

Shared Stories: Community

African Americans in North Mecklenburg

Davidson Westside

Input gathered on west side

By Sam Knowlton
 About 35 western Davidson residents gathered June 30 at the Ada Jenkins Center to discuss the future of their neighborhood. The meeting was held as Davidson waits for word on its recent application for a Community Development Block Grant. The town board has committed \$100,000 over the next two years toward a potential grant package involving money from several other sources and totaling more than \$100,000. Work on the grant should come in September, according to Bob Stark, the town's consultant on the project. Grant money would be used to help low- and moderate-income families and to fix up houses in the area south of Griffith Street and west of Main Street. Part of the \$100,000 the town has budgeted is being used to build the sidewalk along Griffith Street from Interstate 77 to Main Street. More of it has also been budgeted to commission a study

Station 2 Sidewalks



Ruby Houston guides participants at one of seven stations

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.
 —Bee Jay Caldwell



Davidson Lakeside Terrace



Hood Norton and family in Davidson

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.
 —Ruby Houston

After they moved over, we moved over here 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 [unclear] And that's where, that's the area known as Gunsmoke.
 —Maggie Smith

Pottstown

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.
 —Bee Jay Caldwell

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.
 —Bee Jay Caldwell

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 on 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 (unclear) time, and you could see all your friends during the summer, so that was really big doings.
 —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 (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 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.
 —Bee Jay Caldwell



AA Baseball Team

Smithville

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.
 —Susie Lowery

When I was growing up in Cornelius-Smithville, there were plenty of kids. One of the families had nine children all about my own age and they lived down on the dead end. Even in the summer time, even then there was always plenty of kids. And we used to play in the road. We'd play softball, dodge ball, hopscotch, hide and seek—all of those things outside. A buddy of mine, we say that we had such a great childhood growing up here. We didn't know, we really didn't know perhaps how disadvantaged we were. We did not because things were so—pretty pleasant. We used to be able to play all over the community, bicycles, activities at the community center. Just about every weekend there was something going on.
 —Ron Potts

I remember asking my mother why 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—I remember them killing pigs, killing hogs.
 —Verdie Torrence

MOVIES: 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.
 —Erving McClain

