

Survey of African American Buildings and Sites in Mecklenburg County

The African American Presence in the Mecklenburg County Built Environment, 1850-1950

Introduction

The written history of Mecklenburg County spans over two hundred years, from its eighteenth century origins as a backwoods trading crossroads and courthouse town to its current modern identity as a regionally recognized marketing, commercial, and transportation center. African Americans have been an integral part of the county's population since its establishment in the 1740s, as many citizens owned slaves and several planters operated sizeable plantations. Although dwarfed by the more successful and wealthy "aristocratic" economies in South Carolina and Virginia, North Carolina and Mecklenburg County were fully entrenched in the cotton economy of the nineteenth century. Until the early nineteenth century, the area was stymied by a poor infrastructure and inadequate water transport. Although a strong producer of cotton and other crops, Mecklenburg County initially suffered from its distance to regional markets and ports.

This changed in the late 1840s when prominent citizens of the county had the foresight to promote investment in a railroad. The first rail line was completed in 1852, and on the eve of the Civil War, four railroads served Mecklenburg County. The significance of the advent of the railroad cannot be overstated; rail links provided the only cost-effective connections to outside markets for the county's farmers, merchants, manufacturers and consumers.

As the railroads made the economy more robust, the county's white and African, and African American population increased. By 1860 slaves accounted for 40% of the county population, but physical relics of this substantial demographic component are now almost totally non-existent. Written references to slaves in the records of local slave owning families are also rare. Auctions were advertised in the newspapers, as were notices of runaways and town ordinances that applied only to slaves. Beyond this, most residents did not register tremendous interest or concern in slaves unless they misbehaved.

While generally disruptive and costly in human and monetary resources, the Civil War did not directly adversely affect Mecklenburg. Sheltered in the piedmont hinterland, Mecklenburg was never invaded or occupied. Local merchants took advantage of opportunities to capitalize on war contracts and as a consequence, by the

end of the war, the county stood in good shape to resume its commercial and agricultural activities. The post-bellum world was fraught with unpleasant social and economic changes for nearly all levels of society. Whites seem more disposed to react adversely to blacks during Reconstruction and in the years after. Planters had to learn to make do without slaves, whites had to adjust to blacks as free people, and ultimately as citizens, and blacks had to learn to navigate the uncertain waters of their new status. The extant built resources relevant to Mecklenburg's African American population date from the late nineteenth century and after.

In addition to planters' concerns about securing sufficient labor, the former ruling elite was preoccupied with the restoration of their political and economic ascendancy and with the reversal of any democratic gains made during reconstruction. The general social and economic unease prevalent after the Civil War was ultimately articulated in the disfranchisement and Jim Crow laws of late nineteenth and early twentieth century. As racial divisions formalized by the turn of the century, blacks found themselves sequestered from the social mainstream in every conceivable aspect. In the rural world, they were mostly confined to sharecropping, although there are notable instances documented in this survey of landed African American farmers who managed large farms that were competitive with neighboring white farmers.

In Charlotte, blacks were segregated into residential sections and had a separate commercial district centered on Brevard Street, adjacent to the locus of the white commercial hub on the principal commercial arteries of Trade and Tryon Streets. Blacks were also segregated in terms of occupations and where they could work. The black middle class was small in the early twentieth century; most African Americans worked in blue-collar skilled and semi-skilled jobs. Blacks rarely worked in textile mills, and when they did, they were never alongside whites. In an unusual bid for labor, the Hoskins Mill built six mill houses for African American workers, and located these houses on the opposite side of the mill from the significantly larger white mill village. The workers who lived in these houses worked in the boiler room, or as janitors or on the loading docks, and did not typically share their work environment with white mill operatives.

In spite of the existence of discrete black and white business sections, urban residential patterns in Charlotte were not rigidly defined. Blacks and whites lived in "salt and pepper" configurations in the various wards and neighborhoods. This pattern continued until after the Second World War. Increased suburbanization and demand for housing caused a white flight from the city center. Post war urban development and suburban growth spelled disaster for Charlotte's historic urban black neighborhoods, which either deteriorated over time as the residents aged out, or were demolished to make room for expansion in the center city. There are few vestiges of

these neighborhoods left in Charlotte and even fewer examples of such neighborhoods extant in the incorporated townships of the county. The best nearly intact example is found in Davidson. Fragments of such neighborhoods remain in Huntersville, Cornelius, and Matthews. If any African American neighborhoods existed in southeast Mecklenburg, they have long since vanished in the wake of massive suburban development. The same is true for unincorporated places annexed by Charlotte.

By the 1950s, segregated residential patterns were firmly established. Some African American housing developments were built in North Mecklenburg to accommodate the displaced middle and professional classes who previously lived in town. The black urban population increased since the 1950s as the post-war boom created more jobs, and sharecropping and tenant farming were abandoned in the interest of better jobs in town.

Mecklenburg County History and the African American Experience

Early Development to 1865

The earliest inhabitants of Mecklenburg County were Native American tribes who hunted and traded throughout the Carolinas. Their first encounters with white men were with the traders and trappers who roamed the area in the seventeenth century. Permanent white settlers did not arrive until the mid-eighteenth century. The Native American dominance of the region collapsed within ten years of the coming of white settlers, who had different ideas about land use and land ownership than the native people, and who also possessed the force of will and gun power to secure what was once commonly shared land for their private use.^[1]

The Piedmont region was not initially attractive or practically accessible to the earliest white settlers of North Carolina. Those colonists, who settled in the eastern part of the colony, came from established British colonies such as Virginia, Barbados, and South Carolina. Others migrated from England, Germany and Switzerland in hopes of creating a profitable plantation economy in the newly organized Carolina Proprietary Colony. Unfortunately, the North Carolina's dangerous coastline, shallow harbors, and unnavigable rivers in the Piedmont region assured the colony's status as a poor relation to the more prosperous and aristocratic plantation economies to the north and south. Eastern North Carolina, however, was initially founded on commercial agriculture based on slave labor.^[2]

Mecklenburg was not settled by migrants from the east, but by Scots-Irish Presbyterians and German Lutherans who arrived in the 1740s by way of the Great Philadelphia Wagon Road, which stretched from Pennsylvania into South Carolina. These pioneers came with the intention of carving out their future on small farms as independent farmers. By the 1760s, the Catawba Indians were marginalized by warfare and diseases indigenous to the Europeans. The new settlers carved out small farmsteads and established several rural communities centered on country churches. The early core of Presbyterian churches: Hopewell, Providence, Sugaw Creek, Steele Creek, Rocky River, Centre, and Poplar Tent, were all organized by the late 1760s, and became the locus of social and cultural life in the newly settled region.^[3]

In spite of its position on the Great Wagon Road, Mecklenburg initially developed in relative isolation. As late as 1837, a discriminating visitor from Charleston remarked that Mecklenburg was “a place not offering anything worthy of note or interest,” and that even the better-bred locals [perhaps inclusive of her hosts] were “almost primitive.”^[4] Compared to the eastern counties, colonial Mecklenburg was not prosperous. Farmers and planters did not have adequate water transport to facilitate commercial growth, and goods had to be hauled over land to Charleston, which was the nearest port.^[5] This horrendously expensive mode of transportation made large-scale agriculture out of the question for all but the wealthiest of farmers. The lack of a reasonable infrastructure contributed to a sagging economy and hampered diversification. The inability to build wealth on brisk commercial relations with other commercial centers also depressed population growth. Most of the county’s residents were subsistence farmers who lived in rough log cabins. They were reputed to be coarse, rude, and illiterate folk, given to brawls, drinking and debauchery. When Royal Governor Arthur Dobbs visited Mecklenburg County in 1755, he took particular note of the impoverished state of most of the citizens. The primary civilizing influence in this wilderness was the church, which according to contemporary accounts had its work cut out for it. Town life was scarcely superior to rural life. By 1780, Charlotte, the county seat, was comprised of a courthouse at the intersection of two streets, on which sat about twenty houses.^[6]

Mecklenburg achieved some small measure of fame in the years prior to the American Revolution. Several civic leaders allegedly wrote and endorsed the Mecklenburg Declaration of Independence, the actual existence of which has never been documented, and the Mecklenburg Resolves [May 31, 1775], which have. In the late 1770s, the county’s sentiments were mostly with the Patriots, and antiquarian historical accounts of the period relate the exploits of the Mecklenburg patriots with great pride. The Mecklenburg Resolves, issued by the Mecklenburg Committee of Safety placed the county in sympathy with the recently chastised Massachusetts colony and declared all laws issued by the crown to be invalid, and that these laws

would furthermore be superseded by local law until further notice from the Congress.^[7] British and loyalist troops entered Charlotte in 1780 and remained through October. This brief and highly disruptive episode was the worst that the county endured during the War, and when this incident was over, citizens returned to the necessary business of tending their farms and replenishing stocks confiscated by marauding British and Patriot troops in fall of that year.^[8]

The political and economic elite of the county acquired large tracts on which they hoped to make their fortunes as cotton planters. Slavery was introduced into the county through this layer of the economy, and according to record was in the area as early as the 1760s.^[9] Significant economic growth in Mecklenburg did not occur until after the Revolutionary War, and by the War's end, some well-to-do citizens had built substantial rock houses, such as the Hezekiah Alexander House and the Robinson Rock House. The prosperity of some planters was evident in the more sophisticated and grand homes built in the late 1780s and the early nineteenth century. Rural Hill [1788], White Oak [1792], Oaklawn [1818], Beaver Dam [1829], Cedar Grove [c. 1833], Edgewood [1840], and the W.T. Alexander House [c. 1840] still stand as testimonials of the affluence attained by the planters who built them. Their wealth, based on land and slaves, secured their positions as the powerful ruling minority of the county.

From 1800 to c. 1830, the county's economy was based on agriculture and gold mining. Foreign and native-born American miners swarmed to the area once the news of the discovery of gold became widely known. Nine gold mines were chartered by 1834, and in the heyday of mining operations, mining companies often rented slaves when they needed additional labor.^[10] The small gold mining boom was a short-lived economic boost, but the county's foundation rested on agriculture, the potential of which was limited by the lack of a satisfactory transportation infrastructure. The county's population increased from 1800-1830, but after the gold boom, many people migrated to other more promising areas. The population declined 30% from 1830-1850. Facing dire times, city leaders launched what was ultimately a highly successful campaign to build a railroad. Fundraising began in 1846, and 1847, farmers, planters, and other investors raised \$300,000.00 for the construction of the Charlotte and South Carolina Railroad, which connected Charlotte to Columbia and Charleston. The line was completed in 1852. In 1856, the state-owned North Carolina Railroad completed track from Goldsboro to Charlotte, connecting the area to Raleigh, Richmond, and northern markets.^[11] In his travels through the state in 1856, Frederick Law Olmsted noted the construction of a railroad from Charlotte to Raleigh would increase production by lowering the cost of transporting produce from the central part of the state.^[12] By 1861, a third line, the Wilmington, Charlotte, Rutherfordton Railroad Company built a passenger station on North Tryon Street in

Charlotte, the eastern terminus of its Charlotte to Lincoln leg, and a fourth line completed its route from Charlotte to Statesville in 1863.^[13]

Compared to planter societies in Virginia, and the South Carolina Low Country, plantations in Mecklenburg were smaller both in number and in size. However, Mecklenburg County was clearly an integral part of the Southern cotton culture. Slaves accounted for 40% of the county population in 1860.^[14] The majority of slave owners enumerated in the 1860 Census Slave Schedule for Mecklenburg County owned over ten slaves, and many had well over twenty. A cursory examination of the 1860 slave census suggests that planters did not attempt to own a disproportionate number of males over female, that according to the ages of slaves in most plantation groups, they were probably in families, and slave cabins accommodated three to five people.^[15] Twenty-five per cent of the county's white population owned slaves, but only 1% were classified as planters. Thirty-five per cent of the population did not own slaves, and slaves comprised the remaining 40%.^[16] The majority of slaves worked as field hands or domestics, and in some instances, slaves worked in the area gold mines.^[17]

As the slave population represented nearly half of the total county population, local government passed a separate set of rules governing their behavior and movements. The Charlotte Town Ordinances published in *The Western Democrat* in 1864 regulated interaction between free blacks and slaves, prohibiting slaves from frequenting "dram or grog shops" without written permission, from smoking in public, carrying weapons, or from straying from home after 9:30 in the evening.^[18] A slave's life was highly regimented whether they lived in town or on a plantation. Margaret Torrance, mistress of Cedar Grove, instructed her overseer James Brown in his responsibility to monitor the slaves' work and protect the Torrance's property. Slaves were to begin their day early enough to feed the stock and prepare their own breakfast. Brown was to follow the slaves to their work to make sure that they stayed on the job. Slaves usually worked until sundown. In the summer, field hands received a two-hour break at midday, and one hour in the fall and spring. The slave cabins were inspected at least once a week at night "to keep the negroes from running about", and no one was allowed out of their cabin without permission. On Saturday evenings, women were allowed to spend two hours to wash their laundry and all hands were expected to appear on Monday mornings with "comb head and clean clothes unless prevented by circumstances." Brown was also responsible for the maintenance and health of livestock. He supervised gearing horses and had to account for the condition of gear, wagons and tools.^[19]

Even though 6800 slaves lived in Mecklenburg County in 1860, it is difficult to find any evidence of their existence. Grand planter homes built by slaves still stand, and

land cleared by slave labor is in some instances still in use, but there are few other physical reminders in Mecklenburg County of the “peculiar institution.” The lone surviving slave cabin inventoried by this survey is the **Stafford Plantation Log Dwelling** in eastern Mecklenburg County. The **Roseland Cemetery** and the **Tunis Hood Slave Cemetery**, both also situated in the eastern section of the county, near Matthews and Mint Hill, respectively, allegedly contain the remains of slaves and freed blacks. The Historic Landmarks Commission has also documented two slave cemeteries, the Neely Slave Cemetery and the W.T. Alexander Slave Cemetery.^[20]

After the Civil War, clusters of slave cabins near the big house were dismantled and gave way to sharecropper or tenant houses scattered on the property. Three tenant houses once occupied by African American tenant farmers were inventoried in this survey, but only one of them stands in fair condition, the remainder are in deteriorated condition. Tenant houses, for both black and white landless farmers, were once a familiar aspect of Mecklenburg’s rural landscape, but these structures have not survived the current demands for land use. In addition to the lack of physical reminders of the sizeable slave population that once labored in Mecklenburg County, there is a dearth of local family papers in which their slaves are discussed. Older histories of the county dwell on the civic and military accomplishments of the aristocratic families, and only mention the local black population in passing, as caricatures. As 40% of the population, free and enslaved blacks represented a significant segment of the ante-bellum population, and although they were present in every aspect of life, physical structures related to slavery disappeared with the dismantling of the institution. Except for slave auction advertisements, the publication of new slave laws, and notices of runaway slaves, slave related documents are scarce. From the perspective of public and private record, slaves were all but invisible in the ante-bellum period by virtue of their subordinate position and because they were well controlled. This changed in the post-bellum era, as whites became obsessed with the behaviors of freedmen.

The Civil War devastated the region as a whole, and Mecklenburg County also suffered significant losses in manpower and economic stability. The war did not come directly to Charlotte, so the city escaped the massive destruction faced by other southern towns and the county’s farms and infrastructure remained mostly intact. Parts of the Charlotte to Statesville railroad was torn up and re-laid in areas where it would better serve the Confederate War effort, and much of the Charlotte and South Carolina Railroad was destroyed. The Confederate Navy Yard was moved from Norfolk to its sheltered location in Charlotte in 1862, and several local businesses, notably the Mecklenburg Iron Works prospered as suppliers of war materiel.

Reconstruction to 1900: Social Changes and Political Battles

Rural and Agricultural Life

The social and economic chaos endemic in the post war years aggravated extant rifts between the races and between socio-economic classes. White southerners were overwhelmed with the prospects of a ruined economy and society. Faced with tremendous capital losses in slaves and other property, many planters were confronted with the uncertain prospect of pursuing an economy based on agriculture without slave labor. The common lament of planters during this period revolved around the regional labor shortage. The manpower existed in similar numbers as before, but freedmen refused to work in any conditions vaguely resembling slavery. Freedmen seized the opportunity to shape their own futures. Ex-slave owners were shocked, appalled and hurt that their former slaves, some of them their most faithful and obedient, defiantly left to live as free people.^[21] Many freed slaves left their masters in search of lost family or of other employment. During the first years after their liberation, freed blacks continued to work as field labor, but they demanded cash wages.

Landowners desperate for laborers and freedmen desperate for work created a short-lived system of contractual agreements in which black field hands earned cash wages in exchange for a year of work. At first many observers had high hopes for this plan because by freely entering into a contractual arrangement, planters and laborers embraced the practices of a free labor economy. However, many serious problems bedeviled this system. Farmers remained cash poor for many years after the war and fluctuating market prices often made contracts difficult to honor. Many contracts were thinly disguised post war versions of slavery: wages were ridiculously low or were not part of the agreement, and the employer was free to control his employees' personal lives. Illiterate freedmen often entered into contracts they could not understand or read, and had no recourse when an employer failed to pay them. The concept of a yearlong contract was ludicrous to critics who asserted that other free laborers were not bound by such restrictions, and could leave their employers when it suited them.^[22]

Planters and landowners who were accustomed to slave labor were aghast that they would now have to pay their former slaves to perform the same tasks which they once did under coercion and for food and board. A movement to recruit foreign labor started in several southern states. North Carolina created the North Carolina Land Company in 1869 to market the state abroad and to enlist immigrant farm labor.^[23] After several unsuccessful attempts to convince Northern Europeans that

North Carolina was a safe and profitable place to work, the North Carolina Land Company was dissolved in 1876, and in 1887 the state completely abandoned any further immigrant labor schemes on the basis that North Carolinians were opposed to “foreign and promiscuous immigration” and the state would not sponsor it.^[24]

Although North Carolina’s feeble attempts to recruit foreign labor came to naught, the ill-fated appropriation of such labor is a significant indication of the change of mood towards blacks. Foreign labor recruitment was intended to paper over a serious labor question and to place a buffer between blacks and native whites. Had it succeeded, it would have marginalized African Americans even more severely than the insidious systems of tenancy and Jim Crow laws. Whites felt frustrated and vulnerable because a way of life was dismantled without their consent and they exacted their anger and fear on the freed black population. The way most whites referred to their former slaves also changed in the post war period. Before the war, most slave owners preferred euphemisms such as servants, darkeys, or “my people” to the word slave. In correspondence between members of the Torrance Family of Cedar Grove we see the terms “Negroes,” and “the black people” when they discussed their slaves.^[25] By the end of the war, this picturesque language gave way to harsher terms such as slaves or niggers.^[26] Moreover, the white elite was more than willing to let the traditional labor force wither away if it could be replaced. The new perception was that freed blacks were indolent and insolent, and that they deserved to be marginalized. This venom is evident in a letter to an editor: “...poor cuffy, in the plenitude of his freedom, will find himself without food, without employment, without a home, and without a friend, a citizen of the world with perfect liberty to starve.”^[27]

It ultimately suited both employers and employees to discard the contract arrangement, and adopt the tenant and sharecropping system. These systems developed more rapidly on small piedmont farms than on the huge plantations of the black belt, where planters tenaciously clung to gang labor practices. In the years immediately after the Civil War, African Americans expected to somehow acquire their own land. This was not to be for a variety of reasons. Freedmen had no money, which made it difficult to navigate the complexities of purchasing land through provisions within the Freedmen’s Bureau. Available land was not easy to come by. Planters were not interested in democratizing the agricultural economy by selling parcels of their lands to former slaves. Since most African Americans could not afford to buy land, their next preference was to rent land, and failing that to work for shares. Sharecropping and tenant farming became the dominant system of agricultural production in the South, if only because it met the needs of both landlord and laborer. Neither party appears to have been satisfied with the system, which critics charged depressed the region’s agrarian economy by its sheer inefficiency, depleting the soil, producing a reduced yield per acre, and confining farmers to a one or two crop

system. However, planters needed laborers, so they consented to rent or provide land to persons who would farm it in return for the cash they earned on their crop, or for shares of the crop. Landless laborers preferred this to the contract system, which promised cash wages but rarely delivered them. Sharecropping and tenant farming also afforded more freedom to the tenant, a new facet of life, which was preferable for the black laborer since it was a relief from the constant supervision of the slave system. Planters were accustomed to exercising greater control over their workers and disliked the lack of supervision inherent in these systems, but they went along with it in the absence of other alternatives. In reality, it was nearly impossible to extricate oneself from these methods once committed to sharecropping or tenant farming. ^[28] The **Tib Morehead Tenant House**, **The J. Wilson Alexander Farm Tenant House** and the **Washam Farm Tenant House** are among the last standing tenant houses in Mecklenburg County.

In spite of the growth of Charlotte in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Mecklenburg retained a largely rural character until after the Second World War. By the close of the nineteenth century, Mecklenburg County led the state in cotton production. Although other states produced more cotton than North Carolina, the state clearly maintained its pre-war position as a leading cotton producer and participant in the cotton industry. Over one-half of the cotton produced in North Carolina by 1896 was grown in 28 counties; most of it was grown in Mecklenburg County. ^[29] A published report by the state's Board of Agriculture, which put the best spin possible on the status and potential for agricultural development and opportunity for future investors, extolled the piedmont plateau's prospects: "The hand of improvement is more visible in this than any other section. Almost the entire region is dotted over with thriving villages and towns." The improvement was, in part, a result of waterpower and road building; Mecklenburg had 40 miles of graded, drained or macadamized roads by 1896. ^[30]

Although Mecklenburg County produced a significant amount of cotton, its dependency on the crop doomed the local agricultural economy to stagnation and deterioration. By 1920, American agriculture began a steady decline that was exacerbated by the depression of the 1930s. Southern farmers who were dedicated to cotton production and mid-western farmers who were dedicated to wheat production had no recourse when the international market prices of these commodities plummeted in the 1920s and 1930s. The overarching response to the crisis was overproduction, which worsened the situation, leading to increased foreclosures and an increase in tenancy. Like many of their southern counterparts, Mecklenburg farmers were hampered by inefficient methods, such as one or two crop agriculture, and by crop liens. The consequences of this system were that the number of land owners, both white and African American, decreased over time, and that tenancy

increased, swelling the ranks of poor rural whites and blacks. Rural African Americans already tended to be poorer than the majority of rural whites and more likely to be landless and bound to some form of tenancy. The disparity between the incidence of tenancy between blacks and white in Mecklenburg County is illustrated in the table below.

Percentage of Farm Operatives Classified as Tenants, by Race, Mecklenburg County, 1925-1940.

Year	Colored	White
1940	82.81	32.84
1935	87.50	42.0
1930	90.36	42.64
1925	74.98	37.93

Source: U.S. Census of Agriculture. Colored includes Negroes, Chinese, Japanese, and Indians. White includes Foreign Born and Mexicans.

Of the 4344 farmers identified in the 1920 Census of Agriculture for Mecklenburg County, 1647 were African American and of these only 150 were farm owners and 1497 were tenants, compared to the 2690 farms operated by whites, of which 1492 were owner operated, and 1184 were operated by white tenants. This not only illustrates the vast economic gaps between black and white farmers in the county in the early part of the century, and it also raises the perplexing question of why there were so few African American farmers of any type when the rural African American population in Mecklenburg in 1920 numbered over 12,000. Somewhere scattered around the county in unincorporated areas and in the small towns outside of Charlotte were approximately 10,000 African Americans, and slightly over half of them were over the age of twenty-one. They were likely employed as domestics, as skilled and unskilled workers in the small towns, on the railroad, and in processing jobs affiliated with agriculture such as cotton ginning.^[31]

The existing agricultural depression coupled with the Great Depression took its toll on Mecklenburg farmers, decreasing the number of farmers to 3773 by 1930. The number of African American farm owners decreased to 97, compared with 150 of the previous decade, and the number of African American tenants also decreased from 1497 in 1920 to 1229 in 1930. Of the 3773 farms, 794 were described as cotton farms, and of all the farms reporting, nearly 50,000 acres were devoted to cotton, producing over 24,000 bales, averaging less than a bale an acre.^[32]

There were notable exceptions to the rural poverty among African American farmers in the early twentieth century, and the best examples of substantial African American farms are in north Mecklenburg near Davidson, and in west Mecklenburg in Shuffletown.

The Frank Lytle House

Frank Lytle was a prosperous African American community leader and farmer in North Mecklenburg. His impressive farmhouse stands on Huntersville-Concord Road. Lytle purchased 35.5 acres, the first parcel of what would become a large farm, in 1895 from neighbor Hattie Bradford. In 1906, he purchased an additional 41.25 acres, and 26.5 more in 1910. It also seems that he invested in a tract of land in Biddleville in 1902. There are no extant records of Lytle's farm production, but family members recall that he grew cotton and corn, in accordance with the commercial agricultural practices of the period. The farm is large enough to have warranted hired help or tenant farmers, but there is no confirmation of this. He controlled a great deal of land and carried tremendous influence within the black community. His wealth allowed him to loan money and hold the debtor's property in a lien, as he did with William and Eliza Howard in 1919; holding 54 5/8 acres as collateral for their debt of \$3277.50, which was payable by January 1, 1924, or they forfeit all rights of the land to him. The Lytle Grove Colored School and Torrence-Lytle High School are named for him. [The Torrence is Issac Torrence, a county agricultural extension agent who promoted 4-H programs]. Frank Lytle died in 1939; his wife Elizabeth died in 1971.^[33]

The Logan Houston House

Logan Houston [1895-1969] was a Davidson native and a leader in the local African American community. His grandfather and his father, Beauregard, were slaves on the Houston Plantation in Mount Morne in Iredell County. His mother, Alice Martha Washam Potts, was a wet nurse. Logan attended the Reed School, which was located on NC 73 and Black Belt Road. Houston farmed for most of his life, except for a brief hiatus when he served in the armed forces during the First World War. He acquired the property on Catawba Avenue in 1918, and married Alice Torrence [1896-1994] in 1922. While the house was under construction, they lived with Alice's aunt on Mock Circle in Davidson's Westside. There were other houses on this section of Catawba Avenue when the Houston family moved there, but they were the only black family on the block for many years. Although Houston had a five-acre working farm devoted mostly to livestock [pigs and beef cattle], his employment was on the Griffith farm. In the 1930s and 1940s he worked at the Griffith Dairy at 600 South Main Street, and later with the Hoke Lumber Company. Logan and Alice Houston had eleven children, but only nine of them survived to adulthood. Alice supplemented the family income by taking in laundry, and by making and selling buttermilk. Both Logan and Alice engaged in menial labor when necessary to support their large family.

Working with Mecklenburg School Superintendent Wilson, Logan Houston was instrumental in the creation of the **Davidson Colored School**, the elementary school for African Americans that replaced the older one-room small country schools. To support the school, Houston organized many fundraisers selling ice cream, made with milk from his own cows. County funding was lax for black schools, and local parents

continuously had to figure out how to provide supplies. Logan's daughter, Mrs. Frances Beale, recalled that textbooks were outdated rejects from white schools. Building the school also required ingenuity; most of the bricks used in the building were recycled from Love Auditorium, which formerly stood on the Davidson College Campus.

The Espy Alexander House

Espy Alexander was a landed African American farmer in Huntersville. Deeds show that he purchased his first tract of land in this location in 1912.^[34] He augmented this holding in 1920, and in 1930.^[35] Although the deed references are vague, he certainly owned over 35 acres and was able to pay \$1000.00 for 34.4 acres in 1930. Alexander's lands lay around the Old School and behind St. Phillip's Missionary Baptist Church. He and his wife Viola lived in the house that is now 300 Dellwood Road. In addition to farming, Alexander worked as the janitor of Torrence-Lytle High School.^[36]

The Bright Bland Log Cabin

O. Bright Bland, a stone and brick mason, built this c. 1930 log cabin off of Lawing School Road.^[37] This road had both white and black residents, most of whom were farmers. Not only did black and white farmers live adjacent to each other, but whites and blacks also sometimes moved in and out of the same house. For example, the Whitesides farmhouse, located down the road from the Bland cabin, was built by whites, but was rented by a black family c. 1910, and then subsequently occupied by another white family. This kind of residential exchange between the races happened occasionally and did not upset the order of the neighborhood.^[38] In the 1920s, O. Bright Bland acquired nearly 60 acres in the Paw Creek Township.^[39] It was on this site that he built his "dream home," a one and a half story log house on a rock foundation deep enough to make a full cellar. Bland, his wife Della, and their only child, Howard lived in the cabin until the 1950s. The site slopes to the east and a creek cuts through it on its northern boundary. Bland built a small springhouse in the creek by laying a semi-circular stone wall in it. Here his wife washed laundry, and then dried it in the open yard near the creek.^[40] Although he earned his living as a brick mason, Bland also farmed, raising subsistence crops.^[41]

Other smaller farmsteads include the **Rich Hachett House** and the **Pink Graham House**, both near Huntersville in northern Mecklenburg, the **Pressley Farmhouse** in northwest Mecklenburg and the **John Murray Alexander Farmhouse** on Glory Street in what is now Charlotte near Sugar Creek Presbyterian Church. These farms and farmhouses were smaller than the farms listed above, and like many of the larger African American farmers, these men also had to have second jobs in addition to

farming. Rich Hachett, for example, was a blacksmith, and John Alexander worked for an oil refinery in Charlotte.

Rural Institutions

The Freedman's Bureau was able to mitigate only some of the harsh realities of freedom in a hostile society. The agency provided relief and assistance to both blacks and poor whites that found themselves bereft of advocates in the bleak and unsettled post-war period. In addition to economic stress, politically and socially explosive issues such as extending citizenship to all blacks and voting rights to black men tested the foundation of the southern social order as well as the Bureau's ability to maintain it. In 1865, Freedmen's Bureau officials recorded that Mecklenburg County Courts would not recognize changes in the status of the black population, and a magistrate had recently beaten a black man on the street.^[42] The bureau also provided schools for blacks, the first were established in the state in 1867, and by 1871, the county had schools for blacks in each township. D.A. Tompkins' history of Mecklenburg claims that by 1874, there were 34 black schools and 46 white schools in the county. The first graded school for blacks in Charlotte was in an old tobacco barn in First Ward, and was later replaced by Myers Street School.^[43] In addition to the surviving examples of Rosenwald Schools, the **Reed School** and the **Bethesda School** are the only surviving rural African American school houses in the county.

African Americans faced many difficulties in the years after their emancipation. They were ridiculed for "aping" so-called white lifestyles. Freedmen wanted to buy land, have women work at home and to send their children to school instead of working in the fields. Seeking new ways to keep blacks "in their place" angry whites hurled endless volleys of racial epithets, intimidation and violence, and economic obstacles in the path of African American progress. The newly established African American churches became safe havens for a people under siege. In the ante-bellum period, if slaves went to church, it was with their master at the master's church. Churches had slave galleries or balconies for this purpose, to contain the slaves in one area where they could be locked in and monitored for their Sunday lessons. After their emancipation, freedmen immediately separated from white congregations and formed their own churches, another break with the past that perplexed and irritated whites.

Some of these churches were African American extensions of the churches they previously attended, and some were uniquely African American institutions. In Charlotte, Clinton Chapel A.M.E. Zion [1865] and First United Presbyterian Church [1866] were the first exclusively black churches established after the war. Clinton Chapel was located in Third Ward and First United Presbyterian still stands in what was formerly First Ward. The congregation that built First United Presbyterian had previously attended First Presbyterian Church and interior of First United Presbyterian

resembles that of First Presbyterian.^[44] The dates of their organization suggest the urgency of the times for newly freed African Americans. As an independent African American population expanded in Charlotte, more churches were necessary. Little Rock A.M.E. Zion Church [c. 1870] in Third Ward and Grace A.M.E. Zion Church [1886] in Second Ward added to the growing list of African American institutions in the city and served as the anchors of the nascent black neighborhoods that developed around them.^[45]

New congregations were also formed in the rural areas that surrounded Charlotte. Murkland Presbyterian Church [1865] was formed by an assembly of former slaves that broke away from Providence Presbyterian Church, which they had attended with their masters. The determination of the freedmen to separate from Providence Presbyterian perplexed the church session, which recorded in 1866 that many black members left without asking permission to organize into a church "separate and distinct from ours." The majority of those who left joined the newly organized Murkland church.^[46]

Rev. Samuel Carothers Alexander, pastor of Steele Creek Presbyterian Church [1861-1865], was forced out of his congregation, because he preached to slaves. After Alexander left Steele Creek, he and two other unnamed ministers "of like idiosyncrasies" met of their own accord at Bethany Church near Statesville and established themselves as the Catawba Presbytery. The history of Steele Creek Presbyterian discloses that "after laboring a year or two in this irregular and revolutionary way" Rev. Alexander moved to Charlotte, where he started a Freedmen's Bureau school, which would later develop into Biddle Institute, and is now known as Johnson C. Smith University. The congregation was at a loss to understand Rev. Alexander's sympathies for abolition and his work for the rights of the freedman, and they interpreted him as a product of a northern upbringing and education.^[47]

The Catawba Presbytery was originally part of the Atlantic Synod, which was organized in 1869, but became part of the Catawba Synod at the time of its establishment in 1887. Samuel C. Alexander is listed as one of the "founding fathers" of the Synod, along with prominent African American church officers such as Rev. Sidney Murkland, Rev. Amos Billingsley, and Rev. Stephen Mattoon. The rapid growth of African American Presbyterian congregations is apparent in the minutes of the meeting of the Catawba Synod in Charlotte on November 1, 1887, in which fifty-four ministers, eighty-nine churches, and 5490 members were recorded on their rolls. Among the first churches founded in the Catawba Presbytery in 1865 was McClintock Chapel.^[48]

In addition to the growing number of Presbyterian churches, the African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church established itself with great popularity in Charlotte and Mecklenburg County. Besides the A.M.E. Zion churches organized in Charlotte, a number appear as country churches in all areas of the county. The A.M.E. Zion church was more prevalent in rural areas than in the smaller townships around Charlotte. **Columbus Chapel** was a center for many African American farm families in North Mecklenburg since the late nineteenth century, as a place of worship and as a gathering place. In addition to the sanctuary and attached [recent] education building, the church grounds also have a cemetery, and remnants of two picnic huts and a baseball field. In 1926, Lytle's Grove Colored School was adjacent to the property and the building remained there until the early 1960s.^[49]

Churches such as **Torrence Grove A.M.E. Zion Church, Mowing Glade A.M.E. Zion, Huntersville A.M.E. Zion, Jonesville A.M.E. Zion, as well as New Friendship Presbyterian, St. Phillip's Baptist and Red Branch Baptist** functioned as anchors for the communities around them. Today all of these churches operate out of sanctuaries of recent construction that are located on or near the site of the original structure and are adjacent to their original churchyards. African Americans in rural Mecklenburg depended on their churches as a primary source of solace as well as a center of entertainment and sociability. The church was the site of worship as well as after church courting, ballgames and picnics and the news center for farm families who did not have the opportunities for social contact that were taken for granted by urban people. Going to church on Sundays was the culminating event of the week. Those who lived close to church walked to Sunday services; those who had to travel long distances arrived in surreys, mule carts, and ox carts. It was common for families to travel miles for Sunday services.^[50]

Political Battles and Jim Crow

The institution of the church proved to be an indispensable refuge for African Americans in the late nineteenth century. The disastrous developments of segregation laws and disfranchisement further marginalized the African American community and made the availability of a safe haven and meeting place, such as the church, all the more essential. While planters bemoaned the labor shortage, political leaders strove to maintain Democratic ascendancy in the face of Republican and third party advances. The North Carolina Republican Party was comprised largely of white ex-Unionists, blacks, and Piedmont manufacturers who favored protective tariffs. The African-American electorate was at its freest to vote in the 1870s and 1880s. North Carolina had comparatively few suffrage restrictions during this period; blacks voted in large numbers, and there was generally less corruption at the ballot box than in other states. Because of this, North Carolina was one of the more democratic states in the late nineteenth century. Democrats never had more than 54% of the vote in

gubernatorial elections, and their grip on the state was further threatened in the 1881 when their party split over dry v. wet issues, and again in the 1890s when the Republicans and Populists consolidated forces, as “Fusionists” to create a potent threat to Democratic power.^[51] The Populist Party was of particular concern to the Democrats, as it welcomed blacks, poor whites, and even women to their ranks.

In 1892, the Populists put up their own gubernatorial candidate, and in 1894 they fused with the Republicans to form a joint legislative ticket. Their tactics were successful; in 1894 Fusion politics controlled 62% of the seats in the legislature, and in 1896 they controlled 78%. The appeal of the Fusionist agenda accounted for higher voter participation rates in 1896.^[52] Between 1894 and 1898, Republicans and Populists generally agreed to fuse behind a particular candidate, and after the election work out the details of creating a common agenda. This strategy not only gave them control of the legislature in 1894, but also the governor’s office in 1896.^[53] By 1898, the Democrats had had enough, and brazenly laid plans to eliminate their competition. In Charlotte, Democrats organized The White Supremacy Club, whose purpose was to “aid in maintaining White Supremacy and White Labor in North Carolina.”^[54]

Using race baiting and sensationalist journalism as their principal weapons, Democrats launched all-out war on the opposition. Their solution was to change election laws to prevent blacks from voting and to propose an amendment to the state constitution that would effectively disfranchise them. According to new election laws, all voters had to re-register, and the registrar had discretionary power to exclude any person for any reason from the rolls. The proposed amendment had potential to exclude most blacks and some whites, on the basis of literacy. On June 6, 1900, the *Charlotte Daily Observer* noted “The struggle of the white people of North Carolina to rid themselves of the danger of the rule of Negroes and the lower classes of whites is being watched with interest outside the state.”^[55] In addition to revised election laws, proponents of the amendment adopted other methods of guaranteeing a Democratic victory by implementing techniques used by their South Carolina counterparts, The Red Shirts, who openly intimidated blacks and Republicans at the polls to prevent them from voting. Democrats used the state’s major papers to carry lurid stories of the dangers of Negro rule, which portrayed black men as homicidal and sexually predatory. The state voted in overwhelming support of disfranchisement on August 2, 1900. African American political empowerment was effectively shut down by this action.^[56] Political power in North Carolina was restored to the Democratic elite, who had no regard for blacks, poor whites, or Republicans. The short-lived era of democracy was suspended, and would not be restored until the last quarter of the twentieth century. This political defeat was furthermore socially and economically reinforced by Jim Crow laws, which effectively separated the races within the public sphere.

1870-1930: Urban Growth

African American Community Development

The years after reconstruction were positive ones for Charlotte. At this time, Charlotte traded its court town identity once and for all for that of a growing commercial and market center. The county experienced vibrant economic and demographic growth in the final decades of the nineteenth century and Charlotte acquired a reputation as a regionally important commercial, marketing, and distribution center. The basis of this dynamic growth was cotton, but cotton could not have provided the impetus for this expansion without the backbone of railroad and an improved infrastructure. In addition to the four railroad lines laid in the ante-bellum period, the Carolina Railroad Company and the Atlanta and Charlotte Air Line were added in 1873.^[57] Completing the economic foundation of cotton and transportation was Charlotte's banking network. The city became a regional financial center, with five banks by 1867.^[58]

By the 1880s, one sees fewer complaints of war related impoverishment and more commentary about the hustle of burgeoning entrepreneurial activities and business opportunities. Perhaps the most famous reference to Charlotte during this period came from a visitor who was moved to eloquence in 1888: "Everything about Charlotte seems to be on a big boom, and everybody seems to be in good spirits at the prospects ... Everything is going ahead and there is more evidence of push and enterprise than I have ever seen... Businessmen are up and doing."^[59] Charlotte had a new breed of businessman; more often than not, the most successful businessmen in Charlotte were newcomers. Both old residents and new invested in the city's future as the region's textile processing and marketing center.

Studies of New South cities show that the towns which welcomed new men and new ideas were the urban areas that flourished. Towns where the established ruling elite closed ranks to outsiders were destined to continue their post-war decline and would lose valuable opportunities. Charleston, a thriving port city in the ante-bellum period, lost some of its hold on the region by the 1850s, with the construction of inland railroad networks. After the war, the port city's deterioration continued as outsiders were denied co-operation or co-option. Charlotte, on the other hand, blossomed as it embraced new men with new ideas and the capital to implement them.^[60] Two of the most influential men to settle in Charlotte at the turn of the century were Daniel Augustus Tompkins and Edward Dilworth Latta, both men of vision and ambition and both from South Carolina. Tompkins was instrumental in the enlargement of Charlotte's textile presence. Within a few years of his arrival in Charlotte, he established his own textile machinery manufacturing firm, owned several textile mills, and three newspapers, including the *Charlotte Observer*. Tompkins brashly admitted that he used his newspapers to "preach the doctrines of industrial development,"

among the other beliefs near to his heart.^[61] Tompkins was also staunchly Democrat, a firm believer in racial segregation and black disfranchisement. The *Charlotte Observer* was his workhorse in the white supremacist campaign to amend the state constitution.

The county's prosperity was accompanied by an expansion of the population. Population statistics show steady increases for whites and to a lesser extent for African Americans. The gap between whites and blacks is apparent as early as 1910, corresponding to the period of African American migration out the region.

Mecklenburg County By Race: 1890-1940

Year	County Total	Negro	White
1940	151,826	43,295	108,507
1930	127,971	38,023	89,926
1920	80,695	26,657	54,034
1910	67,031	25,481	41,547
1900	55,208	23,873	31,893
1890	42,673	19,526	23,141

Source: U.S. Census of the Population. Figures for whites include native and foreign born.

The city's assertion as a textile manufacturing and marketing center as well as a significant transportation crossroads in the central piedmont, created a variety of new jobs and new reasons to move to town. The attraction for urban living, for both races does not significantly manifest itself until 1900. A higher percentage of African Americans lived in Mecklenburg County in the late nineteenth century than would live there in the early twentieth; the lack of economic opportunities and social and political impediments account for out migration.

Charlotte By Race: 1890-1940

Year	City Total	Negro	White
1940	100,899	31,403	69,475
1930	82,675	25,163	57,490
1920	46,338	14,641	31,693
1910	34,014	11,752	22,259
1900	18,091	7141	10,938
1890	11,557	5134	6417

Source: U.S. Census of the Population. Figures for whites include native and foreign born.

In 1890, the Charlotte population was almost evenly divided between African American and whites. By 1910, the effects of disfranchisement and segregation laws

are apparent; the black population more than doubled [there are 9 blacks in 1910 for every 4 blacks in 1890], but the white population more than tripled [there are 14 whites in 1910 for every 4 whites in 1890]. In 1890, African Americans were 44% of the city population, in 1910, their representation had dropped to 34% even though the urban black population had more than doubled, the gap in the ratio of black to white residents in Charlotte continued to widen. The black population was never as large as the white, and by 1910, fell significantly behind the white increase. Charlotte's attraction for both black and white residents is clear by 1900. In spite of the rural to urban migration within the county, the black population of Charlotte never exceeded the city's white population, nor did it ever represent even as much as half. By 1930, only 30% of the city's population was black; although the numbers for both black and white increased, limited prospects for blacks suppressed black urban growth. The effects of segregation laws stemmed African American urban opportunities.

The heart of Charlotte's business district was along the principal downtown corridors of Tryon and Trade streets. The trolley lines also met at The Square, or the intersection of Trade and Tryon streets, pouring out scores of passengers who worked and shopped in the area. Professional offices, retail merchants, cafes and restaurants, banks and movie theaters lined these streets; all of them owned by whites. African Americans could patronize these businesses, but no African-American owned businesses on these streets, at least not near the center of activity. It is worth noting that Jewish businessmen had shops on these streets, as did the growing Greek and Lebanese-Syrian population. White ethnic businessmen were welcome in those venues, but blacks were not. The African American business community was confined to South Brevard Street in Second Ward, the neighborhood with the highest density of black residents.

Jim Crow culture stifled entrepreneurial growth, since most black shop keepers and service providers could only cater to a black clientele. Segregation also limited employment opportunities for African Americans. Although textile mills became a familiar aspect of the city landscape, they employed very few blacks and if they worked inside the mills, as was the case in the Hoskins Mill, they worked in different rooms from white operatives. The **Ashford** and **Strong Family Houses** are a surviving remnant of housing the Hoskins Mill built for African American employees. The company only built six houses for black workers, and these were situated across the street from the white mill village and behind the mill. While the mill employed white men and women and a few black men, it did not employ black women. James Ashford had several jobs at Hoskins: as a custodian, in the boiler room, and later on the loading dock. His wife did not work in the mill, but like other African American women in the mill village, she did domestic work for white mill families, working mostly as a laundress.^{[1621](#)}

The majority of African-Americans in Charlotte worked as common laborers or in the service sector. A minority were merchants or small business owners, and an even smaller minority was in the professional class. Clergymen dominated in the black professional and upper class. In 1911, there were two attorneys, fourteen barbers, one dentist, five physicians, five nurses, two funeral directors, and sixty-seven clergy men, in addition to proprietors of billiard rooms, drug stores, eating houses, as well as several other types of businesses were listed in the Charlotte City Directory.^[63] By the early twentieth century, thanks to vagaries of segregation laws and customs, the African American business community was fairly well self-contained. Black businesses were sequestered in a separate location from the larger white district. If African Americans wished to eat inside a restaurant, they had to patronize a black-owned establishment, if they required legal, financial, or medical services; they sought the services of black professionals. There were a few businesses that were used by clients of both races, such as barbershops and shoe repair shops, but generally, in the urban setting, the white and black worlds drifted apart. These economic and occupational trends continued well into the first half of the twentieth century. By 1940, 88.8% of the non-white employed workers fourteen and older in the city of Charlotte were concentrated in the following categories: operative, domestic worker, service, and non-farm labor. By contrast, 77.6% of white employed workers fourteen and older in Charlotte were concentrated in the categories of professional, managerial, clerical sales and operatives.^[64]

African American Community Development in Mecklenburg County

Charlotte's post Civil War residential areas were often a mixture of black and white residents; distinct pockets of segregated residence were not clearly visible until the close of the nineteenth century, and even then there was no "black side of town."^[65] This "salt and pepper" pattern was common in many Carolina towns.^[66] Isaac Erwin Avery recorded one example of the maintenance of the spatial proximity between black servants and their white employers:

When the old black mammy became too old for service, Mr. James H. Carson built her a house in the rear of his own residence and there she spent her last days in peace. Every Sunday afternoon each one of the Carson men visited her. They came to her, too, at other times, and their wives and children gave to her the affection that was so readily returned. She kept up with what every member of the family was doing and was privileged to ask any question she pleased.^[67]

By the late nineteenth century, thanks to the new demands of segregation laws, concentrations of African Americans occurred in particular sections of the city. Neighborhoods at the periphery of Charlotte's city limits also developed around

African American institutions such as Biddle Institute, or along trolley lines. Incorporated towns such as Davidson and Matthews were also home to discrete neighborhoods for African American citizens. Most of the historic African American neighborhoods, such as Brooklyn in Charlotte's Second Ward have been razed to accommodate varying visions of urban growth and improvement. Other black neighborhoods, such as Greenville, built in North Charlotte in the 1880s-1920s have been completely demolished and rebuilt in the spirit of urban renewal and exist today as historic neighborhoods in name only.

Several significant issues merged at the time of the formation of new African American neighborhoods at the turn of the century. The state had determined new rules to govern society and culture through its advocacy of racial segregation laws and disfranchisement practices. Mecklenburg County and particularly Charlotte blossomed as commercial and financial center of the region; urban development and economic growth were the buzzwords of the day. Newcomers with capital seemed interested in investing it in developing the city's economic vitality and they were welcomed, with hopes that more investors and business concerns would follow the road that led to Charlotte. In this new age of boosterism, civic leaders pulled out all the stops to convince outsiders that Charlotte was worthy of capital investment. Numerous locally printed publications championed the county's significant assets, such as a productive agriculture, a thriving textile industry, an educated population, and a law abiding, peaceful citizenry. By the end of the first decade of the twentieth century, it also became essential to note the great strides of the resident African American population, with special reference to their temperance, industry, and adherence to Christian ideals, all of which were the polite way of saying that the black people now knew their place, and that racial tensions were no threat to a sound business environment. These sentiments are easily found. In 1913, The Greater Charlotte Club published a guide that discussed topics such as the advantages of hydroelectric power, banking, roads, transportation, newspapers, churches, and education. The brief section, "Charlotte's Negroes," claimed, "...the negro is respected by the white population so long as he respects himself, and the result is that the black man here is making strides which are surprising to those who do not realize the relations existing between the races in this city." The essay praised African American churches, schools and library as hallmarks of the promise of the race. It concluded by saying that whites and blacks in Mecklenburg enjoyed friendship and co-operation and "*the Negro is welcomed in the pursuits to which he is best adapted*, [italics not original] and there is nothing of the race prejudice felt elsewhere and he is given every opportunity to better his own condition and that of his children."^[68] These sentiments were reprinted in the 1915 booklet, *Colored Charlotte*, the promotional publication for Washington Heights, an African-American streetcar suburb.^[69] The booklet is a mixture of real estate promotion, acclaim for the

new black middle class, and the white endorsement reserved for blacks that understood the limitations inherent in their condition. The success of the Democrat and white supremacist objectives to curtail unchecked African American political and social influence can be gauged in a several ways: political disadvantage, limitations in social and economic growth, limited housing, and the change in rhetoric for “deserving” African Americans.

Center City Neighborhoods

In the city center, African Americans were concentrated in the First, Second, and Third Wards. By the early twentieth century, the African American population of *First Ward* was concentrated in the eastern section of the neighborhood, away from North Tryon Street, and the heart of downtown. As in Second and Third Ward, the African American residents represented all socio-economic levels. Prominent African American businessmen and civic leaders such as Thad Tate, who owned a two story brick Italianate style home on Seventh Street, lived near blue collar workers and laborers who rented shotgun houses.^[70] First Ward had a collection of shopkeepers; barbers, grocers, cafes, and hairdressers, but it was not as extensive as the business district found to its south in Second Ward, nor was it a contiguous extension of that business district. First United Presbyterian Church and Little Rock A.M.E. Zion Church anchored the neighborhood at each end.^[71]

Of the four original city wards, *Second Ward* had the highest density of African-American residents, but by 1930, 24% of Second Ward’s population was also white, and 1% foreign born white.^[72] The neighborhood was a dense mix of professionals, artisans, and laborers, all crowded together in the space of several city blocks. Some of the most elegant homes owned by African Americans were found there, but the back streets were narrow and unpaved.^[73]

The black district of Second Ward, informally known as Brooklyn by the 1920s, was the heart of the African American business district. The boundaries of business corridor ran along South Brevard and East Trade Streets. Within this area was a dense concentration of a variety of businesses owned and patronized by African Americans both of and out of the neighborhood. Barber and beauty shops, pressing clubs, trucking companies, piano teachers, shoe repair shops, groceries, restaurants, confectioners, tailors and other shopkeepers thrived in the quarter. Pack peddlers, usually Lebanese immigrants, roamed Second Ward and other neighborhoods with large low-income populations who could not afford to shop in neighborhood stores.^[74] In addition to retail and commerce, South Brevard Street was home to the African American professional elite. Charlotte’s black community had the services of dentists Dwight and Frank Martin, Thomas Watkins and Albert Williams on the 400 block. Physicians Thomas Craig, Sterling Hogan, James Pethel and French Tyson had

offices on the 200 block; Napoleon Houser, instrumental in the organization of the Old North State Medical Society rented an office two blocks away on the 400 block. The Afro-American Insurance Company and the Mecklenburg Investment Company served as the financial cornerstones of the black community.^[75] The Mecklenburg Investment Company and Grace A.M.E. Zion Church are the sole remaining vestiges of what was once a vibrant and successful neighborhood. Many of Charlotte's African American leaders lived in Second Ward. Dr. J.T. Williams the first black physician in Mecklenburg County, and United States Consul to Sierra Leone, Dr. E. French Tyson, graduate of Howard University and Harvard, and the Rev. George W. Clinton, Senior Bishop of the A.M.E. Zion Church, all resided in Second Ward.^[76]

Prior to 1900, *Third Ward* was the center of black Charlotte. Third Ward was home to several African-American churches, schools, and the Good Samaritan Hospital but had no black business district, and less than half of its residents were black.^[77]

New Suburban Neighborhoods: Biddleville, Washington Heights, Cherry, Greenville, Grier Heights

Biddleville began in 1871 as a residential enclave for professors who taught at Biddle Institute, and the school remains at the heart of the neighborhood. The neighborhood grew considerably after the Charlotte Consolidated Construction Company extended a trolley line there in 1903, conveniently opening a new suburban area to Charlotte blacks. The early residents appear to have fully appreciated the significance of the trolley and their suburb by nicknaming it "New Dilworth."^[78] Although Biddleville was built around Biddle Institute, the neighborhood was a mix of black and white residents.^[79]

Washington Heights, named for Booker T. Washington, was the first Charlotte streetcar suburb developed exclusively for blacks. White developer W.S. Alexander hired C.H. Watson, a black real estate agent, to promote the community to Charlotte's African-American middle class. In a promotional booklet, *Colored Charlotte*, Washington Heights was endorsed as the up and coming African American neighborhood showcasing the best aspects of the African-American experience in Charlotte. The booklet included a section from a white civic organization that implied respectable black people could easily advance in Charlotte; the advertising in the booklet suggested that the upwardly mobile, and therefore respectable black potential home owner should live in Washington Heights, a mere two miles from town with housing at reasonable prices.^[80] Washington Heights did not have any of the elegant homes found in the inner city wards or in Biddleville. Modest bungalows were the prevailing style, and although many residents of Washington Heights were renters, there were no shotgun houses built in the neighborhood. The African-American neighborhood on the east side of Beatties Ford Road from Washington Heights, was originally named Douglasville, and later renamed McCrory Heights after Biddle

Institute president H.L. McCrory. The trolley line that extended up Beatties Ford Road to Booker Avenue served both neighborhoods, and a cluster of shops was located at the trolley's end.^[81] There was no business district in Washington Heights; the small complex of shops supplied most of the daily needs of the residents. If they required more sophisticated or professional services, they could take the streetcar to downtown and Second Ward. The types of businesses in the neighborhood were small dressmaking, laundering and pressing enterprises on Booker Avenue and Tate Street.^[82]

The *Cherry* neighborhood was platted in 1891 from a cotton plantation belonging to John and Mary Myers. Homebuilding in Cherry increased after a trolley line was extended up nearby Elizabeth Avenue to the new and fashionable white streetcar suburb of Elizabeth. According to contemporary records, Myers took personal interest in planning and administering Cherry. His purpose was to create "model Negro housing" and to offer new opportunities for homeownership to African Americans. Implicit in his good intentions were to settle blacks into a new suburb with neighborhood amenities similar to those found in white streetcar neighborhoods, such as new homes, a school, churches, and a park, and by so doing placate African Americans, who had to be content with separate rules and separate spaces, with living space similar in trend and desirability that white citizens enjoyed.^[83]

Cherry's residents were blue-collar workers, and approximately three quarters of them were renters. Lots were less expensive in Cherry than they were in Washington Heights, priced from \$40.00 to \$100.00 between 1900-1909, but even at those prices were still out of reach for the average common laborer. The rental situation was probably more comfortable in Cherry than it would have been in the city wards. Cherry was less crowded and designed with a suburban feel with tree-lined streets, and there were no shotgun houses. The neighborhood experienced a small building surge after the First World War, the period in which the neighborhood's bungalows were put up. The neighborhood had a few small shops such as cafes, and a billiard parlor, and as late as 1938, still had a resident blacksmith.^[84]

Greenville's history dates to the late nineteenth century; it was a community of bungalows, a neighborhood school, Fairview Elementary, churches, small retail shops, restaurants and barbers. Similar to other African American neighborhoods, Greenville was mixture of renters and homeowners. Many of the children were sent to Miss Jesse Bangum Robinson's home for etiquette lessons. A resident of the Greenville neighborhood recalled that the houses were "small, but nice. They were not the straight through places. We had a backyard. And always during the summer months, we planted a vegetable garden there." Many of the residents were employed at the Buckeye Cotton Mill and also at a nearly cottonseed oil plant and flour

mill. ^[85]Greenville had a number of neighborhood businesses, mostly confectioners, grocers, barbers, and blacksmiths. ^[86]

Since blacks were relegated to certain areas in town, the city's African-American upper classes often lived in close proximity to the black middle and lower classes. Jim Crow laws and restrictive covenants effectively separated the races by the 1920s. Socio-economic class defined the new white neighborhoods, but this stratification would not occur to the same degree for African American residential areas until after the Second World War. ^[87] Some homes in the African-American neighborhoods were elegant and large, but most were modest, simple, and small. Many residents of these neighborhoods have happy memories of times past, and recall with great fondness the benefits of these tightly knit communities. African-American residential communities were also the scenes of more formal socializing. Many of the city's elite blacks formed a number of social clubs, such as The Montauk Society League of Charlotte, the Queen City Medical and Pharmaceutical Society, the Friday Afternoon Club, and the Pierian Literary Circle. ^[88] The Excelsior Club, founded in 1944 by James Robert "Jimmie" McKee still stands between Biddleville and Washington Heights, and since its establishment has served as the region's premier social club for African American professionals and politicians. ^[89]

Parts of these neighborhoods became the sites of some of the worst urban poverty and living conditions in the city. Conditions were so bad in some areas that in 1937, *The Charlotte News*, the city's evening paper, condemned the poor quality of housing and the general poor living conditions in the neighborhoods that white Charlotte did not wish to notice. ^[90] Some of Charlotte's older African-American neighborhoods were torn down in the 1960s for urban renewal. Greenville, established in the 1880s, was slated for a massive urban renewal program and was flattened in the 1960s. Rebuilding took nearly thirty years because the Nixon administration cut the federal rent and home building subsidy. Greenville, unlike Second Ward, still exists, but not in its original form. Although dislocated residents intended to move back into new housing, the interruption of funding destabilized the community, making it impossible for the neighborhood to reconstitute itself. ^[91]

Grier Heights was not planned as a suburban neighborhood, but developed in the late nineteenth century approximately two miles from Charlotte. According to neighborhood tradition, former slaves organized the community. Sam Billings was the first recorded black landowner; he purchased fifty acres for \$913.50 in 1892, and another substantial parcel in 1893 for \$1057. Grier Heights was originally described as a community of one square mile with 50 families, many of them craftsmen. As the community grew, it became commonly known as Griertown, after one of the large landowners, Samuel Grier who started buying land in the area in 1900. Grier built an impressive home in 1922 on the northwestern edge of the neighborhood and had a store on the lot adjacent to his residence. Samuel Grier formed Grier Heights Development Company in 1949,

and built approximately 30 houses on Fannie Circle, Montrose Drive and Gene Avenue.^[92] Many of the people who bought homes in Grier Heights in this period were veterans who used G.I. Bill financing.^[93]

The oldest streets in Grier Heights are Skyland Avenue [formerly known as Davidson Street] and Orange Street. Most of the homes on these streets are bungalows, many of them in the pyramidal cottage style. The occupations of the residents of these streets ranged from skilled to unskilled jobs. Janitors, domestics, laundresses, and laborers lived among bricklayers, plasterers, and mechanics.^[94] Grier Heights had two churches, and a school; Billingsville Elementary School built in 1927, on land donated by Sam Billings.^[95]

Rural Communities

Significant African American properties are still found in what was formerly rural Mecklenburg and in the incorporated small towns that ring Charlotte. African American neighborhoods in Davidson, Cornelius, Huntersville, and Crestdale (Matthews) remain intact to some degree and still reflect the history of the original communities.

Davidson

The best-preserved example of the early twentieth century African American neighborhood is the **Westside** area of Davidson. Davidson grew around the college established there in mid-nineteenth century. Cotton fields and farms surrounded the town well into the twentieth century. In addition to the college, an asbestos plant and cotton mills were the principal employers in the town, and several of the African American residents found work at the asbestos plant or at the college. Some of the African American employees that worked in the asbestos plant lived on Eden Street in simple gabled houses. Housing for white employees was located on the opposite, or north side of the mill. Some of the older residents remember asbestos lint from the plant frequently matted their window and door screens. The original boundaries of Davidson's African American neighborhood extended from the Alley, which ran parallel to the railroad tracks on the block west of Main Street. The houses in this area were removed for town expansion and parking. Approximately three blocks to the west of the 1920s boundary of the neighborhood are homes built in the late 1960s to accommodate residents who were displaced by construction and renovation that occurred along the Alley . This neighborhood was home to factory workers and domestics as well as to community leaders, such as Ralph Johnson, a minister and the owner of several rental properties in the neighborhood, and Ada Jenkins, a principal of the **Davidson Colored School**, which is situated on the southwestern edge of the

neighborhood. By the early 1950s, **Davidson United Presbyterian Church** was built on the northeast margin of the community.

Cornelius

Smithville is the location of the African American neighborhood in Cornelius, which was formerly a mill town to the south of Davidson. The only remaining vestiges of the 1920s character of the community are found on South Ferry Street, near the Union Bethel A.M.E. Zion Church [organized in 1917]. Some small gabled houses and hipped roof bungalows still survive among what is now mostly new construction. Union Bethel A.M.E. stands at the neighborhood's northern boundary on Catawba Avenue, and a Rosenwald School was located several blocks to the south.

Huntersville

The site of the earliest African American neighborhood in Huntersville is to the southeast of the town center and until recently would have been distinctly separate from the rest of the town. Situated for the most part behind the railroad tracks that run parallel to N.C. 115, this community began as a sparsely settled area of small farms and worker's dwellings. Three churches mark the boundaries of the community: **Huntersville A.M.E. Zion, St. Phillip's Missionary Baptist**, and a United House of Prayer For All People. In addition to these churches, some African Americans in Huntersville also worshipped at **New Friendship Presbyterian**, located on the northern end of town on N.C. 115. A Rosenwald School, now used as a community center is located near St. Phillips's Missionary Baptist and the Espy Alexander House. One of the principal landowners in this area was Otha Potts, who was a brick mason, landowner, farmer and a well-known figure in the Huntersville community. Potts owned a substantial amount of land in the vicinity around and behind Church Street (which runs on the other side of the railroad tracks from N.C. 115), so much so the area was once known as Pottstown. Pottstown was initially farmland, but in time, Potts sold parcels to the people who built the houses around him, and also sold land to the House Of Prayer, located to the rear of the house. In addition to farming, Potts worked for Myers-Chapman Construction Company in Charlotte. He used scrap materials from commercial construction sites to build his house, the **Otha Potts House**, which is allegedly framed in 4x4 lumber, and is widely acknowledged by his older neighbors as an extremely well built house. The **Torrence-Lytle High School**, built in the 1930s, and which served as the only African American High School in north Mecklenburg, is also located in this neighborhood.

Matthews

The original African American neighborhood in the Matthews vicinity, in southeast Mecklenburg is known as **Crestdale**. Located adjacent to the railroad tracks, the community was once known as Tank Town, because it was the site of the water tank used to supply steam engine trains. The tank is long since gone, and the neighborhood changed its name from Tank Town to Crestdale in 1963. The southeastern leg of Charles Street is still called Tank Town Road, and is one of the few remaining relics of Tank Town's history. The community is only a few miles from the Matthews town center, but it was regarded as a separate entity until 1988, when the town annexed it.^[96]

The community dates from the 1860s, and was originally settled by freemen and freed slaves. Crestdale's early history is obscure; no one seems to know anything about the original inhabitants or how they came to settle there. Most Tank Town residents were sharecroppers or day laborers in Matthews. A few worked for the railroad and these jobs were the best option available to blacks in Tank Town. The railroad provided steady employment, cash wages, housing, and later, insurance benefits.

Most of the residents of the community, however, were farmers, and few of them could afford to own land. A fifteen-acre tract in the community, now under development, once belonged to Abelola Weddington, the mulatto daughter of a prominent white farmer in the area. Abelola and her husband Green Lee Stewart farmed the land until they lost it in a crop lien. Abelola and Green Stewart were probably the only independent farmers in Tank Town.^[97]

In the late nineteenth century, the children of Tank Town went to Hood's Crossroads Colored School, which was several miles from their neighborhood. After 1900, a shotgun house that stood at the intersection of what is now Crestdale and Matthews School Roads, and which is the present site of the new Matthews House of Prayer, was converted into a more conveniently located community school. This school had grades one through seven, and was only open for three months a year. By 1918, the residents of Tank Town were able to build a new school. The Rosenwald Foundation financed 50% of the cost of the new school, and the community raised the remaining funds by having fish fries, and by assessing the parents \$25.00. Since this sum was prohibitive for most residents, parents who could not afford the tuition contributed by helping with construction. The Tank Town School changed its name to Crestdale School in 1963, and was closed in 1966, when the Crestdale students were integrated into the Matthews School.^[98]

The African American population of the community could conveniently attend one of four churches: Roseville AME Zion, Mount Moriah Baptist, a Presbyterian Church, or the United House of Prayer for All People. Roseville AME Zion was located on Ames

Street, which was not in Tank Town, but in Matthews, three blocks to the west of the town center, and a significant distance from Tank Town. This church was organized in the late nineteenth century, and had an active congregation until 1928. The House of Prayer was established in Tank Town in that year and most of the members of Roseville switched to the United House of Prayer. The abandoned Roseville Church eventually collapsed. The Roseville congregation maintained a cemetery several miles away. **The Roseland [Roseville] Cemetery** is located in between a housing development and an apartment complex near the intersection of Monroe Road and Sardis Road. This cemetery served as the primary burial ground available to African Americans living near Matthews and who were not affiliated with other churches that had their own churchyards.^[99]

The United House of Prayer acquired land in Tank Town in 1938.^[100] The original sanctuary was a frame structure with a sawdust floor, and was located near the present site of the **Clyburn House**. In the 1950s, the original House of Prayer was replaced by a brick building that included a sanctuary and a small café attached to the east elevation that served Sunday lunch to congregants.^[101] Both the Clyburn House and the House of Prayer are on Crestdale Road. The Matthews House of Prayer is the oldest standing structure owned by the House of Prayer in Charlotte. Charles Manuel “Sweet Daddy” Grace founded the United House of Prayer For All People in 1919, in Waltham, Massachusetts. The church was open to all who wanted to join, and based its message on spiritual perfection, as well as on social improvement and respectability. Grace attracted members from other sects, and his services became known for their lively and celebratory character marked by enthusiastic and vocal worshippers and brass bands.

Henry Boyd established Mount Moriah Baptist Church in 1879. The church and cemetery are located on Crestdale Road; the current brick building replaced the original sanctuary in the 1950s.^[102] A small cemetery is adjacent to the church. A Presbyterian Church stood at the end of Matthews Chapel Road, near the **Garris House**. The original frame building was removed in the 1960s, and the newer building is now used as a community center. Remnants of the brick pier foundations from the old church still stand in the overgrowth at the perimeter of the site.

Few of Tank Town’s original buildings still stand. The Clyburn, Thompson, Garris, and Rowland houses are the only remnants of the community’s early twentieth century architecture. Other older structures have been torn down or have been rehabilitated by Habitat for Humanity.

The Clyburn House

Manley Clyburn was the town barber. His barbershop formerly stood on Crestdale Road and he ran a small store where he sold candy, cakes and cold drinks on Charles Street. He also worked for the city of Charlotte. He acquired several parcels in Tank Town and built rental houses on them, but none of the approximately ten rental houses he built survive.

The Thompson House

The Thompson House sits on .5 acre. The earliest deed reference for this parcel is January 25, 1904, in which R.B and Sallie Kirkpatrick, parents of Joseph Kirkpatrick, who owned a large farm on McKee Road in the 1930s, sold the property to Peter and Alice Howey. This is the oldest house in Crestdale. [\[103\]](#)

The Garris House

Built on land owned by John Garris in the 1920s, this is the second house to occupy this site. It is adjacent to the former Presbyterian Church, which now serves as the community center. Garris also accumulated several parcels in Tank Town, which he sold in 1922, after he moved to Philadelphia. [\[104\]](#)

The Rowland House

Charlie Rowland acquired this land in 1929. Rowland worked for the railroad and was able to afford to have this brick craftsman style bungalow built for his family. This is the only house in Tank Town to show elements of a popular style from the period. [\[105\]](#)

Rural Communities

Shuffletown

The Shuffletown community is located in Paw Creek Township in northwest Mecklenburg County, along Rozzelle's Ferry Road. The settlement dates to the early nineteenth century and was originally known as Spurrier, named for the local store owned by Ed Spurrier. Its not clear when the community name changed to Shuffletown, and no one is quite sure why, although a number of anecdotal explanations abound. One account is that a Spurrier relative, Sam Oglesby, sold dippers of liquor for five cents, and after indulging in a few dippers, the residents of Spurrier shuffled home. [\[106\]](#)

Several plantations formerly stood as the economic foundation of the area, and descendants of many of the former planter families still live on family lands. The Rozzelle Ferry, which began operations c. 1816, transported people and goods across

the Catawba River between Mecklenburg and Gaston County. A bridge replaced the ferry in the 1870s, but the flood of 1916 washed it out and ferry service, provided by the Rozzelle family resumed until a new bridge was built in the 1940s. [\[107\]](#) In the 1930s, Shuffletown was on a route used by bootleggers running moonshine into Charlotte. [\[108\]](#)

Like their white neighbors, the small African American population of the area was also tied to the land. Most were small farmers or tenant farmers, although some, like Robert Caldwell, O. Bright Bland, and Elijah Reid, owned sizeable farms. These men were able to purchase large tracts because they were skilled workers, and earned the cash to make landownership possible. The Caldwell family were brick masons, as was Bright Bland. Elijah Reid was a preacher and a blacksmith. These craftsmen were able to build their own homes, and helped each other in the construction of their houses. The generation of African-American men that came of age after the Second World War credited these men for influencing them to learn to lay brick, which was a well-paying craft and the way out of tenancy and dependency. [\[109\]](#)

The institutional life of Shuffletown's African American community was centered on Lawing School Road, the site of a Rosenwald School, and the only African American church in the area [now demolished]. The two-room schoolhouse had seven grades. In the 1930s, Mrs. McAuley taught grades 1-3, and Mrs. Stephenson taught grades 4-7. In the winter, the first children to arrive were responsible for building a fire in the old coal stove. The school served the black Shuffletown families, as well as children from the Todd's Park area in the Hoskins community, approximately five miles away. [\[110\]](#)

Robert Caldwell purchased 120 acres for \$3900.00 in 1911; part of a tract owned by the Dunn Gold Mine. [\[111\]](#) In addition to his work as a brick mason, he farmed with the help of his wife Molly and their twelve children. **The Robert Caldwell House**, built c. 1915, is a one-and-one-half story side gabled bungalow built in a rural setting. Like other Piedmont farmers, Caldwell planted cotton and corn, and vegetables. His children took the vegetables to Charlotte in an A-Model Ford, and sold them door-to-door in the Dilworth neighborhood. Caldwell also pumped sand from Long Creek, which cut through his property, to make plaster for houses. [\[112\]](#)

The Post –Second World War Period

Post Second World War urban development in Charlotte was increasingly characterized by expansion and renewal. The city's economic growth increased the size of the downtown business district, and by the 1950s, it was no longer fashionable

for whites to live in the city center, which they abandoned for newer homes in the latest suburban development. The prosperity of the post-war period resulted in increased suburban development for both blacks and whites

Typical examples of African American residential development in suburban Mecklenburg County in the early 1950s are **Misenheimer Street** in the J.H. Gunn community in east Mecklenburg, which developed around **J.H. Gunn High School** (formerly known as Clear Creek High School) and the Sterling neighborhood, which developed around **Sterling Elementary School** in south Mecklenburg. More recent construction is built around the small 1950s core of these neighborhoods. The majority of the homes are modest, gabled frame or concrete block dwellings. Older A.M.E. Zion churches are within a third of a mile of the original homes of each neighborhood. Most of the residents of these communities drove to jobs in town. Other contemporary African American neighborhoods, such as Double Oaks, University Park, Brookhill, and Newland Road, constructed in the late 1950s, represented new options for Mecklenburg's African Americans in the waning years of segregated housing.^{[1][3]}

Between white migration to suburbs and the need for commercial and infrastructure expansion, and within the general trend toward urban renewal, older, urban African-American neighborhoods were suddenly “in the way”. Neighborhoods in First, Second, and Third Wards were cleared to make room for subsidized housing, an inner city belt road, a football stadium, and the extension of the city's government district. African-American churches, schools, residences, and businesses disappeared from the older sections of the city by the 1970s. Similar patterns of removal have occurred as a result of suburban development in the county. Farms and tenant houses have disappeared in the wake of the increased need for housing. In the post-segregation world, most African Americans live in the neighborhoods of their choosing, and because of stronger patterns of residential integration, dedicated African American neighborhoods are again disappearing.

^[1] Dan L. Morrill, *A History of Charlotte and Mecklenburg County*, Chapter 1. An on-line resource: www.danandmary.com/historyofcharlotte.htm

^[2] Jeffrey J. Crow, Paul D. Escott, Flora J. Hatley, *A History of African Americans in North Carolina*, [Raleigh: Division of Archives and History, North Carolina Department of Cultural Resources, 1992], pp. 1-4; William S. Powell, *North Carolina*

Through Four Centuries, [Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1989], pp. 69-73.

[3] Charlotte-Mecklenburg Historic Landmarks Commission, Survey and Research Reports for Hopewell Presbyterian Church, Providence Presbyterian Church, Steele Creek Presbyterian Church, and Sugaw Creek Prebyterian Church.

[4] Morrill, *A History of Charlotte*, Chapter 3.

[5] Edgar T. Thompson, *Agricultural Mecklenburg and Industrial Charlotte. Social and Economic*, [Charlotte; Chamber of Commerce, 1926], pp. 11-12.

[6] Morrill, *North A History of Charlotte and Mecklenburg*, Chapters 1, 2.

[7] Powell, *Carolina Through Four Centuries*, pp. 176-177.

[8] Morrill, *A History of Charlotte and Mecklenburg*, Chapter 2.

[9] Janette Thomas Greenwood, *The Black Experience in Charlotte-Mecklenburg, 1850-1920. A Teaching Packet for Charlotte-Mecklenburg Teachers*, Charlotte-Mecklenburg Historic Properties Commission, 1984.

[10] *Ibid*, Chapter 4.

[11] Morrill, *A History of Charlotte and Mecklenburg County*, Chapter 4; Thomas Hanchett, *Sorting Out the New South City. Race, Class, and Urban Development in Charlotte, 1875-1975*, [Chapel Hill: Univesity of North Carolina Press, 1998],

[12] Frederick Law Olmsted, *A Journey in the Seaboard Slave States With Remarks on Their Economy*, [London: Sampson Low, Son , and Co., 1856], p. 363. North Carolina Collection, University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill. Documenting the American South Database: <http://docsouth.unc.edu/nc/topics.html>

[13] Morrill, *A History of Charlotte and Mecklenburg*, Chapter 4; Hanchett, *Sorting Out the New South City*, p. 25

[14] *Ibid.*, Chapter Three.

[15] 1860 Census Population Schedule, North Carolina, Slave Schedule: Mecklenburg County.

[16] Hanchett, , *Sorting Out the New South City*, pp. 16-17.

- [17] Morrill, *A History of Charlotte and Mecklenburg*, Chapter 4.
- [18] Greenwood, *The Black Experience in Charlotte-Mecklenburg, 1850-1920*.
- [19] Torrance-Banks Family Papers, Part 1, Box 1, Folder 12. UNCC. Agreement between Margaret Allison Torrance and James Brown, 1862.
- [20] Survey and Research Reports, Neely Slave Cemetery; W.T. Alexander Slave Cemetery.
- [21] James L. Roark, *Masters Without Slaves. Southern Planters n the Civil War and Reconstruction*, (New York; W.W. Norton and Co., 1977), pp. 84-89.
- [22] Eric Foner, *Reconstruction. America's Unfinished Revolution. 1863-1877*, (New York: Harper and Row, 1988), pp. 164-167.
- [23] Governor's Message to the Legislature, November 17, 1868. *North Carolina Legislative Documents, 1868-1869*. North Carolina State Archives.
- [24] Hugh Talmage Lefler and Albert Ray Newsome, *North Carolina. The History of a Southern State*, 3rd edition, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1973), pp. 520, 521.
- [25] Torrance-Banks Family Papers.
- [26] Roark, *Masters Without Slaves*, p.84.
- [27] Rowland T. Bertoff, "Southern Attitudes Towards Immigration, 1865-1914," *Journal of Southern History* 17 [1951]: 330-331.
- [28] Powell, *North Carolina Through Four Centuries*, p. 417; Roark, *Masters Without Slaves*, p. 142; Foner, *Reconstruction*, pp. 174, 405.
- [29] North Carolina Board of Agriculture, *North Carolina and Its Resources*, [Winston: M.I. and J.C. Stewart, Public Printers and Binders, 1896.], p. 158. North Carolina Collection.
- [30] *Ibid.*, pp. 24, 118.
- [31] U.S. Census of Agriculture, 1920; U.S. Census of the Population, 1920.

[32] U.S. Census of Agriculture, 1930. Figures for bale weights were not provided, it is assumed that bales were approximately 500 pounds as was common twenty years earlier.

[33] Mecklenburg County Courthouse: Deeds 101-536, 208-71, 303-65, 345-520, 394-4.

[34] Deed Book 303 Page 27, October 28, 1912. M.C. and Ida Hunter, and J.K. and Julia W. Wolfe sold an unspecified amount of land to Espy Alexander.

[35] Deed Book 430 page 505, April 8, 1920: M.C and Ida Hunter and J.K. and Julia K. Wolfe sold an unspecified amount of land to Espy Alexander for \$50.00. Deed book 776 Page 82, March 12, 1930, T.C and Eunice Wilson and Rawlinson Myers sold 34.4 acres to Espy and Viola Alexander for \$1000.00.

[36] Interview with Mr. John Caldwell, Huntersville, N.C., March 2002.

[37] Lawing School Road was a center for African Americans in the Shuffletown area; the Lawing School [a Rosenwald School] stood at the top of the street, an African American church and cemetery were situated across the street from the school, and two large farms owned by blacks were also located on this road.

[38] Interview, Judy Rozzelle, Shuffletown, May 2002.

[39] Deed 526-536, 12/15/21; Deed 643-152, 11/23/26. Mecklenburg County Courthouse.

[40] Interview, Agnes Blakely, Charlotte, N.C., May 2002.

[41] Ibid.

[42] Paul D. Escott, *Many Excellent People. Power and Privilege in North Carolina, 1850-1900*, [Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1985], p. 129.

[43] Janette Greenwood, *The Black Experience in Charlotte-Mecklenburg, 1850-1920*, 3-31.

[44] Charlotte-Mecklenburg Historic Landmarks Commission, Survey and Research Reports: *First United Presbyterian Church; Grace A.M. E. Zion Church*.

[45] Ibid, *Grace A.M.E. Zion Church; Little Rock A.M.E. Zion Church*.

[46] Ibid., *Murkland Presbyterian Church*.

[47] Historical Committee of 1976, *The History of Steele Creek Presbyterian Church, 1745-1978*, 3rd Edition , [Charlotte: Craftsman Printing and Publishing House, 1978], pp. 62-63.

[48] Burke, Rev. D.G., *The Catawba Story. A Brief History of the Catawba Presbytery*, [Historical Committee of the Catawba Presbytery, 1981], p. 1.

[49] Mecklenburg County Courthouse, Deed 617-145; Interview John and Sadie Caldwell, Huntersville, February 2002.

[50] Charlotte Mecklenburg Historic Landmarks Commission, Survey and Research Report, *Murkland Presbyterian Church*.

[51] J. Morgan Kousser, *The Shaping of Southern Politics. Suffrage Restriction and the Establishment of the One Party South, 1880-1910*, [New Haven: Yale University Press, 1974], pp. 182-184; Patricia A. Buggs, *The Negro in Charlotte, North Carolina as Reflected in the Charlotte Observer and Related Sources, 1900-1910*. M.A. Thesis, Atlanta University, 1976, pp. 47-48.

[52] Escott, *Many Excellent People*, pp. 251-252.

[53] Kousser, *The Shaping of Southern Politics*, p. 184.

[54] Buggs, *The Negro in Charlotte*, p. 49.

[55] Kousser, *The Shaping of Southern Politics*, p. 191

[56] Kousser, *The Shaping of Southern Politics* p. 188; Buggs, *The Negro in Charlotte*, p. 51.

[57] Morrill, *A History of Charlotte and Mecklenburg*, Chapter 7.

[58] Hanchett, *Sorting Out the New South City*, p. 24.

[59] Escott, *Many Excellent People*, p. 172.

[60] See; Don H. Doyle, *New Men, New Cities, New South*, [Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1900].

[61] Escott, *Many Excellent People*, p. 198.

[62] Interview, Willie Ashford, Charlotte, N.C. November 2002.

[63] *Charlotte City Directory*, 1911. The business section of the 1911 City Directory indicates an African-American presence in the following occupations: Attorneys: 2 of a total of 48; Barbers: 14 of 34; Billiard & Pool Rooms: 2 of 6; Boarding Houses: 2 of 36; Tobacco shops: 2 of 16; Cleaning & Pressing: 12 of 21; Clergy: 67 of 112; Dentists: 1 of 15; Dressmakers: 3 of 22; Drug Stores: 3 of 21; Eating Houses 22 of 24; Fish, Oyster & Game: 2 of 5; Funeral Directors: 2 of 4; General Merchandise; 1 of 20; Grocers; 13 of 154; Hairdressing: 1 of 4; Hotels: 1 of 14; Insurance: 4; Papers: 2 of 12; Nurses: 5 of 17; Physicians: 5 of 61; Schools & Colleges: 2 of 14; Shoemakers & repairs: 13 of 29; Tailors: 3 of 19; Wood & Coal: 9 of 23.

[64] U.S. Census of the Population, 1940. The total number of non-white employed workers in Charlotte was 14,906; the total of white employed workers was 30,419. The non-white category included Chinese, Japanese, and Indians as well as Negroes, but in Mecklenburg County the number of Chinese, Japanese, and Indians was so small as to be negligible, and “non-white” can be assumed in this case to mean African Americans.

[65] Hanchett, *Sorting Out the New South City*, p.116.

[66] Ruth Little, “The Other Side of the Tracks: The Middle Class Neighborhoods That Jim Crow Built in Early-Twentieth-Century North Carolina”

[67] Isaac Erwin Avery, *Idle Comments*, (Charlotte, N.C.: Avery Publishing Company, Inc.), p. 80. North Carolina Collection.

[68] The Greater Charlotte Club, *Charlotte*, Charlotte, N.C., 1913, “Charlotte’s Negroes.”

[69] C.H. Watson, ed. *Colored Charlotte*, [Charlotte: A.M.E. Zion Print Job, 1915], pp. 4-6.

[70] Hanchett, *Sorting Out the New South City*, p. 125.

[71] *Charlotte City Directory*, 1938.

[72] Fifteenth Census of the United States, 1930. The total population of Second Ward was 10,624; 8048 were African American.

[73] Rose Leary Love, *Plum Thickets and Field Daisies*, [Charlotte: Public Library of Charlotte and Mecklenburg County, 1996], pp. 3-5

[74] *Ibid.*

[75] Charlotte City Directory, 1938; Watkins, Carlton G. *Beyond Medicine. A Century of Parenting and Pediatrics in Charlotte and Mecklenburg County*, p. 10.

[76] Randolph, Elizabeth, ed. *An African-American Album*. Vol. 1 Charlotte: Public Library of Charlotte and Mecklenburg County, 1992; A.B. Caldwell, ed., *A History of the American Negro. North Carolina Edition, vol. IV*, [Atlanta: A.B. Caldwell Publishing Co., 1921], p. 13; Watkins, *Beyond Medicine*, p. 10.

[77] Hanchett, *Sorting Out the New South City*, pp. 122-137.

[78] Dan L. Morrill and Nancy B. Thomas, "Biddleville"; Thomas Hanchett, "Neighborhood Guide: Biddleville," Charlotte Mecklenburg Historic Landmarks Commission.

[79] Hanchett, *Sorting Out the New South City*, p. 137.

[80] *Ibid.*, p. 140; Watson, ed. *Colored Charlotte*, pp. 4-6.

[81] Hanchett, *Sorting Out the New South City*, p. 142.

[82] Charlotte City Directory, 1938.

[83] Thomas Hanchett,, Cherry Neighborhood Guide, Charlotte Mecklenburg Historic Landmarks Commission.

[84] *Ibid.*, Charlotte City Directory, 1938.

[85] Rhonda Y. Williams, "Welcome Back Greenville" *Charlotte Observer* [Mecklenburg Neighbors], August 2, 1992. Clippings file, Robinson Spangler Carolina Room, Public Library of Charlotte and Mecklenburg County.

[86] Charlotte City Directory, 1938.

[87] Love, *Plum Thickets and Field Daisies*, pp. 3-5

[88] Robert C Kenzer, *Enterprising Southerners: Black Economic Success in North Carolina, 1865-1915*. [Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1997], pp. 113-114.

[89] Charlotte-Mecklenburg Historic Landmarks Commission, Survey and Research Report, *The ExcelsiorCub*.

[90] Crow, et al, *History of African Americans in North Carolina*, p. 130.

[91] Jerry Shinn, “Greenville Plan Hopes are Fading”, *Charlotte Observer* July 14, 1974, 1D. Clippings File, Robinson Spangler Carolina Room.

[92] *Charlotte Observer*, November 22, 1981. P. 1A, 10 A.

[93] Interview, Arthur Eugene Grier, June 8, 2002.

[94] Charlotte City Directory, 1940.

[95] *Charlotte Observer*, November 22, 1981. P. 1A, 10A.

[96] A plat for Tank Town is on file at the Mecklenburg County Courthouse in Map Book 332 Page 368.

[97] Interview with Harvey Boyd, Matthews, N.C. April 2002. There are no documents in the Mecklenburg County Courthouse regarding a crop lien or a land sale associated with Abelola Weddington/or Stewart or Green Lee Stewart, or with the Ross Family, which allegedly had the original lien agreement with Abelola and Green Stewart.

[98] Paula Hartill Lester, *Discover Matthews: From Cotton to Corporate*, p. 60. The Tank Town School was torn down to make room for a larger House of Prayer.

[99] *Ibid.*, p.63.

[100] Mecklenburg County Courthouse, Deed 937-345, July 21, 1938. There is a ten-year discrepancy in dates between Paula Hartill Lester’s account of the establishment of the House of Prayer in Tank Town in 1928, and the first recorded deed to the trustees of the church in 1938.

[101] Harvey Boyd.

[102] Lester, *Discover Matthews*, p. 60.

[103] Mecklenburg County Courthouse: Deed 264-575.

[104] Mecklenburg County Courthouse: Deed 481-584; Harvey Boyd.

[105] Mecklenburg County Courthouse: Deed 735-104; Harvey Boyd.

[106] Interview, Judy Rozzelle, Shuffletown, May 2002; Undated Kays Gary newspaper column, “Town That Isn’t Has What Was,” Shuffletown Clippings File Carolina Room, Public Library of Mecklenburg County.

[\[107\]](#) Undated typescript prepared by Jackie Rozzelle, Shuffletown Clippings File.

[\[108\]](#) Interview, Ed Rankin, May 31, 2002.

[\[109\]](#) Interview, Louis Caldwell, May 31, 2002. After WWII, young black men learned through apprenticeships with large construction firms in Charlotte, such as J.A. Jones and Southeastern.

[\[110\]](#) Interview, Louis Caldwell; Interview, Agnes Blakely, May 2002.

[\[111\]](#) Deed 277-376, 4/2/1911, Mecklenburg County Court House.

[\[112\]](#) Interview, Louis Caldwell.

[\[113\]](#) “Charlotte. A Good Place To Live and Do Business,” *The Charlotte News*, December 7, 1954.