks to do things ... I was the only child that my mother had. I was not the only child that my father had ... I tried to volunteer to go to Bangkok, Thailand back in 1966 and '67 ... and that was a combat zone. They needed a person to assist in running the post office over in Bangkok, Thailand. That was the career field, administrative. I could work in any military facility in the United States or overseas. And I tried to volunteer, but they said because I was a sole surviving son and only child, the Air Force or the Department of Defense at that time had a policy that they would not send those individuals in the combat zone. So I was not able to go. So I was in Boston, Massachusetts at that time and it was just too cold up there, being a Floridian all my life. I kept on working it until I was able to get a transfer to MacDill Air Force Base over in Tampa.

... My best friend, Irvine Pete Gillam and I went to the Air Force on the buddy plan. We went to the Air Force together. The late Leonard Butler, the late William Walter Jenkins, Earnest Haines. Most of those guys are dead now but Pete is not passed away. Like I said, we went on the buddy plan and we left Sarasota, went to Miami. We was supposed to went to Lackland Air Force Base for basic training, which he did. But because of the Vietnam War at that time, you had a lot of draft dodgers. You had a lot of people volunteering to go to the Air Force and the Navy, and the Army and the Marines were drafting folks. They didn't draft in the Air Force and in the Navy. I initially wanted to go to the Navy but, unfortunately, the Navy told me that they wouldn't let no new recruits in until the following year, which was in 1967, and I didn't want to wait that long. So I had a first cousin that had been in the Air Force for six years at that particular time from 1960 to '66. And he was in Paris and Germany and he loved it. So I said, "Well, if I can't go to the Navy now, I'll go to the Air Force." So that's how I ended up in the Air Force.

(Oldham: Now this buddy plan, how did that work?)

...They would guarantee if you went in on the buddy plan you would go to basic training together and y'all would stay together while you were in the Air Force, but it didn't work that way. I call that the bait-and-switch. They bait you in, then they switched out on us ... They broke us up. Like I said when we went to Miami, he went to San Antonio, Texas to Lakeland Air Force Base and I went to Amarillo Air Force Base in Amarillo, Texas. After then, he was a fireman. He went to Battle Creek, Michigan and I went to New Bedford Air Force Base right out of ... the city of Boston, Massachusetts ... The whole while, after he finished his fireman training, he stayed in Battle Creek, Michigan ... And the late Lonnie Ward ... and I was very good friends also. He was out in Texas so the Air Force got what you call a AUTOVON line. You could call any military installation in the world and talk to anybody that you want to talk to. So Lonnie and I had each other's numbers so we called each other and stuff of that nature ... It was a lot of fun.⁸

Robert Taylor's military service disrupted his education at Morehouse College:

I got an academic scholarship to Morehouse ... I didn't finish the first semester because once I was drafted and was 1A, I knew it wouldn't be long before I go in the service. So I didn't go back ...I went to service in March of 1943. I was in the Army ... I began over at Fort Sill in the radio department. Fort Sill is a field artillery camp. All the people and all the groups came and all that. But I was in the radio...I learned your Morse Code. You have to learn how to send messages by Morse Code and I didn't think I needed to be there because it took me about three weeks before I even learned the letter A [Laughter]. But eventually I could do about fifteen words-a-minute, which was pretty good... Fort Sill...That's down in Texas, Fort Clark, Texas. And that was traumatic for me because

it was a cavalry unit, horse, and I was afraid of horses for one thing. But fortunately, I was put in the headquarters where it was mechanized. But we were there for about a year before we went overseas.

(O: And where did you go overseas?)

Went to North Africa first. We spotted Oran, North Africa. We were there for a year and I got to see all of North Africa... We were made into a trucking outfit when we got overseas. And so I got a chance to drive from Oran all the way to Casablanca. It was probably a six-truck convoy. So I got to see Casablanca. I saw everything in between. And we stayed there and went to Italy...staying in Italy a year and we stationed right outside Naples. And we traveled from Naples ... north, as far as Pisa, hauling supplies and whatever. So we'd make that trip about every two weeks ... We would go to Rome ... stay at Rome overnight when we were going north. So we did that until the war was over.

We were nowhere near a combat zone. I think the closest we got combat, we went to Genoa once, but they was about twenty-five miles north of us there. But no, I had fun. I saw places I would never see. After the war was over ... we carried troops on sightseeing tours and I got a chance to go to ... see the Pompeii and Mt. Vesuvius and all these things. And I never would have seen it otherwise. The Coliseum in Rome and all this stuff. I never would have got to see it otherwise ... One of my classmates, he was in the Air Force in Naples there ... We were about less than ten miles from each other, but we never saw each other in a year ... Because I would be going on the trip north and he would come looking for me and I'd come back and he'd be somewhere gone. So we never saw each other.

(O: Okay, do you remember his name?)

Joey Walker.

(O: Okay so when you returned from the military, did you come back to Sarasota?)

Yes ... By that time most of the people had moved to Newtown once the school moved.⁹

Willie Charles Shaw, current Mayor of the City of Sarasota, has a family history of military service. Below, he provides a brief history of his and a few other Newtown residents' military service experiences in World War II (WWII), the Korean War, and the Vietnam War.¹⁰

World War II (1939-1945)

Wade Shaw, Willie Shaw's father, served in WWII; he went to war in 1942. Forest "Buddy" Natter, Jesse Hardy, and Charlie Hardy also served.

Charlie was my uncle who ... was in a hospital ship that was torpedoed by the Japanese and spent days in the water in a raft. Jesse was an MP, a Military Policeman, in WWII. The Hardy Boys were from Newtown. Forest Buddy Natter [and] Sim Streeter, those were relatives of mine.

Quite a few served in the military from here in WWII. They were all drafted.

My dad drove the Red Ball Express –18,000 troops that were at the Battle of the Bulge for [General] Patton’s Third Army. He crossed the Rhine River. The Red Ball Express [troops] were largely blacks who drove trucks that carried ammunition, arms, fuel and troops to the front during the Battle of the Bulge.

Having finished service in the European theater, he went to both Hiroshima and Nagasaki. He was at both of the atomic bomb sites. There is no [information] recorded; he couldn’t find the ship that he went over on, the Admiral Coos. We know that it docked in Japan. The manifest for it was destroyed in 1953 so there was no record of who was onboard. Until his death, he had an open claim with the VA because he was a survivor of the cancers - prostate and colon - which were noted side effects [of the radiation exposure at the atomic bomb sites, Hiroshima and Nagasaki].

NAACP President Trevor Harvey’s cousin Burney Florence, Jr., served in the Air Force during the WWII.¹¹

John Buck O’Neil, the famous Negro League Baseball player from Newtown, interrupted his Negro League Baseball career to serve from 1943-1945 in the US Navy.

O’Neil served in the Navy Stevedore Battalion, loading and unloading ships in the Mariana Islands and Subic Bay in the Philippines. While surprised to encounter a similar degree of prejudice in the Navy as he had living and traveling through the South, Buck also learned from a Navy Chaplain of efforts by the NAACP to integrate the armed services. [He] would join the NAACP and later become a life and heritage member. Mustering out of the Navy in 1946, Buck married Ora Lee Evans, a graduate of Lemoyne College with a degree in education. [They] spent the winter with family in Sarasota and then moved to Kansas City.¹²

Oscar Manigo served in the US Navy during the WWII. His son, Eugene Manigo, served in the US Army and was a casualty of the Vietnam War.

The Korean War (1950-1953)

According to Mayor Shaw, Pete Bolden, father of Sarasota Police Sergeant Eric Bolden:

...Was an infantryman who challenged the machine gun nest in North Korea. Albert “Red” Collier and the late Burt Gibbons were also Korean War vets. Burt Gibbons was one of the first officers from this area ... a lieutenant in the Army. Burt was at FAMU. James Moreland also served. [Moreland’s] house was used as the first USO. It was called “the Bamboo Club.” If those walls could talk!¹³

The Vietnam War
(Dates vary: 1954-1973; 1955-1975; 1961-1973; 1969-1975)¹⁴

Mayor Shaw's personal military experience began:

... Right after Gibbs [Junior College]. I joined the Air Force on August the 24th 1967 ... My dad was a veteran, family members had been veterans, served the country, and I, too, wanted to serve. I volunteered and joined the Air Force. And it was funny, about two weeks after getting there, my mom, when I did get an opportunity to use the telephone, told me that ... a letter had come ... It was the, "Dear, so-and-so, your services are needed for the United States Army." The draft. I had been drafted, but I had already volunteered and was in the Air Force ... [Next year will] be fifty years since my discharge. I only served four active years, and there were six years of active reserve.

(O: Were you in combat?)

No. I'm a Vietnam era veteran ... and I quickly make that understood because there are a lot of men and individuals who latch on to that experience ... I had classmates and individuals that I grew up that were in-country, on the ground, so I can't dare take their honor for being a Vietnam Veteran. I'm a Vietnam era Veteran.

I served in the United States Air Force in Korea ... in Osan (K55 is the base number). I was on base 13 days when they took the [USS] Pueblo¹⁵ and Commander Lloyd Bucher, and we were put on alert in 1968. I was on base 13 days when they took the Pueblo. Those individuals were kept in North Korea. As a matter of fact, the only captive Naval vessel is that Pueblo, in North Korea. It sits there today

I was a security policeman. My rank was Staff Sergeant. I was 19. It was a life changing experience. It was an endearing experience because of the people I was stationed with. I'm still friends with several of them. We got there in 1967. From Osan, I went to Kaserl AFB [Air Force Base] in Fort Worth, Texas where I was assigned to the Strategic Air Command.¹⁶ There I protected the nuclear weapon as a part of base security. I completed the rest of my 4 years there. In Korea, I spent 13 months, and [I spent] two and a half years in Texas."

(O: What did the military teach you?)

The military prepared me for many of the roles that I have encountered in life. I was the youngest NCO [Non-Commissioned Officer] on my base ... I credit the military with maturing. You had to be responsible and accountable. I was responsible for others on a regular basis as a security alert team leader. I have to say that the military prepared me for leadership roles early, and enhanced responsibility and accountability. I took the US

Postal Service exam in the military on my exit out. There I was given a five point advantage because I served in the military.¹⁷

Numerous men from Newtown were awarded the Purple Heart medal. “The Purple Heart medal is awarded to members of the armed forces of the U.S. who are wounded by an instrument of war in the hands of the enemy and posthumously to the next of kin in the name of those who are killed in action or die of wounds received in action. It is specifically a combat decoration.”¹⁸

According to Mayor Shaw:

We have servicemen with “Purple Hearts” - quite a few.

Robert “Baldy” White, who sits under tree at Fredd Atkins Park every morning at 7:00 am, has several Purple Hearts. He walks with a limp. He has a Vietnam Purple Heart. His act of heroism [was that] he went in to bring someone out through a firefight and was hit in the ankle.

Jimmy Allen has a Purple Heart. He went to Vietnam more than once.

Horras Sheffield ... and Rudolph James have Purple Hearts.

These are all Vietnam era vets with Purple Hearts. Combat veterans.

We had the first casualty in the war, Michael Campbell, KIA, killed in action in Vietnam October ‘65. After him, was J.B. Gibson (J.B.’s dad was killed in WWII) ... Wilbur Gillespie ... and Enoch Hampton.¹⁹

Horras Sheffield, as Mayor Shaw states above, was awarded the Purple Heart medal in 1968 at age 23. While serving with the US Marines, Sheffield states that:

When I was in Vietnam, my whole company, Foxtrot 2nd Battalion, 1st Marine was alienated in 1967. We were to check on a village that had underground tunnels. When we made an approach, enemy fire mowed the guys down, everybody. Only two of us survived. I was wounded that day and played dead. I kept my M-14 rifle underneath my belly, up to my throat. We slept in the rice patty dykes on our guns. The Vietnamese fighters picked up the rifles from the wounded. It took two days to be rescued. I was shot twice in my left leg and left side. After the rescue, I was treated and recuperated for four months aboard the USS Sanctuary, a hospital ship; then was transferred to Walter Reed National Military Medical Center in Bethesda, Maryland.²⁰



Gabrielle Russon published a moving tribute to Michael Campbell in the *Herald Tribune* titled “Remembering a Fallen Soldier” – 49 years after his death. She wrote that:

...He joined the military a week after graduating from high school in 1964, following in the footsteps of his father, a World War II veteran. At that time, Michael and his classmates felt that going to war was just about inevitable. Joining the military was also a way to leave Sarasota, and Campbell figured he could save some money for college.

“The military was a way of getting out, an opportunity,” says [Johnny] Hunter, a 1966 Booker High graduate who is now the publisher of the African-American newspaper “The Tempo News,” published in Sarasota. For only the second time in his life, Michael left his home and traveled to Georgia for Army training with the 101st Airborne Division. At age 19, Michael Campbell, the youngest in his platoon, deployed to Vietnam as a paratrooper. The phone call came ... just short of Campbell’s 80th day in Vietnam ... A sniper’s bullet had found him on Oct. 14, 1965, during a search-and-destroy mission. “It was pretty rough when one was lost,” says Floyd Sheffield, a classmate of Campbell’s who now lives in Union City, Georgia. “It was devastating for the entire community.”²¹

A headstone to mark Campbell’s grave in Galilee Cemetery was obtained in 2014, thanks to the efforts of “Debora Livingston, a Newtown historian who visited the cemetery one day, about two years ago, and stumbled on the site. [Livingston said to Russon,] “There was a bed of grass over him. He was overlooked. That’s when I went to work.”²²



TWO HIGHLY RANKED NEWTOWN VETERANS

According to Mayor Shaw, “Lieutenant Colonel Doxey Byrd, Jr. was responsible for logistics in Vietnam, the movement of equipment.”²³ Annie M. McElroy wrote about Lt. Col. Doxey Byrd, Jr., a 1953 graduate of Booker High School, in her 1986 book. He was:

The first black from Sarasota to attain Field Grade Rank in the US Army. In September 1953 he enrolled at Florida A&M University. During his four years there he was part of the ... ROTC programs. Based on his achievements in both academics and military skills he earned the status of Distinguished Student and this provided the basis for his being awarded a Regular Army Commission ... Doxey Byrd’s military career was both varied and distinguished. Some of his duty tours include Europe, the Far East the Middle East and Southeast Asia ... He has received three awards

of the Army Commendation Medal, two awards of the Meritorious Service Medal and the Bronze Star for distinguished combat performance in Vietnam.²⁴

According to his daughter Kathy,²⁵ Lt. Col. Byrd was a Battalion Commander in Okinawa, Japan where he commanded more than 1,200 men and women, a fleet of ships and other equipment. After his two duty tours in Vietnam he was sent to Command General Staff College in Ft. Leavenworth, Kansas, where he graduated in the top 5 of his class. After that, he was stationed in Washington D.C. where he worked at the Pentagon and was a professor at Howard University teaching Military Science. Lt. Col. Byrd retired after serving 21 years in the Army and returned to Sarasota with his wife Ethel Byrd, whom he had married in 1958. They had one daughter Kathy Byrd-Pobee. After returning, he was active in his church, New Bethel Missionary Baptist. He also decided to go back to school to obtain another degree. He went to University of South Florida and obtained a BA in Criminal Justice. He owned and operated his own trucking business until his health required him to retire completely. Lt. Col. Byrd passed on August 7, 1996 at the age of 61.

McElroy wrote about another distinguished African American military officer – Captain Cornell McKenzie. He was “the son of McDonald McKenzie and Mary Mays ... the third generation of the Willie McKenzie family and the fourth generation of the John Mays family.”²⁶ Cornell McKenzie was “the first black man from Sarasota to attend West Point Military Academy. He graduated from West Point in 1976 with a commission of Second Lieutenant and a B.S. degree ... McKenzie was commissioned Captain in 1980.”²⁷

He was working at the Pentagon in 1986, the year McElroy’s book was published. According to his “LinkedIn” website information, McKenzie is currently a Project Management Professional (PMP) at Engility Corporation in the Washington, D.C. area.²⁸

THE USO IN NEWTOWN

During WWII, what is now the Sarasota Bradenton International Airport was a US military air base. Mayor Shaw states that, “There were barracks there and quite a few black [soldiers] were stationed at that air base from all around the country.” Because of segregation laws, African American soldiers could not use the USO on the military base. “The “Black USO,” Shaw continued, “That’s where I learned how to do the hully gully. We rocked in the old USO.”²⁹ A USO building for the African American soldiers was built in Newtown in 1940. When the war ended, the building was no longer needed for that purpose and it became the “The Rec” center for the Newtown community.³⁰ “The Rec” and its replacement was run by Robert L. Taylor, in whose honor the new 44,000 square-foot, state-of-the-art facility is named.

ENDNOTES

¹ Sarasota Times. November 1, 1917. In McElroy, Annie M. But Your World and My World. 1986.

² Bryan, Jami. "Fighting for Respect: African-American Soldiers in WWI." Managing Editor, On Point. An Army Historical Foundation publication. <http://www.militaryhistoryonline.com/wwi/articles/fightingforrespect.aspx>

³ Scott, Emmett J., Scott's official history of the American Negro in the World War. "Chapter VIII: The Treatment of Negro Soldiers in Camp." <http://net.lib.byu.edu/estu/wwi/comment/scott/SCh08.htm>

⁴ McElroy, Annie M. But Your World and My World, 1986, 73.

⁵ Bryan. "Fighting for Respect: African-American Soldiers in WWI."

⁶ Interview with Vickie Oldham, 4 September 2015.

⁷ Interview with Dr. Rosalyn Howard, 20 December 2015.

⁸ Interview with Vickie Oldham, 19 October 2015.

⁹ Interview with Vickie Oldham, 18 August 2015.

¹⁰ Interviews with Vickie Oldham, 18 August 2015 and 16 March 2016.

¹¹ Interview with Vickie Oldham, 16 March 2016.

¹² Porter, Les. "Newtown Sports Personalities." Unpublished paper. Sources: O'Neil, Buck, and David Conrads. "I was Right On Time, My Journey through the Negro Leagues." NY: Simon & Schuster. Reprint 1997; Wikipedia: Buck O'Neil, Jackie Robinson, Branch Rickey; Goldstein, Richard. "Buck O'Neil, Negro League Pioneer, Is Dead at 94." *New York Times* 7 October 2006.

http://www.nytimes.com/2006/10/07/sports/baseball/07oneil.html?_r=0

¹³ Interview with Vickie Oldham, 16 March 2016.

¹⁴ The dates of the Vietnam vary because of differing ideas about when it actually began: conflict between the North and the South (1954) or when the US had its first casualty (1961), and ended: when the US officially withdrew troops (1973) or when Saigon fell to the North Vietnamese (1975). A CNN article discusses details of an extensive timeline concerning the Vietnam conflict, and states that, "The Vietnam War began in the decade before, but the conflict, and especially U.S. involvement, escalated in the 1960s. McLaughlin, Katie. "The Vietnam War: Five Things you might not know." <http://www.cnn.com/2014/06/20/us/vietnam-war-five-things/>.

Another good source for a timeline of the war that includes information about the war protest movements and the deaths of the Kennedys and Martin Luther King, Jr. is a user-friendly, educational site called Shmoop. "The Vietnam War Timeline." <http://www.shmoop.com/vietnam-war/timeline.html>

¹⁵ North Korean patrol boats captured the USS Pueblo, a Navy intelligence vessel, while it was conducting surveillance on the North Korean Coast. The crew held for 11 months until released into South Vietnam after the US made an official apology to the North Korean government. "USS Pueblo Captured."

<http://www.history.com/this-day-in-history/uss-pueblo-captured>

¹⁶ "Strategic Air Command (SAC), [is the] U.S. military command that served as the bombardment arm of the U.S. Air Force and as a major part of the nuclear deterrent

against the Soviet Union between 1946 and 1992 ... SAC was the component of the unified command plan charged with organizing, training, equipping, administering, and preparing strategic air forces for combat." "Strategic Air Command United States Air Force." <http://www.britannica.com/topic/Strategic-Air-Command-United-States-Air-Force>

¹⁷ Interview with Vickie Oldham, 16 March 2016.

¹⁸ "The Military Order of the Purple Heart."

<http://www.purpleheart.org/HistoryOrder.aspx>

¹⁹ Interview with Vickie Oldham, 16 March 2016.

²⁰ Interview with Vickie Oldham, 22 March 2016.

²¹ Russon, Gabrielle. "Remembering a Fallen Soldier." *Herald Tribune*. 13 Oct. 2014.

<http://newtown100.heraldtribune.com/2014/10/13/remembering-sarasota-soldier/>

²² Russon. "Remembering a Fallen Soldier."

²³ Interview with Vickie Oldham, 16 March 2016.

²⁴ But Your World and My World, 1986, 73-74.

²⁵ Biographical notes submitted to Vickie Oldham on 20 March 2016.

²⁶ But Your World and My World, 1986, 74. John Mays was among the first African American settlers of Sarasota in the late 1800s and was a founding member of Bethlehem Baptist Church. But Your World and My World, 2.

²⁷ But Your World and My World, 74.

²⁸ Accessed March 19, 2016.

²⁹ Interview with Vickie Oldham, 16 March 2016.

³⁰ But Your World and My World, 1986, 69. The "Rec" was later rebuilt as the Robert L. Taylor Community Complex.

CHAPTER 13: SPORTS

Newtown community members have had a noteworthy history in amateur, semi-professional, and professional sports. The three major sports have been baseball, basketball, and football.

NEGRO LEAGUES BASEBALL

In the late 1800s, there were some integrated teams, but after 1900 the pressure of the Jim Crow laws, enforcing racial segregation, prevented African Americans from playing on any teams with white players "...The term "Negro Leagues," as it is used by the [Negro Leagues] museum, refers to the highest level of play for black baseball during segregation."¹

The Negro Leagues Baseball Museum, located in Kansas City, Missouri, was created to preserve an important part of African American history and culture. The Negro Leagues Baseball Museum in the 18th and Vine District owes its existence to O'Neil, chosen president of the infant organization in 1990. From that time on he gave hundreds of talks, working without a salary, to raise money for the facility. It opened in 1997.²

The Negro Leagues were organized in 1920 in response to the lack of opportunity for talented African American athletes to play ball. Unofficial groups of players began:

... 'Barnstorming' around the country to play anyone who would challenge them ... An organized league structure was formed under the guidance of Andrew "Rube" Foster—a former player, manager, and owner for the Chicago American Giants. In a meeting held at the Paseo YMCA in Kansas City, Missouri, Foster and a few other Midwestern team owners joined to form the Negro National League. Soon, rival leagues formed in Eastern and Southern states, bringing the thrills and innovative play of black baseball to major urban centers and rural countrysides in the U.S., Canada, and Latin America. The Leagues maintained a high level of professional skill and became centerpieces for economic development in many black communities.

In 1945, Major League Baseball's Brooklyn Dodgers recruited Jackie Robinson from the Kansas City Monarchs. Robinson now becomes the first African-American in the modern era to play on a Major League roster. While this historic event was a key moment in baseball and civil rights history, it prompted the decline of the Negro Leagues. The best black players were now recruited for the Major Leagues, and black fans followed. The last Negro Leagues teams folded in the early 1960s, but their legacy lives on through the surviving players and the Negro Leagues

Baseball Museum.

The Jacksonville Red Caps are the only team recognized in Florida as a member of the Negro Leagues. However, there is a proud tradition of African Americans playing baseball in Sarasota and Bradenton. Although the Bradenton Nine Devils were considered a semi-pro team,³ and were not part of the nationally recognized Negro Baseball League, they occasionally played those teams.

Semi-Pro Baseball

T

The Sarasota-Bradenton Nine Devils

The Nine Devils:

Was [Bradenton's] black baseball club, comprised of players from Sarasota and Manatee County, who enjoyed prolonged success during segregation in the independent Florida State Negro League from 1937 to 1956. Originally the Aces, they were renamed Nine Devils after winning their first nine games one season.

The players were dry cleaning owners, field workers, golf course groundskeepers and sanitation workers who excelled on the baseball diamond. "When we knocked off work, we'd go behind the projects and practice," said Copeland, a McKechnie Field caretaker. "Sundays we'd play ball."

The Nine Devils played 70 to 75 games a year against ball clubs from Daytona, Miami, Orlando, St. Petersburg and West Palm Beach. They also played Negro League ball clubs like the Cleveland Buckeyes, Homestead Grays and Indianapolis Clowns. Home games at McKechnie and long gone Roush Field were festive affairs, usually drawing big crowds. "Women wearing their Sunday hats, people laughing," said Morris Paskell, a second baseman. "Everybody knew each other. It was beautiful."

The Nine Devils were a great source of local entertainment and civic pride to the African American communities in Bradenton and Sarasota. Local games were played on Sundays.⁴ Segregation didn't inhibit that enjoyment. The Nine Devils were their team. "I used to live there on Sunday afternoons," said Joe Grissett Jr., a retired educator, whose father was a Nine Devils pitcher. "For a poor kid from the projects, this was our closest connection to big league baseball."⁵

In 1983, Harry Robinson, manager of the Sarasota-Bradenton Nine Devils baseball team said:

The original Nine Devils team was organized 40 years ago and it was pretty much all-black team playing against all-black opposition. The general idea of the organization was, and still is, a place for kids of any color who don't have the chance to go to college or sign with the pros. It's a chance for them to show their stuff in front of the scouts ... For some of the kids, it's their last chance or only chance.⁶



Source: The Robert "Bud Thomas Collection

The photo above shows the Nine Devils team:

With Robert "Bud" Thomas kneeling on the left and holding a bat ... [He] played shortstop for the team, which played around Florida and often beat teams from larger cities, such as Tampa and St. Petersburg. In a *Sarasota Herald-Tribune* interview many years ago, Thomas, now deceased, regretted not having had the opportunity to play professional ball ... In Newtown since the 1920s, Thomas established Bud's Barber Shop on (then) 27th Street, and it became the place to have your hair cut.⁷

The Sarasota Tigers

The second local semi-pro baseball team for African Americans was the Sarasota Tigers, whose most famous team member was Buck O'Neil. The Sarasota Tigers:

... served as a jumping-off point for John Jordan "Buck" O'Neil, a Sarasotan [from Newtown] whose fame as a player for the Kansas City

Monarchs, a Negro American League team, gained renewed recognition in 1994 when he helped narrate Ken Burns' PBS documentary, "Baseball."⁸

Education was the one area of life in which O'Neil spoke of feeling wronged ... He was barred from attending all-white Sarasota High School [Sarasota did not admit African American students until 1962.], so he enrolled in [Edward Waters] junior college [in Jacksonville, FL] to earn his high school diploma. Sarasota High would come to realize it, too, and awarded him an honorary degree [at age 83] in 1995, the year after Burns' baseball documentary made O'Neil famous. He said at the lectern it was one of the happiest days of his life.⁹ In 1995, Sarasota honored O'Neil with the naming of the Buck O'Neil Baseball Complex at Twin Lakes Park.¹⁰

Buck O'Neil lived in Newtown as a youth and worked alongside his father in the Celery Fields. His father also owned O'Neil's pool hall and recreational center that became the "hang out" place for baseball players. His parents, Lou Ella and John Jordan O'Neil, Sr. encouraged him to pursue his passion, and that was playing baseball. Several major-league baseball clubs held Spring Training in Florida, including the New York Yankees who trained in Sarasota, and the New York Giants who trained in Tampa ... Buck and his friends would gather outside the local stadium and retrieve balls for sale to tourists. He also got to see Negro league players from teams such as the Chicago American Giants and the Indianapolis ABCs. During the winter, these players worked in the posh Palm Beach hotels as waiters, cooks, bellhops and chauffeurs, and played some of the best baseball in the country on their days off. They included Andrew Rube Walker who established the Negro National League in 1920.¹¹

As a teenager, in the spring [O'Neil] watched from a tree beyond the outfield fence while major league teams trained at Payne Park. Occasionally his teacher, Emma E. Booker, would let him leave class to play for the Sarasota Tigers. She saw to it, however, that he advanced in his studies as much as he could in her classes, so that when he entered Edward Waters College in Jacksonville on a baseball scholarship, he tested out for the 11th grade in the school's high school program.¹²

Buck O'Neil's Professional Career

O'Neil began his professional career with a semi-pro league, but was soon chosen to play in the professional Negro Baseball League.

O'Neil signed to play baseball with the Miami Giants, a Negro barnstorming team, and in 1937 he was signed by the Memphis Red Sox of the Negro Baseball League, And the following year with the Kansas

City Monarchs. Bucks career with the Monarchs as a smooth building first baseman and savvy manager (1948 to 1955) spanned 1937 to 1955. The Monarchs won consecutive Negro American League pennants from 1938 to 1942. His Negro League baseball career was interrupted by service in the U.S. Navy from 1943 to 1945. As a manager, O'Neil led the Monarchs to two Negro Baseball League championships and one title. He compiled a lifetime batting average of .288, and led the league in hitting with a .345 batting average in 1940, and .350 in 1945, his best season. He was manager of the Western team at the annual All-Star game from 1951 to 1954.

In 1955 Buck signed with the Chicago Cubs thus becoming the first African-American scout in the major leagues, and subsequently became the first African American coach in the major leagues as well. However, due to the enduring racism of the times, this accomplished baseball veteran never got the opportunity to coach on the field during a major league game. However, O'Neil was credited with signing Hall of Fame shortstop Ernie Banks, and outfielder Lou Brock and many other successful black major league ball players. He became a scout with the Kansas City Royals in 1988 and earned the Midwest scout of the year in 1998. His association with the Royals would continue throughout his life.¹³

Buck O'Neil's Awards

Buck O'Neil received numerous awards and recognition of his outstanding performance on the field and promotion off of the field Negro League baseball, including:

- Presidential Medal of Freedom
- Buck O'Neil Lifetime Achievement Award –National Baseball Hall of Fame
- Civil Rights game “Beacon of Light” award - Major League Baseball
- Honorary doctorate degrees from the University of Missouri, Kansas City; and Duquesne University, Pittsburgh, PA.
- Florida State Hall of Fame
- Statue of O'Neil in the Negro League Baseball Museum
- Bust of O'Neil in the Hall of Famous Missourians

Buck O'Neil died in 2006 at the age of 94. The fact that he was never inducted into the Baseball Hall of Fame is a controversial issue, especially among his supporters. However, the Baseball Hall of Fame built a statue of him at Cooperstown, Pennsylvania, its headquarters, and created a Lifetime Achievement Award in his honor.¹⁴

Adair James Ford's baseball career began by playing as a younger man:

With the first all-Negro teams - Huntsville Rockets and the All Star Team. Later, he signed with one of the St. Louis Cardinals' minor league team[s] and played with the Winnipeg Goldeyes, Mattoon Phillies, and Gainesville G-Men. During 1954-1955, he traveled to several cities in the United States and Canada. His love for the sport encouraged him to teach young males to attain their baseball aspirations. Some of whom pursued college and a professional sport ... for over 35 years he worked at the Sarasota Parks & Recreation (part-time) in the Newtown community. The newly constructed gym was named in his honor by the City of Sarasota.¹⁵

Willie "Curly" Williams"



Began playing with Negro teams in Charleston, Lakeland and Jacksonville in the 40s. He'd win a spot on one of the "major" Negro League teams in 1948. Williams, then a shortstop, was a member of the Newark Eagles (and its successors) from 1948 to 1951 and was selected to play in the 1950 East-West All-Star game. He also played winter ball in the Dominican Republic and Puerto Rico. In late 1949 in Puerto Rico, Williams, on a homer spree, attracted the attention of the Caribbean scout for the New York Giants. Then after the 1950 All-Star game the Chicago White Sox came calling ... He came to the prairies after a career in the Negro Leagues and a stint in pro ball with the Chicago White Sox organization where he reached the Triple-A level with Toledo ... In 1997, the Sarasota, Florida Council declared "Curly Williams Day" in honour of his efforts to raise funds (through the Curly Williams Foundation) to provide college scholarships for needy students.¹⁶

Major League Baseball

Several African Americans from Sarasota played Major League Baseball:

- Hugh Yancey, Jr. - Chicago White Sox, 1968 and the Cleveland Indians; Manager of Chicago Cubs rookie team in the Gulf Coast League, 1985
- Edward "Duke" Wheeler – St. Louis Cardinals, 1970
- Robert "Pookie" Williams – Texas Rangers, 1971
- Johnny Jenkins – Texas Rangers, 1972

Youth Baseball in Newtown

Baseball has traditionally been very popular in Newtown. In 1954 the American Legion Post #295:

Fielded a baseball team for Newtown's youth that was to eventually develop into a four-team league. These teams went on to win two district and divisional titles. In 1958, the Post's teams won the 8th Division Title and in 1963, the 11th District Championship.¹⁷

Perhaps due to the strife created in Newtown and Sarasota by desegregation and civil rights issues, the organized youth baseball teams ceased to play. According to McElroy:

The rebirth of youth baseball in the Newtown area came about as the result of hard work by two dedicated parents...[who] had boys in the 9-13 year old range ... Ervin Crummer and Robert White are the two of many who began the drive to have our black youngsters play organized baseball ... They went around and begged for donations, for uniforms, travel expenses and refreshments. While doing this, they interested Fredd Atkins in their quest to have a league. Fredd was the sports writer for the Bulletin, which is our black newspaper. While the coaches were doing their best ... the columnist continued to bombard the sports section with pleas for help. ... George Parson, regional director for Little League Baseball, read about their desire to become a league ... After several meetings ... Newtown Little League was embraced into Little League International ... The league opened up play the first weekend in April 1984, with eight teams.¹⁸

Other Newtown People Involved in Athletics: Semi-Professional and Professional

The interviewees for this NCHD Project reflected on their sports activities while growing up in Newtown and as professional athletes.

Anthony "Tony" Majors

... I had grown up playing baseball all my life. And my uncles and my brother, all my father's brothers were baseball players, all great baseball players. I played [in] '55, '56. My grandmother wouldn't let me play when they really came to get me [to go to out of town games] because I had to go to church ... they played games on Sundays ... So the manager finally

talked her into letting me play home games. So I'd go to church in the morning and head out to the ball field. And then the following year, I finally could travel with them ... I played baseball, basketball, and football when I was in high school, but we didn't have a baseball team in high school, so I played with the Sarasota Red Sox. We were a part of the ... I think it was called the Florida West Coast League, with the Bradenton Nine Devils, and Tampa, and Plant City, Bartow, and you know we'd travel on Sundays.¹⁹

Wade Harvin

In 1945, my granddaddy was the manager for the black baseball team. ... Granddaddy lost all the money out there tryin' to keep the team going, because he didn't have any money in the bank. But by the same token, it didn't stop him from doin' it. So folk ... really watch the people who don't quit.²⁰

Wendell "Pat" Carter

A lot of times we played football in the street, or dodge ball; we might even plan stickball, baseball. We were very creative, played football with a pinecone ... If we couldn't find a ball, we'd play football with a pinecone. We were very creative. [I started playing football] when I was young. I want to say I was about five or six ... The older guys in the neighborhood, my neighbor across the street -Lawrence Jordan, and ... some guys on the next street over - Tim Chestnut and Stanley Chestnut, I looked up to all those guys ... those guys would play in the streets and so they let me be a part of them ... all I did was probably retrieve their errant balls but, as a five-year-old, that was pretty cool for me to be able to be a participant in that. But at the same time, as I got older, they went to Riverview [High School]. Well, in my mind, I'm like, "Oh I'm going to Riverview, I'm gonna be just like them." That was always something I aspired to do. Everything else just kind of just happened to fall into place or you know by the blessings of God. And I can honestly tell you that, I wish I could say this was me but, this was all God. This was God's divine plan.

(Oldham: So now when did you start playing football in school?)

[Laughter] That's a funny one too. My first year I think I played I was nine, and we were playing the Redskins ... They had a weight limit then and I think if I remember correctly it was 110 pounds ... So you play [at ages] nine, ten, and eleven. So you can be eleven and play in this particular group but you'd have to weigh 110 pounds. Well, I was always a big guy ... I had trouble at nine maintaining 110 pounds ... My first year playing I wasn't a very good player, but our team won ... We won the Redskin's championship, Comanche. Had a very good team.

(O: And who was working with you coaching-wise?)

Then Mr. [Earl] Watts was one of the coaches then. But that was really the only year I really played here young because, like I said ... I moved away [to Hawaii during the] sixth grade, seventh grade.

(O: Did you play in Hawaii?)

I played football one year there. The big sport over there was baseball. So I participated in baseball there. And it was pretty good, but once I got back here, I mean they had baseball, but baseball was out by Babe Ruth, and that was kinda difficult ... to get there with my mother working every day. So I just participated in the sports everybody else was playing, football and basketball. And so I was allowed to do that at The Rec, which is to me a saving grace for a lot of us kids. 'Cause that's where we all got an opportunity to compete and play basketball on that outside court, back in the day. There was nothing like that. That's a great memory as well. That basketball court outside ...

Carl East was actually running it, but a guy I don't think I've given enough credit to that was really instrumental was Larry Chestnut. Larry was hard but fair ... He was really tough on us ... When I say tough, you know, wanted us to do the right thing, stand in line. You know typically when you go to The Rec, you kinda getting away from your parents so you can kinda let your hair down a little bit. Well, he didn't really allow us to do that. [Laughter] He kinda kept us in line, but he was really instrumental in a lot of us kids going the right way.

(O: But it doesn't sound like, Patrick, that you really had aspirations on playing professional football in high school yet.)

Oh no, no, no don't get me wrong. Yeah, I wanted to play, but that was something that was instilled in me in at home. "Yeah you may be able to play but you can blow your knee out and you want to make sure you have something to fall back on." And that was why obviously I did well enough in high school as well as in college to graduate. 'Cause that was one of ... the big things my grandmother made me promise before she died – that I graduated from college. She was like, "Well, they getting that football out of you, you better get something out of them. So you promise me you gonna graduate." "Yes ma'am I will." And so I had to actually go back. I was actually playing professional football, but I had to go back two off-seasons to finish. And I did.

(O: So how did you all do as a team when you played for Riverview?)

Let's just say this ... I thought we should have been better. Overall we underachieved. We had a lot of talented individuals, but I don't think collectively we did on the field as well as we should have ... As time went [on] I didn't realize I was gonna be as highly recruited as I ended up,

because my junior year ... a guy in front of me, Glenn Moyer, he was a senior. He was one of the top prospects in the nation. And everyone came down here to see him. Well guess what? Once they saw him, they saw me. And so I was pretty much a hot commodity the following year.

(O: Tell me about your experiences playing on that [FSU] team for Bobby Bowden, right?)

Yeah, for Bobby Bowden. That was great. It was a great experience but I have to share [that] one of my greatest moments in my life happened my freshman year at Florida State. I want to back up a year. My senior year in high school I'm sitting watching a football game and my grandmother, she's walking by and I say, "Hey grandma! That's gonna be me next year." And she's like [sucking his teeth] "Yeah all right baby." And kept on going. Well speed that up a year. I forgot who we played. I had a really good game as a freshman. And she calls me the next day and she was like, "Yeah we saw you on TV, and all my friends they was just calling." You could hear how proud she was and that was very meaningful to me that she was very proud of that. I had made her proud.

My senior year [at FSU] was my best year. We finished 11-1, lost to Miami, who ended up being the eventual national champs. It was a game we should have won, but they came back. They beat us ... I like to say it this way. The Florida State I left was not the Florida State I came [to]. So I feel like I was responsible for helping us propel ... to that next level. But at that time, too, we had quite a few people from Sarasota on the team too: Herb Gainer and Roosevelt Snipes was there ... Prince Matt ... he was from Bradenton. And then, we had my high school teammate, Derek Schmidt; he was a kicker. My roommate Tracy Sanders ... he's out of Palmetto ... was there too.

(O: You had some clinics here [in Newtown] for little kids.)

Mhm-hm that was while I played [in the NFL] ... It was "giving back" to the community.²¹

Howard Porter

By all accounts, Howard Porter:

Was arguably the greatest basketball player from any high school in the state of Florida, and some go further to say he was the best in the country. Porter was born on August 31, 1948 in Stuart, Florida, and later moved with his family to Newtown. As fate would have it, the family moved next door to Booker High School basketball coach Al Baker. Baker had received

communication from a coaching colleague about the talented high school basketball player's move to Sarasota. Porter would not disappoint. Together with teammates Hugh Yancey and Arthur Johnson, the powerful 6'8" center/power forward led the Tornadoes to an undefeated 35-0 season. The team averaged 102 points and won the Florida Interscholastic Athletic Association Championship for all-black teams. Coach Al Baker said his team could have scored 200 points. Indeed, on January 21, 1967 the Tornadoes defeated Marshall 166-66, at the time the highest total by a team in Florida, and this was before adoption of the three-point shot. Excitement about the team went far beyond the Newtown community. Howard averaged 35 points as a senior, and in one game he scored 37 points, pulled down 28 rebounds and blocked six shots. In another memorable game, he shattered the backboard on a dunk. Coach Baker said Porter was not just a superbly talented athlete, but also the hardest worker on the team. First in the gym and the last to leave; an ideal team leader.²²

There was much excitement not only in Newtown, but also throughout the Sarasota community about the exploits of the exciting Booker team. It seemed as though the entire city supported the team and, increasingly, white Sarasota residents started coming to the games. The all-black team was a "uniting" force in an otherwise racially divided Sarasota community.²³ "Until that particular time, there was a fear of coming into our community," longtime Newtown barber Jetson Grimes says. "I thought it had a lot of meaning for the relationship between whites and blacks."²⁴

Buried in the excitement of winning, though, was a foreboding sense of loss. Integration took place after 1966-67, and Booker High was shut down for the next three years. The team was the last great thing residents of Newtown had to hold onto for a while. "It was a sense of pride," Frazier says. "You had something you could focus on, rather than knowing you were going to get shut down the next season. So many things happened after that and it wasn't nice. Booker had a lot of pride and it was destroyed, and Booker has never been the same since."²⁵

However, to the disappointment of many Newtown residents, for the next three years Booker High and other black schools would be closed as Sarasota and other Southern communities struggled with integrating public schools.²⁶

Several universities heavily recruited Porter, but not those in Florida, a state steeped in the Jim Crow racism of the segregated South. Colleges across the country wanted Porter. But [Coach] Baker was also intercepting a lot of hate

mail from towns like Gainesville [Florida] and Tallahassee [Florida], where people were not too keen on having a black player at the local university. Lou Watson, then head coach of basketball powerhouse Indiana University, came to see Porter play – the first time he had flown to see anyone. Porter didn't score in the first seven minutes. Then he exploded with 54 points over the next 25. Watson was quoted in the Herald-Tribune as saying, "I gave Howard a 98 percent rating out of 100 percent the first time I scouted him, and my first comment on the scouting report was 'Superstar.'"²⁷

Villanova was among the first northern schools to recruit blacks in the South, and it dispatched assistant coach George Raveling to scout Porter. "By halftime I knew there couldn't be five guys in the universe his age better than him," Raveling told the Orlando Sentinel.²⁸

Porter decided to play at Villanova University in Philadelphia. A three time All-American selection, he compiled a career average of 22.8 points a game and 14.8 rebounds per game. He holds the Villanova career record for rebounds and led his team to the 1971 NCAA Championship game. Porter scored 25 points, grabbed eight rebounds and was named the tournament's Most Valuable Payer despite his team losing the final game to UCLA 68-62.

Unfortunately, following the advice of his agents, Porter signed a contract on Dec. 16, 1970 with the American Basketball Association (ABA) Pittsburgh Condors while still playing for Villanova. This was a violation of the NCAA's rules. That mistake resulted in three major negative events: "The NCAA made Villanova forfeit every game of the 1970-71 season dating back to Dec. 16, 1970. That included the two Final Four games, played in March 1971. The school also had to return close to \$72,000, its cut from the tournament."²⁹ Porter's MVP award was also withdrawn.

In an Orlando Sentinel interview, Porter said:

The professional contract issue crushed him and kept him from being the NBA star many felt he'd been destined to become. "My understanding was it wasn't binding," Porter said. "It was just a document and not a contract. I think the whole Villanova thing carried over and affected my confidence. I had always been the nice, easygoing, good guy, but back then I was viewed as a crook."³⁰

Porter played professional basketball in the NBA for seven years. He played with the Chicago Bulls, the New York Knicks and the Detroit Pistons. The Villanova University Wildcats:

Retired Porter's #54 basketball jersey in 1997 and it hangs from the rafters in the Pavilion. Returning to his alma mater in 2001 for a Wildcats Legends Gala, he was greeted warmly by teammates, administrators and students. "He is a beloved figure here, said Villanova coach Jay Wright. Following his NBA career, Porter struggled for a time with alcoholism and drug abuse. He had seemingly turned his life around, however, and was working as a respected probation officer in Minneapolis, Minnesota when he was tragically murdered.³¹

On May 18, 2007, Porter left his St. Paul home in his champagne-colored Cadillac and Villanova sweatpants and met a prostitute who lured him into a home, where he was badly beaten by two men looking to rob him. It was a setup. The men checked his car and found out that Porter was a probation officer. Fearing he might recognize them, they drove him to Minneapolis and dumped his body in a narrow alley. When the authorities arrived, he was comatose. Because he was not carrying ID, no one knew who he was. Howard Porter died on May 26, 2007. He was 58.³²

Howard Porter's story has both celebratory and tragic aspects. Another example of those aspects in Porter's everyday life was told by Sam Shields (Sr.), Porter's friend and another Booker High School athlete who:

Grew up a few houses down from Porter in Newtown and was 10 years younger. He remembers Porter coming back to Sarasota and bringing him to a Mercedes-Benz dealership, where Porter bought a brand new car. The unspoken message: Anything is possible ... Shields also recalls Porter trying to buy a house on Bird Key, but being rejected because he was black. The message that time: Not everything is possible...³³

Over the years, more opportunities became possible for Sam Shields, Sr.'s son, Sam Shields, Jr.

Sam Shields, Jr.

Sam Shields, Jr. was a star athlete in football, track and field, and baseball at Booker High School. He was an excellent wide receiver in football:

With 67 receptions for 1,201 yards and 44 touchdowns in his senior year and was ranked 17th Best Receiver by Rivals.com. In track, he was a top sprinter and ran a leg on the Booker High School 4 x 100 relay team that won the state title with a time of 41.44 seconds.³⁴

Shields currently plays for the NFL's Green Bay Packers. He signed a 4-year, \$36 million

contract that includes a \$12.5 million signing bonus in 2014. His parents Mimi and Sam Shields, Sr. lived in a small home in Newtown but relocated, thanks to a gift from their son, Sam Shields, Jr. who always dreamed of being able:

To give his parents something more than Newtown has. Mimi and her husband, Sam Sr., are moving to a spacious home in a gated golf course community in Sarasota. There will be a pool and a flattop stove, a dishwasher, space to breathe. Everything Mimi has never had. “But I’m going to tell you the truth,” she says from her chair outside. “I’m going to come back here during the day and then go home at night because I’ve got to be with my community. I just can’t leave my community. “They love me and I love them back.”³⁵

Another professional football player from Newtown is Tony Green. Green played for the NFL’s Washington Redskins and the Seattle Seahawks.

The Athletic Legacy of Booker High School

All except one of these stories about Newtown athletes have a common thread – Booker High School (BHS). (Buck O’Neil was unable to attend high school at Booker.) Prior to school desegregation, which forcibly spread out its talented African American athletes across various Sarasota schools, Booker High School was called “The School of Champions.” Both boys and girls from BHS represented some of the best athletes in the State of Florida.

NCHD Researcher Les Porter (no relation to Howard Porter) documented the numerous plaques and trophies in the “History Display Area” at BHS.³⁶

| | |
|-----------|--|
| 1948-1961 | Winifred Jones, Girls Basketball Coach Plaque 204 wins of 320 Games Played 11 District Titles 7 State Championships 2 State Runner-Up Titles 2 State Consolation titles |
| 1960 | Girls’ Basketball Team won the State Championship |
| 1965 | Nathaniel Butler – Football |
| 1966-67 | Tornadoes Championship Season |
| 1967 | Tornadoes Men’s Basketball State Champions |
| 1967 | “Dream Team” Photograph |
| 1981 | State Track Champions Class “A” |
| 1989 | Baseball Runners-Up District 11 AA |
| 1994 | Fast Pitch Softball Champions District 12 AAA |
| 1996 | District Champions Tennis |
| 1998 | Guaranty Bank and Trust Company, Co-Ed Relays, Venice, FL |

| | |
|-----------|---|
| | Team Champions |
| 1998-2000 | Awards: Tennis, Football, Volleyball Class 4A |
| 2000 | District Champions Tennis |
| 2000 | Kicking Team; Ranked #1 Nationally; 3 All-American Teams; Florida First Team All State |
| 2003 | Girls Volleyball District Champions |
| 2009 | Florida Association of Coaches: Court of Legends; Honors No. 1 Team 1966-67; |
| 2009 | Court of Legends 2009; Florida Association of Coaches; #31 Howard Porter; Coach Al Baker 1966-1967; Class A State Champions |

There were likely more of these plaques and trophies in existence at BHS before some were tossed into the trash when Principal Jan Gibbs took over at BHS, during the first year of school integration. (See the Chapter on education for details). McElroy lists four State Basketball Championship Teams:³⁷

- First Championship Team – 1966-1967
- Second Championship Teams – 1977-1978
- Third Championship Team – 1981-1982
- Fourth Championship Team – 1984-1985

GOLF

Leonard Reid was “the right-hand man and confidant of Colonel John Hamilton Gillespie, first mayor of the township of Sarasota.”³⁸ Reid assisted Col. Gillespie in mapping the first golf course in Sarasota:

That covered 110 acres in the eastern end of downtown. The first hole was where the Terrace Building, on North Washington and Ringling boulevards, stands ... When Gillespie was designing the [nine-hole] golf course in 1901, the pair walked through the palmetto covered land ... After the design was completed, Reid and a crew of 50 men went to work pulling out the palmettos to create the fairways and the greens. The Gillespie Golf Course opened in 1905 and closed in 1925.³⁹

Many African Americans from Newtown and other areas of the region like to play golf. The climate is certainly perfect in this area for it to be played as a year-round sport. It is a sport that can be played until your elder years. African Americans were unable, however, to enjoy the beautiful Bobby Jones Golf Course that they helped to build and worked at on an equal basis with white players. That is until Robert Boyd “Bud” Thomas took a stand on the matter. His good friend, Jetson Grimes recalls that Bud was his mentor. Grimes followed in his footsteps and became a barber. He describes Bud as:

A person that really stood up. He didn't let people push him around. I remember a lot of times, people from outside the community come in and tried to kind of push him around ... Bud has always stood up to that. And I always talk about Bud. He was the one that forced the integration of the Bobby Jones Golf Course ... I can remember ... when it started out with the Golf Course ... they had the Caddie Club ... At four o'clock the caddies could go out and play. And if they had friends, they could bring their friends to play. And Bud, he never was a caddie, but loved to play golf. So he would play ... in the afternoon, after work ... and after a while he said, "Well hey. If I can go out there at four o'clock, we can go out there at eight o'clock or nine o'clock, in the daytime." So he formed a group and they went out and got on the tee and teed off. And the City Manager at that time ... they had a big commotion ... they had these black people out there on the golf course. And in fact, as I was told, he didn't get any kind of repercussion [from the white players on the course] ... They was just like, "Okay we just got some black people out there." But the city was up in arms ... [not] ready for integration... They finished eighteen holes and they called them in [off the course] but Bud said, "We gonna go back out here the next day." "We gonna continue to play." So I think Sarasota didn't want any kind of controversy because it was a tourist town. You know, they didn't need that kind of publicity. So it was resolved. And he just said, "As long as you don't have no trouble, you can play." So that's how the golf course was integrated and the beautiful part, people from all over the state would come down to play at Bobby Jones because it was the only public course at that particular time that was integrated. So I got a chance to see a lot of the athletes, professional football players; a lot of them played at Bobby Jones. And that's why they continue to have the celebration, the Martin Luther King Celebration in honor of Robert "Bud" Thomas, at Bobby Jones Golf Course, to recognize what he had done for people in the community for integrating the golf course.⁴⁰

Newtown has a remarkable past with regard to sports and talented athletes. Prior to school desegregation, Booker High School was a powerhouse in local and state sports, winning numerous award and trophies. "The Rec," the former USO for African American soldiers, was the place where many Newtown children and teens congregated to play different sports. The Robert Taylor Community Complex, a state-of-the-art facility, replaced it and now provides many different kinds of athletic activities for Newtown youth, including: a fitness center; dance room; gymnasium; aquatic center; basketball court; volleyball court; and many others.

Newtown Professional and Semi-Professional Athletes Football

- Baraka Atkins
- Dumaka Atkins
- Pat Carter
- Herb Gainer
- Tony Green
- Herb Haygood
- Greg Hill
- Amari Jackson
- Tim Johnson
- Larry Kennedy
- Reggie Lee
- Rod Miller
- Barry Redden
- Herman Redden
- Shad Sanders
- Marcia Waters
- Courtney Watson

Basketball

- Tony Davis
- Gary Clark
- Justin Hamilton
- Altron Jackson
- Derrick Krice
- Howard Porter
- Enaile Polynice
- Que Quantance

Baseball

- Adair James Ford
- Moses Healy
- Altron Jackson
- Johnny Jenkins
- John “Buck” O’Neil
- Sam Washington
- Edward “Duke” Wheeler
- Robert “Pookie” Williams
- Willie “Curley” Williams
- Hugh Yancey

Body Building

- Tim Howard
- Jermaine Ward

Boxing

- China Smith
- Nate Gates

Head High School Coaches**Basketball**

Booker High School - Boys

- Lem Andrews
- Al Baker
- Gary Clark
- Neil Cohen
- Fred Gilmore
- Derrick Kirce
- Ron Major
- Leroy Rawls
- Rickey Thomas
- Carl Williams

Booker High School - Girls

- Wade Mc Vay

Riverview High School - Boys

- Al Baker
- James Ward

Riverview High School - Girls

- Art Larkins
- Carl Williams

Sarasota High School - Boys

- Earl Watts

Sarasota Middle School - Boys

- Ben Jacobs

Sarasota Military Academy - Girls

- Jasmin Ward

Football

Booker High School

- Al Baker
- Fred Gilmore
- Leroy Rawls

Sarasota High School

- Brian Rawls

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CHAPTER 14: REDEVELOPMENT OF NEWTOWN

“As in many African-American communities, what is necessary for revitalization goes well beyond streetscape and beautification. These physical solutions must be combined with social and economic ones in order for the community to reach its full potential.”

-Newtown Community Redevelopment Area Plan

The above statement is an excerpt from the Executive Summary of the Newtown Community Redevelopment Area (CRA) Plan. It declares the intention to implement a comprehensive approach – addressing the social as well as the physical and economic infrastructure – in the planning process for the revitalization of the Newtown community. That is what the participants interviewed for the NCHD Project indicated was their desire for the improvement of their community. The December 2015 notice by Sarasota Memorial Healthcare System announced their intention to open a clinic in Newtown by July 2017. This clinic adds a vital element that was missing in the social aspect of the revitalization process.¹ Since African Americans first settled in Sarasota they have been underserved and discriminated against with regard to healthcare, a topic that is fully discussed in the medical history chapter of this Report.² The addition of healthcare to the CRA Plan makes it a truly holistic approach to addressing all of the critical aspects involved in the well being of Newtown residents. Healthcare is a vitally important aspect of social revitalization. Heart disease and diabetes are two illnesses that are prevalent in the Newtown population. The announcement of Sarasota Memorial Hospital’s plan to establish a clinic in Newtown is overdue but welcomed news. “This is a game changer,” said Mayor Willie Shaw, a strong advocate of revitalization efforts in Newtown.³

In a recent newspaper article about the clinic’s opening, Dr. Lisa Merritt, founder of the Multicultural Health Institute in Sarasota, commented that hospital leaders should also pay attention to delivering care that takes into account the life experiences of the patients they are serving. Dr. Merritt is a longtime advocate and expert on racial health disparities. She hopes that officials will take into account the cultural aspects of medical treatment that require serious consideration. “Will the [post-graduate medical] residents speak Spanish? Will they look like the patients they’re serving? And will they understand what local resources are available to patients?”⁴ These are critical questions that have serious consequences for the type of care patients receive.

Planners may also want to consider collaborating with the faculty and graduate students in the University of South Florida Department of Anthropology’s program in Biocultural Medical Anthropology (Biocultural Dimensions of Human Health and

Illness.)⁵ The field of Medical Anthropology, a sub-section of Cultural Anthropology, asks the same types of questions as Dr. Merritt. Medical Anthropologists often work with physicians, helping them to understand how cultural factors influence health and wellbeing, and how the awareness of these cultural factors can improve healthcare programs and services. Since the physicians treating patients in the Newtown clinic will be post-graduate residents, it is hoped that the hospital's planning process for their training includes cultural competency education,⁶ and possibly consulting Dr. Merritt for her expertise in this area. If adopted, these suggested measures could make the Newtown healthcare clinic a true "state-of-the-art" facility.

A "New" Newtown

Extensive planning and millions of dollars have been invested by various entities in a collaboration to revitalize Newtown. In the City of Sarasota's fiscal year 2000-2001 budget, the Commissioners demonstrated their support for revitalizing Newtown by allocating funding for this purpose. Following is a portion of the report:

The Newtown Comprehensive Redevelopment Plan, also known as the Newtown Community Redevelopment Area Plan (CRA) was prepared by the citizens of Newtown as a blueprint for the revitalization of their community, which has experienced a decline in its economy, a decline in living conditions as the housing stock deteriorates, and a decline in their quality of life.

Concern over the community's decline prompted several community leaders, represented by the Coalition for African American Leadership, to organize an effort to get the City Commission of Sarasota to verify the severity of these issues, identify the causes and, where appropriate, assist them in turning these trends around. There have been numerous isolated organizational efforts and specific public improvements made in this neighborhood in the past. However, the Commissioners agreed that it was time to make a more comprehensive examination of the factors contributing to the area's economic decline and to devise a series of strategies for the redevelopment of the community.

The City's goal is to revitalize the entire community through the stimulation of commercial and housing development and redevelopment within Newtown. This Comprehensive Newtown Redevelopment Plan is the summary of this planning effort and shall act as the blueprint for the Newtown community renaissance. The plan outlines detailed strategies for achieving this goal, and identifies specific projects to be included as part of the City's Ten-Year Capital Improvement Program. The plan also identifies other financial resources and partners to assist with the implementation of plan strategies.

Outside funding is definitely necessary to bring the revitalization process to reality. However, outsiders cannot “fix” these community problems. A grassroots, bottom up strategy is required. Therefore, the fact that the CRA plan “was prepared by the citizens of Newtown” is good news. Too often community projects are dictated, top down, by people who may be well meaning but do not know or understand the particular culture of the community nor bother to consult community members about solutions. In this case, it is apparent that residents’ input was heard because, for one example, changes were made with regard to hiring practices after Janie Poe’s Gardens Phase I was completed.

The Sarasota Housing Authority and its developer Michael’s Development were responsible for the redevelopment of Janie Poe’s public housing projects. Over the years, the projects, named in honor of a well-respected mathematics teacher from Newtown, had severely deteriorated and became a haven for illegal activities. A three-phase project called Janie’s Garden was the plan to renovate or demolish structures, revitalizing that part of Newtown. Phase I began in 2008 with the renovation of a number of low-income housing units into 86 modernized mixed income units. That project, however, revealed disparities in hiring practices that led to the establishment of a community taskforce to address hiring concerns before additional projects were started, specifically the upcoming Janie’s Garden Phase II and the Robert L. Taylor Complex redevelopment projects. In the effort to increase the number of local people hired for the project, Suncoast Technical College developed an introduction to construction class and training programs to teach job readiness skills. Graduates of the program were hired by contractors. A total of 167 hires comprised of area residents⁷ were made by four construction companies.⁸

The involvement of local workers provided an income for people in a community that, during the time of the Phase I Janie Poe construction project, had a 17% unemployment rate.⁹ One third of the workers who constructed the Robert L. Taylor Complex lived in the community. They experienced an enormous sense of pride and personal investment while working on the project.

The 2005 documentary film, “Condemned” brought negative attention to the City of Sarasota when it illuminated the great disparity in living conditions between white and African American residents of Sarasota. It highlighted the Janie Poe housing projects. One summary of the documentary film reads:

“One of the wealthiest cities in the country has a secret. In the shadow of the swankiest downtown hi-rises, children are sleeping with roaches swarming their beds, black mold invading their lungs, and raw sewage bubbling up in the yards where they play. For decades, the 128 poor families who live in the Janie Poe housing project in Sarasota, Florida, were out of sight, out of mind. “Condemned” gives a voice to the families living inside the tenement, and shows how poverty and neglect are interlaced with racism, politics and power.”¹⁰

Considering the recent transformation of the area, a new documentary is in order. Perhaps the Booker High School VPA program students would find this a worthy project.

Community Redevelopment Area Projects

- In recent years, CRA programs have included projects such as:
- Construction of a mock courtroom for Booker High School's Law Academy;
 - A 10-week Counselors-In-Training (CIT) program at the Robert L. Taylor Community Complex;
 - Surveillance cameras placed along the Martin Luther King Jr. Way corridor and within Fredd Atkins Park to address public safety issues;
 - Community Development Grants to organizations such as the Boys and Girls Club, Children First, Inc., Greater Hearst Chapel SOAR, Friends of the Newtown State Park, Trinity Youth and Family Services, and Van Wezel Performing Arts Hall;
 - Manasota Career Edge workforce - provides job readiness training for residents in the Newtown CRA - part of the economic development strategy;
 - Newtown Land Appraisals - part of the economic development strategy; and
 - Sarasota Technical Institute renovation – it offers career and technical education courses for students pursuing construction, security, and GED preparation coursework.

The renovation of housing and other buildings is key to the CRA. The deteriorated condition of some areas attracted crime and exposure to drug dealing. The second phase of Janie's Garden began in 2011 and was completed in 2012. It added 68 affordable housing units and new retail space along Newtown's primary thoroughfare. The transformation of the rundown Janie Poe housing projects began with tearing down the Mediterranean Apartments, a haven for undesirable elements who moved into the community over the past few decades. Eager to bring palpable change to Newtown, local and federal housing officials pledged to tear down the buildings and transform them into modern, colorful mixed-income housing complexes. Eddie L. Rainey, Jr., a retired postmaster lived near the Mediterranean Apartments and was glad to see its destruction. Rainey attended the ceremonial demolition held that December day and told a reporter, "This was the nest" ... "By taking the nest down, those birds got to fly somewhere else."¹¹ The King Stone Townhomes Complex replaced the demolished Mediterranean Apartment complex with 28 environmentally friendly townhomes.¹²

Approximately 60% of Newtown real estate is owned by investors, not community residents. The trend occurred when the economy took a nosedive in 2008. Homes went into foreclosure, which opened opportunities for outside investors to purchase distressed properties. There is an effort to assist aging homeowners to retain and maintain their property.

The Newtown-North Sarasota Redevelopment Office (NRO) is on the front line of redevelopment efforts in Newtown. The NRO is a division of the City of Sarasota's Neighborhood and Development Services Department, works with the community, developers and other stakeholders to implement the City Commission priorities and goals related to the Community Redevelopment Area (CRA) plan. The NRO lists these major projects (completed from 2008-2013) in its April 2014 report:

North Sarasota Workforce Initiative (NSWI)

- Primary goal is to create jobs and job training opportunities for local area residents
- Alliance between the community, City of Sarasota, Sarasota County, Sarasota County School Board, Sarasota Housing Authority, Suncoast Workforce and the various construction companies

North Sarasota Entrepreneur Collaborative (NSEC)

- Funded by the Sarasota County and bank sponsors
- Goal is to advance business assistance and expand training opportunities and resources to existing and new businesses; Three Phases
- Includes strengthening business operations, stabilizing and increasing income, creating additional employment, promoting youth involvement and revitalizing the community.
- CEO business training, business development workshops

StoreFront Grant Program

- Provided community development Block Grants to commercial and nonprofit establishments within the targeted Newtown Community Redevelopment Area (CRA).
- Priority given to businesses located on the Dr. Martin Luther King Junior Way corridor to facilitate façade improvements and code compliance.
- Fifteen establishments participated in the program, ending in 2012.

Youth Empowerment

- Robert L. Taylor Community Complex (administers the annual \$10,000. budget for youth empowerment.
- Program that support productive, creative, and ongoing youth and teen finish it
- Annual teen summit entitled Greatness Beyond Measure encourages academic enhancement, self-empowerment and entrepreneurial development
- Youth programs include, summer camp, sports clinics, after school programs, swimming lessons, Counselors in Training, youth summer employment, HARD-NOC Teen Program and competitive and noncompetitive sports leagues.

Alice Faye Jones, a volunteer at the RLTC, offers the program “Brothers and Sisters Doing the Right Thing.” It is a free after-school homework assistance program for students from seventh grade to high school in various studies and subject areas.¹³

Booker High School Rebuild - also a part of the CRA

- \$60 million renovated campus
- State of the art labs, studios and technology classrooms that provide for innovative dynamic instruction and greater student achievement
- The renovation provided for new educational experiences.
- Enhanced staff and student safety
- More untied school community
- Job opportunities for local residents. –

- During the renovation process more than 24% of the laborers were hired from the schools 34234 ZIP Code the new hires created more than 1.7 million in wages for the local community.

The Neighborhood Stabilization Project (NSP)

- received \$23 million in NSP2 funds
- \$2.5 million in funds were used for the Janie's Garden Phase II development
- other funds used to purchase single-family homes under foreclosure or had been abandoned and were renovated by nonprofit agencies.

A Walmart Neighborhood Market, located on 3500 N. Tamiami Trail opened for business in September 2012. This begins to address some residents' concerns about the lack of fresh food resources, some calling Newtown a 'food desert.'

The redevelopment plans appear to be proceeding in a very positive direction for Newtown. The data presented in the NCHD Project's Final Report will provide the NRO and others additional insight into the community, its people and their visions for the future. The NCHD Project Report accomplished number of goals:

- Providing the Newtown community with a deeper knowledge of its history, intermingled with the personal stories of community residents' experiences;
- Presenting historic preservation analysis, an inventory of the community's structures and information about those that hold special historical and cultural significance to community members;
- Contributing to the cultural knowledge base of the community's residents and leaders as well as the governmental agencies working to redevelop Newtown-North Sarasota.

In 2009, the City Commission made Newtown's uplift a priority. It was the catalyst needed to complete many of the initiatives. A major factor in the progress now occurring in the Newtown area has been the commitment and longstanding support of City Commissioners and their desire to garner strong community consensus. There were challenges in navigating people, place and politics, but having CRA/TIFF funds assisted greatly in accomplishing goals.

It is gratifying to learn about cooperative ventures between the Newtown community and outside entities that seek to collaborate on rebuilding and revitalizing, rather than gentrifying, an historic African American community. These CRA projects benefit the city's economy and demonstrate that Sarasota is striving to become an inclusive city that acknowledges and respects the diversity of its citizens.

ENDNOTES

¹ LeCoz, Emily. "Sarasota Memorial to open clinic in Newtown." file:///Users/rosalyn/Desktop/Sarasota%20Clinic%20in%20Newtown.webarchive

² See A White Paper 2009, SARASOTA'S NEWTOWN HEALTHCARE ICONOCLASM©:

An Under-served and Ill-served African American Community Building Capacity To Meet their Basic Healthcare and Wellness Needs And A Challenge To Sarasota County Health Departments, "Communities Putting Prevention To Work", Grant Application Process. Written by James E. McCloud, President/CEO, Genesis Health Services, Inc.

³ LeCoz, Emily. "Sarasota Memorial to open clinic in Newtown. "The \$2.2 million project is part of Sarasota Memorial Hospital's new internal residency program, which it announced in April through a partnership with Florida State University College of Medicine. The first 10 residents are expected to arrive in the summer of 2017, and the clinic will serve as their training ground... They will "provide a reliable source of adult primary care for a vulnerable population that does not have ready access due to lack of transportation, money or health insurance," Verinder (Sarasota Memorial CEO) said..." "That's especially important for uninsured patients with chronic health issues, like hypertension, diabetes, asthma, COPD or congestive heart failure," Verinder said. "So they don't have to wait until things get so bad they end up in the emergency room." <http://g52-shweb.newscyclecloud.com/article/2015151209678>

⁴ Clark, Maggie and Billy Cox. "New Clinic will target adults." Herald Tribune. December 8, 2015. <http://g52-shweb.newscyclecloud.com/article/2015151209650>

⁵ "Biocultural Dimensions of Human Health and Illness." <http://anthropology.usf.edu/research/themes/>

⁶ Increasingly, hospitals are requiring this type of cultural competency training for residents. Dr. Rosalyn Howard, a member of the NCHD research team, participated in such a program at the Shands Hospital while matriculating as a doctoral student at the University of Florida.

⁷ "Local area residents were defined as: a person who resides within the Newtown boundaries, which are from the North: Myrtle Street, from the East: Tuttle, from the South 17th Street, from the West: Orange Avenue, then back South: 10th Street to the West: U.S. Highway 41 (Tamiami Trail)." Source: Newtown-North Sarasota Redevelopment Project Report.

⁸ Source: Newtown-North Sarasota Redevelopment Project Report.

⁹ 2010 census data reported in the Demographic Survey prepared by the Newtown-North Sarasota Redevelopment Office. April 2014.

¹⁰ "Condemned." <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt1500158/>

¹¹ "New day for Newtown housing."

<http://www.gainesville.com/article/SH/20111202/ARTICLE/111209898/0/david.mcswane@heraldtribune.com?p=2&tc=pg>

¹² Source: Newtown-North Sarasota Redevelopment Project Report.

¹³ Interview at Robert Taylor Community Center with Nicholas Manting-Brewer a Florida Campus Compact AmeriCorps VISTA Volunteer Coordinator at New College of Florida, October 25, 2012.

CHAPTER 15: VISION FOR THE FUTURE

We know that neither institutions nor friends can make a race stand unless it has strength in its own foundation. In order to succeed, it must practice the virtues of self-reliance, self-respect, industry, perseverance and economy.

Paul Robeson

The words of Human Rights champion Paul Robeson aptly describe the fortitude of the founding fathers and mothers of Newtown. Through determination, enterprise, self-reliance and self-respect, they accomplished great fetes. Their silent mantra, “I shall either find a way or make one” is a recurring theme that emerges throughout their history as reflected in the NCHD research report.

Even though the conditions under which Newtown residents lived were unacceptable, undesirable and in many cases deplorable, the pioneers continued working and building the communities of Overtown and Newtown with available resources for future generations that would follow. Residents found a way to pool their assets to ensure that neighbors and neighbors’ children ate, accessed electricity, and were educated. Those who could afford to purchase consumer goods such as cars and televisions shared. Teachers worked overtime to prepare students for college and life.

African American owned businesses thrived because Newtown residents had to patronize them for survival.

Today, many in the Newtown community are observing ongoing construction projects that will expand Ringling College of Art and Design along Martin Luther King, Jr. Way. Gentrification is the term they are using to describe what many suspect is beginning in Newtown. Don’t mention the “g” word though among some developers and new residents who moved into Overtown, purchased valuable property, strategically rebranded with a new name the neighborhood where Sarasota’s Black community began.

There was only a historic marker to remind visitors that Black residents built a beloved district there. In early 2016, a contractor constructing a new, multimillion dollar condominium and office complex too the marker was taken down. Mayor Willie Shaw called for city workers to find the marker and reinstall it. They did.

There is a way a right way to transform struggling neighborhoods with high crime rates, unemployment and deprivation. Municipalities throughout the country are grappling with how to find the right balance to improve blighted areas avoiding the pitfalls that come with transformations and “turn arounds.” Mixed-income housing, quality schools, child

care and job training services are a few amenities that are changing neighborhoods from Atlanta, Austin, and Boston and beyond.

Newtown residents were queried about their vision for Newtown's future. Older residents long for days of old, but millennials are embracing inevitable changes in the community.

Anthony "Tony" Major

H: What do you see as the future or what would you hope for the future of Newtown?

M: Well the reason why I'm doing this for you guys and Vickie is because I think the history needs to be told and needs to be preserved. In fact, I wanted to do one myself, but I just never got around to it. So thank you Vickie. But I think I can see the same thing for it like I see for Eatonville and that is that the history of it and what it went through to get to where it is. Then the people have a sense of pride, the people who live in the neighborhood will have a sense of pride and get rid of all the drugs and get rid of all the stuff that went on – I mean that's going on. And have a sense of caring about the community. Right now it's like every other black community; it's the old folks who are carrying it on. The youth could care less. But I think if we can instill that in the youth, probably get some more black teachers at Booker. So it's a mixture. Same way we need some at UCF in authority, some deans and so forth, and I think then the future would be bright.

Carolyn Mason

B: How can we, the community at large, influence teenagers who might be going astray, to come back and make a life for themselves?

M: I think programs like the Community Youth Development, and then the city has a youth group, I think as much as we can, we need to try and touch not only those groups, but any groups of, organized groups of youngsters like at community centers and Boys and Girls' Clubs and Girls, Incorporated and the YMCA. As much as we can start to talk to those groups of children or wherever children are in the libraries. Wherever they are, we ought to be taking our messages there, and then inviting them to our places of business and volunteer. Give them the opportunity to learn what we have learned. And I think that can help build our community going forward.

Dorothee Smith

O: One more question. What would you have to say to this Newtown community about moving forward in the coming years and decades and centuries? What can they learn, this new generation, from the early years?

S: They can learn there's close relationship. It should be always between the school, the home, and the community. And also that children learn by sharing and people in general learn by sharing, not just in the community but remember there are people over—we call it "other side of the track"—and their bodies work the same

way yours work. And if you show love and respect, they'll show love and respect. Because sometimes we can be kinda hostile. And forget about things that happened in the past and remember the good things that's happening now and the good things we expect to happen in the future. That's one of the best things that they can do.

Dr. Edward James, II

I'm glad that you all are doing something that you believe is good for posterity for everybody because I always believed that folk would do better if they knew better. But they don't understand.

Eddie Rainey

O: Okay. Mr. Rainey in Newtown's going forward what is going to need to happen for its future?

R: For the future of Newtown? Well that's a good one. I would say we've gotta find a way to gainfully employ our young people and to educate them. To let them know the benefits of an education and have them get out and earn. And I hate to bring this to the topic, this drug situation. We've got to find something that is going to deter this situation out of the community. You know it's a hard thing to hear a child say, "Well he's driving a Mercedes, he's driving a Cadillac and he does not work." And they understand, "Wow," they say, "well I want to be that way." And that type of influence leads to what we have. But I think that if we could educate them, provide them with jobs and give them better guidance from the churches, from the schools, from the neighbor down the street, talk to them and let them know, "Hey there's a better life if you just apply yourself and put everything down and pick up a book. Pick up a book, learn to read." I spent my younger years—thank God for the momma that I had. if I didn't read a book week I wasn't allowed in the house. She said, "Before you throw a ball, you read one, two, three chapters and then come back and tell me about it." So I think if we had those parents now, we'll be many ahead with our kids. Because too many kids now coming up in one-parent families and there's just not enough time for one parent to oversee three or four kids. When they get home from school, they out in the street a lot of times. I'm not saying everyone; I'm saying that it happens. I don't want to leave that impression. But for the most part, I think that education, the jobs and better discipline will help us.

Estella Thomas and Dr. Harriet Moore

O: Yes, our leaders are aging and we need a new crop of leaders to take this community to the next level. What is it gonna take?

M: We absolutely do. One of the things that I try to do through my church Trinity Christian Fellowship Center, we have a mentoring program, The Youth United for Success Mentoring Outreach Program and under the direction of Reverend R.

Vincent Smith III. He's always said if God told him if I teach and work with the children, he'll give me wisdom. So we work with young people to help them and develop them, kinda like we were nurtured coming up and all of us that are here that know and understand should all be working with young people to mentor them and to train them and to instill in them the wisdom, the knowledge, the understanding and the values of our parents and grandparents and great-grandparents. And helping them to understand the history of our people. Not even just here in Sarasota but the history of us as a people as being the mother and father of the world. And so I think when we tell the real story, the whole story, and young people realize who they are and where they sit in the hierarchy of human beings, it'll make a difference in how they see themselves as leaders and help them to become the great leaders they need to be to take us to the next level. Quite honestly it's very scary because they don't seem to be as interested in sitting down and receiving that, not all of them. It's much more difficult you almost have to make them sit down and hear it. We were hungry for it. We were sitting like little birds with our mouths opened up, trying to receive that knowledge. So I think it's just going to take just continuing to pour into them and to nurture them and to teach them and train them and instill those great values in them. And make sure that have an understanding of the importance of our Lord and Savior in our lives.

Fannie McDugle

- O So, you think that...What's your vision for Newtown's future? If you could envision a future for Newtown, what would it look like?
- M Well, if I could do it, it would look like downtown. [Laughter] If I could do it. It would take a lot of money to do it. So, I'm not dreaming about it right now, but maybe you and the other generation coming on might step up and can do it. [Laughter]

Fredd Atkins

- O: Okay, answer that question about where we're going as a community.
- A: Where we are going as a community has been a very serious struggle for myself and people of conscious and awareness because we are trying so hard to save this community for our own prosperity—posterity. And with that, we want to make sure that Newtown don't get gentrified out of Sarasota and be scattered like they did down there in Lee County or they did in Overtown in Miami in some sections or they did in Palm Beach and Revere Beach in West Palm Beach. This system has a way of dispersing us—just like they did Overtown and Sarasota—and replacing you with a different kind of energy and culture. And so our biggest struggle now is to figure out how we maintain our history and our ownership of this community as we grow and develop economic prowess so that we can preserve ourselves here. Because otherwise, if we don't create a way to maintain

our community and our ownership—which is rapidly leaving—we will not have a Newtown because when you start getting in the threshold of fifty, sixty percent not single-family owned or none of the business properties are owned by the residents, then you become vulnerable to any investment or development agency or group. And that’s where we are right now. So what we are doing—and I’ve encouraged all my life, and now that I’ve become a realtor, it’s almost another strange experience for me because it puts me in this arena of the process, so I can understand it better. So I can help guide people to developing and retrieving their own properties. And so that’s so important to me, and that’s why I’m here.

Helen Dixon

- O: I got two more questions. First your vision for how we move into the next hundred years of Newtown. You’ve seen it, how it was and you’ve seen the community’s ups and downs. What do you think are some most important issues that are needing to be addressed and that’s gonna improve our future, Newtown?
- D: Well I’m a retired social worker and I have been here for years, and years, and years. I came back in 1982 to put back in my own neighborhood that had been so good to me. So I’ve counseled kids for all those years. And I see that education is the key here for our kids because they’re not getting the education that they should get. Our parents, we’ve got to go back and go back and go back and give some things that our parents gave to us for them to change. Because when I counsel kids, they don’t have any get up about them at all. It’s like one of the boys I used to talk to said, “Well he wasn’t living alone.” And he’s sixteen years old anyway. I said, “Why you say that?” So what I got, what my father pushed in me the parents not pushing that in the kids to let them know, they’re free, they can do the things they want to. Put your mind to it. Get good grades, stay in school. But now the kids aren’t getting all of that so we gonna have to go back. I know we can’t go back to all basics but we got to start some basics so that we can teach the kids what it means, the three R’s. They don’t know the three R’s: reading, writing, arithmetic. So all they know is the new age now and we got to change some of that to see. And I love Sarasota, I love Newtown, I love what we’re doing but we just to do more. And it takes us, the older ones, to come back to say, “I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.” And help the others to come from wherever but most everybody I talk, I have so many organizations that I’ve been on the boards, it’s to get people to come and volunteer. They don’t want to volunteer. They don’t want to say, “I can do all things through Christ.”
- O: Anything you’d like to add? You’re gonna think about a lot of things when this is over but I’ll give you a chance to add anything that comes to mind right now Mrs. Dixon about your family. Did you talk about how many sisters you have?
- D: Well...
- O: Brothers?
- D: My father had twelve children. My mother had three girls but my father taught all his children to love each other and to seek more and more and more in your career. Most of my sisters and brothers have educated themselves, they have their

own businesses or either one of my sisters, Gayle, she has her doctorate now, Dr. Moore. And he pushed education in them. He kept saying, he said, "I may not be able to give you the money, but its money downtown. It's money out there, push for it, get it and go for it." And most of them did, we got teachers, we got a lot of people in our family that really have succeeded, nurses and they're pushing. And we push that in our grandchildren and that's what we got to do now. We got to teach them and guide them. Live by example. Look on the wall, that's Charlie Jones, that's a legacy there. You know nobody gets a street named after them just drive along so as we say okay? But you have to have a reason for that. How did you do it? Push until something happens and that's what I want to say to everybody, push until something happens.

O: Until somethings happens push.

D: Yes, yes, yes. I have an award on my wall from the YMCA Achievers Program and say I was a pusher person and I was looking around and I didn't know they was talking about me. And they said, "That Mrs. Dixon, she's a pusher person." So I received that because I am pushy. I got it in me and I'm gonna give it back.

Rev. Jerome Dupree

Wopinski: Getting into public office, becoming involved in the community... What do you feel are the most pressing issues that we still need to work on?

Dupree: Most pressing issues that we need to work on today is to start as early as we can to work with our young people. We need people who are available for our young people as mentors. I mean start in the grade school, and work with those young people, and kind of guide them as they need guidance. Because today we have more people than ever, whether fathers have walked away from the homes, the mothers are raising children by themselves. Sometimes it's the grandmothers, because sometimes the mothers, because the fathers have left, get involved in drugs or something, or get involved in something else, and they just turn them over to the grandmothers. We have so much of that going on now, and I'd just like to see people in the community who have raised their own children, and I'd like to see us come together, and be ready to assist anybody in the community when they have children, and they're having a hard time, to be ready to assist them in as many ways as we possibly can. Because the young people that we raise now, I just want them to look at our lives and find them worthy to emulate.

Jesse Johnson

J: We got to just keep on going and do better.

O: Keep on going. Learning from our ancestors, learning from you all.

J: We can learn and we can go on up the mountain 'cause this a hill we climbing and if we ain't ready to climb it, let us just give up and walk away.

O: Can't do that.

J: Yeah. People want us to walk away 'cause someone else can come in line and say no sir, I know about these people, these my people I'm talking about. That's what I tell people.

Jetson Grimes

- O: Can it be what it was 50 years ago, if not what can it be as we move into the future?
- G: Well I think mentally from a city perspective and a community perspective, it can't continue to be a black enclave off to itself. It needs to be incorporated within the city perspective. And that's the only way it gonna – We can't be looked at as something different. We need to be inclusive with the rest of Sarasota. We're unique, but we need to be inclusive. And I always talk about how polarized this community. You'd have to break down that polarization of this community and I think once we can do that you gonna see – Because it's just like being contained in a environment when you not getting any air. If we don't have the ability to open this environment up where we can get the resources and get the air that the rest of Sarasota gets, we gonna continue to slowly –
- O: Fade away.
- G: Fade away. That's what's gonna happen. And I think those are the issues that we need to work hard to start changing. And mentally we have to start changing ourselves. We got to say, "Okay if we gonna participate in this city, we got to be able to participate throughout the city." And people that's living outside the community, we need to have the ability to have entities in this community so they can have ability to come in this community and spend money. Because if the money not circulating in the community, whether it's through the jobs, whether it's through businesses, the community is going to die.
- O: So you're talking about a niche, developing a niche.
- G: You got to develop a niche. Yeah there needs to be a niche and that's been the kind of magic thing that we're working hard to find and professionals like this gentleman here. He does a lot of PR work; he does a lot of computer stuff. We need to bring some of that talent back in the community and if not to stay in here but to be able to work in here, to be able to utilize their talent to enhance the community and I think once we can do that, we gonna see our thing change. But we have the community still intact and we still have the opportunity to live to create that kind of environment.

Johnny Hunter, Sr.

- So you've seen a lot of changes, Johnny. I've got to ask you, the changes that you've seen, what do you envision for Newtown's future? You've seen its ups and its downs. You've seen it filled with businesses. You've seen successful black-owned businesses and now this very few black businesses.
- H: Well let me tell you this, one of the main problems is, we are not organized. Politics controls everything that we do in this world. From the air we breadth to this interview we doing, there's some regulation that governs that. You have to be politically active in this society. If you cannot vote, you don't even count.
." Until we learn to organize and effectively use our votes – see one of the main problems that African Americans in this town, the squeaky wheel gets the oil. Until we learn that, we vote Democrat but we need have equal amount of African

Americans over in the Republican Party. In fact, imma tell you this. Sheriff Tom Knight told me, I was sitting in his office. I used to be Chairman of his Diversity Committee and he told me that he could be Sheriff, he didn't need to know Sarasota people because he could be Sheriff as long as he want to be. And he's correct because we don't have the voting power to vote him out. The only way to vote him out is to get black folks to register as Republicans 'cause one thing that I do know about Republicans, they gonna always have someone challenge them within the party on a primary. So you got find a candidate that embraces your values and say, "Okay you support, this what we believe in, can you support this?" Then they got to change their party affiliation and register as Republican and vote him out. But so –

O: That is what has to happen, we've got to engage politically?

H: That's the only way.

Rev. Kelvin Lumpkin

I'm finding for the same reason that people came, young people, professionals, leave because there is not adequate employment and they don't come back except for holidays and weekends.

L: Well you know Sarasota is but so big, so you probably always gonna have some people who are gonna find greener pastures, I would imagine. But I think the other problem is that especially people in Newtown have to start developing the skills and creating the skills to make them employable because the economy is growing again, there are construction cranes everywhere. I was talking to our executive pastor and he met a guy who was saying we need electricians; we've got more electrical work then we have qualified people. I'm willing to help train people. So we have to take advantage of those opportunities even if that's not our destiny, even if it's a short-term job to get us where we ultimately need to be, you gotta do something to get to where you're going, where you ultimately want to go. And so we've got to become more employable and you know with our ministerial lanes, we work with the Sarasota Police Department trying to get drug dealers out of the game. And some of those drug dealers, I've had one drug dealer tell me, "Hey Pastor Lumpkin, I don't want to do this. I hate doing this but I feel like I have to. I can't get a job. They keep closing doors in my face." And so I don't even have an easy for what I tell them. Yes, you're gonna make less money initially. If you're selling drugs and making this amount of money, yes it's hard to tell them to go to minimum wage but I try to encourage them to look at the big picture, not the short-term because the short-term is gonna get more difficult, you're not gonna make as much. But if you get a career in the long-term, it's gonna be better off and you can sleep at night and don't have to watch your back. So we've got to have the endurance too and maybe the churches can be a partner in helping some of these individuals transition within that life and encourage them. We've got one in our church now. Young man who was a drug dealer, we were just talking the other day, he's on his way to becoming a chef now. He's got to just make the sauces now and stuff like that but he's climbing the ladder. He's

- at school at Kaiser learning to be a chef and wants to be the best chef in the world. And so I tell him, “Go for it.” So he’s a great example of got to pay the price in the short-term but in the long-term, I’ll achieve my goals.
- O: And then you came back to Sarasota because of a call to come back and serve. I know a certain amount are going to leave and not come back and this is just gonna be a visiting home but what can we do to attract other laborers in the vineyard to come back and serve this community because it is in need of talent.
- L: Well that’s a good question. And let me take the long way to answer that. I think that part of the problem is that some our kids aren’t being brought up without an obligation to serve. I feel an obligation to serve this community. Some people want to live their lives for their pleasure and so they want to live in a city where entertainment is readily available. I’m not saying there’s anything wrong with that but I believe with the problems in the African American community, any African American who’s made it, I think has a responsibility, just like Harriet Tubman to go back and help those who are less fortunate. And so I hope that we can instill – and me and my wife have two kids – I hope we can instill in them, a heart to serve and a burden to serve because if this was just about fun, or shows and concerts, I wouldn’t be living be living in Sarasota but there’s no place I’d rather ‘cause this is where my service field is. And so I think if we can instill in our kids a greater sense to serve, then maybe some will come back. And I see some coming back but maybe more will come back because this community needs the talents of individuals who’ve been fortunate enough get a degree to be exposed to greater things. This community really needs that.

Dr. Louis Robison

- O: You’ve seen its ups and its downs and what do you think? Where are we going? What should we stop doing, what should we start doing?
- R: That’s a good question. I think any community, in order to recognize its greatness or its benefits it has to begin with what you’re doing, this. I think this is so important. You have to recognize the history. There’s so many people that are gonna listen to this and hear this, they aren’t gonna know anything about this community and when a culture denies or does not understand it’s past, then it’s doomed to failure. As a historian we know that. We look any culture in the history of the world that decays, the decay is always based on morals or lack thereof, decadence and the kinds of things we find to be important that take us away from our beliefs in God and takes us away from our belief in church and our fellow man. When those things begin to get in the way, then we begin to see an erosion of society. Things like greed and opulence and things that cause us not to say good morning, good afternoon to the person that lives next door to you. Those kinds of things. So an answer to your question: if we can remember those things and remember what’s first in our lives, and put God first in our life we’ll begin to see a better neighborhood, a better community, a better Newtown. We could talk about education, we could talk about politics we could talk about who the next governor is gonna be but it all has to start in the home and what we’re teaching

our children to be. Because we were poor. I'll tell you. We did not have a lot growing up and my mother lost that restaurant, probably in less than a year. So I can say to you that there were some very, very tough times but the foundation was always there, church, education, reading books, making sure that health was as best it could be at the time. Those kinds of basic needs. We talk about that in the hierarchy of needs. Those things are important.

My youngest daughter lives in Chicago and my youngest son is a teacher at Emma E. Booker Elementary School. He teaches fourth grade.

O: You say that and smile.

R: [Laughter] That's because he and I have a lot of interesting conversations about the very things we're talking about right now, what's important in a home and families. You know getting parents to stand up and come out and represent their children and be there for them. That's what's important

Mary Alice Simmons

O: What do you envision Newtown's future to be in looking beyond today?

M: You know what, I've always thought about it. I was working for a lady, I asked, "How did Longboat Key become Longboat Key? How did these cities become?" That's what I envision for Newtown. I understand we don't have the tax base right now but I think Newtown should be a town within Sarasota. I think Newtown should have its own mayor, it's own police department. If the tax base ever gets there where that can be supported, that's what I look for Newtown.

Nathaniel Harvey

O: Improving. What kind of advice do you have for our town leaders or community as far as what it's gonna take for us to improve even more and progress?

H: I think we got to stick together. We got work a little harder. We got to keep on working till we get it to work. So it's not quite where it should be but it's getting there. So all we got to do is keep doing what we doing and maybe get a little aggressive and things will turn out for us fine.

O: And how about family? You seem to understand how families work, having been married and stayed married for seventy-three years. What made your family and your marriage work for so long.

H: Me and my wife worked together. We done things together with the family. My kids—there's one right there, he can tell you. He never heard me and his mother argue. Never. If we had something to say about one another, we went in our bedroom, we shut the door. I never hit her in her life, she never hit me. So we got along good. We taught our kids to do unto others as you wish them to do unto you. Just be nice. That don't mean you got to let nobody run over you. Just be nice and you'll get along, and they did.

Robert L. Taylor

- O: [Laughter] I see. Well just one other question, this Newtown community and all. What is it going to take to change this community as we move into the next century? What you think needs to happen?
- T: I think teaching kids gonna have to change. We are bringing up kids to be victims because it's everybody's fault that you are like you are. But we not doing anything on the other end of the spectrum to make these people be responsible for themselves. And if you don't respect yourself, how can you expect others to respect you? Our leaders are making people victims. You don't have to be a victim. You can get out of that rut if you want to but you got to want to do it. And you got to have the family to encourage you to do it. So you never hear our leaders talk about the conduct of other black youth. So everything happens, it's somebody else's fault. Nobody make you stop drop out of school in the eighth grade. Nobody make you wear your pants down around your behind. And nobody make you do these things you know will be harmful. But you have no parents now that's willing to make them do it. Right now the kids are in charge of the family. They say, "I'm gonna do this." If I got ready to go somewhere, I didn't tell my mother I'm going here, "May I go there?" You didn't have permission, you didn't go. But now kids roam the street. I wasn't allowed to roam the street, I didn't allow mine to roam the streets. 'Cause my oldest son, my daughter told me, "He just want to get up on that corner so bad." [I said,] "Tell him if he do, I'm gonna beat his behind all the way back home." Because there's nothing on the corner and why would you let your kids hang up on the corner? Ain't nothing but trouble, ain't nothing to do but trouble. So that's the problem. It's gonna have to change where we as blacks gonna have to let these kids know, you don't have to be a victim. Suppose Martin Luther King would have been a victim. Where would we be?

Wade Harvin

- O: Mr. Harvin one more question. The celebration, talk about visioning for Newtown, what do you see? What does this community need to do to reinvent itself? To be self-sustaining?
- H: Go back and get some of the things that we dropped. There are some folk in Galilee Cemetery would say, "But why did they drop this?" About thirty years ago, if I needed a step-ladder at ten o'clock on Saturday night, I could go to Chapman hardware and get a step-ladder. If I needed to touch up some paint.
- O: They were open?
- H: They were open. We gave up things that were really good for us. So now we have to drive out. We had three, four cleaners, dry cleaners. I have to drive to Main Street to put my clothes in the cleaners, my suits.
- O: So there's a need for more entrepreneurship?
- H: Yes, and I can understand the reason why is because we haven't told the children the story well enough. I said, I think Justin in the last conversation. Justin was

raised in a house that his mom who's raising him was a midwife. His dad made cigars, he was of Cuban descent. They lived, one side of the house was for delivering of babies, another is where he made cigars. Now they had a higher environment as any other blacks, in most cases higher than. If we told our children that a man made an extra good living in Newtown doing that out of his house, they say, "Well what he do?" He made cigars and he had his clientele. Now Cubans always make the best cigars is all what I've heard. But you've got to pick up something that was doing it then and just bring it back now. You know how the cleaners survived? Because they came to your house and knocked on your door. They said, "Pearson Cleaners" and you would give him a suit, a couple pair of pants or whatever. He'd say, "When do you want them back?" Pick up and deliver. You got to do something that's gonna make the person feel I'm getting more than I'm buying. And until you do that, until you go back to that. It ain't gonna happen.

O: And patronizing one another.

H: We'll do it if you make it convenient. Think about what happens when you go get groceries now. You go to the Publix you get a cart and roll out. You could go to Jenkins' Market, shop. "Mr. Jenkins, I won't be home until three o'clock, I know it's 1:30 now. But have mine at my house at three o'clock." It was brought to your house. You got to give him something and you got to make him feel what you're giving him and he'll come. Until it happens I'll be driving two and one-half miles down Main Street to put my—

O: Clothes in cleaners, right. Would you like to add anything Mr. Harvin? It's been such a wonderful experience listening to you talk.

H: No I'm just excited about just the thought of what's on the table to be birthed and I think you got the right people. So as long as you head us in the right direction, we'll follow. Okay?

Wendell Pat Carter

O: Okay so is a fair question...When you come back driving through the neighborhood what do you think?

C: Well obviously it's changed. It's not the same any longer. When I was growing up there were families. We don't really have the same type of families. You don't see that anymore. You see a lot of younger mothers.

O: You said there were more families.

C: Yeah it seemed to be. Now I don't live in Newtown now but I mean this is just a guess coming from me but it doesn't look the same due to the fact we don't have the same families in which we used to have growing up now. It's a lot of younger parents then my generation.

O: What do you think it's gonna take to attract young people like yourself back to this area so that we can draw off the talent that they have and hopefully they'll become leaders in the community. What is it gonna take? What does Newtown have to do? What does Sarasota have to do to attract them?

C: Jobs. I mean obviously the bigger the city, the better the opportunity is to have a nice decent paying job and I'm sure there are some here in Sarasota but it's limited and obviously you have a few more people competing for the same

amount of jobs. And that would be the first thing that comes to my mind because upon graduating from college with a degree you want to go obviously where it's easiest to find a job. I would think.

O: Exactly. Anything you would like to add?

C: No but I just commend you for what you're doing. I love Newtown and I think this is great project and what you're putting together. And I thank you for allowing me to be a part of it.

City of Sarasota Mayor, Willie Shaw

O: Okay and let's talk about your role now as Mayor. Wow I understand why you must be Sarasota's mayor. You've seen so many changes over the years. How Sarasota has changed and how our black community has changed. What kind of vision for the future do you have for Newtown, having seen it from its very beginnings?

S: Well one of the things that has driven me more than anything is the identity of Newtown. Presently we who are of color only own 32% of the property within Newtown, we are now 68% of the venders and veneers within our community. I'm very, very big on changing the landscape, restoring the landscape and bringing about a greater vitality to North Sarasota as a whole. Education-wise there are many opportunities being presented to North Sarasota at this time that our schools of learning – the stick in the mud there is that so many of our students from this area being bussed to other schools. And so before I want to say, "Yes bring that on." First who is it gonna benefit on the education side of it. Economics, right now the average resident in Newtown, the median income for the city of Sarasota is \$49,000 a year in our area it's about 24 [thousand]. We're 46% living under poverty. We have 16% percent of the population, presently there are only 89 persons of color working for the city itself of Sarasota, that's 16%.

O: Why so far behind? Why the gap you think?

S: I think that quite frequently we become distracted. There are other things we have, other voices. And our priorities are very difficult to set because we have yet as a community learned how to work together. It's me, me, me, I, I, I and those are things that are not necessarily so. When we think of the whole. We just celebrated a hundred years and it was so discombobulated. Instead did we have day or weekend where everybody born in Sarasota, came back to Sarasota? Did we have a day for Newtown? No. Well why? Because this voice was speaking, that voice was speaking. I'm in charge, I, me, I and we haven't grown beyond that. So hopefully one of my visions is to work toward working across the aisle or working with others to bring about a greater understanding. Some of our arguments are very, very frivolous and I want to see the landscape change. I want to see a destination point, or points within the MLK business quarter. I want to see the benefits of a true CRA effort within this portion of the community.

O: Community Redevelopment.

S: Yes, definitely.

- O: What about grooming new and young leaders?
- S: Oh very much so. In talking to some of our youth, younger people. In a recent meeting that was my conversation. How do we create succession? Who comes behind me? Who do we want to represent? And if you're not at the table, you're on the table explaining that if you're not on our advisory boards, if you're not becoming participant in your neighborhood association, if you're not seeking these things, then those challenges remain the same.
- O: Here's something to think about as well. From what I can gather from observations, when our young ambitious leaders to be graduate and go off to college, many don't return home. But I'm seeing a resurgence, I'm hearing about a resurgence.
- S: We do have a resurgence. There is a resurgence and they're hungry to learn. They're very hungry to participate and in many instances we have old school others who...
- O: Want to keep the rest of the power?
- S: Rest of the power and power is sometimes misunderstood and when we're not leveraging it properly, we stay divided. You know I can talk louder and I can talk longer than you but what do we accomplish? And for me I'm very, very stale on stalling. You know if we're gonna do something let's do it and let's do it right the first time.
- O: Are you optimistic about Newtown's future?
- S: Oh highly, highly of course I am. I'm very much so. My efforts are to see – and I do this with our EDCs and wherever I get an opportunity to speak – I bring this to the forefront. Sooner or later we're going to have to remove the baulk on our applications. Because many of our young people are now in their twenties, later twenties and they got an infraction upon their lives at fourteen or fifteen and that harbors them and hampers them from getting a job today because they can't fill the application. Yes, changing the landscape requires a lot of work but not all of the time are you able to convey this because of the "I's" and the "Me's." I done that. It's not necessary, how do we get the job done. Sometimes your right hand can't know what your left hand is doing.
- O: Mayor Shaw, anything you'd like to add? You've covered a lot of ground.
- S: Oh only that I'm looking forward to our creating and getting this project as far out into the future as we possibly can because I think that here during this historical trek through our story from different individuals and from different perspectives is gonna be the way that we hold ourselves together and one of the things that you mentioned was the church. The churches and the role that they play in this change or in this, has to be, has to be the place we go once again. So I'm very, very, very, very happy to see this project unfold and I look forward to working with you, the task force and anyway that I may assist you in the future.

James Brown

I would get home from school and the next day, if it wasn't Sunday, I was up on the corner trying to catch what you call "a hustle." Whoever comes by wanting to hire

somebody for the day, I'm gone, working my way through college. See this is what I'm talking about. I see this thing. The struggle is no longer there. We use it over and over again and I believe it. The struggle builds character. So that's where we gotta go.

Yvonne Brown

YB: I also feel that we have to try harder in the educational arena. We have to make sure that we get our children prepared for their first day of pre-school as parents, grandparents, relatives. We've got to make sure we get our children in an educational system of some sort at a very early age. We had a Head Start for a long time and in most of our communities we still have something that is akin to Head Start. So those of use that love working with children and families, we've got to reach out a little more and make sure that we're establishing that pride in being whoever they are. You know what I'm saying? It's not enough for us to get it. We got to try to help the others get it. And I think when we look at ourselves as a race, we've always had that pride, we've always had that love for community, love for each other. So I think when we work a little harder and try not to be too afraid of all the things that we see on TV and the looks that you might get when you want to help someone. Try to look beyond that and just quietly go and see if there's something you can do because there's a lot of people that need a lot of help and we see them everyday. So I don't know how we do that but I think if we try a little harder we might be able to figure it out.

JB: Passing shot. I know we gotta go but knowing what my generation came through, knowing the opportunities that my parents missed. I feel obligated, moved, driven to walk through every door that they could not but I'm prepared to walk through that door. I'm not asking for anything, I'm paying my way and I've earned the right to be there.

O: Wow. You both ended your careers. You're both retired now. Give me your title before you retired.

YB: Pre-school Coordinator.

O: For Sarasota County schools?

YB: Mh-hm.

JB: Associate Dean of Educational Services, State College of Florida

CHAPTER 16: MAPPING, DOCUMENTATION AND ANALYSIS

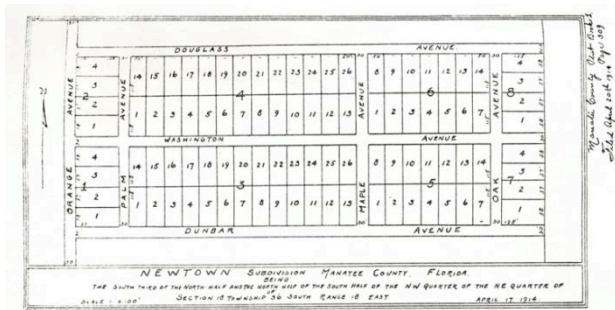
NARRATIVE

The research area was described by the City of Sarasota with an aerial graphic and written description. The Seaboard Coastline railroad tracks define the eastern and Western boundaries. The North bounded by Myrtle Street and the South by 17th Street. During the first community meeting, the land area known as Overtown was discussed with the conclusion that this historic neighborhood be included. Overtown was not included in the City's description of the Newtown research area and there is a distance of non-relevance between the two communities today.



Overtown was successfully designated as a U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, National Register Historic District in 2001 describing the area as “the first black community”. Many historic resource treasures remain including the historic church, theater, grocery store and a key building, the Colson Hotel. An historic plaque marks the community on Boulevard for the Arts and the Leonard Reed House is a National Register designated property. A description of the community, taken from the National Register Nomination is included in this chapter.

A collection of historic maps and land descriptions of the Newtown boundary began with obtaining copies of land survey recordings and documentation filed with the Clerk of Courts, Manatee County in 1914. Prior to 1921, land records and property ownership records of what is now Sarasota County were kept by Manatee County. These “plat maps” described land boundaries and locations relative to survey organization of section, township, and range. The recorded plat of a large land area is named and individual land lots are described by lot and block number with noted measurements of individual lots. This is in accordance with local zoning ordinances for individual land lots and accepted practice of the time as suited for residential construction in a manner commonly noted for single family residential purposes.



Original Newtown plat; 1914

Aerial photographs were collected and reviewed. The file of photographic documentation over the Newtown area is limited. Photographic efforts from the mid-20's onward were focused on the downtown urban area of Sarasota (which included the then populated Overtown community). Newtown was well to the North. Two aerials are particularly useful; one from 1926 and another from 1967. The quality of the photographs is limited however they show enough significant features to warrant further study and depict a quickly developing, close-knit community.

A Soil Survey map from 1959 was found and used to review relative topography and condition of the land suitable for construction. Roads, trails and paths, low lying wetland areas, and drainage features were noted and used to compare with a topography map obtained from 1973. Rainwater runoff drainage features were noted on both maps to determine how the utility evolved and what impact it had on the historic nature of the growing community. These maps also helped to identify features shown on the aerial photography.

Computer digital map files were obtained from the Sarasota County Property Appraiser's office in conjunction with the City of Sarasota. The GIS digital maps were adjusted for relevant information and converted into a standard CAD file for working and illustrative purposes. The digital drawings shown in this report are from those files.

The aerial and topographic images were overlaid and traced onto the digital file and the information was layered to allow for various analyses. The original land plat boundaries were drawn on the digital map. Study information from the report research was placed on the map. The information includes:

- Historic buildings noted on the Florida Master Site File
- Historic buildings noted from the physical survey of the neighborhoods
- Community churches
- Community activity centers
- Location of original land owners prior to 1921
- Location of the oral interview participants

ANALYSIS

Historic Resources

Located on the base map, the +/- 150 historic structures reference shows a distinctive pattern through the community stepping diagonally in a Northeasterly direction encompassing the original plat areas of Newtown, Newtown First Addition, Irvington Heights, Newtown Epstein's Addition, and Newtown Heights. The original commercial district along Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Way is within the area and a few historic commercial structures remain. Clusters of historic structures are also located in the Carver Park and Amaryllis Park areas but they are not cohesive with the larger, overall Newtown pattern.

Two dense patterns of historic structures exist. Worth noting are the areas along Dixie Avenue between 29th and 31st Street and the area within the original 1914 Newtown plat between 22nd and 23rd Street / North Orange Avenue and Maple Avenue. The Dixie Avenue concentration contains 19 historic resources and the Newtown concentration contains 16, including a church and Masonic Lodge. Both areas warrant further research and appear to qualify for nomination as formal 'historic districts'.

Original Property Owners

An overlay of the original 29 property owners – within the 1914 Newtown plat – shows a dense land ownership with several relating, perhaps surviving, structures. Nine structures within the area are listed on the Florida Master Site File. Twenty-six of the oral interview participants' homes were overlaid on the base map. That pattern reveals a consistent, even pattern or cross-section of the community.

| | | |
|---|-----------------------------------|------|
| Lot 3 Block 3 John B Moss | 1643 22 nd Street | FMSF |
| Lot 4 Block 3 Herbert Senor this is for the S1/2 of lot | | NLS |
| Lot 4 Block 5 Anna Johnson | 1763 22 nd Street | |
| Lots 1 & 2 Block 8 Sarah Hankinson | 2310-2312 N. Osprey Avenue | |
| Lot 12 Block 4 Purvis and Narsis Brown | 1723 23 rd Street | NLS |
| Lots 25 & 26 Block 4 Henry Dribbles | 1718 24 th Street | FMSF |
| Lot 3 Block 2 John Mays | 2320 N. Orange Avenue | FMSF |
| Lots 3 & 4 Block 6 James Cole | 1755-1763 23 rd Street | |
| Lot 3 Block 8 Sarah Hankinson | 2314 N. Osprey Avenue | |
| Lot 6 Block 3 Solomon and Carrie Chapman | 1667 2 nd Street | |
| Lot 4 Block 1 and Lot 1 Block 2 J B Mays | 2228 N. Orange Avenue | FMSF |
| Lot 10 Block 5 Mary Wilder | 23 rd Street | NLS |
| Lots 1 & 2 Block 1 Jessie B Adams | 2204-2220 N. Orange Avenue | |
| Lots 1 & 2 Block 3 Jessie B Adams | 1627 22 nd Street | |
| Lot 2 Block 2 Jessie B Adams | 2312 N. Orange Avenue | FMSF |
| Lot 13 Block 4 Rufus Easter | 2311 23 rd Street | |
| Lot 1 Block 6 Carrie Grice | 2304 23 rd Street | FMSF |
| Lot 8 Block 3 Henry Irving | 1681 22 nd Street | FMSF |
| Lot 14 Block 5 Jessie and Mary Wilder | 1786 23 rd Street | |
| Lot 13 Block 5 Jessie B Adams | 1778 23 rd Street | |
| Lot 1 Block 17 Mary Moultry | N. Osprey Avenue @ MLK | NLS |
| Lot 13 Block 12 William M Pratt | 25 th Street | NLS |

| | | |
|--------------------------------------|--|------|
| Lot 25 Block 11 Ada Armbrister | 1730 25 th Street | NLS |
| Lot 1 Block 12 Ada Armbrister | 1738 25 th Street | FMSF |
| Lot 19 Block 3 Annie Dixon | 1666 23 rd Street | |
| Lot 2 Block 4 Robert Harris | 1633 23 rd Street | |
| Lots 14,15,16 Block 4 Matilda Carter | 1628, 1634, 1644 24 th Street | |
| Lot 13 Block 3 A Reeves | 1719 22 nd Street | FMSF |
| Lot 11 Block 15 J N Bellamy | 1685 MLK | NLS |
| Lot 9 Block 6 Mat Pinkney | 1760 24 th Street | NLS |
| Lot 15 Block 3 John and Mary Perry | 1634 23 rd Street | |
| Lot 4 Block 8 Mary Roberts | 2316 N. Osprey Avenue | |

Natural Land Features

The overlay of topographic information provides some of the most interesting information. This information reveals much about the nature of construction and development early in the history of the community. Two notable low-lying areas seem to have considerable influence on the location of the historic resources. Mentioned as swimming ponds within the oral interviews, these two areas are probably the ponds used for recreation. A substantial portion of the Newtown study area was prone to flooding and by 1926 a significant drainage structure was placed through the original Newtown subdivision to direct drainage from the East to Whitaker Bayou. Spoils from the drainage structure were used to elevate the adjacent land and make it more suitable for construction. The diagonal pattern of historic structures is most notably influenced by a low depression in the area of Newtown Heights Second Addition. This area has dedicated drainage structures shown on the 1973 topographic map. There is a distinct absence of historic resources in this area and the historic resources to the North and West border the area in the Carver Park plat and Amaryllis Park plat. This was evidently low lying land prone to flooding and not suitable for many years.

Portions of the 1926 drainage canal exist today in the area West of Maple Avenue between 21st Street and 23rd Street. Otherwise, most of the rainwater drainage seems to have been placed underground. Comparing the difference between dated drainage information, it appears that a swath of high ground coincides with the majority of historic resource locations.

Most of the historic residential structures, most notably the older structures, have been constructed on pier foundations above grade. Although this was typical design for natural ventilation and cooling, there is a distinct advantage against damage caused by flooding. Most of the structures have been updated to enclose the open foundation system, but the signs of elevated porches and steps leading up to the front door remain.



Cultural Resources

Area Churches

Payne Chapel AME Church (Overtown 1926)
 Payne Chapel AME Church (Newtown)
 Bethlehem Baptist Church
 New Bethel Missionary Baptist Church
 Truvine Missionary Baptist Church (1947)
 Greater Hurst Chapel AME Church (1949)
 Community Bible Church of Sarasota
 Shining Light Church
 Shiloh Primitive Baptist Church
 Firstborn Church of the Living God
 Church of Christ
 Community Bible Church
 Society of Our Lady of Mercy
 Mount Calvary Missionary Baptist Church
 Bethel Christian Methodist Episcopal Church
 Newtown Gospel Chapel

Commercial and Cultural Locations of Interest

Robert L. Taylor Community Center
 Cultural Resource Center of North Sarasota Public Library
 Overtown

- Historic Marker
- Payne Chapel AME Church
- Ace Theater
- Horne's Grocery Store
- Leonard Reed House (National Register)
- Colson Hotel (a 'key' structure and is recommended for individual historic designation)
- Overtown National Register Historic District
- Rosemary Cemetery (National Register)

 Booker High School
 Emma E. Booker Elementary School
 Masonic Lodge
 Baker's Service Station
 Miss Susie's Social Club
 Wright Bush House (a 'key' structure and is recommended for individual historic designation)

Oral History Interviews – Historic Residence Location Mapping

1. Fredd “Glossie” Atkins
2. Gwendolyn Atkins and Henrietta Gayles Cunningham
3. Shelia Atkins
4. Prevell Barber
5. Alberta Brown
6. James and Yvonne Brown
7. Patrick Carter
8. Dr. Thomas Clyburn
9. Helen Dixon
10. Walter L. Gilbert, III
11. Jetson Grimes
12. Verna Hall
13. Nathaniel Harvey
14. Trevor D. Harvey
15. Johnny Hunter, Sr.
16. Dr. Edward E. James, II
17. Betty Jean Johnson
18. Jesse Johnson
19. Anthony B. Major
20. Carolyn Mason
21. Elder Willie Mays, Rosa Lee Thomas
22. Dr. Harriet Moore and Estella Moore-Thomas
23. Julian Ross Moreland and Margaret Mitchell Moreland
24. Etienne Porter
25. Eddie L. Rainey, Jr.
26. John Rivers
27. Dr. Louis Robison
28. Sheila Sanders
29. Willie Charles Shaw
30. Dr. Rachel Shelley
31. Dorothea Smith
32. Robert L. Taylor

Overtown Location References

1. Rev. Jerome Dupree
2. Wade Harvin
3. Ethel Reid Hayes
4. Rev. Kelvin Lumpkin
5. Carolyn Mason
6. Dr. Fannie McDugle
7. Mary Alice Simmons
8. Robert L. Taylor

OVERTOWN HISTORIC DISTRICT

The Overtown National Register Historic District was the first formal African American neighborhood in the city of Sarasota, Florida. The approximately 20 acre district is located about five city blocks north of downtown Sarasota and comprises both residential and commercial resources. The district boundaries encompass 35 buildings, of which 25 (71 percent) contribute to the historic character of the district. Most of the historic buildings are modest examples of frame and masonry construction with a limited amount of applied decoration from popular styles such as the Mediterranean Revival and Craftsman styles. The ten noncontributing buildings (29 percent) found in the district were either constructed after 1951 or represent earlier buildings that have been extensively altered. One building, the Leonard Reid House at 1435 7th Street, was moved from another part of the neighborhood in 1999 and is considered noncontributing to the district. It has been considered individually and was nominated to the National Register in 2002 (20021029).

Setting

The Overtown Historic District lies several blocks north of downtown and east of the Tamiami Trail. Much of its residential building stock has been lost through attrition and through urban redevelopment west of Coconut Avenue. Many residents of the community began leaving Overtown during the 1960s, with the decline of segregation laws and as Urban Renewal led to the development of ever more remote suburban developments. The decline of the area, however, has been stopped—and even reversed—by revitalization efforts undertaken by city government and private agencies during the 1990s. Their combined labors have led to the rebirth of the area, prompting the reinvestment and reuse of the remaining historic buildings. Improvements have also been made to the appearance of Central Avenue with the installation of new streetlights, new sidewalk construction, and the planting of palmettos and other shade trees.

Description

The Overtown Historic District consists of a mixture of residential and commercial buildings constructed largely by the African American community of Sarasota between 1913 and 1951. Research using a variety of resources, including city directories, revealed that the African American community historically extended north between 4th and 10th Streets and east from U.S. 41 to Orange Avenue. Due to the widespread demolition of historic buildings and the construction of new buildings not associated with the African American community, the boundaries of the Overtown Historic District incorporate only portions of the blocks immediately adjacent to Central Avenue between 4th and 9th Streets. Although the earliest existing building dates from c. 1913, the Overtown area was included in the 1885 plat for the Town of Sarasota, then a part of Manatee County, which was filed in 1886 by the Florida Mortgage and Investment Company.

The Overtown community once featured a notable mixture of single-family dwellings, commercial buildings, churches, schools, and clubhouses. A great many of these have been demolished, but several notable buildings remain. One of these, the former Payne A.M.E. Chapel, constructed c. 1927, has been rehabilitated for use as commercial offices, but it still remains a visual symbol of the focus of spiritual life in the African American neighborhood.



Another historic resource is the Colson Hotel Building, constructed c. 1925, which was a major hostelry that catered to African American travelers in Sarasota during the Segregation Era. It is now used as apartments.



The majority of the residences in the district are Wood Frame Vernacular buildings set on either brick or concrete piers. Several masonry commercial buildings remain along Central Avenue. One large commercial building, the Hood Block, constructed c. 1925, is located on 5th Street. These establishments formed the commercial heart of the African American community in Sarasota. Most of the buildings are Masonry Vernacular in style or reflect the influences of the Mediterranean Revival style of the 1920s. They were constructed by local builders and contractors, some of who were African Americans. Within the Overtown Historic District, the terrain is principally flat with narrow streets and alleys. During the 1990s, street improvements, including landscaping and parking, were made along Central Avenue and 6th Street, which was renamed Boulevard of the Arts. Within the district, lots are medium to small in size with historically empty lots providing visual breaks and green spaces for the community. Outside the boundaries of the district one finds residential and commercial areas to the east and west, industrial and commercial uses to the north, and commercial enterprises to the south stretching to the downtown area. Most of the surviving historic buildings in the district were constructed

during the 1920s. None of the buildings date from the 1930s but a few date from the early 1940s and the post-World War II era. A few commercial buildings of recent construction are also found in the district.

Architectural Styles

The buildings in the Overtown Historic District display few stylistic elements. Depending on the type of construction, these buildings are commonly referred to as Frame or Masonry Vernacular. The commercial buildings in the district are typically one to two stories in height and are constructed of concrete block, hollow clay tile, or brick and have flat roofs. The houses in the district are mainly small one-story wood frame buildings exhibiting a minimal setback from the street. Most have gable roofs, wood siding, front porches, and pier foundations. Nearly all of the residences in the district can be classified as Frame Vernacular, Bungalow, or Shotgun and have few, if any, decorative details.

Frame Vernacular

Most of the residences in the district are Frame Vernacular. This method of construction was common throughout the historic period in Overtown. The residence at 413 Central Avenue (Photo 4) displays common characteristics of Frame Vernacular residential construction within the district. It has a wood frame structural system, pier foundation, gable roof, drop siding, 1/1-light double hung sash windows, and a brick chimney. The exposed rafter ends and knee braces exhibit the influence of the Craftsman style on the residence. The building at 401-405 Central Avenue is an example of a Frame Vernacular structure that has served both commercial and residential uses. Details include drop siding, 2/2-light single-hung sash windows, and a slab foundation.



Bungalow

After Frame Vernacular, the Bungalow is the most popular house form in the district. Bungalows are typically rectangular, one-story wood frame buildings clad with wood siding. The front porch is a major design feature, as are a low-pitched gable or hip roof, double-hung sash windows, exposed rafter ends, and a pier foundation. The residence located at 1419 7th Street is a typical example of this form within the district. This rectangular building has a gable roof with knee braces, an enclosed front porch, a skirted pier foundation, drop siding, and 1/1-light double-hung sash windows.



Shotgun House

Although the Shotgun House was also popular in the community, few examples of this type of Frame Vernacular house style remain in the Overtown Historic District. The Shotgun form is a small, rectangular one-story residence with a gable roof, double-hung sash windows, a front porch, and a pier foundation. Shotgun houses are often only one room wide and from three to four rooms deep with a central or offset entrance. Often constructed in rows, this style was popular in African American communities following the Civil War through the 1920s. The residence at 1364 5th Way is representative of the Shotgun form as found within the district. It is rectangular in form with a concrete pier foundation, wood siding, one-over-one single-hung sash windows, an open front porch, and a gable roof.

Masonry Vernacular

Most of the Masonry Vernacular buildings in the district are commercial structures that were built between 1920 and 1951. These larger scale commercial buildings within the district are generally one or two story structures constructed of concrete block, hollow clay tile, or brick set on a slab foundation topped by a flat roof surrounded a raised parapet. The building at 500-514 Central Avenue is a fine example of a one story Masonry Vernacular commercial building. Constructed of brick with decorative brickwork in the frieze, the building, which housed the Collman Department Store in 1940, features a raised parapet with coping, transom windows, a metal canopy, recessed entrances, and tile kick plates. Another example of Masonry Vernacular architecture in the district is at 616-622 Central Avenue, which housed Antonio Cladin billiards, barber Ira Jones, and Manuel Kluver drugs in 1940. The building retains its original recessed entry, canopy, pilasters, and decorative tile work.

Mediterranean Revival

Five contributing buildings exhibit design characteristics typical of the Mediterranean Revival style. The former Payne AME Chapel at 513 Central Avenue is probably the best example of the style within the district. The three-story building is characterized by masonry walls surfaced with stucco, an arched window system on the front facade, exposed rafter ends, and arcades which are typical elements of the Mediterranean Revival style. The Hood Block at 1373-85 5th Street is another fine example of the style within the district. The first floor of the building is constructed of masonry, but the second story

is wood frame. The facade is covered with smooth stucco and features a shaped parapet that recalls the Mission style. The building also has diamond and square-shaped stucco accents, canales, transom windows, a wooden canopy, and coping along the shaped parapet. Two other Mediterranean Revival style buildings in the district are 1419 5th Street which operated as the Ace Theatre and 1421 6th Street which served as Coleman Home's grocery. Both are very similar in appearance, with a shaped parapet, canales, slab foundation, and hollow clay tile construction covered with stucco. Although both have enclosed windows and entrances, many of their character defining features remain.



Integrity

Three buildings have been moved into the district but are considered contributing resources to the district. The buildings at 1364, 1370, and 1376 5th Way were moved from a Hillsborough County lumber camp to their current location prior to 1951. Prior to their move, the buildings most likely housed African Americans as part of a lumber camp and continued to serve the African American population at their location on 5th Way. Because of the continued association with African Americans and because the buildings were moved during the historic period, they are considered contributing to the district.



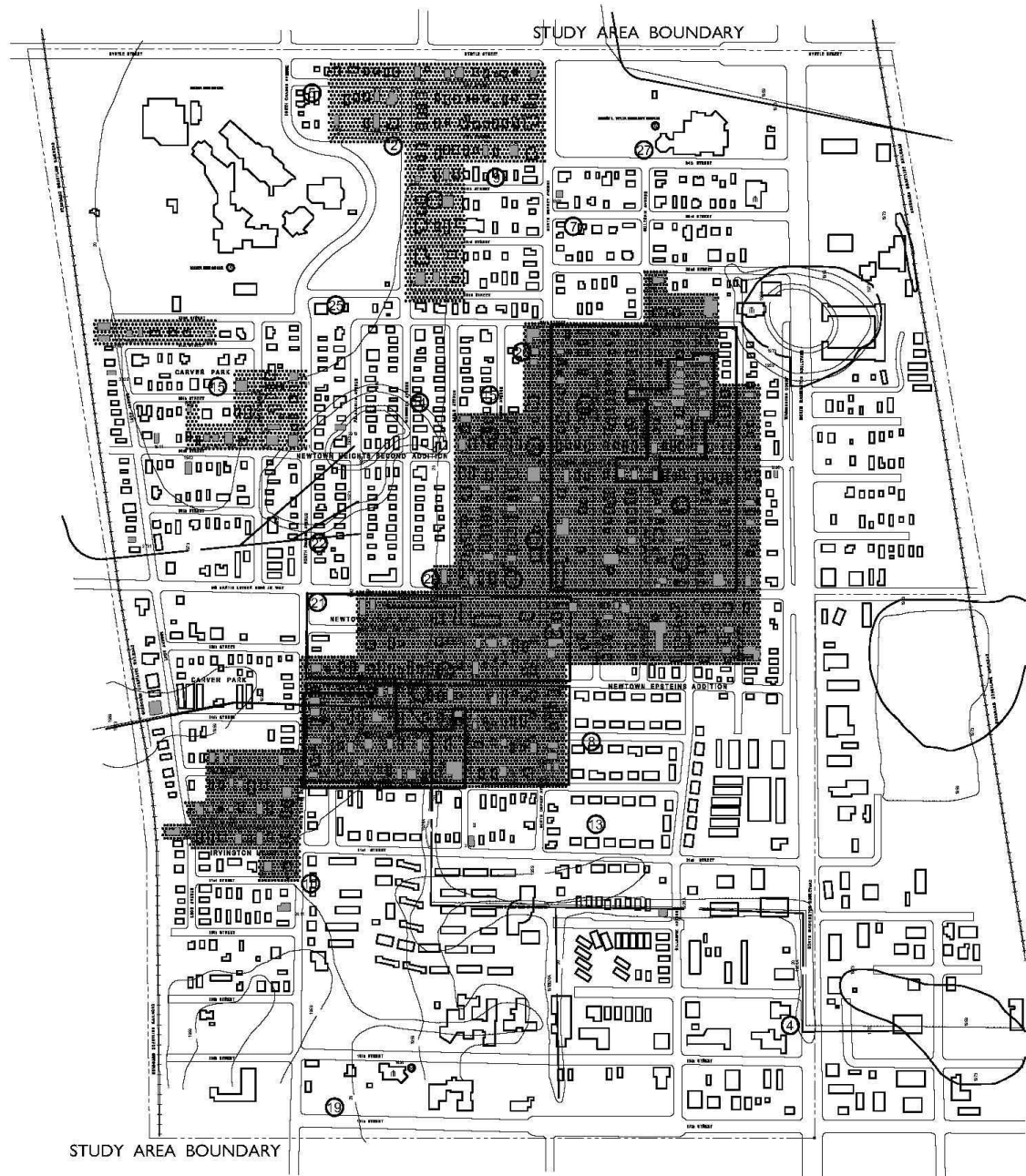
The Leonard Reid House at 1435 7th Street was moved from its original location at 623 Coconut Avenue in 1999 because it was threatened with demolition. It was designated National Register of Historic Places in 2002 because it is associated with a person significant to the community, and is an excellent example of a Shotgun House, a type of Frame Vernacular residence that was once common but is now rare in the Overtown community.







Although alterations have occurred within the district, as a whole, it retains a relatively high degree of integrity. Alterations consist primarily of the replacement of original wood double-hung sash windows with metal single-hung sash windows on residential buildings and the enclosure of original entrances and storefront windows on commercial buildings. These alterations are reversible. Overall, the Overtown Historic District retains integrity of location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association with a strong sense of place.

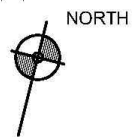
Lewis Colson

Sarasota's first black settler was Lewis Colson. Colson came to Sarasota in 1884 to assist Richard E. Paulson, an engineer for the Florida Mortgage and Investment Company, in surveying the town of Sarasota. A former slave, Colson remained in Sarasota throughout his life, contributing to the development of the community in many ways. Lewis and Irene Colson started Sarasota's first black community in 1910. Businesses included a movie theater, pressing clubs, markets, lunchrooms, and grocery and general merchandise stores. Residences varied in size, but most were modest, one-story, wood frame structures with front porches. There was also a baseball park at 501 Lemon Avenue, according to the 1916 City Directory. The Colson Hotel was one of two hotels in the immediate area. Built by E.O. Burns and opened late in 1926, the hotel was for black tourists and residents. It was located on Eight Street just off Central Avenue. Later it was named the Hotel Palm.

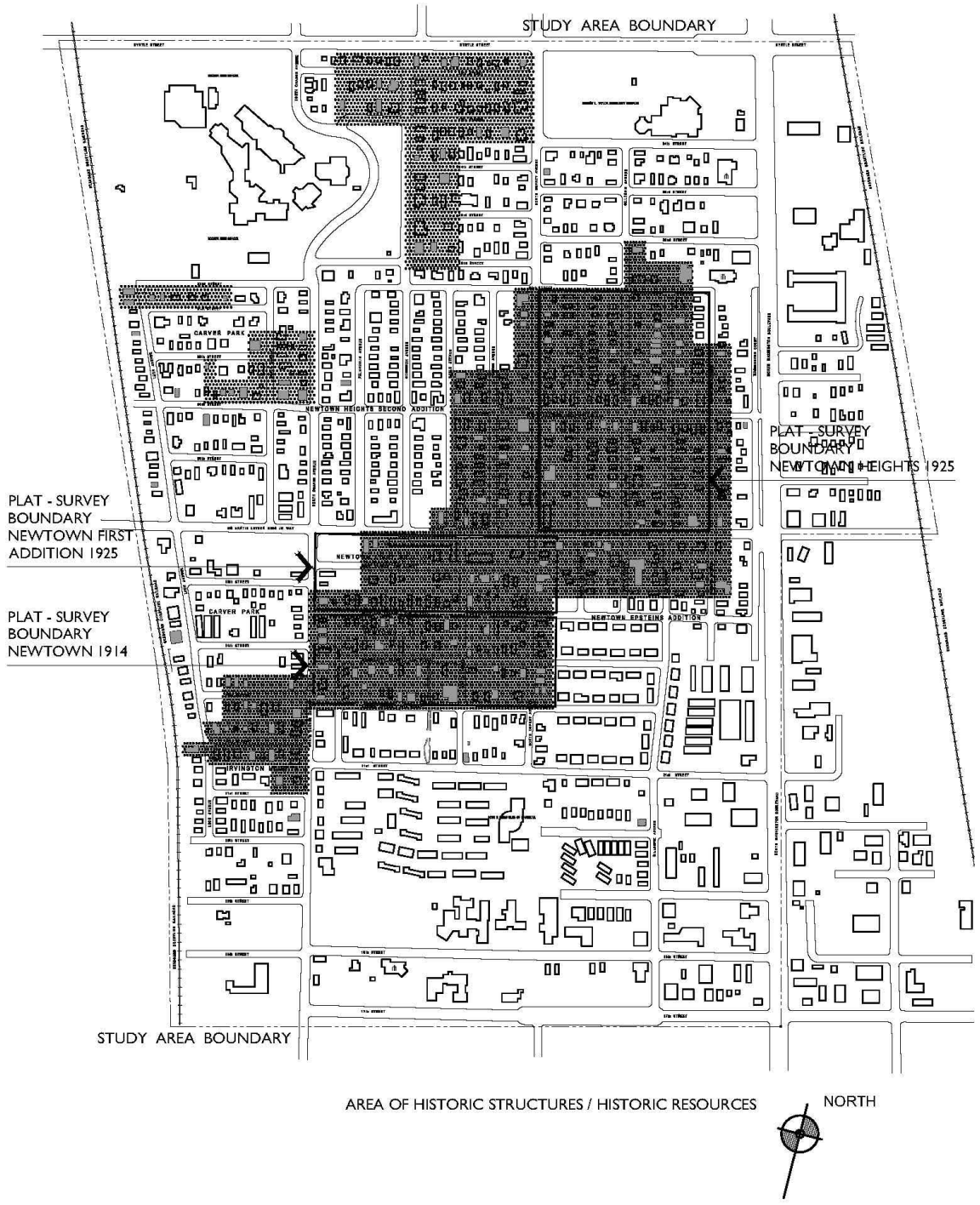


STUDY AREA COMPOSITE OVERLAY MAP

-  STREETS - HISTORIC BUILDING RESOURCES - ADDRESSES
-  LAND CONTOURS AND DRAINAGE
-  ANALYSIS HIGHLIGHTING AND DISTRICT BOUNDARIES
-  CULTURAL IDENTIFICATION

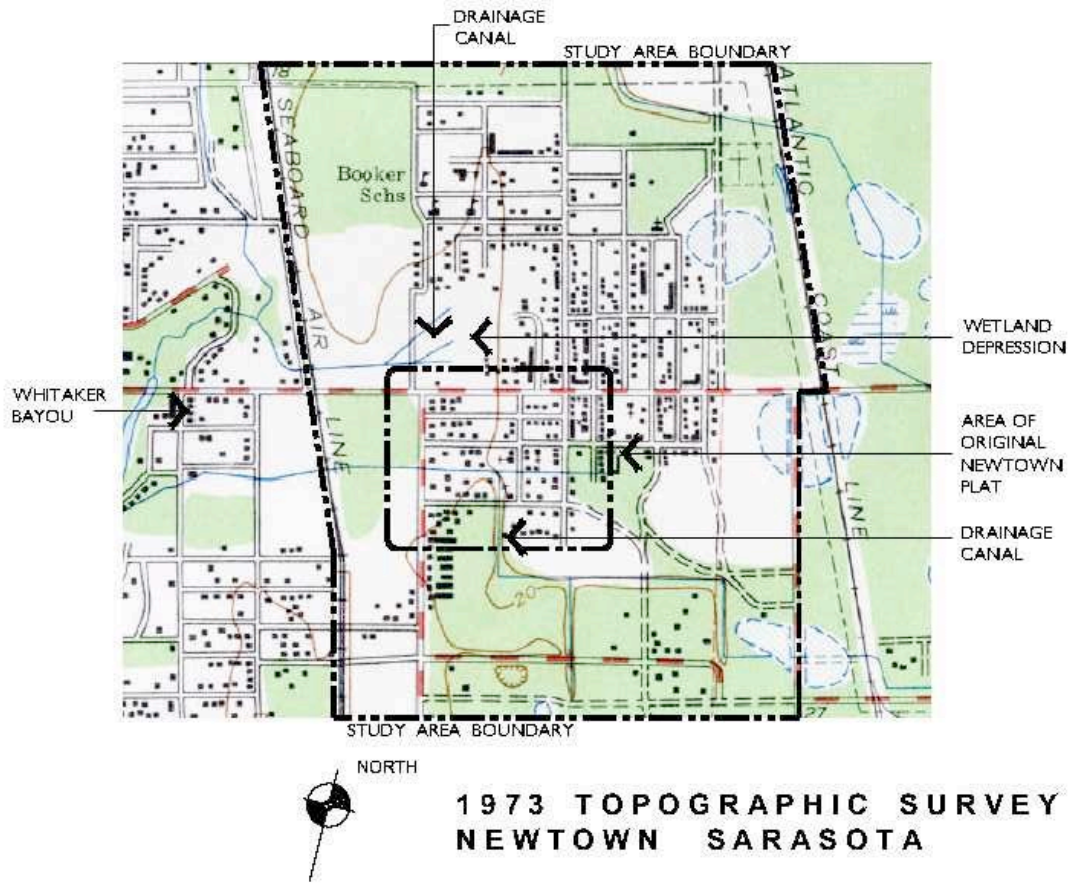


NORTH

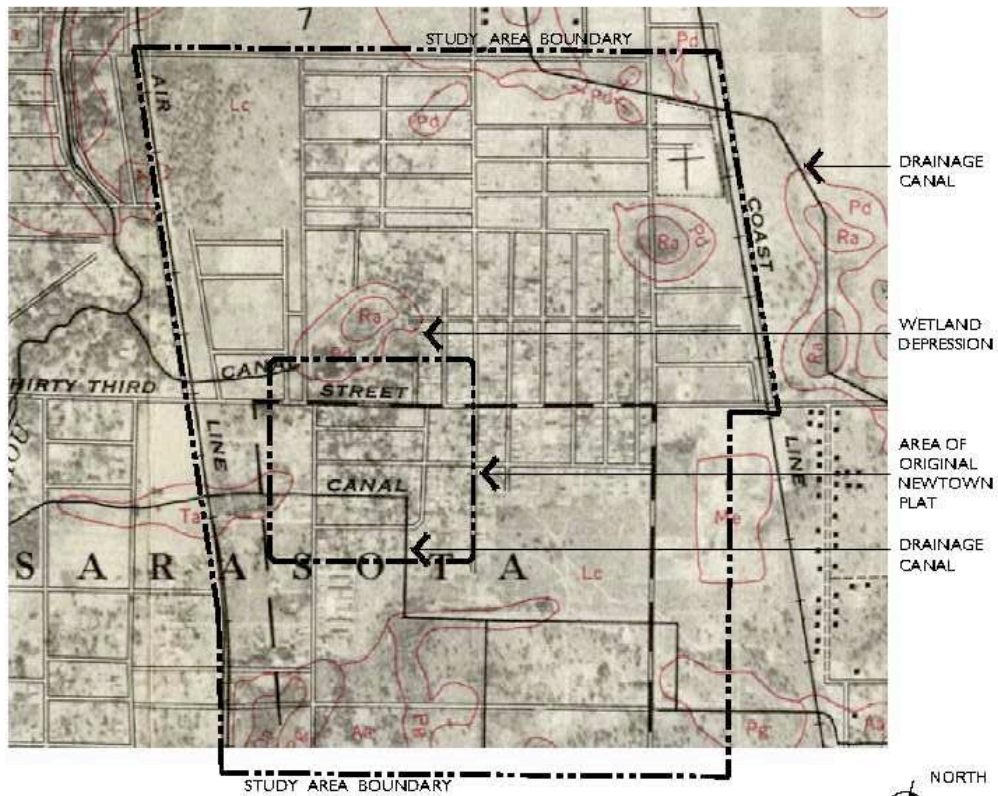
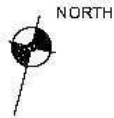


AREA OF HISTORIC STRUCTURES / HISTORIC RESOURCES

NORTH

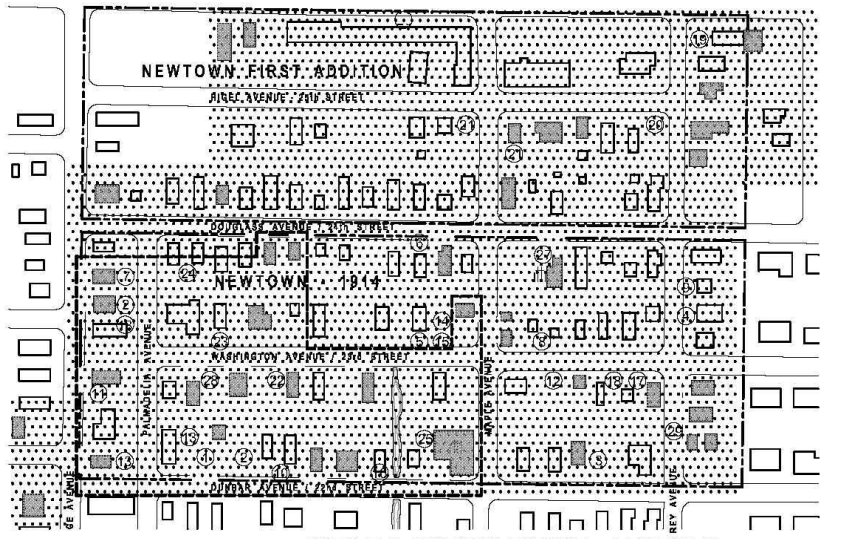
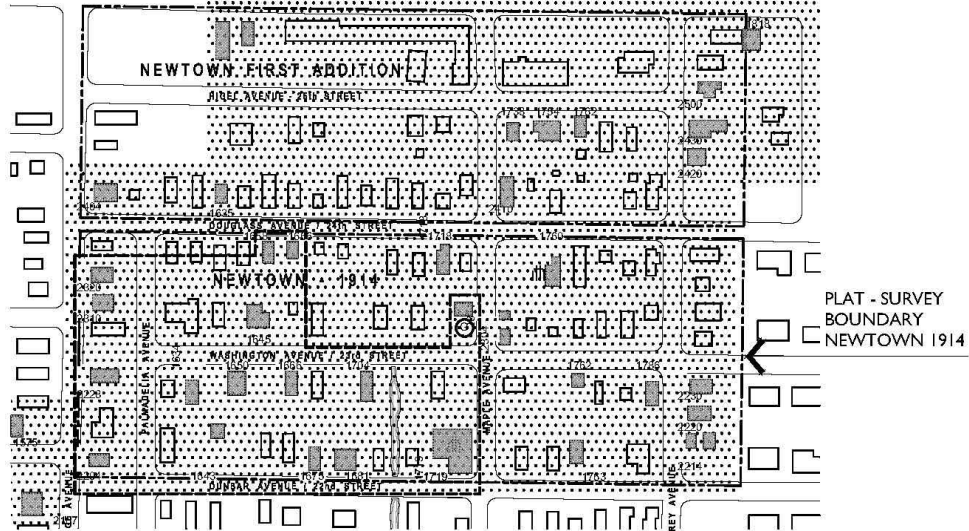


1926 AERIAL PHOTOGRAPH



1959 SOILS SURVEY
NEWTOWN SARASOTA



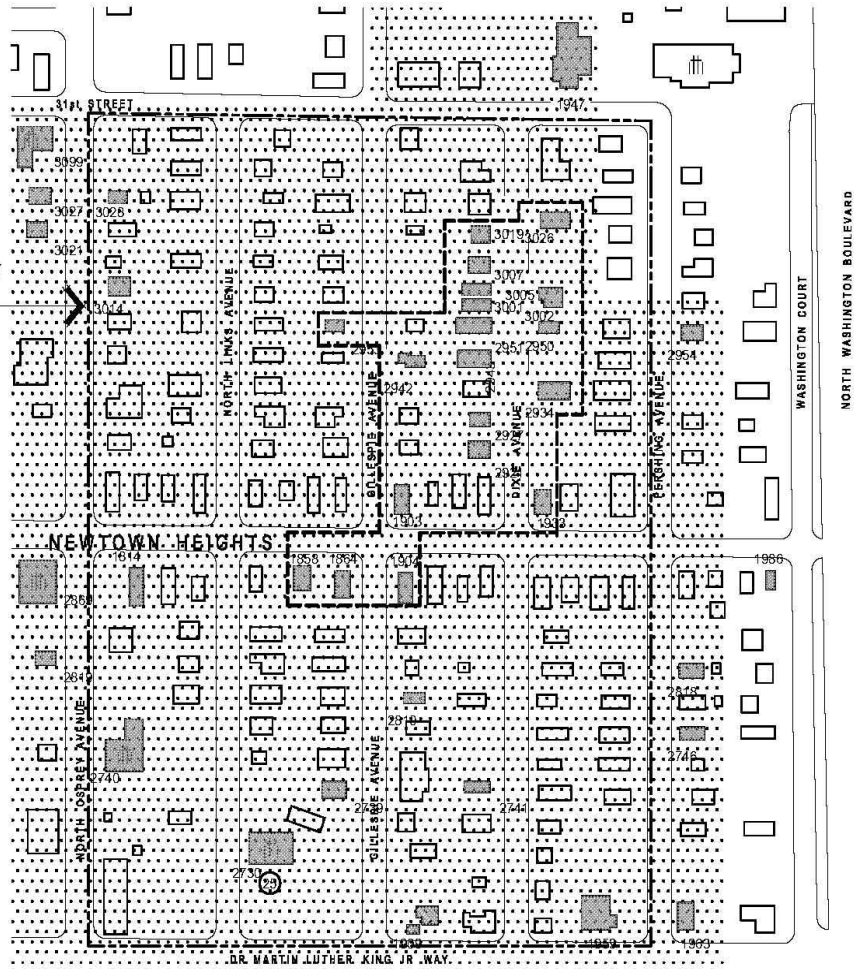


SYMBOLS KEY

- BUILDING STRUCTURE
- HISTORIC RESOURCE FLORIDA MASTER SITE FILE LISTING OR FIELD SURVEY
- CHURCH, SOCIAL ORGANIZATION OR COMMUNITY CENTER
- ORIGINAL PROPERTY OWNERS
- SURVEY BOUNDARY






NORTH

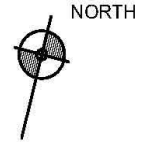
PLAT - SURVEY BOUNDARY
NEWTOWN HEIGHTS 1925



POTENTIAL HISTORIC DISTRICT - DIXIE AVENUE

SYMBOLS KEY

-  PAVED STREETS
-  BUILDING STRUCTURE
-  HISTORIC RESOURCE FLORIDA MASTER SITE FILE LISTING OR FIELD SURVEY
-  CHURCH, SOCIAL ORGANIZATION OR COMMUNITY CENTER
-  SURVEY BOUNDARY



CHAPTER 17: HISTORIC RESOURCES

NARRATIVE

The Newtown neighborhood came into being on April 20, 1914, when the original Newtown Plat was filed with Manatee County. The original plat consisted on 96 building lots. Approximately 3 1/2 months later, on August 6, 1914, the First Addition to the Newtown Plat was filed, creating an additional 74 lots. Driven by market demand, what is known as Newtown today continued to grow as additional plats were created resulting in the large and vibrant community that we know today.

The consultant team for the Newtown Conservation Historic District project analyzed the Newtown neighborhood to identify all of the buildings of historical value that can be used to help in telling the story of the history of the community.

The first step was to access the information generated from the latest historic sites survey conducted in the Newtown neighborhood. That survey generated Florida Master Site File (FMSF) forms that were added to the overall listing for the City of Sarasota. There were 95 FMSF listings for the Newtown neighborhood. The team created a map of the Newtown neighborhood with the boundaries that were approved by the Sarasota City Commission. The FMSF sites were added to the map.

A windshield survey was then conducted of Newtown, looking at every building within the established boundary to identify those that possessed the characteristics required to meet the criteria for historic designation either individually or as part of a district in either the City of Sarasota historic designation program or the National Register of Historic Places. Initially, approximately 90 buildings were identified as potential historic sites in addition to those listed in the FMSF.

The Sarasota County Property Appraiser's website was accessed and was utilized to verify and gather additional information on each site, such as correct addresses, the location of plats, the block, lot number and the approximate age of construction.

Concurrently, research was conducted at the Sarasota County History Center on the development of the Newtown neighborhood. Plat map books were accessed and the early plat maps were identified. City Directories were examined to review early settlement patterns within the neighborhood. Land use informational files were also examined. Finally, an initial cursory review of historic photographs of Newtown was conducted.

As all of the information was initially reviewed and analyzed, it became clear that additional fieldwork was necessary. Many of the buildings identified on the FMSF had

been demolished and others had incorrect addresses. Some of the additional resources identified could not be found in the Property Appraiser's records. After revisiting all of the addresses initially identified to clarify available information, the final number of resources is 148. Architectural styles have also been attributed to each building. A new digital map of Newtown was created with layers to reflect such things as topography and water control systems developed at different periods. The map was populated with the identified historic resources. A table was prepared providing details of each historic resource identified in Newtown. The table includes, for each resource an address, estimated construction date according to the Florida Master Site File and/or Sarasota County Property Appraiser, lot and block number, architectural style and general notes.

TABLE OF IDENTIFIED HISTORIC RESOURCES

| ADDRESS | CONSTRUCTION DATE | LOT/BLOCK | PLAT NAME | ARCHITECTURAL STYLE | NOTES |
|------------------------------|-------------------|--------------------------------|----------------|-----------------------|-------|
| 1717 32 ND Street | 1930 FMSF/SCPA | LOT 21 BLK H | AMARYLLIS PARK | Bungalow | |
| 1723 34 th Street | 1950 SCPA | LOT 19 BLK J | AMARYLLIS PARK | Wood Frame Vernacular | |
| 1730 34 th Street | 1948 SCPA | LOTS 18, 20 & 22, BLK I, | AMARYLLIS PARK | Masonry Vernacular | |
| 1635 35 th Street | 1929 FMSF/SCPA | LOT 9 BLK E, | AMARYLLIS PARK | Wood Frame Vernacular | |
| 1669 35 th Street | 1963 SCPA | LOT 17 BLK E | AMARYLLIS PARK | Wood Frame Vernacular | |
| 1748 35 th Street | 1945 FMSF/SCPA | LOT 12 BLK J | AMARYLLIS PARK | Wood Frame Vernacular | |
| 1768 35 th Street | 1924 FMSF/SCPA | LOTS 6 & 8 BLK J | AMARYLLIS PARK | Wood Frame Vernacular | |
| 1670 36 th Street | 1943 FMSF/SCPA | LOT 18 BLK E | AMARYLLIS PARK | Wood Frame Vernacular | |
| 1678 36 th Street | 1945 FMSF/SCPA | LOT 21 BLK E | AMARYLLIS PARK | Wood Frame Vernacular | |
| 1703 36 th Street | 1938 FMSF/SCPA | LOT 12 & LOT 13 BLK L | AMARYLLIS PARK | Wood Frame Vernacular | |
| 1717 36 th Street | 1925 FMSF/SCPA | LOT 10 BLK L | AMARYLLIS PARK | Wood Frame Vernacular | |
| 1721 36 th Street | 1920 FMSF/SCPA | LOTS 8 & 9, BLK L | AMARYLLIS PARK | Wood Frame Vernacular | |
| 1779 36 th Street | 1945 FMSF/SCPA | LOTS 1 & 2 BLK L | AMARYLLIS PARK | Wood Frame Vernacular | |

| | | | | | |
|------------------------------|-----------|--------------------|---------------------------|-----------------------------------|--|
| 3206 Goodrich | 1935 SCPA | LOTS 23 & 24 BLK H | AMARYLLIS PARK | Wood Frame Vernacular | |
| 3404 Goodrich | 1933 SCPA | LOT 23 BLK J | AMARYLLIS PARK | Wood Frame Vernacular | |
| 1511 29th Street | 1940 SCPA | LOT 142 | CARVER PARK UNIT 2 | Wood Frame Vernacular | |
| 1542 29th Street | 1940 SCPA | LOT 136 | CARVER PARK UNIT 2 | Stucco over Wood Frame Vernacular | |
| 1545 29th Street | 1957 SCPA | LOT 146 | CARVER PARK UNIT 2 | Wood Frame Vernacular | |
| 1553 29th Street | 1953 SCPA | LOT 147 | CARVER PARK UNIT 2 | Stucco over Wood Frame Vernacular | |
| 1569 29th Street | 1925 SCPA | LOTS 148 & 149 | CARVER PARK UNIT 2 | Wood Frame Vernacular | |
| 1544 30th Street | 1952 SCPA | LOT 158 | CARVER PARK UNIT 2 | Wood Frame Vernacular | |
| 1505 31 st Street | 1955 SCPA | LOT 188 | CARVER PARK UNIT 2 REPLAT | Wood Frame Vernacular | |
| 1511 31 st Street | 1954 SCPA | LOT 189 | CARVER PARK UNIT 2 REPLAT | Masonry Vernacular | |
| 1553 31 st Street | 1952 SCPA | LOT 196 | CARVER PARK UNIT 2 REPLAT | Masonry Vernacular | |
| 2731 Leon Avenue | 1960 SCPA | LOT 222 | CARVER PARK UNIT 2 REPLAT | Wood Frame Vernacular | |
| 3025 Leon Avenue | 1955 SCPA | LOT 206 | CARVER PARK UNIT 2 REPLAT | Masonry Vernacular Modern | |
| 3107 Leon Avenue | 1955 SCPA | LOT 202 & 203 | CARVER PARK UNIT 2 REPLAT | Masonry Vernacular Modern | |
| 3111 Leon Avenue | 1955 SCPA | LOTS 201 & 202 | CARVER PARK UNIT 2 REPLAT | Masonry Vernacular Modern | |
| 2924 Noble Avenue | 1959 SCPA | LOTS 97 & 98 | CARVER PARK UNIT 2 | Masonry Vernacular | |

| | | | | | |
|------------------------------|---------------------|------------------------|--------------------------|-----------------------|--|
| 2926 Noble Avenue | 1953 SCPA | LOT 99 | CARVER PARK UNIT 2 | Wood Frame Vernacular | |
| 2005 Gillespie Avenue | 1959 SCPA | LOT 26 BLK A CITY PARK | CITY PARK | Wood Frame Vernacular | |
| 1539 23 RD Street | 1957 FMSF/SCPA | LOT 14 BLK B | IRVINGTON HEIGHT REPLAT | Wood Frame Vernacular | |
| 1575 23 RD Street | 1952 FMSF/SCPA | LOT 4 BLK B | IRVINGTON HEIGHT REPLAT | Wood Frame Vernacular | |
| 1525 22 ND Street | 1955 SCPA | LOT 20 BLK C | IRVINGTON HEIGHTS REPLAT | Wood Frame Vernacular | |
| 1535 22 ND Street | 1958 SCPA | LOT 18 BLK C | IRVINGTON HEIGHTS REPLAT | Wood Frame Vernacular | |
| 1553 22 ND Street | 1957 SCPA | LOT 14 BLK C | IRVINGTON HEIGHTS REPLAT | Masonry Vernacular | |
| 1556 22 ND Street | 1948 FMSF/1959 SCPA | BLK D | IRVINGTON HEIGHTS REPLAT | Masonry Vernacular | |
| 1570 22 ND Street | 1964 SCPA | LOT 4 BLK D | IRVINGTON HEIGHTS REPLAT | Wood Frame Vernacular | |
| 1571 22 ND Street | 1951 FMSF/SCPA 1951 | LOT 8 BLK C | IRVINGTON HEIGHTS REPLAT | Wood Frame Vernacular | |
| 1521 23 RD Street | 1949 SCPA | LOT 18, BLK B, | IRVINGTON HEIGHTS REPLAT | Wood Frame Vernacular | |
| 1529 23 RD Street | 1925 FMSF/SCPA | LOT 16 BLK B | IRVINGTON HEIGHTS REPLAT | Wood Frame Vernacular | |
| 1546 23 RD Street | 1957 SCPA | LOT 11 BLK C | IRVINGTON HEIGHTS REPLAT | Wood Frame Vernacular | |
| 1536 23 RD Street | 1958 SCPA | LOT 13 BLK C | IRVINGTON HEIGHTS REPLAT | Wood Frame Vernacular | |

| | | | | | |
|---------------------------------|-------------------------|-----------------------|--|--------------------------|--|
| 1585 21 ST Street | 1948 FMSF/ 1950 SCPA | LOT 4, BLK E, | IRVINGTON HEIGHTS UNIT 2 REPLAT | Wood Frame Vernacular | |
| 2025 Leon Avenue | 1960 SCPA | LOT 4 & 5 BLK F | IRVINGTON HEIGHTS UNIT 2 REPLAT | Masonry Vernacular | |
| 2183 Leon Avenue | 1930 SCPA | LOTS 5 & 6, BLK A | IRVINGTON HEIGHTS REPLAT | Wood Frame Vernacular | |
| 1643 22 ND Street | 1926 SCPA | LOT 3 BLK 3 | NEWTOWN | Wood Frame Vernacular | |
| 1675 22 ND Street | 1930 FMSF/ SCPA | LOT 7 BLK 3 | NEWTOWN | Wood Frame Vernacular | |
| 1681 22 ND Street | 1925 FMSF/ SCPA | LOTS 8 & 9 BLK 3 | NEWTOWN | Wood Frame Vernacular | |
| 1719 22 ND Street | 1944FMSF/ SCPA | LOTS 12 & 13 BLK 3 | NEWTOWN | Wood Frame Vernacular | |
| 1739 22 ND Street | 1940 FMSF/ 1944 SPCA | LOTS 12 & 13 BLK 3 | NEWTOWN | Wood Frame Vernacular | |
| 1763 22 nd Street | 1963 SCPA | LOT 4 BLK 5 | NEWTOWN | Masonry Vernacular | |
| 1634 23 rd Street | 1959 SCPA | LOT 15 BLK 3 | NEWTOWN | Masonry Vernacular | |
| 1645 23 RD Street | 1959 FMSF/ SCPA | LOT 3 BLK 4 | NEWTOWN | Wood Frame Vernacular | |
| 1650 23 rd Street | FMSF | LOTS 16 & 17 BLK 3 | NEWTOWN | Wood Frame Vernacular | |
| 1666 23 rd Street | 1930 SCPA | LOT 19 BLK 3 | NEWTOWN | Masonry Vernacular | |
| 1704 23 RD Street | 1923 FMSF/ SCPA | LOT 22 BLK 3 | NEWTOWN | Bungalow | |
| 1762 23 RD Street | 1930 FMSF/ SCPA | LOT 11 BLK 5 | NEWTOWN | Wood Frame Vernacular | |
| 1786 23 RD Street | 1919 FMSF/ SCPA | LOT 14 BLK 5 | NEWTOWN | Wood Frame Vernacular | |
| 1658 24 TH Street | 1925 FMSF/ SCPA | LOT 18 BLK 4 | NEWTOWN | Wood Frame Vernacular | |
| 1666 24 TH Street | 1926 FMSF/ SCPA | LOT 19 BLK 4 | NEWTOWN | Wood Frame Vernacular | |

| | | | | | |
|------------------------------|----------------------|---------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|--------------------------------------|
| 1718 24 TH STREET | 1938 SCPA | LOT 25 BLK 4 | NEWTOWN | Masonry Vernacular | |
| 1760 24 TH Street | 1954 FMSF/ SCPA | LOTS 8 9 & 10 BLK 6 | NEWTOWN | Wood Frame Vernacular | Mt Calvary Missionary Baptist Church |
| 2100 Maple Avenue | 1937FMSF/ SCPA | LOT 1 BLK 3 | NEWTOWN SOUTHSIDE ADD | Wood Frame Vernacular | |
| 2500 Osprey Avenue | 1928 FMSF/ SCPA | LOT 3 BLK 17 | NEWTOWN 1ST ADD | Wood Frame Vernacular | |
| 2304 Maple Avenue | 1944 FMSF/ SCPA | LOT 1 BLK 6 | NEWTOWN SUB | Wood Frame Vernacular | |
| 2304 Maple Avenue | 1920 FMSF/ SCPA | LOT 2 BLK 6 | NEWTOWN | Masonry Vernacular | |
| 2410 Maple Avenue | 1930 FMSF/ 1961 SCPA | LOT 2 BLK 12 | NEWTOWN FIRST ADD | Wood Frame Vernacular | |
| 2204 Orange Avenue | 1945 FMSF/ SCPA | LOT 1 BLK 1 | NEWTOWN SUB | Wood Frame Vernacular | |
| 2228 N. Orange Avenue | 1925 FMSF/ SCPA | LOT 4 BLK 1 | NEWTOWN SUB | Wood Frame Vernacular | |
| 2310 Orange Avenue | 1945 SCPA | LOT 1 BLK 8 | NEWTOWN | Masonry Vernacular | |
| 2320 Orange Avenue | 1945 FMSF/ SCPA | LOT 3 BLK 2 | NEWTOWN SUB | Wood Frame Vernacular | |
| 2404 Orange Avenue | 1946 FMSF/ SCPA | LOTS 3 & 4 BLK 10 | NEWTOWN FIRST ADD | Wood Frame Vernacular | |
| 2214 Osprey Avenue | 1933 FMSF/ SCPA | LOTS 1 & 2 BLK 7 | NEWTOWN SUB | Wood Frame Vernacular | |
| 2220 Osprey Avenue | 1935 FMSF/ SCPA | LOT 3 BLK 7 | NEWTOWN | Masonry Vernacular | |
| 2230 Osprey Avenue | 1935 FMSF/ SCPA | LOT 4 BLK 7 | NEWTOWN | Wood Frame Vernacular | |

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|------------------------------|---------------------|--------------------------|----------------------|-------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| 2420 Osprey Avenue | 1925 FMSF/SCPA | LOT 2 BLK 13 | NEWTOWN FIRST ADD | Wood Frame Vernacular | |
| 2430 Osprey Avenue | 1925 SCPA | LOT 1 BLK 13 | NEWTOWN FIRST ADD | Wood Frame Vernacular | |
| 2500 Osprey Avenue | 1928 FMSF/SCPA | LOT 3 BLK 17 | NEWTOWN FIRST ADD | Wood Frame Vernacular | |
| 2420 Osprey Avenue | 1935 FMSF/1925 SCPA | LOT 2 BLK 13 | NEWTOWN FIRST ADD | Masonry Vernacular | |
| 2518 Links Avenue | 1938 SCPA | LOT 3 BLK B | NEWTOWN EPSTEINS ADD | Wood Frame Vernacular | |
| 2504 Gillespie Avenue | 1944 SCPA | LOTS 1, 3, 5, 7, 9 BLK C | NEWTOWN EPSTEIN ADD | Masonry Vernacular - Ecclesiastical | NEW BETHEL MISSIONARY BAPTIST CHURCH |
| 2427 Pershing | 1949 SCPA | LOT 10 BLK G | NEWTOWN EPSTEIN ADD | Masonry Vernacular | |
| 2430 Pershing | 1940 SCPA | LOT 9 & 11 BLK H | NEWTOWN EPSTEINS ADD | Masonry Vernacular | |
| 2511 Pershing | 1940 SCPA | LOT 6 BLK G | NEWTOWN EPSTEIN ADD | Wood Frame Vernacular | |
| 1635 24 TH Street | 1944 FMSF/SCPA | LOT 4 BLK 11 | NEWTOWN FIRST ADD | Wood Frame Vernacular | |
| 1738 25 TH Street | 1948 FMSF/SCPA | LOT 1 BLK 12 | NEWTOWN FIRST ADD | Wood Frame Vernacular | |
| 1754 25 TH Street | 1947 FMSF/SCPA | LOTS 3&5 BLK 12 | NEWTOWN FIRST ADD | Wood Frame Vernacular | |
| 1762 25 TH Street | 1935 FMSF/SCPA | LOT 7 BLK 12 | NEWTOWN FIRST ADD | Wood Frame Vernacular | |
| 1642 27 TH Street | 1948 FMSF/1950 SCPA | LOTS 3 & 4 BLK 15 | NEWTOWN FIRST ADD | Masonry Vernacular | |
| 1904 29 TH Street | 1930 FMSF/SCPA | LOT 1 BLK I | NEWTOWN HEIGHT | Wood Frame Vernacular | |
| 1933 29 TH Street | 1940 FMSF/SCPA | LOT 23 BLK D | NEWTOWN HEIGHT | Wood Frame Vernacular | |
| 1814 29 TH Street | 1930 FMSF/1950 SCPA | LOTS 1 & 2 BLK G | NEWTOWN HEIGHTS | Wood Frame Vernacular | |

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|------------------------------|----------------|------------------------------|-------------------------|---------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| 1858 29 th Street | 1939/SCPA | LOTS 2 & 3, BLK H, | NEWTOWN HEIGHTS | Wood Frame Vernacular | |
| 1864 29 TH Street | 1937 FMSF/SCPA | LOT 4 BLK H | NEWTOWN HEIGHTS | Wood Frame Vernacular | |
| 1903 29 TH Street | 1940 FMSF/SCPA | LOT 23 BLK C | NEWTOWN HEIGHTS | Wood Frame Vernacular | |
| 1986 29 TH Street | 1933 FMSF/SCPA | LOT 4 BLK K | NEWTOWN HEIGHTS | Wood Frame Vernacular | |
| 1909 27 TH STREET | 1956 SPCA | LOT 21 & 22 BLK 1 | NEWTOWN HEIGHTS | Masonry Art Modern | Filling Station |
| 1959 27 TH Street | 1945 FMSF | LOTS 20, 22, 23 & 24, BLK J, | NEWTOWN HEIGHTS | Wood Frame Vernacular | COMMUNITY BIBLE CHURCH OF SARASOTA |
| 1963 27 th Street | 1953 SPCA | LOTS 21 & 22 BLK K | NEWTOWN HEIGHTS | Masonry Vernacular | |
| 1735 29 th Street | 1925 FMSF/SCPA | LOT 23, BLK C, | NEWTOWN HEIGHTS 1ST ADD | Wood Frame Vernacular | |
| 1723 27 TH Street | 1920 FMSF/SCPA | LOT 24BLK F | NEWTOWN HEIGHTS 1ST ADD | Wood Frame Vernacular | |
| 1741 27 th Street | 1955 SPCA | LOT 22 BLK D | NEWTOWN HEIGHTS 1ST ADD | Masonry Vernacular - Commercial | |
| 2746 Pershing | 1930 SPCA | LOTS 13 & 14 BLK K | NEWTOWN HEIGHTS | Wood Frame Vernacular | |
| 2818 Pershing | 1969 SPCA | LOT 7 BLK K | NEWTOWN HEIGHTS | Wood Frame Vernacular | |
| 2954 Pershing | 1940 SPCA | LOT 13 BLK E | NEWTOWN HEIGHTS | Wood Frame Vernacular | |
| 2726 Church Avenue | 1940 SPCA | LOT 19 BLK B | NEWTOWN HEIGHTS 1ST ADD | Wood Frame Vernacular | |
| 2727 Church Avenue | 1929 SPCA | LOT 20, BLK D, | NEWTOWN HEIGHTS 1ST ADD | Wood Frame Vernacular | |
| 2810 Church Avenue | 1960 SPCA | LOT 9 BLK B | NEWTOWN HEIGHTS 1ST ADD | Masonry Vernacular | |

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|--------------------|-----------|--------------------|-------------------------|---|--|
| 2825 Church Avenue | 1961 SCPA | LOT 6 BLK D | NEWTOWN HEIGHTS 1ST ADD | Masonry Vernacular | |
| 2741 Dixie Avenue | 1945 SCPA | LOT 16 BLK I | NEWTOWN HEIGHTS | Masonry Vernacular | |
| 2921 Dixie Avenue | 1933 SCPA | LOT 22 BLK C | NEWTOWN HEIGHTS | Wood Frame Vernacular | |
| 2927 Dixie Avenue | 1950 SCPA | LOT 20 BLK C | NEWTOWN HEIGHTS | Wood Frame Vernacular | |
| 2934 Dixie Avenue | 1942 SCPA | LOT 17 BLK D | NEWTOWN HEIGHTS | Wood Frame Vernacular | |
| 2943 Dixie Avenue | 1940 SCPA | LOT 16 BLK C | NEWTOWN HEIGHTS | Wood Frame Vernacular | |
| 2950 Dixie Avenue | 1941 SCPA | LOTS 13 & 15 BLK D | NEWTOWN HEIGHTS | Wood Frame Vernacular | |
| 2951 Dixie Avenue | 1926 SCPA | LOT 14 BLK C | NEWTOWN HEIGHTS | Wood Frame Vernacular | |
| 3001 Dixie Avenue | 1926 SCPA | LOT 12 BLK C | NEWTOWN HEIGHTS | Masonry Vernacular | |
| 3002 Dixie Avenue | 1946 SCPA | LOT 11 BLK D | NEWTOWN HEIGHTS | Wood Frame Vernacular | |
| 3005 Dixie Avenue | 1934 SCPA | LOT 12 BLK C | NEWTOWN HEIGHTS | Wood Frame Vernacular - covered in stucco | |
| 3007 Dixie Avenue | 1947 SCPA | LOT 10 BLK C | NEWTOWN HEIGHTS | Wood Frame Vernacular | |
| 3019 Dixie Avenue | 1952 SCPA | LOT 8 BLK C | NEWTOWN HEIGHTS | Wood Frame Vernacular - covered in stucco | |
| 3026 Dixie Avenue | 1926 SCPA | LOTS 5 & 7 BLK D | NEWTOWN HEIGHTS | Wood Frame Vernacular | |

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|-----------------------------|------------------------------|---|--|---|---------------------------------------|
| 2739 Gillespie Avenue | 1960 SCPA | LOT 16 BLK H | NEWTOWN HEIGHTS | Masonry Vernacular | |
| 2810 Gillespie Avenue | 1943 SCPA | LOT 9 BLK I | NEWTOWN HEIGHTS | Wood Frame Vernacular | |
| 2942 Gillespie Avenue | 1925 SCPA | LOT 15 BLK C | NEWTOWN HEIGHTS | Wood Frame Vernacular | |
| 2953 Gillespie Avenue | 1942 SCPA | LOT 14 BLK B | NEWTOWN HEIGHTS | Wood Frame Vernacular | |
| 2730 Links Avenue | 1949 SCPA/corner stone | LOTS 15, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21 & 22, BLK H, | NEWTOWN HEIGHTS | Masonry Vernacular - Ecclesiastical | GREATER HURST CHAPEL AME CHURCH |
| 2924 Maple Avenue | 1930 FMSF/ SCPA | LOT 19 BLK C | NEWTOWN HEIGHTS 1ST ADD | Wood Frame Vernacular | |
| 2011 Orange Avenue | 1930 SCPA | LOTS 3 & 4 BLK G | IRVINGTON HEIGHTS UNIT 2 REPLAT | Wood Frame Vernacular | |
| 2167 N. Orange Avenue | 1954 SCPA | LOTS 1 & 2 BLK C | IRVINGTON HEIGHTS REPLAT | Wood Frame Vernacular | |
| 2911 Orange Avenue | 1940 FMSF/ 1955 SCPA | LOT 11 BLK K | NEWTOWN HEIGHTS 1ST ADD | Wood Frame Vernacular | |
| 3001 Orange Avenue | 1959 SCPA | LOT 6 BLK K | NEWTOWN HEIGHTS FIRST ADD | Masonry Vernacular | |
| 2911 Orange Avenue | 1940 FMSF/ 1955 SCPA | LOT 11 BLK K | NEWTOWN HEIGHTS 1ST ADD | Wood Frame Vernacular | |
| 3001 Orange Avenue | 1959 SCPA | LOT 6 BLK K | NEWTOWN HEIGHTS FIRST ADD | Masonry Vernacular | |
| 2740 Osprey Avenue | 1960 SCPA | LOTS 11 13 & 15 BLK G | NEWTOWN HEIGHTS | Masonry Vernacular - Ecclesiastical | Osprey Avenue Church of Christ |

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| 2819 Osprey Avenue | 1935 FMSF/ 1950 SCPA | LOT 8 BLK B | NEWTOWN HEIGHTS 1ST ADD | Wood Frame Vernacular | |
| 2869 Osprey Avenue | 1958 SCPA | LOTS 3 & 4 BLK B | NEWTOWN HEIGHTS 1ST ADD | Masonry Vernacular - Ecclesiastical | First Born Church of the Living God |
| 3014 Osprey Avenue | 1925 SCPA | LOTS 9 & 11, BLK A, | NEWTOWN HEIGHTS | Wood Frame Vernacular | |
| 3021 Osprey Avenue | 1925 FMSF/ SCPA | LOT 8 BLK A | NEWTOWN HEIGHTS 1ST ADD | Wood Frame Vernacular | |
| 3027 Osprey Avenue | 1935 FMSF/ SCPA | LOT 6 BLK A | NEWTOWN HEIGHTS 1ST ADD | Wood Frame Vernacular | |
| 3028 Osprey Av | 1940 FMSF/ SCPA | LOT 5, BLK A | NEWTOWN HEIGHTS | Wood Frame Vernacular | |
| 3308 Osprey Avenue | 1925 SCPA | LOT 2 BLK A | NEWTOWN HIGHLANDS | Wood Frame Vernacular | |
| 2919 Palmedelia Avenue | 1961 SCPA | LOT 22 BLK I | NEWTOWN HEIGHTS 1ST ADD | Colonial Revival (Cape Cod) | |
| 3099 Osprey Avenue? Church | 1964 SPCA | LOTS 2 & 4 BLK A | NEWTOWN HEIGHTS 1ST ADD | Masonry Vernacular - Ecclesiastical | Shiloh Primitive Baptist Church |
| 1947 31 ST Street | 1935 FMSF/ 1950 SCPA/ 1947 corner stone | LOTS 9 THRU 15, BLK I | NEWTOWN PARK | Masonry Vernacular - Ecclesiastical | True Vine Baptist Church |
| 3130 Gillespie Avenue | 1952 SCPA | LOTS 3 & 4 BLK I | NEWTOWN PARK | Wood Frame Vernacular | |

An analysis shows that the vast majority of the identified potential historic sites are located within five plats and their additions, Newtown, Newtown Heights, Amaryllis Park, Irvington Heights and Carver Park. Through further examination it was determined that the greatest concentration of historic buildings is grouped in a swath from the southwest to the northeast built on what would have been the land with the highest elevation in the neighborhood. Collectively, this grouping of buildings provides context necessary for telling the story of Newtown's history.

ARCHITECTURE

The historic residential buildings in Newtown are built in vernacular styles with a variety of forms and subtle details. Vernacular architecture is a category of buildings that are not designed by architects but are instead based on local needs, construction materials and reflecting local traditions. The most common residential building form in Newtown is rectangular with the narrow facade along the street. This building form has either a gable roof, some with a clipped gable end or a hip roof. The rectangular building typically has a porch along the full width of the front, though many have been enclosed. Other building forms include cross gable, sometimes with an asymmetrical plan, reminiscent of a simplified Victorian plan, a simple Cape Cod form, and buildings with craftsman bungalow influences.



There are churches scattered throughout the Newtown neighborhood. Collectively, they are an important community resource. Like the residential buildings in the neighborhood, they are vernacular buildings but with some simplified details referencing formal architectural styles such as Romanesque and Art deco.



Historic Districts

One of the outcomes of the analysis of the historic sites in Newtown was the determination of two potential historic districts, one in the heart of the original Newtown plat and the other in the Newtown Heights plat predominantly on Dixie Avenue. Both of these areas have a high enough concentration of historic buildings to meet the City of Sarasota's criteria to be designated as a local historic district, if there is a will to pursue it in the neighborhood. There are benefits associated with buildings in historic districts—flexibility in the building code and the FEMA substantial improvements rule.

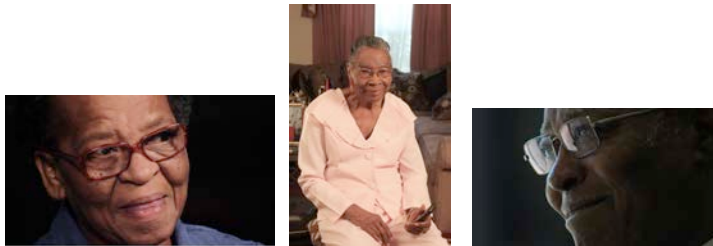
In 2002 the State of Florida released an analysis of the economic impacts associated with historic preservation within the State of Florida. This study was conducted jointly by The University of Florida, Frederic G. Levin College of Law and the Center for Urban Policy Research at Rutgers University. As a part of the study, 18 historic districts in 8 cities were compared to equivalent neighborhoods that were not historic districts. In no case, did property values in the historic districts decrease compared to the non-historic neighborhoods; and in 15 of the 18 historic districts property values increased at a higher rate than the comparable non-historic neighborhood. An update of the study was released in 2010 with similar results.

Heritage Tourism

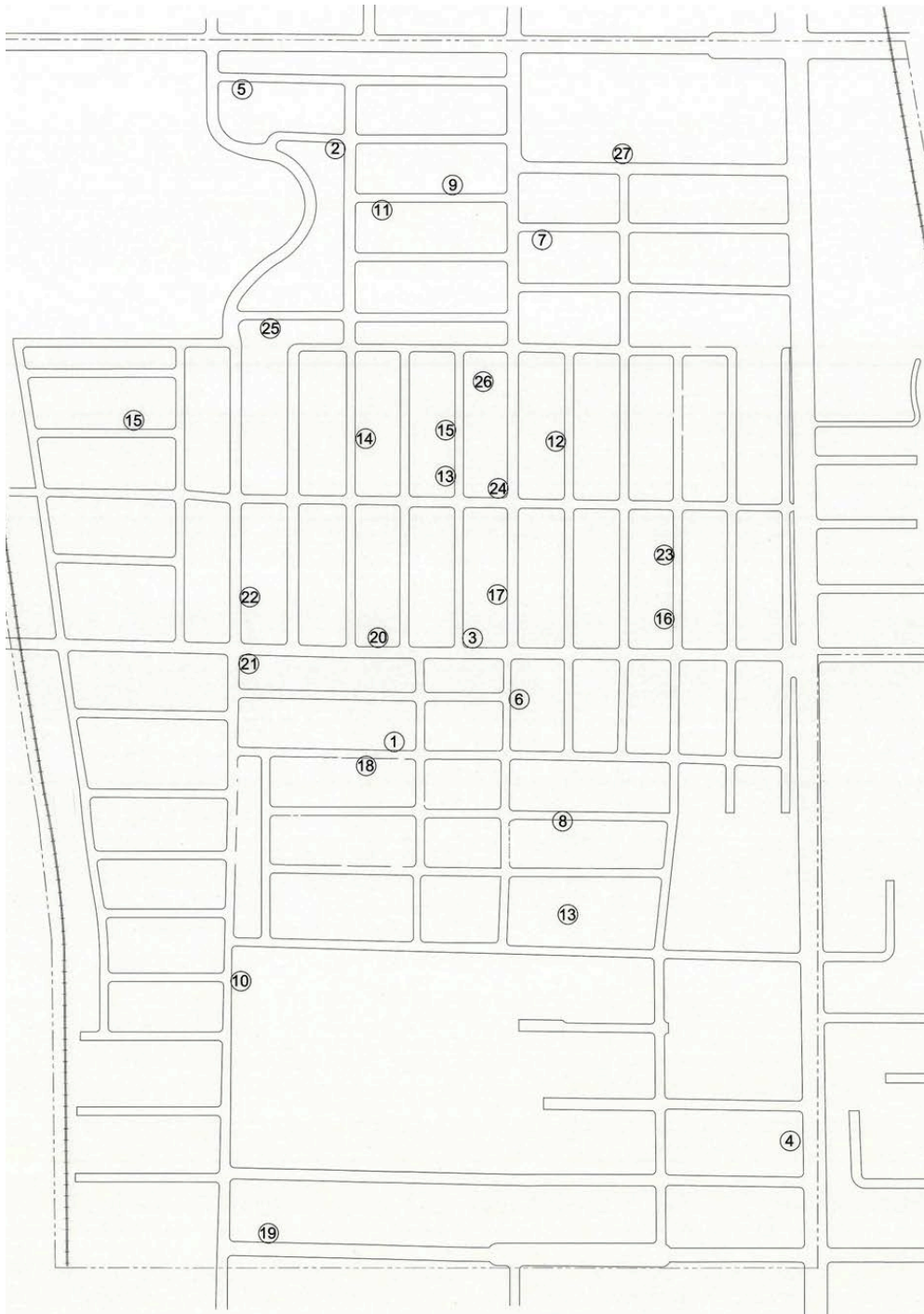
One of the long-term outcomes of the Newtown Cultural Historic District project could very well be to create a heritage tourism program. Heritage tourism is a major economic driver, both nationally and in Florida. In the 2010 update of the Economic Impacts of Historic Preservation, it was reported that heritage tourism generated \$4.13 billion in expenditures within Florida. It was determined that 46.7% of vacationers coming to Florida in 2008 participated in history activities during their stay. The Newtown heritage trail, including interpretive markers, walking tours, and an associated website could become a substantial tourism draw. The heritage trail, if successful will have a positive economic development impact on the neighborhood.

CHAPTER 18: NEWTOWN ORAL HISTORY TOUR

*PIONEERS, VISIONARIES, ENTREPRENEURS,
EDUCATORS AND CIVIC ADVOCATES*



- 1. Fredd Atkins** Fredd Atkins has been in public service for 18 years. Atkins was Sarasota's first African American mayor and led the city commission in that capacity three times. As a teenager, he was active in the community's NAACP Youth Council registering voters and teaching in the freedom school during the Booker school boycott.
- 2. Gwendolyn Atkins and Henrietta Gayles Cunningham** Two retired African American nurses treated patients in public housing, migrant camps and the Newtown neighborhood. Henrietta Gayles Cunningham, the first Black public health nurse and Gwendolyn Atkins became extended family members of their clients while working at the Sarasota County Health Department.
- 3. Shelia Atkins** Shelia Atkins grew up in the carriage house on the grounds of the Caples Mansion owned by Ralph and Ellen Caples. Her mother Delma Hammond was a cook and her father John Hammond was a butler there. Atkins has lived in Sarasota for over six decades. The paraprofessional aide, employed at Alta Vista Elementary School, married Fredd Atkins, Sarasota's first African American mayor.
- 4. Prevell Barber** Prevell Barber worked in her uncle's grocery store called Carner's located on present day Martin Luther King, Jr. Way. The retired educator completed an advanced degree at the University of Chicago, then returned to Sarasota to teach. She joined caravans of other NAACP officers and members to systematically take a "stand in the sand" to integrate Lido Beach.
- 5. Alberta Brown** Alberta Brown picked tomatoes and beans in Manatee County, then eventually worked as a domestic on Siesta Key taking care of a little girl. She became a cook and confidant of Jane Bancroft Cook, heir to the Dow Jones & Company family enterprise.
- 6. James and Yvonne Brown** James and Yvonne Brown are retired school administrators. Their teachers at Booker High School were motivators with great expectations for students. Mr. Brown graduated with honors in the top ten percent of his Florida A&M University class.
- 7. Patrick Carter** Patrick Carter is a retired NFL wide receiver and tail end. He played football for the Florida State University Seminoles and Riverview High School. The FSU Hall of Famer is thankful for the support of his grandmother and RHS coach Jim Ward.



8. Dr. Thomas Clyburn Dr. Thomas Clyburn was selected by school district administrators for a pilot program at Sarasota High School to test the effects of integration in 1963. His experiences were harrowing, but he was an exceptional student determined to persevere. Dr. Clyburn is a retired university administrator.

9. Helen Dixon Helen Dixon was one of the first students to attend Newtown Day Nursery later named the Helen R. Payne Center. She is a 1964 Booker High School alumna and the daughter of Charlie Jones, a Newtown leader who advocated at City Hall and the Sarasota County School Board for Black residents.

- 10. Walter L. Gilbert, III** Walter L. Gilbert, III is former president of the Sarasota NAACP branch. He watched change agents such as the late John Rivers and Neil Humphrey (both predecessors) transform the community, then emulated them.
- 11. Jetson Grimes** Jetson Grimes followed in the footsteps of his mentor Robert “Bud” Thomas, a Newtown community organizer. He helped Thomas plan Easter Parades, Martin Luther King, Jr. Day celebrations and golf tournaments for student scholarships, then took the reins. Grimes advocates on behalf of Black entrepreneurs on historic MLK Way.
- 12. Nathaniel Harvey** The ancestors of Nathaniel Harvey were Seminoles and his late wife Mary Lee is of African American and Cherokee ancestry. The Harvey family patriarch worked on the celery farm located in east Sarasota and lived in the Johnson Camp with other laborers. Harvey’s teachers were education icons, Emma E. Booker and Annie McElroy.
- 13. Trevor D. Harvey** Trevor D. Harvey is president of the Sarasota NAACP and area director of the Florida State Conference that oversees seven NAACP branches. He attended the Helen Payne Day Nursery as a little boy and works at State College of Florida as Student Development Advisor.
- 14. Johnny Hunter, Sr.** Johnny Hunter, Sr. publishes Tempo News. It is the only Black owned newspaper serving Sarasota and Manatee Counties. The publication began in 1960 by the late William Fred “Flick/Boo Cooter” Jackson and provides information about issues of relevance to Newtown residents, but is read countywide.
- 15. Dr. Edward E. James, II** Edward James, II has spent a lifetime in the battle for Civil Rights just as his parents and their parents did. He is producer and host of "Black Almanac" on ABC 7. The show has covered issues that impact the African American community for 38 years.
- 16. Betty Jean Johnson** Betty Jean Johnson knew that the Sarasota County Public Library was not a welcoming place for African American residents. She experienced great difficulty in checking out books. When Johnson became a librarian, she took the library to Newtown children via an outreach van. Her actions, eventually led to the construction of the North Sarasota Public Library.
- 17. Jesse Johnson** Jesse Johnson came to Sarasota in the early ‘60s to escape lynchings in Mississippi. The cement finisher was on construction crews that built the Siesta Key bridge and condominiums on Lido, Longboat and Bradenton Beach. He speaks out at meetings on behalf of construction workers.
- 18. Anthony B. Major** Following in the footsteps of his brother and uncles, Anthony B. Major played baseball in Newtown. Negro Baseball League legend John “Buck” O’Neil was a frequent visitor. Major also played in the Booker High School Band. At Hofstra University, he majored in music. A switch to theatre propelled his career in directing, producing and acting in Broadway and Off Broadway shows. Major is associate professor in the Film School at University of Central Florida.
- 19. Dr. Harriet Moore and Estella Moore-Thomas** Estella Moore-Thomas supplied Newtown residents with fresh produce and other grocery store items. She grew up in a turpentine camp and couldn’t complete high school because of family responsibilities. The entrepreneur made sure her children received a quality education. Dr. Harriet Moore, her daughter is principal of McIntosh Middle School.
- 20. Julian Ross Moreland and Margaret Mitchell Moreland** Julian Ross Moreland and Margaret Mitchell Moreland are the grandchildren of Wright and Sarah Bush. The Bush family owned a general store and Main Street and used their influence to push for equal accommodations for Black residents.
- 21. Eddie L. Rainey, Jr.** Eddie L. Rainey, Jr. helped his father build homes in Newtown when other builders would not. Rainey served his country in the U.S. Army and retired from the U.S. Postal Service.

22. John Rivers The late John Rivers is the former president of Sarasota's NAACP branch. He led the battle for Civil Rights and racial equality during the turbulent 50's, 60's, 70's and 80's when Sarasota was a hotbed of segregation.

23. Dr. Louis Robison Dr. Louis Robison is a retired school system administrator from both Sarasota and Manatee Counties. He was Chief Executive Officer of an education consulting company. Under his leadership, Riverview High School moved from a "C" to an "A" school.

24. Sheila Sanders Sheila Sanders' activism began as a third grader at Booker Elementary School. She persuaded classmates to boycott Sarasota Federal Bank because African American students were unable to tour the bank as other students could. Active in the NAACP Youth Council as a teenager, she attended school board meetings and was among the plaintiffs in a federal lawsuit against the City of Sarasota that led to Black representation on the city commission.

25. Willie Charles Shaw Willie Shaw is a retired letter carrier and pastor. Elected the District 1 Sarasota City Commissioner in 2011, he continues the proud tradition of Black pioneers by challenging injustice and speaking out for his constituents and Sarasota residents.

26. Dorothy Smith Dorothy Smith is a revered retired educator and the first African American hired to lead a Sarasota County school as principal. After graduating from Bethune Cookman College, she taught fourth graders in the USO building until Booker's two-story building was moved to Newtown. She taught there for 15 years, then in Venice during integration before becoming Southside Elementary School's principal.

27. Robert L. Taylor The Robert L. Taylor Community Complex was named after the Morehouse College graduate who held many part time jobs before working at the neighborhood recreation center. Children of all ages gathered there to do homework and play after school and summers. Robert Taylor was sometimes a one-man operation - center manager, program planner, swimming instructor and he handled pool maintenance.

CHAPTER 19: RECOMMENDATIONS

Throughout the country, communities are rediscovering the benefit of showcasing and leveraging local history. The City of St. Petersburg's 22nd Street Corridor, the Cortez fishing village in Bradenton, the Venice Train Depot, Fort Pierce's Jetty Park, the Zora Neale Hurston Dust Tracks Heritage Trail and the Highwaymen Heritage Trail; also the historic districts in Boca Grande and Palmetto provide shining examples of what happens when residents embrace, highlight and promote history and heritage. Visitors hungry for information about how the communities evolved are attracted to historic locales. As a result, the heritage trails have transformed neighborhoods.

Over a six-month period, the Newtown Conservation Historic District team with the support of a City of Sarasota-appointed Task Force has identified historic treasures – over 200 primary and secondary source documents about the African American community, 150 historic structures and conservation zones in residential neighborhoods. Over 40 oral history interviews support the information found in books, archival photographs, and recordings.

Preservation and interpretation of the community's rich history are needed and the information must be shared with the public through the development of a heritage interpretive trail. Creating a repository, for instance a website that contains Newtown's history and stories about its pioneers will spark pride in the past, confidence about the future and respect for the contributions of Black trailblazers.

Another byproduct of promoting Newtown's historic resources is a transformation of the community. Laurel and Gillespie Park neighbors promoted their assets. A map and walking tour were created. As a result, a transformation occurred. Residents began improving their properties block by block. A movement began and the value of real estate increased. Properties are now in demand.

Often misunderstood and unfairly maligned, Newtown's assets have been underutilized. Recasting its image and brand through historic preservation is a key element in economic stimulation and revitalization. Focusing on historic assets will shatter misconceptions and the racial divide that persists in the community. According to Derek Kilborn, a City of St. Petersburg urban planner, "the historic markers and heritage trails are revitalizing the Black community's business district and neighborhoods, changing its landscape, attracting visitors, and triggering economic development."

City of Fort Pierce Urban Redevelopment Manager Libby Woodruff agrees. Marker panels were installed highlighting stories about The Highwaymen artists. An official ribbon cutting celebration and festival were held February 20, 2016.

As part of the Newtown Conservation Historic District project final report, the NCHD team is proposing recommendations that will rebrand the community, spark economic development and increase investment opportunities. The City of Sarasota has outlined deliverables for Phase II of the project which include a website, the design and installation of historic markers and the creation of a brochure. The team recommends

adding to the list the development of a mobile app and QR codes that are easily accessible to younger audiences.

Public and private partnerships to fund multiple phases of the NCHD project are envisioned and include marketing and branding strategies; and the preservation of historic structures that will be showcased to Sarasota residents and tourists interested in African American history.

The specific recommendations for future activities associated with the NCHD project include (but are not limited to) the following:

Main Street America

A new movement began in the 60's. Developers constructed shopping and strip malls for customers that led to the decline of downtown business districts. Shoppers embraced the concept of large indoor shopping venues and stopped patronizing shops on main streets in towns. The mall experience was perceived as easier and better because stores were under one roof, even though long treks from parking lots ensued, especially during holidays.

Downtown shopping decreased because small shop owners couldn't keep up with how to effectively market their products and services. Their methods were no match for mall managers who promoted sales and provided advice about the design of storefronts. In 1977, concerned about continuing threats to traditional commercial architecture in economically declining downtowns across America, the National Trust for Historic Preservation launched the Main Street Project. It began as a three-year demonstration initiative to study the reasons so many downtowns were dying, identify the factors affecting the health of the business corridors, and develop a comprehensive revitalization strategy to save historic commercial buildings and jumpstart economic revitalization. Three communities were chosen as models. The architectural and community profiles were analyzed and the information gleaned was the foundation by which design improvements and financial stimulation strategies were developed. A full-time main street program manager was hired for the three communities through a grant. The managers were change agents. They advocated for the downtown; coordinated project activities; and convinced merchants, property owners, and city officials to earmark funds toward the initiative that would create long-term benefits. The messages that emerged about revitalization during the three-year pilot project were clear. To produce success, communities must have in place:

- A strong public-private partnership
- A dedicated community-based organization
- A full-time local program manager
- A commitment to good design and quality promotional programs
- A coordinated, incremental process

Business improved in all three downtowns by showing the direct connection between historic preservation; also economic and community revitalization. Shop owners supported the program. They were taught how to market their wares like a mall and each storeowner contributed money toward the endeavor.

As a result of the project's success, the original pilot project was replicated. Some changes were made to the National Trust's relationship with communities. Assistance to communities was provided through state Main Street programs, each headed by a state coordinator. The Main Street program has expanded exponentially.

From 1980 to 2002, Main Street communities saw a cumulative net reinvestment of \$17 billion, with an average reinvestment of \$9.5 million in each community. More than 57,000 net new businesses and 231,000 net new jobs have been created. The Main Street program became the most cost efficient economic development program in the country and leads in preservation-based commercial district revitalization.

Land-use planners, economic development officials, chamber of commerce executives, local and state governments, and others saw the advantage of revitalizing their communities' existing resources and witnessed the correlation between historic preservation and economic development.

In 2013, the National Main Street Center was launched and advances the preservation-based revitalization of commercial districts throughout the country (www.preservationnation.org). Last year, in 2015, the Center launched a new program brand, "Main Street America."

The Martin Luther King, Jr. business corridor may be a good fit for a Main Street program. The business corridor needs the structure provided by Main Street America and can benefit tremendously by aligning with the National Main Street Center to achieve its objective of revitalization through preservation. The City of Venice is a good example of a successful Main Street program.

Renovation of Historic Properties

The renovation of historic properties in Newtown can be accomplished by a special allocation of Community Development Block Grants (CDBG) or other affordable housing rehabilitation funding for homeowners and owners of commercial property in the area. Expenditures can be used to make interior and exterior improvements, bring the structures up to code to stabilize the buildings, repair electricity and install new plumbing features.

Foundation grants, potentially combined with Tax Incremental Financing (TIF) would complete the work to properly preserve building exteriors. Neighborhood windshield surveys show that extensive work is needed such as painting and the repair of damaged, rotted siding. Historic windows must also be repaired instead of replaced. The installation of storm shutters and strengthening roofs to protect properties from damage associated with weather events must be included. Insulating the homes would improve energy efficiency. Structure considerations including strapping would make the buildings resistant to high winds. Landscaping would improve the exterior as well.

In order to qualify for special funding, residences must be historically designated, then follow the criteria in the City of Sarasota ordinance for how to make historic building improvements.

The NCHD team recommends that foundation/TIF funding be structured as forgiveness loans to homeowners. If residents meet a set of standards for 10 years, for instance by properly maintaining their property, 10% each year would be forgiven of the loan. After 10 years, the loan would be completely forgiven.

A large number of Newtown properties are owned by absentee investors. The investors may be apt to participate because doing so increases the value of their property. Data shows that property values in historic districts increase at higher rates than homes that are not located in such districts. The neighborhoods are more stable and homeowners are more apt to maintain their properties and invest in them because of the set standards.

Refine South Boundary of Newtown

Throughout the process of the NCHD project, the boundaries of Newtown, as determined by the City of Sarasota, were reviewed and early on, discussed with residents during initial community meetings. However, in later meetings, discussions ensued regarding the south boundary along 17th Street. Though there was general agreement that this boundary is not accurate, there was no consensus of what the southern boundary should be. Additional research and community input is needed to make a final determination of the south boundary.

Historic District Designation

Our recommendation is to explore creating two historic districts by gauging the interest of property owners. The City of Sarasota code requires majority owner consent to begin designation proceedings. The process cannot be forced on residents nor is one hundred percent support necessary. City of Sarasota officials or the Newtown Redevelopment Office must educate residents and promote the benefits of the designation to homeowners.

In 2001, Overtown owners reached a consensus to seek the historic district designation with consent of a majority of property owners. Historic research was completed. A map was drawn and meetings were held to update the community. A marketing and rebranding effort changed its name to the Rosemary district. As a result of a 20-year effort, the neighborhood improved and new commercial enterprises opened that provide jobs to local residents. The community, once considered blighted is a desirable place to live. Large tracts of land now are the location of housing and commercial construction projects.

A National Register historic district designation provides no local level of protection from demolition. A local designation by the City of Sarasota provides a moderate level of protection. The NCHD team recommends pursuing the submission of two local historic district designations concurrently.

The NCHD team's responsibility is not to design the program or develop details, however in a subsequent phase, team members can assist in developing historic preservation design guidelines that work within the parameters of the City of Sarasota's historic preservation ordinance.

Our role is to provide recommendations to explore the program's development. The team can provide suggestions and advice about how to prioritize the homes that qualify for

renovation first, but it is not a responsibility to list the structures. Homeowners with the guidance of the NCHD Task Force are best to lead the effort.

Website Development

The NCHD website will open communication among present and former Sarasota residents, newcomers, visitors and a worldwide audience. It will raise awareness about community issues and explore solutions. The NCHD history project has created lively dialogue on social media sites. Newtown’s pioneers of the early days, the Civil Rights era and school integration have much to teach Sarasota stakeholders. The website will help rebrand the community’s identity. As pride in identity increases, then improvements in safety, the environment, community character and value follows.

The website will contain the NCHD research report, historical content matched with photography, historic maps, a virtual walking tour, oral history interviews, content contained on the historic markers, a “reading room” bibliography, a news center, “contact us” page, biographies of the research team, volunteer researchers and contributors; also links to the NCHD Facebook, Twitter and YouTube pages. Visitors can also read contemporary articles about Newtown.

On January 26, 2016, the Board of Sarasota County Commissioners granted final approval for the development of a website. A \$10,000 grant will pay for its creation. The consultant Vickie Oldham and the North Sarasota Community Organization submitted the proposal.

To date, the Collaboratory at Ringling College of Art and Design was selected as the preferred vendor to design the website. Emerging and creative young leaders are putting their skills to work in a professional setting to create an innovative website design. Features of the website will include (but are not limited to) content, design, maintenance, programs and plug-ins, analytics, social media links and mobile responsiveness. The budget does not cover the cost for a project director.

The website’s timeline is as follows:

- Project Launch: Organization and creation of the content from Phase I research report
- Design and develop mock-up of website; creation and approval of mock-ups
- Review of content, draft, mock-ups
- Edits, additions and changes. Project director will review and request changes
- Focus group demonstration, beta test, feedback
- Project completion

The launch of the website will be marketed through a strategic, integrated marketing plan. The plan includes goals and objectives, the target audience, the marketing message and specific steps to reach Newtown stakeholders and a worldwide audience.

A major step in marketing the site is the development and distribution of a press release about the official product launch to local, statewide and regional media; churches, social studies teachers at schools, history faculty at higher education institutions, librarians, history center administrators, local Greek organizations, civic groups, neighborhood associations, the legislative delegation, the state and local Chamber of Commerce, and Visitors Bureaus.

Development and Installation of Historic Markers

The marker process includes the following:

- Preparation of the content for 15 markers initially
- Coordination of photography, written content and visual elements with a graphic artist
- Meetings with City of Sarasota staff about marker locations, permitting, placement and installation
- NCHD Task Force feedback
- Property owner and neighborhood association meetings about marker locations
- Marketing, public relations for updates
- Designing, printing, publishing brochures
- Event planning for unveiling and ribbon cutting

Placement of Historic Trail Markers

Marker locations will be designated after community feedback and direction from the NCHD Task Force, the NCHD team and City of Sarasota officials. A recommendation list is as follows:

Settlement areas (conservation zones) and original development areas

- Newtown Subdivision; 1914, Orange & Osprey / 22nd St. & 24th St.
- Newtown Subdivision Additions; 1914 – 1916, Orange & Osprey / 22nd St. & MLK Jr. Way
- Irvington Heights Subdivision; 1925, approx. Leon Ave. & 23rd St.
- Carver Park Subdivision; 1926, Leon Ave. & 25th St.
- Newtown Heights Subdivision; 1926, Washington Blvd. & Osprey Ave. / MLK Jr. Way & 31st St.

Potential Historic Districts

- Newtown Subdivision and Additions; 1914-1916.
 - The 6 sq. block area contains 30 historic structures
Dixie Avenue in the Newtown Heights Subdivision; ca. 1926
 - The 4 sq. block area contains 15 historic resources (several residences are clustered together)

Individual Historic Properties

- ✓ Five oldest churches within the study area
- ✓ The Sarasota Lodge of Free and Accepted Masons #314
- ✓ 1723 Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Way; 1920
- ✓ 1909 Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Way; 1956
- ✓ 1846 Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Way; 1936
- ✓ 1425 8th Street; 1926
- ✓ Wright Bush House
- ✓ Ace Theatre
- ✓ Leonard Reid House
- ✓ Colson Hotel
- ✓ Miss Suzie Social Club
- ✓ Emma E. Booker Schools

Oral History Interviews

Subsequent phases of the NCHD project must include ongoing oral history interviews with trailblazers and trendsetters in Sarasota's African American community, as well as residents in the majority community. There are 42 oral history interviews now on videotape. The NCHD team was required to deliver 22 transcripts and DVDs. In reports over a six-month period, 25 interviews and transcripts were submitted to the City of Sarasota. The remaining interviews must be dubbed to DVDs and transcribed. During a December, 2015 City Commission meeting, Mayor Willie Shaw familiarized the audience with a litany of pioneers' names that should be interviewed. Additional pioneers and emerging leaders whose stories should be documented are:

Dubose Family (the family matriarch, Keith, Ernie)

Mrs. James West

Rev. Sellers

Rev. Vincent Smith, III

Hank Battie

Minnie Bryant

Delores Lumpkin

Minnie Coleman

Lee & Helen Clark

Kenneth Waters (reared on William & Marie Selby's property)

Alma Johnson

Doris Jones

BB Maulsby

Maude (lives next to Solomon's Grocery)

Michael Suarez

Dominic Harris

Lucias Bonner

Henry Porter

Jerry Swartz

Willie B. Rogers

Richard Campbell
 Dorothy Clark
 Dr. Harry O. Specht (and his colleagues Drs. Morton and King)
 Juanita Cherry
 Rev. Brown Family / Willie B. Woodard (lived in Hyde Park community near South Gate)
 Jerome Stephens Family
 Vegas Brown
 Leroy Butler
 Raven Coakley
 Attorney Rikiya Thomas
 Sam Shields
 Shoneji Robison
 Tim Jenkins
 James Evans
 Choirs' Union founder
 Florence Ford
 Mary Jolly
 Danny Redden
 Lawrence Major
 Mimi McAdoo
 Elvira Gary

The NCHD Task Force must provide direction to the consultant about whether the stories of African American newcomers who presently serve the community should be documented. The work of Sarasota City Commissioner Shelli Eddie, ASALH president Mark Jackson, Bethlehem Baptist Church historian Henry Richardson and others are impactful.

Additional Projects

Grant funding and public/private partnerships to complete future phases and projects of the Newtown Conservation Historic District initiative are currently under review. The NCHD team and Task Force will work together to prioritize the projects that include but are not limited to:

- Education
 - ✓ Integrate, align NCHD research into Florida social studies standards
 - ✓ Teacher training workshops
- Publications about the latest research
- Formalize educational collaborations with higher education institutions: Ringling College of Art and Design, New College, USF-Manatee and State College of Florida to create an education pipeline (which may include a branch campus for prospective students who live in Newtown)

- Market Newtown real estate to churches, investors who intentionally and strategically rebuild communities in need
- Photography exhibition (Jenny Acheson, Kacey Troupe, Stephen Katzman, Brad McCourtney)
- 2nd edition NCHD Research Report (with Colby College, New College, FAMU, FVSU)
- Coordinate opening of Sarasota Memorial Hospital's satellite office in 2017 with a public presentation about Newtown's Medical History
- Produce trailer for Sarasota Film Festival, 2016
- National Register application for potential historic districts
- Replace Emma E. Booker's headstone at Pinellas County cemetery
- Book/s
- Walking/Trolley Tours
- Bronze statues (i.e. Emma E. Booker, Neil Humphrey, John Rivers) or bronze busts
- Develop Think Tank of scholars (many born in Newtown) to help solve community issues (i.e. education)
- Leadership Academy to train emerging Newtown leaders
- Feature length documentary
- Theatrical play, reenactment
- Multi-media theatrical presentation
- Annual magazine featuring Newtown residents' accomplishments
- Monthly E-Newsletter via Constant Contact or Mail Chimp
- Podcasts
- Social media
 - ✓ Create hashtag for use consistently
 - ✓ Twitter
 - ✓ LinkedIn
 - ✓ YouTube
 - ✓ Google+
 - ✓ Instagram
 - ✓ Snapchat
 - ✓ Periscope to broadcast live stream of opening event of the historic markers
- Cultural Resource Center expansion
- African American Museum and Cultural Arts Center
- Colson Hotel preservation/Artists Loft
- Continual branding, messaging, marketing
- Panel discussion and lecture series (featuring oral history interviewees)
 - ✓ Neighborhood associations
 - ✓ School programs

- ✓ Historic preservation organizations
- ✓ Architectural organizations
- ✓ Civic and social groups

POTENTIAL FUNDING SOURCES

Potential funding partners include the Selby Foundation, Tourist Development Tax, City of Sarasota Neighborhood grant (also Demolition Funds), the Community Foundation, Gulf Coast Community Foundation, the Patterson Foundation, Bank of America Neighborhood Preservation grant, the National Park Service, and the U.S. Department of the Interior through a grant administered by the Bureau of Historic Preservation, Division of Historical Resources and Cultural Resources, Florida Department of State and the National Endowment for Humanities.

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APPENDIX

A White Paper 2009, SARASOTA'S NEWTOWN HEALTHCARE ICONOCLASM ©:

*An Under-served and Ill-served African American Community Building Capacity To
Meet their Basic Healthcare and Wellness Needs*

And

*A Challenge To Sarasota County Health Department's, "Communities Putting
Prevention To Work", Grant Application Process*

by

James E. McCloud, President/CEO
Genesis Health Services, Inc.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The first institutional healthcare provider in Sarasota, Florida was the racially segregated Sarasota Hospital, constructed in 1925. This hospital grew to be the present Sarasota Memorial Healthcare System. The current continuum of healthcare services in Sarasota is both broad and deep. There are numerous private providers, community clinics, Health Department sites, outreach/home health workers, elderly care services, disability support organizations and services, as well as research and teaching facilities. Since the appearance of Sarasota Hospital in 1925, the predominantly African American Newtown Community of Sarasota has been neglected, discriminated against, and ill-served by the political, funding, and healthcare establishment of Sarasota County. This statement is evidenced by (1) the disparity in death and disease adversely experienced by the residents living in the zip code encompassing this African American community of over 8000 persons (2) the dearth of indigenous health and wellness providers in Newtown (3) the inadequacy of funding from government and private or community foundations when compared to non-Newtown agencies receiving funding to provide services in Newtown.

Though African Americans comprise 5% of the population of Sarasota, they comprise over 50% of annual HIV infections, have a fetal death rate exceeding that of whites and 5-8 times as many African Americans in Sarasota are diabetic as compared to Whites. More statistics and epidemiological data can be observed at http://www.genesishealthclinic.org/newtown_healthcare_access_study_summar_and_recommendations.pdf The 2008, Newtown Healthcare Access Study was the first empirical community healthcare- related assessment exclusively studying Newtown

residents. A recent SCOPE (Sarasota County Openly Plans for Excellence) study, Race and Cultural Relations Report 2008, showed that 67% of Sarasota County's White population viewed their community as a "Healthy" or "Very Healthy" place to live. Only 32% of African Americans felt that way.

http://www.scopexcel.org/scope_studies/race_cultural_relations/pdf_downloads/race_and_cultural_relations_final_report.pdf

In the last 85 years, there has only been approximately a dozen years when the Newtown community had minority private practice healthcare providers (partially 1950's - 1960's). The Jim Crow character of Sarasota prior to the Civil Rights Act of 1964 ironically enabled this aberration. The end of legal segregation and the distribution of Great Society funding (medicaid, medicare) of the 60's made Newtown a viable market for exploitation. The availability of these "social dollars" is the attraction that keeps the offspring of the formerly segregated institutions in Sarasota as the main healthcare providers to Newtown residents. Adding insult to injury, the mantra of Sarasota's funding community to Newtown healthcare initiatives is, "you are a duplication of services and thus not eligible for our support". Due to Newtown's health disparities, efforts rightly should be triplicated. Further, due to Sarasota's segregated healthcare past, any organization or institution other than the originally segregated ones (Sarasota Hospital and Health Department), would be duplicative. Maintaining the "duplication of services" reasoning to not support Newtown's indigenous and start-up healthcare initiatives continues the residue of Sarasota's shameful bigotry.

Another continuation of an outdated and discriminatory practice is the current lack of inclusion of Newtown residents and providers at the planning table. Healthcare delivery is most often simply "provided" to Newtown in any way that outside organizations see fit. The most recent example of this practice was the Center for Disease Control and Prevention grant to fund nutrition and obesity initiatives written by the Sarasota County Health Department. Newtown's health and wellness community planning bodies were not invited to participate in the selection process of choosing providers to serve Newtown. There was only an email blast and a perfunctory community-wide meeting to give a veneer of inclusiveness without the actual act of effectively collaborating.

The most callous and odious characteristic of Newtown's healthcare continuum is that it is replete with outside providers that obtain funding and other resources by citing Newtown's vast disparity in deaths and diseases in numerous categories, i.e, hypertension, breast cancer, diabetes, HIV/AIDS, colon cancer, etc. Yet, the people living and dying in Newtown are refused support to build capacity within their institutions to assist themselves in collaboration and partnership with others. Teaching how to fish, rather than being given fish, should be the apt metaphor for Newtown's healthcare needs.

Beginning with Sarasota's State and Federal government-funded healthcare institutions; analyses, policy documents, and other observations or studies should be forwarded to appropriate legislators requesting modifications in policies and procedures by government-funded providers and vendors that perpetuate Newtown's marginalization, under-service, and health disparities. Another area of great concern is our local foundations. Many entice donors to bequeath funds that are advertised to benefit the Sarasota community. When it comes to healthcare dollars, minority agencies in Newtown are systemically overlooked. Again, the culture is to have others serve Newtown and not encourage capacity-building of indigenous organizations. The formal reports should be accompanied by phone calls, visits, and emails, to further inform and demonstrate to legislators and funders the evidence of historical healthcare discrimination and its effects in Newtown.

Sarasota's history as it relates to race discrimination is better than some, worse than others. After all, it took a voter referendum in Alabama in 2000 to repeal that state's anti-interracial marriage law. And even then, 40 percent of the voters backed the law! (my emphasis) <http://www.huffingtonpost.com/earl-ofari-hutchinson/jim-crow-laws-still-on-ma-b-28411.html> Sarasota's custom and practice of systemically excluding Newtown calls for healthcare iconoclasts. Much progress has been made in this area by many agencies and individuals that are on the front lines of Newtown's healthcare battles. These iconoclasts have always been, and continue to be essential to Newtown's access to healthcare.

PREFACE

In late October , 2009, the Sarasota County Health Department was notified by the Florida Department of Health that it had been nominated to submit an application for the CDC's Putting Prevention to Work Community Grant initiative. Though large metropolitan areas could apply independently, Sarasota County was one of just two small counties in the State invited to apply for funding to address obesity. If fully funded, more than \$4 million would be made available over a period of two years, to support intensive community approaches to achieve:

- Increased Physical Activity
- Improved Nutrition
- Decreased Overweight/Obesity

The application's total budget proposal of \$4.7 million included \$0 to be contracted with any indigenous Community-Based Organization (CBO) or Faith-Based Organization within the Newtown community. To better understand how the CBO's and FBO's serving the community suffering the greatest disparities in death and diseases resulting from overweight/obesity could be excluded from the list of contracted vendors, it is necessary to look for the answer in an historical context.

NEWTOWN HEALTHCARE ACCESS 1925- 1964

The city of Sarasota with a population of 52,500 is located in Sarasota County on the Gulf of Mexico in Southwestern Florida between the Tampa/St. Petersburg metro area to the north and the Ft. Myers metro area to the south. Newtown is an historic African American community in the incorporated City of Sarasota with a population of 8500 (census 2000). In 2000, in the unincorporated Sarasota County, non-Latino White persons made up 87% of the population. African Americans and Latino's comprised 4.5 % and 7 %, respectively.

During the early 20th century, Jim Crow healthcare was established in Sarasota as it was throughout Florida and the other 10 southern States. Sarasota's African American population was prohibited by custom or law from receiving services at Sarasota Hospital upon its completion in 1925. This prohibition did not change when the hospital was turned over to the City of Sarasota in 1927 and renamed the Sarasota Municipal Hospital. Nor did the Legislative Enabling Act creating a special hospital district in 1949 result in African Americans receiving equal services at the hospital. On the contrary, African Americans received services within a barracks building on hospital grounds that had been relocated from the US Army Air Base in north Sarasota County. Even though surgeries and other treatment occurred in the Barracks, it was rudimentary compared with available services and amenities in the main building in 1949, i.e., a modern surgical suite, enlarged garage, a kitchen and dining room, a new concrete block wing and an air-conditioning unit. Sarasota Municipal Hospital changed its name to Sarasota Memorial Hospital in 1954 to honor the veterans of both world wars, but did not change its discriminatory policies. In the 1940's, Georgie Thomas, LPN, was the first African American nurse employed by Sarasota Municipal Hospital. She was followed by Nurse Timmons, RN and Nurse Nothage, RN. It wasn't until 1957 that the first African American physician would be hired or given privileges at the hospital. In the 1950's all African American patients were treated in only one wing of the hospital, known as 1-North. 1950 also saw the birth of Venice Hospital in south Sarasota County. The opening of this hospital provided no relief to Newtown's residents as it too was "whites only".

In 1957, John W. Chenault, MD, moved to Sarasota from his post as Administrator of Florida A&M University Hospital in Tallahassee. He had the first African American medical office in Newtown and was the first African American given privileges at Sarasota Memorial Hospital. He was a diplomate of the American Board of Orthopedic Surgery. His private practice was located on 27th Street (MLK Jr. Way) near Osprey Avenue. He was a community leader and created great controversy when he purchased a home in the segregated Whitfield Estates subdivision. Mrs. Elizabeth Moore, a white realtor lost her business and was forced from town for selling the Chenaults her home. There was national attention and controversy drawn to Sarasota upon the murder-suicide deaths of Dr. Chenault and his wife on March 18, 1965. See http://books.google.com/books?id=kMADAAAAMBAJ&pg=PA29&lpg=PA29&dq=dr.chenault+sarasota+suicide&source=bl&ots=OOh0X15ns8&sig=WCG3s6ZuKz6p_jn8d3SYyjUwr94&hl=en&ei=TekrS-

[_UGIy1tgfqtoCQCQ&sa=X&oi=book_result&ct=result&resnum=1&ved=0CAgQ6AEwAA#v=onepage&q=dr.chenault%20sarasota%20suicide&f=false](#)

Also located on 27th Street during this period was Dr. McAllister, DDS, Newtown's first dentist. Humphrey's Drug Store completed the health care provider components in Newtown.

In the 1940's, 50's, and 60's, providing medical care amidst such segregation required innovation, courage, and persistent fortitude by healthcare providers serving Newtown residents. Obstetrical services were provided by African American midwives. The most noted was Elnora Brooks, known as Madam Brooks. Primary or urgent care was provided by two White physicians, Dr. Weil King (unlicensed) and Dr. Patterson (first name unavailable), conducting segregated practices with separate waiting rooms and entrances for African American and White patients. These two medical offices were located outside Newtown. The Sarasota Health Department provided healthcare (including treatment of communicable diseases and vaccinations) to Newtown residents through visiting Public Health Nurses. It [Sarasota Health Department] too, was strictly "whites only" during the Jim Crow period. It did not serve African Americans except through the visiting Public Health Nurses. Henrietta Gayles, RN and Nurse Nothage, RN, mentioned above, were the first African American Public Health Nurses hired by the Sarasota Health Department in the 1950's to serve the African American community. Sarasota's neighboring county to the north, Manatee County, had a similar segregated system with one "whites only" hospital (the author's mother, Josephine McCloud RN, was the first African American nurse to be employed by the hospital as an emergency room nurse). Segregated doctor offices were typical of outpatient care. The Manatee Health Department was also a "whites only" Health Department with one Public Health Nurse (Ophelia Wright, RN, the author's godmother) to serve the County's African American population.

Newtown residents unable to afford standard medical services or hospital care, relied upon home remedies. Many others sought miraculous healing at their Church. Some residents sought out other-worldly solutions such as Root Men and Root Women (so called because of their sometimes use of herbs, roots, and other organics in healing potions). Because of their purported abilities to cast spells and curses, remove spells and curses, and their participation in occult practices, many residents avoided root practitioners. Newtown true believers traveled as far as Ocala, FL and Thomasville, GA to consult with the most powerful Root Men.

St. Petersburg and Tampa completes the continuum

Prior to the Barracks being used in the late 1940's, African Americans had to travel to the Mercy Hospital in St. Petersburg. Built in 1923 as the primary care facility for the city's African Americans it continued operations until 1966 and played a significant role in the community. Mercy Hospital is the oldest surviving hospital building in St. Petersburg.

After moving to St. Petersburg in 1924, James Ponder, MD, became St. Petersburg's

first African-American physician in 1926. Practicing at Mercy he was an active member of the Pinellas County Medical Society, was recognized as a role model to those who wanted to become doctors and was one of the most influential community leaders of the period.

Mercy Hospital was the site of protests demanding the desegregation of the City's hospital facilities during the Civil Rights movements of the 1960's. Also a rising city population had led to overcrowding at both Mound Park (white) and Mercy Hospitals (black). Full funding for the operation of two state certified city hospitals became too much by the mid 60's and Mercy was closed in 1966 as Mound Park (now Bayfront Medical Center) then became more fully integrated and the lone city funded hospital. The Mercy building was then used for other things.

In 2004, after renovations and large addition to the old Mercy Hospital it became home to the Johnnie Ruth Clarke Health Center. See

<http://www.discover22ndst.com/1History.htm>

In 1950, the Lily White Hospital began operations in Tampa. Oxymoronically, the Lily White Hospital was an African American-owned and staffed non-profit hospital. There was an affiliation with the Lily White Lodge, an African-American fraternal organization that provides burial benefits and health care. The Lily White Hospital, at the time, was the only African American-owned hospital in the State of Florida. It was distinguished from Mercy Hospital in St. Petersburg by the fact that Mercy was city funded and operated. The Lily White Hospital was the preferred hospital of Sarasota's African American Community even though it was much farther away. Neither the Lily White Hospital, nor the Mercy Hospital were convenient for Newtown residents' emergency care however.

NEWTOWN HEALTHCARE ACCESS 1965- 2009

The Civil Rights Act of 1964 outlawed discriminatory policies and practices in healthcare and all other public accommodations and services based on race. Sarasota evidently "didn't get the memo". As late as 1967, the City of Sarasota passed an ordinance against interracial beaches stating that "Whenever members of two or more...races shall...be upon any public...bathing beach within the corporate limits of the City of Sarasota, it shall be the duty of the Chief of police or other officer...in charge of the public forces of the City...with the assistance of such police forces, to clear the area involved of all members of all races present."

Sarasota County Health Department

To the credit of the Sarasota Health Department, it dropped its "whites only" policy before many local government institutions. For example, it took Federal court Orders to racially integrate Sarasota's classrooms and City Commission. The Sarasota Health Department quickly became the major primary care provider for the vast majority of Newtown's residents during the 1960's and 70's. The 70's and early 80's saw a Migrant Health Clinic located on MLK, Jr. Way that was operated by

the Health Department that treated infants only. Circa 1984, the Migrant Health Clinic was closed and relocated to the Schoenbaum Center where the new Health Department's Pediatric Clinic was opened.

The main Health Department campus recently expanded into new facilities with increased treatment, education, and community meeting space in the downtown area of the City of Sarasota. Prior to this expansion, in the late 1990's, the Health Department opened new facilities in south Sarasota near Taylor Ranch. South Sarasota services were further expanded into North Port with the designation of a Federally Qualified Clinic Site operated by the Sarasota County Health Department. North Port also received an Emergency Care facility operated by Sarasota Memorial Hospital in 2009.

Sarasota Memorial Healthcare System

The early 90's saw a fundamentally new model of service provision for primary care to Newtown residents. First, Sarasota Memorial Hospital started a Community Medical Clinic on the first floor of their hospital that treated any uninsured and impoverished Sarasota County resident, including those needing medical specialty care. The second change was the Health Department's cessation of the Public Health Nurse home visit services in 1995. On its face, these changes resulted in increased medical services available for Newtown residents. But by 1995, access to primary medical care in the County was driven by whether one had insurance. Newtown residents, who historically experienced access to care problems, now were further from access due to the elimination of significant services within their community and the increased numbers of other uninsured County residents seeking the same finite resources serving the uninsured. The elimination of the Public Health Nurses and the relocation of primary care outside Newtown resulted in a perpetuation of the culture of residents resorting to episodic care, usually at the hospital's emergency room. Sarasota Memorial's Community Medical Clinic was transformed from a primary care clinic to a specialty care clinic in 2006.

Manatee County Rural Health Services, Inc.

In response to the entrenched health disparities existing in the Newtown community, Sarasota Memorial Health Care System received a three-year "Closing The Gap" grant through the Florida Department of Health that ended in 2000. The hospital started a Once-A-Week Primary Care Clinic at the Goodwill site on Martin Luther King, Jr. Way in January of 2001. The clinic grew to be the most successful medical initiative ever undertaken in Newtown. Unfortunately, it only survived four months. In May of the same year, it was replaced and relocated by a collaboration between the hospital and Manatee County Rural Health Services, Inc., a Federally Qualified Medical Clinic. This clinic was relocated outside Newtown in 2009. The Manatee County Rural Health Clinic largely serves the most

impoverished Sarasota residents, as well as a significant number of the County's Latino residents. The clinic provides free and sliding-scale fee services that include; pharmaceutical, primary care, and OB/GYN. The staff is often present at community health fairs and health information events.

Genesis Health Services, Inc.

In 2001, Genesis Health Services, Inc., began primary medical, dental, and mental health services in Newtown. Genesis is a non-profit agency that uses a volunteer health care provider model to provide reduced-fee services. Sarasota Memorial Health Care System supports the model by providing free laboratory, specialty, and radiology services. The Health Department funds Genesis' HIV/AIDS outreach and testing services. The very low patient fees are the almost sole source of clinic support. These fees, however, present a barrier for many Newtown residents, who live in the most impoverished community in Sarasota (See US Census data 2000). The inability of the clinic to provide free or lower reduced fees results in many Newtown residents being unable to access the facility. In the context of the many healthcare delivery facilities, programs, and initiatives in Sarasota over the past ten years- Sarasota's planning, funding, and government support for Newtown's Genesis clinic should be looked upon as abysmal.

PUTTING PREVENTION TO WORK GRANT

The CDC's Prevention and Wellness- Communities Putting Prevention To Work (CPPW) grant is the application that the Sarasota County Health Department submitted for funding deadline 12/1/09. <http://apply07.grants.gov/apply/UpdateOffer?id=14027> . This grant is published under the CDC's Division of Nutrition and Physical Activity and Obesity and grew out of that Division's Nutrition, Physical Activity and Obesity Prevention Partnership Agreement grants. That *"program's focus is on policy and environmental change initiatives directed towards increasing physical activity; consumption of fruits and vegetables; breastfeeding initiation, duration, and exclusivity; and decreasing television viewing and consumption of sugar-sweetened beverages and high-energy dense foods (foods high in calories). The program seeks to address health disparities and requires a comprehensive state plan.* It is the issue of health disparities and a Sarasota policy to integrally include minority communities that is the concern of this paper. The CPPW grant instructions state at lines 365-7, "**It is recommended that awardees include a STRONG FOCUS on the needs of populations who suffer disproportionately from the burden of disease**" (my emphasis). The CDC's 24 Recommended Community Strategies and Measurements to Prevent Obesity in the United States <http://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/preview/mmwrhtml/rr5807a1.htm> certainly doesn't preclude or obviate the need for minority communities' full participation. Lines 552-3 of the CPPW grant instructions state, "**Propose strategies that are most likely to affect community-wide burden and therefore where appropriate emphasize plans to reduce health disparities**".

There are very specific and detailed outcome measurements for adults and youth required for the grant. Below are just a few examples:

- Stabilize or begin to decrease (up to 2%) adult overweight/obesity prevalence, thus reversing long term trends.
- 20% increase in the percentage of adults getting adequate physical activity, meaning 20% more adults meeting Physical Activity Guidelines.
- 5% decrease in consumption of sugar-sweetened beverages, for adults, a decrease of about 5 gallons per person per year.
- A 20% increase in average daily fruit and vegetable consumption, an increase of approximately 1 serving.
- 5% increase in the percentage of adults with a heart-healthy diet based USDA's Healthy Eating Index (HEI), meaning 15% more adults with diet including adequate fruits and vegetables and reduced intake of fats
- 6% decrease in the percentage of adults getting excess calories based on USDA's Healthy Eating Index (HEI).

To address minority health disparities in Sarasota and to best quantify the effect of Communities Putting Prevention To Work (CPPW), there should be an increase of capacity in existing ethnic minority coalitions and program resources throughout the grant application, enabling their full inclusion in all aspects of planning and execution of local initiatives. The "Leadership Team" called for in the grant instructions should have more than token minority inclusion at the least. The fiscal manager of the grant should be accountable to demonstrate that they have, **"provide(d) funding to local entities and organizations that will: support the goals of the initiative and the selected interventions, focus on population-based strategies, are evidence-based and policy-focused, and will reach diverse groups"** as called for in the grant instructions at lines, 457-9. This is a circuitous instruction to ensure the full inclusion of diverse groups because in order to include diverse groups, the interventions **selected** must serve diverse groups. Lines, 558-9 of the instructions support this by saying, **"Engage existing coalition or coalitions and potential members of the leadership team in the selection process"**. I am sure that Sarasota can accomplish this inclusion in the planning process, if willing. The CPPW grant requests information identifying a Leadership Team, risk factors and interventions, a Community Action Plan, and program infrastructure.

Since the CPPW grant is so new, a look at current NPAO projects serves as an excellent guide and example of evidence-based initiatives to review for the CPPW grant:

The California Convergence Project is an NPAO funded initiative. <http://www.californiaconvergence.org/about.php> The California Convergence Project seeks to share information, tools, and resources across funding streams and initiatives to create healthy communities where people can thrive. One of the four goals of that Project is to, "Increase opportunities for leaders and community coalitions to build their capacity and leadership skills to support this work". Indeed, for any population-wide initiative contained in Sarasota's submission there should be a component that addresses cultural and linguistic imperatives that will include the entire population.

Another NPAO Project is the Michigan Physical Activity, Nutrition, and Obesity Prevention Program.

http://www.michigan.gov/documents/mdch/NPAO_Report_1_287189_7.pdf This Program relies on a socio-ecological model to change behaviors. I particularly point to this initiative as an example of addressing health disparities through funding allocation methodology, planning, and minority community involvement in programs. The current grant planning activity is on a short time-line, but our planning can still be measured by its focus on and resource allocation to the issue of minority health disparities, both through local/State government initiatives and community-level program capacity-building support for minorities through the grant.

Eat Smart, Move More, North Carolina is North Carolina's initiative that was started in 2003 with a 5 year NPAO grant. The Shiloh community in Asheville has a small African American population similar to Laurel or Tallevast but was given the resources to sustain a stellar community garden project

<http://www.eatsmartmovemorenc.com/SuccessStories/SuccessStory.html?snipit=Archieve/2008-03-28> However, in comparing the Michigan NPAO project above with the North Carolina NPAO Project, the obvious differences are (1) the lack of a strong health disparities component in the North Carolina Project and the (2) total integration of that Project [Eat Smart, Move More, North Carolina] in the State Health Departments' county units-which seems to be the most noteworthy achievement of that project in dollar terms. On the other hand, the strategic plan and design of the Michigan project is very much identified with minority health disparities, chronic disease reduction/prevention, and progressive policy decisions evidenced by a strong ethnic minority program component. The North Carolina project is a bit aberrant in light of African Americans and Hispanics comprising only 19% of Michigan's population, but 29% of North Carolina's. I mention these statistics to point out that Florida with a 37% African American and Hispanic population could very well end up with a "North Carolina model" of a seemingly limited minority characteristic in planning, capacity building, and resource allocation (All population figures are from U.S. Census Bureau, Sept. 2009) if there is not a culturally and linguistically competent leadership component in all phases of planning, implementation, and reporting. If, for example, we were to allocate state-wide chronic disease prevention funding based upon measurable criteria such as chronic disease disparity, population, access to healthy foods, concentration of expensive or exploitative retail food outlets, etc. then 37%+ would go to initiatives targeting ethnic minority initiatives in our State. Such funding allocation would easily make possible a credible and effective obesity prevention initiative in ethnic minority and other under-served communities.

On another tack, included is the following link for an interesting and innovative policy change to increase access to healthier foods at the retail level in minority communities. http://www.michigan.gov/documents/mda/FINALPA231FactSheet_290187_7.pdf The targeted families of the Michigan initiative share a shopping characteristic of most low-income families- a high percentage of their income is spent on basic necessities such as food and a significant amount of food and other purchases are done at the higher-priced neighborhood stores or bodegos (Urban Dictionary definition,,A

hispanic/spanish/latin mini-mart, kind of like a 7-11, but usually smaller and more like a liquor store atmosphere. Commonly used term on the east coast, especially in the New York City region, where you will find many of these. The word came from the actual spanish word for "grocery store" - la bodega). Sarasota's grant application should be mindful of the absolute imperative of increasing access to healthy foods beyond fresh fruits and vegetables to its under-served communities. Viable neighborhood retail markets must be a part of any application. Employment opportunities for residents of those communities would stem from construction, remodeling, vending, and operation. Stimulus funding is being attacked viciously by its opponents for its lack of aggressive job creation. Retail markets could address this point. Redevelopment and other economic development incentive activities within the County could easily facilitate the "healthy market" concept within appropriate neighborhoods.

Another area that Sarasota should explore is changing Sarasota's social, cultural, and environmental landscape to facilitate increased breastfeeding. Our Healthy Start Coalition has been consistent participants in numerous ongoing initiatives and projects in this area and could be CPPW partners that would add the expertise needed to improve the number of women breastfeeding as well as increasing the length of time mothers breastfeed. Support for initiatives to foster a more culturally representative La Leche League of Sun Coast Florida would also be efficacious.

Finally, the most important policy change needed is that the Florida Department of Health allocate additional and sufficient resources and support initiatives to substantially and consistently close the gap in health disparities between minorities and whites in Sarasota by assigning the highest priority to such an objective. The instant CPPW grant application of Sarasota is an opportunity to lead the State in showing how progressive policy guidance coupled with evidence-based strategies in minority communities can be linked to other community initiatives and partners involving transportation, zoning, parks, agricultural projects, retail food projects, school nutrition and exercise programs, and workplace programs to reduce/eliminate health disparities in certain chronic disease areas. We must quickly move beyond, and not repeat the poor planning and resource allocation methodologies of the past that so easily excluded the expertise and full inclusion of the most at-risk communities that were being served.

Sarasota County Health Department's CPPW Grant Shortcomings

- There is not a single community-based agency sited in the Newtown District that will receive a contract through this proposal. The grant itself called for system-wide initiatives and initiatives that increased the capacity of under-served populations. Out of a total of \$4.7 million, \$300- \$500,000 should have been applied to the systemic change. Such change would have the under-served community itself take the lead in building collaborations and service providers to serve the needs of their community. The grant is very parochial in its resource allocation methodology, i.e., the sole use of agencies outside of the Newtown community to contract for service delivery within that community. By virtue of population per centage of the African American community in Sarasota (5%), \$235,000 would have been the bare minimum

allocated to minority providers. Using multipliers to account for disparities in death and disease, would account for an even greater amount of funding.

- The grant also seems to be heavy in the area of contracting individuals, not agencies or service providers, in the Newtown community. There is also a large (\$400,000+) amount for consultants, but a narrative or job description of these consultants is not present.
- This grant was written with only tangential or marginal collaboration with the existing Health Advisory entities in Newtown. We were presented with a fait accompli that leaves this community behind in this great opportunity (if funded) to increase the resource capacity of our local faith and community-based Newtown service providers. In toto, the grant is excellent for what it purports to accomplish, but without a strong minority component it is a failure in the area of effective and sustainable interventions to reduce or eliminate ethnic minority health disparities- another stated objective of the grant application by the CDC.

Recommendations to Insure Inclusiveness In CDC Grant

- Looking ahead, the Newtown advisory groups are certainly available to speak with the staff in Tallahassee that will be responsible for contracting with the CDC if the grant is successful. There are numerous opportunities within the structure of the grant as it is currently written to include contracts for Newtown entities. They are awaiting an interest by anyone responsible for the integrity of this grant to invite their input. There is still an opportunity for Newtown's inclusion during any contract agreement negotiations with the CDC if the grant is awarded.
- To insure inclusion, Newtown's healthcare planning bodies (Newtown Health Advisory Council, Community Health Action Team) should contact the office of Rep. Keith Fitzgerald, chair of the Florida House Health and Children's Policy Committee. He should be encouraged to understand the affected community's concerns re the stimulus application and asked to request that the FDOH inform his office immediately of ANY communication to or from the CDC related to the grant. Upon any approval of the application, FDOH must be informed that before any execution of grant contract, modifications should be made, with the input of NHAC and CHAT, to include contracts for Newtown CBO's and FBO's. Rep. Darryl Rousseu's office should also be contacted for support, as well as any other legislative contact the planning groups feel that may be helpful. Time is of the essence. CDC will notify awardees in January 2010 (latter part of month).
- Finally, the most important policy change needed is that the Florida Department of Health allocate additional and sufficient resources and support initiatives to substantially and consistently close the gap in health disparities between

minorities and whites in Sarasota by assigning the highest priority to such an objective. The recent CDC grant application of Sarasota is an opportunity us to lead the State in showing how progressive policy guidance coupled with evidence-based strategies in minority communities can be linked to other community initiatives and partners involving transportation, zoning, parks, agricultural projects, retail food projects, school nutrition and exercise programs, and workplace programs to reduce/eliminate health disparities in certain chronic disease areas. We must quickly move beyond, and not repeat the poor planning and resource allocation methodologies of the past that so easily excluded the expertise and full inclusion of the most at-risk community needing to be served.

Disparities in Stimulus Funding Awards

reference McClatchy article

http://news.yahoo.com/s/mcclatchy/20091212/pl_mcclatchy/3376404