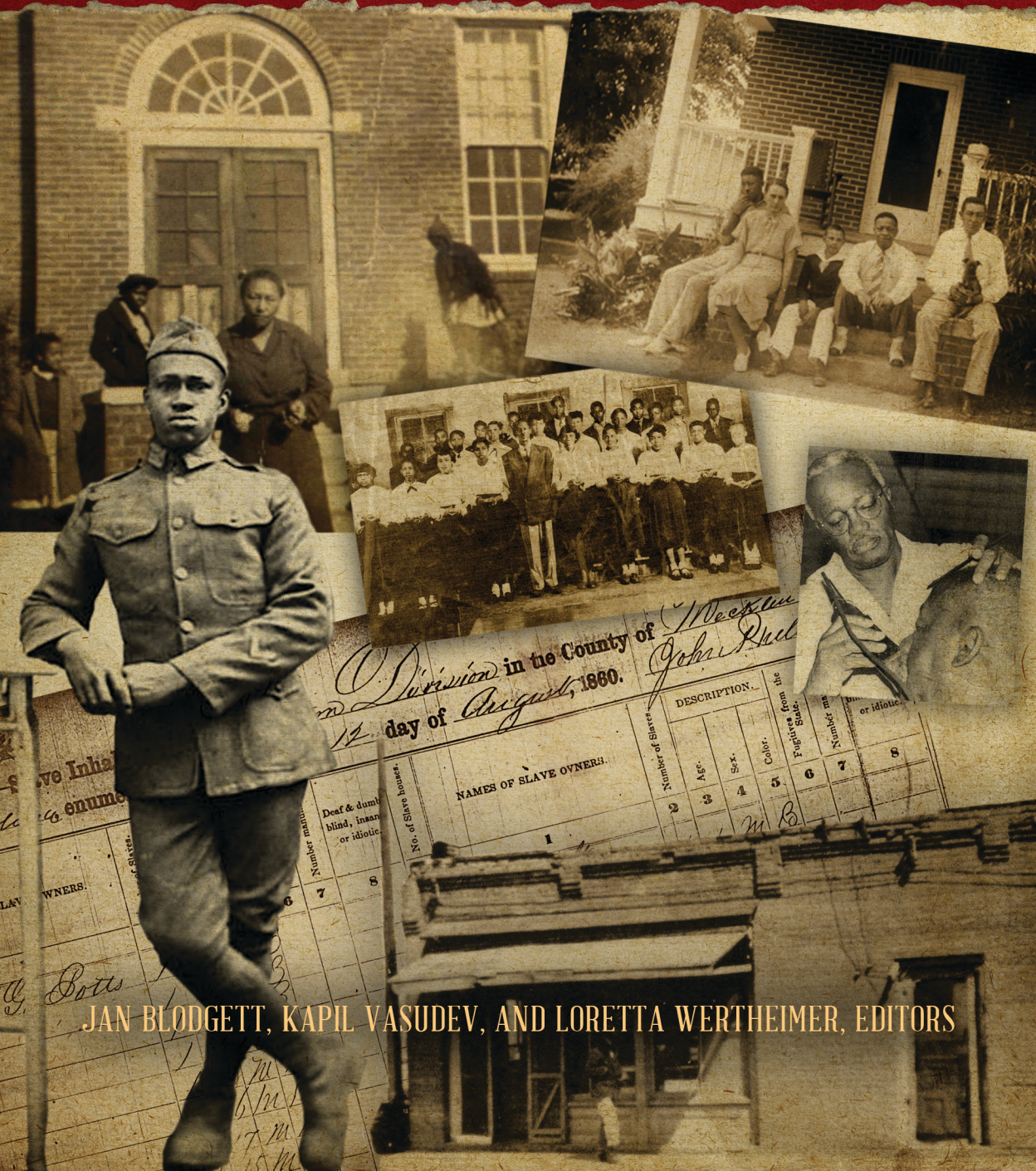


VOLUME ONE

SHARED STORIES

AFRICAN AMERICANS IN NORTH MECKLENBURG



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Shared Stories:
African Americans in North Mecklenburg
Volume 1

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INTRODUCTION

This book is part of a larger project to capture and share the hidden history of African Americans in North Mecklenburg and South Iredell counties. This history is found in the everyday lives and stories of individuals and families. The interview excerpts and photographs included document the important contributions African Americans have made and the experiences they have had over generations. Some stories overlap, some contradict one another. The purpose here is to show the complexity of history and to let voices speak for themselves each with its own perspective, based on its own experience.

The stories are grouped into three general areas: education, social life and neighborhoods, and businesses and working. The majority of the stories come from interviews conducted in 2016 and 2017 through funding from a National Endowment from Humanities Common Heritage grant. Additional material has been excerpted from oral histories housed in the Davidson College Archives and Special Collections.

This is volume one with hopes that more people will be encouraged to contribute more interviews to create a volume 2 and 3. In this way, we can create an even more complex mosaic and a deeper understanding of local history. Full versions of the interviews and more photographs and documents are available online at http://libraries.davidson.edu/archives/shared_stories and in the Davidson College Archives – email: archives@davidson.edu; phone: (704) 894-2158.

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EDUCATION

Schools have always had such an important role in our communities. The Rosenwald schools in Pottstown and Smithville as well as Ada Jenkins and Torrence-Lytle were not just places of learning; they were focal points of community life drawing in parents and community members for activities and socials. Many of the interviewees attended all-black schools for their entire education. Some finished their schooling at integrated schools resulting in shared stories of post-integration education.

Theodore Roosevelt Wilson: They used to have what they called the old school building. It had classrooms on each end and had a stage in the center where they could have little shows. You played out there on the school grounds. We didn't have nowhere else to play, period.

Frances Beale: [speaking about the Davidson Colored School, now the Ada Jenkins Center] The courses were reading, writing, arithmetic. Oh, one thing the teachers did try to do was to provide some activities for us. You know how your parents want to come see you perform, so we had plays. We had a choir, we had a dance group, we had May Day outside. The higher students, they had oratorical contests.

That was the best school we ever had. It was a long building and I can't think of how many rooms it had but it had a long front porch. No indoor water. No indoor anything. We had pot-bellied stoves.

But one thing that in the winter time children had to walk so far, when they got to the room their fingers would be almost frozen. The bus, the white bus would pass them, they would be walking. I resent, at an early age I resented getting second-hand books. They would take the books from the white school and send them here. Fortunately, I was helping all the teachers because I was just in the community and I was the first to see the books so I got a good book. But I didn't like that, I just resented getting those second-hand books. It was very hard for me to deal with.

Patricia Stinson: All the teachers [at Ada Jenkins] stood out. Ms. Brown - Josephine Brown was her name - she was our first grade teacher. She made the biggest impression on me, because I always

said, when I finish school, I want to be a teacher just like her, a first grade teacher. And in the mornings, we would get started. We always did the Scripture, and then she taught us - she was real particular about your penmanship. We had to make those letters just right. And back in those days, we printed. We had to print. And so, she was real particular about that. She always made sure we read. We always had to read, and then you come back and you tell what you read.

In the first grade, I don't think we did a lot with math and stuff. But I know reading, writing - just like they say, reading, writing, and arithmetic. You know, we had to do the one plus one and the two plus twos and all that stuff. Another thing she instilled in us was being courteous. We always had to raise our hand. We could not just blurt out if we wanted to say something. If we did, we would get in some trouble. So, she was - she wasn't hardcore, but she was - you knew what she wanted you to do, and you did it. I had no problems with that. Then, Ms. Kimbrough came along. I can't remember what grade she in. She was good. And she and Ms. Boyer - or at the time, her name was Ms. Whitley when we first started. We had music. We always had to go to music. And you always had to go outside to play, always had to do that. And so, they taught me the piano. Ms. Whitley and Ms. Kimbrough taught me piano. I had piano. And we'd just go down to the Davidson Presbyterian Church to take our lessons. That's where we took our lessons. Yes. When we were in school, we took our piano lessons.

The one person that made the biggest impression was the principal at the time, and that was Mr. Harris. Mr. Harris was real stern, but he made sure you were going to get your - back then, we used to diagram sentences. You had to take them apart. And math. And he was the one who instilled in me the idea of the math part, because when I finally went to Torrence-Lytle High School - I guess now they would call it in junior high, because we started in 9th grade - but anyway, I got an A-plus in math. That was my best one. I loved math.

LaGretta Neal: From kindergarten through 8th grade I attended Ada Jenkins Elementary School, that was a family-oriented school, and I could walk to school. From 9th to 12th grade I attended

Torrence-Lytle High School, which is now the David Waymer Center. And from the experience I had from Ada Jenkins' principal there. Mr. Harris was a stern principal and that helped us to be the person that we are now.

Ron Potts: My older brother and sisters and my parents all went to the Smithville Rosenwald School. And so, and I think the records show - let me think about that - that it opened somewhere in the '20s. I'm not sure. I may have something on that in here someplace, but that it opened sometime in the '20s, because I know my mother went there, and she was born in 1910, as I said.

In the black community, the teachers were like gods, you know? And so, my first grade teacher was Ms. Diamond. My brothers and sisters all had Ms. Diamond over here at - and so, Ms. Diamond was one of the teachers that came from the Rosenwald School and went to Ada Jenkins. And the other was the principal up there, who was Mr. J.O. Harris, and he ruled with an iron fist, but everybody respected him. [Interviewer: I've heard stories of people that if you acted up in school, your parents knew before you got home.] Absolutely, absolutely. And then, you got a punishment, you got a spanking at school, and you got another one at home, because the teachers could not do any wrong.

Verdie Torrence: Back then, I went to the old school right there in Smithville through the fifth grade, then I came to Davidson and went to sixth through eighth. And then I had to leave Davidson. Well, there was not a high school, so I went to Huntersville for high school.

[Interviewer: Tell me a little about your school in Cornelius. How many teachers were there?] Must have been about four or five. The principal might have taught the fifth grade or taught something. And my main thing I remember is, the teacher - I'm left-handed, and so she was going to make me be - and she would come by and she said, "That's not the right hand," and she put it over here. Soon as she got on whichever way she was going, I put it back. Because my grandfather was left-handed, and my father was left-handed, and they didn't try to change me. So, to me, that's all I knew, being left-handed.

Peggy Rivens: We went to school at Ada Jenkins through the eighth grade. Well, to begin with, we were in Cornelius. We had a school there. We went to school, and grades were combined. We had two teachers, and then a third came. But it was Diamond and Mars, Ms. Diamond and Ms. Mars, first and second, third and fourth. And then, we came to Davidson for the fifth grade.

Brenda Tapia: Now, Big Daddy put a lot of emphasis on education. I remember him telling me very early in life, shortly after he told me about the little baby born in Bethlehem, that there were two things in life that were important, a sound education and a strong relationship with God. If you had those two things, the sky was the limit. He said that a lot and he also kept saying, to whom much is given, much is expected. I think if he quoted anything more, I don't know what it was other than, to whom much is given, much is expect.

He was forced to stop his formal education in grade five to help support his family. And so, but he was a lifelong learner. So, that 12:00 dinner became his classroom. And everybody had to teach him something every day that they had learned. And if you didn't learn something you better go find a book - which they didn't have a lot of books back then, I think that's why books are important to me and to my Aunt Francis Houston Beale, who taught me how to read when I was about three, four years old, and then bought me my first set of books which were fairytales. But I think that's why books were so important to us, was that they didn't have a lot growing up.

We had 4H clubs, we had - we had 4H club, we had glee club, choir, drama. Drama was a big thing. Every spring we put on a play, every Halloween the church and the school would come together and they'd have a Halloween festival. I can remember bobbing for apples. I remember one Halloween my grandfather made this roulette wheel and it wasn't really gambling as much as they got people to donate gifts and things and they would put them on the numbers on this board and then they would spin it, and if your number came up you got to get that prize. Pin the tail on the donkey, lots of dancing. We loved to dance.

And we had sock hops almost every Friday at Ada Jenkins. We had sock hops. They would take us away to things. I can remember

playing with the Charlotte Symphony because of the band. And the fact that I had gotten a xylophone, a little small xylophone as a child, I remember playing the larger xylophones with the Charlotte Symphony orchestra during the Nutcracker Suite. I also remember band competitions. We had band and every year there was state competitions. Now, in elementary school you didn't go to state competitions. But one year the required piece that - like, there would always be the school would choose a piece, but the judges would choose a piece for everybody to play.

And when I was in the 8th grade, the song they chose was Mozart's *Così fan tutte* which has a bassoon solo. And Mr. Ledbetter, who was the band director at Ada Jenkins and Torrence-Lytle, couldn't get any of the high school kids to even look at a bassoon. And so, because I played clarinet and it's not that much of a switch, he asked me would I be willing to try. And I was like, well, my parents can't afford a bassoon, they're still paying for my clarinet - because I was the only one in the band that was actually purchasing, the rest of them were renting their instruments. He said, well, I will rent you a bassoon if you will learn to play.

I had six weeks to learn to play the bassoon and that solo part. My dad, because of, again, chemistry students needing extra help, had a chemistry student who was a bassoon player. So, I went to the college and got tutored on the bassoon and we won state competitions because of that solo. But that gave me an opportunity to visit North Carolina Central in Durham and I fell in love with the campus in the 8th grade. And that was what got me through North. North was very difficult for me because Ada Jenkins was like going to school with your family.

Bee Jay Caldwell: In 1952 I did enter first grade right here, this was a four-room Rosenwald school. Rosenwald schools were built as a one- room, as a two, three, four or five-room school, but we had a four-room Rosenwald school. And this was first grade, second grade was where the kitchen is, third grade was where the restrooms are, and fourth grade was up here. And between third and fourth grade was a wall that they could raise and lower. And we were so excited about school, and at some point in time, in the early years before we got the Torrence-Lytle building, the Huntersville Colored School,

we would have a Rosenwald Day in honor of Mr. Rosenwald, because we were so beholden as a race of people in the South.

When I was in school this was grades one through four. The fifth and sixth grades were somewhere, and seventh and eighth, I don't really know where. In '53, they added another wing to Huntersville Colored School, and in '53-54 it became Torrence-Lytle in honor of the men who had lobbied so hard to the county commissioners of Mecklenburg County to obtain a school, because before, if you wanted to further your education from the sixth grade, you had to attend a boarding school in another city, like Salisbury or Kannapolis or Concord, and that's pretty much all I can recall. Once in 1937, when they built Huntersville Colored School, the seventh grade was added to Huntersville Colored School, so fifth and sixth grades were somewhere in Long Creek. And when they added the cafeteria portion to Torrence-Lytle, the name changed from Huntersville Colored School to Torrence-Lytle in honor of Mr. Lytle and Mr. Torrence, and that was when all the little Rosenwald schools were closed, and everyone moved to Torrence-Lytle, which was right out my back door.

Ron Potts: Right. And interesting enough, my class was the last full class at Torrence-Lytle. The class after mine, they had a choice. They could go to either North or stay at Torrence-Lytle, because that was the last year.

Patricia Stinson: I was in the choir, but I never could sing that good, and I still can't. But I was probably more in the different clubs that did things. I know we had the home economics group. We had a group, and we learned how to sew, and we learned how to bake, and they taught us that type of thing. The guys that went there, they were in, like, an agriculture class, and they also had a class that taught mechanics, auto mechanics and stuff like that. But the biggest thing most of the people did was, they were cheerleaders.

[Our class] had 100 and some. We had the largest class that went down there. It used to be, it was 91, 92, 93. Well, we went, it wound up being a 94. So, we had a number of kids, a number of people. And so, there was like 100 or better that graduated. We were the last class to graduate from Torrence-Lytle in 1966.

[Interviewer: Did you know that when you graduated, that the next year the students would be going to North Meck?] Yeah, we knew that. Well, what happened was, we were told that the year before, or the year when we were going to the 12th grade. And they gave you an option. You could either stay at Torrence-Lytle or you could go to North. And so, I chose to stay at Torrence-Lytle. Some of the rest of them chose to go to North. So, some of them did go to North that would have been in our class. And so, just this year, we celebrated 50 years of being at our school.

Brenda Tapia: When I went to Torrence-Lytle, they had - compared to Ada Jenkins - they had everything we didn't have - they had French club, math club, honor society, drama club, there was a band, glee club, home ec., vocational aid, all of that. And I remember student government. I remember by 10th grade, my second year at Torrence-Lytle, I was president of every organization except for the student council, which I was vice president because you had to be a senior to be president of student council. Looking forward to 11th grade oratorical contest because back then they put a lot of emphasis on memorizing famous people's poetry and work. That was when I got my first taste of black authors.

Theodore Wilson Roosevelt: We had some of our [athletic] equipment from the College, they gave us their used equipment. We had to buy shoes. They gave us their pants. We had a baseball team, we had a basketball team and we had a pretty fair team [given] the conditions. We didn't have a gym. We didn't have one in Davidson and we didn't have one in Huntersville. So if it rained, the game was cancelled. The ground was so wet you couldn't practice. We had a track team, and my first year at Huntersville, the guy came there from the agricultural department. We hauled grass and dirt to make the fields.

Ruby Houston: When I went to North Mecklenburg, it was in 1965. Went to 10th grade, I was at Torrence-Lytle in the 8th and 9th. That was something. People would sit beside you and they'd move. I told one little girl, I said, "it won't rub off." We had fights and the day that Martin Luther King was killed, that was hard. They said, "What you all crying for?" We just had to fight our way out of it and I was not a big fighter.

Brenda Tapia: You could sit down on Star Spangled Banner when it was played, but when Dixie was played you better stand up if you didn't want to be expelled. And people say, "Are you serious?" I'm say, I'm serious. Dixie was very important. To look at that bigger than life size Confederate soldier every time you went in the gym.

Shane Stewart: By the time I went to school, it [integration] would have been about 20 years. Mooresville, I think, did a lot of integration in the early '70s, actually. So, yeah, it would have been about 20, because I started school in '91. So, about almost 20 years. But it was still - you could still feel that it was still this feeling of, like, I don't want to say you weren't welcome, but there was still this tension between the black students and white students in the '90s. Even in elementary school, we knew, okay, all the black kids still play with each other, and all the white kids play with each other, and we'll play with each other when the teacher will make us, and then we'll start seeing we weren't so different. But when we first started school, it was like, okay, all the black kids over here, and all the white kids over here, and one random Latino kid would be over here like, "I don't know where to go." We had two Asian kids like, "Well, I guess we're sticking together." And until the teachers forced us all to play together, it was like, we still went along those lines of our own segregation.

Verdie Torrence: [speaking about attending Livingstone College] It was an understood thing. First time being away from home. We must have had, it was about 300 students. It was small, but everybody knew everybody. [Interviewer: And what did you major in?] Elementary education. I think about it now. I travel back over that highway. You know, that as the longest, dreariest road. A classmate of mine from Cornelius, her father would take us back and he would take us in the early afternoon so he could get back before dark. I thought that worse thing that could happen but that was your ride back to school. I think now, they talk about the cost of college. My mother made \$12 a week, doing domestic work. Somehow we made it.

Ron Potts: I always knew that I was going to go to college, and that's what my parents promoted. And then, my brother, and he was the valedictorian of his class, just that path set for me. And he went

to North Carolina Central. And, like I said, by the time I went to college, he had worked a couple years, but he had always wanted to be a doctor, so he went back to medical school, and then, the next year, I went to Fisk there.

He was in medical school at Meharry, and Fisk is the sister school just across the street. And so, I lived with him my first year, maybe two. And then, after that, I moved onto campus.

LaGretta Neal: Appreciate different things? Oh, also, after my children were in middle school I attended college. I finished my college degree at Johnson C Smith University. And that's where my grand-daughter graduated from two years ago. And she's there working on her masters, for social work. And then Keneshia Gaston graduated from here. The dates and the years, I have all that written down. She graduated from Davidson College

Shane Stewart: I said, well, I like going to school, so I might as well go to college. And plus, it was the added benefit of, no one else has done it. And I'm one person who likes to take risks. You tell me I can't do it, I'm going to do it. Because I actually had a teacher in eighth grade tell me I would never go to college, because I was filling out the forms for our high school classes in eighth grade, and one of the classes I chose was a college prep class, and she said, "Well, I don't think you really need that class." I said, "Well, I want to go to college." She said, "Well, you don't strike me as college material." I know, right? And it was like, when she said that, it set something off inside of me. I said, okay, I'm going to prove you wrong. And so far, my graduating class, I've pretty much picked up more degrees than any member of my graduating class. I've gone further than almost any member of my graduating class. And I think that's - to me, that's something. That was a huge inducement to go to college, not only to prove people wrong, but just to prove to myself what I could do.

BUSINESSES & WORK

Barbershops are perhaps the best known black owned businesses in this area but there have been many other businesses owned and operated by African Americans. Beyond the exception of Davidson College and some mills as consistent employers, employment opportunities have often been limited for local African Americans. The creativity of local residents in finding work and making contributions to their communities is a common thread found in these interviews.

Frank Jordan: I started being a lead man at [Carolina] Asbestos, right after I left there I went to Merita Bakery and I was assistant shipping clerk. That was down on Trade Street in Charlotte, NC. I left there after four years and I wanted to get a job closer to home, so I started working at Reeves – Foamex. I spent 27 years there. While I was working there, I was partly doing my own business. I was working on second shift and at that time I had about 27 employees. I was a supervisor down there at that time. After I stayed there for a while, I went and took some business courses so I could start my own business. After I finished up doing that I continued to work at Foamex. I worked until they closed down the plant. I went off doing my own business. I used to have a garbage route when I was working on second shift. I had a commercial painting business as well. I started it shortly after I started the limousine business.

Peggy Rivens: And then my mom, Lula Bell Houston, went to part of Davidson College. My grandmother worked for Davidson College laundry. They both worked in the laundry. And I used to go to the laundry, to keep me in the laundry, and fold me up in the clothes, clothes baskets. I remember that, when I was just a little girl, you know, because that's where they were babysitting me, at the laundry. And my grandmother worked there until she retired. And, of course, my mama Lula Bell worked there until she retired, after 57 years, and went back to work the next day and worked another three years. [She] went back to work at the laundry for another three years.

I even worked for Davidson College. In the library in the serials and documents. That's in the early 70s. I had worked at the bank,

Piedmont Bank and Trust in Davidson. I was one of the first Blacks, really I was the first Black they hired at Piedmont Bank and Trust.

Susie Lowery: We quit farming then. Everybody had jobs and we went to the white folks, took care of their children, cleaned their houses, and cooked. I worked at the Mooresville cotton mill and Mooresville laundry a while and over at the fraternity boarding house.

Well, you see, Davidson didn't have but one clothes store. We had to go to Charlotte to get what we needed. Even groceries.

James Raeford: I heard that Mr. Johnson had an opening, so I came here in '57 and started working for him. And then in '70, I got a job in Charlotte as a salesman, selling cars. Worked there for six and a half years. Ray Skidmore American Motors. Five and a half years and then a year in Gastonia, that was in the middle seventies and the economy got bad, the gas prices. And I said, "Well, I'm going back to the barber shop." I didn't keep my license renewed, so I went back to renew the license and I started at Potts Barber Shop in Cornelius and worked there for a number of years; 22 years. And it was good for me, good to me there, too. I enjoyed working with Mr. Potts over there. Seven years ago, in '93, I decided to come over here and get my own shop. That's when Norton went out of business. The way it got started was, Mr. Knox came over and said, "Raeford, I've got a place available, you would be interested?" I said "Nah," I wasn't even going to think about it. And then he said, "Norton's going out of business," and I said, "It might be good for me." And I went by a few days later and we made a deal that same day to get this place."

Erving McClain: I graduated from nursing school in 1956. Then after that, I worked at Good Samaritan school for 2 years, on the medical unit. After that, I changed jobs and went to the Physical Rehabilitation Institute in Charlotte and worked there. I worked rehab for 36 years. I changed different positions there and my last 15 years at rehab, I was in nursing administration. And I did some family education during that time at rehab with families and physically handicapped patients. That was really rewarding. The whole time I was there I enjoyed it, you were always learning something different, some new from working with those people.

Patricia Stinson: At Torrence-Lytle, we had some wonderful teachers. I had one, Ms. Hackett. She taught us typing and that type of stuff to get us ready. And so, at that point in time, after that, instead of being a teacher, I wanted to be a secretary. And I didn't like shorthand, didn't like it at all, but typing was what I really liked. And I think from what I learned there is what helped me here at Davidson College, because what I learned there helped me get the job, I think, here, even though one of the criteria here at that time, they said you need to know shorthand. Well, I didn't know the first thing of shorthand, so the first time I applied, they wouldn't give me a job.

Then, the second time I applied, because at the time they already had an African American working here, and I guess they didn't need any more. So, then, the second time I applied, I got the job. And the funny thing was, like I told Mr. Stevenson, I said, "It's funny, the first time I applied, because I didn't know shorthand, you wouldn't hire me. And this time, you didn't even ask me if I could type or if I had ten fingers." But I did get the job, and I was here for, I think, two and a half years.

I worked at General Time. That was my real first job, at General Time. Worked second shift. And then, when I left, I wanted to work in the office. And so, I applied for the job at the office, the office at General Time. I didn't get that one either. It was just difficult for us to get those type of jobs.

I was soldering at General Time. And then, a job came open up at Draymore Manufacturing. I found out about it, I applied for it, and I went there and started working at Draymore. I left General Time. I was making \$6 an hour. I went to work at Draymore for \$3.75, something like that. And stayed there for two and a half years or something like that, I guess. And when my daughter started going to first grade, they would have programs. And what was happening was, I would have to either be late going to work up there or I'd have to come back down the road to her programs, and so then the job came open here at Davidson College, and when that job came open here and I was able to get it, I came back to Davidson College and started working.

Ron Potts: My dad made me work. I shined shoes at the barbershop, as my brothers had. I'm hoping I might have a picture of the shoe shine stand somewhere. But, yeah, I started shining shoes probably when I was 11 or 12. Then I got a job at Davidson College. I worked in the kitchen my senior year of high school with my buddies.

Now, in the '70s, when this neighborhood [Smithville] was developed, that's where most of the people worked. They worked at the mills, with the exception of - now, I have a cousin down the street. She's a schoolteacher. Of course, Nan was a schoolteacher.

Brenda Tapia: I grew up in this large extended family. My aunts and uncles were my first playmates because the street that we lived on, there was only one other black family on it at the time and they lived to the right of my grandparents, Esther and Walter Johnson. Esther was a librarian at the Torrence-Lytle High School. Walter and his brother, Harry, both worked at Davidson College in the laundry and over their lifetime, together, accumulated, I think, 150 years of employment because they started very young working at the college, because the college was the source of employment for many, almost all, of the black people in this area at some point in time if not their whole working life.

Ron Potts: It was called Brick Row. And actually, by the time I was growing up, my dad was one of the last businesses in this row of brick businesses where he had a barbershop, but actually, it was owned by a white man. Now, I'm not sure. I might have to have you talk to my brother. But the white man hired dad to cut hair. What I can't remember is that they cut hair together. That part, I don't know about. But I think he's the one who trained dad, I think. And so, somewhere in the '50s, he sold dad the business on Brick Row. And so, then, it became - but I don't know, back then, it had the name Potts Barbershop. But, you know, it didn't have Potts Barbershop until it moved to the current location. That was in 1960. The banker, Mr. Boone was the president of the bank, who we all knew, and he knew Wilson. You know, everybody called him Wilson, even the kids. The kids all called him Wilson. It wasn't "Mr. Potts" until much, much later. Yeah, it was much, much later before they started calling him Mr. Potts, but it was always Wilson. I remember him

getting the business. I remember him and my mother talking about it. But I don't remember that there was any difficulty with it.

LaGretta Neal: [My mother's] livelihood has been, she worked in the schools, Charlotte Mecklenburg schools, some, and then she worked at the fraternity. I can remember that the most, she would cook there. She worked there some years. We got the taste of different foods and that's why I appreciate the foods that I'm able to taste now, be it new food or different food. This was her livelihood. She enjoyed doing what she was doing, because she had to cook for her family, a family of seven plus my daddy.

Brenda Tapia: So, my grandfather and my uncles helped Ms. Mable run the dairy. They had been share cropping on some land, I think it was Griffith land. So, after the war, they acquired the land. They also had acquired six cows. From somewhere he had gotten 200 pigs. And so, growing up there were always - it was like growing up on a farm, six cows, 200 hogs, my grandmother raised chickens and guinea sometimes, but always chickens. We had two very large gardens, so really the only thing that we went to the grocery store for was toilet paper. Because until I was five years old we had an outdoor toilet and plumbing, but when I turned five we got one of the first indoor bathrooms.

Patricia Stinson: Well, my grandmother Minnie, she worked here at Davidson College. She worked at the Phi Beta Kappa, at the Eden House. She worked there. She and my mom both did here for many years. Then, she also worked for Will Terry. She worked for the Whites. She worked for Coach Couch. She worked for a number of people, my grandmother did. My mom worked for Dr. Bill Williams and Tom Clark. She also worked for the Keltons. She worked for the Whites, too, and the Avingers. They pretty much worked for a lot of the Davidson College community. And when I got older, I worked for - or babysat for the Keltons, the Ratliffs, and the Avingers. That was, when in school, when I get out of school, I'd babysit for their kids when I was young. I guess you could call it a job. I didn't really call it a job. But it was, more or less, yes.

My grandfather worked for the asbestos mill there. It was the only place I knew him to work. Oh, I take that back. He also worked for the Charlotte-Mecklenburg school system. He worked at Davidson

School one time, and also he worked at North Mecklenburg. My dad was a truck driver. When we lived in Charlotte, before we officially moved to Davidson, my dad worked for Sears Roebuck, the Charlotte Observer, worked for Alexander Trucking Company, and he also worked at the asbestos mill and in Mooresville.

Bee Jay Caldwell: No, there was nothing to do, no, goodness no. To be Black, to be a Negro and get a job, that was unheard of. The only thing you could do was work in somebody's kitchen or pick cotton. Every year at this time in the fall, there was a couple who lived down Holbrook Road. They would stop at the corner of Central and Holbrook and pick us up, and let us ride on the back of a truck to the Bottom, and we would shell peas, half a bushel for fifty cents and a bushel for a dollar. That's how we made our money, but you could do a lot with that. But our daddy gave us a quarter allowance every week, so we thought we were living large.

Brenda Tapia: As far as businesses, the only black business I saw before I went to college were the two barber shops, and Ralph's was on the corner where the college bookstore is now, and Hood's was further down in the middle of the street. Oh, and the shoe repairman, Mr. McKissock, who I think became a minister eventually. He ran a shoe shop, shoe repair that was right, maybe one door or two doors down from the soda shop. Those were the only black faces you saw on Main Street prior to 5:00. At 5:00 you saw black faces for the first time going in buildings to clean, but prior to that you didn't see black people.

Dorothy Burton: My mom worked in the laundry. She would go and they would walk over there to the laundry. I had a job over - well, I was over at Davidson College, when I got out of school I'd go over there in the evening. I was, like, 14. I put my age up because I was big. And so, I start washing dishes in the dish room in the evening.

Oh, I went over from 4:00 - 8:30 after we got through serving the line and cleaning up. I did the dishes and helped in the pot room. And it was a lot of people worked in that building. And it was called ARA I think at first. And then they changed the name to ARA Food Services. And then they moved the cooking places down to three buildings at Rusk House, Bailey House, what was the other house?

It was three houses because I baked in the Bailey House. I came from the dishwashing room and everything to the Bailey House doing dessert. I baked desserts.

[My supervisor] sent me along with a lady - I forgot her name, but anyway - Jean, to a cooking school in Charlotte. And that's how I learned how to bake and decorate. I learned a lot under a lady names Isabell Davis at Slaters. She was the baker. And then, when they moved me from the dish room to the pot room, they moved me from there dipping up desserts, setting up the line. And then, from that, she really is the one that taught me how to bake.

I [also] worked at Reese Brother Corporation. We walked to work from Griffith Street to Cornelius. Right there by Food Lion. But we worked there. I worked there and I worked at Burlington Mill in Mooresville and then came right back to Davidson College. And that's when I worked in the housekeeping. I worked there, clean dorms and everything, houses up down the street and everything.

[Interviewer: You had a little business at your house and you did hair in that shop. That would be on the weekends or at night?] Everyday except Monday. When I come in from work I had hair appointments. Sometimes I would do it until sometimes up to 10:00/11:00 at night. [Interviewer: And then get up the next day and go back to Davidson College?] Yes. The doctor told me, he said, you have to let one of these jobs go. And so, I said, well I'm going to have to let my hair go because I need something with benefits.

[Interviewer: A lot of women went to cosmetology school and they would have hair salons at their house. So, you had one. Do you know of anybody else who had one?] Dovie Howard. And once upon a time in Cornelius I think Paulette did hair at her house.

If you want a curl, the curl's, like, \$35 or \$40. Shampoo and roll and set, it would be - what was that? - I think it was \$20. Yeah, it wasn't high.

Verdie Torrence: There were two beauticians there. At first, I remember my mother going to Charlotte to get her hair done, and then there were two ladies that went off to school and ended up coming back building shops, Essie Bryce Davidson, Willie or Bryce, that had shops there in Cornelius, in Smithville.

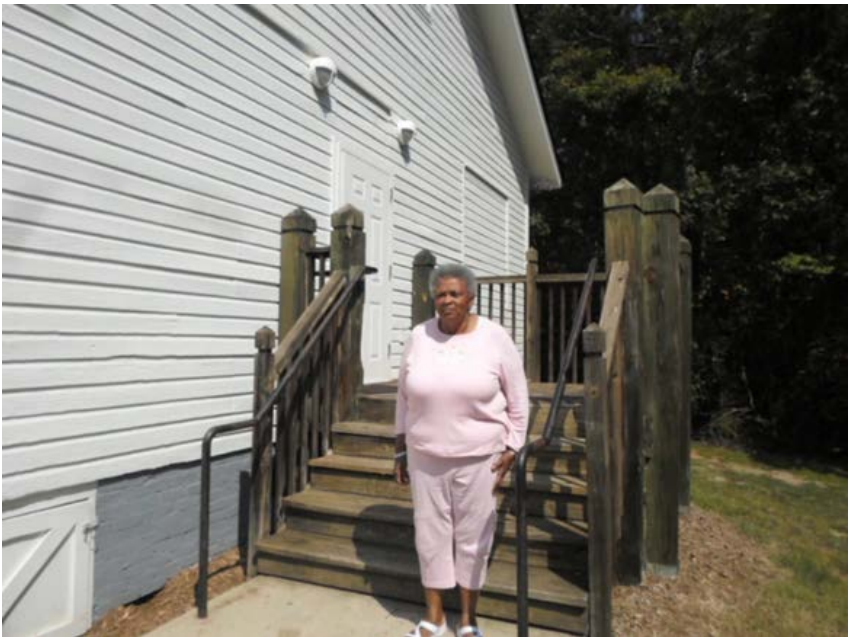
Bee Jay Caldwell: There were two stores: Sherrill's grocery, and they provided most of what the people needed; then you had something called Youngblood's, it was where the Rock Store was, right below North [Mecklenburg High School], and they moved the road and put the car lots there. It was called the Rock Store, but it was owned by the Youngblood family. We could shop there for groceries. Then there was another store, almost to [Route] 21. We didn't shop there much, because it was too far and we didn't have a car. We had to shop local pretty much.

Dorothy Burton: We used to have a grocery store, Mr. Anderson, he was white, he ran the grocery store on [Depot Street]. I believe it was Sic and his wife's little restaurant. And black people couldn't go on the white folks' side. Now, I remember that. I remember that one, now. They had a side to sit on and we had a side to sit on. And that was Sic's restaurant. Okay, you come on down the street, I'm thinking it was a dry cleaner, it was ran by Mr. Jackson, which he was white. Come on down the street, there was Mr. Anderson's grocery store. . Then we had a shoe store ran by Mr. Brown. We used to go up there and get our shoes. [Interviewer: Did they let you try on shoes when you were little?] Yes, Mr. Brown did. Mr. Brown didn't care. Well, you try on this shoe, your daddy told me to let you try on this shoe. I said, okay. Black and white shoes.



**EIGHTH
GRADE**

Image from 1958 Torrence-Lytle yearbook



Bee Jay Caldwell at the Pottstown Rosenwald School in 2017



Mrs. Ada Jenkins and students in front of the school. Courtesy of DC Archives.



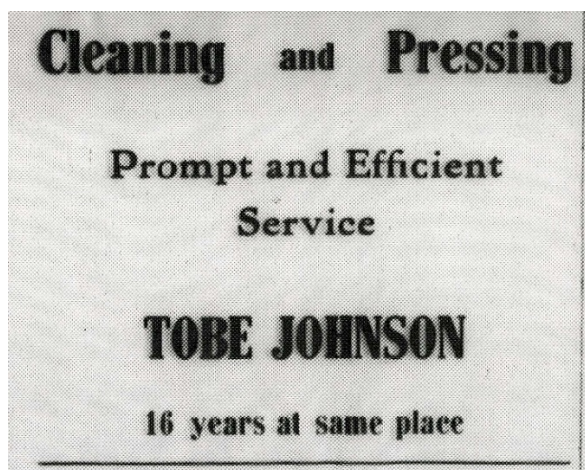
Students and staff at the first Davidson Colored School. Courtesy of DC Archives.



Torrence-Lytle Principal Isaac T. Graham



Teen babysitting class. Courtesy of Frances Beale.



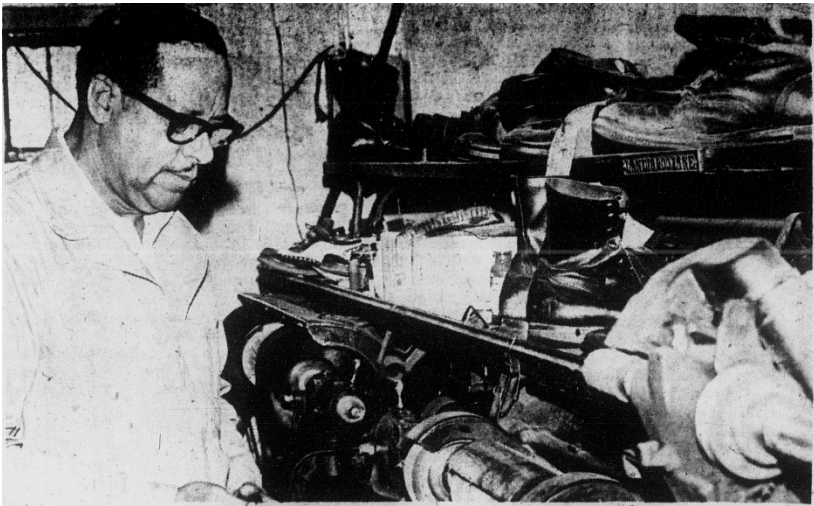
Advertisement for one the earliest black-owned businesses in Davidson.



Ralph Johnson's Barber Shop in Davidson. Courtesy of Ralph Johnson.



Original location of Potts Barber Shop in Cornelius. Courtesy of Ron Potts.



Warren McKissock in his shoe repair shop in 1974. Courtesy of Mecklenburg Gazette.

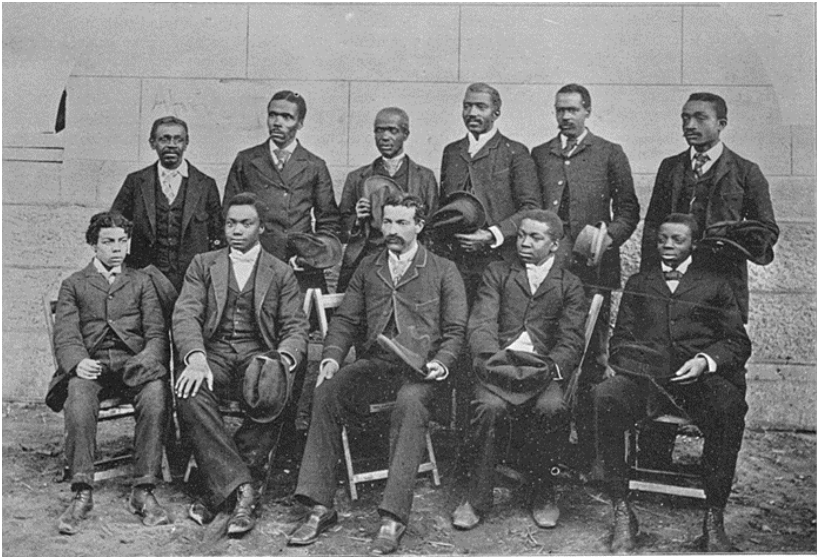
Church & Social

by Marjean Torrence



Grand Opening of J & G Beauty Supply Shoppe

Marjean Torrence's weekly column in the Mecklenburg Gazette celebrating a new business in 1987.



Staff at Davidson College in 1895.



Enoch Donaldson at Davidson College. Courtesy of Davidson College.



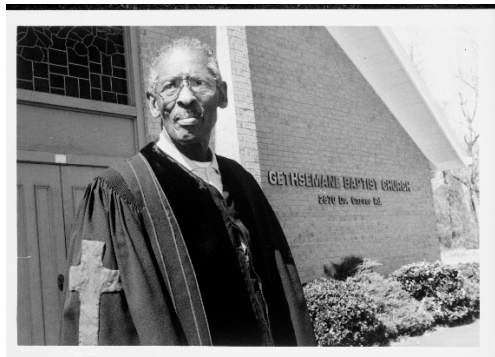
Original Torrance Chapel AME Zion Church building. Courtesy of Ron Potts.



Women of Reeves Temple AME Zion Church. Courtesy of Maggie Smith.



Original Gethsemane Baptist Church building. Courtesy of Marvin Brandon.



Rev. Clement Morris. Courtesy DC Archives.

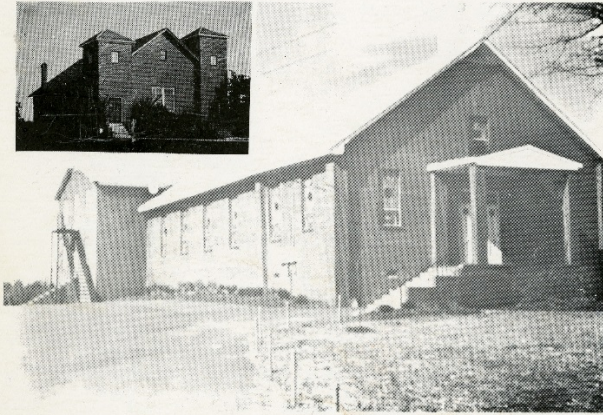
**TORRENCE CHAPEL
A.M.E. ZION CHURCH**

Torrence Chapel Church Road
Cornelius, North Carolina 28031

115th Anniversary

1869-1984

Sunday, August 12, 1984



The Right Reverend William Milton Smith, Presiding Bishop
Mrs. Ida M. Smith, Missionary Supervisor
Reverend Horace C. Walser, Presiding Elder
Mrs. Josephine Walser, District President W.H. & O.M. Society
Reverend G. Sidney Waddell, Pastor

Cover of anniversary booklet. Courtesy of Ron Potts.



Reeves Temple AME Zion Youth Choir. Courtesy of Maggie Smith



Davidson Presbyterian Junior Choir. Courtesy Frances Beale.



Reeves Temple AME Zion Church. Courtesy of DC Archives.



Shane Stewart at Reeves Temple AME Zion Church in 2017.



Fish Fry fundraiser. Courtesy of Maggie Smith



Honoring Ada Jenkins Center staff.



Davidson Masonic Lodge. Courtesy of James Howard.



Ken North with his Boy Scout troop. Courtesy of Ken Norton.

The Davidson African American WestFest 2000

Ada Jenkins Center



Saturday, April 8, 2000
1:00 p.m. - 6:30 p.m.



A SALUTE TO THE NEW MILLENNIUM-CELEBRATING THE AFRICAN CULTURE



Gospel, special entertainment, dancers, steppers,
cultural events/activities, children games,
exhibits, concessions, fellowship and more!

Free to the public!

African
American Soul
Food!

AFRICAN DRUMMING

VENDING MARKET
ARTS/CRAFTS



Contact: 892-7759 or 896-0182

Sponsors
Davidson Parks and Recreation Department
Mecklenburg County
Park and Recreation Department

Flyer for WestFest celebration. Courtesy of DC Archives



WestFest at Roosevelt Wilson Park. Courtesy of Maggie Smith.

HOOT Volunteer Survey

Name _____
 Telephone _____ PO Box _____
 Residence Address _____

Read the skill level descriptions below and mark the categories below that interest you with a I, II or III as appropriate.
Skill Level I. Highly skilled, professional, able to lay out materials and work, oversee others.
Skill Level II. Skilled worker, can take responsibility for own activities and tools
Skill Level III. Specific interest in the area although no real skills.

CONSTRUCTION	NON-CONSTRUCTION
<input type="checkbox"/> Laying block	<input type="checkbox"/> Computer data input
<input type="checkbox"/> Pouring concrete	<input type="checkbox"/> Word processing
<input type="checkbox"/> Finishing concrete	<input type="checkbox"/> Computer programming
<input type="checkbox"/> Plumbing	<input type="checkbox"/> Phone receptionist
<input type="checkbox"/> Electrical	<input type="checkbox"/> Lunch preparation
<input type="checkbox"/> Heating	<input type="checkbox"/> Bulk mailing
<input type="checkbox"/> Framing	<input type="checkbox"/> Typing
<input type="checkbox"/> Roofing	<input type="checkbox"/> Family involvement
<input type="checkbox"/> Hanging drywall	<input type="checkbox"/> Public relations
<input type="checkbox"/> Finishing drywall	<input type="checkbox"/> Fund raising
<input type="checkbox"/> Vinyl siding	<input type="checkbox"/> Committee work
<input type="checkbox"/> Painting	<input type="checkbox"/> Board of directors intern
<input type="checkbox"/> Laying linoleum	<input type="checkbox"/> Solicit building material
<input type="checkbox"/> Landscaping	<input type="checkbox"/> Signs & posters
<input type="checkbox"/> Building design	<input type="checkbox"/> Other
<input type="checkbox"/> Other	

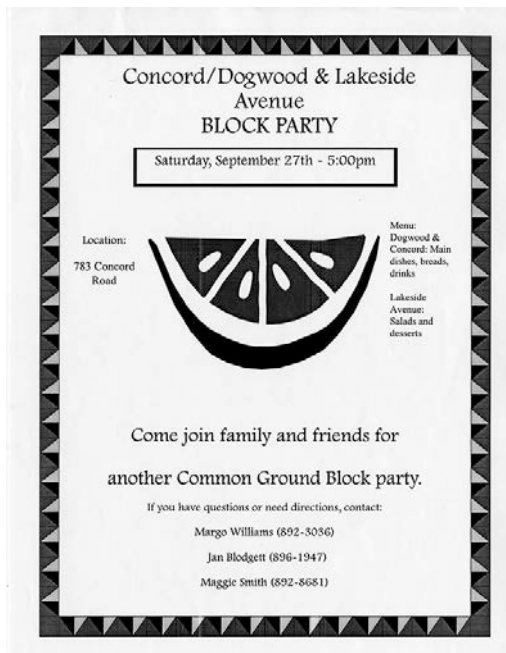
Return the survey to: Kim Wood, Careers Office, College Union Basement, Davidson College, Davidson, NC 28036. Call 892-2000 ext. 132. Thank you!

Hey
Davidson...

Give A HOOT!

Here's an opportunity for you to become involved in a meaningful community project that will make a tremendous difference in the lives of some of your fellow Davidson citizens. We're going to build 11 houses one-quarter mile from campus and sell them to families who, until now, have been unable to afford their own homes. Think home ownership doesn't make a difference in someone's outlook on life? You better believe it does! We're going to make it possible, and we want your help!

Before Habitat for Humanity, there was Housing Opportunities for Our Town (HOOT). Courtesy of DC Archives.



Flyers for community activities. Courtesy of DC Archives

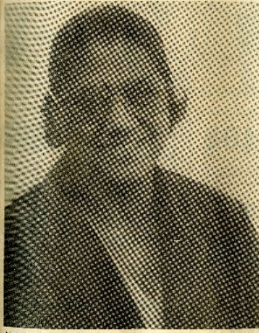
The Mecklenburg Gazette

The Home Town Newspaper Of North Mecklenburg And Lake Norman

Vol. 35, No. 04 1962

September 23, 1962 Davidson, N.C. 28036

Twenty Five Cents



Nannie Potts, the new mayor of Cornelius

Nannie Potts voted in as new mayor of Cornelius

by Gail Derwort
In the first order of business at the Cornelius Town Meeting, September 21, Nannie Potts was nominated and unanimously voted in to fill the vacancy of Mayor of Cornelius by the Town Commissioners.

Potts, a first time candidate in last fall's election, ran for the Town Commissioner because she saw a need to be involved in the local government. She said at that time, that if she were elected she would take an active part in helping to solve some of the problems of Cornelius, and thought that she could be of service to the total community.

Monday night's Town Council vote put Potts in a position where she will not only have the chance to service the community, but be its leader as well.

To fill the Board vacancy created as Potts became Mayor, the Board nominated and approved Stanley R. Wade, Jr.

to finish out Potts term. Wade was the next highest vote getter in last fall's election, following Alton Hoke's 187 votes.

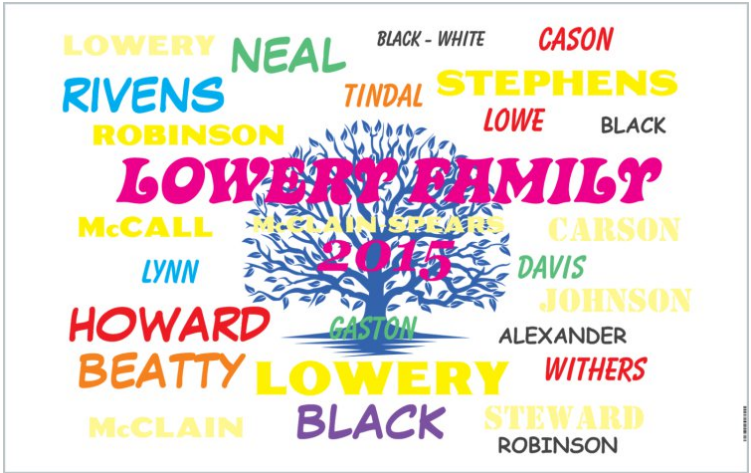
She Brown was nominated and approved as the new mayor pro tem since she had the highest number of votes in the fall election following Potts.

The next order of business was input from the citizens of Cornelius on problems in the town. Fletcher Jones, speaking for himself and a group of concerned citizens, pointed out three matters of concern: 1) the new electrical rate in comparison to the old and the reduction of revenue that it would cause; 2) the position of Town Administrator and the fate of the petition signed by 500 residents to do away with that position and; 3) enforcement of a Town ordinance about junked cars and trailers within the city limits. The Board said they would look into the matters.

First African-American mayor in the North Mecklenburg County area.



Annie Mildred Lowery. Courtesy of LaGretta Neal.



Family tree from Lowery Family Reunion. Courtesy of LaGretta Neal.

60th Wedding Anniversary



Potts Family gathering. Courtesy of Ron Potts.

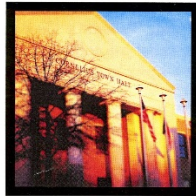
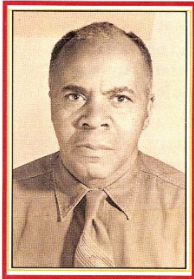
Celebrate Black History Month

"Building a Legacy"

Rivens & Potts Families

Saturday, February 28, 2015

2:30-5:00pm



Cornelius Town Hall, 21445 Catawba Ave.

FREE Public Event

- ◆ Performances
- ◆ Children's Activities
- ◆ Hear and Learn from the Rivens and Potts Families
- ◆ Family Memorabilia
- ◆ Refreshments



For more information on these or other PARC Department programs & events, please visit our website at www.cornelius.org/parc, or call us at 704.892.6031 ext. 160.



Poster for Smithville Community, Inc Black History Month Program

FAMILIES, SOCIAL LIFE & NEIGHBORHOODS

As one contributor notes most African Americans in this area are related. The family trees of the Torrences, Alexanders, Potts, Caldwells, and Conners are linked through marriages and by in-laws. There are stories about neighborhoods but families cross boundaries. Each family branch has its own stories and these stories of the ordinary – where children played, churches attended and adults danced -- and the extraordinary – lynching trees and determined battles to bring water to neighborhoods prove that all history is local history. These lived experiences are all our history. Also evident is the continuing theme of resiliency, creativity, and community spirit in overcoming barriers and prejudice.

Ron Potts: When I was growing up here in Cornelius, in Smithville, there were plenty of kids. One of the families had nine children, all about my age, and they lived out on the dead end. So, even in the summertime, it was always plenty of kids, and we used to play in the roads. On the roads, we played softball, dodge ball, hopscotch, hide-and-seeK, you know, all of those things outside. And some of my - a buddy of mine, we say that we had such a great childhood growing up here. I mean, we didn't really know, perhaps, how disadvantaged we were. We did not, because, you know, things were so pretty pleasant. Right. And we used to be able to play all over the community, ride bicycles, activities at the community center. Just about every weekend, there was something going on.

In Smithville, there was a man that had a troop for - I mean, it was, like, one of the - Troop 17 was the number, Troop 17 or 18, something like that. And he was a member of my church, and my brothers, they had all been active in - but, now, as I recall, the Boy Scout troops were all segregated. You know, when they used to go to camp, it was a segregated Boy Scout camp. But, yeah, we had Boy Scouts. Now, I wasn't as active as my brothers were. But, again, it was rural enough. There was creeks and things like that, that we used to go out and dam and play in and swing in trees.

So, when I grew up, right there in Cornelius across the railroad track was one of those theaters where the blacks sat upstairs and - then the blacks were upstairs and the whites were downstairs. But it closed

real early in my life. But my older brothers, that's where they used to go. But I did go there, but it didn't last long. So, then we ended up going to Morrisville. But you'd have to get a ride there.

Peggy Rivens: That was knowing what growing up was all about. You had fun, and did. [We] played hopscotch, hide-and-peek, throwing the ball over the house like that. [Interviewer: Now, throwing the ball over the house, would that be to see how far someone could make it?] Somebody's on the other side. We say, "Throw it over, throw it over," say, "Hand it over." They say, "Okay, here it come." It was fun. It was fun, I tell you. We kept ourselves busy. And then, we would - at that time, we didn't even have paved streets sometimes. And we would walk, and we didn't have streetlights, of course, so we'd get together and we'd walk around the block, because it was just a circle, really, in Smithville. That's what we called the community, Smithville, the black community. Still called Smithville. They have a Smithville Park there, named after the - it's just funny. I just think about how you walked in the door, and no lights. Then we would make-believe somebody was - there was a big tree, and that they had hung people by the tree. I don't know if they did hang in the tree or not. So, we'd get to that tree, and then everybody would take off. But it was fun.

Frances Beale: We had newspapers. We always got 2 newspapers every day because everyone in the family was sports fanatics and that's what they read. So I learned to read that too.

Patricia Stinson: I know we always had newspapers, always. But the one book that I did a lot was - and I can't remember now who gave it to me, but somebody gave me a Bible story book, had all the stories of the Bible. And that was the one book that I had most of the time. And so - and my grandfather and my aunts and my mom and whoever would come in, I'd pull that book out, and they'd read me a story, because at the time, I couldn't walk or anything, so I'd be there, laying there or sitting in the chair, and they would read to me. And so, that's how I learned what I learned.

Erving McClain: The lady that taught me music, she had three little boys and I used to go to her house at 4 o'clock in the afternoon. I would ride the school bus out there, and go to her house and they would bring me home at seven. I would help with supper and help

her get the little boys bathed. If we had plenty of time, I could get some extra practice on my music with her. And her husband would bring me home after. There used to be a little café [where] my aunt worked; they fed some students. I used to go there and work with her in the afternoon from 4 o'clock to 6 and then I'd have to go home and do my homework and practice my music.

Verdie Torrence: I remember asking my mother why did she cooked so much on Sundays. And she said, well if anyone comes by we'll have enough to share with them. She was from a family of, I think, 7 sisters and one sister had 9 or 10 children. That's where we could end up on Sundays a lot of the time, out in the country. No matter who came there was always enough food for everybody. She go in and pull out another jar and open it up. I remember them canning. I remember my dad having a small garden and my granddad. My granddad, I remember them killing pigs, killing hogs.

Brenda Tapia: We had, I remember, a big event that we would look forward to would be the Torrence-Lytle homecoming. Torrence-Lytle homecoming parade was a big event because we would play the homecoming game in Davidson stadium where we had just had maybe one set of bleachers at Torrence-Lytle and the opposing team people and the home people had to sit in the same benches. But that was a big event. And the parade would start at Ada Jenkins and we would go down the hill and up Depot Street, you know, and then across the street to the college to the stadium. That was fun. That was the only parade that we had.

Shane Stewart: And my grandmother, my mother's mother, her name was Ophelia Stewart. She was born Ophelia Rice. She tells me a lot of stories about what life was like when they were sharecropping, about how there was nine of them - there were three girls and six boys, and the three girls were the oldest, and she was the youngest of the three girls - and about how, when they were coming up, they didn't ever stay in the same house, because they were so many kids and such limited space, the kids would go off to different people. Like, she stayed with her grandmother, who they called Big Momma, name was Zula Alexander. She stayed with Big Momma, and one of her sisters stayed with her Aunt Lizzie, and then

another sister stayed with another aunt, and then one of the brothers would stay with their people.

So, their parents raised them, but it was, like, on a limited basis, because they were in the fields all day. And so, she would be with Big Momma all day, cooking food for them while they were out in the field. So, then, she saw her parents every day, but it was like, she didn't stay with them. And it got to a point and place where, when she got older and it was time for her to move back with her parents, she didn't want to go, because she was like, "I've been with Big Momma all this time. Now I'm 11 years old, and you want me to go live with y'all." She said, "I loved my parents, but I was just used to living with Big Momma." Because she was telling me stories about her and Big Momma and her grandpa would all share this one bed and this quilt, especially in the wintertime, to keep warm and stuff like that. But she said it was some good days, though, because she was like, "You know, in this area," she said, "you sense a lot of hostility from whites, but not like you did in other areas." Because she said that the poor whites were just like them, and they would share stuff with each other. They would eat with each other and cook for each other, and the poor white kids, sometimes they would say little things, but they would be friends real quick the next day

Brenda Tapia: My first playmates were white. And when I started school I remember coming home the first day and waiting for Lynn to come play. And when she didn't show up I asked my mother when she got home, Lynn didn't come, why didn't she come to play? And she said, well, Brenda, school has started and Lynn probably has homework. Well, why didn't I have homework? And in retrospect, thinking back, the more appropriate question would have been, well, why do we not go to the same school. That's one of the things that has perplexed me the most of my adult life, I didn't question the separation.

Because in the early 1950s, things in Davidson were separate. Sometimes somewhat equal, but most times not, but definitely separate. We also had one of the first televisions. So, watching TV 24/7 - well, almost 24/7 because back then I think the TV went off at 10:00 or 11:00.

Mattie Fletcher: The fact [is] that I grew up with people with money and there was never any difference, we all swung across the gutters down under the hill - all teenagers, and go down there and meet up with them there. College boys, and you talk about playing ball and playing foot - girls and boys. Wasn't nobody standing on the hill watching us, nobody driving through to see what we were doing. The only time we saw an adult, somebody come down there and get the chaps home for supper. Sometime a student would come home and eat with us, sometime they didn't.

Patricia Stinson: The teen canteen, we used to go there on Friday nights, I believe it was, Friday or Saturday nights. But anyway, we'd go to teen canteen. We danced. We played games. Prior to that, when we lived out there off of Jetton Street, my brother and I. I was the only girl there for a while, so it was me and two brothers. They played marbles. But then, in order for them to get me to play marbles, they had to help me jump rope. So, we jumped rope, so they would turn the rope while I jumped. And then, you know, there was such a thing called hot peas or something. They'd turn it real fast. But that was what we did. And they played ball and everything.

Then, after that, at Ada Jenkins, we would have dances. And the gym they had over there, I mean, we thought that gym was the best thing that ever happened when they finally put that gym there. And my brothers and all them played basketball there, and so we would always go to basketball games. And they would play each other at one time, and then they started playing the different schools and stuff like that. But we also had dances there, too, at the school. And like I said, just as somebody said, there was always picnics. Either the churches would have them or the schools would have them, or just families would get together and cook and eat.

Brenda Tapia: The one thing I remember from my adolescence of fighting for was the teen canteen because there's never really been anything here for children, black or white. The white children had had what was here to do that their recreation at their teen canteen, but they also had parents that could take them to Mooresville, nine miles north, to see a movie.

We got to go once in a while, and when we did, you went up these narrow, dark stairs, you couldn't see your hand in front of your face,

and you sat in the balcony. And sometimes we'd throw popcorn and chips of ice down at the white people below. But the movie theater was segregated.

Susie Lowery: There was a movie [theater] in Cornelius we'd go to. There wasn't much fun, you made your fun yourself. [Churches] used to have fried fish picnics and picnics on May Day, ball games, and that was fun.

Patricia Stinson: But we didn't go to the movies that much. We used to always go to the movies at Mooresville and they had one in Charlotte. So, those were the movies we went to most of the time. But during that whole time, all the movies were integrated. In Mooresville, we used to have to sit in the balcony, up in the balcony. And sometimes just to be a little on the mischievous side, we'd be up there, we'd throw some popcorn down there on the other people. Not to hurt them, because, you know, popcorn don't hurt no one. But I just remember going to movie in Cornelius one time that I can remember. But most of the time, I went to the movies, my husband - at the time, he was my boyfriend - but me and him and his sisters, we drove - he drove us to the movies. And so, but we always found something to do, you know?

Peggy Rivens: Of course, the library in Cornelius has changed too. They have a new library now from what it used to be. But I used to really love to go to the library. When we had the bookmobile, we could only get, like, four or five books at a time. So, my goodness, if we didn't do anything else but read the book, then by Saturday, you've gone through those books, you know. So, it was interesting.

[Interviewer: Can you tell me about the time, the shift from primarily getting books from the bookmobile to being able to go to the Cornelius Library?] Well, see, that was - that came sometime later. When we came to Davidson, I don't think they had the bookmobile. I think we had a library in Davidson. At Ada Jenkins, we had a library. Did we have a library? Yeah, we did have a library at Davidson Elementary. So, and we went to the - of course, we had the - I don't think there was any difference in going to the library then. No difference in maybe going - not segregated at that point.

Shane Stewart: You had to work hard. Church was a big part of everything. They sung morning, noon, and night. My family is a singing family. That helped pass the time away. They made up songs - blues songs, gospel songs, spirituals, anything to help pass the time away. She said they had a good childhood, but she said, at the same time, they could tell that it was different for white kids than it was for them. And the things they heard and the things that people said to them, it just - it made them feel like they were less-than, but she said that her momma and her father - her mother's name was Lily Ada Lavinia Carson Rice.

It tells me why they have such strong faith, because that's all they had, was faith in each other, because Lord knows that's what - what my grandma says, what carried them through was their faith in God and their faith in each other and love for God and love for each other, because, you know, somebody might not have flour one day, and somebody might not have sugar one day, or if I got flour and you got sugar, then I'm going to give you some of my flour, you give me some of your sugar, and we'll make it till tomorrow. And if we run out tomorrow, we'll both find somebody else. I'm sure somebody else will bring more flour and sugar.

It was just one of those things where the community was huge. You know, it wasn't about the individual. The individual had room for themselves in their own way, but it was more about the community, taking care of everybody. When your daddy's sick and I know you got to go to the field today, I'm working in the house today, so I'm going to check on your daddy while you're out in the fields. And then, when I'm out in the fields and my children are home and you're working in the house, you're going to check on my children. It was one of those things where everybody played off each other. It wasn't just about, "Oh, I'm a Stewart and you're a Cowan, or you're an Alexander." We were all in this together.

James Howard: They used to have what was called the Teen Canteen and they had one that used to be there where the Carolina Inn is, they had it only for the white kids. And I questioned the mayor of the town, why Black kids couldn't go. And they said, "No, no. no. They can't do that." And that was before Martin Luther King. I said, "What about another place, then?" And he said they didn't

have the money. So I drafted a letter to President John Fitzgerald Kennedy, and you know, I never believed he would answer. He answered the letter.

We had an education building [at Davidson Presbyterian Church], and the town decided to give us the money to open it up as the Teen Canteen. Friday night was for children 9-12 years old and Saturday night was for 12 years old through high school. That was the form of recreation. . . I worked with the Saturday night group. . That was the way I got involved and that's when they asked me to be on the Davidson planning board; planning the town of Davidson.

Brenda Tapia: They opened up - they helped us to open a canteen in the fellowship hall of Davidson Presbyterian my junior year in college, but we had been fighting for a couple of years to get one. And that gave us a place to go to - we had an old jukebox that had been renovated and the music on there was often old as dirt. We had all these old magazines, majority of which were National Geographic. To some of the kids they were interesting because they didn't get magazines in their home. Shuffle board on the floor. The tile - the room was tiled in one area with shuffle board. We had a ping pong table. Games, a lot of the games were old. In fact, almost everything we had was old. You could tell it had been donated and that people's kids had played a lot with the board games that we had. But for us, it was somewhere to go on Saturday night from 7:00 to 10:00, and on Friday nights, 12 and under would go to 9:00. But on Saturday night, 13 to 18 would come.

Erving McClain: Basically, Davidson is an all right place to live and raise children if you don't set goals that are higher than you can attain in a small town. If you want to have extra things you almost have to have a connection with someone who isn't right in Davidson. And you have to be willing to go out of Davidson in order to expose them to the better things that are not offered here. Even though there are things at Davidson, the college makes a difference, but there is a limit to what they can actually be able to be exposed to. You have to be able to find things like that for children as well as adults. It's almost like living in two different places. You go out of Davidson for the big town shopping and the concerts and things you'd like to attend, and you live here and like, all the years I've

worked, I worked in Charlotte. It's like I lived in Davidson and in Charlotte. And you have to be ready to either accept or try to change some of the areas in Davidson that are not quite what they should be.

Ron Potts: People went, "Uptown," because that's what we called Cornelius. We called it Uptown. I still call it Uptown. Uptown. And most people used to walk it. A lot of people used to walk, because, you know, we always had a car, so sometimes we'd see people walking, "You want a ride?" I mean, it's like it was something major.

Annie Mildred Lowery: And so, from there, we got into the housing situation. That's where the Piedmont Development Association got in and organized the club, the Piedmont Association, and people who were getting houses would attend and people who weren't getting houses would attend. Davidson won several prizes.

Bee Jay Caldwell: And in Pottstown there were three sections, even though there was one little Pottstown section of Huntersville. And in 1909, the governing body of Huntersville decided that was where Negro descendants of slaves would be relegated. And this was on the east side of the railroad track. But I have to tell you too, where the North Campus is, the Merancas campus is now, that is where the slave quarters were after the Civil War. There was always a site just outside of town where Negroes or descendants of slaves could live. So that was where Central Piedmont's North Campus is now. So as descendants of slaves were able to move forward, they would find a job, become self-employed or become an entrepreneur-minded person, and moved to a place where they didn't have to be a sharecropper, because sharecropping you only got one-third of what you produced and a lot of times that left you and your family wanting. It was not a good time for descendants of slaves.

So Mr. O. Potts was a mulatto, meaning he was almost white, pretty near (unclear), as we say. And he owned land, and he understood the value of being a landowner. So as the men with families who had been living in the quarters, as they became more and more able to find land. So Pottstown, as it was known, had three different sections. We had "across the hill," and the reason it was across the hill, most Negroes who were descendants of slaves did not have a

car. So you didn't want to cross the railroad track and walk down 115 or the railroad track to get to this site across the hill. So we just called it across the hill, and you went down a steep hill to get here. And down Holbrook Road there was farming land and people had always farmed there. So after the war my father went to school on the GI Bill. He was taught how to lay brick, and they paid him to farm cotton a couple of years. And so when you wanted to go down Holbrook Road, it was called the Bottom. So you had Pottstown, Across the Hill, and the Bottom. And even though this was considered Pottstown, it was not really that close in proximity, but it was still called Pottstown.

Maggie Smith: We moved over here [Griffith Street in Davidson] but we moved in an apartment. They were down there in the lake, where the lake is now. They were Ralph Johnson's apartments. Then they moved the apartments up further on the road. And that's where, that's the area known as Gunsmoke.

Erving McClain: There was a recreation teacher, she taught phys. ed. at the school, she would spend a lot of time with us on Saturdays, riding bicycles, skating and other things like that. Our parents would let us out of the neighborhood with her. We sort of made our own fun with stuff to do. We went to Cornelius. We would walk down on Saturdays to the movies and I had to be back by 4 o'clock, so most of the rest of them came back, too.

Annie Mildred Lowery: They went to Tracy, Cherokee, The Wizard of Oz, and Timberland. When Carowinds opened up these children were able to go the first year. There was a program where they would finance these trips. You just had to sign up and they would provide buses. A year later, we found there was a program in Charlotte where they would provide lunches for the children but a parent or somebody would have to go and pick them up at about 4:00 or 5:00 in the morning. We even had volunteers to do that; Evelyn Carr, Phoebe Houston, her husband Harold Houston, they would go to Charlotte. That age group helped a lot with our trips.

Bee Jay Caldwell: We had picnics. We had to be industrious because there was no outlet for us. We were relegated to the east side of the railroad track, so we had picnics and camp meetings. The reason we did this was because we had to have some source of joy

and fun to release the anxiety and tensions that we had, and so we had that. And people became entrepreneurs. You soon learned that if you were going to have a picnic, you had to have somebody to sell the fish, hot dogs and drinks, for popcorn and for somebody to take the twenty-five cent photographs.

And the men had to have some sort of outlet, too, so baseball was one of the biggest sports that they had, and a lot of the men played baseball. Some were very good, and some were not so good. It was an opportunity for us to get out. Wherever there was a little pocket of descendants of slaves, they would have a little AME Zion church, and usually it had enough land so you could have a ball field and so you could play ball there. And we had a ball field here, you could always play ball here. And there was one over on Church Street, it's Huntersville AME Zion, and you had another one at Catawba Presbyterian, you had a ball field at Columbus Chapel. And so when you played ball you had a picnic, and so it was really a [good] time, and you could see all your friends during the summer, so that was really big doings.

Ruby Houston: A lot was centered around the family and the church. It all happened in your front yard and in your back yard or your church because the opportunity to have the organized recreation and the playground and those kind of things, it was not there in my world. So basically Sunday School picnics. One thing I loved was going to Belmont to the park to ride the big Ferris wheel. On Tuesday nights we all got on a bus. So what I have to tell you is that it wasn't here for the families on my side of town and for me. What we had to do was to go elsewhere.

Peggy Rivens: I grew up in Cornelius. My church is in Davidson, Gethsemane Baptist. That's been my home church. I've attended all my life. I grew up in Gethsemane, had to walk to church. We walked from Cornelius to Davidson. My grandmother was one of the ladies that would be there to make the fires, sweep the floors and dust. I was raised by my grandmother, so I had to be there. She was a faithful church goer every Sunday. She helped organized the first usher board.

Our church, Gethsemane Baptist Church, was original on Potts Street. Where they have the Habitat houses. And that was at the

bottom of the hill. That's where we started and they went through quite a few ministers at that time. I know during my lifetime I can remember a Rev. Long, a Rev. Norris, a Rev. Walker, and then Rev. Morris, and Rev Jeffries, our current pastor. When they marched from the old church to the new church in 1977, unfortunately I couldn't walk with them because I was working.

That was special for them. They broke ground - let's see. They purchased the land in '74, and the church was constructed in '76, and then '77, the Gethsemane Church family marched from Potts Street to the current location. And the church has been very prosperous. They paid off the mortgage two years in advance. They used to go on trips to - I remember going to the park in Highpoint. I think it was Highpoint. Go to a park up there, and they would go off to Sunday School, go to - I think they took trips to the beach, down there.

Mattie Fletcher: But the only thing - and this was done throughout the South - you had to go to church when you were a kid. You had to go to church. If you lived under these folks roof and you eat, and they fed you, and they clothed you, you were going to do what they say do. Now, you can go out here and stay out all night long, when you come through the door, come on, let's go to church.

And then, you know, and another thing, church was also an outlet for us. It was a social outlet for us because there wasn't any clubs we could go to. And a whole lot of places you could go to - you really couldn't go anywhere really too far.

Dorothy Burton: I grew up in Davidson Presbyterian Church, that was my home church. When we got older we moved over to Gethsemane Baptist Church where our father was at. Jimmy and myself were the first two of us who left the Presbyterians to go over to the Baptists. I was 15 when I went to the Baptists. I liked it and I stayed over there. [The minister was] Rev. Nash, Thomas Nash, he was from Salisbury. We had service church every other Sunday. We didn't have it every Sunday. [We had] Sunday School every Sunday because the teachers were local. They lived in Davidson, Miss Brandon and John Brandon. That's who taught Sunday School for us.

Ruby Houston: What we did, we got to go on Sunday School picnics, that was our recreation. If you were in church, you were happening. Because you had fun, you had Westminster Fellowship that connected with what was going on in school and what was going on in church.

Peggy Rivens: Well, we [Gethesmane Baptist] still have the church anniversary. They still do that, and the homecoming and revival. At one time, we had our church anniversary, and they had a men's day, women's day, children's day, and you learn, and then, of course, the Easter. They would learn poems and things to recite. We had children's day. Boy, I'm trying to access something. I can't remember which one was the children's day, but we did have children's day. Because somebody asked me, said, "What day was children's - when did we have children's day?" You know, because somebody else wanted to remember. And I told them, "I don't know when we had children's day." I think it was in June. I don't remember. Yeah, those days are gone, though. And churches we visit, you know, you visit other churches, especially churches right around Davidson and Huntersville. And trying to think. I don't know if we visited that much in Mooresville. But now, as far as the choir, we would go all around and sing. We were a very large choir at one time, and then we're down to four or five members. The Gethsemane gospel singers have two programs a year. We used to do about three. We would have Gospel Explosion in January, anniversary in May, and at one time, we used to have what we call - excuse me, end of the year, end of the year is male choir singing. It was just for male choirs, and that was at the end of the year. And that was good. We have watch service. We still have that during sunrise service.

Now we're combined with Michael Flake and his church, Lake Forest. Was it Thanksgiving time that we - Thanksgiving or Christmas, we combined with them. Thanksgiving, I think it is. This is just one of those things. Yeah. And we have service with them.

Dorothy Burton: Sunday School, because our teachers were local, you know, in Davidson such as Ms. Brandon and John Brandon and all them. That's who taught Sunday School with us. Marvela's momma, Ms. Evelyn. We was under them for Sunday School. Of course we went to Sunday School when we was at Davidson

Presbyterian too. Ms. Judy Grimm - I think she was a Grimm - she was our teacher. And then, after that, that's when they got Reverend Marsh.

There were a lot of activities. It was all three churches together. We participated together. We went places to Georgia, up to the mountains, White Sands. We just had a good time at church picnics. They had buses and they packed lunches for us. We got off the bus and spread the lunch and we had a good time.

Verdie Torrence: I'm still at Torrence Chapel. Yeah, I'm a trustee. I was the first lady put on the trustee board. [Interviewer: Very impressive. When did that happen?] I think in 1990. And we were just talking one day, and they said they didn't have any women on the board. And when I was running my mouth and talking, I wasn't thinking about me. You know, I'm a very good follower. I don't have to be the leader. And I was there. We was talking and just - and then, when the minister confronted me, and I let him know that I wasn't thinking about me being the first trustee. I was just saying they needed some women on there. But I've enjoyed it. And I hope I've contributed something to the board.

Ron Potts: Living right in this area [Smithville]. The person who raised my mother and father, I know he was born in 1860, and I knew him. And so, this community, according to the book, was settled by released slaves. And the property was sold to them by a Mr. Smith. And I think he's from the Potts family, with Miriam. Miriam Potts' family. He sold the property to the newly released slaves.

And so, that was in the 1800s, late 1800s. So, my mother was born here in 1910, my dad in 1912, right here in the community. There's a lot of other people - and a lot of the residents are all descendants of someone else from the community. Some people have never left. They've never left.

Shane Stewart: In Mooresville, it's long been known there are several areas where African Americans live. One area is called King's Creek. There's Bell Street, which is also called Patterson Avenue; West End; Sedgenville; Kelly Street; and then the area I lived in was called Eastern Heights, but everyone called it Hike,

because, you know, in the Southern dialect, Height becomes Hike. Yeah, so, it's like, everybody calls it Hikeville, but actually it's Eastern Heights. But those are the major areas where black people lived in Mooresville. And then, you know, it kind of formed a semicircle, kind of like a crescent moon in Mooresville, and then you got all the whites staying everywhere else, like Fieldstone and Downtown and, now, on the lake. But for the most part, all black people lived in those little areas. Now we branched out, but for the most part, growing up, I remember those were the areas where African Americans lived.

You can tell certain things. Like, if you go on what we call Bell Street, which consists of Bell Street, I want to say Lee Avenue, and Patterson Avenue, if you look at the houses, you can tell those back in the day where the middle-class African Americans lived. But now, it's kind of like everybody lives back there now. I don't want to say it's gone down, but it's like, you can see there's a lot of different types of people who live there, whereas back in the day, it was like, okay, this is where all the professional African Americans live.

What's different is just everything. Like, Mooresville and Davidson and Cornelius have just exploded. Like, areas now where you see all these people living, when I grew up, it was nothing but fields. I still remember when there were cotton fields coming through what we call Mount Mourne between Davidson and Mooresville, near what used to be the Reed Plantation. They still had cotton fields growing out there when I was in elementary school. But now I see all these housing developments. Where Lowe's corporate office is, that actually used to be - that was plantation land, and there used to be cotton fields out there. And it's just amazing me to see all the development that's taking place and all the people who are coming here. I meet more New Yorkers than I meet native North Carolinians.

And it's just interesting to see how the people who are moving in here, how they're changing the way in which this area, you know, is viewed as a whole. You know, we're becoming more progressive in this area. We still have a strong element of the Old South. Don't get me wrong. That's one of the things that does not change, is you still

got those manners. You still got people who, you know - I guess you'd call them the Sunday porch type people. You know, Driving Miss Daisy type people. You know, you still have those people who live in this area. But for the most part, it's such a diverse mixture now, that it's like, you get both the best of the South, but also a unique taste of the North, too. And I think that's one of the reasons why, you know, North Carolina is becoming so much more progressive.

Bee Jay Caldwell: The people in Pottstown did not have water until the late '40s or early '50s. What happened, we had to get water from the spring. There is a spring where you cross the hill, and that's where a lot of the people got their wash water, drinking water and washed their clothes there. And Miss Daisy Potts and Mr. Otha Potts, the house where they lived, they had a pump. And someone else had a spring, and they had put a pipe in the spring to get the water to come close to their home. But we didn't have any water. And the good people up town, the elected officials, did not see the need for people in Pottstown to have running water. So one of the men who used to live here, Mr. Alexander Henderson, he had lived in big cities before and he knew his way around a lot more than the people around who were just local, and he was a plasterer. And he continually went up town to talk with the commissioners or mayor, whomever, about getting running water down Delwood Drive to Church Street, up to where the House of Prayer is. And so he finally got permission from them to go buy the galvanized pipe and to dig the trenches themselves.

James Howard: Back in 1952, I even tried to get on the volunteer fire department. I went to the Mayor again about that. That was before I was at the college. And they asked, "Why did I want to come on?" And I said I want to give my service to the community, like everyone else. And their answer was, "Well, we have these dinners once a year, and they don't want Blacks at that dinner." And I said, Well, I don't need the dinner." Well, some of the people said they wouldn't come to the meetings if I were there. So, therefore they wouldn't allow me to become a volunteer fireman.

Annie Mildred Lowery: After that, the next year, we had Town Day again, up there. After having the second year and coming up on

the third year, we asked if we could have Town Day on the green and we had a committee and they gave us permission. You might not have thought about that. It wasn't the town green then but that place was full of trees and you had to walk with your shoulders hunched. The first year we moved there, we had games and everything. Jim Martin was the governor and it was my idea to invite him. And they said, 'Ms. Mildred, he isn't going to come.' And I said, 'I asked him so he better come!' I wrote him a letter and he never answered whether he would [come] or not. But the day we had Town Day, about 12:30 everyone was saying, 'Ms. Mildred, he isn't going to come'. But I knew in my heart he would come and we looked out at about 1:00 and there was his black shiny car with the American flag on it. He brought some of his staff and he walked around and talked to people.

Ron Potts: These men formed for the purpose of doing improvements in the community, getting running water, because people had wells, and so they got running water. They got our own street lights. And, again, they leased Rosenwald School and made it into a community center, which was - it truly was the heart of not only Smithville, but Davidson, Huntersville, you know, just surrounding black communities. And there would be a dance there just about every weekend. And the men, you know, they kind of took turns manning the center, even though there was one particular one that always did it on the weekends.

Brenda Tapia: Going to Mooresville was scary to us because Mooresville and Huntersville, during the time I was growing up here, the first 18 years, were considered Klan territory. Klan was very active in this area, much more so than the people in the town of Davidson want to acknowledge.

Shane Stewart: One thing about this area, if you look from Monroe all the way up to Statesville, up to Caswell County tucked away in the western part of the state, people didn't pay a lot of attention to what took place in this area. And so, it was very dangerous to be a black person living in Mooresville or Davidson, because the white community may have had relations with one another, but if they see a black person stepping out of line, they're going to come together at that moment, back in those days, and they're going to put that

person, quote-unquote, in their place, because you still have lynching trees in places like Mooresville and Salisbury. Salisbury's lynching tree is still definitely standing. But it was definitely violent back then.

Mooresville's tree apparently was, I believe, near Highway 21, not too far from where I live. And apparently, there was one also going between Mooresville and Salisbury on, I want to say, Highway 115, maybe. Maybe 115 or 801. I can't remember which one it is. Between Mooresville and Bear Poplar.

I know it's [Highway] 1-something. But it's the road that runs in front of Carrigan Farms. It goes through a little area called Bear Poplar. There was several historic lynchings that took place there. One involved black people actually lynching a black person. These black men hung a black man back in the 1970s because he killed another black man, and these white people weren't doing nothing about it. So they said, "Let's take the law into our own hands." But, yeah, that's another interesting story you might want to hear about it.

But I remember walking downtown with my grandma, and we were coming out of, I want to say, D.E. Turner hardware store. It's an old, old hardware store in Mooresville. I remember just seeing, it was like five of them walking down the street from that side, and I looked on the other side, and there were three other - I want to say about three or four other robed men were coming down the other side of the street. And it was just so interesting. I was like, "Grandma, what is that?" She was like, "Come on here, come on here."

I never knew why she was so - it was more so anger than fear. It was like, "Come on here, we got to go, we got to go." And I'd never seen my grandma get like that before, agitated like that. So, we got in the car, and I remember just going to her. I kind of knew who they were, but I didn't. I knew they were bad people. I didn't know - I knew they didn't like black people. I didn't know fully everything about them until later on. Back then, kids knew not to ask questions, because you're going to get sent outside or worse. That's grown folks business. But being the type of kid I was, I picked up on stuff very quickly.

And I remember, it was such an awkward experience. I remember just standing there like... My biggest question was, "Why do they have the hoods on? Why do their hoods look like that?" You know, just asking normal kid questions to myself. Also, it was scary, because, I mean, that was their clothes and stuff, and they have on these hoods and stuff. It was just, it seemed like they were just doing it as an intimidation thing, just because they could, because they knew in Mooresville, at that time period, you could get away with stuff like that back here. But nowadays, they can't. But back then, they knew they could pull that off and get away with it. I remember just thinking to myself, "Wow." Even looking back at that right now, it's like, wow, this town has come a long, long, long, long way. But it was a mixture of fear and just curiosity that day.

Frank Jordan: Well, the west side, you don't have - one thing for sure, let me say this, the Ada Jenkins Center, I was a part of putting it together. Well, see, the thing about it, we had to organize a board for that school. Davidson Presbyterian Church, USA, we-leased that building through Rev. Shirley, we leased it. And when the lease ran out the town said, well, we're going to turn it back over to the County and let the County tear it down. So, see, he stepped up and he said, "I see a vision at that place over there." He said, we can use - I tell you, I wish he were living today. He said, down the road you're going to need that building. And sure enough it has come to reality.

What we did, went in there and sand the floors, and painted, and put windows in it, and ripped out ceilings - Lord, the ceiling, and took up about six inches of wax on the floors. We had to do a lot of hard work, but we pulled it together. And when I ride by that place today I feel chills because I see so many people there. It makes me feel like we accomplished something, you know. And when you're doing something like that, that makes a lot of difference to the community and all the other churches here because everybody uses it now. You know, once upon a time, you know, no one wants to use it, it was leaking so bad, it was run down. So, we brought it back to life. So, I appreciate myself for being a part of that.

Ron Potts: I was working in Charlotte, still back handling the insurance for Carolina's health care. But, you know, I still kind of

started getting involved in the community, because, again, that's what my dad did. And so, when I came back, it was obvious to me how everything had grown right here around the community, except my community. And as all these developments just squeezing Smithville in, and, you know, I see all this prosperity outside of it, but I don't see any of it here. And so, you know, this was an area that my dad took pride in. So, I didn't feel like I was just going to lay down and see it happen.

Shane Stewart: I think one of the unique things about the history of this area, particularly for African Americans, is that it's actually a little bit on the easier side to do your family tree in this area. And I know that's, like, a random fact, but the unique thing about this area slavery-wise was, you had several plantations that set in this area, and the slaves, after they were freed, took the names of those plantation owners, and you still see those names here in Davidson, in Mooresville, and Cornelius, like Reed. They owned the big plantation in Mount Mourne, where Mount Mourne gets its name from. The Woodlawn Plantation, where the school is, that was the Stinson family. There are hundreds of Stinsons in Davidson. The Houston family, the owned the Greene Plantation that's a bed and breakfast now. There's a lot of Houstons here.

We're Torrences. And then, there was a plantation called Alexandriana. There's a road down to Charlotte named Alexanderana. It was connected to the Revolutionary War. That's where my mom's side comes from, Alexandriana Plantation, the Alexanders. And you still see a lot of them up and down this area, too. And I would say that, you know, if I would tell anyone, especially if you're African American or if you're white, regardless, and you're from this area, it is very easy to look up your family tree, because when you start putting those pieces together and you start seeing how interconnected we are here in Davidson, because everybody's kin to everybody. You know, I might have a little bit of your blood. You might have a little bit of my blood, white and black. And, so, it's one of those things where I say, I would encourage anyone, do your family tree. Look it up. See where you come from, because when you know where you come from, it helps gives you a better footing going forward in life. Because I'm proud to say that maybe somebody will look back and say, "Well, Shane went to

college back in 2004, and he was my great-great-grandfather. So, maybe I should go to college.

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