McCrorey Heights:
Making History in an African American Neighborhood

Draft for McCrorey Heights history committee:
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Matilda Spears House by architect Harvey Gantt

Jimmie and Minnie McKee House

Dr. Reginald Hawkins House

OVERVIEW

McCrorey Heights, located just north of Johnson C. Smith University off Beatties Ford Road and Oaklawn Avenue, is one of Charlotte's most historically important neighborhoods. Founded by JCSU president H.L. McCrorey in 1912, it really took off after World War II as a development of ranch-style suburban homes for Charlotte's African American educated elite.

Many of the men and women who built and led key Black institutions in the era of segregation made their homes here. College professors and administrators resided next to school principals, doctors, ministers and business leaders. Nearly every woman worked outside the home, many as teachers and administrators in Charlotte-area schools.

The neighborhood held top religious leaders. The largest group were Presbyterians, both Charlotte ministers and also pastors who commuted to surrounding counties. Developer H.L. McCrorey, himself a Presbyterian minister, made the neighborhood a haven for people associated with Presbyterian-supported Johnson C. Smith University. That included headmasters of an astonishing network of Presbyterian private academies throughout the southeastern U.S., founded to give African American youth the educations that were denied in under-funded public schools. After Presbyterians, McCrorey Heights's next largest religious group worshipped in African Methodist Episcopal Zion (AME Zion) churches. These included a president of the denomination's Livingstone College in Salisbury, N.C., executives of the Charlotte-based AME Zion Publishing House, as well as a Bishop. Other McCrorey Heights residents included locally important Baptist and Catholic clergy. The impressive campus of First Baptist Church West became a landmark on Oaklawn Avenue.

McCrorey Heights boasted nearly as many school administrators as it did religious leaders. These included the principals of nearly every Black school in Charlotte. It is hard to grasp today how important school principals were in the era of segregation. African Americans held no management jobs in the corporate world, no management jobs in government. Being a school principal meant hiring a large staff of teachers, managing a budget and a physical plant, as well as being an educational and community leader. Even today, more than half a century after desegregation, the names of Dr. E.E. Waddell, Dr. Spencer Durant, Howard Moreland, Clarence Moreland, Eddie Byers, Alexander H. Byers, Joseph Belton and others inspire tones of reverence in the voices of older Black Charlotteans. School administration also was an early entry point for women into the ranks of leadership, including Dr. Gwendolyn Cunningham, Elizabeth Dargan and Lena Sammons -- as well as Dr. Elizabeth Randolph, who rose from being a principal to become the Charlotte Mecklenburg Schools (CMS) administrator who instituted kindergarten classes across the district, for white as well as Black students.

Beyond "preachers and teachers," McCrorey Heights held a diverse array of African American upper-income families. Willie L. Johnson, Sr., resided in the neighborhood when he bought the *Charlotte Post*; the Johnson family would be the city's leading Black newspaper publishers well into the 21st century. Across the street, Romeo Alexander made his living as a real estate investor; daughter-in-law Vi Alexander Lyles would become Charlotte's first African American female mayor in 2017. YMCA executive Edgar C. Goodwin raised money to construct the McCrorey YMCA. Jimmie and Minnie McKee ran the Excelsior Club, the elite social club in a landmark Art Moderne style building on Beatties Ford Road. Alongside the neighborhood's white-collar professionals were highly skilled African American artisans, notably brick layers and other masonry contractors. In slavery times, most building work in the South had been handled by African Americans and that carried over into the twentieth century. Their skills in managing and budgeting, as well as in hands-on construction itself, gave them incomes that were solidly middle- or even upper-class.

As the Civil Rights movement heated up during the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s, McCrorey Heights residents often took the lead locally and even nationally.

- Rev. J.A. Delaine, who organized the South Carolina lawsuit *Briggs v. Elliott* that became part of the *Brown v. Board of Education* case in which the U.S. Supreme Court outlawed segregation, lived across the street from Moses Belton, a key behind-the scenes liaison with white leaders including Mayor Stan Brookshire as Charlotte's lunch counters and upscale restaurants desegregated in the early 1960s, ahead of many other South cities.

- Civil Rights lawyer Charles V. Bell, who sparked headlines when he sat down in a "white" bus seat years before Rosa Parks, resided three blocks from fellow attorney Thomas Wyche, who successfully sued to integrate Charlotte's Revolution Park and Douglas Airport in the 1950s and later aided activists on the Freedom Ride as it came through Charlotte in 1961.

- The dozen doctors who lived in the neighborhood pushed successfully to open Charlotte's hospitals – and North Carolina's medical societies – to all. Dr. Emery L. Rann, a key leader in that decade-plus campaign, was

named one of the nation's "100 Most Influential Black Americans" by *Ebony Magazine* in 1974.

- Dr. Elizabeth Schmoke Randolph, who co-led Charlotte Mecklenburg Schools in the wake of the U.S. Supreme Court's 1971 *Swann v Mecklenburg* busing ruling, lived around the corner from McCrorey Heights families who were plaintiffs in the landmark lawsuit.

- Rowe Motley, Mecklenburg's first Black County Commissioner, could look out his picture window at the residence of William Covington, one of Charlotte's earliest Black police officers, who in turn could stand at his front door and see the home of Oren McCullough, one of the city's first Black postal carriers.

- Residents still remember the neighborhood coming together in November 1965 to help Dr. Reginald Hawkins and his family after their house was bombed in the night by an unknown assailant. Hawkins earned national notice as an outspoken activist who spurred the desegregation of restaurants, schools, and hospitals in Charlotte and became the first African American to run for governor in North Carolina in 1968.

Today McCrorey Heights looks much as it did in its heyday in the late 1960s and early 1970s. The rectangular grid of straight streets includes five major avenues running up from Irwin Creek: Van Buren, Madison, Patton, Washington and Oaklawn. Most dwellings front on these streets, though a few are on the short cross-streets of Andrill Terrace, Creek Street, Clifton Street, Fairfield Street, Mulberry Avenue, Condon Street and Fairmont Street.

Three areas have seen disruption over time.

- After he filed his plat map in 1912, Rev. McCrorey began construction in the blocks near the intersection of Beatties Ford and Oaklawn avenues, two rural roads that were already in existence. About two dozen houses on Oaklawn Avenue and adjacent blocks date from this early period. There are a number of empty lots today where early dwellings have been demolished, often because owners considered them outmoded and allowed them to fall into disrepair.

- In 1915 the city took land by eminent domain from Dr. McCrorey between Beatties Ford Road and Fairmont Street for construction of the Vest Water Works. Mountain Island Lake had just been created north of the city and high land was required for a station that would pump in water, purify it, and store it in elevated tanks, from whence it could move by gravity throughout the city. The facility is still in use today with Art Moderne concrete architecture and two large steel water towers; it is a designated Charlotte Mecklenburg Historic Landmark.

- In the early 1960s the city announced plans for the Northwest Expressway (now Brookshire Freeway). In 1968 it bulldozed a route along the southern edge of McCrorey Heights. Houses along one side of

Van Buren Avenue, plus those just completed on a hillside extension of Fairfield Street, were in the project's way. Some houses were demolished. Owners had house-movers transport several to lots elsewhere in McCrorey Heights and others to the upscale African American neighborhood of Hyde Park further out Beatties Ford Road.

While these losses have nibbled at the edges of the neighborhood, the bulk of McCrorey Heights is impressively intact. It looks much as it did half a century ago.

The predominant architectural form in McCrorey Heights is a one-story ranch house, constructed in brick. The minimal trim popular in the 1950s and 1960s sometimes has a hint of Colonial style – multi-paned windows, boxed cornices – but more often favors what is now termed "Mid-century Modern" simplicity. All of the houses appear to be custom-built and distinctive, with the exception of four look-alike dwellings on Van Buren Avenue. Interviews suggest that many residents modified plans that they had selected from magazines and newspapers. A favorite builder was Mangie McQueen, perhaps Charlotte's busiest Black residential contractor and a resident of McCrorey Heights whose daughter still resides in the neighborhood. Two structures flowed from the pen of Harvey Gantt, pioneering African American architect who desegregated South Carolina higher education when he entered Clemson University's architecture school, and who later became Charlotte's first Black mayor in 1983. He designed the Matilda Spears house at the heart of the neighborhood and the First Baptist Church West complex on Oaklawn Avenue, both in his characteristic powerful 1970s Modernism.

Today McCrorey Heights is one of Charlotte's best-preserved neighborhoods from the boom decades immediately after World War II. It is significant for its architecture, including both pre-war examples and especially post-war ranch style and related designs. It is even more significant for its history, as home to numerous African American leaders in the era of segregation and in the subsequent Civil Rights movement. North Carolina's State Historic Preservation Office has determined it to be eligible for the National Register of Historic Places.[1] As of this writing, only one post-WWII Charlotte neighborhood has sought historic designation: Oaklawn Park, a slightly later African American neighborhood just north of McCrorey Heights, became an official Charlotte Historic District in 2020.[2]

McCrorey Heights residents, working with the McCrorey Heights Neighborhood Association, might pursue two types of historic designation:

- **Become a <u>National Register historic district</u> listed in the National Register of Historic Places.** This federal program is administered by the North Carolina SHPO (State Historic Preservation Office). The National Register safeguards against government projects that might harm historic character. But it does not regulate what individual property owners can do. There are

[1] Marvin Brown, "Intensive-Level Historic Architectural Analysis for Conversion of High Occupancy Vehicle Lanes to High Occupancy Toll Lanes on I-77 Between I-277 and I-85, Charlotte, Mecklenburg County" (Morrisville, NC: URS Corporation – North Carolina, 2012).

[2] "Oaklawn Park Local Historic District," 2020, on the *City of Charlotte Historic Districts* website. https://charlottenc.gov/planning/HistoricDistricts/Pages/Oaklawn-Park-.aspx

small tax breaks available for owners who renovate properties -- but only if those properties are income-producing (not private dwellings).

- **Become a <u>local historic district</u> under Charlotte Mecklenburg zoning**. City Council makes the designation under its zoning power, administered by Charlotte Mecklenburg Planning. Residents work with Planning to draft a special zoning ordinance. It regulates what owners can do to the exterior of their property. The neighborhood can choose what to regulate; usually only major changes that are visible from the street. It is a stronger preservation tool than the National Register – but it cannot block demolition; owners retain that right, after a one-year waiting period.

If the Neighborhood Association decides to pursue either or both of those possibilities, this essay plus the detailed information about each house at https://mccrorey.historysouth.org/ will constitute most of the required documentation.

McCROREY HEIGHTS HISTORY ESSAY

February 8, 2022

Introduction

It's a hidden neighborhood, nestled down behind Charlotte's old city waterworks just north of historically Black Johnson C. Smith University. Turn off busy four-lane Beatties Ford Road onto Oaklawn Avenue and on your right you'll see a handful of worn but handsome early twentieth century bungalows, then a string of well-maintained brick ranch-style houses. Turn right again onto one of the side streets and discover a grid of rectangular blocks lined by brick single-family homes, mostly custom-built examples of ranch-style design. The names of major avenues recall patriotic history-makers: Washington, Madison, Van Buren. It's a time-capsule of post-World War II suburban America.

But McCrorey Heights is much more than that.

Johnson C. Smith University president Rev. H.L. McCrorey created McCrorey Heights as a modern suburb for Charlotte's African American educated elite – an alternative to white suburbs that barred even the most accomplished Black buyers. McCrorey initially envisioned the neighborhood in 1912 but it did not fully come into its own until after World War II. Most of its 167 structures today date from the 1950s and 1960s.

The families that originally built and occupied those homes – and who often still own them today – became history-makers in their own right. McCrorey Heights residents created and led key Black institutions in the era of segregation. In the process, they worked diligently, year after year, to plant seeds of what became the Civil Rights Movement. As that era blossomed, McCrorey Heights residents stepped forward as Civil Rights leaders whose actions shaped the course of history locally, regionally and even nationally.

Civil Rights history often has been told as the story of heroic individuals who made national headlines: attorney Thurgood Marshall and bus-rider Rosa Parks, to name two justly famous examples. More recently, scholars have uncovered the organizational networks that were essential in supporting and propelling those leaders. Marshall's breakthrough 1954 lawsuit *Brown v Board of Education*, in which the Supreme Court ruled against segregation, rested upon a generation of groundwork by Howard University law professor Charles Hamilton Houston and the lawyers he trained. Rosa Parks' decision to sit in a "white" bus seat, sparking the seemingly spontaneous 1955-56

Montgomery Bus Boycott, in fact sprang from years of planning and community organizing by women of the Montgomery Improvement Association.

McCrorey Heights' story adds two new perspectives to that evolving understanding of history.[3] First, by closely examining this neighborhood, we can get beyond the customary emphasis on a single individual or a single organization. In McCrorey Heights, what might be termed an "ecology of organizations" – from the national NAACP to informal bridge-playing card groups – functioned together to build social networks. Activists never acted alone. Nor did organizations act in a vacuum. In a myriad of ways, McCrorey Heights residents knew each other as allies in the struggle to build a city and nation with liberty and justice for all.

The second valuable perspective from McCrorey Heights involves the amount of effort that it took to transform Civil Rights headlines into lived reality. Supreme Court decisions and Sit-In victories signaled a new day – but for every single "white" school, workplace or other institution there still had to be a "first Black" person to walk through

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[3] Though studies of African American history at the neighborhood level remain rare, two works have pointed the way: Vincent Harding, "Community as a Liberating Theme in Civil Rights History," in Armstead Robinson and Patricia L. Sullivan, eds., *New Directions in Civil Rights History* (University of Virginia Press, 1991), pp. 17 – 29. Andrew Wiese, *Places of Their Own: African American Suburbanization in the Twentieth Century* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004). See also Kimberly Johnson, "Black Suburbs: Oxford Bibliographies in Urban Studies," 2020, on the Oxford Bibliographies website, on-line at https://www.oxfordbibliographies.com/view/document/obo-9780190922481/obo-9780190922481-0021.xml

Histories of African American neighborhoods that have been written mostly come from an historic preservation perspective, for instance "College Heights Historic District" [Durham, NC], 2019, National Register of Historic Places, on-line at https://files.nc.gov/ncdcr/nr/DH0303.pdf. M. Ruth Little, *Culture Town: Life in Raleigh's African American Communities* (Raleigh: Raleigh Historic Districts Commission, 1993).

See especially the excellent study of Charlotte's Hyde Park Estates, begun in the 1960s further out Beatties Ford Road from McCrorey Heights. John G. Howard, Jr., "The Friendly Village of Hyde Park Estates: A Mid-Twentieth Century African American Suburb in Charlotte, North Carolina" (unpublished report for Charlotte Mecklenburg Planning Commission, 2014). On Charlotte's Oaklawn Park subdivision, begun by white developer Charles Ervin for Black homebuyers in the mid-1950s just north of McCrorey Heights, see Tom Hanchett, "Oaklawn Park: An African American Neighborhood in Charlotte," 2019, on-line at https://charlottenc.gov/planning/HistoricDistricts/Documents/OaklawnPark_LocalDistrictDesignationReport_Final.pdf

A recent essay in the newsmedia exploring McCrorey Heights history is Tonya Jameson, "McCrorey Heights: The Neighborhood that Shaped Charlotte," *Pride Magazine*, November-December 2018, pp. 15-16. https://issuu.com/watchdog-ent./docs/pm_1118_issuu

On McCrorey Heights's surroundings on Charlotte's west side, see Tom Hanchett, "A Guided Tour of the Northwest Corridor," in Ron Stodghill, editor, *Let There Be Light: An Anthology Exploring How Charlotte's Historic West End is Shaping a New South* (Johnson C. Smith University, 2014). A version of the essay is also on-line at: www.historysouth.org/jcsu/

the door, take the heat, endure disapproval. Nearly every house in McCrorey Heights held someone who walked that walk.

Today in 2022, a group of McCrorey Heights residents are working to designate the neighborhood as an official Charlotte Mecklenburg Historic District. An extensive detailed house-by-house history has been drafted. The equivalent of a 200+ page book, it includes information on initial occupants of all 167 houses. Go to https://mccrorey.historysouth.org/, click on street names to explore the stories.[4]

This essay provides an overview of that material, offering an introduction to one of Charlotte's most important mid-twentieth century neighborhoods. In particular, it suggests some of the many bonds of community that developed in McCrorey Heights and considers some of the ways that neighbors came together to make history.

Looking west on Madison Avenue, home of Isaac and Gwendolyn Heard at left. *2017 photo.*

"1623 Madison Avenue," on the *McCrorey Heights.HistorySouth.org* website. https://mccrorey.historysouth.org/1623-madison-avenue/

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[4] Many McCrorey Heights residents have assisted in gathering information. Special thanks to Natalie Kennedy Beard and the McCrorey Heights Neighborhood Association, to life-long McCrorey Heights resident Audwin Ross, and to Rev. Edward Newberry at Memorial Presbyterian Church.

Thanks, also, to John Howard, Jr., then director of the Charlotte Historic Districts Commission, who suggested this project, to oral history videographer Ken Koontz, and to the librarians at the Inez Moore Parker Archives at Johnson C. Smith University and the Robinson-Spangler Carolina Room of the Charlotte Mecklenburg Library.

Reverend H.L. McCrorey's dream

Henry Lawrence McCrorey – future university president and McCrorey Heights developer – came into the world March 12, 1863, as the Civil War raged.[5] He grew up in Fairfield County, South Carolina, a region of rolling farmland around the courthouse village of Winnsboro about seventy miles south of Charlotte. He was the second of ten children born to Nancy McCrorey, enslaved "from girlhood to womanhood" as a cook and housekeeper in the home of a Presbyterian plantation-owner. "My mother, a mulata, … could neither read nor write," Henry later remembered, but she could "spell one or two-syllable words" and was "considered fairly intelligent."[6] In an era when laws forbade the teaching of African Americans, gaining even partial literacy was a large achievement.

Nancy McCrorey wanted a better education for her children. The end of the Civil War in 1865, however, did not mean the arrival of opportunity. "At that time the state was not providing public schools in the county for Negro children," Henry McCrorey later recalled. "A white woman volunteered to teach a private [class] for Negro children for a small [fee] to be paid by parents." Nancy McCrorey and her husband, Henry's stepfather, scraped up the money. But young Henry missed many of the class sessions, "since I could not be spared to attend school except when the ground was too wet to work."[7] He pestered neighboring kids to tell him what they learned each day. Then, "at fifteen years of age, I learned of a private school in Winnsboro operated by Reverend Willard Richardson."[8]

Rev. Richardson, a white Presbyterian minister, had brought his wife and daughters south from Pennsylvania in 1869 with the goal of actively healing some of the

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[5] "Final Rites for President Emeritus Henry Lawrence McCrorey," on the *DigitalNC.org* website, on-line at https://lib.digitalnc.org/record/238454 Inez Moore Parker, *The Biddle-Johnson C. Smith University Story* (Charlotte: Charlotte Publishing, 1975).

"Personal: Henry Lawrence McCrorey," *Journal of Negro History*, 37:3 (July 1, 1952), pp. 354-355. https://www.journals.uchicago.edu/doi/abs/10.1086/JNHv37n3p354?journalCode=jnh

"Rev H.L. McCrorey" in A.B. Caldwell, ed., *History of the American Negro and His Institutions*, Volume IV, North Carolina Edition (Atlanta: A.B Caldwell Publishing, 1921), pp. 619 – 621. On-line at https://archive.org/details/historyofamerica04cald

[6] H.L. McCrorey, handwritten document cataloged as "Biography of President McCrorey," in the Inez Moore Parker Archives, Johnson C. Smith University. https://cdm16324.contentdm.oclc.org/digital/collection/p15170coll5/id/419/rec/3

[7] H.L. McCrorey, handwritten document cataloged as "Biography of President McCrorey," in the Inez Moore Parker Archives, Johnson C. Smith University. https://cdm16324.contentdm.oclc.org/digital/collection/p15170coll5/id/419/rec/3

[8] H.L. McCrorey, handwritten document cataloged as "Biography of President McCrorey," in the Inez Moore Parker Archives, Johnson C. Smith University. https://cdm16324.contentdm.oclc.org/digital/collection/p15170coll5/id/419/rec/3

scars of slavery.[9] The Richardson School was small in size but effective as a stepping-stone for future educators, including men who went on to key roles in the growth of Howard University, Johnson C. Smith University, and the A.M.E. Zion religious denomination.[10] In 1888 it merged with the Brainerd Academy at Chester, South Carolina.

The Richardson and Brainerd institutions were part of a remarkable network of private academies that grew up in the decades after the Civil War to nurture Black leaders. White-dominated Southern school boards refused to adequately fund African American public education. Most Black children went to school in makeshift quarters for a few weeks a year, barely enough to be able to read and write. So, an alliance of white and Black activists stepped in and developed an alternate system. It did not attempt to educate every child – too huge a task – but it did build an educational ladder for the best and brightest.

Many of the academies, including Richardson and Brainerd, grew under the auspices of the Presbyterian Church, specifically its Presbyterian Church USA (PCUSA) branch.[11] The Presbyterian denomination had split as the Civil War began in 1861, with

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[9] "Fairfield Institute Marker," on the Olde English District website, on-line at https://www.oldeenglishdistrict.com/points-of-interest/fairfield-institute-marker Also "The Reverend Willard Richardson," [no author, date or publisher listed], on-line at http://comfusion.pbworks.com/f/THE+REVEREND+WILLARD+RICHARDSON.pdf

Presbyterian minutes about establishing academies: *Minutes – United Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A.,* Volume 2, May 1872, p. 158.
https://books.google.com/books?id=N5JJAAAAMAAJ&pg=PA158&lpg=PA158&dq=Willard+Richardson+school+Winnsboro&source=bl&ots=pSo6knMvoR&sig=npMY1Dh42NO_plumDfEkkiA7QU&hl=en&sa=X&ved=2ahUKEwjH6IG1ksDdAhUKc98KHaClADEQ6AEwBnoECAUQAQ#v=onepage&q=Willard%20Richardson%20school%20Winnsboro&f=false

[10] Histories of the Richardson school celebrate alumni Kelly Miller, an early Howard University professor, AME Zion Bishop William David Chappelle, and the first two Black presidents at what is now JCSU: Daniel J. Saunders and H.L. McCrorey. On their careers: "Kelly Miller, Jr," *South Carolina Encyclopedia*. http://www.scencyclopedia.org/sce/entries/miller-kelly-jr/; "William David Chapelle," in Larry G. Murphy, et al, editors, *Encyclopedia of African American* Religions (New York: Routledge, 2011), p. 155.
https://books.google.com/books?id=fxsmAgAAQBAJ&pg=PA155&lpg=PA155&dq=Willard+Richardson+school+Winnsboro&source=bl&ots=lJm8bELxsC&sig=uK-P7T3XOIxy4a2mGLBiML92zA0&hl=en&sa=X&ved=2ahUKEwj_kJDcmsDdAhUFVN8KHW6sAiM4ChDoATAIegQIAhAB#v=onepage&q=Willard%20Richardson%20school%20Winnsboro&f=false; Presidents of Johnson C. Smith University" on the *Johnson C. Smith University* website, on-line at https://www.jcsu.edu/happenings/events/founders-week/presidents-of-johnson-c.-smith-university

[11] E.P. Cowan, "Christian Education of the Negro," in W.N. Hartshorn, *Era of Progress and Promise, 1863-1910: The Religious, Moral, and Educational Development of the American Negro Since His Emancipation* (Priscilla Pub. Co., 1910), pp. 196 – 200.
https://digital.ncdcr.gov/digital/collection/p249901coll37/id/4353
Joseph T. Durham, "the Other Side of the Story: The World of African American Academies in the South after the Civil War," on the *Real African American History* website,
http://www.raahistory.com/EarlyAcademies.pdf
Inez Moore Parker, *The Biddle-Johnson C. Smith University Story* (Charlotte: Charlotte Publishing, 1975), p. 14.

pro-slavery whites starting a separate “Presbyterian Church of the United States.” (The two branches would not re-join until 1958, forming the modern United Presbyterian Church USA.)[12] The PCUSA’s commitment to it Black members did not cease at the end of the war. The Presbyterian denomination believed strongly that ministers must be well educated in Biblical theology. Education of “preachers and teachers” among the newly freed Black population became a PCUSA priority.

TWENTY-ONE SOUTHERN INSTITUTIONS FOR THE EDUCATION OF THE NEGRO, OPERATED AND AIDED BY THE BOARD OF MISSIONS FOR FREEDMEN OF THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

INSTITUTION	LOCATION	PRESIDENT	Founded	Students, 1908	Teachers	Theological Students	Approximate Annual Expenses	Value of Property
Biddle University	Charlotte, N. C.	H. L. McCrorey	1867	177	16	19	$32,000	$156,000
Scotia Seminary	Concord, N. C.	A. W. Verner	1870	278	21	..	18,000	65,000
Mary Allen Seminary	Crockett, Tex.	John B. Smith	1885	220	15	..	15,000	50,000
Mary Holmes Seminary	West Point, Miss.	Edgar F. Johnston	1892	230	14	..	12,000	45,000
Barber Memorial Seminary	Anniston, Ala.	S. M. Davis	1896	157	13	..	......	50,000
Ingleside Seminary	Burkeville, Va.	Graham C. Campbell	1892	142	14	..	7,000	35,000
Haines Normal and Indus. Inst.	Augusta, Ga.	Miss L. C. Laney	1886	626	18	..	7,000	43,000
Albion Academy	Franklinton, N. C.	John A. Savage	1878	254	8	..	9,000	20,000
Brainerd Institute	Chester, S. C.	J. S. Marquis	1868	198	8	..	......	33,000
Swift Memorial College	Rogersville, Tenn.	W. H. Franklin	1883	280	10	..	12,000	36,000
Harbison College	Abbeville, S. C.	C. M. Young	1884	244	10	..	......	25,000
Mary Potter Memorial School	Oxford, N. C.	G. C. Shaw,	1893	335	9	..	10,000	17,000
Cotton Plant Academy	Cotton Plant, Ark.	W. A. Byrd	1880	180	6	..	6,000	17,000
Richard Allen Institute	Pine Bluff, Ark.	Thos. C. Ogburn	1885	155	3	..	600	8,000
Oak Hill Industrial Academy	Valliant, Okla.	R. E. Flickinger	1886	82	6	..	4,000	5,000
Dayton Academy	Carthage, N. C.	H. D. Wood	1883	80	4	..	......	2,500
Kendall Academy and Institute	Sumter, S. C.	A. U. Frierson	1891	351	6	..	2,000	8,500
Billingsley Memorial Academy	Statesville, N. C.	S. F. Wentz	1899	125	3	..	1,000	4,000
Hardin Institute	Allendale, S. C.	W. H. Mitchell	1898	166	4	..	2,500	4,600
Sarah Lincoln Academy	Aberdeen, N. C.	Wm. J. Rankin	1896	136	3	..	686	1,500
Fee Memorial Institute	Camp Nelson, Ky.	J. A. Boyden	1904	54	3	..	2,000	10,000
				4,470	194	19	$140,786	$636,100

Note that Biddle was the sole university on this 1910 list of academies dotting the southeastern U.S. *From E.P. Cowan, “Christian Education of the Negro,” 1910.*

Biddle University in Charlotte stood at the apex of the PCUSA’s network of academies. Founded in 1867 as Biddle Institute, it occupied a hilltop campus just west of downtown. Teachers began by offering classes in basic literacy to formerly enslaved students, then year-by-year added elementary and high school grades, and finally college classes. In 1876 it became Biddle University and in 1884 the doors opened on grand Biddle Hall, whose Victorian style brick clocktower soared six stories. Students came for a variety of courses of study but especially for training as ministers. Its Theological Seminary graduated its first class in 1876. Over the next ninety years, according to one estimate, “it produced more than one-half of the ministers” serving Black Presbyterian churches nationwide.[13]

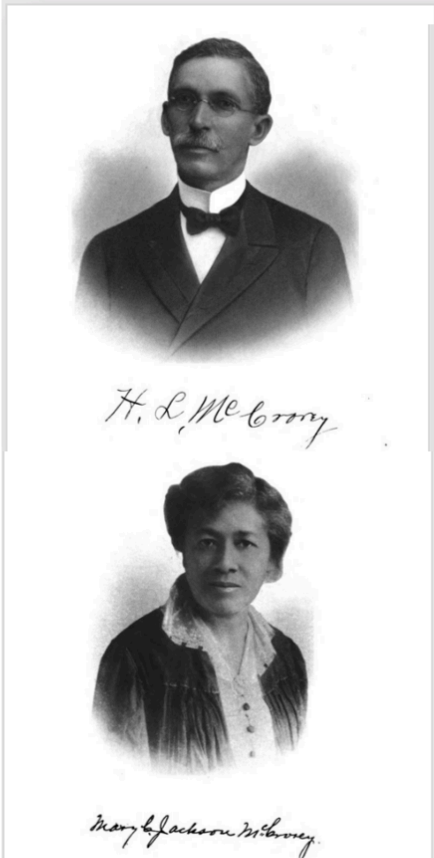
Henry McCrorey made his way to Biddle University at age 23 after working to save up money. He thrived at the campus on the hill. He earned a high school diploma, then took all the college classes that the young institution had to offer, then completed a degree at Biddle Theological Seminary. His aptitude caught the eye of the school of

[12] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Presbyterian_Church_in_the_United_States_of_America

[13] “JCS Theological Seminary to Remain Open,” *Carolina Times* (Durham), August 17, 1968. https://newspapers.digitalnc.org/lccn/sn83045120/1968-08-17/ed-1/seq-11/

theology at the prestigious University of Chicago. He went north to study Hebrew with Dr. William Rainey Harper, one of the era's most renowned scholars. All the time he kept ties to Biddle, where he taught courses and earned a Doctor of Divinity Degree.

When Biddle's first Black president, Daniel J. Saunders, died in 1907 the college's trustees named Dr. H.L. McCrorey to lead the institution. Over the next four decades, to his death in 1951, McCrorey would become one of the most successful institution builders that Charlotte has ever witnessed.



Henry Lawrence McCrorey

The growth and development of the church, as well as the progress and prosperity of the State depend upon the right sort of leadership. Nowhere are intelligence and efficiency more important than in the pulpit. The Presbyterian church has always stood for an educated ministry. That the principle is sound has been demonstrated by the work accomplished in the South since Emancipation. As a rule, wherever one finds a Presbyterian church with a minister on full time, a school will also be found, and acquaintance with these preacher teachers will usually reveal the fact that they are well balanced men of symmetrical character. Their standards are high. Investigation will almost invariably reveal the fact that they are either Biddle or Lincoln University men. In the South Biddle men predominate. It is a fine type of leadership. So one is not surprised when he finds at the head of the institution and in its various departments men of simple faith, splendid vision and fine attainments. At the very head of this superb group stands Rev. Henry Lawrence McCrorey, A. B., A. M., S. T. B., D. D., President of Biddle University of Charlotte.

He is a native of Fairfield Co., S. C., and laid the foundation of his education at the Willard Richardson school in the historic old town of Winnsboro. Later he entered the preparatory school of Biddle University and passed from that to the college department, from which he was graduated with the A. B. degree in 1892. The following year he began his Theological course, which was completed in 1895 with the S. T. B. degree. Since that time the A. M. and D. D. degrees have been conferred on him by the same institution in recognition of his attainments. He also took

Caldwell, History of the American Negro & His Institutions (1921)

Rev. McCrorey envisioned things that others could not yet see and he possessed the gifts of persuasion to turn them into reality.[14] He made friends with Jane Berry Smith, widow of Pennsylvania steel executive Johnson C. Smith, and talked often about what the University could accomplish if it just had more space. During the 1920s, Jane Smith endowed the construction of nine buildings, more than doubling campus facilities.[15]

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[14] "Rev H.L. McCrorey" in A.B. Caldwell, ed., *History of the American Negro and His Institutions*, Volume IV, North Carolina Edition (Atlanta: A.B Caldwell Publishing, 1921), pp. 619 – 621. "Dr. McCrorey has not sought to make money and yet he has handled his investments in such a way as to indicate that had he decided to devote himself to business, his energy and capacity would have carried him far. He owns property in and around Charlotte amounting to at least seventy-five thousand dollars."

[15] "Johnson C. Smith University has Interesting History," *Charlotte Observer*, November 22, 1930.https://www.newspapers.com/image/616858141/

President McCrorey renamed the institution Johnson C. Smith University in her husband's honor. At the same time, McCrorey cultivated a relationship with tobacco millionaire James B. Duke. Born in Durham, NC, Duke had pioneered the mass production of cigarettes which made him one of the world's richest men. He built a mansion in Charlotte so that he could put some of his profits to work creating what is now the giant electric utility Duke Energy. When he launched the Duke Endowment in 1924 – today one of the largest philanthropies in the South – McCrorey's university became a core beneficiary alongside white Duke University in Durham.

Rev. McCrorey's vision extended outward. Even before he reeled in the big donors, he was already thinking about Black opportunity beyond his campus. Restrictive covenants, written into real estate deeds beginning about 1900, specifically barred African Americans from residing in most of the "streetcar suburbs" then being constructed around the city's rim. So McCrorey dreamed of developing his own neighborhood where African Americans – especially the ministers and other prosperous and highly educated leaders who had graduated from JCSU – could live in comfort and respectability.

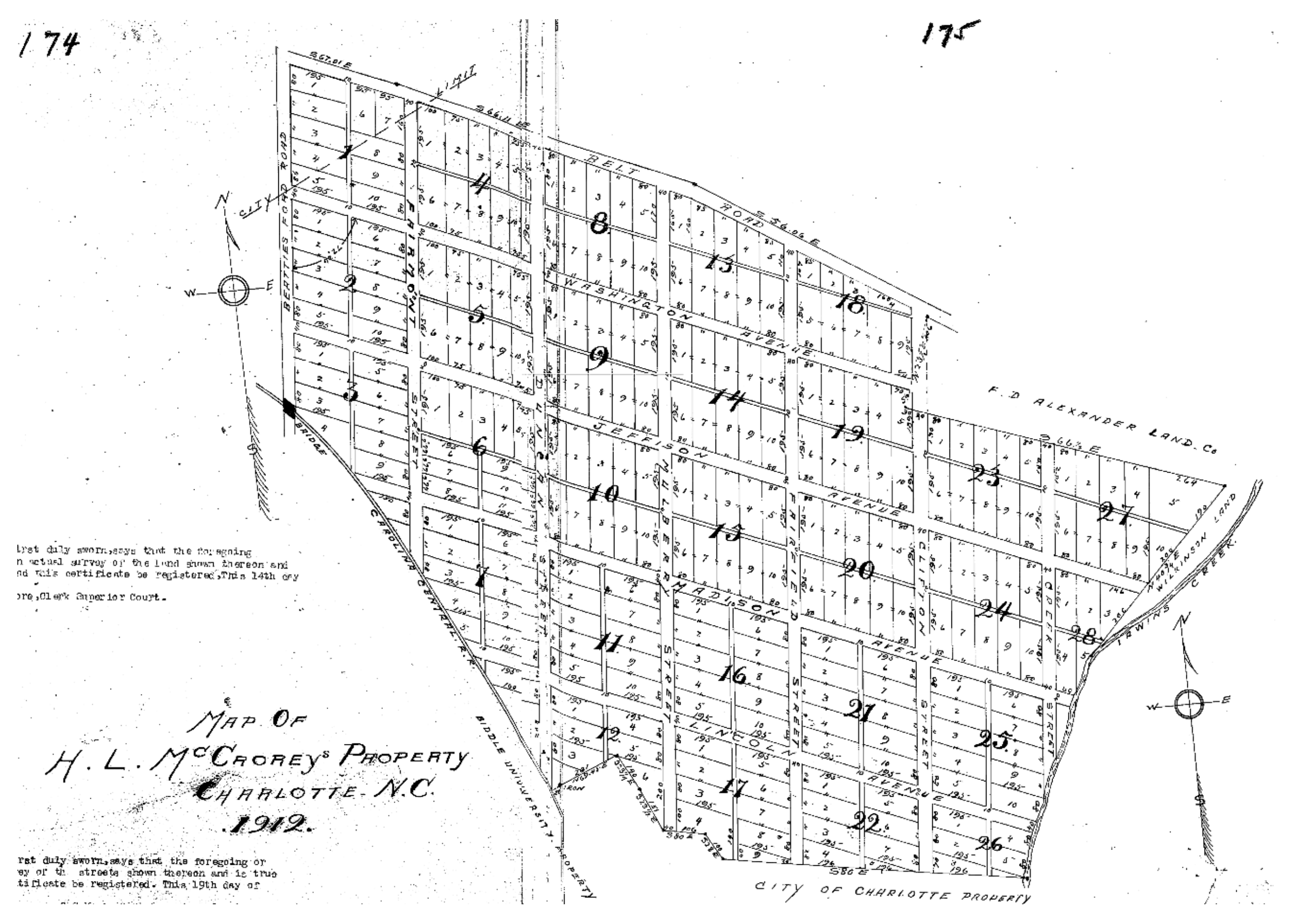
Around 1911 he bought a swath of farmland out beyond the college campus. The parcel bordered Beatties Ford Road, a very old roadway that ran atop a low ridgeline northward to the Catawba River, where a shallow spot allowed wagons to cross ("ford") the water easily. McCrorey's acreage extended down the gently rolling hillside from Beatties Ford Road all the way to Irwin Creek (today the route of US Interstate 77), a distance of just over half a mile. A small farm lane, now Oaklawn Avenue, bordered the parcel on one side.

On October 14, 1912, he filed an official plat at the Mecklenburg County Register of Deeds Office with a map showing streets in his new suburb. Lots fronted on the Belt Road (Oaklawn Avenue) and four east-west streets that paralleled it: Washington, Jefferson (renamed Patton in 1918*), Madison and Lincoln (renamed Van Buren in 1925).[16] Minor cross-streets connected them, running north-south to form a grid: Fairmont, Mulberry, Fairfield (named for McCrorey's home county), Clifton and Creek streets.

At the bottom of the plat map, large letters proudly declared: "H.L. McCrorey Property, Charlotte, NC."

** A McCrorey Heights mystery: At first glance, it might seem that Patton Avenue patriotically honored World War II general George S. Patton. But its naming in 1918 came when Patton's career had barely begun. Who is Patton Avenue named for?*

[16] As Charlotte annexed its suburbs over the years, there were often duplicate street names. Periodically the city passed ordinances to rename groups of streets. Jefferson to Patton re-naming: "An Ordinance Changing the Names of Certain Streets in the City of Charlotte," *Charlotte News*, October 16, 1918. Lincoln to Van Buren Avenue re-naming: "Ordinance with Reference to Changing the Names of Certain Streets," *Charlotte Observer*, December 3, 1925.



McCrorey Heights begins, 1910s – 1930s

McCrorey Heights lay at the very edge of Charlotte, barely inside the city limits drawn in 1907. Decades would elapse before the new neighborhood fully came into existence.

A streetcar did run out from downtown via Beatties Ford Road, terminating at the Oaklawn Avenue intersection. A competing neighborhood grew up there, named Washington Heights in honor of national Black educator and economic empowerment advocate Booker T. Washington. A firm called Freehold Realty platted it in 1913. Led by white investors who had previously developed part of the white Elizabeth streetcar suburb, it had more capital than Rev. McCrorey and was able to hire a Black sales executive named C.H Watson. In 1915 Watson printed *Colored Charlotte: Published in Connection with the Fiftieth Anniversary of the Freedom of the Negro*, a booklet that both proudly summarized African American achievement since the Civil War and also served as a sales tool for Washington Heights.[17] It trumpeted the rise of African American

[17] Thomas Hanchett, "Washington Heights," Charlotte Mecklenburg Historic Landmarks Commission, 1985, on-line at https://www.historysouth.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/Washington-Heights.pdf W.S. Alexander, developer of Charlotte's Elizabeth neighborhood, led Freehold. "Suburb for Negroes: Freehold Company Formed to Develop Land Back of Biddle," *Charlotte Observer*, September 22, 1912. https://www.newspapers.com/image/616120568/ "Model Suburb for Colored

entrepreneurs – "Barber shops – 24 … Grocery Stores – 24 … Bricklayers – 40 … Doctors –12" – while also presenting photographs of half a dozen Washington Heights residences.[18]

Rev. McCrorey, with his demanding work at JCSU, had less time for real estate sales. He was also busy at home. His first wife died in 1911, leaving four young children: Henry, Jr., Madeline DeArosa, Muriel and Novella (who would take over McCrorey Heights development in the 1950s, as we shall see). He met and courted Mary Jackson McCrorey, whose national career in social work and Civil Rights is chronicled in the book *Gender & Jim Crow* by Yale professor Glenda Gilmore.[19] Mary and Henry McCrorey were wed in 1916.[20]

Despite all of that, Rev. McCrorey seems to have sold perhaps two dozen McCrorey Heights lots during the 1910s. All lay at the Beatties Ford Road end of his land, most on the existing Oaklawn Avenue. Much of the rest of the street grid would remain only on-paper into the 1940s. Looking closely at the families who owned two houses that still stand today, Henry and Lula Warren and Abraham and Susan Prince, we can see themes that would mark McCrorey Heights history throughout the twentieth century.

Henry and Lula Warren house, circa 1917.
1923 Oaklawn Avenue, 2017 photo.

Abraham and Susan Prince house, 1932.
1927 Oaklawn Avenue, 2017 photo.

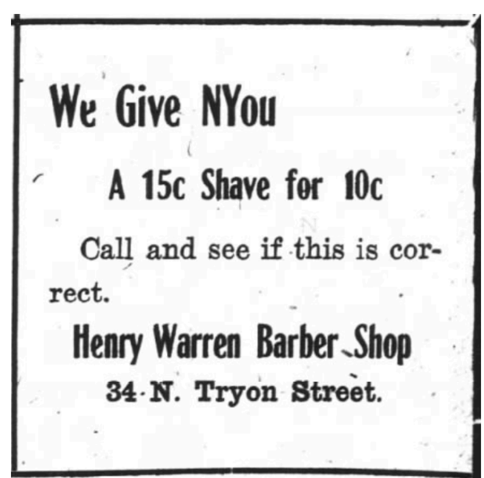
People to be Developed," *Evening Chronicle*, September 23, 1912. https://www.newspapers.com/image/58230351/

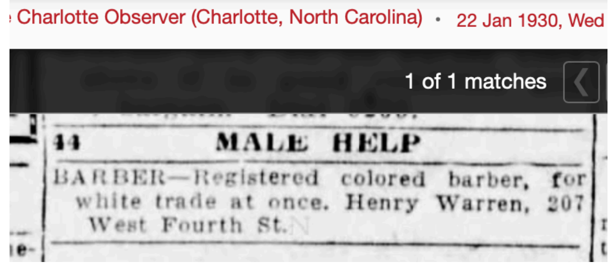
[18] C.H. Watson, *Colored Charlotte: Published in Connection with the Fiftieth Anniversary of the Freedom of the Negro* (Charlotte: AME Zion Job Print, 1915). https://archive.org/details/coloredcharlotte00wats/page/48/mode/2up

[19] Mary Jackson began her career as a teacher and administrator at Haines Institute, a Presbyterian academy in Augusta, Georgia, then moved to a national platform with the YWCA. Glenda Elizabeth Gilmore, *Gender and Jim Crow: Women and the Politics of White Supremacy in North Carolina, 1896-1920,* 2nd edition (Chapel Hill: UNC Press, 2020). Mary Jackson McCrorey died in a house fire in 1944. "Mrs. McCrorey Funeral Held," *Charlotte Observer*, January 17, 1944. https://www.newspapers.com/image/618042706/

[20] "Henry Lawrence McCrorey," *Journal of Negro History*, volume 37, v. 3. https://www.journals.uchicago.edu/doi/abs/10.1086/JNHv37n3p354?journalCode=jnh

J. Henry Warren and his wife Lula were among the first to purchase in the neighborhood, buying two Oaklawn Avenue parcels in September of 1912 even before Rev. McCrorey officially filed the plat map. Warren had graduated from Biddle University in 1894, where he is remembered for having chosen the school colors of gold and navy blue – still the signature of JCSU today. He opened a barber shop for white clients in the heart of downtown. Under the odd customs of racial segregation in that era, barbering was considered an African American trade – but with separate shops for white and Black customers. Warren's income and his connections with upscale whites enabled him to serve on many civic committees: raising funds to expand Good Samaritan Hospital; urging Black men to volunteer for World War I military duty; asking Charlotte city officials to create a public park for African Americans. In 1920 the *Charlotte News* recognized him as one of the "leaders in public life among the [N]egro population of Charlotte."




Charlotte Observer (Charlotte, North Carolina) • 22 Jan 1930, Wed

MALE HELP

BARBER—Registered colored barber, for white trade at once. Henry Warren, 207 West Fourth St.

Charlotte Evening Chronicle, June 2, 1911.
https://www.newspapers.com/image/57881398/

Henry Warren's business and civic activities intertwined with his religious life – a pervasive pattern in McCrorey Heights. He became a lay leader (ie. not an ordained minister) in the Black-led A.M.E. Zion Church, advocating tirelessly for the creation of Sunday Schools. In an era when public schooling was scarce, especially for low-income African Americans, church-based classes could provide not only faith training but also literacy and other essential skills. During the 1910s he helped organize a series of statewide Colored Interdenominational Sunday School and Educational Conventions and in 1923 he presided over a national summit of Sunday School activists held in Cleveland, Ohio, under the auspices of the AME Zion denomination.

Warren had a solid connection into AME Zion top leadership: his wife Lula was the daughter of Bishop Thomas H. Lomax, key figure in the growth of the AME Zion religion in the United States. Bishop Lomax helped start Livingstone College in Salisbury, NC, the denomination's top educational institution and he established the AME Zion Publishing House in Charlotte, which churned out all of the printed material for AME Zion churches nationwide. Lula's fortunate upbringing did not inspire her to

choose a life of ease. Instead, like most women in McCrorey Heights' long history, she became an educator, teaching for many decades at Biddleville Elementary School.[21]

Thomas Warren, Son of Mr. and Mrs. J. Henry Warren, and Grandson of the late Bishop Lomax.

From *Colored Charlotte*, 1915.

Next door to the Warrens, the home of Abraham and Susan Prince at 1927 Oaklawn Avenue went up about 1932. The lag of more than a decade after the Warren house showed the slow pace of sales in McCrorey Heights. Susan Peacock Prince came from Wilson, NC, where her father Levi H. Peacock had been a schoolteacher, postmaster, and a leader in the Republican Party in the years before Disfranchisement in 1900.[22] She was in the first graduating class at Wilson's first Black high school in 1924, then went on to Shaw University in Raleigh.[23] In Charlotte she became a life-long teacher in the public schools.

[21] Despite the couple's hard work, however, they lost the property in 1930. As the nation slipped into the Great Depression, the bank foreclosed on the house on Oaklawn Avenue. "Notice of Sale of Land," *Charlotte News*, June 2, 1930. https://www.newspapers.com/image/616845966/

[22] "We the colored people of Wilson assembled," *Wilson Advance*, October 25, 1894, on the Black Wide-Awake website, on-line at https://afamwilsonnc.com/2016/10/26/we-are-the-republican-party-and-those-who-denounce-us-are-the-traitors/ Also https://afamwilsonnc.com/tag/peacock/

[23] "First Graduates of Colored High," *The Wilson Times*, May 27, 1924. https://www.newspapers.com/image/74411390 Mrs. Susan P. Prince, obituary November 2, 1992, at https://greensboro.com/guilford-county-obituaries/article_e0532b6f-d85c-50d1-b74c-d093023048b8.html

Daughter Dr. Dorothy Prince-Barnett, born about the time the family moved into the house on Oaklawn Avenue, would grow up to be the first female Dean of the School of Education at NC A & T University in Greensboro. Dorothy Prince-Barnett obituary, https://www.legacy.com/funeral-homes/obituaries/name/dr-dorothy--barnett-edd-obituary?pid=146508750&v=batesville&view=guestbook

Her husband Abraham H. Prince ranked among the leading Presbyterians in the southeastern United States. After pastoring Brooklyn Presbyterian Church in Charlotte, Rev. Prince in 1939 stepped into one of the top administrative positions in the Presbyterian denomination's Synod of the Atlantic: Field Representative covering South Carolina, Georgia and Florida. He travelled almost constantly, helping open new churches, coaching local ministers, and assisting with the meetings at which Presbyterians came together to set church policy.

The Presbyterian denomination divided itself both racially and geographically into administrative districts called synods. The biggest Black synod in America during the 1900s – 1960s was the Catawba Synod, which covered North Carolina and had its office at JCSU. The second largest in term of population was the Synod of the Atlantic, comprised of South Carolina, Georgia and Florida. The fact that Rev. Prince chose to live next to JCSU – technically outside the Atlantic synod's boundary – indicated of how important the University was in the Presbyterian life of the entire southeastern U.S.[24]

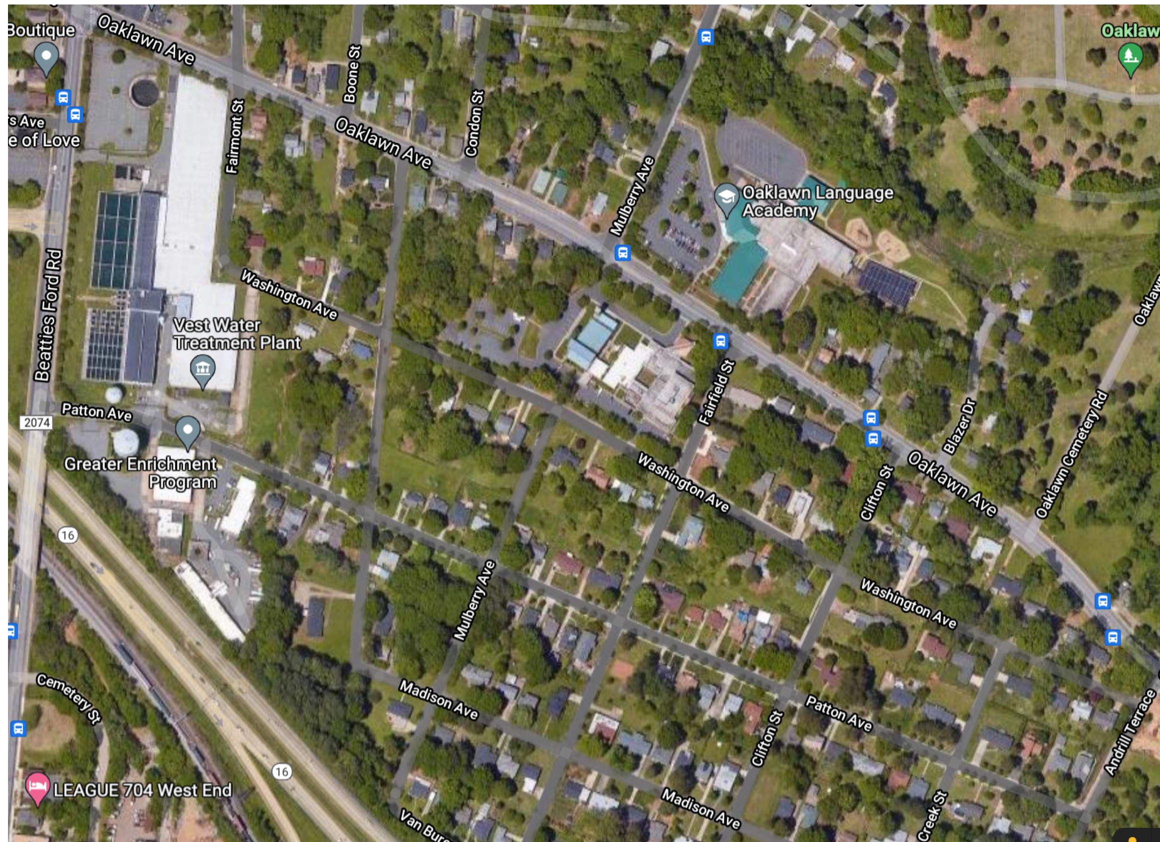
Even as he struggled with lot sales, Rev. McCrorey unexpectedly found himself forced to sell a chunk of his neighborhood against his will. In 1922, Charlotte's municipal water system was completing Mountain Island Lake, the dammed-up portion of the Catawba River that still supplies the city's water today. As the big pipeline came southward along the Beatties Ford Road / NC Highway 16 corridor, it required a filtration and pumping station where water could be purified, then boosted up to tall water towers from whence it would flow to households throughout the city. W.E. Vest, the system superintendent, identified part of McCrorey's property along Beatties Ford Road as the best and highest point on the supply line as it entered the city. McCrorey turned down an offer of $15,000 for eleven acres, comprising three blocks facing Beatties Ford Road. "He seemed to have some idea about keeping the place for the future expansion of colored inhabitants of Charlotte and would not agree to offers," said the *Charlotte Observer* incredulously. [25] The city used its condemnation powers. A jury awarded McCrorey $16,800. It was a better price, but the loss of the land deeply rankled Rev. McCorey and still remains a painful memory among residents today. [26]

[24] "Mecklenburg Deaths and Funerals," *Charlotte News*, April 12, 1985. https://www.newspapers.com/image/624403757/ Rev. Prince grew up in Sumter County, South Carolina, the child of poor cotton farmers. Abraham H. Prince, oral history, 1975, in the James H. Costen Collection of Atlanta University Center Woodruff Library. https://radar.auctr.edu/islandora/object/auc.071%3A0303 Yet another of the Presbyterian academies provided an essential stepping stone for Abraham Prince: Goodwill Parochial School founded by formerly enslaved families in Sumter, S.C. https://www.scpictureproject.org/sumter-county/goodwill-parochial-school.html

[25] "Condemn Site of Filter Plant: Tract of Over 11 Acres Owned by Dr H.L. McCrorey," *Charlotte Observer*, July 12, 1922. https://www.newspapers.com/image/616164914

[26] "Objects to Jury Award for Filter Plant Site: Attorney to Appeal from $16,800 Value Placed Upon Land of Dr. H.L. McCrorey," *Charlotte Observer*, September 4, 1922. https://www.newspapers.com/image/616166656/

2021 Google aerial shows Vest plant at left, McCrorey Heights at right.



Ultimately the Vest Waterworks, industrial and unwelcoming as it was, held an unexpected benefit for the neighborhood. It sheltered McCrorey Heights from outsiders. Even drivers who regularly travelled along Beatties Ford Road might not know that an upscale African American enclave existed – which could be a safety feature in the tense days of the Civil Rights movement. For kids, the lack of through-traffic made all of McCrorey Heights a shared recreation area. “I played ball in the streets,” recalled Sam

Fulwood, a national journalist who grew up there in the 1960s. "It was a world where … every kid owned roller skates and a bicycle."[27]

Young people benefitted more directly from a happier government investment in the vicinity. West Charlotte High, which opened on Beatties Ford Road in the fall of 1938, became Charlotte's second Black high school (the building would become Northwest School of the Arts in 1993). West Charlotte was just three blocks north of McCrorey Heights, an easy walk for neighborhood youngsters who previously had commuted downtown to Second Ward High.[28]

While West Charlotte High increased McCrorey Heights' desirability, the Great Depression was still sapping the U.S. economy, so houses continued to go up at a slow rate during the late 1930s. Notable new residents included Dr. Robert H. Greene at 2001 Oaklawn in 1937.[29] He would be part of a lawsuit in 1951 which desegregated Charlotte's public golf course, as we'll see later. Up the block at 2019, Dr. Edson Blackman built a brick Colonial residence in 1938, so stylish that its housewarming was written up in the national Black newspaper the *Pittsburgh Courier*.[30] Blackman headed the medical team at Charlotte's Black hospital, Good Samaritan. North Carolina's governor tapped him to write "Negro Hospital and Medical Needs in North Carolina." The hard-hitting report helped lay groundwork for the national Hill-Burton Act of 1946, the first federal aid to hospitals. Dr. Blackman's son, Edson E. Blackman, Jr., became one of the initial four African Americans to win the rank of sergeant in the United States Marine Corps in 1943.[31]

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[27] Sam Fulwood III, *Waking from the Dream: My Life in the Black Middle Class* (New York: Anchor Books, 1996), p. 8. "1627 Oaklawn Avenue," on the *McCrorey Heights.HistorySouth.org* website. https://mccrorey.historysouth.org/1627-oaklawn-avenue/

[28] Pamela Grundy, *Color and Character: West Charlotte High and the American Struggle Over Educational Equality* (Chapel Hill: UNC Press, 2017). On the history of Northwest School of the Arts: https://schools.cms.k12.nc.us/northwestHS/Pages/AboutOurSchool.aspx

[29] "2001 Oaklawn Avenue," on the *McCrorey Heights.HistorySouth.org* website. https://mccrorey.historysouth.org/2001-oaklawn-avenue/

[30] "Housewarming of the Blackmans in Charlotte," *Pittsburgh Courier,* November 19, 1938. https://www.newspapers.com/image/40093398

[31] "2019 Oaklawn Avenue," on the *McCrorey Heights.HistorySouth.org* website. https://mccrorey.historysouth.org/2019-oaklawn-avenue/ "Marines Promote Four to Sergeancy," *Pittsburgh Courier*, May 22, 1943. https://www.newspapers.com/image/40891227/ "Negro Marine from City is Promoted," *Charlotte News*, May 21, 1943. https://www.newspapers.com/image/617517142

Robert H. Greene house, 1937.
2001 Oaklawn Avenue, 2017 photo.

Dr. Edson Blackman house, c. 1938 - 39.
2019 Oaklawn Avenue, 2017 photo.

Fresh energy after World War II

The close of World War II brought an extended era of prosperity for the United States. Suburbia sprawled outward. The years after the war ended in 1945 saw one of the biggest-ever booms for suburban construction in American history, both in Charlotte and across the nation. A wide band of new houses encircled Charlotte as the city's population shot up by fifty percent between 1950 and 1960. New subdivisions rapidly tripled the city's built-up area from barely twenty square miles at the start of the Depression to more than sixty-five square miles by the 1960s. [32] No longer would McCrorey Heights be considered "too far from town."

In 1947 Rev. McCrorey retired after four decades at Johnson C. Smith University. He turned his attention to community projects, including assisting with fund-raising for a long-sought building to hold the Black YMCA. When the large, modern structure opened in 1951 on South Caldwell Street in the center-city neighborhood called Brooklyn, the grateful community named it the McCrorey YMCA.[33]

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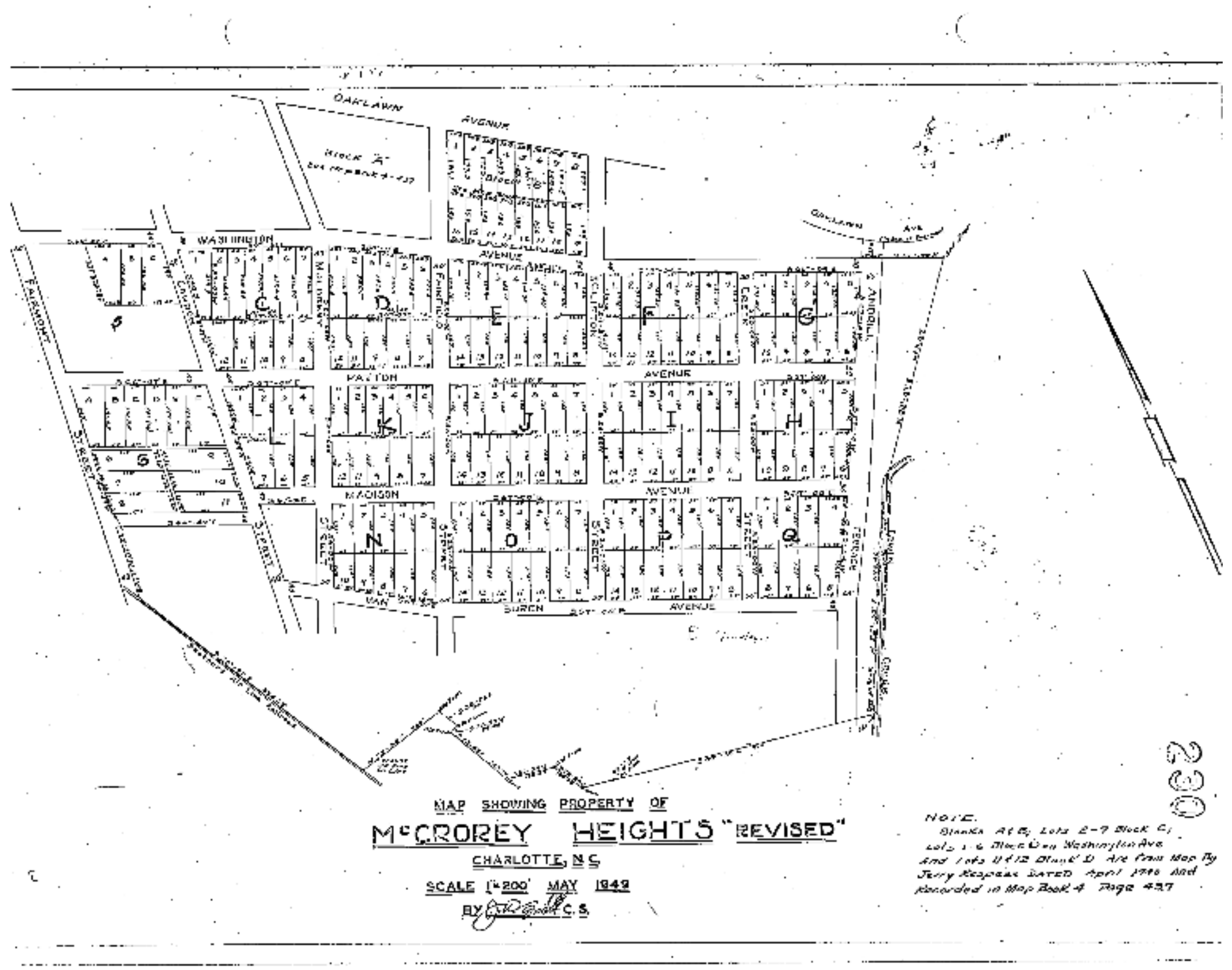
[32] *Metrolina Atlas.* Sherry Joines Wyatt and Sarah Woodard for David E. Gall Architects, "Final Report: Post World War II Survey" (Charlotte Mecklenburg Historic Landmarks Commission, 2016). http://landmarkscommission.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/Post-World-War-II-Survey-Study.pdf
Also http://www.cmhpf.org/essays/postwarcommdev.html
And see Mattson, Alexander & Associates, "Charlotte Comprehensive Architectural Survey, Phase I, Charlotte, North Carolina" (unpublished report prepared for Charlotte Historic District Commission of the Charlotte Mecklenburg Planning Department, 2014).

[33] "Brooklyn McCrorey Branch YMCA," designation report, 2020, Charlotte Mecklenburg Historic Landmarks Commission, on-line at http://landmarkscommission.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/Brooklyn-McCrorey-Branch-YMCA-Local-Landmark-Report-min.pdf
"Official Opening and Dedication of the Henry Lawrence McCrorey Branch of the Young Men's Christian Association of Charlotte, N.C., April 15, 1951," pamphlet in the Inez Moore Parker Archive, Johnson C. Smith University, on-line at Https://cdm16324.contentdm.oclc.org/digital/collection/p15170coll5/id/561/rec/6

As Rev. McCrorey tapered off his work at the university, he was able to devote more time to McCrorey Heights. He had updated the plat map in 1940, but then the war intervened. In 1949 he filed a slightly revised map and began selling lots in earnest. When he passed away in 1951, his daughter Novella McCrorey Flanagan took over the task. During the next two decades, nearly all the properties in McCrorey Heights would fill up with houses.



Rev. McCrorey reached out personally to young people he thought would benefit from becoming homeowners. O'Dell Robinson still remembered, some seventy years later:

> [Another student and I were on campus,] leaving the administration building, and Dr. McCrorey was just walking down, you know, leaving the building. He saw us and said, 'Young men, I've got something I want to talk with you about. I've got some land down here that I would like for you to see, and I want you to walk with me.'
>
> We walked from the campus. 'I want you to walk down there and I will show it to you.' And he said, 'Now what you guys need to do, you need to invest in land.

> Because once you get a hold to a piece of land, you can go as high as you can go. It's something that everyone needs to have.'
>
> 'I want all the Smithites to purchase this land and I've paid a little over nothing for it.' I mean, but it was a lot of money for him to pay at that time …. I think he said he paid something like $50 an acre for the land.
>
> So, we walked from the campus and weren't nothing down here, but I think they had, they had done begun preparing this road, Patton Avenue, and I believe the side street here, making it ready to be laid out into lots… Thick trees and bushes were on the [land]…
>
> As we walked, he showed us the streets and the lots that he had already sized out. He said, 'If you want this land, you can buy it and I will sell it to you for little or nothing.' I think I paid something about like … $750 for a corner lot, and the interior lots were something like about 600….
>
> And he said, 'Now, if you own land, you've got something that is very valuable.'[34]

It would take several years for Robinson to actually build his house. He served in World War II which qualified him for a Veterans Administration loan under the GI Bill.[35] Back from the military he got a job as assistant administrator of the McCrorey YMCA. His boss, Edgar C. Goodwin, introduced him to one of the new homeowners in the neighborhood, W.W. Twitty, regional rep for the Durham-based North Carolina Mutual Insurance Company. "The Mutual" as it was known, was the largest Black-owned financial institution in the world. At a time when most banks refused to lend to African Americans – even under the GI Bill – the Mutual opened doors of opportunity. Robinson recalled:

> I was at the McCrorey branch YMCA, where Goodwin [later a McCrorey Heights neighbor] worked as secretary, and my insurance was North Carolina Mutual Life Insurance Company -- and he told me that if I wanted to build, that he could work it out for me through North Carolina Mutual Life Insurance Company. Could get a loan through [W.W. Twitty]. And that I did. And this is how I got started here. Because of the insurance that I had with North Carolina Mutual Life Insurance

[34] O'Dell Robinson, oral history interview with Tom Hanchett, April 6, 2018.

[35] An influential book on the role of the federal government in racial segregation, Richard Rothstein, *The Color of Law: A Forgotten History of How Our Government Segregated* America (Liverwright, 2017) gives the impression that African Americans were entirely barred from lending programs of the Federal Housing Administration and Veterans Administration. See especially pages 50, 67.

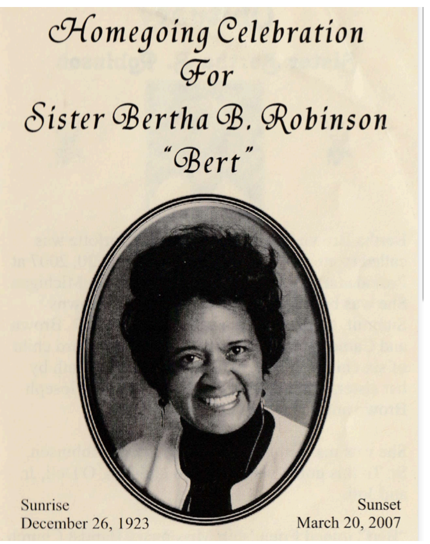
This overstates the reality. Though Blacks did receive much less than whites, FHA/VA mortgages still improved hundreds of thousands of lives. According to careful research by historian Andrew Wiese, "as much as 40 percent of new housing occupied by African Americans" was FHA/VA assisted during the 1950s. Andrew Wiese, *Places of Their Own: African American Suburbanization in the Twentieth Century* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), p. 140.

> Company, the policy that I had with them, I got a loan … through the G.I. Bill to build here.[36]

While Robinson and his wife Bertha saved money to build, they lived in a new apartment complex called Double Oaks, located down Oaklawn Avenue at Statesville Avenue. The city's first public housing for African Americans, Fairview Homes, had opened in that vicinity in 1940. Over time, both publicly owned Fairview and privately owned Double Oaks would suffer from poor maintenance and be demolished (the Park at Oaklawn and Brightwalk developments stand on those sites today). But when the Robinsons lived there in the early 1950s, they were good spots for a young married couple.

Nonetheless, Bertha Robinson longed for a house of her own. She taught school at West Charlotte High, then at the new Double Oaks Elementary off Statesville Avenue.[37] She was always clipping home-building articles from newspapers and magazines. O'Dell fondly remembered how they prepared to start construction:

> The plans my wife cut out of the *Charlotte News* and *Observer*. Back then… the *Charlotte News* would come in the evening, I believe, and the *Observer* would come in the morning. And she saw this house in the paper and she said, 'Hey, this is the one. I like this. We need to get something like, a house built like this.'
>
> When she told me that, I said, 'Well, I need to get an automobile.' She said, 'No, you can't have no car until you get a place for us to live.'[38]



O'Dell and Bertha Robinson house, 1800 Patton Avenue, built 1952 – 53.
1971 Gantt addition is at far left. *Photo 2017.*

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[36] O'Dell Robinson, oral history interview with Tom Hanchett, April 6, 2018.

[37] "1800 Patton Avenue," on the *McCrorey Heights.HistorySouth.org* website. https://mccrorey.historysouth.org/1800-patton-avenue/ "Double Oaks Elementary School," on the *North Carolina Architects and Builders: A Biographical Dictionary* website, https://ncarchitects.lib.ncsu.edu/buildings/B003739

[38] O'Dell Robinson, oral history interview with Tom Hanchett, April 6, 2018.

On September 18, 1952, Odell and Bertha Robinson took out a building permit to erect a one-story brick residence on their lot. They listed Mangie McQueen as the builder. "Mangie McQueen, a Black contractor – his daughter lives down on this street," O'Dell said in 2017. "Good builder. Great builder. And he built several homes down here."[39] As the family grew, adding son O'Dell Jr. and daughter Joli (later a basketball coach at NC Central University and JCSU), the Robinsons thought about expanding the residence. In 1971 they sat down with a young Black architect just starting his career, to sketch up an addition to the dining room and kitchen. It was one of the earliest commissions for Harvey Gantt – not only a path-breaking architect but also Charlotte's first African American mayor (1983 – 1987).

Doctors, Ministers, Educators and more

As the lots filled out around O'Dell and Bertha's house during the 1950s and 1960s, McCrorey Heights came to include a *Who's Who* of Charlotte's African American elite. The famous scholar W.E.B. DuBois talked about the "talented tenth" that led Black America. McCrorey Heights neighbors were even more elite than that – what might be literally labeled a "talented one percent."

In nearly every household at least one spouse had a college degree. Indeed, couples with a Master's degree each – or even a Ph.D and an M.A. – were not uncommon. College-going remained unusual even for whites in America during the 1940s and 1950s; about eight percent of white men had a four-year degree in 1940, rising to fifteen percent by 1960. For Black men, in contrast, the figures stayed at one percent 1940 through 1950, then edged up to four percent.[40] McCrorey Heights residents were people of rare accomplishment.

"To whom much is given, much will be required," went a much-quoted passage from the Bible's book of Luke. McCrorey Heights people sought to live that advice, typically choosing careers helped the wider community and held hope of – as DuBois put it – uplifting the race.

One highly visible cohort of McCrorey Heights leaders were medical men. Dr. Robert H. Greene and Dr. Edson Blackman had begun that pattern when they built in the late 1930s. After World War II, they were joined on Oaklawn Avenue by Dr. Oliver B. Williams (1641 Oaklawn, 1949), Dr. Rudolph M. Wyche (1713 Oaklawn, 1959-60), and Dr. Roy S. Wynn (1721 Oaklawn, 1950-51). Physicians elsewhere in the neighborhood included Dr. Emery Rann, Jr. (2008 Patton, 1952) and Dr. Drayton P. Graham (1624 Madison, 1962-63). Along with doctors, McCrorey Heights had dentists: Dr. J. Dwight

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[39] O'Dell Robinson, oral history interview with Tom Hanchett, April 6, 2018. According to McQueen's obituary, the contractor was self-taught and constructed 78 houses throughout Charlotte. "Mangie McQueen," obituary in *Charlotte Observer*, October 19, 2003. https://www.newspapers.com/image/630611852/

[40] "College Gap by Race and Gender," *Brookings Institution*, December 4, 2017. https://www.brookings.edu/blog/social-mobility-memos/2017/12/04/black-women-are-earning-more-college-degrees-but-that-alone-wont-close-race-gaps/

Martin (1622 Van Buren, 1955-56), Dr. Spurgeon Webber, Jr. (rented at 915 Condon in 1964) and Dr. Reginald Hawkins (1703 Madison, 1953-54). Each developed active private practices that served Black patients, while at the same time also staffing Good Samaritan Hospital.

McCrorey Heights doctors led the Black statewide Old North State Medical Association as it became a force for Civil Rights. In those days before the internet, medical societies with their regular meetings were an essential way that doctors exchanged ideas and kept up with the latest science. The white North Carolina Medical Society barred black physicians, a hindrance to the free flow of ideas – as well as being a calculated insult. But the harm went further. As pressure built for racial desegregation during the 1950s, North Carolina's white hospitals adopted a policy of only admitting physicians who belonged to the North Carolina Medical Society – which only accepted white members. Could African Americans win the end of medical society segregation? Of hospital segregation?

Dr. Emery Rann, Jr., and Dr. Reginald Hawkins took up that challenge. Rann started in 1951 by applying for membership in the local white Mecklenburg County Medical Society. "All applications were doomed," he later wrote, "because the application form required the signatures of three members of the society, which were unobtainable." But three years later, after the U.S. Supreme Court's landmark 1954 *Brown v Board* ruling that segregation in education must end, the local society changed its mind and accepted Dr. Rann as its first African American member, making national headlines.[41] That opened no other doors initially, however. The statewide society remained segregated. And Black doctors and their patients could only use Good Samaritan, whose meager and outmoded facilities never remotely equaled those at City-funded white Charlotte Memorial.

"Foremost in the struggle for hospital availability was Dr. Reginald Hawkins, a practicing dentist and minister," wrote Rann years later, tipping his hat to his McCrorey Heights neighbor.[42] During 1961 Hawkins led "Johnson C. Smith University students in

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[41] "Charlotte Medical Society Admits First Negro Member," *Alabama Tribune* (Montgomery), September 24, 1954. https://www.newspapers.com/image/554735549 "Medical Group Accepts Negro in North Carolina," *California Eagle* (Los Angeles), September 23, 1954. https://www.newspapers.com/image/693566531/

[42] Rann, Emery L., "The Good Samaritan Hospital of Charlotte, North Carolina," *Journal of the National Medical Association* (May 1964), pp. 223 – 226. On-line at: www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2610783/

Rann, Emery L., Jr., "The Black Physician in Charlotte (A Historical Review)," 1990, self-published manuscript in the collection of the Carolina Room, Charlotte Mecklenburg Library.

For more on Rann: "2008 Patton Avenue," on the *McCrorey Heights.HistorySouth.org* website. https://mccrorey.historysouth.org/2008-patton-avenue/

Dr. Reginald Hawkins' house is now an official Charlotte Mecklenburg historic landmarks. Its designation report includes an extensive foot-noted biography. "1703 Madison Avenue," on the *McCrorey Heights.HistorySouth.org* website. https://mccrorey.historysouth.org/1703-madison-avenue/

picketing the four hospitals and held a prayer vigil on the front lawn of Memorial Hospital." Hawkins also appealed directly to U.S. Attorney General Robert Kennedy, brother of President John F. Kennedy. Hawkins pointed out that all the hospitals had utilized federal construction money under the Hill-Burton Act which required equal treatment. Robert Kennedy, known for his willingness to wield federal power for Civil Rights, arranged for U.S Health Department officials to visit Charlotte on a fact-finding mission on August 15, 1962. "Immediately Mr. John Rankin, the Memorial administrator, announced that 'the doors are open to one and all,'" remembered Rann. In July of 1963, the hospital's governing council "voted unanimously to remove all barriers" to Black physicians.

That September newspapers around the South carried an Associated Press story on Emery Rann's admission to the staff at Charlotte Memorial Hospital.[43] And as white hospitals opened up, the North Carolina Medical Society finally integrated its membership. Dr. Rann would keep pushing to bring together Black and white healthcare workers, organizing a series of national "Imhotep Conferences" sponsored by the NAACP.[44] *Ebony* magazine named Rann to its 1974 list of "100 Most Influential Black Americans."[45]

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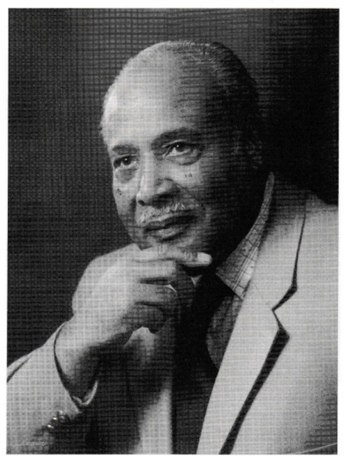
[43] Some newspaper stories called Dr. Rann the first Black doctor at Charlotte Memorial. "Hospital Men OK Negro," *Charlotte Observer*, September 24, 1963. https://www.newspapers.com/image/620350741 "Negro Will Join Staff of Hospital," *News and Observer* (Raleigh), September 24, 1963. https://www.newspapers.com/image/652382997/

But actually Rann was the second. Dr. C.W. Williams, a neighbor in the nearby Oaklawn Park suburb, broke the barrier in 1962. "Memorial Group Oks Dr. Rann as Member," *Charlotte News*, September 24, 1963. https://www.newspapers.com/image/619672001 "Negro Surgeon Qualifies: Memorial to Cut Staff Color Line," *Charlotte Observer*, July 12, 1961.
https://www.newspapers.com/image/619950506/
"N.C. Hospital Admits First Negro Doctor," *Gaffney Ledger*, November 8, 1962.
https://www.newspapers.com/image/78523313/

[44] Rann, Emery L. and W. Montague Cobb, "The Imhotep Conference — Why a Conference?" *The Crisis* (May 1963). On-line at:
https://books.google.com/books?id=qlsEAAAAMBAJ&pg=PA274&lpg=PA274&dq=Imhotep+Conference+Rann+Cobb&source=bl&ots=scnClRRCzV&sig=GWIix2A90SnigafPrjfyKDA04d4&hl=en&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwi-0evcgNfTAhWLOCYKHRS9A3sQ6AEIJjAA#v=onepage&q=Imhotep%20Conference%20Rann%20Cobb&f=false

[45] "The 100 Most Influential Black Americans," *Ebony Magazine*, May 1974, p. 92. On-line at
https://books.google.com/books?id=Jt4DAAAAMBAJ&pg=PA92&lpg=PA92&dq=%22Ebony%22+%22Emery+L.+Rann%22&source=bl&ots=bHyva4Ao0B&sig=ACfU3U0YQ9WMg46EOPG7X6hIvMMd873UMg&hl=en&sa=X&ved=2ahUKEwi9xKfC7fz0AhXOmWoFHawuAVoQ6AF6BAgfEAM#v=onepage&q=%22Ebony%22%20%22Emery%20L.%20Rann%22&f=false

Dr. Emery L. Rann's humble house,
2008 Patton Avenue, built 1951. *2017 photo.*



Dr. Emery L. Rann
Funeral program photo, 1996

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Ministers followed a similar trajectory, first building strong Black institutions in the era of segregation, then using them as springboards for Civil Rights activism. McCrorey Heights had numerous pastors, as might be expected from its relationship to JCSU. It is difficult to make an accurate count, since many men who had other jobs also possessed ministerial credentials. For example, Dr. Reginald Hawkins, the crusading dentist we met previously, found time to lead Charlotte's small H.O. Graham Metropolitan Presbyterian Church.[46] Most of McCrorey Heights' clergy contingent were Presbyterians, thanks to the JCSU connection, but there were also important members of the AME Zion denomination, as well as a scattering of other affiliations.

The African Methodist Episcopal Zion church ranked among America's largest Black-led denominations and had great strength in central North Carolina, the legacy of energetic missionaries who arrived almost in tandem with Union soldiers as they liberated the South in the 1860s. The AME Zion Publishing House was in Charlotte and the denomination's Livingstone College and Hood Theological Seminary fifty miles away in Salisbury; in 2002 the denomination would close its New York City offices and relocate to a headquarters campus in Charlotte on Sugar Creek Road.[47]

AME Zion minister Rev. Samuel W. Hamilton became one of McCrorey Heights' early residents in 1926.[48] Educated at JCSU (the university welcomed students of all

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[46] Hawkins earned a Bachelor (1956) and Master (1973) of Divinity from Johnson C. Smith University and became an ordained Presbyterian minister. Biographical essay, Reginald A. Hawkins Papers, Special Collections, Atkins Library, UNC Charlotte. Finding-aid on-line at: https://findingaids.uncc.edu/repositories/4/resources/218

[47] AME Zion Merger Progresses," *Charlotte Observer*, August 5, 2002. https://www.newspapers.com/image/630534930

[48] "1913 Oaklawn Avenue," on the *McCrorey Heights.HistorySouth.org* website. https://mccrorey.historysouth.org/1913-oaklawn-avenue/

denominations), he pastored what is now Gethsemane AME Zion Church adjacent to the JCSU campus. During his three decades living at 1913 Oaklawn Avenue, he also ascended to the upper leadership in the AME Zion denomination. The 1951 city directory listed him as District Supervisor, AME Zion Church, and his wife Helen as Office Secretary at the AME Zion Publishing House.

His neighbor at 1722 Patton Avenue, Rev. Walter Slade, had an even larger leadership platform. Slade served as a Bishop in the A.M.E. Zion Church from 1944 to 1960, part of the 12-person national governing body. A profile in the *Pittsburgh Courier* called him "one of the denomination's great evangelists," a "patriarch of the church." His wife Sallie Mae was Supervisor of Missionary Work in the denomination.[49] The Slades built their Patton Avenue home as their retirement residence in 1960, one of many couples who sought out McCrorey Heights as a capstone for a life of service.

Compared with the AME Zion and Presbyterian denominations, Baptists in the South had much less administrative structure. One exception was a Negro Board of Missions, which encouraged the growth of fledgling congregations. In 1947, Rev. James R. Holloway was hired from a church in Georgia to lead the Board of Missions in the Charlotte area. His flock included twenty-four congregations with some ten thousand members.

Holloway also directed the Mecklenburg Baptist-Interracial Commission, a fascinating organization that merits more research.[50] White minister Rev. Claude Broach at St. John's Baptist Church launched the Commission in 1946, a rare example of Black-white interracial activism prior to the Supreme Court's 1954 *Brown v Board* desegregation order.[51] It seems to have functioned, in part, to get wealthy white congregations to share resources with less-wealthy Black ones. A 1954 story in the Black *Carolina Times* of Durham noted a Bible study camp "supported by both white and Negro churches" for Black children from Charlotte at Lincoln Academy in the countryside west of Gastonia. The Commission also helped awaken white allies. Rev.

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[49] "1722 Patton Avenue," on the *McCrorey Heights.HistorySouth.org* website. https://mccrorey.historysouth.org/1722-patton-avenue/ "AME Zion Bishop W. W. Slade Dies," *Pittsburgh Courier,* June 1, 1963. On-line at: https://www.newspapers.com/newspage/40836477/

[50] "1916 Patton Avenue," on the *McCrorey Heights.HistorySouth.org* website. https://mccrorey.historysouth.org/1916-patton-avenue/ "Interracial Group," *Charlotte News*, April 21, 1947. https://www.newspapers.com/image/617883753/ "Baptist Group Holds Meeting," *Charlotte Observer,* August 23, 1950. https://www.newspapers.com/image/618292153/ "Ministers Will Meet," *Charlotte News*, April 28, 1947. https://www.newspapers.com/image/617884088

[51] "1916 Patton Avenue," on the *McCrorey Heights.HistorySouth.org* website. https://mccrorey.historysouth.org/1916-patton-avenue/ Charlotte's commission seems to have been inspired by the Commission on Interracial Cooperation, 1919 – 1944, a Southern force for progressive activism allied with Jesse Daniel Ames' Association of Southern Women for the Prevention of Lynching and Howard Odum's Institute for Research in Social Science at UNC Chapel Hill. The influential Baptist leader William Poteat, President of the Baptist institution Wake Forest University, established a North Carolina Commission on Interracial Cooperation active from 1921 into the 1950s. The Mecklenburg Baptist Interracial Commission seems to have been the only such organization focused on a particular city/county.

Broach and St. Johns became known for racial bridge-building. “From the late 1940s through the mid 1970s,” remembered a white parishioner, “this Southern gentleman would invite both Catholic priests and black ministers to the church for visiting sermons, an unheard-of practice in Southern Baptist circles in those days.”[52] When the Supreme Court announced its *Brown* decision, Broach was one of the few white southern clergymen to preach in support.

12-A — THE CHARLOTTE (N. C.) NEWS —— MONDAY, APRIL 21, 1947

News Staff Photo by Tom Franklin Studio

INTER-RACIAL GROUP—Officers of the Inter-Racial Commission of the Mecklenburg Baptists are shown above and are, left to right, the Rev. Dr. Claude U. Broach, pastor of St. John's Church and commission chairman; the Rev. James R. Holloway; the Rev. J. F. Wertz, vice-chairman; and the Rev. Lucius R. Evans, pastor of Central Ave. Church and chairman of the public relations committee. The Rev. Mr. Holloway will direct the program of evangelism and religious education in Negro Baptist churches in the Charlotte area. The Commission, organized in 1946, is composed of twenty representatives of white and Negro churches in Mecklenburg County.

Rev. Broach and Rev. Holloway at left. Newspapers in that era rarely showed African American professionals and whites interacting. *Charlotte News*, April 21, 1947.

James and Christine Holloway house, 1916 Patton Av. Built about 1953. *2017 photo*

The Baptist presence in McCrorey Heights also included the only church within the neighborhood’s boundaries: First Baptist Church West. The site on Oaklawn Avenue initially held a dormitory for the Oblate Sisters of Providence. The African American order of the Catholic Church came to Charlotte to staff Our Lady of Consolation Catholic School, an African American academy that opened on Statesville Avenue in 1957.[53] When the Sisters moved out, Oaklawn Avenue residents Jimmy and Minnie McKee knew that their downtown church, First Baptist, was about to lose its site on South College

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[52] Donald C. Mullen, *A Radical Change of Direction: Memoir of the Spiritual Journey of a Surgeon* (Bloomington, Indiana: Westbow Press, 2015), on-line at https://books.google.com/books?id=8TS1CgAAQBAJ&pg=PT262&lpg=PT262&dq=%22invite+both+Catholic+priests+and+black+ministers+%22&source=bl&ots=yN7UgqMJCM&sig=ACfU3U1WZc89AmeTrR9KIprnFduSA-Zecw&hl=en&sa=X&ved=2ahUKEwjptsiU9o71AhVPRjABHYv0CEYQ6AF6BAgCEAM#v=onepage&q=%22invite%20both%20Catholic%20priests%20and%20black%20ministers%20%22&f=false

[53] “Black Catholic School is a Tradition Worth Saving, Parents Say,” *Charlotte Observer*, April 7, 1988. https://www.newspapers.com/image/625089112/ The school’s last principal, Allean Gatson Conner, also resided in the neighborhood. “1615 Oaklawn Avenue,” on the *McCrorey Heights.HistorySouth.org* website. https://mccrorey.historysouth.org/1615-oaklawn-avenue/

Street. The congregation hired Harvey Gantt to design a striking new sanctuary at 1801 Oaklawn, dedicated in 1977.[54]

First Baptist Church West, Oaklawn Avenue. *2017 photo*

An important history-maker of the African Methodist Episcopal denomination (not to be confused with the AME Zion denomination) quietly made his home in McCrorey Heights. Rev. J.A. De Laine had been pastoring churches in the farmlands of central South Carolina when some of his parishioners asked for help in seeking a school bus to get to the nearest Black school nine miles distant. The petition was thrown out. So, De Laine and his neighbors sought NAACP help to file a suit demanding the end of segregated education. It was the first-ever such legal case in the South, and it found an ally in Thurgood Marshall, renowned head of the NAACP Legal Defense Fund. Marshall made the case, *Briggs v Elliott*, the first of five cases which came together under the title *Brown v Board of Education*. In the wake of the Supreme Court's landmark ruling in *Brown*, De Laine's South Carolina home and church were torched by arsonists. As assailants fired bullets into his home in the night, he escaped northward. He preached at churches in New York, then chose to retire to Charlotte, where relatives of his wife Mattie Belton De Laine made the couple welcome. De Laine descendants still own Rev. De Laine's final residence at 1706 Washington Avenue (built 1971).[55]

Among Presbyterians, McCrorey Heights became a favorite neighborhood. First United Presbyterian, perhaps the city's leading Black congregation with a large and impressive edifice downtown on Seventh Street, erected the manse for its minister at

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[54] "1801 Oaklawn Avenue," on the *McCrorey Heights.HistorySouth.org* website. https://mccrorey.historysouth.org/1801-oaklawn-avenue/ "First Baptist Church Buys Fellowship Hall," *Charlotte Observer*, December 12, 1968. On Jimmy and Minnie McKee, see "1607 Oaklawn Avenue," on the *McCrorey Heights.HistorySouth.org* website. https://mccrorey.historysouth.org/1607-oaklawn/

[55] "1706 Washington Avenue," on the *McCrorey Heights.HistorySouth.org* website. https://mccrorey.historysouth.org/1706-washington-avenue/ Ophelia DeLaine Gona, *Dawn of Desegregation: J.A. De Laine and* Briggs v Elliott (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 2012).

1650 Washington Avenue. Rev. James W. Smith, Sr., moved there soon after construction in 1951; upon retirement he and schoolteacher wife Margaret built another house nearby so they could stay on in the neighborhood.[56] A second church also chose McCrorey Heights as the site for its manse. Pastors of Amay James Presbyterian, located on West Boulevard, resided at 2015 Patton Avenue.[57]

Even faith leaders outside of Charlotte sought homes in McCrorey Heights. Rev. Calvin M. Young, Jr., for example, resided at 1600 Patton Avenue but commuted twenty-five miles each way to Gastonia, where he led that city's main African American Presbyterian congregation for a quarter century.[58] Rev. Paul L. Ross, a Fairfield County youngster who'd gone to Brainerd Institute then "up the academy ladder" to graduate from JCSU, spent his career pastoring small-town churches in Belmont, Kings Mountain and Shelby but chose to live in McCrorey Heights at 1804 Van Buren.[59]

Many McCrorey Heights Presbyterians served in the denomination's leadership, most often as elected officials at the church or synod level. Rev. Elo Henderson stood at the apex of that hierarchy. In 1955 he was hired as the top administrator of the Catawba Synod, where he would emerge as a much-quoted Civil Rights spokesman. A Presbyterian academy had set his upward path. Harbison Institute near Columbia, South Carolina, prepared him to excel at JCSU. After graduation he helped Charlotte's Ben Salem congregation construct a much-needed building, then launched an entirely new church, Grier Heights Presbyterian. Henderson clearly had a head for numbers and the ability to pull people together.[60]

In 1955 he stepped up to be Field Representative – chief executive – for the Catawba Synod, serving for over fifteen years. He helped to plant churches, mentor ministers and co-organize denominational meetings. The growing Civil Rights movement during the 1960s energized his drive for justice. In 1964 when young white and Black Presbyterians came together to repair and reopen an abandoned Presbyterian church in tiny Elm City, NC, the Ku Klux Klan ran them off and tried to set fire to the building. Rev. Henderson spoke to the national news media: "We're here to demonstrate firmly with our bodies that we believe in freedom of religion."

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[56] "1650 Washington Avenue," on the *McCrorey Heights.HistorySouth.org* website. https://mccrorey.historysouth.org/1650-washington-avenue/ "1901 Patton Avenue," on the *McCrorey Heights.HistorySouth.org* website. https://mccrorey.historysouth.org/1901-patton-avenue/

[57] "2015 Patton Avenue," on the *McCrorey Heights.HistorySouth.org* website. https://mccrorey.historysouth.org/2015-patton-avenue/

[58] "1600 Patton Avenue," on the *McCrorey Heights.HistorySouth.org* website. https://mccrorey.historysouth.org/1600-patton-avenue/ Young's father, Rev. Calvin M. Young, Sr., was headmaster at Harbison College, the Presbyterian academy near Columbia, Sc., and maintained lifelong ties with JCSU.

[59] "1804 Van Buren Avenue," on the *McCrorey Heights.HistorySouth.org* website. https://mccrorey.historysouth.org/1804-van-buren-avenue/

[60] "1716 Washington Avenue," on the *McCrorey Heights.HistorySouth.org* website. https://mccrorey.historysouth.org/1716-washington-avenue/

By late 1960s newspapers were identifying Rev. Henderson as Charlotte's leading "militant." That was an outlandish description of this minister in his 50s, always attired in a suit and tie, who never advocated violence. But it did convey the fact that Rev. Henderson was often Charlotte's most impatient voice for economic justice. He appeared at City Council meetings to demand equality in the police force: "We believe there should be black sergeants, black lieutenants, black majors and black assistants and, if necessary, a black chief of police."[61] He created the Charlotte Frontiers Association which provided job training and also lobbied hard for local employers to hire. Federal laws passed in 1964 forbade job discrimination — but until someone brought pressure, companies seldom sought out non-white job candidates. Henderson got Charlotte to hire its first Black bus drivers and pushed giant Southern Bell to employ African Americans above the rank of janitor. In 1970 Henderson drew up "A Design to Liberate the Oppressed," also known as The Catawba Manifesto. It was, writes a national Presbyterian historian, "a radical proposal whose specific goal was to provide economic liberation for black people in the Catawba Synod."[62] The detailed blueprint for $21 million in low-interest loans and grants was an early call for what are now termed "reparations."

Elo and Doris Henderson house, 1716 Washington Avenue.
2017 photo

Elo Henderson

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Educators were even more prevalent in McCrorey Heights than ministers. Over half of households had at least one woman employed in education, as we'll see below. But even just considering men, the drive to enlighten and uplift ran strong.

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[61] Charlotte City Council Minutes, July 7, 1969, pp. 130 – 131.
https://charlottenc.gov/CityClerk/Minutes/July%207,%201969.pdf

[62] "Black Presbyterianism: Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow – 175 Years of Ministry, 1807 – 1982" (no author, no publication information), page 28.
https://www.pcusa.org/site_media/media/uploads/africanamerican/pdf/periscope1.pdf

If you stand at just the right spot in the intersection of Washington Avenue and Clifton Avenue, you can see the homes of three college presidents. JCSU erected its official presidential residence in 1965 at 1723 Washington.[63] Dr. William H. Greene, who led the AME Zion denomination's Livingstone College in Salisbury during the 1980s, still lives at 1000 Clifton.[64]And Leland S. Cozart, the founding president who brought together two older Presbyterian academies to create Barber-Scotia College in Concord, NC, chose to build his retirement home in 1959 at 1015 Clifton Street in McCrorey Heights.[65]

Dozens of professors resided in the neighborhood, as might be expected from its relationship with Johnson C. Smith University. Lloyd H. Davis at 1633 Madison Avenue headed JCSU's Department of Education. Dr. Coleman Rippy at 1608 Patton Avenue founded the Department of Social Work and had his students gather data on Charlotte's community ills.[66] Kenneth S. Powell at 1653 Washington Avenue came in 1961 to be Professor of Health and Education, Assistant Football Coach and Head Track Coach, serving until his retirement in 1985. The National Association of Intercollegiate Athletics named him track coach of the year in 1969 and the Central Intercollegiate Athletic Association inducted him into its CIAA Hall of Fame in 1987.[67] His neighbor Jack Brayboy, who lived at 1608 Patton, became JCSU's beloved athletic director; Brayboy Gymnasium today honors his memory.[68] William Bluford at 1600 Madison taught history – and as desegregation slowly gained momentum in Southern universities, he became one of several JCSU faculty members who were invited to be "visiting professors" at white institutions such as UNC Charlotte.[69]

Indeed, the neighborhood's professors did not hesitate to put themselves and their families on the front lines of Civil Rights battles. Dr. Edwin Thompkins, the distinguished academic who headed JSCU's School of Theology, and his colleague

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[63] "1723 Washington Avenue," on the *McCrorey Heights.HistorySouth.org* website. https://mccrorey.historysouth.org/1723-washington-avenue/

[64] "1000 Clifton Avenue," on the *McCrorey Heights.HistorySouth.org* website. https://mccrorey.historysouth.org/1000-clifton-avenue/

[65] "1015 Clifton Avenue," on the *McCrorey Heights.HistorySouth.org* website. https://mccrorey.historysouth.org/1015-clifton-avenue/ Cozart interview: "One Setback After Another," *Charlotte Observer*, May 23, 1976. https://www.newspapers.com/image/622815744 and obituary: https://www.newspapers.com/image/623029805/ Cozart was a JCSU alumnus: https://www.newspapers.com/image/620271332/

[66] "1608 Patton Avenue," on the *McCrorey Heights.HistorySouth.org* website. https://mccrorey.historysouth.org/1608-patton-avenue/

[67] "1735 Washington Avenue," on the *McCrorey Heights.HistorySouth.org* website. https://mccrorey.historysouth.org/1635-washington-avenue/

[68] "1608 Patton Avenue," on the *McCrorey Heights.HistorySouth.org* website. https://mccrorey.historysouth.org/1608-patton-avenue/

[69] "1600 Madison Avenue," on the *McCrorey Heights.HistorySouth.org* website. https://mccrorey.historysouth.org/1600-madison/

Professor Herman Counts provide a case in point.[70] In 1957, the Counts family asked their fifteen-year-old daughter Dorothy if she would volunteer to be one of four Black students to desegregate Charlotte's all-white schools.[71] When she walked toward Harding High (now Irwin Elementary) on the first day of classes, an angry mob met her. Photos flashed around the world, seen even in Paris by famed essayist James Baldwin who wrote of the "unutterable pride, tension and anguish in that girl's face as she approached the halls of learning with history jeering at her back."[72] Beside her in the famous photographs walked Dr. Edwin Thompkins, his face set in determination. And when classes ended on that difficult day, another McCrorey Heights resident, dentist Reginald Hawkins, arrived to escort Dorothy safely home.

The New York Times

THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 5, 1957

Associated Press Wirephotos

CHARLOTTE, N. C.: A crowd of students follows Dorothy Counts as she is escorted to Harding High School by Dr. Edwin Tompkins. She became first Negro to attend school.

CONGRESS SAVING PUT AT 3 BILLION

Budget Bureau Study Lists Cuts of 2 Billion More Than President Noted

By EDWIN L. DALE Jr.
Special to The New York Times

WASHINGTON, Sept. 4—The recent Congress session made genuine savings totaling about $3,000,000,000, the Budget Bureau revealed today.

This became known as the

School Integration Begins in Charlotte With Near-Rioting

By CLARENCE DEAN
Special to The New York Times.

CHARLOTTE, N. C., Sept. 4—School integration was begun here today accompanied by disturbances ranging from disorder to near-riot.

No injuries were reported, but two arrests were made. An 18-year-old white boy was held on a charge of assault, and a 15-year-old white girl was charged with disorderly conduct.

The police also broke up a brief rock-throwing exchange

U. S. OPENS INQUIRY IN ARKANSAS CASE

Action Follows Request by Judge Davies—President Briefed by Brownell

By ANTHONY LEWIS
Special to The New York Times.

WASHINGTON, Sept. 4—The Justice Department set in motion today an official investigation of the events that have blocked public school integration at Little Rock, Ark.

World Press Photo of the Year 1957 by Douglas Martin. Front page, *New York Times*, September 5, 1957.

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[70] "1800 Madison Avenue," on the *McCrorey Heights.HistorySouth.org* website. https://mccrorey.historysouth.org/1800-madison-avenue/

[71] "1604 Patton Avenue," on the *McCrorey Heights.HistorySouth.org* website. https://mccrorey.historysouth.org/1604-patton-avenue/ The Counts family then lived closer to campus but were getting ready to build at 1604 Patton Avenue.

[72] "Dorothy Counts at Harding High: A Story of Pride, Prejudice," *Charlotte Observer*, September 2, 2007. On-line at: https://www.charlotteobserver.com/news/local/article66900492.html "News, First Prize Singles: Douglas Martin, 4/9/57," *WorldPressPhoto.org* website. On-line at: https://www.worldpressphoto.org/collection/photo/1957/spot-news/douglas-martin

Intermingled among the professors, homes of public-school teachers also dotted McCrorey Heights. Many brought high-level expertise to their classrooms. For example, Johnny A. Williams at 801 Condon Street studied at the nation's premier Black engineering school, A & T in Greensboro, then taught vocational courses in electronics at West Charlotte High; as job opportunities for African Americans opened up in the late 1960s, he became an administrator at Charlotte's vast Westinghouse turbine factory.[73] At 1901 Madison Avenue, Calvin McKennie, a musician with a degree from the jazz program at Florida A & M as well as a Masters from Columbia University, taught music in the public schools for thirty years – while after school his skills as an arranger, songwriter and multi-instrumentalist helped propel Charlotte's famed R&B hitmakers Maurice Williams & the Zodiacs (best known for the classic "Stay (Just a Little Bit Longer)").[74]

Neighborhood residents today are especially proud to remember the public-school principals who lived among them in the 1950s and early 1960s. In the era before the Civil Rights movement began opening doors of opportunity, a school principal was often the most highly placed African American person in city life. There were no Black people in corporate management, no Black people in even the middle ranks of government. A school principal hired and fired staff, managed a budget and supervised a physical plant. The men and women who ascended to that position often possessed the qualifications and gravitas that today would mark a CEO or top government official.

McCrorey Heights had nearly a dozen male principals. Louis Hughes (1817 Madison Avenue) headed Morgan School.[75] Howard Moreland (1722 Madison) was the founding principal at Marie G. Davis Elementary.[76] His brother Clarence Moreland became the founding principal of Northwest Junior High.[77] Eddie Byers led Piedmont Junior High (1608 Madison).[78] Alexander H. Byers, his younger brother, was a close neighbor at 1812 Madison. Reported his funeral program, "Two distinct honors for Alex

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[73] "801 Condon Street," on the *McCrorey Heights.HistorySouth.org* website. https://mccrorey.historysouth.org/801-condon-street/

[74] "1901 Madison Avenue," on the *McCrorey Heights.HistorySouth.org* website. https://mccrorey.historysouth.org/1901-madison-avenue/ Calvin McKennie, obituary in the *Charlotte Observer*, December 28, 2006. On-line at: http://www.legacy.com/obituaries/charlotte/obituary.aspx?n=calvin-montgomery-mckennie&pid=20444715

[75] "1817 Madison Avenue," on the *McCrorey Heights.HistorySouth.org* website. https://mccrorey.historysouth.org/1817-madison-avenue/

[76] "1722 Madison Avenue," on the *McCrorey Heights.HistorySouth.org* website. https://mccrorey.historysouth.org/1722-madison-avenue/

[77] "1616 Patton Avenue," on the *McCrorey Heights.HistorySouth.org* website. https://mccrorey.historysouth.org/1616-patton-avenue/

[78] "1608 Madison Avenue," on the *McCrorey Heights.HistorySouth.org* website. https://mccrorey.historysouth.org/1608-madison-avenue/

occurred when he was named the first principal of the newly opened J.T. Williams Junior High School, and later Ranson Junior High, where he became the first principal of a predominantly white school."[79] Dr. E.E. Waddell also navigated that difficult transition out of the segregation era. CMS recruited him in 1963 from Albemarle, N.C., where he was so revered that a building is now named in his honor. He came to lead Second Ward High, beloved as Charlotte's oldest Black high school. But within five years planners declared that Second Ward would be bulldozed as part of federally funded "urban renewal." A new school was planned but never built. Waddell moved up into administration as Assistant to the Superintendent, a promotion that did not really feel like an advancement. After his death, CMS named suburban E.E. Waddell High School in his honor. [80]

Alexander and Rachel Byers house, c1958
1812 Madison Avenue, 2017 photo.

E.E. and Frances C. Waddell house, c1965
1632 Patton Avenue, 2017 photo.

As with ministers, even teachers who worked outside Charlotte itself sought to live in McCrorey Heights. Villages at the then-rural edges of Mecklenburg County had schools offering grades 1-11 for Black farm children. Lorenzo Poe (1908 Patton) headed Sterling School in Pineville for nineteen years.[81] Joseph Belton (1700 Washington) led Clear Creek, today J.H. Gunn School.[82] Isaac T. Graham (1601 Oaklawn) was principal

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[79] "1812 Madison Avenue," on the *McCrorey Heights.HistorySouth.org* website.
https://mccrorey.historysouth.org/1812-madison-avenue/

[80] "1632 Patton Avenue," on the *McCrorey Heights.HistorySouth.org* website.
https://mccrorey.historysouth.org/1632-patton-avenue/ His predecessor Dr. Durant lived briefly in the neighborhood during the late 1950s. "1916 Patton Avenue," on the *McCrorey Heights.HistorySouth.org* website. https://mccrorey.historysouth.org/1916-patton-avenue/
Durant obituary: *Charlotte Observer*, October 11, 2003.
https://www.newspapers.com/image/630656960

[81] "1908 Patton Avenue," on the *McCrorey Heights.HistorySouth.org* website.
https://mccrorey.historysouth.org/1908-patton-avenue/

[82] "1700 Washington Avenue," on the *McCrorey Heights.HistorySouth.org* website.
https://mccrorey.historysouth.org/1700-washington-avenue/

at Torrence-Lytle in Huntersville.[83] Ernest L. James (1722 Patton) commuted to the neighboring city of Concord, twenty-five miles distant, to lead Logan School.[84]

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Before we get to women in educational leadership in the next section of this essay, let's round out this part with a quick survey of men who worked outside of education, ministry or healthcare. As in other sections, this list suggests a range of activities, making no attempt to name every person.

Postal jobs were highly prized by African Americans in the mid-twentieth century, protected by Civil Service laws that prevented arbitrary firing.[85] Edwin M. Barrett, a career employee in the U.S. Railway Mail Service, took out the permit to build 1713 Madison in 1952. Like many men who moved into McCrorey Heights after World War II, he was a veteran – a member of the famed Tuskegee Airmen.[86] Other mail workers in McCrorey Heights included Willie Lee Johnson, Sr., who also created a side career for himself as a freelance journalist for both Black and white newspapers. When the founder of the African American *Charlotte Post* died, Willie Lee Johnson, Sr., became the publisher in 1974 (his son Gerald Oren Johnson is the publisher today in the 2020s). The family constructed the house at 815 Condon Street about 1970.[87]

Romeo Alexander built across the street in 1964-65 (1913 Patton Avenue). He was well-known as the proprietor of Razades Restaurant on Statesville Avenue and an active investor in real estate. His son, an attorney, died young – leaving a widow who became a financial officer with the City of Charlotte, then in 2017 won election as its first female African American mayor: Vi Alexander Lyles.[88]

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[83] "1601 Oaklawn Avenue," on the *McCrorey Heights.HistorySouth.org* website. https://mccrorey.historysouth.org/1601-oaklawn/

[84] "1722 Patton Avenue," on the *McCrorey Heights.HistorySouth.org* website. https://mccrorey.historysouth.org/1722-patton-avenue/

[85] Postal jobs did not open to African Americans without struggle. Historian Willie Griffin is writing a biography of Trezzvant Anderson, a Charlotte-based journalist who help lead the successful effort for Black hiring in the early 1940s. Emily Ethridge, "How a Local Historian Uncovered Trezzvant Anderson, the Charlotte Civil Rights Here You've Never Heard Of," *Charlotte Magazine*, August 11, 2020. https://www.charlottemagazine.com/how-a-local-historian-uncovered-trezzvant-anderson-the-charlotte-civil-rights-hero-youve-never-heard-of/

[86] "1713 Madison Avenue," on the *McCrorey Heights.HistorySouth.org* website. https://mccrorey.historysouth.org/1713-madison-avenue/

[87] "815 Condon Street," on the *McCrorey Heights.HistorySouth.org* website. https://mccrorey.historysouth.org/815-condon-street/

[88] "1913 Patton Avenue," on the *McCrorey Heights.HistorySouth.org* website. https://mccrorey.historysouth.org/1913-patton-avenue/

Another neighbor who did well in the hospitality business was Jimmie McKee (1607 Oaklawn). [89] He and his wife Minnie opened the Excelsior Club in 1944 in an old house on Beatties Ford Road, then remodeled it in the early 1950s in the Art Moderne style to become one of Charlotte's most visually striking structures. No country clubs were open to African Americans; the Excelsior filled that important niche as a gathering spot for Black leaders. Business meetings, card parties, political strategy sessions and more made the Excelsior a beacon not just to McCrorey Heights families, but to anyone seeking to connect with Charlotte's African American elite.

W.W. Twitty and William Covington were among the regulars at the Excelsior. Twitty was a rising star with North Carolina Mutual Insurance, helping plant offices on both coasts (in Wilmington, NC and Los Angeles, CA) but always returning home to 1723 Madison Avenue in McCrorey Heights. [90] When college students launched sit-ins at area lunch counters in 1960, Twitty put his staff to work. "We hauled the students back and forth. My agents and me. We had cars so we would take them down there," he later told a Duke University interviewer. Twitty's next-door neighbor William Covington (1717 Madison) also helped make history.[91] As one of Charlotte's early African American police officers, he co-founded the N.C. Organization of Black Police Officers to push for equal treatment, even suing the Charlotte department in the 1970s. At the same time, he delighted the community as a tireless semi-professional photographer as well as owner of the West Charlotte Drive-in, a social hotspot on Beatties Ford Road that lived on into the 2010s as RuDean's Restaurant.[92]

Another bustling social hub was Neal's Barbershop at Oaklawn and Beatties Ford Road, presided over for fifty-some years by A.D. Neal (home at 1805 Patton Avenue). [93] As a youngster, he'd been the first football quarterback at West Charlotte High and a bass singer in the quartet groups that became popular during the 1930s and 40s. Barbering was a logical fit for his people-skills – and it built on a proud history. African American barbers had a long track-record as community leaders in Charlotte, including Henry Warren (mentioned earlier in this essay) and also Thad Tate, whose grandson Ray Booton (1722 Van Buren) helped integrate the city's police force.[94]

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[89] "1607 Oaklawn Avenue," on the *McCrorey Heights.HistorySouth.org* website. https://mccrorey.historysouth.org/1607-oaklawn/

[90] "1725 Madison Avenue," on the *McCrorey Heights.HistorySouth.org* website. https://mccrorey.historysouth.org/1725-madison-avenue/

[91] "1717 Madison Avenue," on the *McCrorey Heights.HistorySouth.org* website. https://mccrorey.historysouth.org/1717-madison-avenue/

[92] "William Covington Dies, Pioneer Black Police Officer and 'Superman' to Kids," *Charlotte Observer*, August 10, 2016. On-line at: http://www.charlotteobserver.com/news/local/news-columns-blogs/mark-washburn/article94926562.html "Popular RuDean's Restaurant Closing," *Charlotte Post*, August 31, 2016. https://www.thecharlottepost.com/news/2016/08/31/local-state/popular-rudean-s-restaurant-closing/

[93] "1805 Patton Avenue," on the *McCrorey Heights.HistorySouth.org* website. https://mccrorey.historysouth.org/1805-patton-avenue/

[94] "1722 Van Buren Avenue," on the *McCrorey Heights.HistorySouth.org* website. https://mccrorey.historysouth.org/1722-van-buren-avenue/

Like barbers, construction professionals brought an impressive heritage to McCrorey Heights. Back in slavery times, African Americans had dominated trades such as brick-making and masonry work. They handled not just the hands-on labor but also the planning, crew-hiring and budgeting. Shade Payne continued that tradition. "It was his extreme joy to show others samples of his masonry in and around the City of Charlotte," said his obituary. "He excelled in laying and placing exquisite corners and other structural brick masonry." His home at 1801 Washington Avenue, across from the JCSU presidents house, shows off an abundance of "exquisite corners." [95] Other McCrorey Heights neighbors in the building arts included brick craftsman James G. Connor (1615 Oaklawn),[96] masonry contractor Malachi L. Greene (1704 Patton) who co-founded the union local of the Operative Plasterers and Cement Masons International Association[97], and Isaac Heard, Sr., who served as a building engineer for the vast Hercules Missile Plant (now Camp North End) on Statesville Avenue. [98]

Shade and Margaret Payne house, built 1952-55
1801 Washington Avenue
2017 photo

William and Johnsie Covington house, built 1956-57
1717 Madison Avenue
2017 photo

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[95] "1801 Washington Avenue," on the *McCrorey Heights.HistorySouth.org* website. https://mccrorey.historysouth.org/1801-washington-avenue/

[96] "1601 Oaklawn Avenue," on the *McCrorey Heights.HistorySouth.org* website. https://mccrorey.historysouth.org/1601-oaklawn/

[97] "1704 Patton Avenue," on the *McCrorey Heights.HistorySouth.org* website. https://mccrorey.historysouth.org/1704-patton-avenue/

[98] "1623 Madison Avenue," on the *McCrorey Heights.HistorySouth.org* website. https://mccrorey.historysouth.org/1623-madison-avenue/ "Isaac Heard, Sr., 1925 – 2021," obituary, Charlotte Observer, March 14, 2021. On-line at https://www.legacy.com/us/obituaries/charlotte/name/isaac-heard-obituary?id=7663157

Women in McCrorey Heights

Nearly every woman in McCrorey Heights worked outside the home – a rarity in wider upper-class American society before the 1970s. They most often took what were then considered "women's occupations," especially nursing or teaching. Whatever their main paid employment, they also dove into an amazing array of clubs and organizations.

* * *

A few women broke out of the nurse/educator mainstream. Marjorie Belton (wife of Principal Joseph Belton at 1700 Washington) was executive director of the Phyllis Wheatley YWCA.[99] Her neighbor Mildred Y. Gaillard (1704 Madison Avenue) served as its Program Director. The Wheatley YWCA, located in the Brooklyn neighborhood, ranked among Charlotte's most important African American institutions. Mary Jackson McCrorey created it in 1916 – the third Black branch of the organization in the United States.[100]

Edith Shearin (1650 Washington Avenue) worked as barmaid and *defacto* manager at the Excelsior Club for years – and won respect as an equal among the elite customers on the other side of the counter. Outside of work, she co-founded Charlotte's Black Political Caucus. "About six or seven of us decided that we needed to stop the bag men in Charlotte. We had Black elder people who were saying that they were delivering the Black vote and they were getting money, getting big money," Shearin explained in a 2018 oral history. McCrorey Heights residents Rowe Motley and Rev. Coleman Kerry were among the BPC activists. The group worked "to register people to vote and give them the information that they really needed about candidates. And we would drill the candidates to see if they were going to do something for, not for us, but for the total Black community."[101]

As African Americans began to find footholds in government following the 1965 Voting Rights Act, Rosemary Lawrence made history in Charlotte.[102] A 1969 JCSU alumnae, she began her career in Charlotte's fast-growing banking sector. In 1985 she joined the City of Charlotte as its first-ever Revenue Manager – the individual responsible for tracking all cash-flow into city government.

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[99] https://mccrorey.historysouth.org/1700-washington-avenue/ On the Phyllis Wheatley Branch, including Mrs. Belton, read Michelle Busby, "'The Price of Integration': The Story of the Charlotte YWCA in the 1960s" in Nina Mjagkij and Margaret Ann Spratt, editors, *Men and Women Adrift: The YMCA and the YWCA in the City* (New York: NYU Press, 1997).

[100] "1704 Madison Avenue," on the *McCrorey Heights.HistorySouth.org* website. https://mccrorey.historysouth.org/1704-madison-avenue/

[101] Edith Shearin, oral history interview with Tom Hanchett, Februrary 21, 2018.

[102] "1616 Patton Avenue," on the *McCrorey Heights.HistorySouth.org* website. https://mccrorey.historysouth.org/1616-patton-avenue/

Novella McCrorey Flanagan at her residence in McCrorey Heights
Digital Smith collection, Inez Moore Parker Archives, Duke Library, Johnson C. Smith University.
https://www.flickr.com/photos/23167301@N03/2250138707

Novella McCrorey Flanagan, who came down from New York City to handle land sales after Dr. McCrorey's death in 1951, was a cultural entrepreneur of considerable glamor.[103] An accomplished classical pianist, she had left Charlotte for New York in the 1920s to attend the famed Julliard School. In 1936 she signed on with the Harlem unit the WPA Music Project, part of the federal government's New Deal effort to provide jobs during the Great Depression. She created a school that hired out-of-work musicians to teach lessons to youngsters and play concerts for the community. When the WPA ended, NYC Mayor Fiorello LaGuardia personally arranged for the school to continue. Mount Morris Music School welcomed "children of all racial groups who are unable to pay for instruction," reported the *New York Age*. Novella made friends with numerous Black musical and social leaders: Marian Anderson, the world-famous classical singer, served on the Mount Morris board. In McCrorey Heights, Flanagan built a showplace house (914 Clifton Street at Washington Avenue) inspired by Frank Lloyd Wright – but only lived there between trips back to New York.[104]

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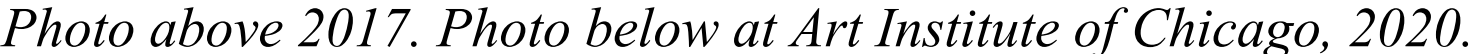
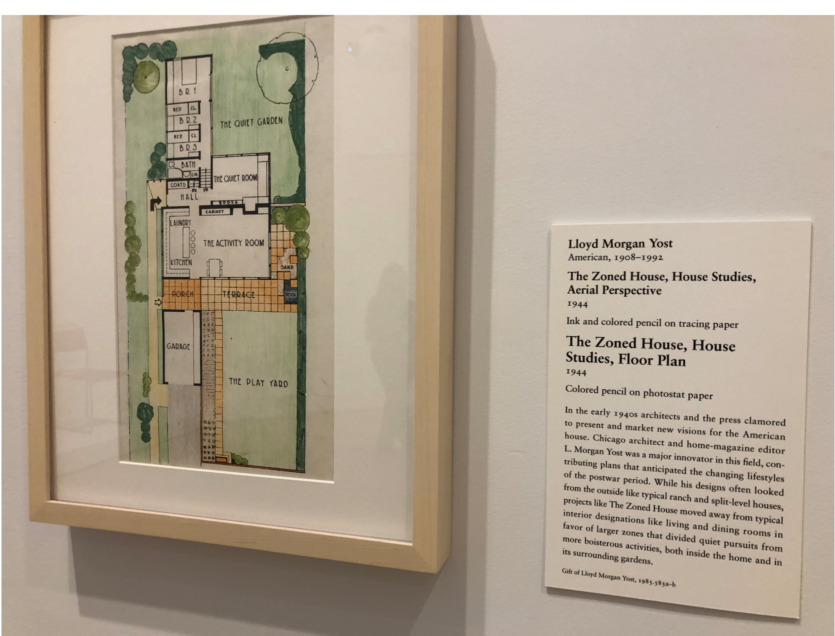
[103] "Dr. McCrorey Taken by Death," *Charlotte Observer*, July 14, 1951. www.newspapers.com/image/618284309/

[104] "914 Clifton Avenue," on the *McCrorey Heights.HistorySouth.org* website. https://mccrorey.historysouth.org/914-clifton-avenue/



The Novella McCrorey Flanagan house features a central sunken living room anchored by a massive chimney, with a bedroom wing extending off it in one direction, and a dining/kitchen/carport wing in the other direction. This division into "zones" resembles a Zoned House study drawn by Chicago architect L. Morgan Yost, who trained with Frank Lloyd Wright, then became a prolific author of house plans in national magazines. It is not known if Yost or another architect designed the Flanagan House.

Photo above 2017. Photo below at Art Institute of Chicago, 2020.



Ivestia "Peggy" Beckwith (1641 Oaklawn Avenue) had a career as a radio personality and fashion model in her youth, then married Carson H. Beckwith who owned Band's Beauty College, the first cosmetology school for African Americans in this part of the Carolinas. Peggy Beckwith helped start Charlotte's Sickle Cell Disease Association, which won grants to launch what is now C.W. Williams Community Health Center on Wilkinson Boulevard.[105]

* * *

Beckwith was not literally a nurse, but she had neighbors who were. Florence Cannon Goodwin at 1822 Patton Avenue, for example, came to Charlotte from a Presbyterian academy in Cheraw, SC, to earn a degree in the nursing school at Good Samaritan Hospital. She began her career at Good Sam, as Charlotteans nicknamed it, then worked thirty-four years as a Public Health Nurse in Charlotte's recently formed public health department, one of the first such agencies in the South.[106]

Nursing was customary occupation for doctors' wives. Dr. Edson Blackman's spouse Gertrude McWilliams Blackman was a leader among Charlotte's nurses. She had graduated from the nursing program at St. Agnes Hospital on the campus of St. Augustine College in Raleigh in 1917 and worked as a hospital dietician there. In Charlotte she became a clinical technician at Good Samaritan Hospital and in the 1940s headed its Florence Nightingale Club, the professional association of nurses. In 1946 she helped found the Charlotte chapter of the National Council of Negro Women, an activist organization that had been started by the renowned Civil Rights leader and Presbyterian educator Mary McLeod Bethune.[107]

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The majority of McCrorey Heights women worked in education – in every type of institution and at every level. Many were classroom teachers in the Charlotte Mecklenburg Schools system. Some were librarians, including Grace Wyche (1635 Oaklawn Avenue).[108] Others worked outside the school system, such as Blanche Rann Oliver, a beloved music teacher with studios in her home at 1813 Washington Avenue.[109]

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[105] "1641 Oaklawn Avenue," on the *McCrorey Heights.HistorySouth.org* website. https://mccrorey.historysouth.org/1641-oaklawn-avenue/

[106] "1822 Patton Avenue," on the *McCrorey Heights.HistorySouth.org* website. https://mccrorey.historysouth.org/1822-patton-avenue/

[107] "2019 Oaklawn Avenue," on the *McCrorey Heights.HistorySouth.org* website. https://mccrorey.historysouth.org/2019-oaklawn-avenue/

[108] "1635 Oaklawn Avenue," on the *McCrorey Heights.HistorySouth.org* website. https://mccrorey.historysouth.org/1635-oaklawn-avenue/

[109] "1813 Washington Avenue," on the *McCrorey Heights.HistorySouth.org* website. https://mccrorey.historysouth.org/1813-washington-avenue/

An elite cohort held college-level positions. English professor Ione Jones (810 Condon) became one of JCSU's most respected teachers and a frequent community spokesperson.[110] Her son J. Charles Jones would inherit her eloquence, making a national mark in the U.S. Civil Rights movement.[111] Dr. Esther Page Hill (1624 Madison Avenue), a talented artist, got her start teaching art in CMS then joined formerly all-white UNC Charlotte; along the way she earned a doctorate in Art Education from Florida State.[112] Another notable Ph.D. was Mary Harper, who lived on Van Buren as a newlywed.[113] She taught at JCSU, then at UNC Charlotte. There she and allies introduced a Black Studies curriculum and planned the cultural institution that is now the Harvey B. Gantt Center for African America Art and Culture.

Female principals in the public schools were held in especially high esteem in McCrorey Heights. They began as classroom teachers, usually in Black segregated schools, then rose to be administrators, often in newly integrated institutions – breaking barriers of both race and gender. Evelynne Hill Maxwell (1712 Washington), an early trailblazer, was principal at Amay James Elementary when she passed away in 1964.[114] Elizabeth Ross Dargan, a math teacher when she moved into 1621 Oaklawn Avenue in 1958, retired in the 1980s as principal at what is now Charles Parker (formerly Baringer) Academic Center.[115] Lena Sammons (1601 Patton) taught at Garinger High School, served as Director of Public Relations at Johnson C. Smith University, and finished her career as Principal at Hidden Valley Elementary.[116] Matilda Spears was "one of the first

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[110] "810 Condon Street," on the *McCrorey Heights.HistorySouth.org* website. https://mccrorey.historysouth.org/810-condon-street/

[111] History-maker Charles Jones, an adult by the time that his mother and father moved to McCrorey Heights, co-led Charlotte sit-ins, played a role in the creation of SNCC, and was jailed during the Freedom Ride. "Stumbling Across a Hero," *Charlotte Magazine*, January 22, 2011. https://www.charlottemagazine.com/stumbling-across-a-hero/ When he died in December 2019, the national press took notice: "Charles Jones, Civil Rights Activist, is Dead at Eighty-two," *New York Times*, January 10, 2020. https://www.nytimes.com/2020/01/10/us/j-charles-jones-dead.html? On Jones' impact in Washington, DC: "Charles Jones, Civil Rights Activist Who Led Protest Walk Around the Beltway, Dies at Eighty-two," *Washington Post*, January 18, 2020. https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/obituaries/j-charles-jones-civil-rights-activist-who-led-protest-walk-around-beltway-dies-at-82/2020/01/18/21978438-395b-11ea-9541-9107303481a4_story.html Jones first made headlines as the spokesperson for Charlotte's 1960 student sit-ins. To enjoy his gift as a talker, check out this podcast from the *Charlotte Observer:* *https://www.charlotteobserver.com/charlottefive/c5-around-town/article236162743.html*

[112] "1624 Madison Avenue," on the *McCrorey Heights.HistorySouth.org* website. https://mccrorey.historysouth.org/1624-madison-avenue/

[113] "1630 Van Buren Avenue," on the *McCrorey Heights.HistorySouth.org* website. https://mccrorey.historysouth.org/1630-van-buren-avenue/

[114] "1712 Washington Avenue," on the *McCrorey Heights.HistorySouth.org* website. https://mccrorey.historysouth.org/1712-washington-avenue/

[115] "1621 Oaklawn Avenue," on the *McCrorey Heights.HistorySouth.org* website. https://mccrorey.historysouth.org/1621-oaklawn-avenue/

[116] "1601 Patton Avenue," on the *McCrorey Heights.HistorySouth.org* website. https://mccrorey.historysouth.org/1601-patton-avenue/

black female school principals to work in an integrated community when she became Principal of Park Road Elementary," noted her funeral program, and later taught as Associate Professor of Education at Barber-Scotia College.[117] Charlotte's African American Catholic school at Our Lady of Consolation Church also recruited a principal from McCrorey Heights: Allean Gatson Conner.[118]

Dr. Gwendolyn Davidson Cunningham (1627 Oaklawn) won national notice for her deft handling of racial integration at Oaklawn Elementary School, where she was founding principal in 1964.[119] She also kept an eye out for pupils with top grades and strong character who would be good candidates as Charlotte integrated its junior high and high schools. Sam Fulwood III, son of a McCrorey Heights minister (1632 Madison Avenue), later wrote about feeling pride — and trepidation — when she tapped him in 1968.[120]

> "One day when I was in sixth grade, Principal Gwen Cunningham summoned me to her office. Mrs. Cunningham, who was always immaculately dressed and smelled as though she took baths in a large vat of floral perfume, handed me some papers…. 'I've talked with your teacher. Mrs. Wheeler says you are one of the best students in her class and she thinks you should go to Ranson Junior High next year. I think you and your parents should be very proud.'"[121]

The school board turned down Fulwood's initial transfer request, but he became part of integration at McClintock Junior High, Garinger High, UNC Chapel Hill, and in his work-life as a reporter for publications from the *Charlotte Observer* to *Time* magazine.

No educator in McCrorey Heights engendered more respect than Elizabeth "Libby" Randolph. She was already principal at University Park Elementary when she and her husband moved into their new home at 1616 Patton Avenue in about 1959. During the 1960s as a CMS administrator she launched kindergarten classes across the school district. At the height of school desegregation in 1976-77, CMS fired its superintendent and put a four-person team in charge for a year as it sought a new chief. Libby Randolph was one of the four, the first African American female in top leadership at CMS. She was named WBT Woman of the Year – the city's highest honor – and today

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[117] "1648 Patton Avenue," on the *McCrorey Heights.HistorySouth.org* website. https://mccrorey.historysouth.org/1648-patton-avenue/

[118] "1615 Oaklawn Avenue," on the *McCrorey Heights.HistorySouth.org* website. https://mccrorey.historysouth.org/1615-oaklawn-avenue/

[119] "1627 Oaklawn Avenue," on the *McCrorey Heights.HistorySouth.org* website. https://mccrorey.historysouth.org/1627-oaklawn-avenue/

[120] "1632 Madison Avenue," on the *McCrorey Heights.HistorySouth.org* website. https://mccrorey.historysouth.org/1632-madison-avenue/

[121] Sam Fulwood III, *Waking from the Dream: My Life in the Black Middle Class* (New York: Anchor Books, 1996), pp. 24 – 26. "1627 Oaklawn Avenue," on the *McCrorey Heights.HistorySouth.org* website. https://mccrorey.historysouth.org/1627-oaklawn-avenue/

the main building at the School Board's administrative campus is named in her memory.[122]

Cunningham house, 1627 Oaklawn Avenue

Randolph house, 1619 Patton Avenue

[122] "1616 Patton Avenue," on the *McCrorey Heights.HistorySouth.org* website.
https://mccrorey.historysouth.org/1616-patton-avenue/
https://charlottewoman.omeka.net/exhibits/show/charlotte-woman-of-the-year/item/149

Organizations: from bridge clubs to the NAACP

Everyone in McCrorey Heights, female or male, participated in a wide array of social and civic organizations. That not only created a community where neighbors felt connected on many levels, but also helped forge a sense of self-worth that could be a bulwark against a sometimes-hostile world. When McCrorey Heights people joined together to push for Civil Rights, they already knew each other well -- allies who could be counted on.

Mrs. Wilkins Hosts Warm Party in Bitter Cold

CHARLOTTE, N. C. The afternoon of Saturday, Jan. 28th saw an exciting party at Charlott's Phylis Wheatley "Y" where Mrs. Lydia G. Wilkins was the hostess and 39 braved the cold-and-ice.

Playing bridge were Mesdames Mildred Alridge, Gladsy, Anderson Miss Estelle Arthur; Mesdames Cora Booton, Marjorie Belton, Julia Boulding, Miss Lavonn Brown, Mesdames Thelma Byers, Gweldoyn Cunningham, Fannie Dobson, Carolyn Graham, Gladys Greene, Floretta Gunn, Aurelia Henderson, Ione Jones, Shirley Kennedy, Elizabeth Frazier Moore, Helen Moreland, Mable Creft Moss, Delcyn Murray, Sallie Phelps, Elizabeth Randolph, Margratha Rann, Misses Martha Reddick and Hattie Russell, Mesdames Mable Russell, Sterleta Sasso, Matilda Spears, Dorothy Steele, Nannie Syphax, Lucille Tyson, Fannie Wallace, Louise Watkins, Grace Wiley, Lizzette Williams, Nancy Williams and Maria Wynn.

■

Mesdames Helen Alexander and Mararet Patterson assisted the hostess, with Mr. Clinton Blake and associates serving a delicious buffet supper.

Mrs. Carolyn Graham won first prize, a lovely marble compote; the second prize, a linen bridge set was awarded Mrs. Cora Booton; third prize, tinted water glasses, to Mrs. Thelma Byers. The fourth prize, a set of linen dish towels, went to Mrs. Gwendolyn Cunningham.

Similar gifts went to those who assisted the hostess. Small palm plants were presented to 14 high scorers (following the fourth highest).

Semi-informal social clubs abounded in McCrorey Heights. Bridge seems to have been the most favored pastime, though other card games were played. The *Pittsburgh Gazette*, an African American newspaper with a national readership which often printed Charlotte society news, recapped one gathering in 1961 at the Phyllis Wheatley YWCA.[123] McCrorey Heights women enjoying the carefully planned sociability included Cora Booton, Marjorie Belton, Thelma Byers, Gwendolyn Cunningham, Helen Moreland, Elizabeth Randolph, Margratha Rann, Martha Reddick, Matilda Spears, and Maria Wynn.

Such clubs were seldom limited to McCrorey Heights residents, but instead built bonds beyond the neighborhood. They sometimes met the Wheatley Y or the Excelsior Club, but even more often in the participants' homes. Some players got deeply into the game, travelling to tournaments of the American Bridge Association, a nationwide Black organization found in 1932. Edward High (1709 Patton) served a term as national chair of the Association. The *Charlotte Observer* reported when W.W. Twitty earned the ABA's Life Master ranking. [124]

[123] "Mrs. Wilkins Hosts Warm Party in Bitter Cold," *Pittsburgh Courier*, February 11, 1961. On-line at: https://www.newspapers.com/image/40272842/

[124] "1709 Patton Avenue," on the *McCrorey Heights.HistorySouth.org* website. https://mccrorey.historysouth.org/1709-patton-avenue/ "A Big Hand for W.W. Twitty," *Charlotte News*, August 18, 1978. https://www.newspapers.com/image/623479446/ On the joys of neighborhood card playing, see O'Dell Robinson, oral history with Tom Hanchett, April 6, 2018, also Michael Motley, oral histories with Tom Hanchett, April and June 18, 2018.

On the history of the ABA, see "ABA to Meet in Cleveland," *Alabama Tribune*, August 7, 1959. https://www.newspapers.com/image/554601356/ Equality Wasn't in the Cards," *Chicago Tribune*, August 10, 1997. https://www.newspapers.com/image/168654880

Other clubs met simply to talk and enjoy each other's company. The Moles were one women's organization with several McCrorey Heights adherents. Launched in Norfolk in the 1920s, it chartered its first North Carlina affiliate in Charlotte in 1952. Gladys Moreland, Margratha Rann and Carolyn Wyche were among the initial members, [125] soon joined by Roberta[126] Thompkins, Naomi High, Evelynne Maxwell. If "Moles" was not unlikely enough a name, the club eventually added a husbands' group known as the "Mules." In that it echoed another women's group, the Amigas, whose spouses called themselves the Amigos.

Along with socializing, many clubs worked for community betterment. In the 1930s, seven boys in the Brooklyn neighborhood dubbed themselves the Swanks Social Club. [127] The group stuck together for the rest of their lives, adding like-minded members up to a total of thirty. They endowed the upfit of the main offices at the new McCrorey YMCA in 1951 and fundraised for many other social-uplift efforts over the years.[128]

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[125] "New Moles," *Pittsburgh Courier*, May 31, 1952. https://www.newspapers.com/image/40136795

"Moles Plan for Sixth Conclave," *Washington Afro-American*, April 3, 1956. "Convention Planning," *The Afro-American* (Baltimore, Washington), April 28, 1956. "Charlotte, N.C. Socialites Entertain," *Pittsburgh Courier*, January 14, 1961. "N.C. Links Hold Bridge Brunch at Club Excelsior," *Afro-American* (Baltimore, Washington), December 17, 1960.

Carolyn Wyche's daughter Diane discussed the Moles briefly in an oral history interview: Wyche, Dianne, oral history by Tosha McLean Pearson, History Department, UNC Charlotte, April 28, 2007. Transcript on-line at: http://www.history.uncc.edu/publichistory/pages/oralhist/brooklyn/transcripts/wyche%20transcript_files1.htm "1713 Oaklawn Avenue," on the *McCrorey Heights.HistorySouth.org* website https://mccrorey.historysouth.org/1713-oaklawn-avenue/

[126] Roberta Thompkins: "1800 Madison Avenue," on the *McCrorey Heights.HistorySouth.org* website. https://mccrorey.historysouth.org/1800-madison-avenue/

Naomi High: "1709 Patton Avenue," on the *McCrorey Heights.HistorySouth.org* website. https://mccrorey.historysouth.org/1709-patton-avenue/

Evelynne Maxwell: "1712 Washington Avenue," on the *McCrorey Heights.HistorySouth.org* website. https://mccrorey.historysouth.org/1712-washington-avenue/

[127] Swank Social Club records, collection MS0267, Special Collections, J. Murrey Atkins Library, UNC Charlotte. https://findingaids.uncc.edu/repositories/4/resources/313 "Swank Social Club," on the Wikipedia website: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Swank_Social_Club "Swank Social Club Celebrates Sixty Years," *Charlotte Observer*, November 21, 1934. https://www.newspapers.com/image/627455749/

[128] "Official Opening and Dedication of the Henry Lawrence McCrorey Branch of the Young Men's Christian Association of Charlotte, N.C., April 15, 1951," pamphlet in the Inez Moore Parker Archive,

When McCrorey Heights lot sales took off after World War II, several Swanks built houses near each other – forming a nexus of families who would take large roles in the Civil Rights movement: activist attorney Thomas Wyche (profiled later in this essay, 1635 Oaklawn); Ray Booton, Jr., (1725 Van Buren) the first African American on the city police force, who later sparked the integration of Charlotte's public golf course; desegregation-era educators Eddie Byers (1608 Madison), Samuel Woodard (1709 Madison) and Gerson Stroud (brother Julius Stroud lived at 1905 Washington); as well as W.W. Twitty (1725 Madison) whose role in Charlotte's 1954 airport sit-in will be described below.[129]

Like Lois Harris Byers (1608 Madison Avenue), most McCrorey Heights residents participated actively in multiple organizations

BA from JCSU, MA from New York University
taught physical education in CMS for 30 years

- President of the local chapter of Jacks and Jills
- National president of the Holidays Bridge Club
- Chaired local membership committee of Links, Inc.
- Active lifelong in Delta Sigma Theta sorority and served on Charlotte's Pan Hellenic Council

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Johnson C. Smith University. Https://cdm16324.contentdm.oclc.org/digital/collection/p15170coll5/id/561/rec/6

[129] Wyche: "1635 Oaklawn Avenue," on the *McCrorey Heights.HistorySouth.org* website. https://mccrorey.historysouth.org/1635-oaklawn-avenue/

Booton: "1722 Van Buren Avenue," on the *McCrorey Heights.HistorySouth.org* website. https://mccrorey.historysouth.org/1722-van-buren-avenue/

Byers: "1608 Madison Avenue," on the *McCrorey Heights.HistorySouth.org* website. https://mccrorey.historysouth.org/1608-madison-avenue/

Woodard: "1709 Madison Avenue," on the *McCrorey Heights.HistorySouth.org* website. https://mccrorey.historysouth.org/1709-madison-avenue/

Stroud: "1905 Washington Avenue," on the *McCrorey Heights.HistorySouth.org* website. https://mccrorey.historysouth.org/1905-washington-avenue/

Twitty: "1725 Madison Avenue," on the *McCrorey Heights.HistorySouth.org* website. https://mccrorey.historysouth.org/1725-madison-avenue/

Two clubs specializing in educational uplift were the Links and Jacks & Jills, both affiliates of major national women's organizations.[130] In 1955 fourteen local women, including Cora Booton, Thelma Byers, Novella Flanagan, Gladys Greene, Ruby Martin, and Maria Wynn from McCrorey Heights, chartered the Charlotte chapter of The Links, Incorporated.[131] Launched in Philadelphia in 1946, the Links became perhaps the nation's most important organization (outside of the sorority system) forging social networks among upscale African American women locally and nationally. The Charlotte chapter funded college scholarships and supported health and education programs aimed at African Americans. Jacks and Jills got its Charlotte start in 1957, with Carolyne Wyche (1713 Oaklawn) and Gwendolyn Heard (1623 Madison) among its leaders. Jacks and Jills provided after-school educational enrichment for upscale Black families – and it planned intercity events with counterparts outside Charlotte. "Jack and Jill was a national organization so you got to travel and to meet people," Carolyn's daughter Dianne Wyche told a UNC Charlotte history interviewer. "I was in the first teen group. There were doctor's wives, preacher's children, professors from Smith, the president of Smith -- [their children all participated] in the teen group."[132]

Sororities and fraternities added to the busy social calendar, while also creating networks that could be harnessed for civic change. These "Hellenic" (Greek-inspired) organizations functioned differently in Black life than they did among whites. White chapters were usually on college campuses where they often operated housing facilities. Black fraternities and sororities, in contrast, had a more life-long trajectory. They often inducted members after college (in what were called "graduate chapters") and functioned as mechanisms for well-educated Black adults to build friendships over the years and engage in public service at the local, state and national levels. Charlotte, like other major African American urban centers, boasted chapters of all the "divine nine" major sororities and fraternities, coordinated by a Pan Hellenic Council.

Charlotte's Kappa Alpha Psi graduate chapter, to discuss just one example, got its start in 1944 under the leadership of young professor Herman L. Counts (who would build at 1604 Patton Avenue in 1958).[133] "Desegregating public facilities and local schools, improving healthcare, creating national service programs, promoting personal advancement, developing community leaders and providing unparalleled hospitality are just a few of the collective hallmarks of our chapter," states the chapter's organizational

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[130] "1608 Madison Avenue," on the *McCrorey Heights.HistorySouth.org* website. https://mccrorey.historysouth.org/1608-madison-avenue/

[131] "Charlotte Chapter History," on the *Charlotte Links, Inc.* website. On-line at: https://www.charlottelinksinc.org/history

[132] Wyche, Dianne, oral history by Tosha McLean Pearson, History Department, UNC Charlotte, April 28, 2007. Transcript on-line at: http://www.history.uncc.edu/publichistory/pages/oralhist/brooklyn/transcripts/wyche%20transcript_files1.htm "1713 Oaklawn Avenue," on the *McCrorey Heights.HistorySouth.org* website https://mccrorey.historysouth.org/1713-oaklawn-avenue/

[133] "1604 Patton Avenue," on the *McCrorey Heights.HistorySouth.org* website. https://mccrorey.historysouth.org/1604-patton-avenue/

history. [134] Ray Booton, Jr., who broke the color line in Charlotte's police department was a Kappa Alpha Psi member. So were two other notable McCrorey Heights neighbors, the dentist Reginald Hawkins and JCSU theologian Edwin Thompkins. When Herman Counts' daughter Dorothy walked to school on that first day of integration in 1957, Herman knew that he could rely on fraternity brothers to walk alongside and shield her from harm: Hawkins and Thompkins.[135]

While Civil Rights was part of the mission of many African American organizations that McCrorey Heights residents joined, one group made racial activism its prime purpose: the Charlotte chapter of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). Kelly Alexander, Sr., reenergized the group in the 1940s and made it into a strong force for change – even as he moved up to statewide NAACP president. The chapter lobbied local government and issued regular press releases on major issues. In 1950, for instance, a ten-point Charlotte NAACP program for the post-WWII era called for a Black representative on the school board; urged a loosening of segregation that included elimination of white and colored signs on buses and at water fountains; requested that Black businesses be allowed to operate in every part of the city, not just Black neighborhoods; and demanded that the City build infrastructure in African American areas, ranging from new public housing to such basics as street paving.[136]

McCrorey Heights men and women took a public role in the NAACP. In parts of the deep South, anti-Black forces were so powerful that NAACP groups kept their meetings and membership rosters secret. But here the chapter's press releases boldly listed officers and executive committee members – a declaration against fear. [137] Thomas E. Gilliard (1704 Madison Avenue) served for many years as the chapter's vice president, and his wife Mildred regularly appeared on committee lists. Dr. Roy S. Wynn did a stint

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[134] "History of Charlotte Alumni" page on the website *The Charlotte Chapter of Kappa Alpha Psi Fraternity*. On-line at: https://cltkappas.com/history-of-charlotte-alumni/

[135] "Alpha on Campus: JCSU," *The Sphinx, Official Organ, Alpha Psi Alpha Fraternity, Inc.,* December 1968, page 6, on-line at https://issuu.com/apa1906network/docs/196805404/8 JCSU presidents Rufus Perry and Lionel Newsome were also Alpha men. "Brother Rufus P. Perry Passes Gavel to Brother Lionel H. Newsom," *The Sphinx, Official Organ, Alpha Psi Alpha Fraternity, Inc*, pp. 4-5.

[136] "Better Living Conditions Sought: NAACP to Push Improvement Program,' *Charlotte News*, January 23, 1950. https://www.newspapers.com/image/621660600/

[137] "J.A. Jackson Guest Speaker," *Charlotte News*, October 27, 1943. https://www.newspapers.com/image/617518456/ "NAACP Plans Broad Program for 1948," *Charlotte News*, January 23, 1948. https://www.newspapers.com/image/617909923/ "Aims of Negro Group Are Outlined," *Charlotte News*, January 26, 1949. https://www.newspapers.com/image/621663713/ "NAACP Speaker: Durham Publisher Will Install New Officers of Charlotte Branch Today," *Charlotte Observer*, February 12, 1950. https://www.newspapers.com/image/618221177/

On long-time NAACP chapter stalwarts Thomas and Mildred Gilliard, see "1704 Madison Avenue," on the *McCrorey Heights.HistorySouth.org* website. https://mccrorey.historysouth.org/1704-madison-avenue/

as treasurer. Other current and future McCrorey Heights people often listed included Moses Belton of JCSU, dentist Reginald Hawkins, physician Edson Blackman, and Baptist leader Rev. James R. Holloway.

Along with behind-the-scenes lobbying and public calls for change, the Charlotte NAACP organization also filed lawsuits in the courts. Thomas H. Wyche, an attorney who headed the chapter's legal committee from the 1940s into the 1960s, handled much of that difficult work.[138] A look at his life provides a way to explore what scholars call the "long Civil Rights movement" as it unfolded in Charlotte.

An unsung Civil Rights leader: attorney Thomas Wyche

The "Civil Rights Movement" was not a separate category of endeavor, some type of new effort that began at a particular moment after, say, the 1954 *Brown* decision by the Supreme Court, or the Montgomery Bus Boycott by Rosa Parks and Rev. Martin Luther King. Jr., in 1955-56. Instead, Civil Rights actions were always ongoing, on many levels. We've already seen that in preceding sections of this essay: the decades-long labor by Presbyterian clergy to provide an educational ladder to train Black leaders; Dr. Blackman's 1940s work for better hospital facilities, followed by Dr. Rann's and Dr. Hawkins' struggle to end healthcare segregation; the efforts of Ray Booton, Jr., and William Covington during the 1940s and 1950s to integrate the police department; the rise of Black school principals, capped by Libby Randolph's move into the top rank of CMS leadership; Dorothy Counts' brave walk to integrate Harding High. Those were just a few episodes in a much larger story. The experiences of Thomas Wyche, along with his frequent allies Dr. Reginald Hawkins and attorney Charles V. Bell, suggest how persistent efforts year after year, supported by community networks, brought Civil Rights advances.

Thomas Wyche was born October 29, 1919, to one of Charlotte's most distinguished families. His father Rev. Robert P. Wyche pastored First United Presbyterian Church on Seventh Street, where he led the 1896 construction of its impressive brick church building, today a Charlotte Mecklenburg historic landmark. A profile in the 1921 book *The History of the Negro and His Institutions* applauded him as "a man who, though beginning his life as a slave, has found the largest freedom in a life of service of others."[139]

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[138] "Tom was the local lawyer for the NAACP. Then I think he became state representative for the NAACP," remembered fellow African American attorney Calvin Brown. "Most cases that came up that involved discrimination came, at some point, across his desk. That kept him quite busy." Calvin Brown, oral history with Tosha McLean Pearson, April 24, 2007. https://brooklyn-oral-history.charlotte.edu/calvin-brown/

[139] "Robert P. Wyche" in A.B. Caldwell, ed., *History of the American Negro and His Institutions*, Volume IV, North Carolina Edition (Atlanta: A.B Caldwell Publishing, 1921), pp. 229 – 232, on-line at https://archive.org/details/historyofamerica04cald Dan. L Morrill, "First United Presbyterian Church: Survey & Research Report," Charlotte Mecklenburg Historic Landmarks Commission, 1977, updated 2003. http://landmarkscommission.org/2016/11/02/first-united-presbyterian-church/

Young Thomas attended Second Ward High, where he helped found the Swanks Social Club (see above), then earned a degree from JCSU and went off to Howard University law school. Howard, in Washington DC, was the red-hot heart of a rumbling Civil Rights volcano. Law school dean Charles Hamilton Houston had begun training a network of Civil Rights attorneys in the 1930s for the NAACP, sending them out across the nation.[140] Thurgood Marshall would become the best known, erupting into national prominence when he won *Brown v Board of Education* in 1954, the Supreme Court ruling that would declare "separate but equal" segregation to be "inherently unequal."

The Howard University law professors encouraged students to be active in community Civil Rights work. That included staging the nation's first sit-ins.[141] In 1943 and again in 1944, members of Howard's NAACP student chapter carefully planned protests at restaurants near the university. Leaders included Wyche's law school classmate Pauli Murray (later a nationally important Civil Rights attorney and professor in North Carolina), who earned recognition as "the mother of direct student action." On April 13, 1943, eighteen students including Thomas Wyche walked into the Little Palace Cafeteria in groups of three. Each group "requested service, were promptly refused, took seats at table, and began leisurely reading books," reported the *Baltimore Afro-American*. "Others followed in regular order until the tables were almost all taken." The restaurant closed eight hours early but students stubbornly returned over the next four days. Finally, the cafeteria gave in and ended its whites-only policy. Howard sit-ins went on to target lunch-counters at the city's big Peoples Drug chain. Charlottean Reginald Hawkins, who arrived at Howard as a dental student in the fall of 1944, later pointed to these sit-ins as a key inspiration for his own life of activism. He and Thomas Wyche would soon cross paths back in Charlotte.

Lawyer Wyche opened his Charlotte office in 1945, one of only four Black attorneys serving the city's African American residents. He built his practice over the next few years, handling every type of local legal work. In 1946 he married Grace Long and in 1949 they took out permits to build their home at 1635 Oaklawn Avenue. The little brick house, just 1500 square feet with three small bedrooms, would welcome Attorney Wyche's distinguished NAACP legal colleagues over the years, including Spottswood Robinson III, James Nabrit and Jack Greenberg. "I kept all of them in my house," Grace Wyche later recalled with pride. "They didn't have any place else to stay. Thurgood Marshall, too, right here at this house."[142]

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[140] Genna Rae McNeil, *Groundwork: Charles Hamilton Houston and the Struggle for Civil Rights* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 1993). Jack Greenberg, *Crusaders in the Courts: How a Dedicated Band of Lawyers Fought for the Civil Rights Revolution* (Basic Books, 1994).

[141] Flora Bryant Brown, "NAACP Sponsored Sit-ins by Howard University Students in Washington, D.C., 1943-1944," *Journal of Negro History*, (Autumn, 2000), pp. 274-286.

[142] Grace Wyche, oral history with Tom Hanchett, August 10, 2016.

Wyche's first Civil Rights case of potential national significance came in 1951.[143] Ray Booton, Jr. loved to play golf, a past-time he had picked up during his military service in World War II. He already had experience breaking racial barriers as one of Charlotte's first pair of Black police officers. So on a quiet Monday in late fall of 1951, he boldly went down to the city-owned Bonnie Brae Golf Club in whites-only Revolution Park and asked to play. To no one's surprise, he was denied.

Thomas Wyche brought in Spottswood Robinson III, NAACP lawyer who was also at work on the *Brown* case at that moment. It seems likely that Wyche, Robinson and Booton had planned things in advance. Booton had been one of Wyche's closest friends ever since Second Ward High School, where they were fellow members of the Swanks Social Club. Robinson had been one of Wyche's professors at Howard, teaching a seminar on strategies to attack segregation. In a sequence that closely echoed the Palace Cafeteria sit-ins, three African Americans foursomes went to Bonnie Brae on December 12 and were rebuffed. The next day two more foursomes tried and failed.

On December 21, 1951, Wyche and Robinson filed a petition on behalf of sixteen African Americans to desegregate Bonnie Brae. Petitioners included two of Wyche's Oaklawn Avenue neighbors: physicians Dr. Rudolph P. Wyche (no relation to Thomas Wyche) and Dr. Robert H. Green. The lawsuit attracted national attention.[144] If it had been decided quickly, it might be taught today in history books alongside Rosa Parks' 1955 bus protest. But the court dragged its feet until 1956 – when it ruled that Bonnie Brae must admit African American golfers.

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[143] Jesse Usher, "'The Golfers:' African American Golfers of the North Carolina Piedmont and the Struggle for Access," *North Carolina Historical Review* (April 2010), pp. 158 – 193.
"Seek to Open Charlotte Golf Course to Negroes," *Carolina Times*, January 5, 1952, on-line at https://newspapers.digitalnc.org/lccn/sn83045120/1952-01-05/ed-1/seq-1/#words=Negroes+sixteen "Golf Course Case Starts," *Charlotte News*, January 17, 1955. https://www.newspapers.com/image/618770064/

[144] "NAACP Attacks Golf Jim Crow," *California Eagle* [Los Angeles], January 17, 1952. https://www.newspapers.com/image/693551561/

Seven of the sixteen Negroes who were not allowed to play golf on the Bonnie Brae (Municipal) Golf Course in Charlotte, North Carolina are shown with Attorney Spotswood W. Robinson, III, Southeast Regional NAACP Counsel; Attorney Thomas H. Wyche, Chairman, Charlotte Branch, NAACP Legal Committee and Kelly M. Aelxander, President, North Carolina Conference of NAACP Branches.

Reading from left to right, front row, Charles W. Leeper, Dr. Rudloph M. Wyche, Henry H. Isley, Anthony M. Walker and Russell McLaughlin.

Back row, Attorney Thomas H. Wyche, I. P. Farrar, Attorney Robinson, Willie Lee Weddington and Alexander.

The Charlotte Park and Recreation Commission was asked on December 20th, to change its policy so that Negroes will be given the right to use the Bonnie Brae Course on the same basis the white golfers use the course. The petition was sent to the Commission and to the City Government by Attorneys for the NAACP.

Seek To Open Charlotte Golf Course To Negroes

Carolina Times [Durham], January 5, 1952.

* * *

Even before the Bonnie Brae case was won, Wyche attempted another Civil Rights test of national importance, again scoring a local victory but not changing the course of national history. Dr. Reginald Hawkins, now graduated from Howard University dental school, had settled in Charlotte where he took increasing delight in shaking up segregated society. As a dentist who served Black clients, he was somewhat insulated from white economic pressure and he used that independence with glee.

On July 10, 1954, Charlotte proudly opened a new airport terminal. The federal government funded construction and the facility was for "interstate transportation" – which the Supreme Court had ruled be desegregated. But Charlotte being a Southern city, local administrators barred African Americans from the terminal's restaurant. Dr. Hawkins and Thomas Wyche decided to mount a challenge – a Howard University-style

sit-in. They brought along a pair of McCrorey Heights neighbors, insurance agent W.W. Twitty and Civil Rights attorney Charles V. Bell, and drove out to the airport.

As writer Barry Yeoman recreated the scene years later:

> "Reginald Hawkins could feel his heart racing as he and three friends made their way through Douglas Municipal Airport in Charlotte, North Carolina. Dressed in his best Sunday suit, the 30-year-old dentist and Presbyterian minister sought to accomplish a simple task: to sit at the Airport '77' Restaurant, with its big picture windows overlooking the two asphalt runways, and eat his lunch unmolested….
>
> "As he and the others entered the restaurant, the hostess … said, 'We don't serve blacks here.' …. [The] four brushed past her, spotted an empty table, and took their seats. The ensuing commotion caught the ear of Frank Littlejohn, Charlotte's chief of police, who was at lunch with several city bigwigs. The chief knew Hawkins from previous protests. He walked over to the dentist's table. 'Doctor, won't you all leave?' he said. 'You're embarrassing us.'
>
> "'I'm sorry,' Hawkins replied. 'But we've been embarrassed all our lives.'"[145]

The action made national headlines. "The Negroes were herded off into a small room adjoining the kitchen of the eating establishment to obtain meals," reported the *Carolina Times* of Durham. The affront gave Attorney Wyche the grounds to file suit. Headlined the newspaper: "Queen City Group Seeks Injunction Against City Airport Restaurant; Charge Unconstitutional Bias."

Group Says Food Service Denied

By DICK YOUNG
Charlotte News Staff Writer

Allegation that a group of Charlotte Negroes had been refused service at Airport 77 Restaurant at Charlotte's new terminal at Municipal Airport was made to the City Council today.

Dr. R. A. Hawkins Charlotte Negro dentist, read a statement before the council claiming that operators of the restaurant had violated federal, state, and local laws by refusing to serve a group of Negro citizens.

In the group which appeared at the restaurant, were, besides Dr. Hawkins, T. B. Wyche, C. V. Bell, and W. W. Twitty.

Upon the conclusion of the reading of the statement by Dr. Hawkins, he was requested to present the copy to the city clerk, but the council took no action regarding it and moved on to other business.

SERVED BEFORE

After his appearance before the council, Dr. Hawkins told The News that a group of Negroes had been served dinner in the restaurant last Friday. But, he said, they had been refused service at luncheon yesterday.

He also said that they had been refused service in the coffee shop, located in the same building and operated by the same owners, at 4 a.m. yesterday.

This is the statement Dr. Hawkins read to the council:

"As Negro citizens and tax-

with federal and municipal funds. It also presents a precedent in view of the recent developments …

"It must also be noted that subsection 1118 provides penal-

Charlotte News, June 30, 1954

In Charlotte, N. C.

Bias Suit Filed At Air Terminal

By A. M. RIVERA Jr.

CHARLOTTE, N. C.—A Federal injunction has been filed here against the restaurant at this city's new airport terminal by a group of Negro leaders. The injunction …

Atty. C. V. Bell, one of the plaintiffs, told the Courier that the action was brought against the News Company, lessees of the restaurant, because the facility is being operated contrary to the contract governing the use of the airport, which was built by municipal and Federal funds.

ACCORDING to Attorney Bell, the matter is now before the Civil Aeronautics Authority. The petitioners, Atty. T. H. …

Pittsburgh Courier, July 17, 1954

Queen City Group Seeks Injunction Against City Airport Restaurant; Charge Unconstitutional Bias

CHARLOTTE

Durham's *Carolina Times*, July 24, 1954

WILL SEEK INJUNCTION

Negroes To Fight Airport Decision

A group of Charlotte Negroes plans to go ahead with a federal injunction against the new airport terminal restaurant here, probably next week.

Attorney T. H. Wyche indicated as much after City Attorney John Shaw yesterday delivered his opinion that operators of the terminal restaurant were not violating the law or terms of their lease in refusing to serve Negroes who are not air passengers.

Wyche pressed the Council, "as our elected representatives, to uphold the law," but was told by Councilman Dellinger, "We have to follow the opinion of our attorney or be liable ourselves."

Councilman Basil Boyd asked Mr. Shaw to determine within two weeks whether the Council has the power to enact an ordi-

Mr. Shaw said that the city-owned terminal houses a restaurant which is under lease to private operators, who own its furnishings and equipment.

"But can you lease away our rights under the Constitution?" said Wyche.

"We do not want the final alternative of court action," he added, "because each time we do this we are fighting ourselves as Americans. But what can we do?"

Mr. Shaw said he based his opinion on a study of a Washington case cited to him by the Negro group as legal basis for their claim of illegal discrimination.

Charlotte Observer, July 15, 1954

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[145] Yeoman, Barry, "A Taste for Tolerance," *AARP The Magazine*, May 1, 2004, on-line at: https://barryyeoman.com/2004/05/taste-for-tolerance-charlotte/

After two years of legal wrangling the airport restaurant did desegregate in 1956. The victory brought no wider repercussions, though. In 1960 college students would use similar tactics at a Woolworth lunch-counter in Greensboro, sparking the nationwide Sit-In Movement. The famed Freedom Ride would employ the tactics again in 1961. Attorney Thomas Wyche would be involved in both. But for now, the time was not yet right.

* * *

Charles V. Bell, Wyche's ally in the airport sit-in, was also building a reputation as a crusading lawyer – and getting ready to build a house at 1645 Madison Avenue in McCrorey Heights.[146] Like Wyche he was a second-generation Civil Rights activist; his father was a path-breaking Black lawyer in eastern North Carolina. Almost as soon as Charles Bell arrived in Charlotte, fresh out of the new law school at what is now NC Central University, he began making waves. He ran into trouble during a Greyhound bus ride to Spartanburg on July 20, 1951, where he was scheduled to speak at a Veterans of Foreign Wars rally. As more white passengers got on the bus in Gastonia, the driver ordered him to sit further to the rear. "I will not move unless you place me under arrest," Bell said, according to the report of the police officers who detained him. "Claims He was Arrested in Gastonia: Negro Attorney is Suing Bus Company for $60,000," headlined a *Gastonia Gazette* front-page story picked up by newspapers around the state.[147] The police chief adroitly defused the situation, issuing a denial that any actual arrest had taken place.

Bell would continue to push against inequality. In 1966 he would argue *Davis v. North Carolina* before the U.S. Supreme Court. Charlotte police had taken Elmer Davis into custody during a murder investigation and kept him isolated while they interrogated him for sixteen days until he agreed to confess. Attorney Bell vigorously protested that such a confession was not valid. Through six years of lower court proceedings and finally on the floor of the Supreme Court in Washington, he argued: "It was coerced … they used force, and … it was involuntarily obtained." The Supreme Court agreed. "Petitioner's confessions were the involuntary end product of coercive influences, and thus constitutionally inadmissible in evidence," wrote Chief Justice Earl Warren.[148] In a companion case in that same Court session, Warren also wrote the now-famous *Miranda* decision. It required that police must read arrestees their rights and allow them to contact

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[146]"1645 Madison Avenue," on the *McCrorey Heights.HistorySouth.org* website. https://mccrorey.historysouth.org/1645-madison-avenue/

[147] "Claims He was Arrested in Gastonia: Negro Attorney is Suing Bus Company for $60,000," *Gastonia Gazette*, August 29, 1951. "Charlotte Lawyer Files Jim Crow Damage Action." *High Point Enterprise*, August 29, 1951. https://www.newspapers.com/image/12351315

[148] *Davis v. North Carolina* (384 U.S. 737 (1966)). The official case summary, Warren's opinion, and a transcript of Bell's verbal argument on the Supreme Court floor are on-line via the *Oyez Project*, IIT Chicago-Kent College of Law: http://today.oyez.org/cases/1960-1969/1965/1965_815

a lawyer. The *Miranda* case, buttressed by *Davis*, set a pattern ensuring that the U.S. legal system must safeguard the rights of persons accused of a crime.

* * *

The U.S. Supreme Court issued its *Brown* school ruling in May of 1954, but soon afterward said that change could proceed "with all deliberate speed." What did that mean? For Civil Rights activists, it meant years of keeping the pressure on every local school district. North Carolina NAACP state president Kelly Alexander sent out a letter asking for "law abiding citizens … to translate this decision into a program of action to eradicate racial segregation in public education as speedily as possible."[149] The letter noted that attorneys Wyche and Bell of Charlotte and Durham colleague Conrad Pearson (yet another Howard University law grad) stood ready to assist anyone anywhere in the state willing to file suit. Wyche himself ran for Charlotte School Board in 1955 – a courageous move in an era when, in the words of Kelly Alexander, "a Negro has never been appointed to a policy-making body."

Wyche lost the election but kept schools in his sights. In early 1957 he and Kelly Alexander met with School Board chair Herbert Spaugh and hammered out an agreement whereby four Black students would integrate white schools that Fall: it set up the September events including Dorothy Counts' walk to Harding High. In 1959 Wyche teamed with Conrad Person and Thurgood Marshall to file *Morrow v. Mecklenburg County Board of Education,* asking the courts to "forever restrain" operation of segregated schools. Priscilla Morrow and eight other young African American children lived in rural part pf the county outside Charlotte. The School Board had assigned them to all-Black Torrence-Lytle School, nine miles or more from their homes, even though all lived within a mile and a half of white Derita School. Those facts failed to persuade the judge in the lawsuit, however. He ruled that no evidence for discrimination existed. The NAACP would try again in 1965, eventually leading to the landmark U.S. Supreme Court case *Swann v. Mecklenburg.*

* * *

As his neighbors Reginald Hawkins and Emery Rann sought to open healthcare to all, Tom Wyche often assisted. Wyche represented Hawkins in his quest for admission to the North Carolina Dental Association. NAACP heavy-hitters Thurgood Marshall, Jack Greenberg, James Nabrit and Conrad Pearson all pitched in to aid Wyche before Hawkins finally won the decade-long struggle in 1964.[150]

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[149] John E. Batchelor, *Race and Education in North Carolina: From Segregation to Desegregation*. (Louisiana State University Press, 2015), especially p. 34.

[150] "Negroes Trying to Eliminate Dental Society's Color Bar," *News and Observer* [Raleigh], March 31, 1960. https://www.newspapers.com/image/651893298/ "Dentist Sues Dental Society to End Bias," *Florida Star* [Jacksonville], April 3, 1960.
Dr. Hawkins v. NC Dental Society and Second District Dental Society (230 F. Supp. 805).

Some lawsuits ended less successfully. In 1959 – a year before the famous student-led Greensboro sit-ins – the young nursing students at Good Samaritan Hospital went on strike. Thomas Wyche and Charles Bell represented the women as they protested substandard conditions in the old building. "Striking students are asking that patients be transferred to the Memorial hospital," reported the *Carolina Times*.[151] The action failed. In retribution, hospital administrators ended Good Samaritan's nurse-training program.

* * *

Students took the lead in national Civil Rights actions of the early 1960s. In Charlotte the sit-ins started on February 9, hot on the heels of Greensboro events, and lasted into July. Student leaders at JCSU included Charles Jones (whose parents Rev. J.T. Jones and Prof. Ione Jones would soon build in McCrorey Heights) and Brumit Belton "B.B." De Laine (whose uncles Joseph and Moses Belton both lived in the neighborhood, and whose father and mother would soon build there as well). When protestors were arrested, the *Carolina Times* reported that "Attorneys for the Negro students were Thomas Wyche and Charles V. Bell, both of Charlotte, and Jack Greenberg of the NAACP Legal Defense Fund staff in New York." Thomas and Grace Wyche put their own bodies on the line as well, joining the sit-in students in the downtown eateries. "I remember going to Belk [Department Store]; they said they would close up before they let us eat there," Grace Wyche later recalled. "I remember going to Iveys [Department Store] and they said the same thing." [152]

The next year, a small group of Black and white college students from across the U.S. (including future U.S. Congressman John Lewis) met in Washington D.C. for something they called the Freedom Ride. It had been years since the Supreme Court had outlawed segregation in interstate travel. The students would simply obey that national law as they bought tickets and rode Greyhound and Trailways buses on a route through the South -- but in so doing they knew they would call attention to segregation that persisted on buses, in waiting rooms, and in the stations' shops and restaurants.

The Freedom Ride ended its first day in Charlotte, perhaps because NAACP Attorney Wyche was known to be standing by in case of trouble. Sure enough, when Black rider Joseph Perkins tried to get a shoeshine at a white stand in the Charlotte bus depot he was arrested. This was the very first resistance that the Freedom Riders encountered on their journey. Wyche went to court, got Perkins released within two days, and the young man rejoined his fellow Riders as they moved into the Deep South.[153]

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[151] "Nurses Go On Strike: Charlotte Nurse Students Protest Poor Facilities," *Carolina Times* [Durham], October 17, 1959. https://newspapers.digitalnc.org/lccn/sn83045120/1959-10-17/ed-1/seq-1/ "Hospital Providing for Nurses," *Charlotte News*, October 13, 1959. https://www.newspapers.com/image/619815604/ "Samaritan May Face Student Nurse Suits," *Charlotte Observer*, October 15, 1959. https://www.newspapers.com/image/619945083/

[152] Grace Wyche, oral history with Tom Hanchett, August 10, 2016.

[153] Derek Catsam, *Freedom's Main Line: The Journey of Reconciliation and the Freedom Rides* (University Press of Kentucky, 2009), pp. 117 – 118. Raymond Arsenault, *Freedom Riders: 1961 and the Struggle for Racial Justice* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011) p. 79-80.

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After yet more exploits, Attorney Wyche moved to the sidelines of the struggle. The NAACP sent an energetic young lawyer to Charlotte in 1964 to take up the work: Julius Chambers. Meanwhile Wyche helped start a non-profit legal clinic for poor Charlotteans. When it opened in 1967, Wyche was Deputy Director of the three-person office of Legal Aid.[154]

The long journey toward equality, which Thomas Wyche and his neighbors had done so much to advance, did not stop. In 1965 Chambers filed *Swann v Charlotte-Mecklenburg Board of Education*, which built on earlier school lawsuits by Wyche and Hawkins.[155] Among the ten plaintiff families in *Swann* were McCrorey Heights parents and children: Dr. and Mrs. Reginald Hawkins on behalf of son Wayne and daughter Lorena, Rev. Elo Henderson on behalf of daughter Sula, and Mr. and Mrs. A.D. Neal on behalf of daughter Wanda. The U.S. Supreme Court's 1971 ruling on *Swann* would make school busing for racial balance an important component of education policy throughout the United States for a generation.[156]

McCrorey Heights people continued to make history.

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[154] Peggie Porter, *Doing Justice for 25 Years: The History of Legal Services of Southern Piedmont, Inc., 1967-1992* (Legal Services of Southern Piedmont, 1992).

[155] For instance, "School Board Hears Demand — Negroes: Desegregate Now," *Charlotte Observer*, November 12, 1963. https://www.newspapers.com/image/619675344/ See also the Morrow case, described earlier in this essay.

And also, in December 1965 Reginald Hawkins, Darius Swann and a third Charlotte Presbyterian minister Rev. E.J. Moore filed a lawsuit attacking North Carolina's Pearsall Plan – specifically tuition vouchers given to whites who wished to attend private segregated schools. Hawkins and his allies won. "Ruled Unconstitutional: Pearsall Plan is Killed," *Daily Times-News* [Burlington, NC], April 5, 1966. https://www.newspapers.com/image/52742073/ "Pearsall Plan Ruled Invalid by Panel in Federal Court," *News and Observer* [Raleigh], April 5, 1966. https://www.newspapers.com/image/652063159 Michael B. Richardson, "'Not Gradually … but Now:' Reginald Hawkins, Black Leadership and Desegregation in Charlotte, North Carolina," *North Carolina Historical Review*, July 2005, pp. 347 - 379.

Davison Douglas, "The Quest for Freedom in the Post-Brown South: Desegregation and White Self Interest," *Chicago – Kent Law Review*, pp. 689 - 755. https://scholarship.kentlaw.iit.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?referer=&httpsredir=1&article=2973&context=cklawreview

[156] Roslyn Arlin Mickelson, Stephen Smith and Amy Hawn Nelson, *Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow: School Desegregation and Resegregation in Charlotte* (Cambridge, Mass., Harvard Education Press, 2015). Gaillard, Frye, *The Dream Long Deferred: The Landmark Struggle for Desegregation in Charlotte, North Carolina,* 3rd edition. University of South Carolina Press, 2006). For a comparison of Charlotte's busing experience with that of other cities, read Matthew D. Lassiter, *Silent Majority*: *Suburban Politics in the Sunbelt South* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2007).