

University Park Historical Essay
By Brandon Lunsford, March 10, 2020

The University Park neighborhood formed in the late 1950s off Beatties Ford Road and LaSalle Street on the Historic West End of Charlotte. The development emerged around West Charlotte High School after the school moved north on Beatties Ford in the middle of the decade, and it became a suburban community full of ranch homes occupied by the growing black middle class that was settling further out beyond Johnson C. Smith University (JCSU). As Charlotte is exploding in growth and new development is coming to the west side, University Park remains largely intact as a testament to the strides the African American community began to take in the city during the Civil Rights era. It was the home of several important local civic leaders, educators, professionals, and entertainment personalities and the home of black businesses, churches, and schools that still exist on the corridor.

During the Reconstruction period after the Civil War, Charlotte did not have any dedicated black neighborhoods. As historian Tom Hanchett has shown in his seminal book *Sorting Out the New South City*, African Americans settled all over the city in and around its four wards, often side by side with white residents. By the 1910s, concentrated and segregated black neighborhoods had developed, most notably the Brooklyn community that filled much of the Second Ward area downtown.¹ There was also the Greenville community in the Fourth Ward, and Biddleville, which had grown up along the new streetcar line that ran down Beatties Ford Road near JCSU. Between 1950 and 1960 the number of Charlotte's non-white residents soared 50.5%, from 37,511 to 56,471. Over the years this separation continued to define Charlotte, as the city divided into areas characterized by race and income. Wealthy white families settled in the southeast part of the city, and low- and moderate-income whites resided to the northeast and southwest. African Americans continued to concentrate in the northwest, which only increased when government-sponsored urban renewal policies eradicated the vibrant Brooklyn community². The Historic West End corridor centered around JCSU stands today as Charlotte's only surviving intact concentration of black communities, and it is filled with a rich history as the heir to other neighborhoods destroyed over the years.

Often referred to by white Charlotteans as "The Black Dilworth," Biddleville was one of several small black settlements that emerged in Charlotte in the late 1800's. The first people to settle in the area were the early white presidents and faculty members of the university, but even then white landowners like Rev. Stephen Mattoon often sold lots to black residents. Over the years as the white residents moved out, Biddleville became known as a favored residential area for the middle-class black elite and was populated by families who wanted to raise their children in an intellectual atmosphere centered on the university. Around the turn of the century electric streetcar service was extended to the college, further expanding the village as Charlotte's city limits stretched out to meet it³.

¹ Thomas Hanchett. *Sorting out the New South City: Race, Class, and Urban Development in Charlotte, 1875-1975*. The University of North Carolina Press, 1998, p. 127.

² Hanchett, pp. 248-250.

³ Hanchett, p. 135.

The white Freehold Realty Company teamed with local black businessman C.H. Watson to plat the African American streetcar suburb of Washington Heights in 1913 north of the bridge over the Seaboard Air Line Railway tracks just beyond Biddle/JCSU, and black residents continued to settle farther north up Beatties Ford. JCSU President Henry L. McCrorey helped develop a prestigious and stylish black residential neighborhood along the east side of Beatties Ford behind the Charlotte Vest Water Works Station that would become home to a community of middle class black families. McCrorey Heights residents lived in fashionable ranch homes and included JCSU professors, black leaders in the medical field, ministers, civil rights pioneers, and some of the earliest African Americans to hold important positions in local government. This clustering of predominant black voices would continue to congregate during the 1950s and 1960s in University Park.

One of the earliest of those black pioneers in Charlotte was Frederick Douglas Alexander. His father Zechariah Alexander was the owner of Alexander Funeral Home, Mecklenburg County's oldest African American owned and managed business and the only black-run funeral home in the city. His brother, Kelly Alexander, Sr., devoted his life to fighting for civil rights in Charlotte, and in Kelly's capacity as head of the Charlotte branch of the NAACP he helped North Carolina become the largest wing of the organization in the country. Fred Alexander himself became the first African American to serve on Charlotte's City Council in 1965, after organizing voter registration drives among Charlotte's African American population and working for the appointment of black police officers and mail carriers since the 1940s. During his nine years on the council he helped pass several anti-discrimination ordinances, and notably forced the removal of the fence separating the segregated Elmwood-Pinewood cemeteries in Uptown. He was elected to the N.C. Senate in 1974, one of the first two black senators elected in 104 years⁴.

Fred Alexander was also the driving force behind the formation of the University Park neighborhood, which emerged as the black middle class continued to look farther up Beatties Ford Road for homes they could own. Alexander focused on the creation of University Park after his experience managing the Double Oaks apartments along Statesville Avenue. White Charlotte developer C.D. Spangler, Sr., and his company constructed the 680 units on 60 acres in the mid-1940s with help from the FHA 608 program of the Federal Housing Administration. The Double Oaks Realty Company and the grid of streets associated with it first appear on Sanborn maps in 1929, but its true beginning was in 1949 when a portion of the Selwyn Park neighborhood was revised. These barracks-style low density units were designed for low-income black families headed by black veterans returning from World War II, and Alexander took on the duties of managing the complex in addition to his work at the funeral home. Spangler had come to Charlotte in the mid-1920s and had a connection to the Federal Reserve Bank, and eventually owned the Bank of North Carolina. The real estate market boomed in Charlotte after the war in the late 1940s, and Spangler and other builders like John Crosland guided the feverish growth. Spangler soon founded the C.D. Spangler Construction Company and also developed Selwyn Village, Shamrock Hills, Tryon Hills, and Westfield for white residents in addition to Double Oaks and Newland Road for African Americans⁵. His work with Spangler at Double Oaks convinced Alexander that middle-

⁴ *Charlotte Observer*, April 14, 1980.

⁵ *Charlotte Observer*, Sept. 15, 1958.

class black professionals and their families deserved homes on par with their white counterparts, and he and Spangler combined forces again to create University Park largely based off of money that Alexander himself had borrowed.

The University Park neighborhood was to be situated between the area once referred to as the “Gospel Streets” encompassing St. Paul Street, St. John Street, St. Mark Street, and St. Luke Street past Washington Heights to the future bypass of Interstate 85, which was to be opened in September 1958. It began construction in 1955 behind the area of Beatties Ford Road and LaSalle Street in the form of blocks of 1950s modern ranch-style homes similar to the plans for McCrorey Heights, Northwood Estates, and other black neighborhoods built at the time and was arranged around the new West Charlotte High School, which had moved from its nearby location on Beatties Ford Road to Senior Drive in 1954. University Park was announced in the *Charlotte Observer* on Sept. 5, 1954, with a development cost of \$9 million. The 473-acre tract was to be divided into lots for 1,200 homes, priced between \$8000 and \$9000. The plan at the date of the article was to build about 200 homes a year⁶.

The Plat maps on file at the Mecklenburg County Register of Deeds Office in map book 7 show four distinct phases of expansion in University Park. The first phase, dated January 1955, has the lots for the neighborhood beginning on Remington Street off Beatties Ford Road, near the intersection of Bellair Drive. The house still standing at 2801 Remington Drive is right beside the entrance sign for University Park. It was built in the ranch style in 1965, and is clearly architecturally different than the previous houses on Remington. Above Remington, LaSalle Street curls around and winds eastward until it reaches English Drive. English and Senior Drive are the two main thoroughfares through the neighborhood, and in the first phase both stretch from LaSalle to Keller Ave to form the easternmost marker of the initial development plan. Southwest Boulevard and Engelhardt Street run parallel to LaSalle through the neighborhood, and Bellair Drive and Botany Street also wind around from Remington, with Botany connecting to LaSalle at its terminus⁷.

The Second Phase is dated January 19, 1959, and adds Burbank Drive, Monterey Street, and Syracuse Drive winding between LaSalle and Southwest Boulevard⁸. The third phase is dated March 1960 and extends the neighborhood all the way to the barrier of Interstate 85 via English Drive, adding Ludlow Drive and Abelwood Drive running parallel to it in addition to Sutton Drive connecting Abelwood to English⁹. The fourth and final phase is dated February 1962, and adds Kendall Drive veering off from Senior to the new Twinfield Drive. Abelwood also connects from Kendall to English, and Senior stretches to I-85. The civil engineer for all four of the phases is listed as A.V. Blankenship¹⁰.

During this period the Federal Housing Administration (FHA) was notorious for refusing to consider African Americans for mortgages. From the mid-1940s through the mid-1950s, barely two percent of all FHA loans went to black citizens. Due to his track record with the FHA at Double Oaks, Spangler was able

⁶ *Charlotte Observer* Sept. 5, 1954.

⁷ Mecklenburg County Register of Deeds Office Map book 7, pages 293, 295, 751.

⁸ Mecklenburg County Register of Deeds Office Map book 7, page 449.

⁹ Mecklenburg County Register of Deeds Office Map book 7, page 213.

¹⁰ Mecklenburg County Register of Deeds Office Map book 7, pages 260, 261.

to arrange FHA-backed long-term mortgages for University Park homebuyers¹¹. Suddenly, home ownership became possible for many successful black Charlotte families that had previously been denied their right to pursue it.

But there were still problems..... Biographer Mary Snead Boger wrote:

“He (Alexander) went to Spangler with the idea of building middle-level homes for the Negro on the borderline between affluence and poverty. They were to call the place University Park, and Fred Alexander sold the first twenty-five houses from blueprints — and then the money dried up. Other realtors resented this renegade white man [Spangler].... Bankers backed off and the deal was slithering down the drain. Alexander walked into the Spangler office one day asking ‘What’s holding us up? Why can’t we get started?’ Now, Fred Alexander was a member of the Board of Directors of Southern Fidelity Mutual Insurance Company, a subsidiary of the prestigious black Durham Life Insurance Company. ‘I picked up the telephone, called Durham and said I needed to talk with the board. It met the next morning at eight. So I said I’d be there, save me a seat.’ When he came home from Durham the next afternoon, he had borrowed a quarter of a million dollars.”¹²

Early advertisements for the neighborhood touted insulated 3-bedroom brick/frame/asbestos homes with 1000 square feet heated with forced air.¹³ A 1960 advertisement describes the layout of a typical University Park house: “A paved driveway leads to a carport that has the home’s storage room at its back...A door opens from the carport directly into the kitchen, where there is a built in oven, surface units, and a dishwasher electrically operated. The kitchen opens into the large living room, and into another room that can become either a bedroom or a den depending on the desires of the lucky family moving into the house. Pull down attic stairs offer access to a large area above. A high spot of the home is a colorful bathroom with tub, commode, and sink in matching yellow. The home is electrically heated with an extra coil in the bathroom¹⁴.”

The new neighborhood offered a fulfillment of a dream for many and a sense of community for residents. “But for University Park... when we first came to city of Charlotte, there was very little housing for blacks. There was Fairview Homes and there was Double Oaks, and they were filled,” said Eleanor Washington, who has lived in University Park since 1961. “The first houses were something like 50 houses built on LaSalle Street... and they were occupied by doctors, lawyers... people who really wanted to be in this area¹⁵.”

Fred Alexander himself owned a house there at 2140 Senior Drive near his brother Kelly, who owned the home at 2125 Senior Drive. The Alexander family continues to be very visible in the neighborhood and local politics, with Kelly Sr.’s sons Kelly Jr., and Alfred currently running the Alexander Funeral Home. They remember an idyllic childhood in the suburban streets of University Park, surrounded by a vibrant

¹¹ “All houses have been approved for both FHA and VA financing,” ad in “Charlotte, A Good Place to Live, a Good Place to Do Business,” supplement to the *Charlotte News*, 1954.

¹² Mary Snead Boger, *Charlotte 23* (Bassett, Virginia: Bassett Printing Company, 1972), p. 6.

¹³ *Charlotte Observer*, January 12, 1955.

¹⁴ *Charlotte Observer*, Oct 8, 1960.

¹⁵ Interview with Eleanor Washington conducted by JCSU, 11/6/17.

community. Says Alfred Alexander, “Well everybody to me, everybody kind of knew everybody. You know it was kind of like you had pockets of neighborhoods but you also had people that stuck together. Families seem to have known every other family in the community¹⁶.”

That idyllic childhood changed in the early morning hours of November 22, 1965, when a coordinated bombing attack was carried out on the homes of four civil rights leaders in the Historic West End area. Both of the Alexander homes at 2128 Senior and 2140 Senior were bombed, as were the homes of Reginald Hawkins at 1703 Madison Ave in McCrorey Heights and civil rights lawyer Julius Chambers at 3208 Dawnshire Drive in the Northwood Estates neighborhood. No injuries were reported even though the families, including the children of Kelly Alexander and his wife, were home asleep at the time¹⁷. Despite a statewide manhunt no one was ever arrested for the attacks and the case, code-named CHARBOM by the FBI. The case has never been closed. Kelly’s son Kelly Alexander Jr., who has also become active in the community and local politics, remembers, “I mean, I was half asleep... Alfred and I shared a room and I heard what I thought was thunder and off in the distance... turns out that was probably an explosion and not thunder. But I didn’t really wake up. Next thing I know that there was a big flash of light, and I thought initially what had happened, which is lightning hit the front of the house¹⁸. To this day, Kelly Alexander Jr., still lives in his father’s house at 2128 Senior Drive.

Another important resident of University Park was Eugene "Genial Gene" Potts, often referred to as the "Jackie Robinson of Radio" in Charlotte for opening doors for broadcasters of color. He was one of the "Original 13," the first group of full-time black radio announcers in the South. He first signed on to groundbreaking Charlotte station WGIV in 1948, when he was asked by station owner Francis Fitzgerald to broadcast live from the Excelsior Club on Beatties Ford. Before his career in radio he graduated from JCSU and taught and eventually became the principal at Billingsville Elementary School. He lived at 2120 Senior Drive in the University Park neighborhood and retired from WGIV in 1975¹⁹.

Another groundbreaking DJ still lives there at 2412 Twinfield Drive in the section of University Park closest to I-85. "Chatty" Hattie Leeper became the first African American woman on a Charlotte radio station in the 1950s (and one of the earliest women in the field, period) at station WGIV. Hattie began working for Potts at WGIV as a high school student doing odd jobs and handling records, and eventually made it on the microphone herself. She quickly caught on with listeners, and WGIV became one of the nation's most popular black radio stations in the 1950s and 1960s. Hattie graduated from JCSU and has remained a key figure in the history and lore of the West End. She was also inducted into the Charlotte Broadcasting Hall of Fame in 2015. “We came in the late 60s,” said Leeper in an interview conducted at JCSU. “This land near Twinfield was all trees, and they hadn’t started this phase of it,” says Leeper. “They did the first phase, and then, years later, they expanded it, you know, to having this section was the last section built for it²⁰.”

¹⁶ Interview with Kelly and Alfred Alexander by JCSU, Dec. 12 2018.

¹⁷ *Charlotte Observer*, Nov. 23, 1965.

¹⁸ Interview with Kelly and Alfred Alexander by JCSU, Dec. 12 2018.

¹⁹ *Charlotte Observer*, August 16, 1970.

²⁰ Interview with Hattie Leeper conducted by Johnson C. Smith University, March 30, 2018.

University Park is significant as the home of educational institutions like West Charlotte High School and University Park Elementary School, and it provided homes for notable local black principals, teachers, and librarians. When the “new” West Charlotte High School opened on a spacious campus in 1954, it instantly became the city’s flagship African American educational facility.

The first high school for African Americans in Charlotte was the Second Ward High School in the Brooklyn Neighborhood. There had been talk about opening up Charlotte's second black high school on the West End as early as 1933. West Charlotte High was built in 1938 on Beatties Ford Road farmland that had been owned by local African American barber and civic leader Thad Tate²¹. The school had 384 students in the seventh through the twelfth grades and a dozen teachers when it first opened. The first principal was Clinton J. Blake, who worked on both campuses and remained in charge until his retirement in 1966. Blake also lived in University Park. The original brick school with Art Deco touches, located at 1415 Beatties Ford Road, became a destination for black families who were settling around JCSU and who wanted to provide their children with as much education as Charlotte's segregated school system could provide.

In 1954, West Charlotte High moved further down the road into a new and larger building at 2219 Senior Drive, which spurred the growth of the University Park neighborhood around it²². In the early years of the school’s new location it remained the center of black education in the city, even more so when Second Ward was torn down in the late 1960s. After the Supreme Court’s 1971 ruling in the landmark Swann vs. Charlotte-Mecklenburg Board of Education case, the school was integrated and became a national symbol of the cross-town busing policy that made Charlotte-Mecklenburg the most desegregated major school system in the United States²³. Over the years the school became re-segregated and the ruling was formally rescinded in 1999, leaving West Charlotte mostly all-black once again.

University Park Elementary School was opened in September 1958 at the end of Hildebrand Street. The first principal at the new school was Elizabeth "Libby" Randolph, who first came to Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools in 1944 as an English teacher at West Charlotte High School. After 14 years at West Charlotte she was recruited to open University Park Elementary, with parents specifically petitioning superintendent Dr. Elmer Garinger to give her the job²⁴. Randolph smoothly led University Park through integration, hiring several white teachers that had never worked for an African American supervisor before.²⁵ Today, University Park Elementary still exists at its original location at 2400 Hildebrand Street, and is now known as University Park Creative Arts Elementary. Another former

²¹ *Charlotte Observer* March 26, 1937.

²² *Charlotte Observer*, Sept. 13, 1954.

²³ Race and Desegregation at West Charlotte High School digital project, Southern Oral History Program, UNC Chapel Hill, <https://sohp.org/research/past-projects/west-charlotte-2/>

²⁴ *Charlotte Observer*, August 31, 1958.

²⁵ Interview with Elizabeth Randolph conducted by Jennifer Greeson, 6/16/93 available online at UNCC Goldmine <http://nsv.uncc.edu/interview/mura0047/>

teacher and principal at University Park Elementary was Charlie Dannelly, a JCSU graduate and resident of the nearby Northwood Estates who served on Charlotte City Council from 1977-89 and represented parts of Charlotte as a nine-term state senator from 1994-2012²⁶.

Another University Park landmark is the former North Branch of the Charlotte Mecklenburg Library building, which stands at 2324 LaSalle Street and was integral to bringing library services to African Americans in Charlotte. Allegra Westbrook was hired as "Head of Negro Library Services" for the Charlotte-Mecklenburg library system in 1947, becoming the first black library supervisor in the state. She served in various positions for over 35 years, including as the head of the Brevard Street Library until it closed in 1961 and eventually the North Branch. Under her guidance the black community became increasingly involved in the library through a citizen's advisory committee, which planned lecture series and discussion groups. In December 1952, Charlotte and Mecklenburg County voters approved a bond issue for a new main library and nine branch buildings including four within the city limits. The North Branch of the public library opened on LaSalle Street near the corner of Beatties Ford Road in 1957, serving a community that was almost exclusively African American²⁷. The North Branch building served the West End for 40 years until 1997, when it was replaced by the Beatties Ford Road Public Library. The 1957 library building was renovated in 2009 and is currently a popular learning and community center for the West End neighborhoods²⁸.

As Spangler and Alexander planned University Park, they also included a business district on Beatties Ford Road between LaSalle and the current Dr. Webber Avenue. The University Park Shopping Center was announced in 1954 at a price of \$2 million, and was designed to cover 16 acres. A planned 45 acre park attached to University Park and that would face onto Beatties Ford never came to fruition²⁹. The original flagship store in the Center was the Piedmont Supermarket, which then became a Harris Teeter before it transitioned to a Food Lion. Now lost, a branch of Mechanics and Farmers Bank fronted the shopping center on Beatties Ford on the corner of LaSalle³⁰. The shopping center was once home to one of the two original Bojangles restaurants, which opened at 2312 LaSalle in 1977³¹. At 2249 Beatties Ford Road near the complex is the triangular 1970 North Carolina National Bank by Charlotte architect Harry Wolf³².

Near the University Park Shopping Center at the southwest corner of the intersection of Beatties Ford Road and LaSalle Street is an International Style building which was the original home of McDonald's Cafeteria. John McDonald was born in Charlotte in 1921, but left for New York City and operated McDonald's Dining Room in Brooklyn for years before returning to Charlotte in 1970 and opening the first McDonald's Cafeteria. Much like the nearby Excelsior Club, McDonald's became a meeting place for

²⁶ *Charlotte Observer*, July 11, 2013

²⁷ Allegra Westbrook interview by Willie Griffin, May 15 2008, Southern Historical Collection via the University of NC at Chapel Hill.

²⁸ *Charlotte Observer*, June 15, 1997.

²⁹ *Charlotte Observer*, Sept. 5, 1954.

³⁰ James Peeler Photograph Collection, held by the Inez Moore Parker Archives at Johnson C. Smith University.

³¹ Tom Hanchett, HistorySouth website <https://www.historysouth.org/jcsu/>.

³² (Wolf Architecture, company's portfolio website:

<http://www.wolfarc.com/artist.asp?ArtistID=10391&AKey=wxnqy2j6>

the black community, where they discussed political action and organization. It also became a place where white Charlotteans went to engage their black neighbors and get votes, as well as some legendary home-cooked food. In 1982, McDonald moved the business to a much larger space at 2812 Beatties Ford Road.³³

Also nearby is a 1965 Modernist Style medical complex that served the community for over 50 years. On Nov. 16, 1965, three black doctors opened the University Park Medical Center at 2120 Keller Avenue (now Dr. Webber Avenue) to provide 24-hour care to the area. The doctors were obstetrician Dr. Richard Hill, gynecologist Dr. Walter Washington, and dentist Dr. Spurgeon Webber.³⁴

There are also several churches important to Charlotte's black community that have roots in the University Park neighborhood. Opposite West Charlotte High on Senior Drive stands the original University Park Baptist Church sanctuary. The church's roots go back to 1913, and under the leadership of Rev. Winfield S. Scott the church moved to 613-A North Myers Street in 1932. The church relocated a few more times before settling in the University Park neighborhood in 1961 on land donated by C.D. Spangler and his son at 2348 Keller Ave. The sanctuary was completed and dedicated as University Park Baptist Church (UPBC) on November 13, 1961. In 2001 the congregation moved to University Park Baptist Church II, located farther north on Beatties Ford Road³⁵. The original church is now occupied by the Ministerio Internacional Lirio de los Valles, a Latin American congregation.

Farther out Beatties Ford near I-85, the Memorial United Presbyterian Church occupies a modernistic 1968 building at 2600 Beatties Ford Road. This congregation traces its beginnings to JCSU's founding president Rev. Stephen Mattoon. In 1876, the Emmanuel Presbyterian Church opened its doors in Berryhill Township, NC with the Reverend Mattoon as its first pastor, and in 1880 Biddleville Presbyterian Church was also founded on the West End. Biddle Presbyterian steadily grew, and soon its Pastor, Dr. L.B. West, would lead the congregation to a new sanctuary that was dedicated in the summer of 1922 on Mattoon Street across from JCSU. Emmanuel Presbyterian also grew, and in 1961 the two churches merged. The first worship service was held at the renamed Biddleville Memorial United Presbyterian Church at its current location in December 1967³⁶.

At 2321 Beatties Ford Road is the North Carolina "Mother House" of the United House of Prayer for All People, a Pentecostal denomination with Charlotte roots dating back to evangelist Charles M. "Daddy" Grace in the 1920s. He founded two early versions of his church before establishing the United House of Prayer in Charlotte in 1926. Operating under Pentecostal-Holiness practices, followers witnessed musical brass shout bands, miraculous physical healings, and mass baptisms courtesy of the flamboyant Grace, and poor blacks in urban areas flocked to the congregation³⁷. The church headquarters in the city

³³ Pat R., "McDonald's Cafeteria: Hall of Fame Eatery," Charlotte Eats blog, <http://charlotteeats.blogspot.com/2008/07/mcdonalds-cafeteria-hall-of-fame-eatery.html>

³⁴ *Charlotte Observer* June 19, 1965.

³⁵ University Park Baptist Church history, <https://theparkministries.org/index.php/who-we-are/history>

³⁶ Memorial United Presbyterian Church history, <http://memorialpresbyteriancharlotte.org/mpc1/index.php/who-we-are/church-history>

³⁷ *Charlotte Observer*, Dec 12, 1963.

was located in the Brooklyn neighborhood, but was demolished during urban renewal in the 1960s and replaced with a new building at 2321 Beatties Ford Road in 1970³⁸. Like many other congregations in Brooklyn, many of the members moved to the West End to settle when they were displaced by urban renewal. The church on Beatties Ford, which at the time was the largest House of Prayer temple in the United States, was designed by Grace's successor, Bishop Walter McCullough. The current church building dates from 1999.

The stress of physical and social destruction of many of Charlotte's historic black communities by urban renewal policies and the expressways in the 1970s and the city's economic expansion during the 1980s and 1990s led to an economically depressed area in the Northwest Corridor that was often plagued by crime and drugs. Due to these factors, University Park declined to some extent. When black families started moving into white areas around the community, "white flight" began in earnest. As early as 1966 Fred Alexander feared a huge "negro ghetto" spreading out from the Northwest part of the city³⁹, and by the 1970s these neighborhoods were already experiencing the effects of being surrounded by encroaching highways instead of good grocery stores and quality schools. Boarded up homes and buildings, robberies, sexual assaults, and drugs became commonplace and increased into the 1980s and 1990s.

As Charlotte continued to grow in the 2000s, these distressed areas on the West side began to improve as developers once again turned their attention to the communities bordering center city. Today's LaSalle Street and the winding avenues that connect to it, including English Drive, Botany Street, Senior Drive and others, are again safe places to travel. Despite the changes over the years in the surrounding areas, most of University Park itself retains its historical character today and still beckons as a pleasant group of homes that bring to mind the suburban homes that one might expect to see in TV sitcoms of the time period. Many commercial and institutional buildings, and the homes of many of the neighborhood's most prominent residents still stand. And the wave of gentrification sweeping from Charlotte's downtown core has not yet touched this community. The housing stock remains almost 100% intact with very little recent construction, and the district exists as an excellent example of a black middle-class neighborhood that developed from 1950 to 1970.

³⁸ *Charlotte Observer*, April 11, 1970.

³⁹ *Charlotte Observer*, Dec. 26, 1966.