

CROSSROADS

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Twilight of a Neighborhood

Sarah M. Judson, Department of History, University of North Carolina at Asheville

DRIVING DOWN South French Broad Avenue in Asheville, travelers see a sign that reads “Know our Past, Grow our Future.” This message is strikingly relevant to many Asheville neighborhoods, but perhaps particularly to the predominantly African American “East End.”

“Twilight of a Neighborhood: Asheville’s East End, 1970,” was a multi-faceted public humanities project funded in part by the North Carolina Humanities Council. It was organized around Andrea Clark’s powerful photographs which explore the community’s life before and after the impact of urban renewal there. The discussions and interviews of the “Twilight of a Neighborhood” project revealed a wide array of viewpoints that often contradicted each other and signaled that the history of urban renewal is complex and shaded. Among the factors that influenced responses were race, age, gender, and class. The project helped energize an emerging movement of concerned Asheville citizens who believe that their culture and history will shape how they live in the present and define the future.

Asheville was one of many cities across the United States that participated in urban renewal, part of a national effort during the 1950s through the 1970s to improve so-called blighted areas of cities. In theory, urban renewal would enhance the landscape of cities and provide displaced residents model housing. In practice, however, many rich and vibrant communities of color were flattened throughout the United States. Replacing these neighborhoods were wide roadways, highways, and new multi-story buildings. Residents, some of whom were homeowners, were either relegated to substandard public housing or forced to relocate elsewhere.

Some scholars suggest that as many as 1,600 African American neighborhoods were destroyed by urban renewal during three decades of public policy. Most African American neighborhoods in Asheville, many of which were over one hundred years old, were affected.

One of the most significant outcomes of the programming was how relevant the East End experience was for residents of other neighborhoods. Urban renewal in Asheville took place over a broad cross section of the city and in a relatively short period of time. As a result, urban renewal was a continuous experience for Asheville’s African American community for almost thirty years. Beginning with the Hill Street neighborhood in 1957 as the Cross-Town Expressway was built and moving on to Southside,



Looking down Eagle Street. Photo by Andrea Clark. Courtesy Andrea Clark Collection, Pack Memorial Public Library.

Stumptown, Burton Street, and East End, the fabric of each of these historic African American communities was torn apart.

Dr. Mindy Fullilove, professor of clinical psychiatry and public health at Columbia University, defines this process as “root shock” in her groundbreaking *Root Shock: How Tearing Up City Neighborhoods Hurts America and What We Can Do About It*. Root shock, according to Fullilove, is “the traumatic stress reaction to the loss of some or all of one’s emotional ecosystem.” This devastation of social networks, Fullilove explains, “is a profound...upheaval that destroys the working model of the world that had existed in the individual’s head”; it results in a rupturing of individual and communal identity.

As people looked at Clark’s photographs and attended programs, they voiced their experiences as a profound sense of loss; they had a keen

understanding of what the cost of urban progress meant for them.

Southside resident Robert Hardy poetically describes his own experience: “But the Land!...The community breakdown: family displacement and the loss of businesses, neighbors, continuity, sanguinity, customs, cultures, and social norms.” One tangible symbol of this process was the change of the name of Valley Street to South Charlotte Street after a relative of one of Asheville’s largest slave owners, Charlotte Patton.

“Twilight of a Neighborhood” alerted all of Asheville to the personal stories of how people experienced the past. Andrea Clark’s photographs capture the full spectrum of community life in Asheville’s East End in 1970. The images portray a neighborhood with bustling business and street life, gardens where people grew their own food, and sidewalks on which children played under the watchful eyes of elders.

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ONLINE COLLECTIONS AND EXHIBITS

The Andrea Clark Photographic Collection. North Carolina Collection, Pack Library, Buncombe County Public Libraries, Asheville, NC. www.buncombecounty.org/governing/depts/library/Gallery/andreaClark/default.htm.

Asheville Housing Authority Records and Heritage of Black Highlanders Collection. D.H. Ramsey Library Special Collections, University of North Carolina at Asheville.

http://toto.lib.unca.edu/findingaids/mss/blackhigh/default_blackhigh.html.

An Unmarked Trail: Stories of African Americans in Buncombe County from 1850–1950.

Digital Exhibit. Center for Diversity Education, University of North Carolina at Asheville, 2008. www.diversityed.org/unmarked-trail.

With All Deliberate Speed: School Desegregation in Buncombe County. Digital Exhibit. Center for Diversity Education, University of North Carolina at Asheville. www.diversityed.org/deliberate-speed.

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This neighborhood was home to Stephens-Lee High School, the only African American public high school in western North Carolina. To those who lived there, East End was not a blighted or slum area, though at the same time poor housing conditions characterized many of the structures. Housing codes were not enforced and city officials failed to address damage from storms and sewage.

Beginning on page eight, there are maps that visually locate the African American neighborhoods of Asheville discussed in this issue of *Crossroads*. They were rendered by Betsy Murray, an archivist at Pack Memorial Public Library, and include the East End, Southside, Stumptown and Hill Street, and Burton Street.

Today, the dispossession of neighborhoods continues to resonate with most of those who were displaced. Many residents interviewed for the “Twilight” project discussed the painful severing of neighborhood ties and the disorientation that arises from not really knowing that a place is yours.

However, it is not accurate to say that all residents, including African Americans, responded with acute pain. One project interviewee observed, “[I]t’s easy to get misty-eyed about...all the great collegiality and social networks...in these poor neighborhoods but a lot of people that lived [there]...were happy to get out of them...the point is it was mixed.”

For some, urban renewal promised to rebuild cities and create positive changes in areas that looked as if they needed help. That there could be different understandings of the outcome of urban renewal illustrates how multi-dimensional this process really was. One of the key city administrators of urban renewal during the 1970s was David Jones, executive director of the Asheville Housing Authority (AHA). In 2008 he told *Urban News* that his job was “removing all substandard housing conditions to make a more livable environment for people who cannot do for themselves.” He continued, “People say the next thing they knew was that they looked up and they saw the bulldozers, but that’s not true. All of these urban renewal projects were pretty complicated.”

In the same vein, Ken Michalove, Asheville’s city manager in the 1970s, recalls that “the urban renewal projects, the Opportunity Corporation, and the Model Cities Program helped make Asheville a livable community and helped make us...a top city in the United States to live in.” The issue is perhaps not what policies were implemented, but the ways in which they were implemented.



Elijah Morgan at the entrance to the Savoy Hotel, 35 S. Market Street. Photo by Andrea Clark. Courtesy Andrea Clark Collection, Pack Memorial Public Library.

Ed Sheary, director of the Buncombe County Public Library, places in sharp relief the power of Clark’s photographs to force personal reassessment of this period. He writes, “I am a fifty-four-year-old white male Asheville native, who well remembers the East End and watched it being demolished in the name of ‘urban renewal.’ I did not question the wisdom of tearing down and replacing substandard housing [until viewing]...Andrea Clark’s photographs....[Then] I saw the loss of neighborhood and all the human connections that entails.”

Right now, many residents from all over Asheville want to reclaim this history. There are efforts directed at renaming South Charlotte Street, creating a walking tour of the East End, and working to affect decisions about another road set to divide Burton Street. While the consequences of urban renewal may be difficult to dismantle, a renewed interest in this subject is sparking citizen engagement in determining the future.

About “Twilight of a Neighborhood: Asheville’s East End, 1970”

Harlan Joel Gradin

IN 2008, Buncombe County Public Libraries and partners, the Center for Diversity Education, and the Stephens-Lee Alumni Association, received planning, mini-, and large grants from the North Carolina Humanities Council for the project “Twilight of a Neighborhood: Asheville’s East End, 1970,” which was fueled by the passion and vision of photographer Andrea Clark and project director Karen Loughmiller. Project team members included photographer Rob Amberg, Stephens-Lee High School alumna Pat Griffin, Sarah M. Judson of the University of North Carolina Asheville, public historian and director of UNC Asheville’s Center for Diversity Education Deborah Miles, archivist Betsy Murray, community historian Henry Robinson, and Buncombe County Public Library Director Ed Sheary. The project utilized Clark’s extraordinary photographs from 1970 to examine in depth the history and consequences of urban renewal. While the initial geographic focus was East End, the project grew beyond those parameters as participants shared stories about urban renewal disruptions across Asheville’s African American communities. A culminating weekend of related events was hosted by a large group of community partners including UNC Asheville, the YMI Cultural Center, the *Urban News*, A-B Technical Community College, among others.

The East End had been a vibrant black community since the 1880s, although African American presence there dates back to the earliest times of slavery in western North Carolina. The neighborhood flourished through the first half of the twentieth century, perhaps even as the practices of urban renewal began in the city in the 1950s. By 1978, urban renewal had razed much of this once strong family of neighbors.

Fortunately, Andrea Clark had taken intimate portraits of local life in 1970, before the neighborhood disappeared. Few knew of this collection of photographs, until “Twilight of a Neighborhood.” Project activities included an exhibit, expansion of recent research and gathering of oral histories, story-sharing sessions, book discussions, and public forums, as well as related programs including a class at UNC Asheville and the current examination of revitalization in Asheville.

Today, there is serious discussion of urban revitalization in Asheville that likely will include many more voices than in the mid-1970s. One important result of “Twilight,” Loughmiller observes, is the ongoing partnership that emerged from participants’ “struggles... [in] learning to work together.” She continues, “Projects



Josie McCullough in the doorway of her home overlooking the busy intersection of Valley and Eagle Streets. Photo by Andrea Clark. Courtesy Andrea Clark Collection, Pack Memorial Public Library.

that allow collaborative experiences to happen can empower people in a very real way and give momentum to the effort to reclaim control of our lives and our communities. In today’s world, what could be more important?”

A core notion of “Twilight of a Neighborhood” is “root shock,” a term developed by urban scholar and psychiatrist Mindy Fullilove, the keynote speaker at the project’s conclusion in February 2009. In a recent note to project participants, Fullilove quoted the European urban visionary Michel Cantal-Dupart, who wrote that “the cities of the future are cities that have a past and they must lean on that past to find the way to break barriers and to create the means of sustaining our children one hundred years from now.” The exciting, organic, and intentional group of citizens who now have practice voicing their history in the most public way are reclaiming their past to define their future; they plan to sustain their children one hundred years from now.

Andrea Clark, Photographer: The Family of Man/These Were My Roots

Karen Loughmiller, West Asheville Branch Library

ANDREA CLARK'S East End photographs are stunning. They hold your attention. You look at one, walk away, come back to look again. And again. "What was she thinking about?" you wonder. In an interview with documentary photographer and friend Rob Amberg, Clark mused, "I was really thinking about the family of man...about that photograph that transcends you." Yes. You see it.

But wonderful as the images are, Andrea Clark herself ensured that the questions they evoke in our minds were discussed publicly. Clark saw from the first that the East End photographs offered a way into the true story of her new community and its collision with urban renewal. More than three decades later, Clark envisioned that a full accounting of community history on the issue of urban renewal was essential to reckoning with the past which might lead to reconciliation and healing for people and the city. Tirelessly encouraging participation, Clark was the mighty heart of the "Twilight of a Neighborhood" project.

Although her father was from Asheville, Clark was born and raised in Cambridge, Massachusetts. After studying nursing for a short time, Clark went to photography school. She says, "I was young, footloose,

and curious about the Civil Rights Movement in the South. And I wanted to reconnect with my father and his family. In 1968 I took a Pullman porter to Asheville, and moved in with my family on Valley Street."

For Clark, her new home "was like a little hamlet," and although "Valley Street was one of the poorer sections of town...I loved the spirit of the community. Folks were sweet and friendly...I felt very comfortable here...and when you walked up Beaucatcher Mountain at night with the beautiful view of the city lights, you were standing in a black neighborhood."

"I took my camera everywhere with me," she told Amberg. "I always received a warm reception — I think it shows in the faces in the photographs. I learned about my father's family. I found a sanctuary here and kept coming back. I felt these were my roots."

The photographs of Andrea Clark bring what was and what was lost into our complex present.

—Dr. Mindy Thompson Fullilove



Andrea Clark. Photo by Betsy Murray.

Houses in East End. Photo by Andrea Clark. Courtesy Andrea Clark Collection, Pack Memorial Public Library.



The Patton Family

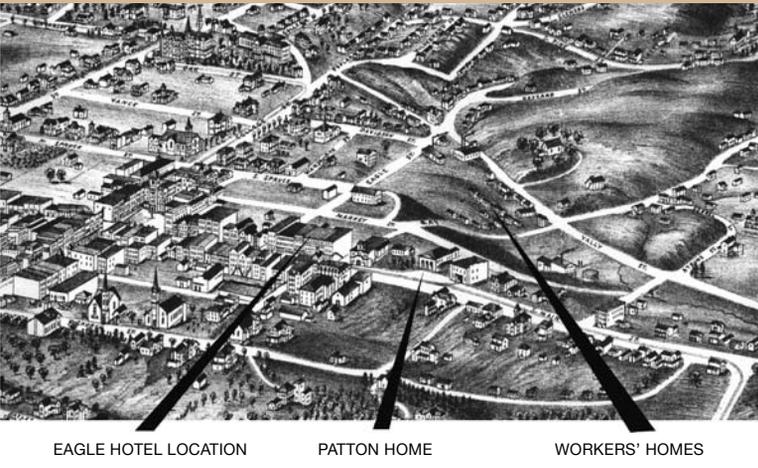
Henry Robinson, Community Historian

ASHEVILLE'S EAST END was the probable site of dwellings of James Patton's family's slaves prior to the Civil War. A Scots-Irish immigrant who arrived in Asheville in 1811,

Patton and his descendants were instrumental in the development of tourism (hotels), roads, railroads, and other community initiatives. Prior to the Civil War, the Patton family ranked second in Buncombe County in number of slaves owned, after the Woodfin family.

And, it was in this area that newly-freed African Americans gathered during Reconstruction to build an enduring community that would provide social, commercial, religious, and educational opportunities in a segregated society.

The map shows the Patton family home and the location of the Eagle Hotel which they owned and staffed first with slaves and later with freed African Americans. Also indicated on the map is a group of homes on Valley Street constructed to house black laborers and their families. These homes became the nucleus of the East End.



(L) Map of East End Asheville, 1891. Courtesy North Carolina Collection, Pack Memorial Public Library. (Above) Henry Robinson. Photo by Johnnie Grant, *Urban News*.



Restoring a Voice: The Case for Urban Archaeology in Asheville's East End

Dwight Mullen, Department of Political Science, UNC Asheville

AFRICAN AMERICANS helped create what we know today as home. The labors of women and men helped build our

what became Asheville. Quality of life issues also need substantiation. What did people who were owned by other people eat? What did they do with the little time they had to themselves? Where specifically did they live? Many questions can be addressed through expertly directed mapping and excavation of selected sites in the city.

Courtesy UNC Asheville.

land while the lives they led shaped the mountain culture. Other urban communities in South Carolina and elsewhere have hosted archaeology projects to document these footprints of early builders and have gained economically, with increased tourism, from the treasures they discovered.

What lies beneath our feet in downtown Asheville is an important way to document the presence and contributions of African Americans in North Carolina's mountains. The doorpost of a home or a cup held for drinking adds layers of connection and meaning to the past.

A likely archeological site is the heart of old East End. By 1811, enslaved people, owned by James Patton, worked at the Eagle Hotel and lived within a short walk behind the current Public Works Building. Further investigation would reveal the nature of the relationship of the enslaved with other founders of

We must not lose this opportunity to restore a voice about how our history was made and who made it. The knowledge we gain will inform how we live and will enrich the culture we make in the future.

Re-Storying Community: Lessons from African American Stories of Urban Renewal in Asheville

Ken Betsalel, Department of Political Science, UNC Asheville, and Harry Harrison, Executive Director, YMI Cultural Center

IN THE SPRING OF 2009 we co-taught a course on the impact of urban renewal on the lives of African Americans living in Asheville, North Carolina. One goal of the course was to restore a sense of community that had been lost due to urban renewal, while linking students to humanities-based perspectives on community-building. Each week students heard from community “story-holders” who experienced urban renewal first-hand. Community participants and students also took a tour of local urban renewal sites and studied photographs and maps that helped tell the story of urban renewal’s devastating impact on the cohesiveness of African American neighborhoods. Together we learned some valuable lessons.

The first lesson was the importance of trust. Without trust there is no community-building. The second lesson was the importance of “home place” in building a community. Holding our weekly sessions at the YMI Cultural Center, one of the oldest African American cultural centers in the country, gave a sense of security and validation, especially to community people as they shared with us.

The third lesson is the importance of the story itself. While story telling sometimes opens up old wounds,

it also has the capacity to heal, as those who told their stories came to value their experience in new ways. More than one participant told how, while it was painful to tell of the past, they were thankful that others might find their stories useful in creating a better community for everyone.

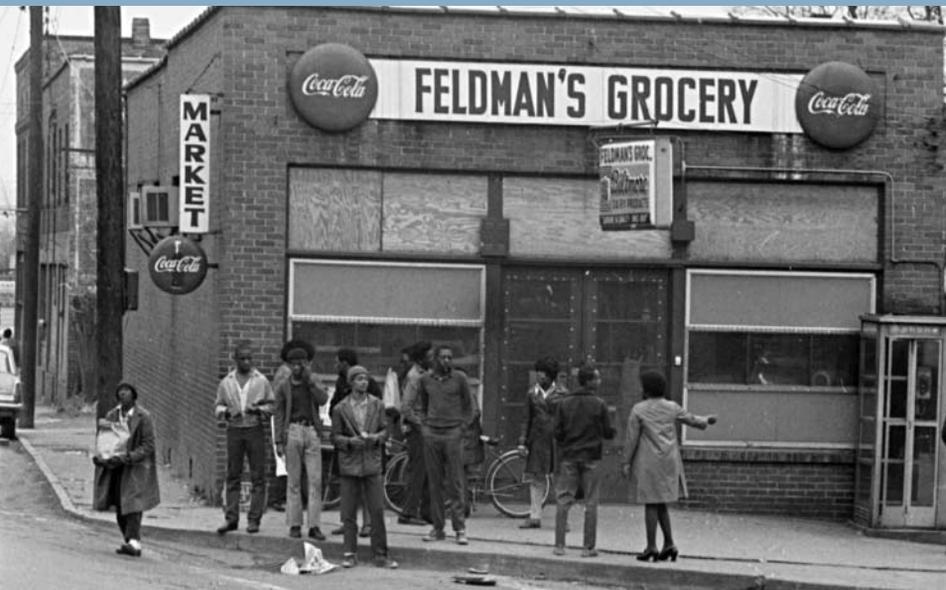
Finally, we learned the value of listening. Story telling gave everyone a chance to slow down and listen!



Hattie M. Sinclair, 119 Valley Street, circa 1968. Photo by Andrea Clark. Courtesy Andrea Clark Collection, Pack Memorial Public Library.

The separation inflicted by urban renewal still haunts many people.

—Johnnie Robinson Grant, East End Resident



(Sidney) Feldman's Grocery, 91 Eagle Street. Photo by Andrea Clark. Courtesy Andrea Clark Collection, Pack Memorial Public Library.

How Does One Begin to Tell the Story?

Wanda Henry Coleman, Former East End Resident and First Director of the YMI Cultural Center

How do you begin to frame the impact of displacement of a raucous, “living-out-loud” neighborhood with all its color, tragedy, and comedy?

When did we forfeit our safe havens, our ports in storm, and become, by default or absence, participants in the destruction of or radically negative altering of what should have been dear to us? We have to think about how and why this happened and account for ourselves.

The following neighborhood maps show some of the hundreds of institutions that sustained community and were a source of pride and identity for over 100 years before urban renewal. Inspired by the communities their elders knew, neighborhood associations are now focusing on the three E's — Economy, Environment, and Equity — as they lead the way to an economically and environmentally sustainable future for communities, including the safe and affordable housing that once had been promised and now must become a reality.

EAST END



CHURCHES

1. Mt. Zion Missionary Baptist Church — 47 Eagle St.
2. Sycamore Temple Church of God in Christ
3. Tried Stone Baptist Church — 2 Sorrell St.
4. St. Matthias Episcopal Church — 6 Dundee St.
5. Cappadocia Holiness Church — 58 Max St.
6. Calvary Presbyterian Church — 44 Circle St.
7. Nazareth First Baptist Church — 60 Hazzard St.
8. St. James CME Church — 44 Hildebrand St.
9. Hopkins Chapel AME Church — 321 College St.
10. Berry Temple UMC — 334 College St.

SCHOOLS

11. Southeastern Business School — 93-99 Valley St.
12. Stephens-Lee High School/Catholic Hill High School — 31 Gibbons St.
13. Mountain St./Lucy Herring School — 36 Clemmons St.
14. Allen High School — 331 College St.

COMMUNITY ORGANIZATIONS

15. YMI Cultural Center/Soda Shop/Drugstore — 37 S. Market St.
16. Market Street Branch Library — YMI Building
17. Phyllis Wheatley YWCA — 356-360 College St.

BUSINESSES

18. Savoy Hotel and Café — 33-35 S Market St.
19. Roland's Jewelry — 29 S. Market St.
20. Club Del Cardo — 38 S. Market St.
21. Ritz Restaurant — 42 S. Market St.
22. James Macon Barber Shop — 89 Eagle St.
23. Carolina Tobacco Corp., Warehouse (music) — Beaumont & Valley Streets
24. Self-Serve Laundromat — 138 Valley St.
25. Mr. Bud Walker's Store — Bottom of Mountain St.
26. Good Value Store — Pine & Clemmons Streets
27. Porter's Store — 58 Pine St.
28. Eagle Street Theater — 51 Eagle St.

Map by Betsy Murray, Archivist, Pack Memorial Public Library. Based on a 1950 map of Asheville. Locations are approximate.



Stephens-Lee High School, c. 1968. Photo by Andrea Clark. Courtesy Andrea Clark Collection, Pack Memorial Public Library.

Stephens-Lee High School & the Stephens-Lee Alumni Association

Pat Griffin, Past President, Stephens-Lee Alumni Association

TO BLACKS OF EAST END and throughout Buncombe County, Stephens-Lee High School, 1924–1964, symbolized Black education, achievement, independence, and culture. As the only high school to accommodate African American students in Buncombe County and surrounding counties, it was known for its classical music programs, drama productions, and beginning in the late 1930s, its marching band. Character, intelligence, fidelity, endurance, and fortitude were instilled in us daily as we learned and built lasting friendships within the hallowed walls of the “Castle on the Hill.”

During the integration crisis of 1962–1972 the decision was made to close the school. After the demolition of the building, an idea was born for an alumni association which would work to retain the rich heritage that emerged from the school. A group of former students and teachers started the movement. The first alumni reunion was held in 1991; 1,000 alumni attended! Today the association meets monthly and collaborates with other programs to emphasize to youth the ideals of dignity and self-help, the heart of the Stephens-Lee legacy.

The East Is Rising!

Sarah Williams, East End Neighborhood Association

ON JANUARY 21, 2010, after five years of inactivity, residents of the East End came together for the good of the neighborhood. Those early meetings led to the East End Future Quest, which are visioning sessions that push community members to think about how they could foster self-improvement. Discussion topics included:

- Our shared vision of the community in five to ten years
- Challenges to make our vision a reality
- Strategies to meet these challenges
- An action plan

Future goals include capturing the neighborhood’s history through discussions with elderly residents; working to improve neighborhood parks; working with the city on land use issues and future plans; developing a newsletter; and organizing volunteers.

LIFE IN EAST END, ASHEVILLE, c. 1950–70

You know, we were very close. It’s like, they talk about the village, it takes a village to raise a child. Well, that’s what we had. That was one of the things that was so joyful.

~Bennie Lake

East End was a community, a neighborhood, self-contained....It had hair-dressers. There were grocery stores, funeral parlors, cab stands. Eagle Street had doctors’ and lawyers’ offices, dentists’ offices, churches. You had theaters. We had swimming pools. You had barbershops and the Dew Drop Inn. Miss McQueen’s restaurant was across from YMI. Roland’s Jewelry and Chisholm’s sold everything.

~Ralph Bowen

There was a time when every black person who wanted to make a living could make a living. There were eateries all up and down Eagle Street, up on the mountain. There were clubs everywhere.

~Talven “Sugarbody” Thompson

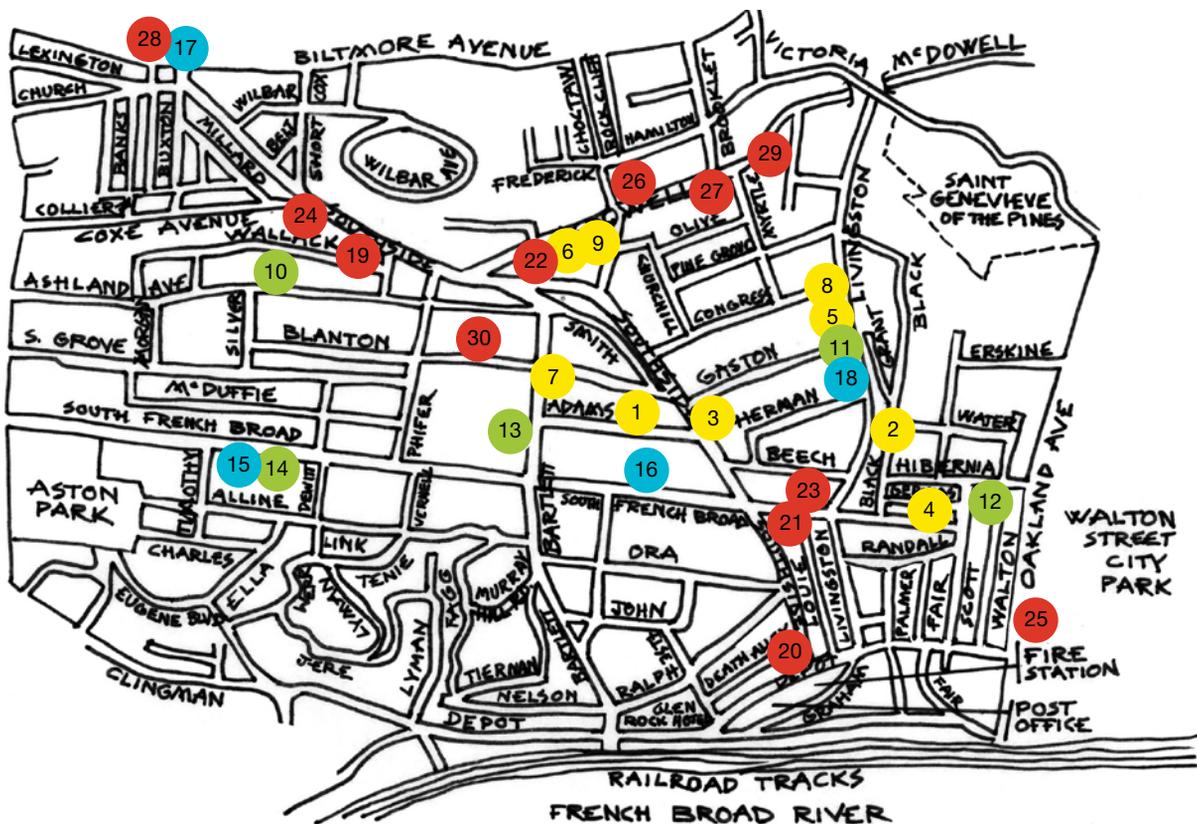
During the 1950s, East End was a place where everybody knew everybody and every child was reared, mentored, disciplined, protected, and taught — not only by their parents but by neighbors as well. Children attended Sunday School and an afternoon training class, often accompanied by their parents. There was a partnership between the local church and the home.

~Dr. Charles Moseley, Pastor, Nazareth First Baptist Church

My mom told me, “Let me tell you something. If somebody comes to you, they need a place to stay, bring them in. They need food, feed them. If they need clothes, put clothes on their back. Don’t deny it.”

~Jene Blake

SOUTHSIDE



CHURCHES

1. Bethel 7th Day Adventist Church — 51 Adams St.
2. Beulah Chapel Holiness Church — 111 Black St.
3. Church of God in Christ — 292 Southside Ave.
4. New Bethel Baptist Church — 508 S. French Broad Ave.
5. New Mount Olive Baptist Church — 148 Livingston St.
6. St. John's Church of God — 100 Southside Ave.
7. St. Luke's AME Zion Church — 40 Bartlett St.
8. Tabernacle Missionary Baptist Church — Corner of Livingston and Congress Streets
9. Worldwide Baptist Tabernacle Church — 85 Choctaw St.

SCHOOLS

10. Asheland Ave. School (Closed 1949) — 190 Asheland Ave.
Phyllis Wheatley YWCA moved here
11. Livingston St. Elementary School — 133 Livingston St.
12. School of St. Anthony of Padua — 56 Walton St.
13. Stewart's School of Beauty Culture — 55 Bartlett St.
14. South French Broad High School — 197 S. French Broad Ave.

COMMUNITY ORGANIZATIONS

15. YWCA — 195 S. French Broad Ave.
16. Elks Club — 382 S. French Broad Ave.
17. Asheville Colored Hospital — 185 Biltmore Ave.
18. W.C. Reid Community Center — 133 Livingston St.

BUSINESSES

19. The Southern News — 121 Southside Ave.
20. James-Keys Hotel — 409 Southside Ave.
21. Allen-Birchette Funeral Home — 350 Southside Ave.
22. Conley's Barber Shop — 187 Southside Ave.
23. Fair Grocery — 452 S. French Broad Ave.
24. Sportsman Club — 105 Southside Ave.
25. Walton St. Park and Pool — End of Depot St.
26. McMorris Amoco Service — 71 McDowell St.
27. Rabbit's Tourist Court & Restaurant — 110 McDowell St.
28. Jesse Ray Funeral Home — 185 Biltmore Ave.
29. Southland Drive-In — 127 McDowell St.
30. Mae McCorkle's Beauty Shop — 87 Blanton St.

Map by Betsy Murray, Archivist, Pack Memorial Public Library. Based on a 1950 map of Asheville. Locations are approximate.

Southside/East Riverside: Lost — In the Name of Progress

Priscilla Ndiaye, Former Resident and Researcher of Southside Neighborhood

BY THE TIME of urban renewal, Southside was the city's premier black business district, surrounded by a large residential neighborhood. At over four hundred acres, the urban renewal project here was the largest in the southeastern United States. The scale of the devastation here was unmatched.

"In the East Riverside area," said the [late] Reverend Wesley Grant, "we have lost more than 1,100 homes, six beauty parlors, five barber shops, five filling stations, fourteen grocery stores, three laundromats, eight apartment houses, seven churches, three shoe shops, two cabinet shops, two auto body shops, one hotel, five funeral homes, one hospital, and three doctor's offices." The Reverend Grant's church still stands on Choctaw Street.



Priscilla Ndiaye. Photo courtesy Story Point Media.

Multiple perspectives, lack of knowledge, much confusion, and discouraged and bitter individuals are all entwined as spiders in a web: any way you touch it, it trembles.

One perspective on this transformation sees families uprooted, relocated, and scattered; a community destroyed; a vibrant entrepreneurial business world shut down; and history fragmented, altered, and lost. A very different perspective sees economic benefits for the whole city and better living conditions for neighborhood residents.

Asheville's formal history was being made while Asheville's African American history was lost — in the name of progress. In 2008, for the first time an effort was made to collect this history through discussions and interviews [funded] by the YMI [Cultural Center] and the "Twilight of a Neighborhood" project.



Dewitt Street c. 1960. (L) Louvenia Booker. Center-Conaria Booker. Courtesy North Carolina Collection, Pack Memorial Public Library.

The L-A-N-D

Robert Hardy, Southside Neighborhood Association

Oh — But the Land — But the L-A-N-D! The community breakdown: the loss of businesses, neighbors, continuity, sanguinity, customs, culture, social norms, and family displacement.

Can one truthfully say there were no benefits? No! However, the benefits received when contrasted are a disproportionate negative to that which was gained!

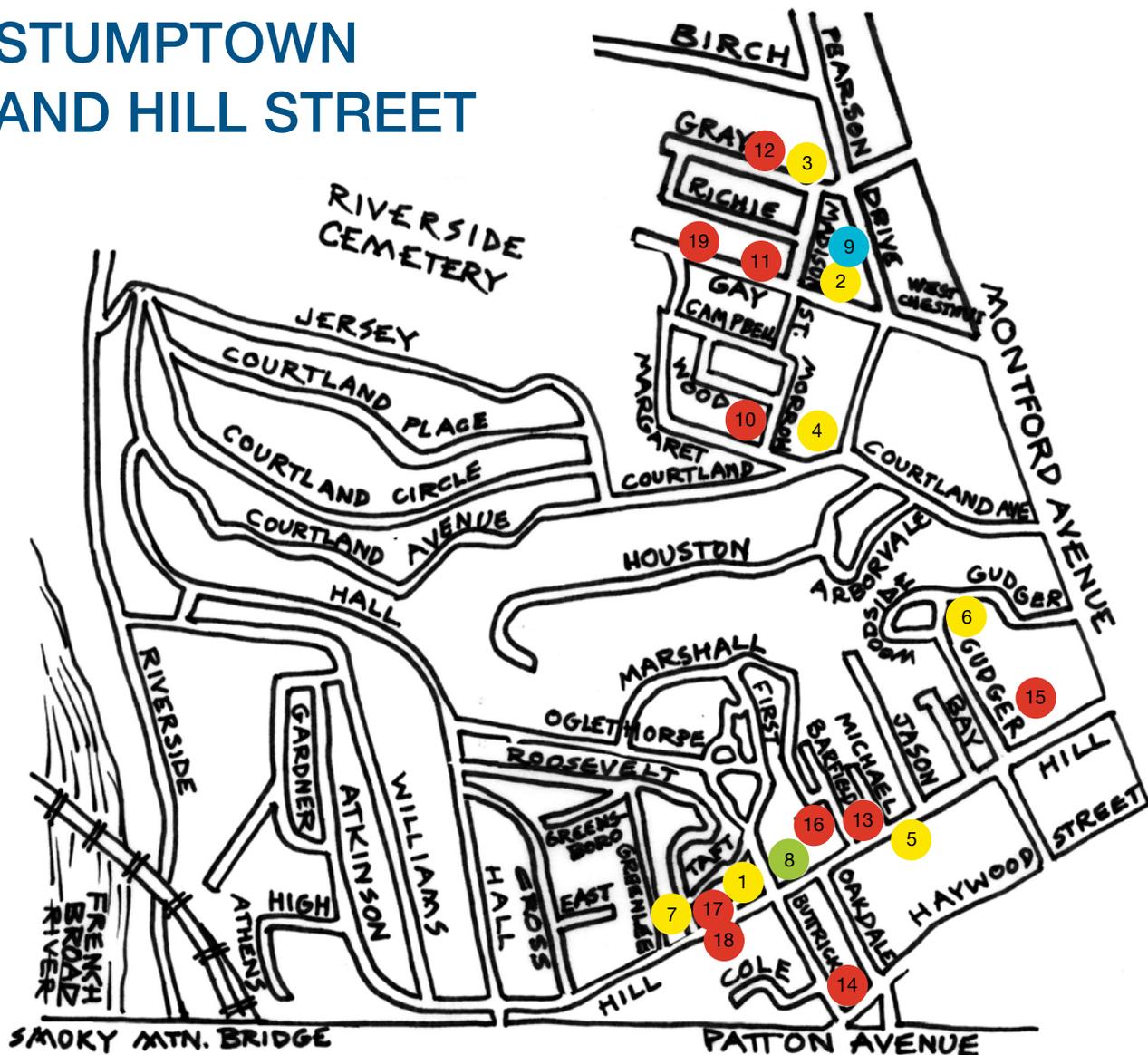
For the most part, the landowners were either elderly and/or sick; more times than not the gains and homes were obscured and/or lost due to the eroded economic base and failing subsequent infrastructure. Purchased at a give-away price, these properties were resold for sums unattainable by the descendants of the original owners.



Southside c. 1968. Photo by Andrea Clark. Courtesy Andrea Clark Collection, Pack Memorial Public Library.

The resulting "fiasco" which we are now living is perpetual poverty for the descendants and gentrification of their land.

STUMPTOWN AND HILL STREET



CHURCHES

1. Hill St. Baptist Church — Hill and Buttrick Streets
2. Welfare Baptist Church — 27 Madison St.
3. Church of God — 13 Gray St.
4. Elder Perkins' Church — Morrow St.
5. Varick Chapel AME Zion Church — 80 Hill St.
6. Church of God in Christ — 89 Gudger St.
7. Church of God — 5 Roosevelt St.

SCHOOLS

8. Hill Street School — 118 Hill St.

COMMUNITY ORGANIZATIONS

9. Stumptown Neighborhood Center — Madison St.

BUSINESSES

10. Morrow St. Corner Store — Morrow St.
11. Mr. Howard's Sweet Shop — 86 Gay St.
12. Chatham Brothers Grocery — 7 Gray St.
13. Torrence Hospital — 95 Hill St.
14. Reed's Coal Company — 8 Buttrick St.
15. Mrs. Bernice Williams Beauty Shop — 21 Gudger St.
16. Oliver Groce Grocery — 12 Barfield Ave.
17. Mrs. Edith Adams Beauty Shop — 157 Hill St.
18. Mrs. Ruby Sherrill Beauty Shop — 153 Hill St.
19. Midget Ice Cream Parlor — 73 Gay St.

Map by Betsy Murray, Archivist, Pack Memorial Public Library. Based on a 1950 map of Asheville. Locations are approximate. Shaded area indicates original boundaries of Stumptown neighborhood.

Hill Street Neighborhood — First to Fall

LOCATED NEAR downtown Asheville, the Hill Street neighborhood was home to African Americans as early as 1900. In the 1950s, the community included working-class families who owned their homes, small businesses, a school, and several churches. Former resident Daryl Wasson recalls: “You had this nice little community. These were all nice homes. They were cared for. There was nothing slovenly about it.” In the mid-1950s, the city started work on the Cross-Town Expressway, Asheville’s first superhighway.

Squarely in its path, Hill Street homes began to fall. Wasson says, “My mother and I watched them build the highway. In 1957 the highway department came



(L) Building of Cross-Town (E-W) Expressway, 1958. Courtesy Asheville Citizen-Times. (R) Daryl Wasson and friend, 6 Cross Street, Hill Street Neighborhood, c. 1958. Courtesy Daryl Wasson.

and took out all the houses except for three on our street (Cross St.). They came through again in '65, and they cleaned the place out completely in '67.”

Stumptown: A Dramatic Disruption

Mrs. Clara Jeter, President, Stumptown Neighborhood Association and Ms. Pat McAfee, Community Historian.

Around 1880, a thirty-acre tract in Asheville, near Riverside Cemetery, was cleared for black residential use. Called Stumptown, the area attracted many black families who came to Asheville in search of work. They formed a dynamic social network, and created a good, respectable community of homes, families, neighbors, and friends.

Stumptown residents found employment in Riverside Cemetery, at nearby Battery Park Hotel, or with affluent whites on Montford Avenue. By the 1920s, Stumptown’s population exceeded two hundred families. Although there was much poverty, we had treasures money cannot buy — pride, dignity, and self-respect, and most of all, love.

Urban renewal came as a total surprise to us. We heard bits and pieces about a new program that promised better living conditions. And then, remembers Mrs. Dorothy Ware, one day “my parents got a letter warning them they had only a few months to find a new home.” Other residents got similar letters. Where would we go? How would we get to work and church? If it’s urban *renewal*, why is eminent domain being exercised? What’s really going on here?



Dr. Mary Frances Shuford in front of community center in Stumptown, 1967. Courtesy Asheville Citizen-Times.

Stumptown residents experienced root shock repeatedly over the next two decades, as our homes were bulldozed to the ground, one by one, and the social order was broken. By the early 1970s little was left. Scattered, hurt, bitter, discouraged — we strove to build new hopes. In spite of the devastation, the strong values of our old community are visible in the successful lives of our young people. Stumptown lives on through them.



Asheville's Burton Street community lost streets and homes in 1965 when I-240 was built. The neighborhood has recently been threatened by an I-26 Connector Alternative known as Alternative 3. This alternative would destroy a federal Weed and Seed neighborhood. A concerted effort by Asheville residents prompted the NCDOT to look for ways to reduce the impact of the connector on the neighborhood. Residents still await a final decision.

Burton Street: Behind the Crack Curtain — Creating a Vision

DeWayne Barton, Co-founder of Asheville Green Opportunity Corps



DeWayne Barton, co-founder of Asheville Green Opportunity Corps, is one young leader in the Burton Street neighborhood trying to address recent problems, such as drugs and violence, that have emerged with community decline resulting from urban renewal. Seeing the history of urban renewal from a new generation's

point of view, he writes of transforming the present by listening to the stories of his elders. Barton is standing with Safi Mahaba, both are Burton Street residents. Photo by Dan Leroy.

THE THREATS: Eager NASCAR drivers looking for dope boys with the checkered flag. And race walkers, picturing their favorite drug medal around their neck — leaving behind small, clear plastic bags, empty lighters, and forty-ounce bottles. The ice cream truck of violence rolls through slowly, daily bell sounds of twenty-twos and forty-fives. I've seen this self-destructive pattern before in DC and Virginia — drugs, bulldozers, developers — not knowing the I-26 expansion was behind Burton Street's crack curtain.

THE RESPONSE: Listening to the warning cries of ancestors from elders who remember land-grabs of the past. We are helping to bring together a team and creating a vision of the future we want, sweating,

praying, and dreaming again, maintaining our consistency, saying good-bye to comfort zones.

The stimulus begins with us. In our attempt to restore a community that supports sustainability, we will need to include everyone. Low wealth communities will sit at the table as equals with all other citizens of the city. By creating our own sustainable plan for the neighborhood, we're protecting our community from the double-edged sword of development. We're creating community programming for seniors and youth. We're creating greenspace and backyard gardens. We envision a community business incubator and a community school, encouraging neighbors to join in.

Historic Burton Street Agricultural Fair Revived

In another effort to restore community, Burton Street resident Mrs. Vivian Conley is leading an attempt to revive Mr. Pearson's Agricultural Fair. "I saw our history and the old ways and the sense of community slipping away," she says. Focusing on the fair's emphasis on community and sustainable living, residents held a one-day mini-fair on September 25, 2009, building toward a centennial celebration in a few years.

A New Vision Held by Many

Sasha Vrtunski, ACIP, Project Manager, Asheville Downtown Master Plan

THE TWILIGHT PROJECT brought much-needed attention to painful memories and experiences that had been left out of our common history. It cannot be coincidence that now we have a lot of energy — multiple groups and individuals — working towards improving the East End neighborhood area.

There now seems to be a new vision held by many of strengthening the bonds of neighborhood residents, stemming the tide of gentrification, and re-connecting East End with downtown through beneficial new development along the Charlotte/Valley St. corridor.

Recovery comes through reclaiming history, restoring esteem, and redefining one's participation in weaving the future. East End residents are becoming players in the creation of the new Asheville Downtown Master Plan. They are making manifest the community's dream of a renewed and vital neighborhood true to its historic promise.



Rendering from Asheville Downtown Master Plan by Goody Clancy. Courtesy City of Asheville, North Carolina.

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James Macon Barber Shop, 89 Eagle Street. James "Big Barber" Macon, Jr. Photo by Andrea Clark. Courtesy Andrea Clark Collection, Pack Memorial Public Library.

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renew1107@yahoo.com

**Burton Street
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DeWayne Barton, President
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**Southside Neighborhood
Association**
Mr. Robert Hardy
(828) 251-0485

**Stumptown
Neighborhood Association**
Mrs. Clara Jeter, President
(828) 258-9474

**Stephens-Lee
Alumni Association**
PO Box 105
Asheville, NC 28802

YMI Cultural Center
39 S. Market Street
Asheville, NC 28801
(828) 252-4614
www.ymicc.org

The Urban News
(828) 253-5585
www.theurbannews.com

**Eagle/Market Streets
Development Corporation**
70 S. Market Street
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**Asheville GO
(Green Opportunities)**
(828) 398-4158

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The North Carolina Humanities Council serves as an advocate for lifelong learning and thoughtful dialogue about all facets of human life. It facilitates the exploration and celebration of the many voices and stories of North Carolina's cultures and heritage. The North Carolina Humanities Council is a statewide nonprofit and affiliate of the National Endowment for the Humanities.



MANY STORIES, ONE PEOPLE