



LOW  
LAND *and the*  
Life and  
Community in  
Hudson Hill,  
West Savannah,  
and Woodville  
Neighborhoods

# HIGH ROAD

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**Cover:** Longshoremen at work. Georgia Ports Authority, VM 1700, Folder 4. Courtesy of the Georgia Historical Society.

**Frontispiece:** Nearly 700 strong, marchers silently trekked to the Chatham County Courthouse in support of the Selma voter registration drive. *Savannah Morning News*, 21 March 1965. Courtesy of the *Savannah Morning News*.

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# CONTENTS

	Foreword	ii		
	Introduction	iii		
	Chapter 1: Beginnings	1		Chapter 5: Leisure 73
	Chapter 2: Work	7		Chapter 6: Faith 85
	Chapter 3: Housing	27		Chapter 7: Rights 99
	Chapter 4: Schools	49		Chapter 8: Community 115
				Abbreviations Used 127
				Bibliography 127
				Acknowledgements 130
				Map of Western Savannah Neighborhoods 138

## FOREWORD

Dear Citizens of Savannah:

It is no coincidence that some of Savannah's most civic-minded residents grew up on the Westside of Savannah, Georgia.

The people who settled places like Hudson Hill, Woodville, and West Savannah in the early twentieth century were seeking opportunity in the newly opened sugar refinery, a bustling port, or the busy railways that were slowly transforming the once rural area. They did the business of living and working in the same factories and on the same narrow streets lined with bungalows and shotgun houses. Bonded by daily experience, these men, women, and children came to rely on one another as if they were family.

It was a diverse family that produced leaders, artists, sport legends, and community activists. The names Florence Gibson, Moses Jackson, Curtis Cooper, Robert Sengstacke Abbott, or Lucinda Williams might have escaped your notice in the past, but their accomplishments will not. Untutored and untrained, Gibson transformed her yard with found objects that others discarded, and earned regional acclaim as an outsider artist. A concern for the quality of education provided to his and others' children led Moses Jackson to advocate for improvements to a school that was later renamed for him. Beneath his quiet air, Cooper's resolve to improve his community was demonstrated first during his work in the local civil rights movement and later in the founding of the Westside-Urban Health Center. The most influential weekly publication for African Americans, the *Chicago Defender*, had at its helm Abbott, who grew up in Savannah. Williams' storied career in sports culminated in the 1960 Olympic gold medal for 4 X 100 meter relay, but began under the tutelage of local sports hero, Coach Joe Turner. And these are just a few citizens who called this place home.

In the pages of this book, you will see the spirit of this community. Here, resident recollections, historic images, and contemporary photographs vividly illustrate how these people lived, where they learned, when they played, and how they are creating an even brighter future for their neighborhood. Photographs of days gone by and histories of moments lost to collective memory help us remember that a community is not defined by its buildings, its geography, or its businesses, but instead by the residents who have, and continue to, live there.

It is with deep satisfaction that I present *Low Land and the High Road* to the citizens of Savannah. I hope you learn from it and enjoy it as much I have about one of Savannah's hidden treasures.

Otis S. Johnson, Ph.D.  
Mayor, City of Savannah

## INTRODUCTION

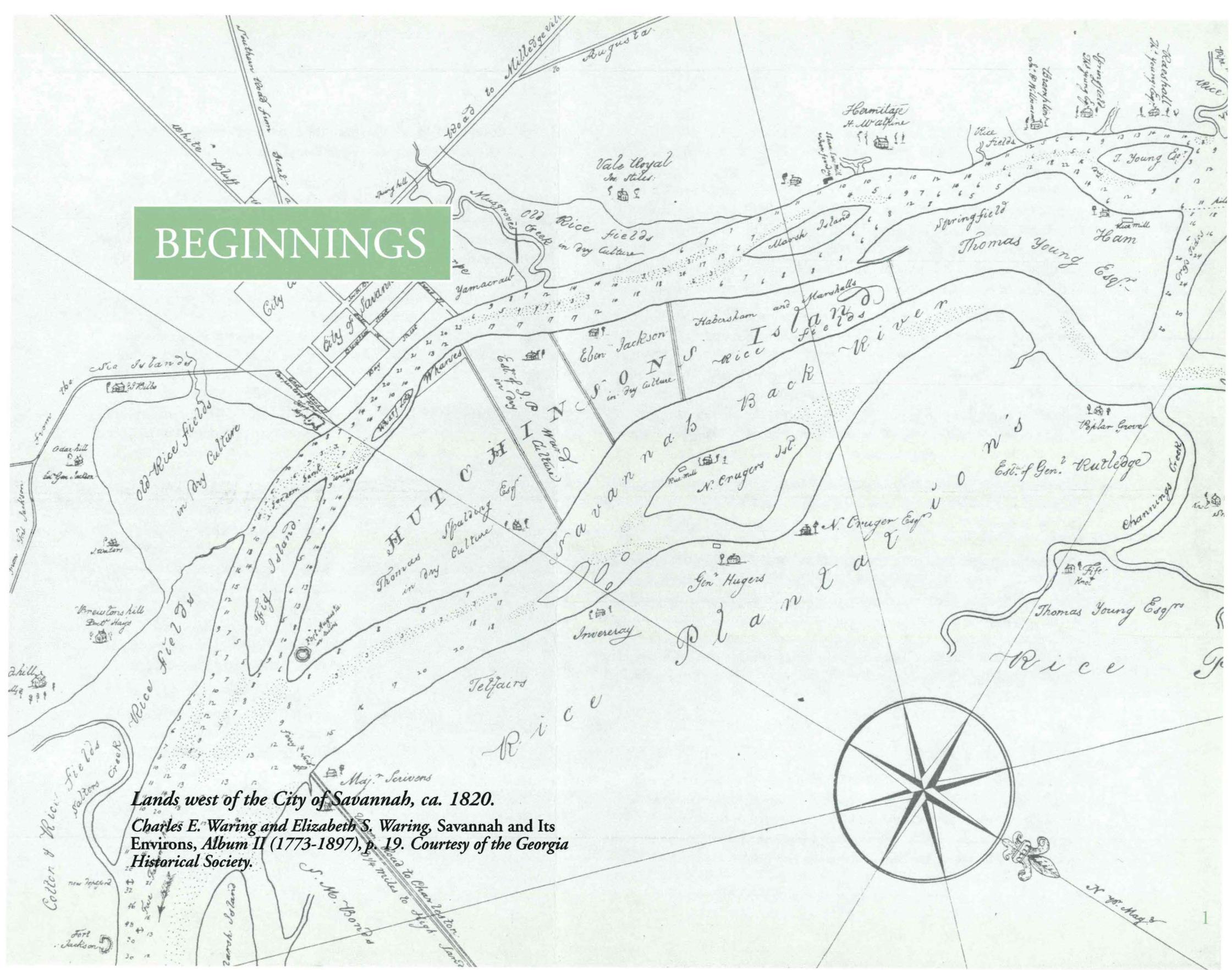
Hudson Hill, West Savannah, and Woodville, the three neighborhoods that comprise western Savannah, have a rich history that dates to the eighteenth century when a rice plantation covered the area. Residential development, however, began in the late nineteenth century. Roughly speaking, these neighborhoods consist of the land bordered by East Lathrop Avenue on the east, McKenna Street and West Bay Street on the north, Highway 80 and Market Street on the west, and Louisville Road on the south.

The purpose of this study is to give an opportunity to the residents of these neighborhoods to tell their own story. Special thanks are owed to the residents who shared stories, photographs, newspaper clippings, and memorabilia. Their generosity and cooperation made this history possible.

Dr. Charles J. Elmore, formerly of Savannah State University, interviewed and transcribed the remarks of a number of residents which provided an invaluable oral history as the basis of this project. The author added to this several taped interviews as well. Reginald Franklin, of Savannah State University, filmed some of the residents.

Although the richness of life in Hudson Hill, West Savannah, and Woodville can never be captured in its entirety, the intent is that this history will preserve the memory of day-to-day life in these neighborhoods from their rural beginnings to the revitalization planned for the future. This book is dedicated to the residents of these neighborhoods, past and present.

# BEGINNINGS



**Lands west of the City of Savannah, ca. 1820.**

Charles E. Waring and Elizabeth S. Waring, *Savannah and Its Environs, Album II (1773-1897)*, p. 19. Courtesy of the Georgia Historical Society.

**BILLY GOLDSMITH** knew the value of land and he had his eye on a property on Augusta Road. It was sixteen and a half acres of high ground, good for farming and livestock, and only two miles from the center of Savannah. Some buyers in 1813 might prefer low-lying rice fields but Goldsmith had neither the money nor the slaves to work that kind of land. A butcher with two slaves, he saw the advantages of land located on the main highway to Augusta, not too far from the southwestern city limits of Savannah. When the sale went through in 1813 for \$115, Billy Goldsmith, a free man of color, was likely the first African American property owner in western Savannah.<sup>1</sup>

Goldsmith hoped to coax a living out of his new property but the land forced him and all those who settled there to respect its characteristics. The pines marked high ground in Goldsmith's time. The sandy soil drained well enough to become farm land or even a road if the forest were cleared. The lowlands, however, were harder to tame. Felling the cypresses and tupelo poplars was difficult enough, but prying out the roots, clearing the underbrush, and digging drainage ditches was an exhausting undertaking. Those who hoped to build a home west of Savannah had to come to terms with the land.

The British took the terrain into account from the time they arrived in February, 1733. Gen. James Oglethorpe chose a sandy bluff for the site of the City of Savannah, the highest ground along the river for miles. The land gave the British a commanding view of the river and an easily defended position. Oglethorpe appreciated the advantages offered by the location but intended to improve on the natural environment by building a city in an orderly pattern of streets and squares. His vision, however, did not extend beyond the bluff. The swamps to the east and the west were obstacles to growth. With the adoption of slavery in Georgia in 1750, the value of the land changed when labor was available to turn seemingly useless swamps into profitable rice fields. Quickly the land bordering the Savannah River to the west was cleared and cultivated as rice plantations.

## THE PLANTATION ERA

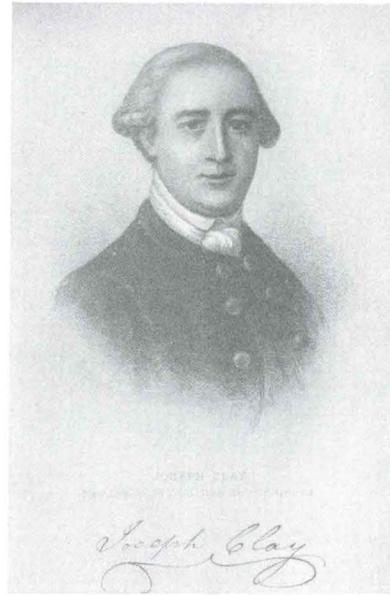
At first the area that later became the Hudson Hill, West Savannah, and Woodville neighborhoods belonged to the Yamacraw. Although Tomochichi deeded over the site of Savannah and points eastward to the British in 1733, the tribe kept control of the land between Musgrove and Pipemaker's Creeks to the west. The Yamacraw built a new town and hunted the land until the

old chief's death in 1739 but afterward the tribe drifted away to other villages. In 1757 the Yamacraw lands were given over to the Crown which promptly distributed them to the colonists.<sup>2</sup>

The original thousand acres of Vale Royal plantation consisted of the land bounded by the Savannah River, Fahm Street on the east, Augusta Avenue to the south, and what is today West Lathrop Avenue. Within these borders lie the modern-day neighborhoods of Hudson Hill and the portion of West Savannah north of Augusta Avenue. In the 1750s, the king granted these lands to Pickering and Thomas Robinson, probably brothers. Pickering Robinson had been recruited to promote the silk industry in the colony but he purchased Vale Royal with the intent of growing rice in its low-lying areas. The same marshlands that attracted Robinson's attention caused Joseph Clay to purchase Vale Royal in 1782 after the conclusion of the Revolutionary War.<sup>3</sup> Although

the slave trade had been interrupted during the war, Clay was one of the most energetic promoters of its revival. A prosperous rice plantation required plentiful slave labor and Clay tripled his work force to one hundred slaves, largely to tend to Vale Royal's dikes and dams near the river as well as to plant and harvest the crop known as "white gold."<sup>4</sup> His success and that of other rice planters near Savannah prompted even George Washington to comment on the "rich and luxurious appearance" of the rice fields bordering the city when he visited Savannah in the spring of 1791.<sup>5</sup>

Clay built a small empire west of Savannah, adding to his holdings property in Yamacraw, as well as Springfield Plantation that included land between Louisville and Ogeechee Roads. He built a large three-story house, near what today would be the intersection of Fahm and Bay Streets. The house turned its back on Savannah and faced west



*Fig. 1: A merchant as well as a planter, Joseph Clay was one of the premier entrepreneurs of the colony and later the state of Georgia.*

*Collections of Georgia Historical Society, Vol. 8, Letters of Joseph Clay, Portrait of Joseph Clay, frontispiece. Courtesy of the Georgia Historical Society.*

so that the planter could gaze on the Vale Royal rice fields. In the 1790s Clay added to Vale Royal the distinctive triangular plot of land between Louisville Road and Augusta Road. The southwestern part of the West Savannah neighborhood came into Clay's hands.<sup>6</sup>

Two years after Clay's death in 1804, his son-in-law Joseph Stiles purchased Vale Royal. Whatever plans he had for expanding the rice production of the

plantation ended in 1817 when the City of Savannah prohibited growing rice using tidal waters within three miles of the city limits. The city's concern was to curb "autumnal diseases," such as malaria and yellow fever, so only dry planting of rice was permitted.<sup>7</sup> Under protest, Stiles agreed not to plant rice and received compensation from the city for lost income. When he backed out of the agreement and resumed planting, the city sued him.<sup>8</sup>

A disgruntled Stiles revamped the plantation to grow cotton on its high ground and even started manufacturing brick, but his days as a rice planter were over. After his death in 1838, the plantation was slowly dismantled and sold off by heirs piecemeal. By the outbreak of the Civil War, Vale Royal ceased to exist.<sup>9</sup>

Along the Savannah River and further inland, many other plantations flourished. The Hermitage plantation, identified with the McAlpin family, bordered Hudson Hill on what is today West Lathrop Avenue. Augusta Road also separated Woodville from Hermitage property, but the lands of Woodville were not incorporated into large antebellum plantations.

### THE PIERCE M. BUTLER SLAVE SALE OF 1859

The slaves who made plantations profitable were usually bought and sold in Savannah, the center of the slave trade in Georgia. Even as the question of slavery pushed the North and the South closer to conflict, the largest slave auction of the antebellum period took place in West Savannah in 1859. In late February of that year, slaves, 436 in all, traveled by train or by steamboat from Pierce M. Butler's plantation near Darien to Savannah. Butler, who spent most of his time in Philadelphia, had squandered a considerable fortune gambling and womanizing. He brought his slaves to the auction block to settle his debts.<sup>10</sup>



Fig. 2: This map, ca. 1800, shows the eastern-most part of the Vale Royal Plantation that bordered the City of Savannah. Note the black square west of Farm (Fahm) Street which was the home of Joseph Clay.

Detail: from West Broad Street to Vale Royal and westward. To focus on Vale Royal, the orientation of the map has been turned so that western lands are on top. Charles E. Waring and Elizabeth S. Waring, *Savannah and Its Environs, Album II (1773-1890)*, p. 11. Courtesy of the Georgia Historical Society.

Originally the sale was scheduled to take place at the slave pen on Johnson Square belonging to Joseph Bryan, “auctioneer and Negro Broker.” However, the site was changed to West Savannah’s Ten Broeck Race Course, located alongside Louisville Road and the Central of Georgia tracks between what is today Abbott Street and the Seaboard Coast Line. For several days before the sale on March 2 and 3, buyers were invited to inspect the slaves at the race course stables to determine the value of each slave. Buyers examined teeth and muscles, and expected the most intimate questions to be answered.<sup>11</sup>

Torrential rains that had begun earlier in the week continued during the two-day sale. The slave women turned handkerchiefs into turbans to look their best at the auction even as wind and rain blew into the room open to the weather on one side. Butler, who came to Savannah for the event, insisted that family groups had to be sold as a unit so that parents and young children would not be separated. However, older children, grandparents, and adult brothers and sisters were sold without regard to family ties.<sup>12</sup>

In the catalogue, each person, identified by a first name, age, and a number, had his or her skills briefly described. Thirteen-year-old Joe was “Rice, Prime Boy” and Allen Jeffrey was “Rice Hand and Sawyer in Steam Mill.” Any handicaps were noted as well; for Anson, his value as a rice hand was qualified by the words, “Ruptured, one eye.”<sup>13</sup>

The sale brought in \$300,205 to Pierce M. Butler, far more than expected. The appraiser estimated that on average each individual would sell for \$572, but in fact the average price was a trifle more than \$716 each. The slaves bowed and curtsied to Butler one last time as he gave each of his former slaves one dollar.<sup>14</sup>

## RURAL CHARACTER OF WESTERN SAVANNAH

With the end of slavery and the plantation era after the Civil War, the appearance of western Savannah changed little. It was still farm land for the most part, forested in some places, crisscrossed here and there by railroad tracks. Rice and cotton production declined over time but vegetables came to be another crop option for farmers. As the nineteenth century slid into the twentieth, developers began to purchase land and lay out subdivisions. Even as the fringes of Hudson Hill and West Savannah were settled, large tracts of land remained agricultural.



*Fig. 3: Workers on a truck farm west of Savannah harvest tomatoes about 1900.*

*Savannah – A City of Opportunities, 59, bound with A History of the City Government of Savannah, GA from 1790 to 1901, Georgia Room, Bull Street Library. Courtesy of Live Oak Public Libraries.*



*Fig. 4: With the help of a mule-drawn plow, farm workers dig potatoes on a truck farm outside of Savannah in the 1900s.*

*Savannah – A City of Opportunities, 56, bound with A History of the City Government of Savannah, GA from 1790 to 1901, Georgia Room, Bull Street Library. Courtesy of Live Oak Public Libraries.*

Truck gardening was common from Hudson Hill to Rossignol Hill, as even small plots of land produced good crops of beans, potatoes, greens, and tomatoes to sell in Savannah markets. Ollie Jones remembers from her youth when workers were picked up at five o'clock in the morning to pick beans and greens.<sup>15</sup>

From these beginnings of plantations and agriculture, a rural heritage persisted in Hudson Hill, Woodville, and West Savannah. It helped to give these neighborhoods a distinctive past and a path into the twentieth century that was uniquely their own.

## FOOTNOTES

- <sup>1</sup> Pierre Henry Rossignol to James M. Wayne on behalf of Billy Goldsmith, 18 December 1813, Deed Book 2EE, 386, rec. 22 December 1813, CCCH; City Tax Digests 1809-1814, C-5600-CT-70-01, GHS.
- <sup>2</sup> Savannah Writers' Project, Mary Granger, ed. *Savannah River Plantations* (Savannah: Georgia Historical Society, 1947), 392, 419.
- <sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 451-54, 459. The original name of the plantation, dating back to colonial times, was Royal Vale. With Clay's purchase of the property, the name was permanently inverted to Vale Royal.
- <sup>4</sup> Julia Floyd Smith, *Slavery and Rice Culture in Low Country Georgia, 1750-1860* (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 1985), 98-99; Granger, ed., 461.
- <sup>5</sup> John C. Fitzpatrick, ed. *The Diaries of George Washington* (Boston: n.p., 1925), 4: 178.
- <sup>6</sup> Granger, ed., 459-60.
- <sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 462-63; Thomas Gamble, *A History of the City Government of Savannah, Ga., From 1790 to 1901* (Savannah: n.p., n.d.), 142.
- <sup>8</sup> Gamble, 143.
- <sup>9</sup> Granger, ed., 465-71.
- <sup>10</sup> Malcolm Bell Jr., *Major Butler's Legacy: Five Generations of a Slaveholding Family* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1987), 308-10, 319-20, 329-30.
- <sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 328-29, 334, 510-1; *New York Tribune*, 9 March 1859.
- <sup>12</sup> *New York Tribune*, 9 March 1859.
- <sup>13</sup> Bell, 335-36.
- <sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 330, 339.
- <sup>15</sup> Ollie Jones, WSDP-OH.

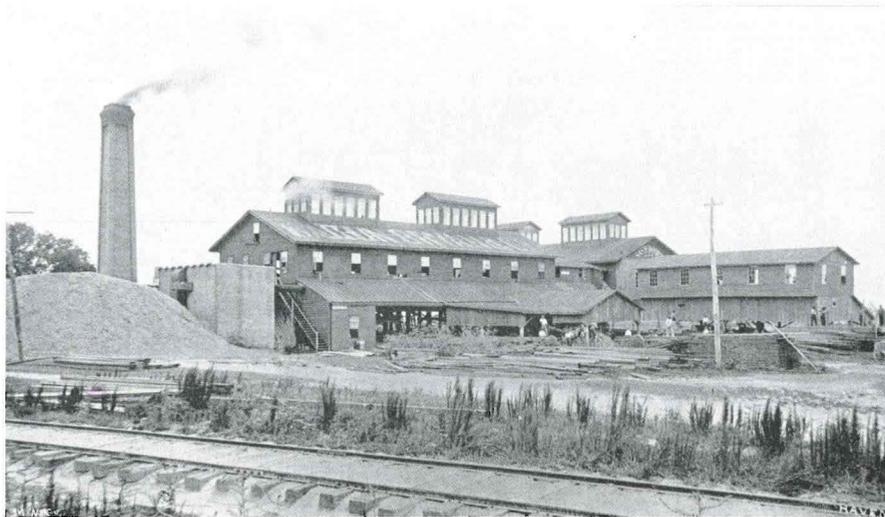


# WORK

*Raw sugar entering an elevator to a sugar bin.  
Courtesy of Imperial Sugar.*

ON WEEKDAY MORNINGS IN 1909, the rush hour for the westbound Mill Haven Street Cars took place between six and seven a.m. when trolleys left from the intersection of Bay and Whitaker Streets every twenty minutes. They carried workers to the new industries that lined the Savannah River, such as A.S. Bacon & Sons' Lumber Mill, the Vale Royal Manufacturing Company specializing in hardwoods and cypress, the Southern Cotton Oil Company, the fertilizer manufacturer Virginia-Carolina Chemical Company, and the "box factory" at Pierpont Manufacturing Company. At the end of the line stood the Mill Haven Company where workers cut and planed pine logs floated down the river to the plant. Hundreds of employees relied on the street car to take them to the factory district quickly and inexpensively.<sup>1</sup>

Other workers simply moved their families closer to their jobs where they could walk to work or ride bicycles. The Yamacraw section was already crowded, so they moved further west beyond the city limits into a more rural area. As more and more people settled near the factory district, they helped create the Hudson Hill, Woodville, and West Savannah neighborhoods.<sup>2</sup>



*Fig. 1: A.S. Bacon and Sons' Lumber Mill, 1909, was the largest manufacturer of yellow pine doors, sashes, and blinds in the area. Approximately one hundred workers were employed there.*

*Fruits of Industry, Georgia Room, Bull Street Library. Courtesy of Live Oak Public Libraries.*

## EARLY INDUSTRIES IN WESTERN SAVANNAH

While many of the new residents were Savannahians by birth, the prospect of jobs attracted Georgians outside of the coastal region. Eulie O. Smith was a native of Wrightsville in Johnson County who moved to Savannah as a young man. By 1935, Mexican Petroleum Oil Refinery hired him as a mechanic. He married and raised a family at his home on 4th Street in West Savannah.<sup>3</sup>

Newcomers from out of state also made their home in the West Savannah area. Some came across the river from South Carolina, but for others a longer and more difficult trip was required. Ernestine Harvey Manigault remembered that her parents moved in 1917 from Dothan, Alabama because the cotton mill press relocated to Savannah.<sup>4</sup> The previous year a large influx of black and white workers from Louisiana followed their jobs to Georgia and many settled with their families in the West Savannah area. The president of the Adeline Sugar Company, Benjamin A. Oxnard Sr., wanted to bring as many employees as possible with him when the refinery set up new operations in Savannah. More than three hundred men, women, and children traveled the seven hundred miles by train from the bayou country of Saint Mary's Parish to the banks of the Savannah River.<sup>5</sup>

The renamed Savannah Sugar Refinery, transplanted from Louisiana and open for business in 1917, joined other enterprises like Mutual Fertilizer Company, Hilton Dodge Lumber Company, and the American Can Company along the riverfront. This spurt of industrial growth in the early twentieth century meant plentiful jobs; for black workers, it meant finding a job and keeping it

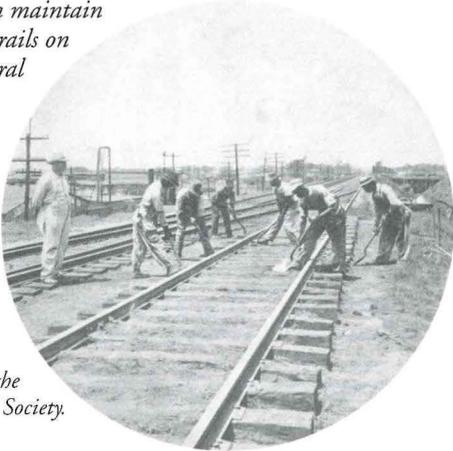


*Fig. 2: For twenty-five years, Eulie Smith worked for Mexican Petroleum before retiring in 1960. The refinery was located next to Union Bag on the Savannah River. Mexican Petroleum was later renamed Amoco.*

*Courtesy of Betty and Milton Rahn.*

*Fig. 3: Trackmen maintain the crossties and rails on a section of Central of Georgia track near Savannah in 1925.*

*Central of Georgia Papers, Right Way Magazine, 1362CL, Box 1, Folder 15, September 1925, cover. Courtesy of the Georgia Historical Society.*



*Fig. 4: After his retirement, James "Jimmie" Hazel poses with his granddaughter. In addition to his pension, he received shirts, a suitcase, and tobacco as farewell gifts.*

*Central of Georgia Papers, Right Way Magazine, 1362CL, Box 5, Folder 11, May 1943, 6. Courtesy of the Georgia Historical Society.*



*Fig. 5: After completing fifty years with the Central of Georgia, Richard Wright Jr. was the first black employee to be awarded a lifetime travel pass.*

*Central of Georgia Papers, Right Way Magazine, 1362CL, Box 6, Folder 11, July 1948, 17. Courtesy of the Georgia Historical Society.*



at a time when Jim Crow laws fanned racial bigotry in much of Georgia. There were other sources of work as well. One of the largest and oldest employers in the city was the Central of Georgia Railway. The railroad, like the factories, offered mainly laboring jobs to African Americans at low wages.

When the Depression of the 1930s cut wages and jobs for many working class people, Savannah was lucky to attract Union Bag and Paper Corporation to the area. In 1935, the company broke ground at the old Hermitage Plantation and opened its plant on the Savannah River in 1936. Savannahians saw in "the Bag" an antidote to the worst of the Depression, especially when about five hundred new employees were hired.<sup>6</sup> Quickly Union Bag became the largest employer in the county.

### EMPLOYEE AND EMPLOYER

Some workers from western Savannah found lifetime employment in the factories and railroad that bordered their neighborhoods. From the early twentieth century through the 1960s, it was not uncommon to have employees who worked thirty, forty, or even fifty years for the same company. For example, James Hazel, a resident of Ferrill Street, retired in 1942 from the Central of Georgia Railway with forty-one years of service. A paint shop helper, he was known as a hard worker.<sup>7</sup>

The Central of Georgia honored veteran African American employees like James Hazel with membership in the Quarter Century Club. Meetings attracted members from across the state for a combination social and business event; in 1937, for example, over sixty men attended a late fall barbecue in Macon.<sup>8</sup>

One of the Savannah members present at that meeting of the Quarter Century Club was Richard Wright Jr. By the time he retired in 1955 to his home on Ferrill Street, he had completed fifty-five years with the Central of Georgia. He began his career as a messenger when he was sixteen years old. In time, he was appointed to the respected position of porter, working on sleeper cars at first, then on the prestigious office cars used by railway management. He was Office Car Porter for eleven railway presidents over his long career.

The work was not without risks. In 1936, Wright survived one of the worst crashes in the railway's history. Two trains hit head-on at Ogeechee, Georgia, killing five crewmen on board. He carried the memory of that wreck the rest of his life with a scar on his forehead over his right eye.<sup>9</sup>

Building a sense of loyalty among workers was very important at the Adeline Sugar Company. That loyalty was put to the test when the company moved to Savannah. Knowing that their employees had deep roots in Louisiana, company executives invited not just the immediate family of their workers to go to Georgia, but also close friends and in-laws.<sup>10</sup> The dividend for the

# Making Dixie Crystals



*Fig. 6: Some of the first employees at the Savannah Sugar Refinery work in the packing room in 1917.  
Courtesy of Imperial Sugar.*



*Fig. 7: In his fedora and white shirt, George Wade, a supervisor with many years' seniority at the sugar refinery, talks with the men on his shift.  
Courtesy of Bernetta Anderson.*

company was a group of employees at the Savannah Sugar Refinery who stayed on the job.

Alex Gilmore was among those African American employees who made the long trip to Georgia. Everyone liked him; he was enough of a prankster to use a hoist to lift a hat off a man's head. That bit of mischief so impressed the manufacturers of the hoist that they tried to hire him away from the sugar refinery but he refused. He was a powerfully built man who could lift a five hundred pound bale of cotton with his right arm. In this case, it was not bravado that led Gilmore to use only one arm – his left arm was deformed. Even so, he kept a monkey wrench in his left hand to disguise his disability. Twenty years after the move to Georgia, Alex Gilmore was still on the job.<sup>11</sup>

Later employees spent much of their working lives at the refinery. In 1965, 70 percent of the workforce had at least ten years' experience with the company. At that time the average length of service was fifteen years.<sup>12</sup> For some of these longtime employees, work at the refinery was a family tradition. James Lemon grew up with the refinery literally in his back yard. He and his family lived at the "village," inexpensive housing built by the company for employees. One day the foreman asked his father, "Is [James] ready to come to work at the plant yet?" James Lemon started in the paint shop as a teenager and over the years rose to the position of master mechanic. Two of his brothers also worked at the refinery, carrying on the tradition begun by their father.<sup>13</sup> It was not unknown for three and even four generations of the same family to be refinery employees.<sup>14</sup>

Companies seeking loyalty among employees understood that it was not built on the job alone. Union Bag, for example, took an active role in the community through its commitment to education. A close relationship developed between the company and Woodville School. In 1951, the company donated trees to be planted for the Arbor Day Celebration at Woodville.<sup>15</sup>

That relationship was formalized in the 1980s as part of the Business-Education Partnership Program sponsored by the Savannah Area Chamber of Commerce. Union Camp donated a jogging course to Tompkins High School (formerly Woodville) in cooperation with Memorial Medical Center to encourage vigorous exercise among students.

Leisure-time activities also encouraged workers to identify with the company and with fellow employees. Black railroad men in Savannah, for example, had a baseball team called the Central of Georgia All-Stars. The All-Stars had a



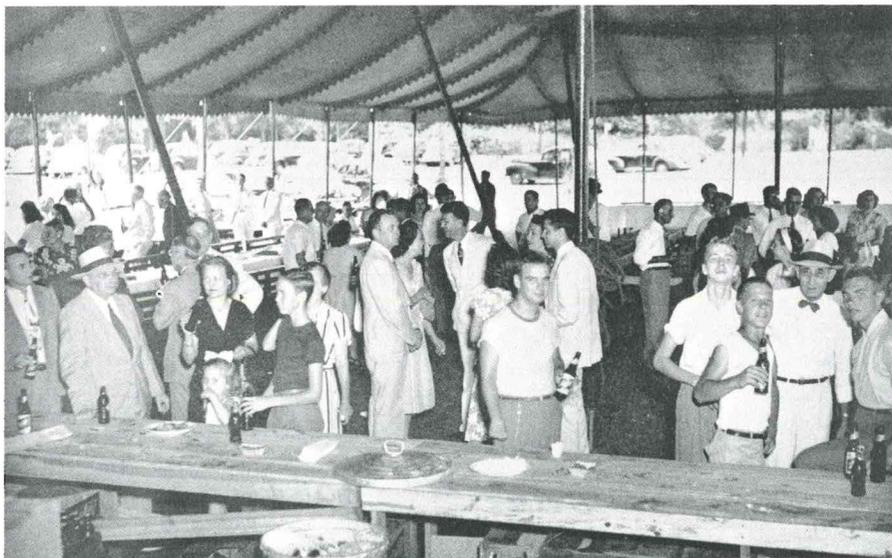
*Fig. 8: Bates Cousley of Union Bag's Educational Staff looks on with Mrs. Sophronia Tompkins and Mr. James Luten as members of the New Farmers of America plant trees on the school campus.*

1954 Wolverine. Courtesy of Enoch Mathis.



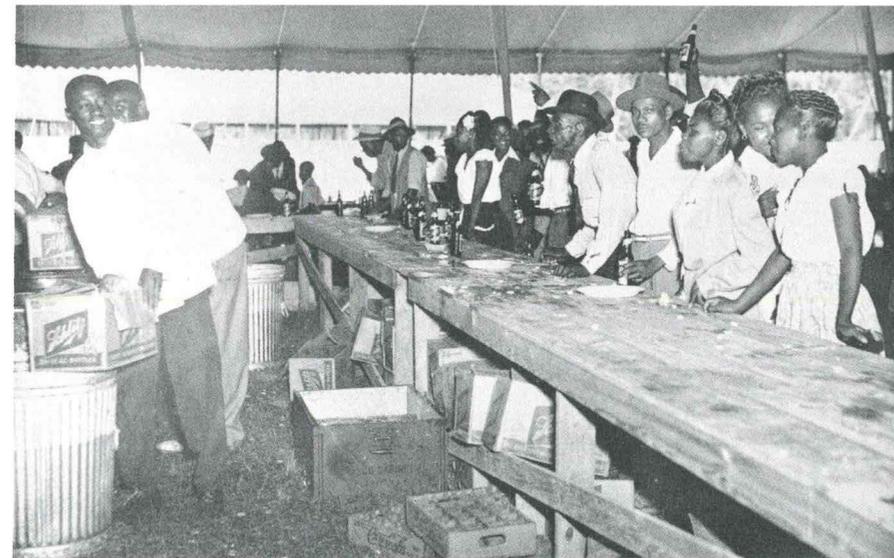
*Fig. 9: Members of the 1925 Central of Georgia All-Star Baseball Team.*

*Central of Georgia Papers, Right Way Magazine, 1362CL, Box 1, Folder 15, September 1925, 35. Courtesy of the Georgia Historical Society.*



*Fig. 10: The refinery's white employees enjoy a cool drink in a separate tent near that of their black co-workers.*

*Vanishing Georgia Collection, Image ctm 126. Courtesy of the Georgia Archives.*



*Fig. 11: African American employees celebrate the Savannah Sugar Refinery's first thirty years in a tent reserved for blacks.*

*Vanishing Georgia Collection, Image ctm 125. Courtesy of the Georgia Archives.*

devoted following and played other black teams in the area. According to one account of a 1925 game with the Augusta Tigers, a special chartered train from Savannah carried 974 passengers to Augusta. The Savannah team took a quick lead with eight runs scored in the first inning and defeated the Tigers 17-12.<sup>16</sup>

The outing was such a success that the next year African American church congregations were invited to join Central employees on an excursion train to Augusta for a game between the All-Stars and the Anderson, South Carolina Giants. A baseball committee that included West Savannah's James Hazel made round-trip tickets available for \$2 each. The response was overwhelming and two trains were chartered to take nearly two thousand fans to Augusta. The crowd cheered on the All-Stars to a 3-1 victory.<sup>17</sup> For the company, the baseball excursion trains were good for morale as well as being good business.

Social gatherings or recreation sponsored by the companies were welcome benefits to workers but it was understood that these events would be segregated. The train trips to Augusta, for example, were referred to as "colored excursions."<sup>18</sup> When Union Bag opened its plant in 1936, a wide array of recreational sites was available to employees at the Mary Calder Memorial

Park. The football and baseball fields, tennis courts, and picnic tables, however, were open to black workers and their families on a restricted basis, and the nine-hole golf course closed to them altogether except as caddies. Similarly, all employees of the Savannah Sugar Refinery celebrated the refinery's thirtieth anniversary in 1947. But when it came to time to serve the food at the barbecue, separate tents were designated for black and white workers.

The logistics of segregation were well understood by the Central of Georgia's Colored Fireman's Fuel Association when it invited white company officials to attend a barbecue in 1920. Two separate tables were set up, close enough to suggest their work relationship, far enough away to show the social distance between them.

Company clubs and committees, like that of the Fireman's Fuel Association, were established at the Central of Georgia in the 1920s for African Americans to improve work performance rather than establish communication between management and employee. The Porters' Club worked to improve their service on sleeping cars and office cars. However, in 1928, the leadership of the Porters' Club took an important step in opening their organization to all

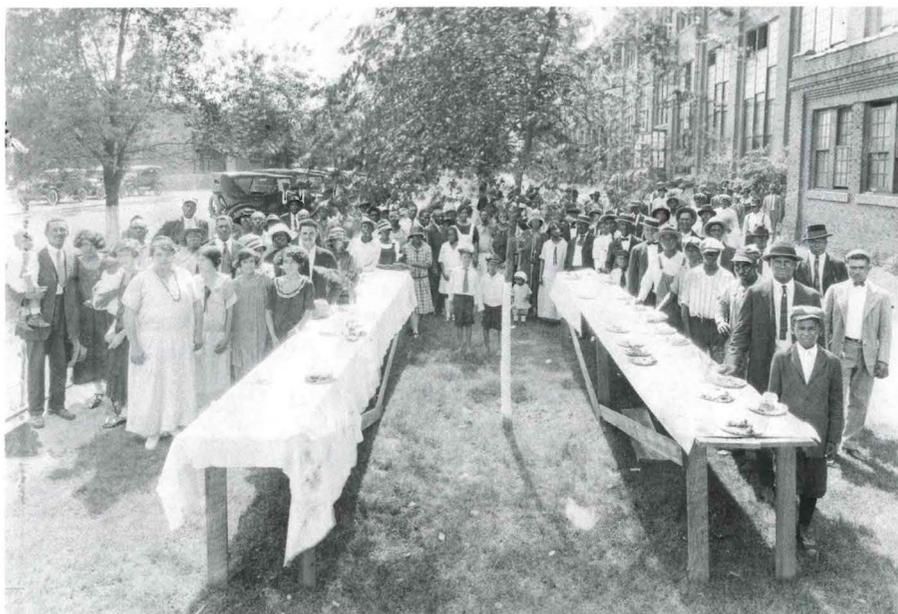


Fig. 12: To show their respect for the black firemen's contribution, white company officials invited the firemen to share the meal at a separate table nearby.

Courtesy of the Kenan Research Center at the Atlanta History Center. Photograph published in Jackson McQuigg, Tammy Galloway, and Scott McIntosh's book *Central of Georgia Railway* by Arcadia Publishing Company, Charleston, South Carolina in 2004.

African American employees. The Black Employees' Club that resulted was in no way a step towards a union. Instead the club was eager to solicit new business for "Our Family Road" and to promote a good work ethic.<sup>19</sup>

What employees understood clearly was that helping the "family road" was in their own best interest. Railroad men defined themselves and their future with the Central of Georgia, just as employees at Union Bag or Mutual Fertilizer or the sugar refinery identified with their companies. In western Savannah, this company identity carried over to neighborhood clubs where employees could socialize together during their free time. In the 1940s and 1950s, there were frequent meetings of the Dixie Crystals Social Club, the Southern Cotton Oil Employees Club, the Pierpont Social Club, and the Union Bag Social Club. Usually these meetings were simply neighbors meeting at each other's homes or sometimes hosting an oyster roast or chicken dinner as a fundraiser.<sup>20</sup> The job was more than a paycheck; it helped define an individual and reinforce friendships.

## LABOR DISCONTENT

By the late 1950s and early 1960s, the relationship between employees and industrial employers became more complex. Workers were not satisfied with menial jobs; black workers, in particular, wanted respect and opportunity unlimited by race. Often industrial plants hired African Americans as laborers at low pay. James Middleton Sr., a Ferrill Street resident who worked for Union Camp, explained the poor wages this way: "At that time you couldn't get a good job, hardly, there wasn't anything for black people to do [in the 1960s] in Savannah here but labor. Very seldom you find anybody who was above the labor. Well, labor work has always been cheap."<sup>21</sup> Even with years of seniority few black workers had the chance to advance to office jobs with better wages. At Union Bag, blacks generally worked in the wood yard; at the railroad, a common job for African Americans was helper. As W.W. Law said, "There was always a ceiling. [Blacks] did the dirty work."<sup>22</sup>

Separate and unequal treatment for black people had been the norm in the first half of the twentieth century and black residents of West Savannah, like African Americans everywhere, saw the discrimination plainly at the workplace. The menial jobs and minimum wages were only part of the problem. It was the constant reminders of second-class citizenship in the small things of life that gnawed away patience. There were separate lines of black and white workers to pick up pay checks, preference for whites to board the first city buses at the end of a shift, and signs everywhere designating separate rest rooms, water fountains, and places to eat.<sup>23</sup>

How to cope with these conditions and to overcome them was an ongoing struggle. James Middleton was certainly one of many West Savannah workers who took second jobs to make up for low wages.

I sent my kids to Catholic school, all of them, every last one of them, I had five of them in Catholic school at one time. How did I do it? You know what I did, I worked two jobs for seven years to keep my children in school. I worked from 3 to 11 at Union Camp, I went down to Liberty Distributing Company down here to the beer place and I get up at 7 in the morning and work there till 2.<sup>24</sup>

Unions, of course, existed to help workers gain higher pay and better benefits. In one instance at the sugar refinery, even the possibility of starting a union was incentive enough to bring about a pay hike. In 1952, the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO) surveyed refinery employees to gauge their

interest in joining a union. The company quickly raised wages 10 cents an hour for men on the job. Even so, the \$1.54 hourly wage was 30 or 40 cents below union averages.<sup>25</sup>

Many black workers at Union Camp joined the International Brotherhood of Sulfate, Pulp and Paper Mill workers. By the 1950s two black locals of that union existed, No. 601 and 615. The locals filed complaints in the early 1960s against the company for practices that segregated employees. As a result, the signs designating certain facilities “colored” and “white” came down.<sup>26</sup>

Another way for employees to press for change was to join the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). The Labor and Industry Committee specifically addressed the grievances of black workers and negotiated with management. When the boycott against Broughton Street businesses began in 1960, workers who had marched and picketed against segregation at restaurants and lunchrooms followed that example on the job. While picking up a load of paper at Continental Can Company, James Middleton noticed black employees were not allowed inside the company cafeteria. Instead they stood outside and food was passed out to them through a window. Just as he had done on Broughton Street, Middleton went inside and asked for service. He did not leave when the manager refused his order and finally the plant superintendent insisted that the black man be served. “That’s the one I integrated by myself,” Middleton said.<sup>27</sup>

Some concessions were won through individual and group effort, but other important issues were resolved only in court. A suit filed against the Central of Georgia Railway, for example, claimed discrimination against hiring black switchmen and firemen. In 1957 an Alabama judge found the railroad guilty and Savannah employees received a share of the settlement.<sup>28</sup> Open access to promotions and better-paying jobs to black employees was at the core of this suit and one filed against Union Camp in 1971. Four years later the Union Camp case was settled when the company agreed to award back pay to those employees denied promotions.<sup>29</sup>

## LAYOFFS

Court decisions and the civil rights movement helped to create a work environment that was integrated, if not always colorblind. Certainly these changes were beneficial, but they could not protect workers against the consequences of mergers and economic downturns. Even longtime employees were

vulnerable to layoffs or job loss. The acquisition of the Central of Georgia Railway by Southern Railway in 1963 did not stop passenger service out of Savannah’s Union Station but the public preference for the automobile over train travel took its toll. By 1971 Southern Railway ceded its passenger lines to Amtrak, and jobs with the railroad diminished for western Savannah residents.<sup>30</sup>

The closing of Pierpont Manufacturing Company in 1976 was another blow. For Curley Milton of Woodville, the end of Pierpont marked the end of a lifetime of work, thirty-seven years in all. He worked in sales, traveling throughout the Southeast and beyond. During World War II, he supervised bomb box production at the plant. His salary increased from \$9.20 weekly in 1939 to a career-high \$3.75 an hour in the 1970s. “Pierpont was good to me,” he said, “but when I retired they had no pension plan, and I had to rely on my social security check in my retirement.”<sup>31</sup>

At the same time that Pierpont shut its doors, employees at the Savannah Sugar Refinery were more confident about their future. They had had pensions since 1929 and workers had never been laid off.<sup>32</sup> In 1957 Bill Sprague, plant superintendent and Executive Vice President of the Savannah Sugar Refinery, recalled hard times in World War II when there was simply not enough raw sugar to process at the plant. The refinery remained closed for the better part of two months. “Was anyone laid off?” he asked rhetorically. “No! That is security.”<sup>33</sup>

In 1970 the workforce grew to over nine hundred when the company renamed itself Savannah Foods & Industries to reflect its growth into areas outside of sugar production. In 1997, Imperial Sugar acquired Savannah Foods and in recent years the size of the labor force has declined because a worldwide oversupply of refined sugar led to low prices. In 2001, roughly five hundred employees remained after layoffs and early retirements trimmed the number of workers.<sup>34</sup> The tragic explosion at the refinery on February 7, 2008 has had a devastating effect on employees and management alike. The refinery, after ninety-one years in operation, hopes to resume production.

The merger of Union Bag and Camp Manufacturing Company in 1956 had been a smooth transition, and the new company, under the name of Union Bag-Camp Paper Corporation and later the Union Camp Corporation, continued to be an important employer for West Savannah residents. Union Camp peaked with 5,500 employees in the early 1990s, but, like the sugar

refinery, had to downsize its operations and its workforce. International Paper bought the company in 1998 but, faced with stiff competition from South America and Asia, had to reduce the number of workers to 1,200.<sup>35</sup>

When the industrial base in Savannah began to change in the 1960s and 1970s, job security faded as longtime employers closed their doors. Even more striking was the decline in manufacturing employment in the 1990s. Twenty-five percent of jobs in Savannah were in manufacturing in 1990; by 2002, the number of factory jobs had dropped to 18 percent.<sup>36</sup> This shift from industrial jobs to those in the service sector was a nationwide phenomenon and certainly not unique to Savannah. However, the impact of this job loss hit hard in western Savannah where so many of these employees lived and worked.

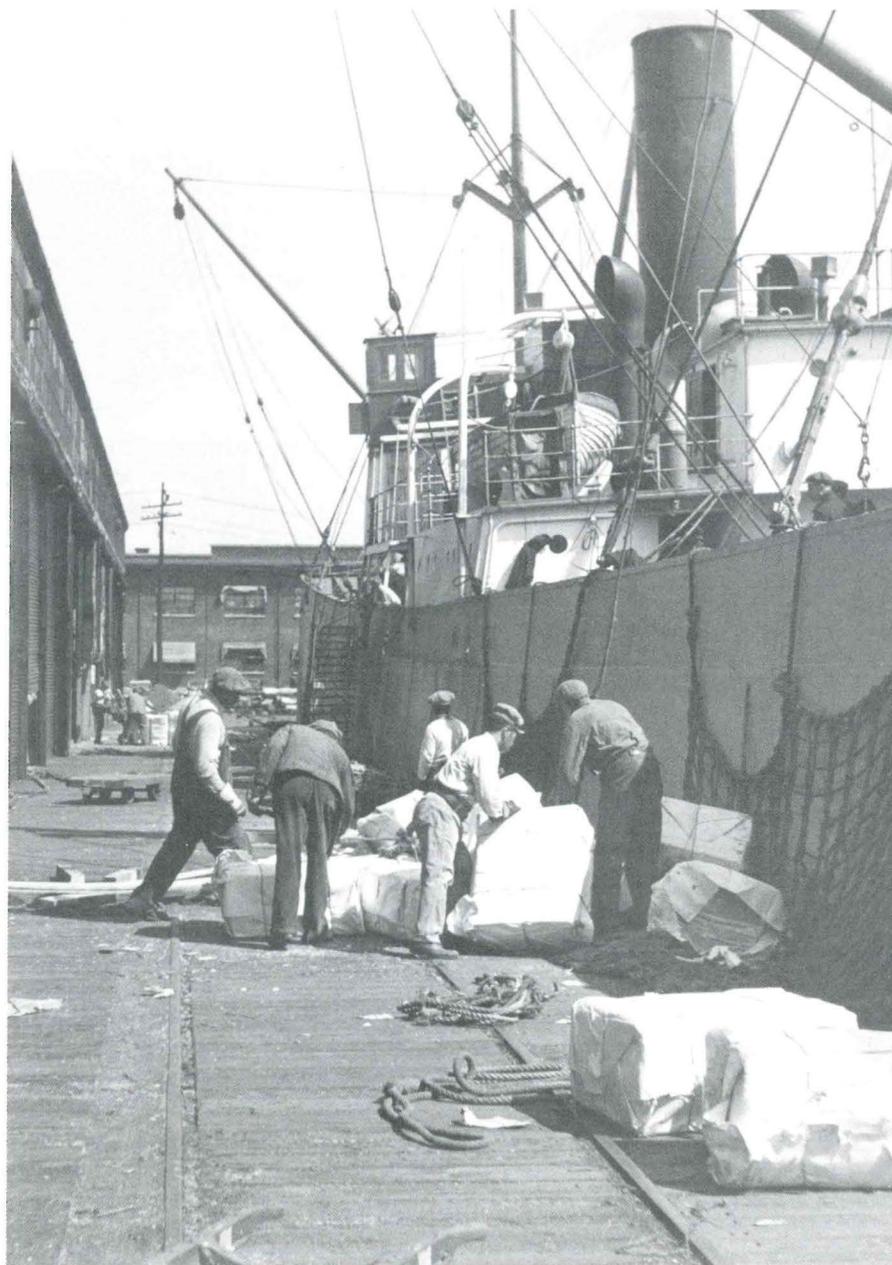
### THE PORT AND LONGSHOREMEN

The most vibrant economic sector in western Savannah is the port. Recognized in 2006 as the fourth-largest container port in the country, Savannah is a destination for many international shippers, especially after the dredging of the river channel to forty-two feet in 1994.<sup>37</sup> Sharing in that growth is the International Longshoremen's Association (ILA).

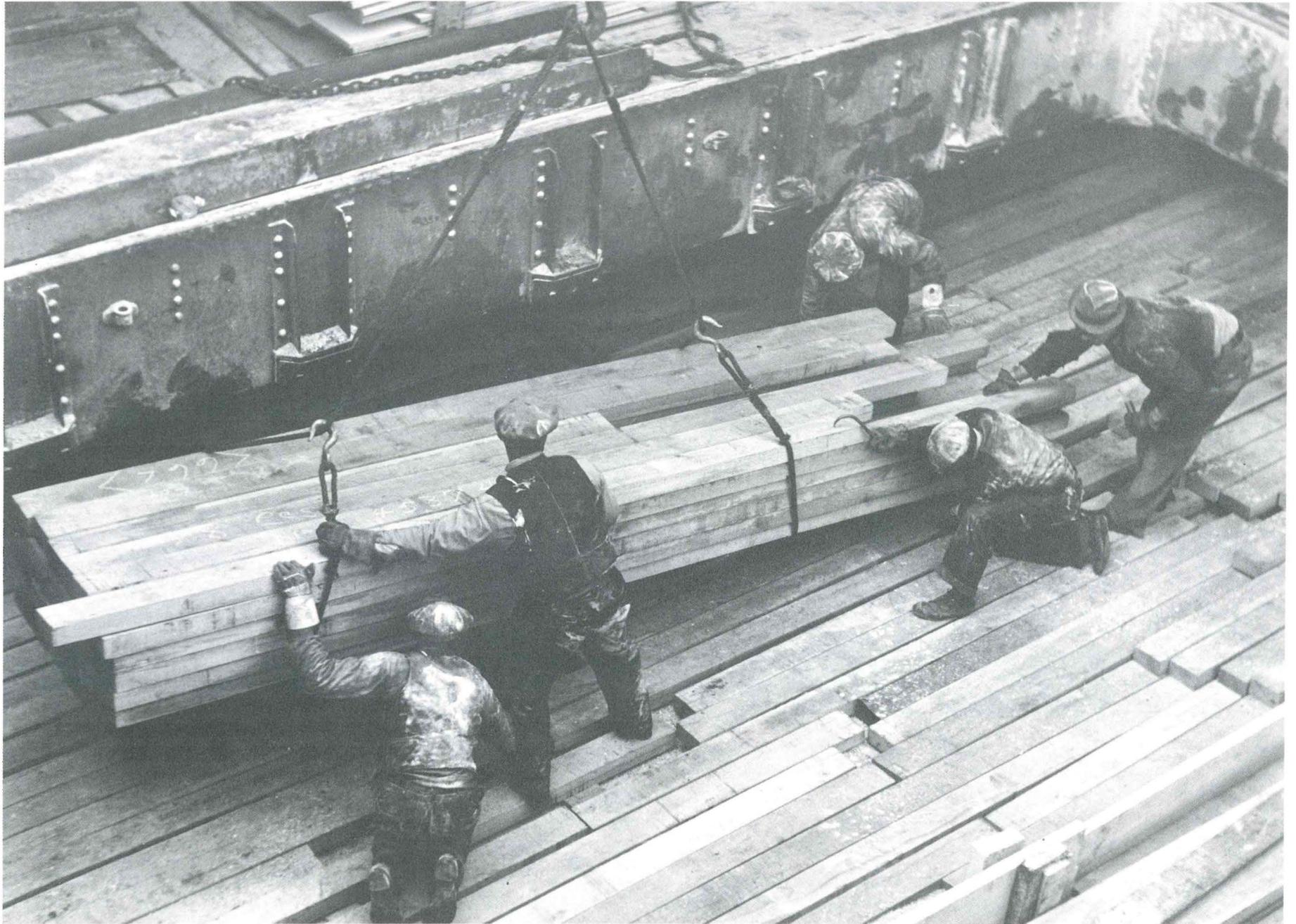
Three ILA locals exist in Savannah, Nos. 1414, 1475, and 2046, but it is Local 1414 that is most identified with western Savannah. Its black membership has worked the docks since 1936 when the local was founded. In fact, Local 1414 carried on a tradition of unionizing black longshoremen that dated from the late nineteenth century.<sup>38</sup> As the "deep sea" local, longshoremen load and unload containers, and secure them on board. Working a ship requires a crew of twenty-two to ninety according to the size of the vessel. Time in port is money lost to the shipper so the longshoremen provide a fast turn-around at the terminal, usually between three to thirty hours.<sup>39</sup>

During the past seventy years, the ILA worked to increase wages of its members and to provide a generous benefit package including medical insurance and pensions. In the words of Timothy Mackey, the Recording Secretary of Local 1414, "Longshoremen have been making good money before making good money was cool."<sup>40</sup>

Often longshoremen lived in western Savannah because of its proximity to the port. With the creation of the Georgia Ports Authority in 1945 and the purchase of a four hundred acre tract fronting the river near Garden City, the



*Fig. 13: At the Garden City Terminal about 1955, longshoremen work to offload cargo. Victor Hugo Bassett Photographs, VM 1700, Folder 7. Courtesy of the Georgia Historical Society.*



*Fig. 14: Victor Hugo Bassett Photographs, VM 1700, Folder 4. Courtesy of the Georgia Historical Society.*



*Fig. 15: The new headquarters is not only the nerve center of the “deep sea” union but also provides a social center for its members.*

*Photograph by the author.*

volume of ship traffic increased. Opening in 1953, the Garden City Terminal had four cargo berths manned by ILA members.

As one of the oldest unions in Savannah, Local 1414 has worked on behalf of its members and promoted solidarity with other unions in the area. As early as 1943, for example, Local 1414 supported the efforts of the Laundry Workers International Union (American Federation of Labor) to recruit employees working at dry cleaners and laundries.<sup>41</sup> In a 1965 strike, a united ILA demonstrated its power by shutting down the port of Savannah in a dispute over benefits with the Georgia Ports Authority. Another challenge occurred in 1989 when non-unionized workers came into the port for the first time. All three locals of the ILA promptly picketed the North Carolina barge company that used non-union labor. More than a half dozen other unions joined the ILA in a march from Forsyth Park to City Hall. With posters and rallying cries of “ILA, All the Way!” a group of nearly a thousand people walked down Bull Street to show their determination to keep the port as a union stronghold.<sup>42</sup>

The current vitality of the ILA can be seen in its new headquarters that opened in 2006 on East Lathrop Avenue.

## SMALL BUSINESSES

If many residents of western Savannah earned their living at the port or in nearby factories, they spent part of their paychecks at neighborhood businesses. Naturally people preferred businesses run by friends or family, but the geographic separation of western Savannah from the rest of the city was another factor that encouraged people to shop at home. To go to City Market or to Broughton Street stores meant a 5 cent ride in the street car in the 1920s or in the 1940s a trip on the bus. Curley Milton remembers as a boy getting a bargain of six pounds of fish at Mathews Seafood Market for twenty-five cents when the store was clearing inventory on Saturday nights.<sup>43</sup> But much of the time it was more convenient to shop nearby. Instead of buying fish at Mathews, for example, Mack Miller’s Market at the corner of East Lathrop and Richards Street offered fresh seafood in the 1950s and 1960s.

Small groceries catered to the needs of residents in the immediate neighborhood. In Hudson Hill, for example, customers in the 1940s could play the juke box at Rufus Wright’s Weldon Street store and shop for supper at the same time.<sup>44</sup> In the West Savannah neighborhood, Mr. Poultry operated a grocery at the strategic corner of Bay and Lathrop Streets, but there was competition on Augusta Avenue with Phillips Grocery and Kolman’s Grocery.<sup>45</sup> In Woodville, Peter Jackson’s two-story grocery on Fair Street was popular in part because of the stature of the man himself. Curley Milton remembered that he was regarded with respect and fondness as the “Bronze Mayor of Woodville.”<sup>46</sup>

Fruit stands conveniently located on main roads specialized in fresh and affordable produce. In the 1940s Sam Grant staked out a promising site on Augusta Avenue. There he sold fresh vegetables, fruit, fish, and newspapers. He was a distributor of the *Savannah Tribune*, the oldest black newspaper in Savannah, and also the *Chicago Defender*, edited by former Savannahian Robert Abbott. The *Defender*, perhaps more than any other African American newspaper at the time, sought to inform its audience about the extent of injustices in a segregated society.<sup>47</sup>

Milton Rahn began his business career in 1954 with a fruit stand on Bay Street called Rahn’s Drive-In Market. He diversified his business to include boiled peanuts, fresh brown eggs, Christmas trees in December, fruit baskets, and fresh sugarcane. He married Betty Smith the next year, and the two of them worked as a team to make the business thrive. The store opened at six in the morning and closed at eleven at night.



*Fig. 16: The Rahn family in June 1956.  
Courtesy of Betty and Milton Rahn.*

Milton Rahn made it a point to sell the best merchandise and to treat his customers fairly.

I wanted to establish my business as one that welcomed everybody. I set personal guidelines for myself and my employees – treat people with respect and sell good products. I pledged that I would wait on people as they came in the store, and not on the basis of skin color.<sup>48</sup>

Small businesses like Milton Rahn’s had a firm niche in the western Savannah market. Arthur Miltiades’ Handy Market Grocery was a Bay Street landmark. As a boy in World War II, Herman Allen remembers taking ration coupons to buy coffee at the Miltiades store.<sup>49</sup> Zipperer’s Grocery at the corner to DeLyon and Love Street had a number of loyal customers in West Savannah, including Floyd Adams Sr. who was fond of the “red-hot sausages” sold there.<sup>50</sup> In 1960,

a modern chain grocery moved into the area that challenged even some of the larger stores. Foodtown was built on Bay Street to take advantage of the busy traffic going back and forth to Garden City, but its location was also convenient to Fellwood Homes just across the street.

The grocery trade was a good business, and customers had their choice of large and small stores nearby. Proprietors were both black and white, which was not surprising in interracial neighborhoods like West Savannah and Hudson Hill. Milton Rahn and Arthur Miltiades were among the white storeowners who operated their business on Hudson Hill and lived in the neighborhood.<sup>51</sup>

Opening a restaurant was another available business opportunity. Berthenia Austin opened “Berthenia’s Grill and Custard Bar” on Augusta Avenue in 1948, and advertised the air-conditioned comfort of her restaurant as well as the fried chicken.

For barbecue, there was longtime favorite Harry Williams’ Piggy’s Bar-be-Que on Augusta Avenue or Wesley Sumter’s Barbecue Pit on Richards Street.<sup>52</sup>



*Fig. 17: The market was a family affair. In June 1956 Milton Rahn’s brother Reginald and his sister Thresia, standing to the right, and his mother Mildred, facing the camera between Milton and Betty, pitched in to help.*

*Courtesy of Betty and Milton Rahn.*

2 Big Free Parking Lots

**FOODTOWN**  
SUPER MARKET

The New  
**Foodtown**  
Is Open  
**1500 Bay St.**

Across from Fellwood Homes

See NEWS and PRESS Ad

Meat and Produce Available At West Broad and Liberty Streets This Week-end

Fig. 18: The Herald, 16 July 1960.  
Courtesy of The Herald.

**DIAMOND DRY CLEANERS**



Quality Service  
Let Us Renew  
The Beauty of Your  
Garments

1024 Augusta Avenue  
1116 East Broad Street  
Dial 2-0692

Fig. 19: The Herald, 11 November 1949  
Courtesy of The Herald.

Baby, It's Cold Inside  
**BERTHENIA'S GRILL**  
AND  
**CUSTARD BAR**

1309 Augusta Avenue  
Phone 4-9253

Air Conditioned  
For Your Comfort

Fried Shrimps  
Fried Chicken  
Beverages of All Kinds  
Motto: "Service With A  
Smile"

Mrs. Berthenia Austin  
Proprietor  
**WE DELIVER**

Fig. 20: The Herald, 17 February 1955.  
Courtesy of The Herald.

Have You Heard!

**WEST SIDE PHARMACY**

Formerly Savannah Pharmacy  
Augusta Ave. Branch

Now Offers Full  
Prescription Service

Compounded by Skilled  
Registered Pharmacists

A Complete Drug Store

Phone 9565—Prompt Delivery  
1307 Augusta Avenue  
Canty and Patrick, Props.

Fig. 21: The Herald, n.d.  
Courtesy of The Herald.

Dry cleaning was a promising venture, so much so that two companies from across the viaduct set up branches in West Savannah. Courtesy Dry Cleaners opened its branch on Ferrill Street in 1952, and a new Diamond Dry Cleaners store was in business on Augusta Avenue.<sup>53</sup> Riteway Dry Cleaners on Eagle Street expanded its operation to include a substation in Woodville, at the corner of Bay and Fair Streets.<sup>54</sup>

The expansion of dry cleaners into western Savannah indicated a strong market but Milton Rahn believed that he could tap that customer base in another way. While on a trip to Florida in the 1950s, he saw a laundromat for the first time. Rahn purchased coin-operated washers and dryers for a Bay Street laundromat, and invited people to use them for free for two days. The laundromat was a great success!<sup>55</sup>

One of the most important businesses to open on Augusta Avenue was a branch of the famous Savannah Pharmacy, the first black-owned drug store in Savannah. For more than twenty years it served West Savannah before pharmacists James Canty and Nathaniel Patrick bought it in the 1950s and reopened it as the West Side Pharmacy.

In many ways, the pharmacy was an anchor for the Augusta Avenue business corridor. Small businesses were at their peak during the 1950s, and that was nowhere more evident than in the 1300 block of Augusta Avenue. Next door to the pharmacy in 1952 was Berthenia's Grill. Across the street was John Mackey's Billiard Parlor, George Jung's Grocery, the Augusta Avenue Cleaners, Duke's Shoe Repair, Oliver Radio and Television Service, Bradshaw Barber Shop, and Russia Confectionary.<sup>56</sup>



Fig. 22: The brick building that housed West Side Pharmacy still stands on Augusta Avenue. Photograph by the author.



Fig. 23: Occupying the strategic corner of West Bay and Stiles (West Lathrop), A&M attracted neighborhood business as well as out-of-town motorists traveling to and from Savannah in the 1930s. Cordray-Foltz Collection, VM 1360, Box 9, Folder 13: A&M Garage, Bay Street. Courtesy of the Georgia Historical Society.

Businesses on the heavy traffic corridor of Bay Street appealed to motorists as well as serving neighborhood needs. Gas stations were common; one of the oldest, J.E. Zealey Service Station, dated from the mid-1930s. At that time Zealey was the only authorized black Gulf gasoline dealer in Savannah. He also did a good business in cigars, groceries, and ice cold beer.<sup>57</sup> By the 1950s, groceries, dry cleaners, and drive-ins alternated with the gas stations, truck stops, and the occasional liquor store. Perhaps the Ray & Tuten Funeral Home in Hudson Hill added a sobering note.<sup>58</sup>

From Jack's Place at the intersection of West Bay Street and East Lathrop to the stores located across from the Alamo Plaza Motel, the variety of small businesses that lined West Bay Street appealed to a large customer base.

Unfortunately western Savannah businesses often became casualties to the positive achievements of integration and the civil rights movement. Black Savannahians throughout the city exercised their rights to shop wherever they chose. Neighborhood businesses that had cultivated an African American clientele lost out to downtown or southside stores. In the same way that West Broad Street (now Martin Luther King Jr. Boulevard) stores, once the jewel of Savannah black-owned businesses, declined in the 1960s and 1970s, western Savannah small businesses could not compete. Richard Shinhoster, who has owned a West Broad Street storefront since 1968, stated, "After integration, the major markets discovered that the African American market was a profitable market. Black businesses were abandoned for the new shopping opportunities available."<sup>59</sup> Also, western Savannah businesses were hit doubly hard because of the flight of white homeowners, a loss of both customers and proprietors.

The impact of this changing business climate was plain to see. Most of the 1952 tenants in the 1300 block of Augusta Avenue were still operating ten years later, although the red brick building that used to house the West Side Pharmacy had been converted to a laundromat. In another ten years, 1972, only Bradshaw Barber Shop and Oliver's Radio & Television Service still remained but six new stores had opened. By 1992, many structures on the 1300 block, both homes and businesses, were vacant; three stores, including Bradshaw Barber Shop, were open.<sup>60</sup>

The ability of small businessmen to adapt to the times is crucial. Herman Allen and Milton Rahn remember a popular man on Hudson Hill named Bob Jack, who operated a coal yard on Bay and Tuten Streets. In the 1940s



Fig. 24: In 1940, West Bay Street streetscape where it crosses East Lathrop was a mixture of businesses and homes.  
 Cordray-Foltz Collection, VM 1360, Box 9, Folder 12: Intersection, West Bay and Lathrop. Courtesy of the Georgia Historical Society.

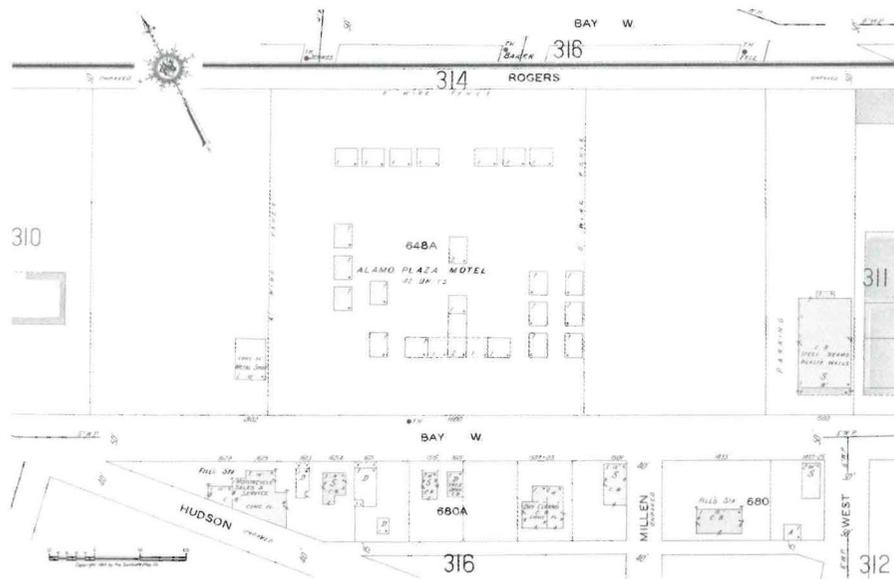


Fig. 25: Among the businesses on the south side of West Bay Street between Fell and Millen Streets in 1954 were Anderson's Service Station (1629), Mahaney Motorcycle Sales (1625), Palmer and Virnedas Confectionary (1515), Marvel Cleaners (1505-1507), and The Chicken Box Restaurant.  
 Savannah, GA: Sanborn Maps, Vol. 3, 1954. Courtesy of the Georgia Historical Society.

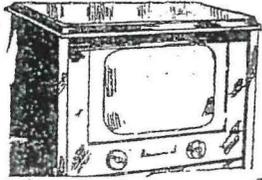
he sold wood and coal for heating, and ice for refrigeration.<sup>61</sup> What had been a good business faded because of forces beyond his control. That was the dilemma facing many small businessmen in West Savannah neighborhoods. As customers began to drive to stores across town, small businesses suffered. As jobs in industry and the railroad began to disappear, people moved away. Although a number of restaurants and beauty shops and laundries and liquor stores found a viable location on Bay Street and other businesses stayed in place, some proprietors gave up their leases and closed.

### WOMEN IN THE WORKPLACE

For the women of the western Savannah area, work had always been a constant in their lives. Raising children and homemaking took priority for many women. Most mothers that Pamela Oglesby recalls from her childhood in West Savannah did not work outside the home. Her mother, Valerie Howard, did not have a job while her four children were small. In the late 1960s, however, when the children were older, she chose to work and found a job at the Mazoll Manufacturing Company making uniforms.<sup>62</sup>

For women who did not have the option of full-time homemaking, the jobs available in the first decades of the twentieth century fell within well-defined categories appropriate for “female labor.” Maids, cooks, and babysitters found

**OLIVER RADIO  
AND TELEVISION  
SERVICE**



**Home of Complete  
Radio and Television  
Service**

**Work Fully Guaranteed  
PICK-UP AND DELIVERED  
SERVICE**

**1346½ Augusta Ave.  
Phone AD 2-5751**

Fig. 26: The Herald, 8 September 1956.  
Courtesy of The Herald.



Fig. 27: Valerie Howard holds her first child, Michael, as she sits on the step at her home on Lincoln Avenue (Brittany Street) in 1948 or 1949.

Courtesy of Pamela Howard-Oglesby.

work in white Savannahians' homes. Ollie Jones worked twenty-two years for one white family, and she remembers that many black women in her West Savannah neighborhood found jobs in service. "You could see a thousand of them in the morning catching a bus to work."<sup>63</sup>

Rather than ride the bus across the viaduct every day, some women chose to join the great migration of Southern blacks north to Chicago, Detroit, New York, or Philadelphia. Advertisements promised young women that a better life awaited them there as maids for well-to-do families.

Other women chose to go into business for themselves. Hucksters were women selling flowers, produce, or seafood, singing out praises of their wares that they carried in a basket on top of their heads. Mae Ola Grant of Fair Street was a huckster who sold vegetables as she walked around the city, but she also kept a stall at City Market where she delivered produce to Morrison's Cafeteria and Mrs. Wilkes' Boarding House.<sup>64</sup> People who lived at the sugar refinery village remember the black women with baskets of oysters or crab poised on their heads arriving early in the morning to sell their seafood.<sup>65</sup>

Although hucksters gradually disappeared in the years after World War II, a more enduring line of work for women was cosmetology. Small

**MAIDS WANTED**

**FOR NEW YORK**

**FINEST LIVE-IN JOBS**

Start \$125 — 180 Monthly — Fare Advanced  
Free Room and Board — Nicest Families

**NEW YORK EMPLOYMENT SERVICE**

4003 Augusta Road Savannah, Ga.  
ADams 6-6924

LARGEST EMPLOYMENT AGENCY  
OF ITS KIND IN THE UNITED STATES

Fig. 28: The Herald, 15 September 1956.  
Courtesy of The Herald.

beauty salons were common in western Savannah, where customers might use a favorite beautician for years. Sadie Milton Howard had that kind of loyal clientele. "Everybody in Woodville went to Mrs. Howard to get their hair done," recalls Berneta Mackey. Sadie Howard graduated from the Madame Cargo School of Beauty, one of the best known in Savannah.<sup>66</sup> In 1957, Virgie Smith, a Woodville High School graduate returning from New York, proudly announced the opening of the "House of Virgie" on Exley Street where "Smith's Superior Beauty Preparations" were available.<sup>67</sup> For women who wanted their own business, a beauty salon was an attractive option.

Women took salaried jobs in many different fields. Evelyn Daniels taught kindergarten at Saint Anthony's School, following in the footsteps of her mother Eugenia Haig Daniels.<sup>68</sup> Gwen Goodman and Catherine Milton Jackson were teachers who became principals at Savannah schools. Pamela Howard-Oglesby worked as a mortician. Some women cooked in restaurants or at the cafeteria at Union Camp, while others chose to work in retail.



*Fig. 29: Ollie Jones stays connected to friends and family by phone at her Cope Street home.*

Savannah Morning News, 28 August 2005. Courtesy of the Savannah Morning News.

One of the most remarkable women who served western Savannah families for five decades was midwife Anna Duncan. Born in 1876, she began the practice of midwifery at the age of twenty and spent over forty years helping women in childbirth.

She was, in the words of Ernestine Manigault, “the old faithful midwife.” She delivered Ollie Jones’ two daughters, and probably “thousands” more, according to Mrs. Manigault.<sup>69</sup> Because she lived in the Mutual Quarters, near to the location of Clearview today, she was well known in West Savannah and Hudson Hill and close enough to attend a birth on short notice.

By the 1930s the City of Savannah Health Department regulated the practice of midwifery to ensure safe deliveries. Each month Anna Duncan and other African American midwives attended classes which were mandatory in order



*Fig. 30: In 1938, when this photograph was taken, Anna Duncan was one of the longest-serving midwives in Chatham County with forty-two years experience.*

Victor Hugo Bassett Photographers, VM 55, Folder 2. Courtesy of the Georgia Historical Society.



*Fig. 31: At this midwifery class in 1938, Anna Duncan was the senior member with forty-two years in service. Another West Savannah midwife attending the class was Katie Gibbs of Scarborough Street. Front row, from left to right, Maggie Whitfield, Mary Lou Irving, Sara Mars, Amelia Hargroves, Janie Fields. Second row, Georgia Barrow, Anna Duncan, Ida Collins, Mattie Cuyler, Lucy King, and Katie Gibbs.*

Savannah Health Center, VM 1478, Box 1, Scrapbook. Courtesy of the Georgia Historical Society.

to renew their licenses each year. Each carried her own obstetrical bag packed with the necessary instruments.

## CONCLUSION

Work was the magnet that brought families to western Savannah. For many decades, manufacturing jobs and railroad work were the bedrock of the western Savannah economy. These jobs supported a customer base for the small businesses that expanded along Augusta Avenue and Bay Street. When the bedrock weakened in the 1970s and crumbled in the 1990s with layoffs and downsizing, the economic health of the community suffered. In 2000, 9.3 percent of Woodville residents were out of work. Hudson Hill's rate of unemployment stood at 9.9 percent and the West Savannah neighborhood registered 14.9 percent.<sup>70</sup> With fewer jobs available, working-age residents, especially young adults, left the area. Their absence meant fewer customers for small businesses and fewer homeowners. The community needs jobs for these core workers to restore economic life to western Savannah.

## FOOTNOTES

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- <sup>2</sup> SMN, 2 September 1911; Mayor Floyd Adams Jr., WSDP-OH; Kenneth Dunham, WSDP-OH; Curley Milton, WSDP-OH.
- <sup>3</sup> Conversations with Betty and Milton Rahn.
- <sup>4</sup> Manigault, "Memories of West Savannah," 1, WSDP.
- <sup>5</sup> Benjamin Oxnard Jr., "The Savannah Refinery – My Recollections of the Early Days," Ch. 6, 4, WSDP; Arthur Gordon, *How Sweet It Is: The Story of Dixie Crystals and Savannah Foods* (n.p., 1992), 8.
- <sup>6</sup> W. Craig McClelland, "Union Camp Corporation: A Legacy of Leadership" (New York: The Newcomen Society of the United States, 1995), 17, Georgia Room Clipping File "Union Camp," Bull Street Library, LOPL; <http://www.savannahnow.com/stories/042802/LOCIPfacts.shtml>.
- <sup>7</sup> *Right Way Magazine* (May 1943): 6, 1362CL, Box 5, Folder 11, GHS.
- <sup>8</sup> *Right Way Magazine* (December 1937): 9, 1362CL, Box 4, Folder 9, GHS.
- <sup>9</sup> Ibid.; *Right Way Magazine* (July 1948): 17, 1362CL, Box 6, Folder 11; SH, 17 February 1955, 3.
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- <sup>12</sup> SMN, 28 May 1992.
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- <sup>14</sup> SMN, 30 January 1968.
- <sup>15</sup> SH, 22 February 1951, 1.
- <sup>16</sup> *Right Way Magazine* (September 1925): 35, 1362CL, Box 1, Folder 15, GHS.

- <sup>17</sup> *Right Way Magazine* (July 1926): 47, 1362CL, Box 1A, Folder 20, GHS; (September 1926): 42, 1362CL, Box 1A, Folder 21, GHS.
- <sup>18</sup> *Right Way Magazine* (September 1927): 32, 1362CL, Box 2, Folder 2, GHS.
- <sup>19</sup> *Right Way Magazine* (September 1928): 42, 1362CL, Box 2, Folder 6, GHS.
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- <sup>22</sup> SMN, 7 July 2002.
- <sup>23</sup> Ibid.; Frederick Baldwin Interviews: George Sawyer, Side 1: 4-5, TMA.
- <sup>24</sup> Frederick Baldwin Interviews: James Middleton Sr., 1, TMA.
- <sup>25</sup> SH, 3 April 1952.
- <sup>26</sup> Frederick Baldwin Interviews: George Sawyer, Side 1: 2, 4-5, TMA.
- <sup>27</sup> Frederick Baldwin Interviews: James Middleton Sr., 9-11, TMA.
- <sup>28</sup> SH, 6 April 1957, 1.
- <sup>29</sup> SMN, 7 July 2002.
- <sup>30</sup> Jackson McQuigg, Tammy Galloway, and Scott McIntosh, *Central of Georgia Railway* (Charleston, SC: Arcadia, 2004), 8.
- <sup>31</sup> Curley Milton, WSDP-OH.
- <sup>32</sup> Gordon, *How Sweet It Is*, 26, 39.
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- <sup>34</sup> "Savannah Sugar Refining Corporation – Marketing and Growth Profile of a Successful Southern Organization," *Savannah Magazine* (January 1970), Georgia Room Clipping File "Savannah – Business and Industry – Sugar," Bull Street Library, LOPL.
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- <sup>37</sup> SMN, 25 June 2006, 5D.
- <sup>38</sup> Conversation with Timothy Mackey, 2006; Stephen G. N. Tuck, *Beyond Atlanta: The Struggle for Racial Equality in Georgia, 1940-1980* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2001), 34; Donald L. Grant, *The Way It Was in the South: The Black Experience in Georgia*, ed. Jonathan Grant (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1993), 278.
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- <sup>40</sup> Conversation with Timothy Mackey, 2006.
- <sup>41</sup> ST, 2 September 1943.
- <sup>42</sup> SEP, 29 March 1989, 1; 24 April 1989.
- <sup>43</sup> Manigault, "Memories of West Savannah," 1. WSDP; Curley Milton, WSDP-OH.
- <sup>44</sup> Herman Allen, WSDP-OH.
- <sup>45</sup> Ollie Jones, WSDP-OH, Mayor Floyd Adams Jr., WSDP-OH; SH, 6 January 1949.
- <sup>46</sup> Curley Milton, WSDP-OH.
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- <sup>48</sup> Milton Rahn, WSDP-OH.
- <sup>49</sup> Herman Allen, WSDP-OH.
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- <sup>54</sup> SH, 6 November 1952.
- <sup>55</sup> Milton Rahn, WSDP-OH.
- <sup>56</sup> *Polk's Savannah City Directory, 1952* (Richmond, VA: R. L. Polk & Company), 58-59.
- <sup>57</sup> Kermit Smalls, ed. *Yearbook of Colored Savannah* (Savannah: Savannah Tribune Presses, 1934), 26. Rare Book Collection, GHS.
- <sup>58</sup> *Polk's Savannah City Directory 1952*, 64.
- <sup>59</sup> SMN, 19 February 2006, 8A.
- <sup>60</sup> *Polk's Savannah City Directory 1962* (Richmond, VA: R. L. Polk & Company, 1962), 87; *Polk's Savannah City Directory 1972* (Richmond, VA: R. L. Polk & Company, 1972), 82; *Polk 1992 Savannah City Directory* (Richmond, VA: R. L. Polk & Company, 1992), 58.
- <sup>61</sup> Herman Allen, WSDP-OH; Milton Rahn, WSDP-OH.

<sup>62</sup> Pamela Howard-Oglesby, WSDP-OH.

<sup>63</sup> SMN, 28 August 2005, 1E; Ollie Jones, WSDP-OH.

<sup>64</sup> Berneta Mackey, WSDP-OH.

<sup>65</sup> Gordon, *How Sweet It Is*, 18.

<sup>66</sup> Berneta Mackey, WSDP-OH; Curley Milton, WSDP-OH.

<sup>67</sup> SH, 9 February 1957, 8.

<sup>68</sup> Evelyn Daniels, WSDP-OH.

<sup>69</sup> Ollie Jones, WSDP-OH; Manigault, “Memories of West Savannah,” 3, WSDP.

<sup>70</sup> Demographic Profiles of Hudson Hill, West Savannah, and Woodville neighborhoods, City of Savannah Community Planning and Development Department, Bureau of Public Development, based on figures from the 2000 Census. Because census tracts and neighborhood boundaries do not exactly coincide, these figures should be considered as estimates.



# HOUSING

*25 Moore Street, 1955.*

*Woodville Real Estate File. Courtesy of  
Savannah-Chatham County Public Schools.*

**THE ONLY HOME** that Curley Milton can remember is 120 King Street in Woodville. He was born in 1914 around the corner on Alfred Street and his family moved to the house on King Street when he was only a few months old. All the happy and sad events of a lifetime have occurred in this house. His father died lying on a little bed in the living room when Curley was fifteen. In 1935, he married his beloved Lorine on the front porch. There they raised their children, Catherine and William, and the house grew with the family. Curley rebuilt the house himself, adding on a new kitchen and bedroom to the original two-room structure, and he installed indoor plumbing. Another wedding took place on the front porch when William married and another death occurred when Lorine chose to stay at home during her last illness. Curley Milton continues to live there and not a day goes by without his children, grandchildren, or great-grandchildren stopping by the house on King Street to see him.<sup>1</sup>

Not many people can call the same building home for over ninety years. A home shelters a family and holds its history but on a practical level it must provide the necessary space, safety, and conveniences. In western Savannah neighborhoods, housing can take the form of a free-standing structure, a duplex, row house, or apartment. Housing design, whether elaborate or



*Fig. 1: 120 King Street.  
Photograph by Lily Keber.*

simple, new or old, makes an architectural statement. From nineteenth century subdivisions to twenty-first century redevelopment plans, housing determines to a great extent the quality of neighborhood life.

## SETTLEMENT AND SUBDIVISIONS

The first major real estate development in these neighborhoods occurred in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries as property in western Savannah was bought and subdivided into lots. When the Fellwood Tract went on sale, the *Savannah Tribune* applauded the expansion on the westside in these words in 1909:

Lots are being sold there every day. A few beautiful homes have been erected by colored men, who are being moved by the praiseworthy ambition of having their 'own sweet home.' Soon a nice colony of good colored citizens will be established on that beautiful healthy spot where peace and happiness reign supreme. Near enough to the city for the working man, Fellwood Tract is an ideal spot for our children, who will be sheltered from the evil influences of the city and at the same time get all the advantages of the city children.<sup>2</sup>

These advantages had been recognized long before. An 1874 survey showed that land had already been cleared and homes built and occupied on the eastern edges of what is today West Savannah and Hudson Hill.<sup>3</sup> Woodville was already a subdivided tract by 1871, with lots sold by the largest property owner Charles J. Hull of Chicago. He donated one of those lots to the Board of Education in 1873 for the construction of "a good substantial building for school purposes" – the first Woodville School.<sup>4</sup> A number of small landholders invested in Woodville as well. Among them was Peter Jackson, an African American storeowner and one of the most respected citizens in Woodville.<sup>5</sup> In 1916, the Brampton Warehouse and Development Company purchased all or parts of thirty-seven lots in Woodville and four months after the sale resold the right-of-way on those lots to Chatham Terminal Company. The impact of that sale is plain to see even today; the railroad tracks that slice through the neighborhood from Bay Street towards Louisville Road still occupy that right-of-way.<sup>6</sup>

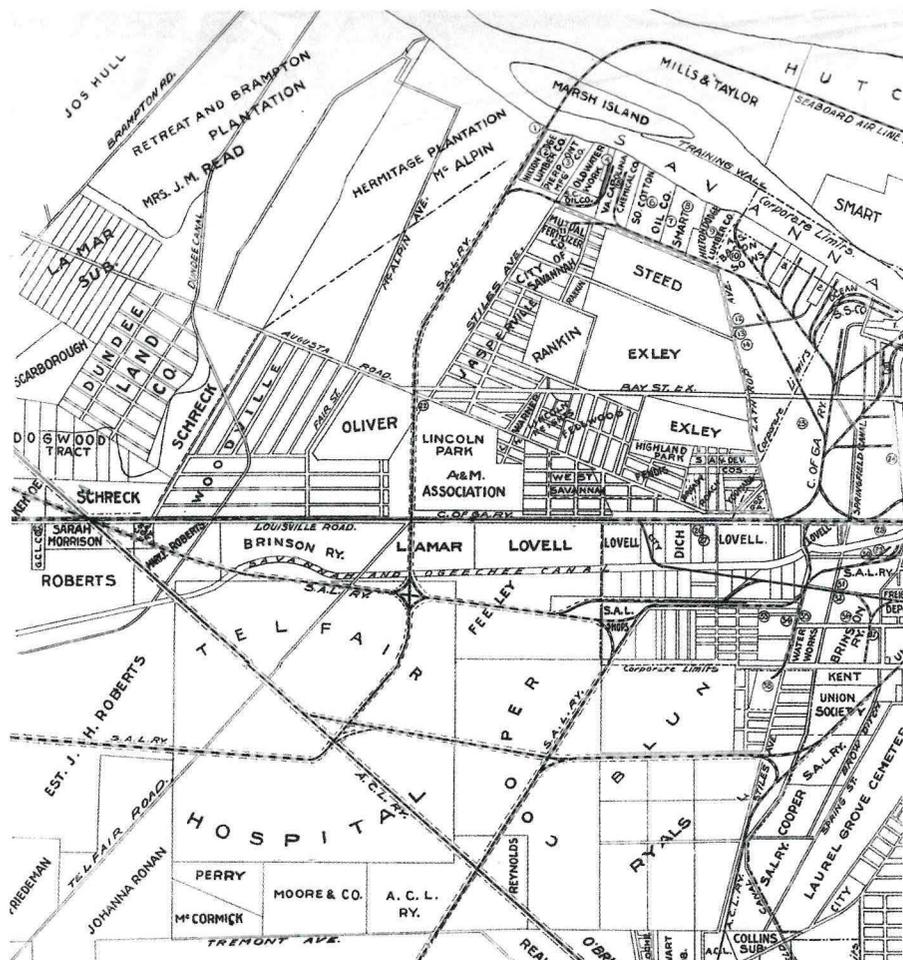


Fig. 2: This portion of a 1910 map shows the subdivisions named and platted in Woodville, Hudson Hill, and West Savannah.

Houston Map of Savannah, 1910, H62. Courtesy of Hargrett Rare Book & Manuscripts Library, University of Georgia Libraries.

In 1890, the Jasperville Land Settlement Company offered lots for sale on the western side of Hudson Hill. Jasperville, as defined by the company, consisted of a tract bounded by Rankin Street on the north, West Lathrop on the west, Hudson Street on the south, and Tuten Street to the east. Many of the streets identified in 1890 still bear the same names – Fox, Krenson, Weldon, and Mell. The advantages promoted by the company were its location near

the riverfront industries and wharves, its high ground and good drainage. Prospective buyers were assured that very soon Jasperville would be occupied by “pretty and attractive homes.”<sup>7</sup>

By 1916, Smart, Bird, Damon, Walnut (later renamed Jay), and Exley (Rogers) Streets existed in Hudson Hill, but the streets were usually only one block long. Duplexes clustered on Smart, Walnut, and Exley Streets in particular. Settlement on the western and eastern fringes of Hudson Hill left empty land in the center. This interior tract was owned by William L. Exley and was vacant well into the 1930s.<sup>8</sup> As a result, parts of Hudson Hill developed considerably later than either West Savannah or Woodville.

Large tracts north of Augusta Road in West Savannah remained mostly vacant until the 1920s and sparsely settled even in the 1930s, while homeowners bought lots south of Augusta Road much earlier. In 1901, for example, two owners sold lots at public auction within three weeks’ time. The Roach Tract, near the junction of Augusta and Louisville Roads, put up lots on A (renamed Ferrill) Street and B (Scarborough) Street for \$20 cash and \$5 per month, without disclosing in the advertising the total cost of an individual property.<sup>9</sup>

A more substantial sale auctioned lots and six two-story homes located on 1st (renamed Newcastle), 2nd (Chester), and 3rd

**THE**  
**Great “Intersection” Sale**  
of  
**69 LOTS**

Takes place at 3:30 p. m. this day,  
9th inst. Take the West End Trolley  
Cars.

**Terms, Only \$20 Down,  
Only \$5 Per Month,  
Only Six per Cent. Interest.**

Remember, these are very large  
lots, and are sure to be sold.

**C. H. DORSETT, Auctioneer.**

---

AUCTION SALES FUTURE DAYS.  
**ADMINISTRATOR’S SALE**

Fig. 3: The auctioneer understood the strategic location of the Roach Tract and offered it to buyers in the “Great Intersection” Sale.

Savannah Morning News, 9 April 1901. Courtesy of the Savannah Morning News.



*Fig. 4: From this view looking east on Louisville Road, a streetcar in 1931 prepares to turn onto the highway.  
Cordray-Foltz Collection, VM 1360, Box 28, Folder 20. Courtesy of the Georgia Historical Society.*



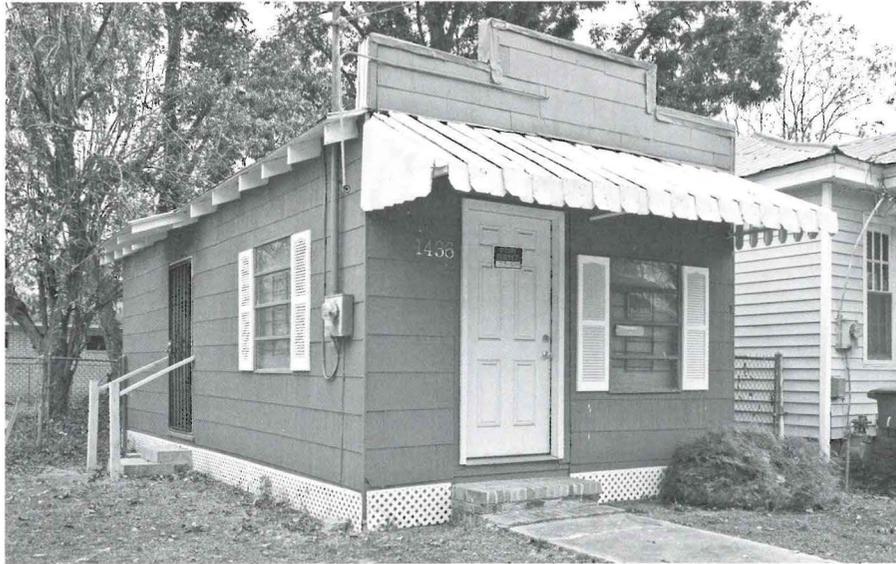
*Fig. 5: Louisville Road as it appeared in 2007.  
Photograph by Colin Douglas Gray.*

(Stratford) Avenues where they intersect Alexander, Cecil (Fell), and McIntyre Streets. Two-story free-standing houses were a real draw, when much of the new construction in the area consisted of duplexes. The houses were priced at \$200 down, \$15 per month. Lots, on the other hand, went for a \$25 down payment and \$10 monthly with 6 percent interest. In the promoter's words, this sale was "the best opportunity ever offered parties of limited means to secure a home or lot...on easy terms."<sup>10</sup>

### STREETCARS

The importance of transportation was not lost on the auctioneers at the 1st Street sale. They chartered streetcars to carry prospective buyers to West Savannah at no charge.<sup>11</sup> What these savvy promoters understood was that good transportation was critical for the settlement of western Savannah neighborhoods. Many new homeowners came to the area specifically because industrial jobs on the riverfront were within walking or bicycling distance.

Nonetheless, transportation to downtown Savannah on the east and the Savannah Sugar Refinery to the west was essential if these neighborhoods were to grow. Fortunately electric railways, or streetcars, served the area as early as the 1890s. The Suburban and West End Railway, incorporated in 1890, operated on Augusta Road and Louisville Road with stops at Jasper Spring, the Ten Broeck Race Course, and Lincoln Park.<sup>12</sup> The Mill Haven line connected the westside and the industrial plants on the river to downtown by 1907 with a route on West Bay Street; the circuit continued around Hudson Hill and back to Bay Street.<sup>13</sup> The Port Wentworth Street Car traveled Augusta Road to pick up sugar refinery workers and even served as a school bus in the 1920s and 1930s to deliver African American students to Woodville School when the black Port Wentworth school closed.<sup>14</sup> Even the Savannah, Thunderbolt, and Isle of Hope Electric Railway was known to travel on Augusta Road and 1st Street.<sup>15</sup>



*Fig. 6: This shotgun house at 1436 Augusta Avenue illustrates the simple lines and construction that made this residential style popular. Additions sometimes disguise a shotgun, but in Fig. 7 the hipped roof indicates the original narrow width of the house. Photograph by Colin Douglas Gray.*



*Fig. 7: 1438 Church Street. Photograph by Colin Douglas Gray.*



*Fig. 8: 7 Lathrop Avenue, as it appeared in the summer of 1934. Cordray-Foltz Collection, VM 1360, Box 12, Folder 10. Courtesy of the Georgia Historical Collection.*

## ARCHITECTURAL STYLES

With jobs available, transportation accessible, and lots reasonably-priced, workers began to migrate to western Savannah. Early homes in western Savannah tended to be modest, one-story structures which reflected several different building styles popular at that time. Shotgun houses were among the most common. One room wide, one or more rooms deep, the shotgun has no hallway so rooms lined up one behind the other. A gable usually fronted the home. The narrow shotgun style suited the West Savannah neighborhood in particular because of the thirty foot-width of many lots.<sup>16</sup>

The Craftsman style became one of the architectural standards throughout western Savannah. The early twentieth century Craftsman house was a one-story structure with trademark exposed rafters, overhanging eaves, and a front porch that spanned the width of the house. Square columns, usually anchored in brick piers, supported the roof over the porch.<sup>17</sup> In this 1934 photograph of a home on Lathrop Avenue (Fig. 8), the prominent gable over the wide porch dominates, but the tapered columns, visible rafters, and roof braces on the gable are clearly Craftsman characteristics.<sup>18</sup>

## Architecture on the Westside



*Fig. 9: 21 Moore Street, as seen in this 1955 photograph. Woodville Real Estate File. Courtesy of the Savannah-Chatham County Public Schools.*



*Fig. 10: 305 Tuten Street. Photograph by Colin Douglas Gray.*



*Fig. 11: 2215 Augusta Avenue. Photograph by Colin Douglas Gray.*



*Fig. 12: Ed Jinks stood in front of his Prairie style home at 1018 Demmond Street in 1946. The intricate woodwork seen in the railings on the porches is some of the finest seen in western Savannah.*

*Cordray-Foltz Collection, VM 1360, Box 11, Folder 11. Courtesy of the Georgia Historical Society.*



*Fig. 13: 1629 Stratford Street.  
Photograph by Colin Douglas Gray.*



*Fig. 15 : This home at 1701 Stratford Street is a magnificent example of the foursquare style in the western Savannah area.  
Photograph by Colin Douglas Gray.*



*Fig. 14: Brick trim accents the windows on this concrete block bungalow at 120 Jenks Street.  
Photograph by Colin Douglas Gray.*



*Fig. 16: These row houses on Cumming Street are an attractive residential gateway off Augusta Avenue.  
Photograph by Colin Douglas Gray.*

A Woodville home on Moore Street (Fig. 9) features a partial-width covered porch, a common variation of the Craftsman style. A metal roof protected this spacious six-room frame structure. In a Hudson Hill home (Fig. 10), the partial-width covered porch has been enclosed. The massive tapered porch posts found at 2215 Augusta Avenue (Fig. 11) illustrate yet another variation of the Craftsman house.

Fig. 12 illustrates a Prairie style house on Demmond Street with Craftsman overtones. The low-hipped roof, porches separate from the main body of the house, and boxed rafters identify the Prairie origins of this structure.<sup>19</sup> However, it also incorporates Craftsman characteristics, such as the square porch posts and one-story design.

The bungalow style, with its origins in India, was also well suited to Savannah's warm weather climate because of the use of porches sheltered by the wide overhanging roof. Tapered porch posts elevated on brick piers resemble those of the Craftsman style.<sup>20</sup> A number of examples of this style can be found in western Savannah neighborhoods.

Other architectural styles that are found less commonly in the West Savannah neighborhood are the Italianate and American Foursquare styles. Houses designed in these styles stand out because they are two-story homes unlike the majority of one-story structures. The Italianate style can be quite elaborate with decorative brackets visible under eaves and eye-catching crowns over the tall, narrow windows.

One of the more elaborate designs in the western Savannah area is an Italianate townhouse at 1629 Stratford Street (Fig. 14). Since most townhouses in this style have flat fronts, the two-story bay windows are striking. Because the upper

story is narrower than the lower floor, the upstairs bay window is even more prominent. The Italianate brackets are found under the eaves, but this house also has a "side hall," or porch. The addition of a side hall to an Italianate home is a feature found primarily in Savannah and Charleston.<sup>21</sup> The Italianate style was popular between 1850 and 1880 but the Chester Street and Stratford Street townhouses proved some attachment to the style long after it was in vogue.

American Foursquare consists of four equally-sized rooms on each floor. Set off the ground on a raised basement, the two stories rise to an impressive height. From ground level, steps lead to a porch that fronts the entire width of the first floor.

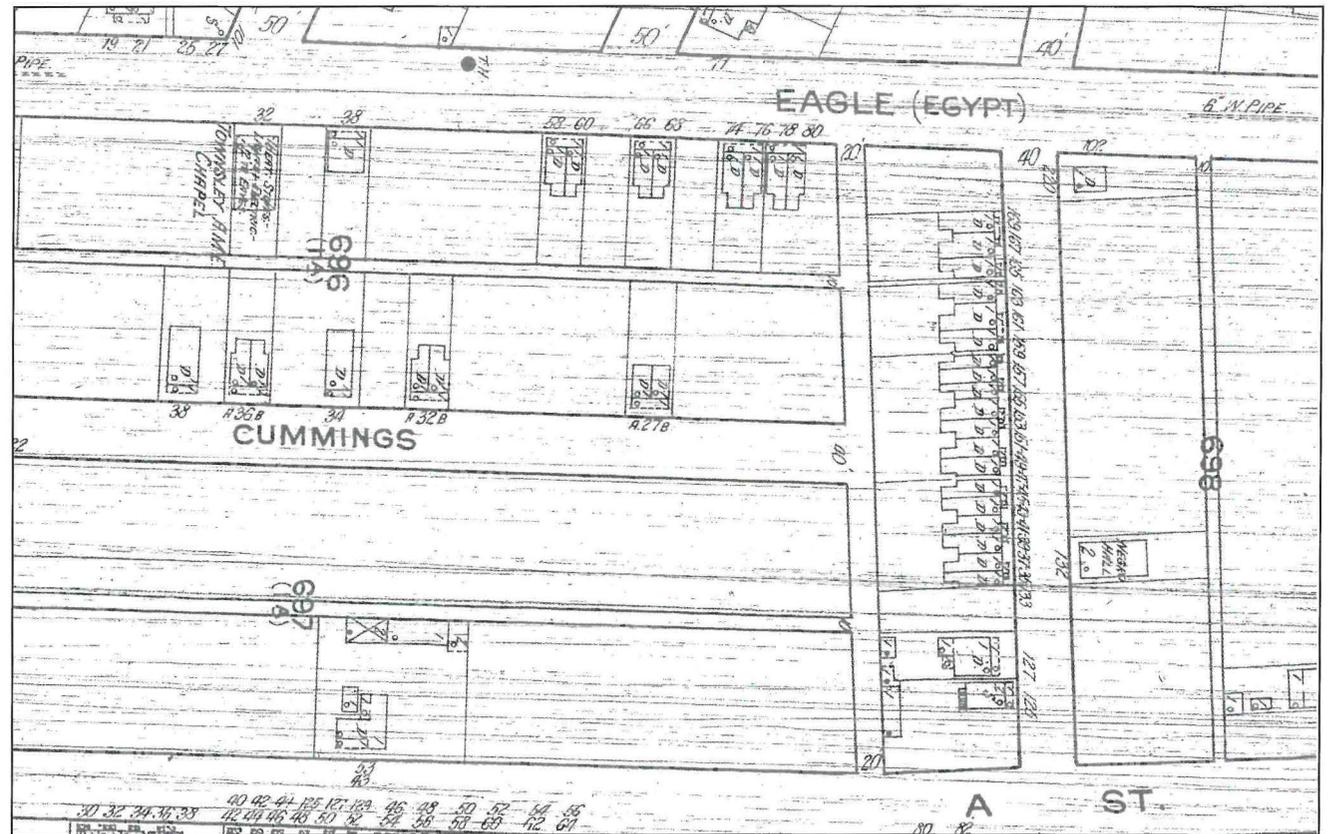


Fig. 17: Although there was much unoccupied land in the West Savannah neighborhood in 1916, small attached housing units were common. The "D" noted on the map stands for "dwelling."

"Sanborn Insurance Maps of Savannah, Georgia, 1916." Courtesy of the Georgia Historical Society.



*Fig. 18: From a Hudson Hill vantage point, the five percent grade of the viaduct is clear. The viaduct at its highest point was thirty-five feet high. Cordray-Foltz Collection, VM 1360, Box 9, Folder 13. Courtesy of the Georgia Historical Society.*

American Foursquare buildings are rare in the West Savannah area. The few examples found probably date from the period between 1915 and 1930 when the style was popular in suburban or rural areas.<sup>22</sup>

Single-family homes in the West Savannah area built during the first half of the twentieth century tended to be small, one-story structures. At first they were constructed of wood, both in framing and siding. But concrete block and cinderblock became viable alternatives for home construction by the 1940s. Sometimes a brick veneer is used over cinderblock, but generally the original blocks are visible.<sup>23</sup>

Although the majority of residences were single family structures, duplexes and row houses existed since the early twentieth century. Duplexes were the usual form of attached houses but in West Savannah both duplexes and row houses could be found.

The map on page 34 dates from 1916 and clearly shows how common duplexes were on Eagle and Cumming Streets, and how row houses lined A (now Ferrill) Street. Row houses also ran on the south side of York Street, on what is today Love Street.<sup>24</sup>

Newly renovated row houses stand near the intersection of Augusta Avenue and Cumming Street today, one of the few examples left of row houses in the West Savannah area.

Duplexes in recent years have been used as infill housing, but many of the older duplexes still stand. According to the 1990 and 2000 censuses, duplexes made up roughly 10 percent of housing in the West Savannah neighborhood but on Hudson Hill nearly 19 percent of all housing were duplexes in the year 2000. One of the more interesting older duplexes in the Hudson Hill neighborhood is an example of hall-and-parlor style, an architectural design that dates back to colonial times.<sup>25</sup>

### AUGUSTA AVENUE, BAY STREET, AND THE VIADUCT

The skeleton of western Savannah consists of its major roads and thoroughfares. The importance of Augusta Road, later Augusta Avenue, cannot be exaggerated. In colonial times, it linked Savannah with the Salzburger town of Ebenzer and Augusta, roughly one hundred miles to the northwest. The traffic and trade between these cities and points in between made the Augusta Road a

critical artery. The road also attracted many of the first settlers and investors to West Savannah and Woodville.

While historic Augusta Road was the traditional gateway to West Savannah, Bay Street Extension was a latecomer. There was no need for Bay Street to continue westward during the eighteenth century and much of the nineteenth. At first, the Vale Royal plantation lay in the path of the road and, more specifically, so did Joseph Clay's house. Further west was Musgrove Creek, and by the 1830s there was the Savannah-Ogeechee Canal. All of these discouraged any extension of the road. It was the growing river traffic and waterfront industry that provided the incentive to push Bay Street westward. By 1916, new construction pushed it past Hudson Hill to its junction with Augusta Road.<sup>26</sup>

With more and more railroad tracks laid to wharves and industry, a major renovation of Bay Street was needed by the 1920s. In a joint venture, the Central of Georgia and the City of Savannah built a 2,780 foot concrete viaduct that spanned the congested network of track. When the Bay Street Viaduct opened February 15, 1928, only a brief ceremony marked the occasion, but newspaper coverage delighted in reporting that "the first paddy-wagon to cross the viaduct transported" a man arrested for loitering at Lathrop and Bay Street.<sup>27</sup>

The viaduct that had been such a marvel in 1928 could not handle the volume of modern traffic. By 1947, the viaduct was considered the "worst bottleneck on US 17," because its two lanes could not absorb the 25,000 vehicles that crossed it every day without traffic snarls.<sup>28</sup> The addition of a reversible lane designed to change with the flow of rush hour was a remedy put into effect in 1956. However, the three lanes operating on the viaduct were each a narrow ten feet wide. Even the reversible lane could not keep pace with the flow of traffic that continued to grow in the 1960s and 1970s. Cars were also more prone to collide in the narrow lanes.<sup>29</sup> Finally, the Georgia Department of Transportation determined that the viaduct needed to be rebuilt. A much higher five-lane viaduct opened in 1995. In 2006, the Bay Street Viaduct was renamed as the Dorothy B. Pelote Viaduct in honor of her service as a representative in the Georgia Assembly.

### PLUMBING, PAVING, AND GARDENS

Benjamin West remembers when Chatham Home builders constructed his Church Street home in 1954. "I told the builder I wanted a five-room house.



*Fig. 19: Companies like Blue Star were essential for heat and refrigeration before mid-century. William Anderson of Demmond Street ran a coal, wood, and ice business, as did Bob Jack on Tuten Street. Frank Blandshaw sold wood from his Love Street home.*

*Savannah Tribune, 1936. Courtesy of the Savannah Tribune.*

The standard in those days was a four-room house.<sup>30</sup> More and more homeowners in western Savannah followed Benjamin West's example, buying larger homes or adding on to existing houses after 1950. Thirty years later, more homeowners had five-room homes in the West Savannah area than any other size. According to the 2000 census, the Hudson Hill neighborhood led the area in larger homes, with five to seven rooms per dwelling.<sup>31</sup>

As homes grew larger, they also came equipped with more conveniences. Electricity replaced kerosene lamps for lighting. The wood stove in the kitchen and the coal used for home heating gave way to gas during the 1950s.

Ollie Jones remembers as a child walking by the railroad tracks to pick up stray lumps of coal that had fallen from the train. "My daddy got up every morning at 5 a.m. to start the fire and warm the house," she recalls. Today the four fireplaces in Ollie Jones' Cope Street house have long been covered over, no longer needed for heat.<sup>32</sup>

Modern plumbing was slower to come to western Savannah. In 1960, less than a third of homes on Hudson Hill and in the West Savannah neighborhood had running water, indoor toilets, and sewer access.<sup>33</sup> Often the transition to modern plumbing came about in stages. Ernestine Manigault remembered when outhouses were placed at the far end of the back yard. City workers emptied them once a month. The first flush toilets, ("what a blessing," in the words of Mrs. Manigault), were still located in the back yard but somewhat closer to the house. Finally, with hot and cold running water installed indoors, toilets were moved inside the home.<sup>34</sup> By 1970, most homes on Hudson Hill and in the West Savannah neighborhood had indoor plumbing, but for Woodville it was 1980 before the great majority of homes had both running water and sewer access.<sup>35</sup>

Paved streets and sidewalks appeared slowly and sporadically. Evelyn Daniels' family moved to their Weldon Street home on Hudson Hill in 1938. She remembers vividly walking dirt roads to Bay Street on her way to attend mass at Saint Anthony of Padua.<sup>36</sup> Even after the City of Savannah annexed the West Savannah neighborhood and Hudson Hill in 1939, there were some dirt streets left unpaved until the early 1980s.<sup>37</sup> For residents in Woodville, paving streets continued in 1982.<sup>38</sup> Parents with children attending Moses Jackson Elementary School petitioned the Board of Education to build a sidewalk surrounding the school so that the children would not get their feet wet walking to school. When the sidewalk was finished in the spring of 1968, second-grader Eleanor Osborne wrote a poetic thank-you note:

Dear Board of Education,  
It was nice of you to pave a sidewalk. You really are grand! It's much nicer to walk on a sidewalk than to walk in mud and sand.

Sincerely yours,  
Eleanor Osborne, Second Grader<sup>39</sup>



*Fig. 20: Michael Howard checked out his family's corn crop growing at his Lincoln Avenue (Brittany Street) home. His stroller was made by his father, Elmer Howard Sr.*

*Courtesy of Pamela Howard-Oglesby.*

Completing the infrastructure of paved roads and utilities brought these neighborhoods physically into city life. In the early part of the twentieth century when houses were scattered, this area was largely rural. Had it not been for the church and school building, Saint Anthony of Padua might have been mistaken for a farm. The priests in the early twentieth century raised one hundred white leghorn chickens and maintained an orchard and vineyard. Even one or two cows grazed nearby.<sup>40</sup> Part of this rural lifestyle continued with gardening. "On Hudson Hill everyone had a little garden," remembers Herman Allen. Vegetables like corn, tomatoes, greens, peas, beans and potatoes were popular to plant and to can. Even families with small yards could find some space for a garden or just plant on the nearest vacant lot. There were even some hog pens and chicken coops to be found on Hudson Hill and Woodville.<sup>41</sup> The gardens that were still common in the 1950s became fewer and fewer with time, and that link with a slower-paced past faded.



*Fig. 21: This bean garden grew in the backyard of 116 Gilbert Street in Woodville in the 1950s.*

*Woodville Real Estate Files. Courtesy of Savannah-Chatham County Public Schools.*

## NEIGHBORHOOD COMPARISONS

In comparing neighborhoods, West Savannah and Woodville were the first to be significantly settled and, as a result, both have older homes. Over 50 percent of homes in the West Savannah neighborhood predate 1960, with the decade of the 1940s as the most common construction date, according to data from the 2000 census. Approximately one-third of housing in Woodville was built before 1960. But the telling difference between West Savannah and Woodville is in new home construction. Only 9 percent of West Savannah homes were built since 1970, but 12 percent of Woodville's homes have been constructed between 1990 and 2000. Housing in West Savannah was not only older but the area attracted fewer builders willing to invest in the area.<sup>42</sup> One factor that discouraged new residential construction is the narrow thirty-foot width of lots in West Savannah. Such cramped space compares poorly to Woodville lots that are usually twice as large.

A point of common concern for these neighborhoods is the growing number of vacant and abandoned houses, a problem more severe in West Savannah than in Woodville. In 2000, a staggering 43.4 percent of housing units in West Savannah were vacant; at the same time Woodville's percentage of vacant houses stood at 13.3.<sup>43</sup> Part of the problem is that houses can be tied up in inheritance disputes when elderly homeowners die without a will. In one extreme case, a Woodville home was part of an estate claimed by eighty-two heirs. Years may go by before the estate is settled, and in the meantime the house sits vacant and deteriorating.<sup>44</sup>

Hudson Hill shows a somewhat different pattern of development than Woodville or West Savannah. With the exception of the Jasperville area, Hudson Hill began to grow as a neighborhood in the 1940s and 1950s, making it a newer residential area. Over 70 percent of its homes were built between 1950 and 1980, with the largest percentage dating from the 1960s.<sup>45</sup> Separated only by Bay Street from the West Savannah neighborhood, Hudson Hill was always much smaller. In 2000, for example, Hudson Hill's 405 housing units numbered only one-fourth of West Savannah's 1571. The most significant difference on Hudson Hill, however, is economic. Incomes are substantially higher on average than in either of the other neighborhoods. Proportionally fewer people on Hudson Hill are elderly and more are in the productive working years of twenty through sixty-four. Home values are also higher there than in the other neighborhoods.<sup>46</sup> Of course, Hudson Hill struggles with vacant and abandoned housing like West Savannah and Woodville. A 17.3 percent rate of vacant housing units on Hudson Hill is a serious problem that has not yet been solved.<sup>47</sup>

### RENTAL PROPERTY

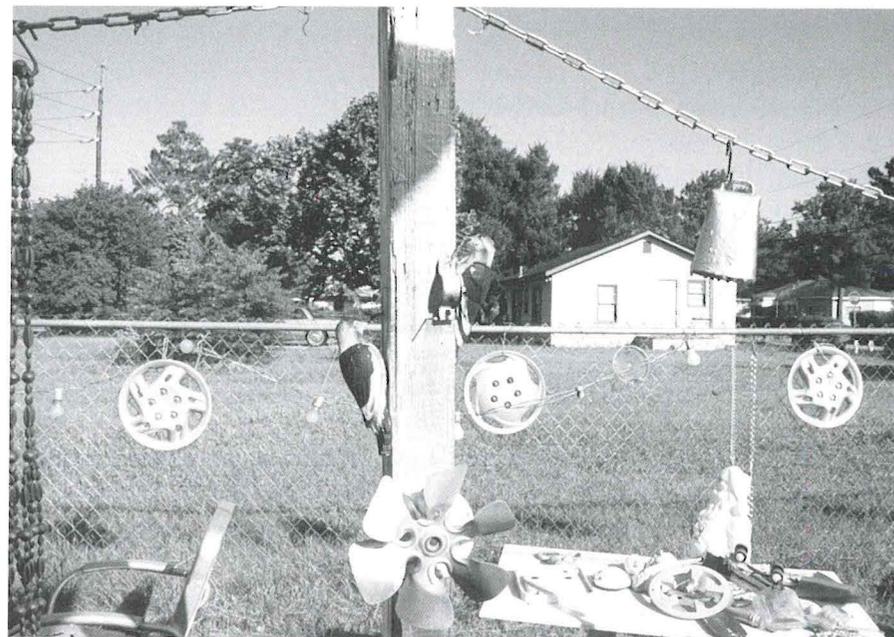
Hudson Hill and other westside neighborhoods have also been home to renters. Traditionally, rents have been low. In 1936, for example, a four-room house on Augusta Avenue rented for \$5.00, a house on Lathrop Avenue went for \$6.00, but a grand house on Newell Avenue with seven rooms, electric lights, bath, and garage commanded a premium price of \$18.00.<sup>48</sup> Twenty-four years later, low rents were still common. A three-room house on Darling Street in Woodville was available for \$15.00. The lack of a bathroom accounted for the modest charge because a four-room house with bath on Wright Street required \$40.00 monthly in rent.<sup>49</sup>

In 2000, monthly rent averaged \$403 in the West Savannah neighborhood, \$414 in Woodville, and, at the higher end, \$477 on Hudson Hill.<sup>50</sup> For those prices, renters can obtain a four to five room house, duplex, or apartment.<sup>51</sup> The proportion of rental units in these neighborhoods has hovered between 40 and 50 percent during most of the period between 1960 and 2000.<sup>52</sup>

The most pressing concern about rental units is the negligence of some landlords in maintaining their property. Dilapidated and substandard rental units create safety hazards, blight, and tend to devalue surrounding property.

### FLORENCE GIBSON OF HUDSON HILL

Hudson Hill's mix of apartments, duplexes, and former war-worker housing is a rental market unlike that of other neighborhoods. In fact, it is one more way that separates Hudson Hill from the older and larger West Savannah. Hudson Hill's individualism is expressed in many ways, but perhaps the landscape art of Florence Gibson is among the most unusual.



*Fig. 22: Mrs. Gibson lent her own artistic vision to the landscape.  
Courtesy of Harry DeLorme.*

Florence Gibson's home was located at 2104 Rankin Street, a concrete block bungalow that she and her husband Eddie built themselves in 1953. It was painted red and white because red was her favorite color. This house was her home for fifty-two years, and she decorated it in a style that was uniquely hers.<sup>53</sup>

It was in her yard, though, that she expressed her style best. Worn out, thrown out, and overlooked objects that most people would put in the trash became landscape art in Florence Gibson's hands. The hurricane fence was the perfect place to display lime green and pastel shower curtain hangers and yellow caution lights. Hanging off a chain-like clothesline were hubcaps, hairdryers, and whatever caught Florence's eye.<sup>54</sup> Some items she bought but most she found; "people throw them away and I pick them up," she said.<sup>55</sup> Florence saw the potential of an electric fan that no one wanted, for example. Taking out the plastic fan blades, she nailed them onto a post so they could spin in the wind. She decorated her trees with yellow plastic roses. "People laugh when they see them up there, but I say flowers look good anywhere."<sup>56</sup> A plastic pink flamingo stood guard in the fig tree to scare away the birds.

Although her yard was packed with Florence Gibson's treasures, those objects were not placed willy-nilly. Part of her yard was the North Pole, where the plastic snowman, penguins, and polar bears lived with the plastic swans and chickens. The other plastic animals, the lions, cows, pigs, and elephants, lived at the South Pole.<sup>57</sup>

Daves Rossell, a professor at the Savannah College of Art and Design, knew Florence Gibson for seven years and often brought students to visit her. He called her yard "the single most dramatic landscape I have seen in all of Savannah."<sup>58</sup> It was a world that she created with her own vision of beauty. Whatever she liked, she put in her yard. She cleaned it, painted it, nailed it down, or hung it up, and felt free to rearrange it in her yard. As Rossell points out, "if she had a North Pole and a South Pole, then it was her world, safe and free and worth a laugh."<sup>59</sup>

## EMPLOYER HOUSING

Before World War II, some industries along the Savannah River built employee housing. This housing was never intended to provide rental lodging for all workers, but in the Mutual Quarters and the villages at the Sugar Refinery and Union Bag employees found affordable rental properties convenient to

the plant. On Hudson Hill the Mutual Fertilizer Mill built duplexes for its workers surrounding the plant, roughly along what is now Hopewell Avenue. The red-painted structures left much to be desired. The houses were so poorly constructed that there were large gaps between the floorboards.<sup>60</sup>

Sugar refinery workers found a much more desirable place to live at the village on the factory grounds. It was a priority for the company to provide housing since three hundred employees made the long journey from Louisiana and the site of the refinery was remote from Savannah. In fact, two villages were constructed, one for white employees, and one for African Americans.

Engineer Alex Ormond described the cottage he occupied in 1919 in the white workers' village:

My house, like all the others, had a private bath; and each room was provided with one electric outlet in the center of the ceiling. The fixture for this outlet was chosen by the tenant. There was a reason for having one outlet per room. The wiring was inadequate; and if a tenant hooked up a fan or a small electric heater, he lowered the voltage and dimmed the lights of his neighbor.<sup>61</sup>

At first the cottages had no heat, but by 1925 lines from the plant carried steam heat to the villages. Tenants paid five dollars weekly in rent in 1925 which included heat, electricity, and water.<sup>62</sup>



*Fig. 23: Small frame cottages rose quickly out of the sandy soil in 1916 to house refinery workers.*

*Vanishing Georgia Collection, Image ctm 124. Courtesy of the Georgia Archives.*

Over the years, cottages grew more spacious as rooms were added. Alex Ormond said additions were determined by “the growth of the family or the aggressiveness of the housewife.”<sup>63</sup> By the early 1950s homes were no longer the identical white cottages of years past. Houses could have as many as three bedrooms and perhaps even a garage.<sup>64</sup>

The separation of black and white employees into segregated villages was the norm when the cottages were constructed and it continued for the life of refinery housing. James Lemon grew up in the village for African American families and he remembers no real racial conflict. “We didn’t really live side by side, but we got along pretty good.”<sup>65</sup> But the homes for black workers were not built to the same standard as those for their white counterparts. There was no indoor bathroom, for example, at James Lemon’s home.<sup>66</sup> The villages closed in 1960. The refinery offered to give the homes to their tenants on the promise that the houses would be moved to another location. Some tenants took them up on the offer.<sup>67</sup>

Just as exceptional circumstances prompted the building of the sugar refinery villages, it was the prediction of war that led the Savannah Machine and Foundry Company to construct lodging for their shipyard workers in Hudson Hill. War broke out in December, 1941, and in no time defense workers swarmed into Savannah. Housing was extremely limited with the sudden crush of new families.



*Fig. 24: The completed refinery village stands newly finished in 1917. Vanishing Georgia Collection, ctm 124. Courtesy of the Georgia Archives.*



*Fig. 25: An avenue of live oak trees shaded the refinery village in the 1940s. Courtesy of Imperial Sugar.*



*Fig. 26: More than sixty years after their construction, Clearview Homes continues to house working families. Photograph by the author.*

The Savannah Machine and Foundry Company already had plans underway to build lodging for six hundred people in a development that was to be named Irvin Gardens.<sup>68</sup> The cinderblock duplexes went up next to the shipyard on Clearview Avenue with all possible speed; the War Production Board granted the development priority status to hurry the project along. Once it was completed, white war workers and their families occupied it immediately.<sup>69</sup> The housing developments were renamed Clearview Homes and Bayview Homes.

### FRANCIS BARTOW PLACE

War workers unable to find lodging at Clearview had another option in the West Savannah area early in 1942. Francis Bartow Place opened in January of that year exclusively for white defense workers. Located on a triangular parcel of land between West Lathrop and Augusta Avenue, it required a commute for its residents who worked building Liberty Ships at the Savannah Machine and Foundry shipyard or at the Army Service Forces Depot. Even so, the 150 units were snapped up.<sup>70</sup>

Tenants had a choice of one, two, or three bedroom duplexes, all one-story buildings constructed of concrete block. Rents varied according to size, from \$35.50 monthly for a one bedroom unit to \$42.50 for three bedrooms.<sup>71</sup>



*Fig. 27: Designed by Cletus Bergen, Francis Bartow Place met a tight construction schedule of four and a half months.*

*Courtesy of the Housing Authority of Savannah.*

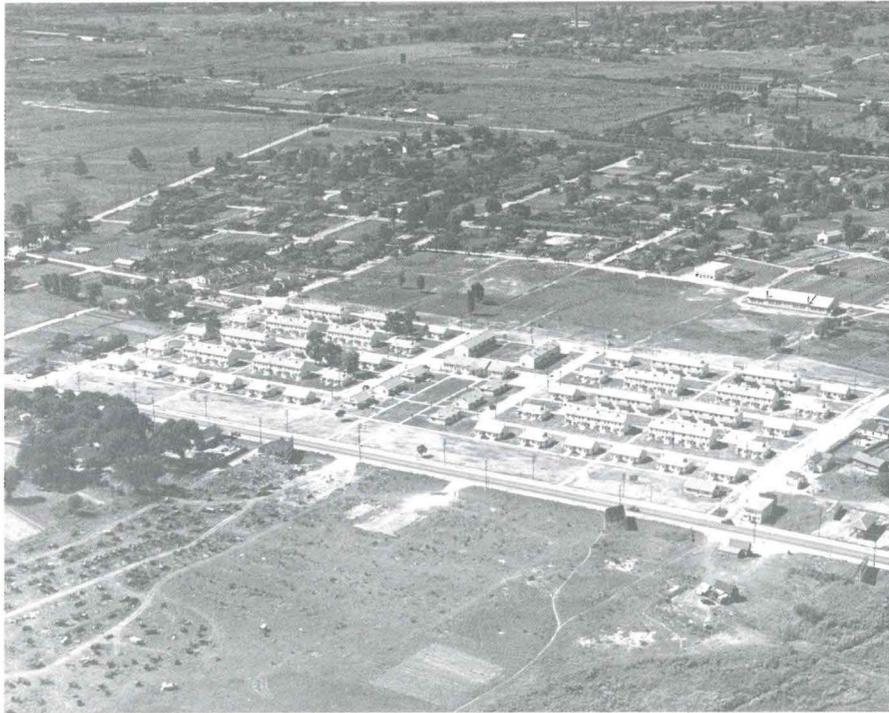
Unlike Clearview, Francis Bartow Place was owned by the federal government instead of a local employer like Savannah Machine and Foundry. War housing was intended to be a temporary solution to a temporary housing crisis. Josiah Tattnell Homes, Moses Rogers Grove, Deptford Place, Cherokee Homes, and Augustine Park, all classified as “war housing,” were slated for demolition soon after the war ended. However, the government designated Francis Bartow Homes and Nathanael Greene Villas as “defense housing,” a category beyond the reach of the wrecking ball. In fact, at the war’s conclusion, the government gave up Francis Bartow Homes to the Housing Authority of Savannah to provide low-cost accommodations for white families.<sup>72</sup>

Residents of Francis Bartow Place developed a close-knit community. Because the housing development was small, neighbors knew each other well. Many had come from small towns to Savannah and transformed Francis Bartow into a self-contained neighborhood. They founded a church nearby where many residents attended services, and seemingly everyone participated in social activities. There was the Women’s Club, the Men’s Athletic Club, and a Teen-Age Club. At the Christmas formal held by the Teen-Age Club in 1946, mothers made corsages for the girls to wear.<sup>73</sup> According to one mother who chaperoned the dance, “the test of a good party is not how much fun a few have, but how scarce the wall flowers are. There wasn’t a single wallflower at this dance.”<sup>74</sup>



*Fig. 28: At this party in June 1949, the bobby-soxers had a swell time.*

*Courtesy of the Housing Authority of Savannah.*



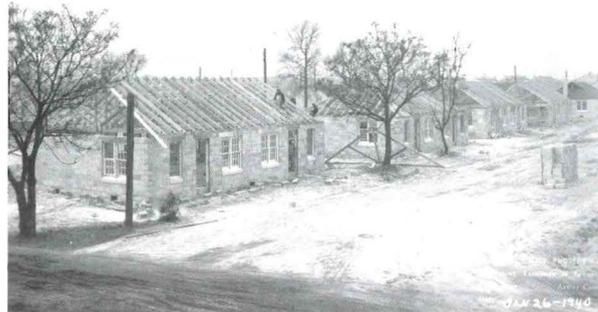
*Fig. 29: This aerial view of the newly-built Fellwood Homes shows how much vacant land was available in the West Savannah and Hudson Hill neighborhoods in the early 1940s. West Savannah School on Richards Street is also visible in back of Fellwood Homes. Courtesy of the Housing Authority of Savannah.*

## FELLWOOD HOMES AND FELLWOOD HOMES ANNEX

Francis Bartow Place was one of the smallest housing projects in the city, and, of course, junior to the oldest development in the West Savannah neighborhood, Fellwood Homes. The Housing Authority of Savannah established a policy of slum clearance late in the 1930s, and its first effort was to build a public housing complex at Fellwood Homes. The decision to break ground on Bay Street, between Ferrill and West Streets, was controversial. The few houses here and there on the tract could hardly be called a slum. The Housing Authority argued that dilapidated and dangerous homes in other parts of Savannah could only be razed when residents had alternative housing. In that sense, building on the relatively open land of the Fellwood site would accelerate slum clearance in other parts of the city.<sup>75</sup>

The bulldozers and construction crews arrived on September 5, 1939. Architect Cletus Bergen designed the development as concrete block one- and two-story structures. The Housing Authority backed his decision to build pitched roofs despite objections raised in Washington. As the Housing Authority pointed out, public housing is a reflection of the community where it is built. The flat roof line favored by federal officials was not in keeping with Savannah traditions where a pitched roof dated back to colonial times. Bergen's design carried the day.<sup>76</sup>

On July 1, 1940, Fellwood Homes was open to African American residents with 176 new units available. The Housing Authority selected occupants on the basis of income and family size. In 1941, the average number of family members was between three and four and average annual income was \$581.



*Fig. 30: The progress in building Fellwood Homes is charted in these photographs from left to right. By October 25, 1939, foundations had been laid; rafters were nailed into place by January 26 to create pitched roofs; shrubs and trees are taking root next to the nearly-finished homes on May 30, 1940. Courtesy of the Housing Authority of Savannah.*

## Views of Fellwood Homes



*Fig. 31: Hanging out the wash was a pleasure for Esther Ryals who had had no place to dry her family's laundry before moving to Fellwood Homes. She is shown here in this 1949 photograph with her daughters Helen and Betty.*

*Courtesy of the Housing Authority of Savannah.*

*Figs. 32 (top) & 33 (bottom): Views of Fellwood Homes in the 1940s and the 1950s.*

*Photograph of family in the kitchen, Georgia Historical Society Photograph Collection, VM 1361, Box 6, Folder 23. Courtesy of the Georgia Historical Society. Other photograph is courtesy of the Housing Authority of Savannah.*



To determine the rental payment due, the Housing Authority factored in the number of children as well as the family's income level. In 1946, for example, the least expensive apartment was available for \$7 monthly for families with fewer than three children and no more than \$630 annual income. Families with more than three children were allowed a maximum income \$756. Rents ranged from \$7 to \$22, all utilities except heat included.<sup>77</sup>

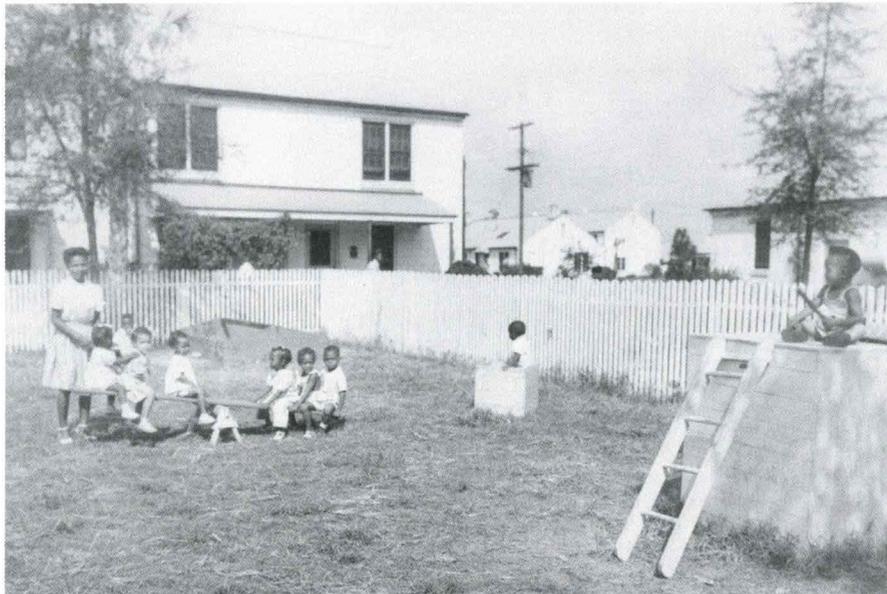
New housing with all the modern conveniences at an affordable price was an unbeatable combination. Among the first families to move in was Esther and Max Ryals, and their three daughters. Their standard of living improved markedly. For the first time, they had indoor plumbing and a kitchen large enough for the entire family to sit around the table together. Instead of sending clothes to a laundry, Esther Ryals had access to a washing machine and a clothesline.<sup>78</sup> It is hardly surprising that Fellwood Homes had no vacancies whatsoever between 1943 and 1945.<sup>79</sup> Even after the housing crisis eased when the war ended, Fellwood Homes was still one of most desirable residences in the West Savannah neighborhood. To meet the demand, the Housing Authority constructed additional homes in 1952 on the back part of

the tract bordering Richards Street, called Fellwood Homes Annex.

Life at Fellwood Homes included a wide range of clubs and activities, much of it revolving around children. A pre-school and Hodge Memorial Kindergarten were in operation at various times. In 1959, for example, the Mothers' Club planned a raffle to buy a phonograph for the kindergarten.<sup>80</sup>

Children made good use of the playground and other recreational activities. In the city basketball league of the late 1940s, Fellwood Homes fielded three boys' teams – the Fellwood Scarlets played in the junior league, while the Fellwood Eagles and Fellwood Sluggers both competed at the “midjet” level.<sup>81</sup>

Clubs gave the adults a chance to socialize. At different times, there was a Parents' Club, the Fellwood Progressive Circle, and a Health Club. The men organized their own team, the Scorpions, for the city basketball league. Women took advantage of classes in canning and food conservation. The sewing course required a commitment of nine months to attend evening classes. At graduation, students held a fashion show and modeled dresses that they had made.<sup>82</sup>



*Fig. 34: Toddlers at play at a pre-school at Fellwood Homes during the 1950s. Georgia Historical Society Photography Collection, VM 1361, Box 6, Folder 21. Courtesy of the Georgia Historical Society.*



*Fig. 35: Beating the heat was never more fun for these children in the 1950s. Courtesy of the Housing Authority of Savannah.*

In many ways, Fellwood Homes and Fellwood Annex mirrored the good and bad times of the West Savannah neighborhood. It was a landmark in public housing as the first complex built in Savannah and one of the first in the nation. Fellwood Homes provided modern, convenient housing for working families at an affordable price, and residents took pride in their homes and in the community they built. They reached out to the West Savannah neighborhood at large, offering its facilities to Saint Anthony School, for example, for graduation ceremonies.<sup>83</sup> Boys from the neighborhood met at Fellwood Homes for Boy Scout meetings. Fellwood Homes enriched the neighborhood with hard-working families during the heyday of the West Savannah neighborhood in the 1950s and 1960s.

The same woes that plagued the neighborhood beginning in the 1970s undermined life at Fellwood Homes. The complex perpetuated segregated housing patterns. Also, layoffs and unemployment took their toll, as did social problems such as crime and drugs. The buildings themselves began to deteriorate. In hopes of restoring both Fellwood Homes and West Savannah, the City of Savannah's Revitalization Plan envisions a new development that brings together single family homes, apartments, duplexes and green space. With that goal in mind, the Housing Authority of Savannah ordered residents to vacate Fellwood Homes and Fellwood Annex in February 2004 and demolition began in the summer of 2006. The tie to the old buildings was strong enough that some former residents kept a brick from the rubble as a souvenir.

## FLOODING

Pamela Howard-Oglesby remembers four floods threatening her home on Brittany Street. "Our house...was built on tall piers and always escaped the floods. However, our house was many times like an island surrounded by waters as the floods ravaged other homes around us in the neighborhood."<sup>84</sup> Eventually, the water eroded the foundation, the walls sagged, and the house had to be rebuilt.

One of the ongoing problems in westside communities is flooding. A downpour that coincided with high tide was sure to result in rising waters in the streets and sometimes in homes as well. Several areas suffered from poor drainage but the most flood-prone were the low-lying parts of Jenks, Baker, and Fell Streets off Bay Street. Because higher ground surrounded the bowl-



*Fig. 36: Standing water engulfed much of Louisville Road.*

*Courtesy of the City of Savannah's Community Services Department.*

like depression on three sides, runoff from heavy storms pooled quicker than it drained. In the fall of 1994, two storms in two months revealed just how bad the flooding could be.

On September 2, just as the tide came in, over four inches of rain fell in West Savannah in an hour. The water rose on Baker Street until cars and homes flooded. In Maggie Bullock's house, the water stood at four feet deep, covering the furniture. Neighbors carried neighbors out of harm's way, and the fire department even used rafts to rescue fifteen residents. Maggie Bullock was among those evacuated. She returned the next day to a home already smelling of mold.<sup>85</sup>

Baker Street residents had hardly repaired the flood damage when an even worse storm dropped eight inches of rain on October 2 and 3. Evacuations began once again, and thirty-one homes suffered damage.<sup>86</sup> Floodwater spread beyond Baker Street towards Brittany Street on the west and beyond Fell Street to the east. It even crossed Bay Street into Hudson Hill. Standing water on Bay Street stalled cars, but tractor-trailer trucks pushed through, leaving a wake of water to flow into the Rib Hut Restaurant.<sup>87</sup>

Angry residents called on city officials to do something. In fact, several municipal drainage improvement projects had been carried out in the area, but they were inadequate to deal with such torrential rains. The solution finally



*Fig. 37: Frustration surely greeted homeowners who returned to find their life possessions destroyed.*

*Courtesy of the City of Savannah's Community Services Department.*



*Fig. 38: The gazebo is the focal point of the new Fell-Jenks Park, designed by Goody, Clancy, & Associates.*

*Photograph by Colin Douglas Gray.*

accepted was a buy-out of homes vulnerable to flooding and more extensive drainage efforts with new pumping stations. Homes purchased were razed and the open space left behind served as a water retention area when rain falls faster than it can be pumped away.

## CONCLUSION

Part of the planning for the revitalization of the West Savannah neighborhood involved asking residents for their suggestions for improving housing. Among the people consulted were teenagers living in West Savannah. Their list of needed improvements in housing included:

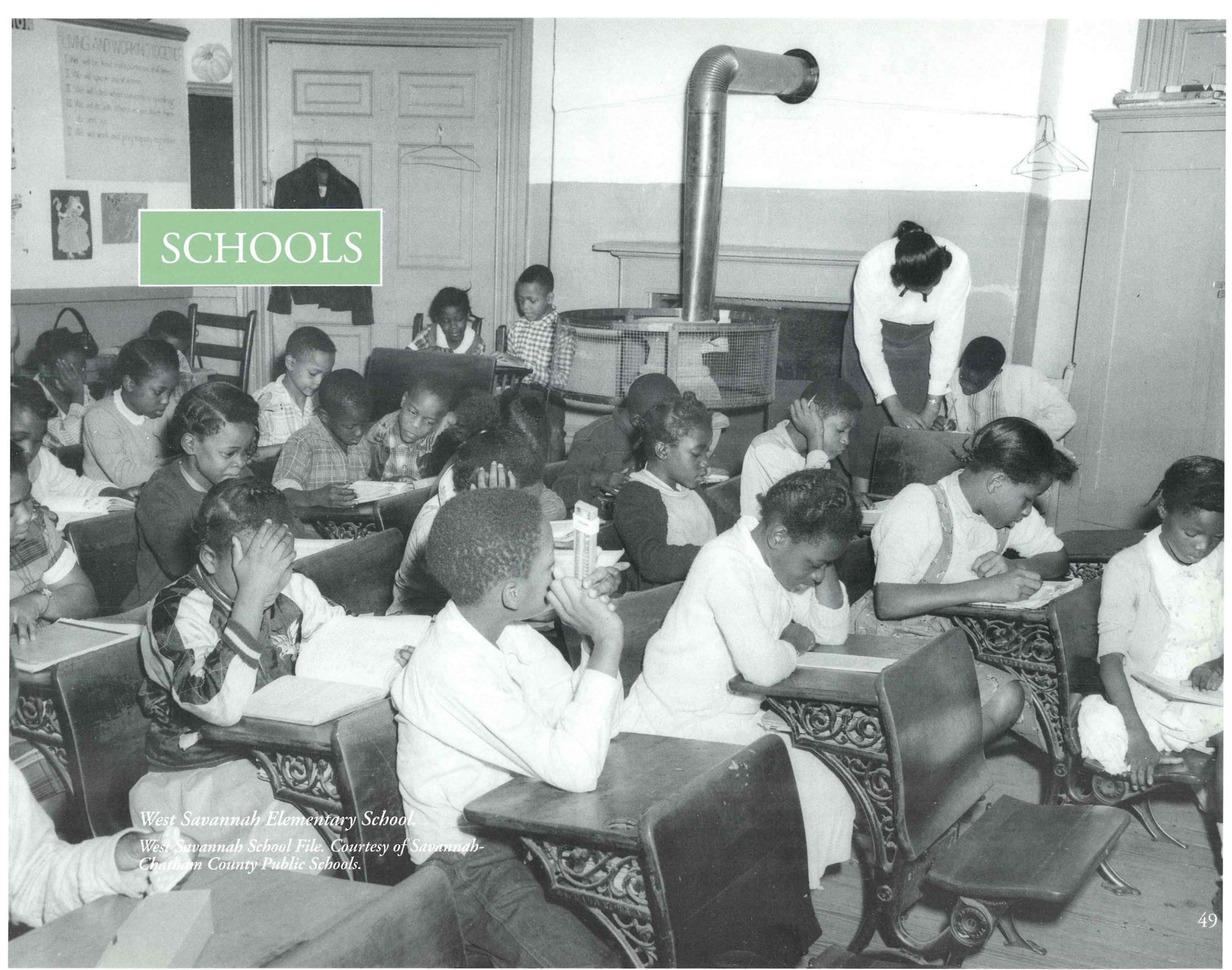
- bigger houses
- new houses
- able to own houses
- 2-story houses
- duplex with escalator
- tear down bad houses
- fix up houses
- paint the houses<sup>88</sup>

In this short list, the young people addressed many of the housing problems facing all westside neighborhoods. They understood that run-down homes needed repair and houses that posed a danger to the neighborhood should be razed. New construction with more room and more conveniences would bring more families to the area, especially if homes were affordable. Two-story houses add architectural variety to the neighborhood as well as more space for the occupants. The elderly have special needs that must be taken into account. The young people set an ambitious agenda to improve housing in western Savannah. It is up to the adults to achieve these goals.

## FOOTNOTES

- <sup>1</sup> Curley Milton, WSDP-OH.
- <sup>2</sup> ST, 14 August 1909.
- <sup>3</sup> City Engineering Map EW/W 203, Drawer 3, MRL.
- <sup>4</sup> Deed Book 4L, 198, CCCH; Deed, 13 August 1873, Woodville School Files, SCCPS.
- <sup>5</sup> Deed Book 12Y, 132-4, CCCH.
- <sup>6</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>7</sup> City Engineering Map EW/W 129, Drawer 2; J-40, Drawer 14, MRL.
- <sup>8</sup> "Sanborn Insurance Maps of Savannah, Georgia, 1916," GHS; Map of Chatham County, 1930, Victor G. Schreck, Abstractor, Georgia Room, Bull Street Library, LOPL.
- <sup>9</sup> City Engineering Map EW/W 203, Drawer 3, MRL.
- <sup>10</sup> City Engineering Map EW/W 434A, Drawer 4, MRL; SMN, 19 March 1901, 3.
- <sup>11</sup> SMN, 19 March 1901, 3.
- <sup>12</sup> City Engineering Map EW/W 014, Drawer 1, MRL; Mary Beth D'Alonzo, *Streetcars of Chatham County* (Charleston, SC: Arcadia, 1999), 66.
- <sup>13</sup> Ollie Jones, WSDP-OH; 1362-60, Box 13, Folder 89-6, GHS; City Engineering Map XH 88, Drawer 22, MRL.
- <sup>14</sup> Ernestine Manigault, "Memories of West Savannah," 2, WSDP; Albert S. Otto, *The Public School System of Savannah and Chatham County* (n.p., n.d.), Vol. 3.
- <sup>15</sup> City Engineering Map EW/W 434A, Drawer 5, MRL.
- <sup>16</sup> Beth Reiter, "The Contributing Architectural Resources of the West Savannah Neighborhood: A Windshield Survey Report," MPC, 2005; Erica Howard and Keilah Spann, "Architectural Survey of West Savannah Neighborhoods," 2005, WSDP; Virginia and Lee McAlester, *A Field Guide of American Houses* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1984), 90.
- <sup>17</sup> McAlester, *American Houses*, 453.
- <sup>18</sup> Analysis by Luciana Spracher, MRL.
- <sup>19</sup> McAlester, *American Houses*, 439.
- <sup>20</sup> Howard and Spann, "Architectural Survey," WSDP; Reiter, "Contributing Architectural Resources."
- <sup>21</sup> McAlester, *American Houses*, 228; Reiter, "Contributing Architectural Resources."
- <sup>22</sup> Howard and Spann, "Architectural Survey," WSDP; Reiter, "Contributing Architectural Resources."
- <sup>23</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>24</sup> "Sanborn Insurance Maps of Savannah, Georgia, 1916," GHS.
- <sup>25</sup> Howard and Spann, "Architectural Survey," WSDP.
- <sup>26</sup> "Sanborn Insurance Maps of Savannah, Georgia, 1916," GHS.
- <sup>27</sup> *Right Way Magazine* (March 1928): 19, 1362CL, Box 2, Folder 4, GHS; SMN, 16 February 1928, 16.
- <sup>28</sup> SMN, 10 September 1947, 18.
- <sup>29</sup> Ibid., 16 January 1974, 10; 3 February 1981, 1A.
- <sup>30</sup> Benjamin West, WSDP-OH.
- <sup>31</sup> Howard and Spann, "Architectural Survey," WSDP.
- <sup>32</sup> Ollie Jones, WSDP-OH.
- <sup>33</sup> Howard and Spann, "Architectural Survey," WSDP.
- <sup>34</sup> Manigault, "Memories of West Savannah," 4, WSDP.
- <sup>35</sup> Howard and Spann, "Architectural Survey," WSDP.
- <sup>36</sup> Evelyn Daniels, WSDP-OH.
- <sup>37</sup> Pamela Howard-Oglesby, WSDP-OH.
- <sup>38</sup> SMN, 28 August 2005, 1E.
- <sup>39</sup> Moses Jackson School File, SCCPS.
- <sup>40</sup> *Bulletin*, 20 December 1920, 9, CDSA.
- <sup>41</sup> Herman Allen, WSDP-OH; Curley Milton, WSDP-OH; Manigault, "Memories of West Savannah," 2, WSDP.
- <sup>42</sup> Howard and Spann, "Architectural Survey," WSDP. Although census tracts do not coincide exactly with neighborhood boundaries, this information nonetheless points out general trends.

- <sup>43</sup> Demographic Profiles of West Savannah and Woodville neighborhoods, 2004, Community Planning and Development Department, MPC.
- <sup>44</sup> SMN, 28 August 2005, 4E.
- <sup>45</sup> Howard and Spann, "Architectural Survey," WSDP.
- <sup>46</sup> Demographic Profiles of West Savannah, Woodville, and Hudson Hill neighborhoods, 2004.
- <sup>47</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>48</sup> ST, 9 January 1936.
- <sup>49</sup> Ibid., 20 August 1960, 5.
- <sup>50</sup> Demographic Profiles of West Savannah, Woodville, and Hudson Hill neighborhoods, 2004.
- <sup>51</sup> Howard and Spann, "Architectural Survey," WSDP.
- <sup>52</sup> Ibid., Demographic Profiles of West Savannah, Woodville, and Hudson Hill neighborhoods, 2004.
- <sup>53</sup> Daves Rossell, " 'This Here's the North Pole': Florence S. Gibson and the World She Gave Us," Paper delivered to the Southeast Chapter of the Society of Architectural Historians Annual Meeting, 2005, 8-10.
- <sup>54</sup> Ibid., 2, 4; <http://old.savannahnow.com/stories/061501/LOCfishman.shtml>
- <sup>55</sup> <http://old.savannahnow.com/stories/050797/fishman050797.html>
- <sup>56</sup> <http://old.savannahnow.com/stories/061501/LOCfishman.shtml>
- <sup>57</sup> Rossell, 5-6; <http://old.savannahnow.com/stories/050797/fishman050797.html>
- <sup>58</sup> Rossell, 1.
- <sup>59</sup> Ibid., 6.
- <sup>60</sup> Curley Milton, WSDP-OH; Milton Rahn, WSDP-OH.
- <sup>61</sup> Alex Ormond, "An Old Sugar Refiner Reminisces," (typescript, 1962), 1, WSDP.
- <sup>62</sup> Ibid., Gordon, *How Sweet It Is*, 10; SMN, 28 May 1992.
- <sup>63</sup> Ormond, 1, WSDP.
- <sup>64</sup> SMN, 28 May 1992.
- <sup>65</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>66</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>67</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>68</sup> SMN, 26 June 1941, 14.
- <sup>69</sup> SMN, 21 January 1945.
- <sup>70</sup> SMN, 8 July 1941, 6; "Oglethorpe was Right . . . A Tale of Two Centuries," (Savannah: Housing Authority, 1946), 19, 45.
- <sup>71</sup> "Oglethorpe was Right," 19, 45.
- <sup>72</sup> Ibid., 6, 19.
- <sup>73</sup> SMN, 6 November 1948; "Change of Address: A Report of the Housing Authority of Savannah" (Savannah: Housing Authority of Savannah, 1949), 22.
- <sup>74</sup> "Change of Address," 22.
- <sup>75</sup> "Oglethorpe was Right," 6.
- <sup>76</sup> Ibid., 7.
- <sup>77</sup> Ibid., 10-11, 44.
- <sup>78</sup> "Change of Address," 6-7.
- <sup>79</sup> "Oglethorpe was Right," 45.
- <sup>80</sup> SMN, 6 November 1948; *Herald*, 22 April 1959.
- <sup>81</sup> SH, 20 January 1949.
- <sup>82</sup> Ibid., 6 November 1948, 7 June 1956, 18 March 1961.
- <sup>83</sup> "Change of Address," 22.
- <sup>84</sup> Pamela Howard-Oglesby, WSDP-OH.
- <sup>85</sup> SMN, 3 September 1994, SNP, 4 September, C1; SMN, 3 October 1994, 1A.
- <sup>86</sup> SMN, 3 October 1994, 1A, 6A; SMN, 4 October 1994, 1C.
- <sup>87</sup> SMN, 3 October 1994, 6A; SMN, 4 October 1994, 1C.
- <sup>88</sup> Goody Clancy, West Savannah Revitalization Plan Draft, 2005.



# SCHOOLS

*West Savannah Elementary School.*

*West Savannah School File. Courtesy of Savannah-  
Chatham County Public Schools.*

A VACANT HOUSE on Augusta Avenue might not seem to be a likely place to start a crusade. But to Moses Jackson and other parents who lived in the West Savannah neighborhood in the early 1930s that small house represented a better life for their children. Too many young children in the neighborhood did not attend school because railroad tracks separated them from the closest public school at Springfield Terrace. That vacant house became a makeshift school. However, so many children came that families rented York Hall on Love Street, furnished it as best they could, and held classes in the rundown two-story frame building. An association of more than 150 residents worked to provide an education for neighborhood youngsters. More than 350 children attended grammar school at York Hall but there were not enough desks, textbooks, or trained teachers to provide a quality education.

In September, 1935, the association petitioned the Savannah-Chatham County Board of Education to incorporate York Hall into the school system. The community promised to pay for rent on the building and electricity if the Board of Education would staff the school with four teachers and provide the needed books and desks.<sup>1</sup> The Board of Education approved the petition



*Fig. 1: Moses Jackson was called the “Mayor of West Savannah” by his neighbors because of his work on behalf of the community.*

*Courtesy of Mrs. Elise Hilton.*

and the old hall re-opened its doors on October 3 as West Savannah School. With over 300 students enrolled, the school was still packed.<sup>2</sup>

As the example of York Hall shows, education was vitally important to residents of western Savannah and well worth the struggle to provide opportunities for their children. Schools created a sense of identity shared by parents, students, and alumni. Schools also showcased leaders – community activists like Moses Jackson, administrators like Principal Sophronia Tompkins, and student athletes like Moses King and Lucinda Williams.

## WOODVILLE SCHOOL

West Savannah School was not the first public school to serve western Savannah. By 1875, Woodville existed as one of the first county grammar schools for African American students. Seven years later, Major John O. Ferrill visited several of the black county schools, and he complimented Woodville and three others for their “excellent work.”<sup>3</sup> Like most county schools, Woodville was a one-room schoolhouse where students of all ages crowded together to learn. In 1906, Mrs. Rachel E. Wright taught forty-five boys and thirty-six girls in one room. Amazingly, she reported that average daily attendance was 87 percent.<sup>4</sup>

Other black children, whose parents worked at the new industrial plants lining the Savannah River, needed schooling, too. In 1913, the Board of Education created Mill Haven School. There was no building erected for this school; instead the sole teacher, Miss Madeleine E. Victory, taught in a church off West Lathrop Avenue. Mill Haven was convenient for families who lived in the Mutual Quarters, the factory village established by Mutual Fertilizer, and the church shared its space for the sake of education.<sup>5</sup>

For four years, Mill Haven School served children in the factory district but in 1917 the Board of Education consolidated Mill Haven and two other small schools with Woodville. John Culver of Baltimore, Maryland, donated



*Fig. 2: Woodville School, as it appeared in 1939.*

*Cordray-Foltz Collection, VM 1360, Box 3, Folder 21. Courtesy of the Georgia Historical Society.*

land that became the site of a new and larger Woodville School. The six-room structure opened on September 24, 1917 and Superintendent Carlton B. Gibson called it a “first class modern school” at its dedication. Modern conveniences included electric lights and steam heating; four of the classrooms could be combined to form one spacious auditorium. Perhaps no one was more astonished at the transformation of the one-room school into a new, multi-classroom building than Mrs. Wright, who had taught at Woodville since 1893.<sup>6</sup>

In 1920 a new faculty member named Sophronia Gaston Tompkins joined the staff at Woodville. A veteran teacher with seven years experience, Mrs. Tompkins quickly established herself as a leader. Two years later, the Board of Education appointed her as Teaching Principal at Woodville. She was the first African American woman to serve as principal of a consolidated school in Savannah.

Mrs. Tompkins was well qualified for the task. Not only did she have ample classroom experience, including two years at Woodville, but she graduated as valedictorian from Scotia Seminary (now Barber-Scotia College) in Concord, North Carolina. As a native Savannahian, she received her first schooling in the Savannah-Chatham County system. In 1919, she married Dr. Archibald Tompkins, a prominent physician.<sup>7</sup>

Children attended grades one through six at Woodville, but in 1922 the number of students enrolled was surprisingly low – only ninety in all. Mrs. Tompkins took as her first challenge to encourage all school-age children living within Woodville’s district to register and come to school. After six weeks of recruitment, the enrollment soared to 300.<sup>8</sup>

In the next ten years, the number of students attending Woodville continued to climb and quickly outgrew its six classrooms. Woodville absorbed Port Wentworth School in 1926. The number of students from the one-room school at Port Wentworth was small, but the children no doubt bragged about riding the street car every day to Woodville.<sup>9</sup> By 1932, pupils attended class on half-day sessions because 406 children could not squeeze into classrooms intended for only 240.<sup>10</sup> Double sessions were not uncommon in the county schools for African American students at that time. Unfortunately the children paid the price for “split day” teaching because their instruction was limited to three hours.<sup>11</sup>

Overcrowding was the most serious problem confronting Mrs. Tompkins but she realized that it was not only the size of the school building that was inadequate. A state evaluation in 1932 judged the heating, light, water, and fire protection “unsatisfactory.” Converting classrooms into an auditorium on special occasions became nearly impossible because the classrooms were constantly in use.<sup>12</sup>

With the opening of the new school year in the fall of 1935, more than five hundred students attended Woodville. Double sessions continued, as no other solution for the congested classrooms had been found. In the early hours of Sunday, April 5, 1936, a fire broke out in a supply room and spread to the attic and roof. Before firefighters contained the blaze in two hours, the school suffered extensive damage. The roof sagged where charred rafters had collapsed.<sup>13</sup>

Faced with a ruined roof and structural problems, the Board of Education decided that the time had come to expand the school in addition to repairing the fire damage. An annex of six new classrooms was ready for students in January 1937, doubling the size of the school.<sup>14</sup>

Responsibilities for directing the school grew as quickly as enrollment, so in February, 1937 the Board of Education appointed Mrs. Tompkins as a full-time principal at Woodville School.<sup>15</sup> At this point, she decided to expand the mission of the school to include job training for adults. The severe unemployment of the Depression had eased somewhat, but Mrs. Tompkins understood that practical skills meant more prosperity in the African American community. She found a partner in the Work Projects Administration (WPA) that provided most of the funding for the Woodville Community House, completed in 1938. Black and white Savannahians also donated money for construction costs, equipment and furnishings.<sup>16</sup>

The brick building housed the Woodville Adult Vocation Program. A modern home was built into the Community Center as laboratory space for those training for domestic service. Classes in cooking, child care, home nursing and first aid, gardening, and interior decorating were offered as well as night courses in mathematics and English. During World War II, with food conservation essential, the center taught courses in canning to both white and black students. Over 5,000 cans of summer produce were put up in 1944, and an additional 1,030 donated to Charity Hospital.<sup>17</sup>

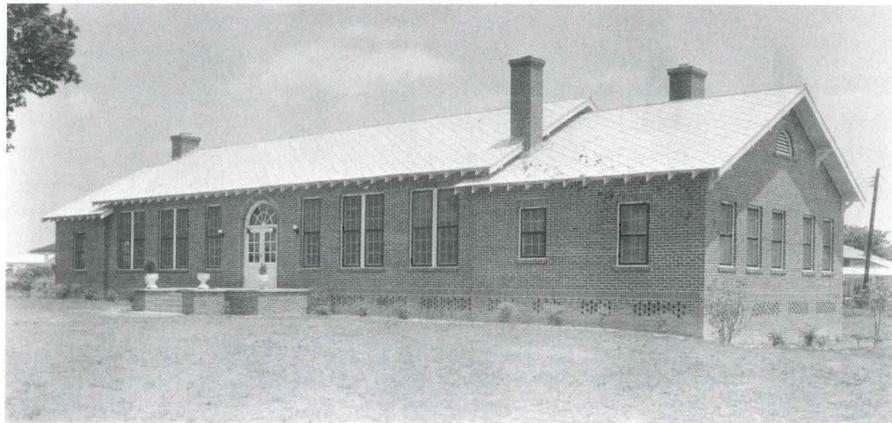


Fig. 3: Woodville Community House.

Cordray-Foltz Collection, VM 1360, Box 3, Folder 21. Courtesy of the Georgia Historical Society.

One measure of the success of the Woodville Community House was Mrs. Tompkins' ability to bring many Savannahians into the project. Woodville at that time was located outside the city limits, a county school out of the mainstream of urban life. Mrs. Tompkins worked to gain recognition for Woodville, and even wrote an article for the *Savannah Morning News* describing the accomplishments of the Community House. The Negro Business Men's Club and Georgia State College (now Savannah State University) helped finance ongoing programs at the training center. Savannah Electric and Power Company and the WPA supplied teachers.<sup>18</sup>

The year 1938 brought not only the Community House to Woodville but also the beginning of a junior high division. The seventh grade was added that year, the eighth grade in 1939 and the ninth grade the following year.<sup>19</sup> Expanding the school to include older pupils was especially important to western Savannah because it was the first time the public school system offered access to the higher grades in that area. Woodville became a point of pride for the neighborhood. For example, in 1940, the eighth graders in Mrs. Thelma Lee Stevens' class found their six-week grades published in the *Savannah Tribune*.<sup>20</sup> Fortunately, all the students did well!

As more and more families moved into western Savannah neighborhoods to take industrial jobs, the Board of Education saw the need for a high school to serve the area. Woodville expanded once more in 1947 and added a senior high division, making it the only school in the Savannah-Chatham County

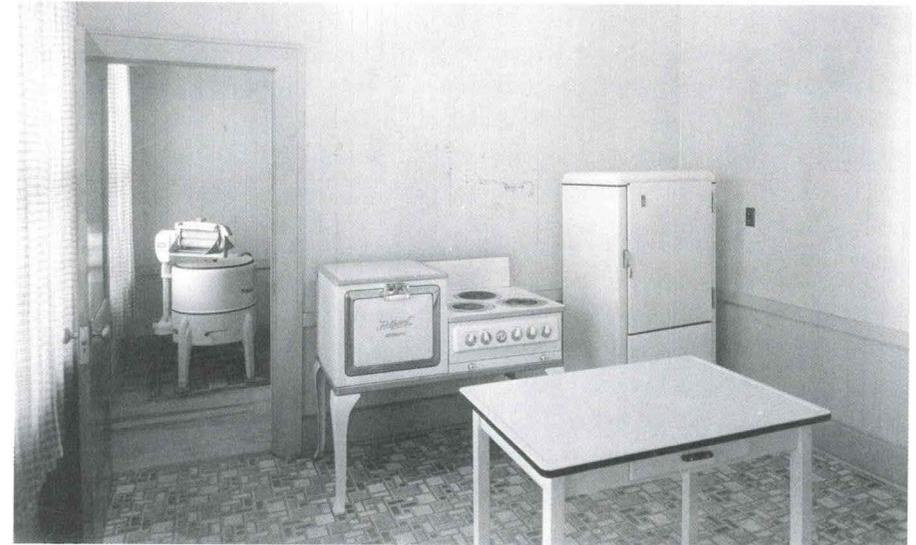


Fig. 4 (top) & Fig. 5 (bottom): Students at the Woodville Community House learned cooking and laundering skills, as well as general housekeeping by working in the model kitchen and bedroom that were part of the house.

Cordray-Foltz Collection, VM 1360, Box 3, Folder 21. Courtesy of the Georgia Historical Society.



*Fig. 6: The 1946 ninth-grade class poses for its graduation picture. All the girls wore white eyelet dresses and white flowers in their hair, while the boys had a white boutonniere in their lapels. Because Woodville did not start its high school program until 1947, these ninth-graders were among the last Woodville students to attend Beach High School.*

*Courtesy of Thelma Honeyblue.*

system to offer the full range of classes from first through twelfth grades. By 1949, over 1,000 students attended Woodville.<sup>21</sup>

The older students took advantage of opportunities to learn vocational skills. The agriculture department taught courses such as gardening, cattle-raising, dairying, and poultry-raising. Mr. James Lutten, the vocational agricultural teacher, mixed class work with hands-on experience to prepare students for



*Fig. 7: Woodville students work in the garden on a spring day in 1939.*

*Cordray-Foltz Collection, VM 1360, Box 3, Folder 21. Courtesy of the Georgia Historical Society.*

careers. In fact, one of the most popular student organizations at the school was the New Farmers of America (NFA). Their motto was “Close to the sod there can be seen a tho’t [sic] of God.”<sup>22</sup>

The home economics department prepared future homemakers with courses on cooking, child care, sewing, and nursing. But its courses were not limited to

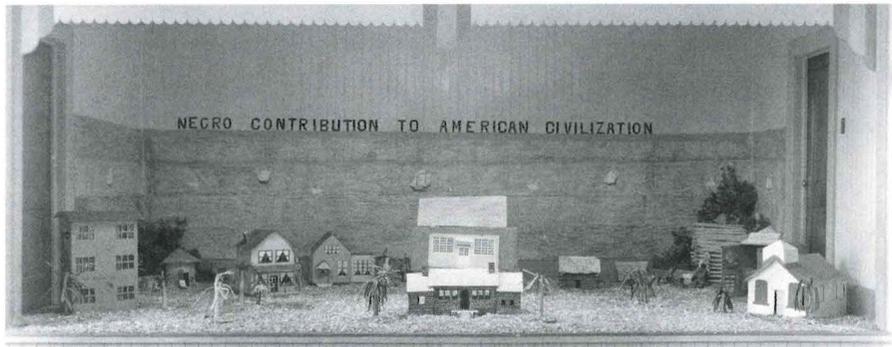


*Fig. 8: Members of the NFA learn about the latest in tractors.*

*1957 Wolverine. Courtesy of Enoch Mathis.*



*Fig. 9: Student work is on display in a sewing classroom in 1939.  
Cordray-Foltz Collection, VM 1360, Box 3, Folder 21. Courtesy of the Georgia Historical Society.*



*Fig. 10: Building pride in black heritage was one of the important goals set by Mrs. Tompkins and the Woodville faculty.  
Cordray-Foltz Collection, VM 1360, Box 3, Folder 21. Courtesy of the Georgia Historical Society.*



*Fig. 11: The newly completed Woodville Elementary was dedicated in April 1954.  
Woodville Elementary School File. Courtesy of Savannah-Chatham County Public Schools.*

girls. Some of the high school boys enrolled in home economics classes because they had evening jobs at hotels and restaurants. To get ahead in the hospitality industry, they wanted to be as prepared and professional as possible.<sup>23</sup>

Families and neighbors of Woodville School applauded the accomplishments of students and faculty. For many, Woodville became a symbol of what the younger generation could achieve through education, and the school had widespread support throughout western Savannah. Money had been raised for the Community House, musical instruments for the band had been purchased, and uniforms provided for players on the football and basketball teams.

Despite this progress, problems remained. In 1949, the average number of pupils per classroom was 71. Double sessions continued as enrollment topped 1,200 three years later.<sup>24</sup> Finally, a new elementary school building with 22 classrooms was built in 1954 to relieve overcrowding at Woodville.<sup>25</sup>

### FELL AVENUE SCHOOL AND THE EDNA MOON SCHOOL

The West Savannah and Hudson Hill neighborhoods were racially mixed. While the new Woodville Elementary School served African American children in Woodville, Fell Avenue School was reserved for white children in Hudson Hill and West Savannah. A small brick building erected in 1926, Fell Avenue School had four classrooms. Students in grades one through four enrolled at Fell Avenue and, for a time in the 1930s, the school even housed fifth- and sixth-graders without coming close to capacity.<sup>26</sup>

Some children attended Edna Moon School, a private school at Union Camp, for first, second, and third grade before transferring to Fell Avenue School. Mrs. Edna Moon, wife of a Union Camp engineer, made it her personal mission to establish a primary school on the grounds of the plant. White employees' children were eligible to attend Edna Moon School but other children who lived nearby also took advantage of what was probably one of the most progressive schools in the county. Miss Dorothy Waters, a teenager herself when she started teaching at Edna Moon in the late 1930s, brought energy and innovation to the classroom. Children were not passive learners for Miss Waters. Rather than dividing the children by grades, the thirty or forty children attended class together. Every day began with chapel where children sang as Miss Waters played the piano. Three times each year, children performed in plays and musical programs to a packed house of parents and Union Camp officials. The children spent days at the company's hunting lodge



*Fig. 12: Fell Avenue School as it appeared in the 1930s.*

*Cordray-Foltz Collection, VM 1360, Box 3, Folder 18. Courtesy of the Georgia Historical Society.*

in South Carolina and walked in the woods for nature study. Occasionally distinguished visitors to Union Camp such as Gen. George Marshall dropped by the school where the students welcomed them.<sup>27</sup>

The company underwrote all expenses and even air-conditioned the classroom, a luxury that no other school enjoyed in the state of Georgia in the 1930s. Students made full use of a well-stocked library and a playground. Sometimes Miss Waters brought the children outside to watch the Union Camp baseball team play and the whole class cheered them on. Mrs. Moon had promised Miss Waters “100% cooperation” and there was never any lack of supplies at the school. The school existed only five years before World War II brought about its closing. As she reflects back on her teaching experience, Dorothy Waters Courington says, “I enjoyed every day I taught school.... [With both parents working at Union Camp] this was something I could help with and it would be good for the children.”<sup>28</sup>

When the graduates of Edna Moon School came to Fell Avenue for fourth grade, the only frills they found there were window boxes full of flowers outside the classrooms. As more white families moved into the homes near the school in the 1940s, the average classroom size at Fell Avenue grew to 45 by 1949.<sup>29</sup> The PTA expressed concerns to the Board of Education about an inadequate number of classrooms and outside plumbing, but the children nonetheless took great pride in their school. Their job was to learn, and as Milton Rahn remembers, they hoped to collect a silver dollar from the principal and fifth grade teacher, Mrs. Mary Crawford, when they graduated from high school.<sup>30</sup>

## WEST SAVANNAH SCHOOL

Not far from Fell Avenue was the neighborhood’s public black elementary school, West Savannah School, opened in 1935 thanks to the efforts of Moses Jackson. The four classrooms in York Hall could hardly contain the school’s 300 students even on split sessions, so the Board of Education joined forces with the WPA to build a new structure. Abandoning the Love Street site, the Board chose a new location on nearby Richards Street and the frame eight-room school opened in 1937.<sup>31</sup>

The new building provided more spacious quarters for students and faculty than the old York Hall but the opening of Fellwood Homes in 1940 meant a climbing enrollment. Seventy students per classroom became the norm by 1949 even with double sessions.<sup>32</sup> Despite the challenges, the nurturing learning environment created by the first principal, Mrs. Veronica Taylor, became a hallmark of West Savannah School.

Double sessions ended temporarily in 1952 when a new brick annex added ten more classrooms to West Savannah School, as well as an all-purpose room, clinic, and cafeteria wing. Students and teachers still occupying the older frame building appreciated the updated heating system. Radiators replaced the old pot-bellied stoves. No longer were children in the back of the room chilly, and students in the front row toasty, at least on one side!<sup>33</sup>



*Fig. 13: West Savannah students show their support for the Red Cross drive in 1944.*

*Cordray-Foltz Collection, VM 1360, Box 3, Folder 21. Courtesy of the Georgia Historical Society.*

## West Savannah School in the 1940s

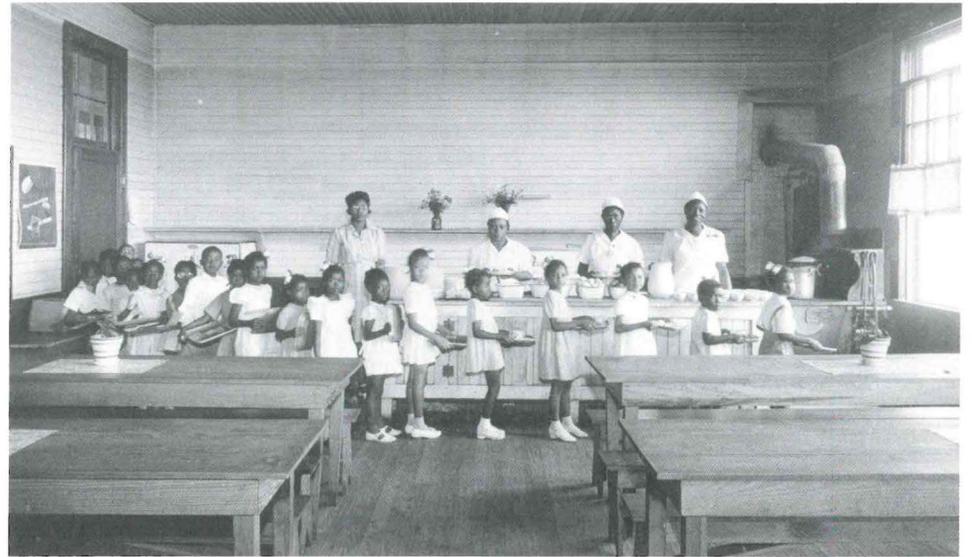
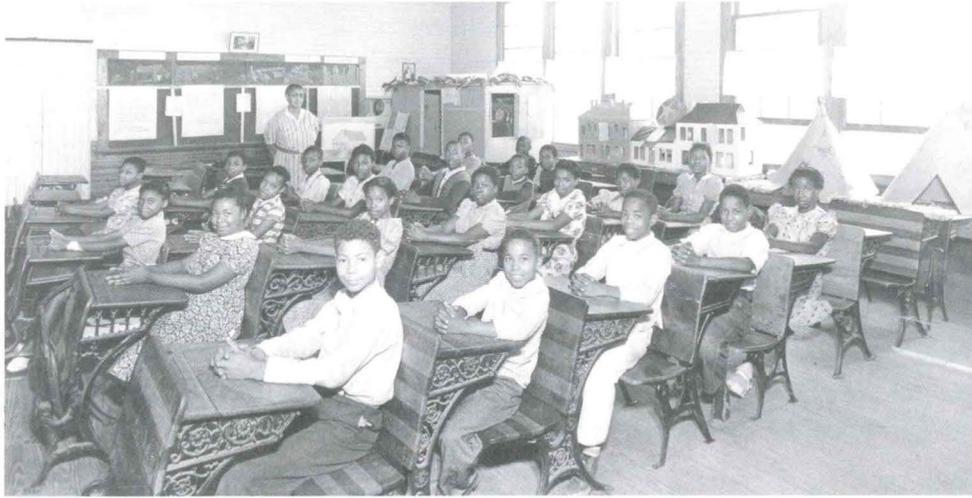


Fig. 14 (top left): Under the watchful eye of their teacher, these students greet a visitor in 1944. Cordray-Foltz Collection, VM 1360, Box 3, Folder 20. Courtesy of the Georgia Historical Society.

Fig. 15 (top right): In this photograph from the late 1940s, Mrs. Veronica Taylor sits surrounded by her faculty. Seated, from left to right, Jeanette Jenkins, Doretha Wells, Leola Sanders, Melissa J.B. Lewis, Veronica Taylor, Mattie Fonvielle, Susie Floyd, Pearle Singleton. Standing: Julia Hamilton, Alma R. Wade, Katherine Williams, unidentified, Geraldine Ziegler, unidentified, unidentified, Ruth Dais. Courtesy of James Jackson.

Fig. 16 (bottom left): Students eager to share their ideas raise their hands in this classroom. West Savannah School File. Courtesy of Savannah-Chatham County Public Schools.

Fig. 17 (bottom right): Lunchroom staff serve the children on a spring day in 1944. Cordray-Foltz Collection, VM 1360, Box 3, Folder 20. Courtesy of the Georgia Historical Society.

Even this expansion was not enough to keep up with increasing enrollment. A new building opened in 1956 to house the fifth-, sixth-, and seventh-graders.<sup>34</sup>

Principal Mrs. Ayler Mae Lovette consistently made West Savannah School a valued and active member of the community. *The Herald* published articles frequently in the 1950s describing classroom activities such as Thanksgiving and Christmas programs, faculty workshops, Girl Scout hikes and cookouts, and the opening of the new library.<sup>35</sup> Among the most exciting events of the year was May Day. In 1942, students met after school to perform folk dances, drills, and special calisthenics. By 1956, a May Queen and a May King reigned over the fun, attended by a princess and prince, crown bearers, ladies-in-waiting, flower girls, and pages. The crowd enjoyed performances presented by each class, but the girls' drill squad was everyone's favorite.<sup>36</sup>

### SAINT ANTHONY SCHOOL

Saint Anthony of Padua School gave western Savannah families the choice of a parochial education. Long before York Hall or West Savannah School, the priests of the Society of African Missions (SMA) operated a Catholic school on Fell Avenue. Bishop Benjamin Keiley gave the SMA the responsibility to minister to the black community in the Savannah diocese in 1907, with Father Ignatius Lissner in charge.<sup>37</sup> By 1909, Father Lissner purchased land in the Fellwood Tract as sites for a church and a school, "an ideal spot for our children," according to the *Savannah Tribune*, because students "will be sheltered from the evil influences of the city and at the same time get all the advantages of city children."<sup>38</sup> A newly-constructed frame building opened its doors to students on October 1, 1909.<sup>39</sup>

Quickly the community recognized the important contributions made by the school. The *Savannah Tribune* commented in December, 1909:

The good work performed in St. Anthony's school, since its opening in October last seems to be highly appreciated by the whole population of West Savannah; and be it said: the good behavior of our children and their rapid progress in the various branches they are taught in, is simply marvelous; . . .<sup>40</sup>

The school welcomed children of all faiths. Every day pupils devoted thirty minutes to the study of Christian principles but teachers assured Protestant

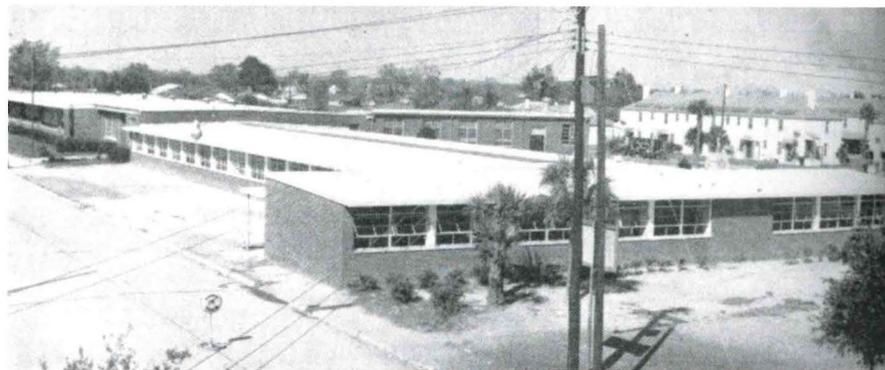


Fig. 18: An elevated view of West Savannah School in 1956 shows the new brick building with Fellwood Homes and Fellwood Homes Annex in the background.

*Savannah State College Bulletin*, Vol. 10, No. 7. Courtesy of the Savannah State University Archives.



Fig. 19: This building was part of the original L-shaped structure of Saint Anthony School. *Saint Anthony Church Files*. Courtesy of the Catholic Diocese of Savannah Archives.

families that their children's religious upbringing would be respected. By the opening of the 1912 school year, eighty students enrolled at Saint Anthony, and paid for the privilege. Tuition charges for that year were ten cents weekly.<sup>41</sup>

Black lay women served as teachers during the early years at Saint Anthony. Often these teachers were members of the congregation as well. Mrs. Bonnie White Remiggio, one of the two original teachers at the school, also played the organ for mass. Eugenia Haig Daniels, whose family was very active in parish life, taught first and second grades from 1933 to 1938.<sup>42</sup>

The Missionary Franciscan Sisters of the Immaculate Conception took over teaching duties beginning in 1938.<sup>43</sup> Herman Allen, who attended Saint Anthony during the 1940s, remembers well the white habits that the nuns wore.<sup>44</sup> Another man recalled being introduced to the nuns' discipline on the first day of school when crying and screaming earned him a light switching. "[Sister] sanctified me a little bit. I learned then she meant business, and I have a lot to thank her for that."<sup>45</sup>

By 1948, Saint Anthony enrolled 181 students in its eight grades. Only sixty-three students were Catholic; a number of Protestant parents preferred to send their children to Saint Anthony. Tuition doubled in January of that year, from 50 cents monthly to one dollar, but families wanted to invest in their children's future. When the student population outgrew the frame schoolhouse, the parish constructed a new building large enough to accommodate two hundred pupils. It opened in November 1948 under the guidance of Sister Mary Irene as principal. She and three other Franciscan sisters made up the faculty.<sup>46</sup>

The highlight of the school year was the eighth grade graduation. In 1957, for example, Father P. J. Fleming awarded diplomas to thirteen students after the fifth-, sixth-, and seventh-graders sang a High Mass. To continue their education, students chose either Woodville as the nearest public school for African Americans or the Catholic high school, Saint Pius X, in east Savannah. Two members of the 1957 graduating class, Frances Bynes and Ralph Jenkins, received Saint Anthony PTA scholarships to attend Pius X.

Saint Anthony School and the public schools in West Savannah neighborhoods had taken root into the life of the community. Parents valued education and showed their support through the PTA, fund-raising activities, petitions to the Board of Education, and cheering on their team at athletic events. Families of children attending Saint Anthony School even kept the pot-bellied stoves well-stocked during the winter.<sup>47</sup> By the 1950s, the difficult early years of these schools were past; new buildings replaced the cramped old ones, and larger faculties were better prepared to challenge their pupils.

## FROM WOODVILLE TO TOMPKINS

Teachers at Woodville served as role models, especially for the high school students. Among those remembered were agriculture teacher James Luten, Assistant Coach Crawford Bryant, Roger B. Jones who taught biology, and Mrs. Thelma Lee in English. If a teacher's impact can be measured by a student's memory, Mrs. Lee influenced her students greatly. Harold Franklin can still recite "Thanatopsis" that he learned in Mrs. Lee's class years ago.<sup>48</sup>

Joe Turner came to Woodville as the new football coach in 1952, freshly graduated from Savannah State College. Gwen Proctor Goodman, a junior at Woodville when the coach arrived, remembered his impact.

At the time, we were just a little country school on the west side of Savannah and in walked this youngster who had such a sense of value and purpose that it was astounding to watch him. It was just a little scrub team that we had. Everybody beat us. We were the laughingstock. He turned that program around and made us respectable.<sup>49</sup>

That first fall, Woodville defeated rival Beach High School on Thanksgiving Day for the first time in history. That victory marked a new era in Woodville athletics. In Coach Turner's twenty-nine years at the school, his football teams won three state championships and five regional championships. Joe Turner earned the award of "Coach of the Year" seven times.<sup>50</sup>

As amazing as his success was on the playing field, Coach Turner's real legacy lay in his ability to inspire students. Moses King and his friend Roland James had no plans to play football in high school even though they loved the game:

Roland and I thought we were too skinny and small to play varsity football as the two of us only weighed about 135 pounds.... We would go out when the football team would practice and catch passes before Coach Turner would come out to the practice field. We did not want



*Fig. 20: A graduate of Savannah State College and the Tuskegee Institute, James Luten taught mathematics and science as well as heading the vocational agricultural program. He succeeded Mrs. Sophronia Tompkins as principal in 1956.*

*Savannah State College Bulletin, Vol. 9, No. 1. Courtesy of the Savannah State University Archives.*



*Fig. 21: A native Savannahian who served as President of the Chatham County Teachers' Association, Mrs. Thelma Lee was chosen the Teacher of the Year at Woodville in 1956.*

1954 Wolverine. Courtesy of Enoch Mathis.

him to see us fooling around on the field with his team as we thought we were too small to play football. One day we were clowning around and trying to make exceptional catches with the football. We did not know it but Coach Turner was watching us.... He told us he wanted us to come out for the football team.<sup>51</sup>

Roland James remembers the coach telling them, "You do not have to be big to play football – you need to have skills." Coach Turner molded Roland James into a quarterback while Moses King's versatility allowed him to run, punt, or catch the ball as needed.<sup>52</sup> Among the many fine athletes trained by Coach Turner were Lemuel Campbell, Hubert Ginn, Johnny Holmes, Louis Peters, Calvin Roberts, Kenneth "Bo" Savage, Henry Wesley, and Freddie Woodson. Clarence Grant of the West Savannah Whippers, an exceptional coach in his own

right, called Joe Turner "the best coach that could be found anywhere."<sup>53</sup>

Girls' athletics flourished under Coach Turner's guidance. Basketball, track, and softball fielded competitive teams and several stars emerged. Lucinda Williams never lost a race while running track for Woodville, whether it was the 50, 100, or 220 yard dash. Often she hoped that her victories would generate more wins for Woodville track. "She would win and then implore the boys' team to do their part," recalled Roland James, who ran the quarter mile.<sup>54</sup> Her victory at the AAU Junior 50-yard dash in 1954 and 1955 brought Woodville's track program into the national spotlight. Her high school career was a springboard to a scholarship at Tennessee State University and international competition. Selected to the U.S. Olympic Track Team in both 1956 and 1960, she won a gold medal in the 4x100 meter relay at the games in Rome. She traced her success back to Woodville, where Coach Turner worked with her from her junior high school years forward. "He's the person I credit for making me what I am as an athlete and a person."<sup>55</sup>

Gladys Brannen was a triple threat in softball, track, and basketball during her career at Woodville from 1957 to 1961. In softball she batted .700 and won the Most Valuable Player award in 1958. In basketball, she averaged twenty points per game over a four-year period. As a sprinter on the track team, she ran the 100-yard dash and one leg of the 440-yard relay. Gladys Brannen played to win in every sport and in every game, and led her teammates with the same determination.

Coach Turner did not focus his attention solely on his athletes. Gwen Proctor Goodman never thought college was a possibility for her. Although her grades were excellent, she had ten brothers and sisters, and a college education seemed out of financial reach. Thanks to Coach Turner's intervention, she received a scholarship to attend Savannah State College. She went on to become a teacher, principal at Sol Johnson High School, and an alderman for the City of Savannah.

After Joe Turner died in 1991, it was Alderman Goodman who worked to enshrine the coach's memory by renaming Howe Street near the high school as Coach Joe Turner Boulevard. The honor was only fitting she said because "he was more or less a father to us all."<sup>56</sup>



*Fig. 22: Building school spirit for the blue and white was easy for cheerleaders, left to right, Lucinda Williams, Varnell Dorsey, Pauline Smith, Gladys Flowers, Armethia Greene, and Rosa Lee Brown.*

1954 Wolverine. Courtesy of Enoch Mathis.

## Always a Wolverine

*Fig. 23 and Fig 24 (right): Moses King, left, and Roland James, right, both earned scholarships to Savannah State College as a result of their outstanding achievements at Woodville.*

*Woodville-Tompkins High School Hall of Fame First Induction Ceremony Program. Courtesy of Enoch Mathis.*

*Fig. 25 (below): Members of the 1957 girls' basketball team sit at the top of the key.*  
1957 Wolverine. *Courtesy of Enoch Mathis.*

*Fig. 26 (facing page, upper left): The coaching staff for the 1956 season, from left to right, Assistant Coaches Malcolm Blount and Richard Lyles, Head Coach Joe Turner, Assistant Coaches Crawford Bryant and Alexander Speed.*

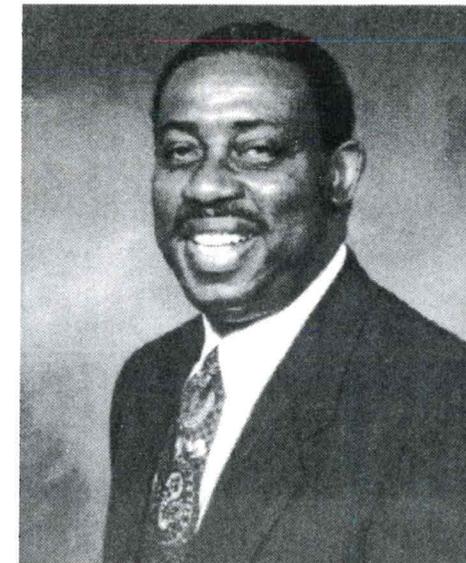
1957 Wolverine. *Courtesy of Enoch Mathis.*

*Fig. 27 (facing page, lower left): Lucinda Williams on her mark to greatness.*

1954 Wolverine. *Courtesy of Enoch Mathis.*

*Fig. 28 (facing page, right): The offensive line and backs led the 1956 team to a 6-3-1 season.*

1957 Wolverine. *Courtesy of Enoch Mathis.*







*Fig. 29: The first edition of the Wolverine was dedicated to Mrs. Sophronia Tompkins in 1954 praising her “genuine love, interest, and faith in people.”*

1954 Wolverine. *Courtesy of Enoch Mathis.*



*Fig. 30: Mrs. Tompkins is surrounded by gifts presented at her retirement reception in May 1955.*

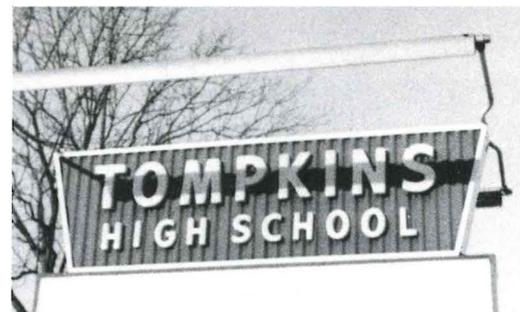
Savannah State College Bulletin, Vol. 19, no. 1. *Courtesy of the Savannah State University Archives.*

In June 1955, Mrs. Sophronia Tompkins retired after forty-two years of service in the Savannah-Chatham County Schools. Two generations of students at Woodville received all of their public school education under her tutelage, from first grade through high school graduation. During her tenure, Woodville grew from an elementary school with fewer than a hundred students in 1922 to a thriving consolidated school with enrollment well over a thousand. A farewell reception at the school honored Mrs. Tompkins and her thirty-three years as principal at Woodville.<sup>57</sup>

The 1954 *Wolverine* accurately described Mrs. Tompkins as “a generous and understanding principal who goes far beyond the line of duty.”<sup>58</sup> For example, she invited the high school students to use and borrow books from her personal library for school research projects.<sup>59</sup> She demonstrated the importance of education by returning to college and earning her bachelor’s degree from Savannah State College in 1947. She knew students by name even after administrative duties took her out of the classroom and she expected the best from them. At Friday assembly, for example, students knew to sit up

straight, fold their hands in their laps, and keep their feet flat on the floor if they did not want to receive her cross glare. According to Harold Franklin, “[Mrs. Tompkins] was quite strict and I had to go to her office quite often.”<sup>60</sup>

What Mrs. Tompkins created at Woodville was a school that the community took pride in. There could be no better tribute than renaming Woodville in her honor. The Board of Education passed a resolution unanimously in



*Fig. 31: Gwen Goodman Yearbook Collection, 1976 Wolverine. Courtesy of the Live Oak Public Libraries.*

September 1956 to change the name to “Sophronia Tompkins High and Elementary School.”<sup>61</sup>

Many changes for the Tompkins schools followed quickly. The new principal, James Luten, brought to completion a plan formulated by Mrs. Tompkins for a new high school building. Dedicated in November

1958, the modern high school added specialized facilities such as lab space, industrial workshops, an audio-visual room, library, lunchroom, and clinic along with standard classrooms.<sup>62</sup>

In the space of four years (1954-1958) new elementary and high school buildings had been constructed. Four more years passed before the Board of Education decided in 1962 to rebuild the junior high. This time, however, the new building would be physically separated from the rest of the Tompkins campus in its location at 402 Moore Street at Alfred Avenue. The school also carried a new name, Scott Junior High School, in honor of businessman and philanthropist Walter S. Scott. The dedication of the Scott Junior High School took place in November 1963.<sup>63</sup>

### FROM WEST SAVANNAH TO MOSES JACKSON SCHOOL

Significant changes for West Savannah School also occurred during this period. On September 11, 1956 Moses Jackson died and the community mourned the loss of the man that many called “the mayor of West Savannah.” He lobbied for more street lights and a greater police presence in the neighborhood; he worked with Ralph Mark Gilbert on voter registration drives; he helped

establish a West Savannah Community Center and served as its president. He was a deacon at Clifton Baptist Church, a member of the Order of Elks, and the president of Beautiful Zion Society, all the while working for Southern Bell for thirty-six years.<sup>64</sup> His most important legacy to the community was West Savannah School and his death accelerated an ongoing effort to rename the school for him. The day after his passing a petition was presented to the Board of Education reiterating the request, "We would like his name in wrought iron and placed on our school." Attached were fifteen pages of signatures.<sup>65</sup> The Board of Education unanimously voted to rename West Savannah Elementary as Moses Jackson School.<sup>66</sup>

### BARTOW ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

Fell Avenue School, in the meantime, had outlived its usefulness. It was too small and too old. Rebuilding a modern school on the same site was not feasible because the land needed would require a buyout of eight homes built on property next to the school. In January 1961, the Board of Education approved its demolition with the intent of building a new elementary school for African American students. Fell Avenue School, however, escaped the wrecking ball and was sold to Chatham Home Builders in 1963.<sup>67</sup>

The location of the new school was tied to Francis Bartow Place. Originally a housing project for white defense workers, Francis Bartow Place relocated its white residents in 1960 and opened its doors to African American families. The new school, placed roughly halfway between Moses Jackson School and Tompkins Elementary, was intended to relieve overcrowding in the two westside schools as well as other black schools in the system. The experience of Pamela Oglesby proves how much a new elementary was needed.

After first grade [at Tompkins Elementary], I was bussed to Spencer Elementary School on Wheaton Street to attend a 12-5 p.m. evening session. The second half of my second grade year (1961-1962) I was bussed to John W. Hubert School on the eastside. In third grade I was bussed to Pearl E. Smith Elementary School. The Board of Education told our parents they were building a school for the children in West Savannah. They built J.H.C. Butler for us, but it was located in Cloverdale. We never attended Butler because the Board of Education bussed us to [Moses Jackson School] on double sessions from 12-5 p.m.<sup>68</sup>

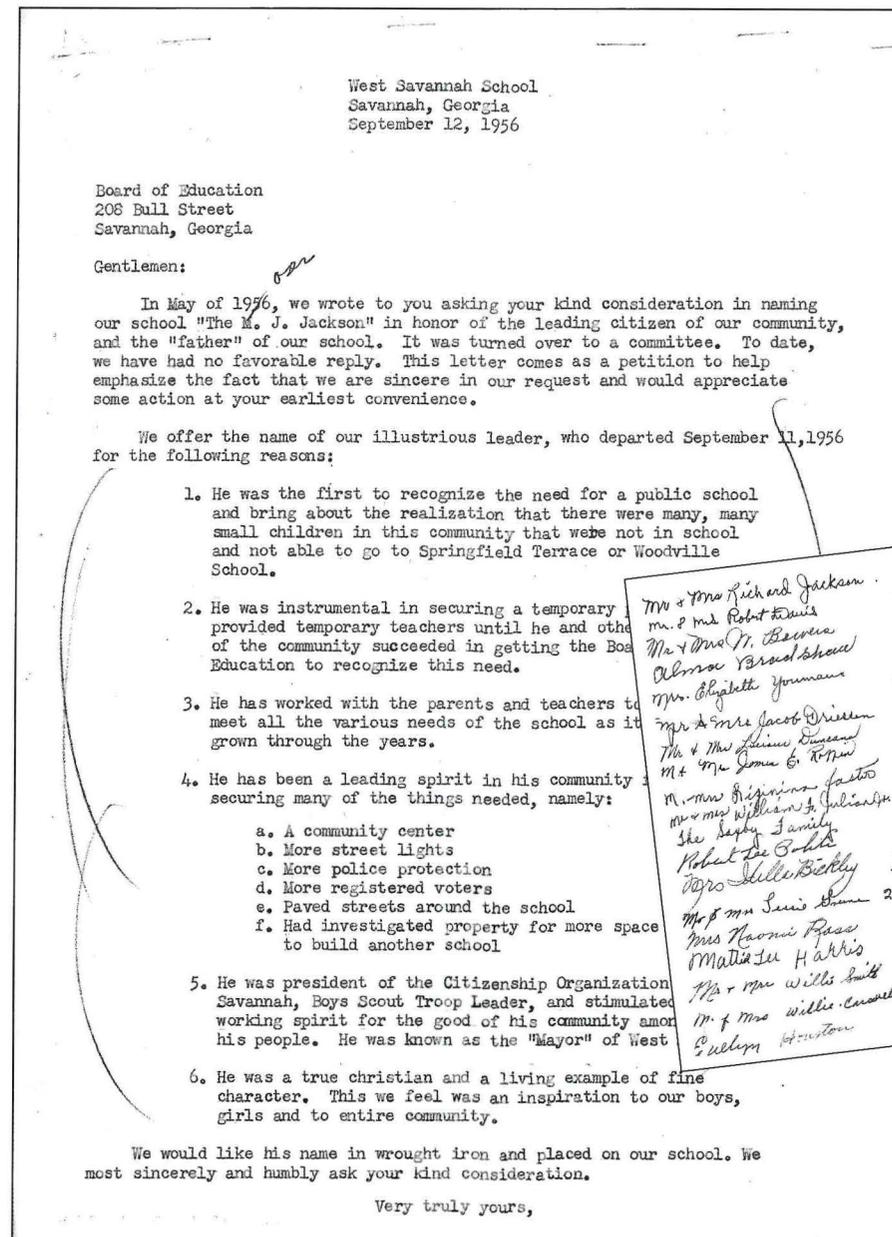


Fig. 32: Residents and businessmen of the neighborhood signed in support of changing the name of West Savannah School to honor Moses Jackson.

Moses Jackson School File. Courtesy of Savannah-Chatham County Public Schools.

The new school that Pamela Oglesby eventually attended was christened Bartow Elementary School and occupied on May 27, 1963, just as the school year was winding down. The students could enjoy their new classrooms for a few days before summer vacation began.<sup>69</sup>

## SCHOOL DESEGREGATION

Students returned to Bartow on September 3, 1963. Outwardly nothing had changed at the school; it still had the freshness of a brand new building. But the beginning of this school year was dramatically different because of the beginning of desegregation at two high schools in the public school system.

The 1954 Supreme Court ruling, *Brown v. Board of Education*, mandated equality in education for all races, effectively overturning the “separate but equal” standard used to segregate schools. The NAACP branch in Savannah twice petitioned the Board of Education to comply with the ruling in 1955



*Fig. 33: The major figures in the 1963 desegregation efforts were, seated from left to right, Lillian Myers, Frankie Coleman, four unidentified, Sara Townsend, Geraldine Loadholt; standing, W.W. Law, president, Savannah Branch NAACP; L. Scott Stell, chairman, NAACP Education Committee; Robert Stephenson; Ulysses Bryant Jr.; George Shinhoster; Sage Brown; unidentified; Anistine Thompson; unidentified; Florence Russell; John Alexander; Robbie Robinson; Eddie Banner; and A.J. Scott.*

*Courtesy of the Ralph Mark Gilbert Civil Rights Museum.*

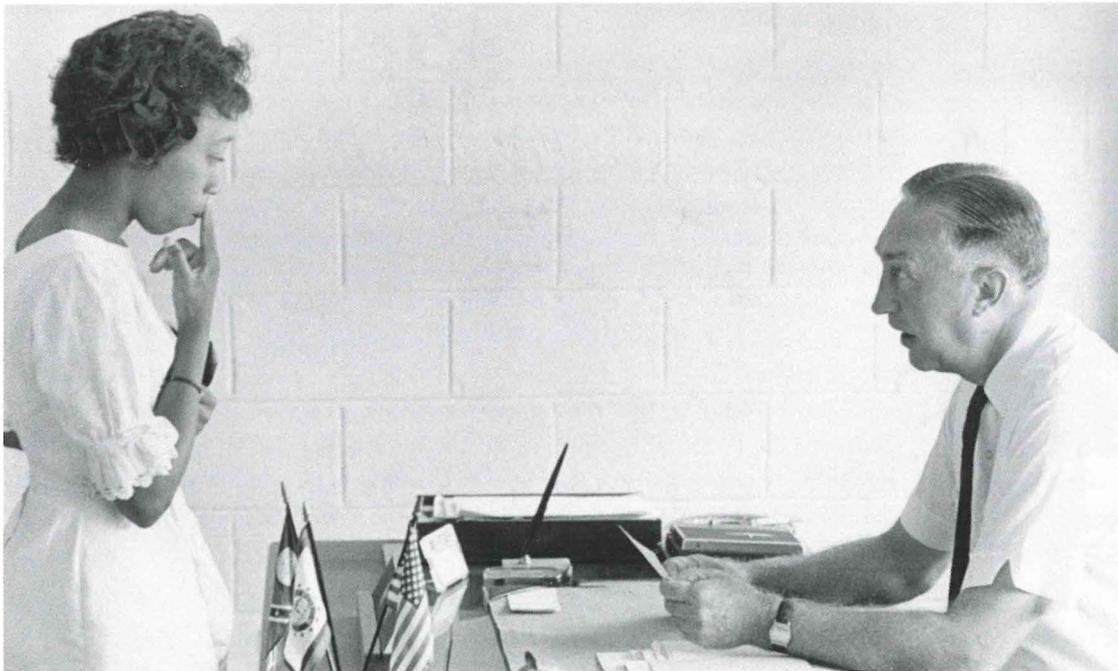
and 1959 but there was no movement towards integration. Finally, in January 1962, Rev. L. Scott Stell and thirty-five other African American parents filed suit on behalf of their children to force the integration of the Savannah-Chatham County Schools. In the summer of 1963, the Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals ordered integration of the twelfth grade to begin that fall.<sup>70</sup>

Nineteen high school students, all rising seniors in the summer of 1963, were chosen to integrate all-white Savannah High School and Groves High School. Five of the nineteen were Tompkins students: Sage Brown, George Shinhoster, Flora Ann Goldwire, Sara Townsend, and Sadie Mae Simmons. These five, as well as Deloris Cooper and Martha Jean Coleman from Beach High School, enrolled at Groves High School.

In the weeks before school opened, the students learned to respond to taunts and attacks with non-violence but the sixteen- and seventeen-year-old students could hardly imagine what was in store. “I didn’t want to go to Groves,” said Sage Brown, already actively involved in the civil rights movement. “I expected it to be more trouble [than Savannah High]” because resentment against integration was believed to be stronger in Garden City. Flora Ann Goldwire, who lived in Garden City, agreed. “I knew it would be rough, but I didn’t know how much.”<sup>71</sup>

Under police escort, the Groves Seven began the school year under trying circumstances. They dodged food thrown at them in the lunchroom and spitballs in class; name-calling, racial slurs, and harassing phone calls added to the hostile environment. White students who reached out to their black classmates suffered retaliation. One teacher sent Sara Townsend to the principal’s office every day because there was a pencil mark on her desk. There was some relief, she recalled, with the arrival of Principal J. Rife English, who joined the staff in mid-year. “He would come out and make sure we got off campus OK.” At graduation, however, taunting continued; the seven received their diplomas to the sound of booing in May 1964.<sup>72</sup>

Memories of their senior year at Groves are still painful. “I felt like a part of Tompkins’ class of 1964,” said George Shinhoster. “I had no friends at Groves other than those of color. There were a couple of white guys with a few kind words.”<sup>73</sup> What the seven endured was, in Sage Brown’s words, “a necessary price,” but one that he would never ask of his own children. Flora Ann Goldwire summed up the determination of the group when she said, “I was definitely going to succeed because I wasn’t going back the next year.”<sup>74</sup>



*Fig. 34: Sara Townsend meets with Principal Donald Gray on a difficult first morning at Groves. Savannah Morning News, 12 February 2006. Courtesy of the Savannah Morning News.*

Progress on full integration of the school district was minimal in the 1960s, and in 1971 U. S. District Court Judge B. Avant Edenfield took control of the desegregation effort in Savannah. Bussing began in 1971, resulting in “white flight” from public to private schools. Approximately 10,000 white children left the school system, changing the racial balance in the student population from majority white to majority black.<sup>75</sup>

Changing educational policies brought the closure of three beloved elementary schools in West Savannah neighborhoods. Saint Anthony School shut its doors in 1970. Its student population dwindled during the 1960s, and the school cut back from eight grades to four in 1968. A survey team from the University of Notre Dame recommended in 1969 that the school be closed and its students transferred to Cathedral Day School.<sup>76</sup> That recommendation went into effect in 1970 but not without protests. The school had served the community for sixty-one years; the sense of loss was felt keenly throughout the parish as a key part of its identity disappeared. Compounding the loss was the closure of

two African American parochial schools on the eastside of Savannah, Saint Benedict the Moor School and Pius X High School, in 1969 and 1971 respectively.<sup>77</sup> Protestant families shared the parish’s pain. Of the last eighty-seven students who attended Saint Anthony in 1969-1970, sixty were not Catholic.<sup>78</sup>

Another landmark school closed in 1987 when Tompkins Elementary failed to meet minimum enrollment standards set by the state. In the desegregation process, Tompkins had been left with only kindergarteners and fifth graders. Judge Edenfield and the Board of Education agreed to close Tompkins, Florance, and Anderson Elementary Schools in June, 1987.<sup>79</sup>

Moses Jackson Elementary School received a new mission in 1981 to serve special education students. For the next twelve years a caring staff of teachers worked with severely to profoundly disabled children. However, in the early 1990s, educators proposed that these students would be best served by mainstreaming them into regular schools. Although they would continue to receive specialized instruction during most of the school day, they could join the other students for some classes. Not only would the

special students benefit by being with their peers, the other students would gain insight and understanding. When this policy of mainstreaming was adopted in Chatham County in 1993, Moses Jackson students were reassigned to new schools.<sup>80</sup> The Board of Education conveyed title of the school building to the City of Savannah in June 1996, and the building once more had a new mission. It stood as the Moses Jackson Center.<sup>81</sup>

With the consent of Judge Edenfield, the Board of Education revised its integration plan in 1988 to establish voluntary magnet school programs. The intent was to lure white students back to public education. Bartow was tapped as one of eight elementary schools to host a magnet program. With specialized instruction for “gifted and talented” students, Bartow met its objectives as a racially balanced school.<sup>82</sup>

It came as a shock to the entire community when the Board of Education announced that Tompkins High School would close at the end of the spring



*Fig. 35: Saint Anthony's last class of eighth grade graduates received their diplomas during mass on May 26, 1968. Father Frank Donahue is flanked by twelve graduates. Saint Anthony School File. Courtesy of the Catholic Diocese of Savannah Archives.*

semester of 1989. The history of Woodville/Tompkins stretched back to the first graduating class of 1950 and for four decades the high school was a rallying point for education, athletics, and civic life. Granted, enrollment at the high school had dropped by more than half in twenty years. The Board of Education envisioned the high school facilities housing a middle school of over 1,100 students, and Judge Edenfield approved the plan as a means to decrease middle school overcrowding.<sup>83</sup>

Converting the buildings into a new Tompkins Middle School did not soften the blow. Freshmen, sophomores, and juniors discovered that they would finish their high school careers at Beach or Groves. One of those students, Erica Coleman, stated, "My grandmother, my mother, and all my brothers and sisters graduated from [Tompkins]. I really don't want to go to another school."<sup>84</sup>

Pamela Howard-Oglesby, Tompkins class of 1971, understood the student's disappointment. "In ninth grade," said Ms. Oglesby, "I could not wait to go to Tompkins High School to be a Wolverine. People felt that they took an institution from the West Savannah area when they closed Sophronia M. Tompkins High School."<sup>85</sup>

## CONCLUSION

Sweeping changes transformed public schools in the western Savannah area with the beginning of desegregation in 1963. No longer were outdated and used textbooks and second-hand equipment the norm for black students. Bussing took some children out of the community for their schooling and brought other children into western Savannah. Some schools with deep ties to the community had closed, while magnet schools made specialized education available to students in a mixed race environment. The opportunities offered by magnet schools encouraged the Board of Education to argue in 1993 that the "dual system" of schools segregated by race had ended. Judge Edenfield agreed and declared that the Savannah-Chatham County public schools were indeed desegregated. In 1994 control of the school system passed from the courts to the Board of Education. In recent years, schools in western Savannah, like those in many parts of the city, have been resegregated. The overwhelming majority of students at both Tompkins Middle School and Bartow Elementary School are again African American.<sup>86</sup>

What lies ahead for these westside schools cannot be predicted, but the memory of past teachers and principals and yesterday's schools is still very much alive. In 1969, the Woodville Alumni Association was founded, in part to bring schoolmates together for social occasions but also to keep the Woodville name and legacy alive after the school was renamed. The association continues to be very active, meeting nine times during the year. In 2007, the organization changed its name to the Woodville-Tompkins Alumni



*Fig. 36: Student Vincent Hankerson, 14, leaves Moses Jackson smiling on the last day of school.*

*Savannah News-Press, 12 June 1993. Courtesy of the Savannah News-Press.*



*Fig. 37: Bartow's innovative approach incorporating technology into the curriculum allows students to learn about architecture and graphic design while honing critical thinking skills.*

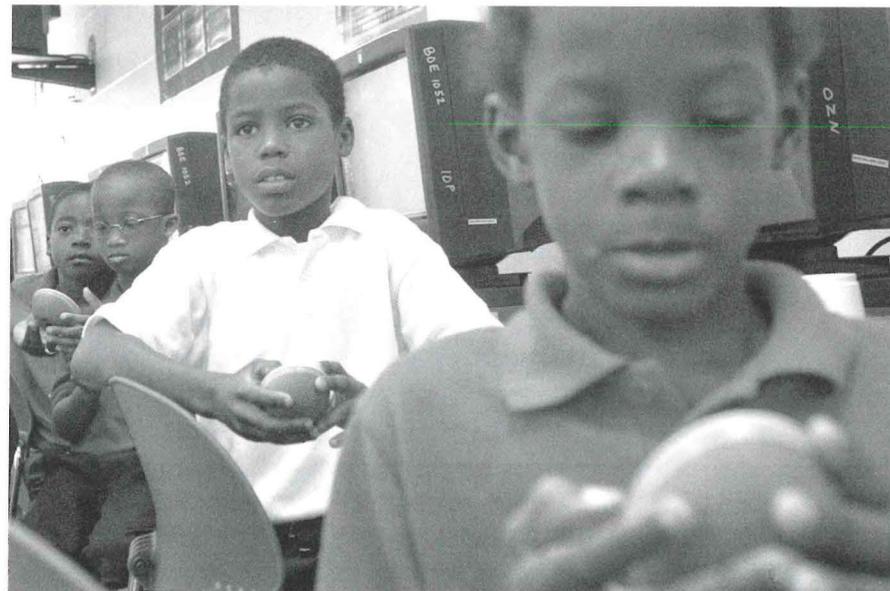
*Photograph by the author.*

J. Hilton, James Jackson, the late Dorothy J. Kitchen, Joe Mitchell, Ruby H. Moore, and the late Marie H. Wright. The association was instrumental in erecting a monument to Moses J. Jackson at the school, and now the community center, that bears his name. The monument was inscribed: *Moses J. Jackson, Man with a Vision.*<sup>89</sup> In West Savannah, the man and his vision have not been forgotten.

Association to embrace all the students who attended the school.<sup>87</sup>

In 2004, Enoch Mathis led the effort to create the Woodville-Tompkins High School Hall of Fame Association and served as its first president. Thanks to his leadership and that of his successor James Hall, a total of five coaches, twenty-seven athletes, and three citation honorees have been inducted into the Hall of Fame by 2007. At the conclusion of each ceremony, all the Wolverines joined in singing the alma mater.<sup>88</sup>

Members of the West Savannah School Alumni Association include the late Alexander V. Speed, president; Nathaniel Jenkins, vice-president; Lessie W. Johnson, secretary; Dorothy B. McCoy, treasurer; the late Richard Hunter, chaplain; Estella J. Barnes, Rosa L. Brisbane, Elise



*Fig. 38: Using hand-held modules, Bartow second-graders Chantz Cooper, in the white shirt, and Natasha Allen, right, click in their answers and see the class-wide results on a screen in the front of the classroom.*

*Savannah Morning News. August 2005. Courtesy of the Savannah Morning News.*

# School Ties that Bind

*Bartow Elementary at Georgia Day Parade, 2005. BOE Photo Archives. Courtesy of Savannah-Chatham County Public Schools.*



*Fig Club, 1954 Wolverine. Courtesy of Enoch Mathis.*



*Drill Club, 1954 Wolverine. Courtesy of Enoch Mathis.*

*Student on camera, Tompkins Middle School, 2005. BOE Photo Archives. Courtesy of Savannah-Chatham County Public Schools.*



*West Savannah School, n.d. BOE West Savannah School File. Courtesy of Savannah-Chatham County Public Schools.*

## FOOTNOTES

- <sup>1</sup> Petition of Voluntary Association to Board of Education, n.d., West Savannah School File, SCCPS; SMN, 17 September 1935, 12; SH, 8 October 2003.
- <sup>2</sup> SMN, 1 October 1935, 3; Albert S. Otto, *The Public School System of Savannah and Chatham County* (n.p., n.d.), Vol. 3.
- <sup>3</sup> Otto, *Public School System of Savannah and Chatham County*, Vol. 3; Haygood S. Bowden, *Two Centuries of Education: Bicentennial 1733-1933, Savannah, Chatham County, Georgia* (Richmond, VA: Press of the Dietz Printing Company, 1932), 416-17.
- <sup>4</sup> *Forty-First Annual Report of the Public Schools of the City of Savannah and County of Chatham for the Year Ending June 30, 1906* (Savannah: Savannah Morning News, 1907); Otto, *Public School System of Savannah and Chatham County*, Vol. 3.
- <sup>5</sup> Otto, *Public School System of Savannah and Chatham County*, Vol. 3.
- <sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, SMN, 1 October 1917.
- <sup>7</sup> Tompkins High School Files, SCCPS.
- <sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>9</sup> Otto, *Public School System of Savannah and Chatham County*, Vol. 3.
- <sup>10</sup> M. L. Duggan, Table CXXIX, *Georgia State School Items 9* (November 1932), No. 7. Atlanta: State Department of Education, 1932.
- <sup>11</sup> SMN, 17 September 1935, 12.
- <sup>12</sup> Duggan, Table CXXX.
- <sup>13</sup> SMN, 6 April 1936, 10.
- <sup>14</sup> Otto, *Public School System of Savannah and Chatham County*, Vol. 3.
- <sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>17</sup> Sophronia Tompkins, "Plan to Train Negro Domestic Set up at Woodville School Years Ago," SMN, 30 December 1945.
- <sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>19</sup> Otto, *Public School System of Savannah and Chatham County*, Vol. 3.
- <sup>20</sup> ST, 1 February 1940.
- <sup>21</sup> Tompkins High School Files, SCCPS; *Public Schools in Chatham County, Georgia: A Survey Report* (Nashville, TN: George Peabody College for Teachers, 1949), 150-51.
- <sup>22</sup> "Mrs. Sophronia M. Thompson [sic]," *The Herald: Official Journal of the Georgia Teachers and Education Association*, (April 1949): 15; Letter from Woodville Community Council, 20 February 1952, presented to Board of Education Meeting, 4 March 1952, Sophronia Tompkins Elementary School File, SCCPS; *1954 Wolverine*.
- <sup>23</sup> "Mrs. Sophronia M. Thompson [sic], 15; Woodville Community Council, 20 February 1952, to Board of Education, Sophronia Tompkins Elementary School File, SCCPS.
- <sup>24</sup> Woodville Community Council, 20 February 1952, to Board of Education, Sophronia Tompkins Elementary School File, SCCPS.
- <sup>25</sup> Program, Dedication Exercises, 11 April 1954, Sophronia Tompkins Elementary School File, SCCPS.
- <sup>26</sup> Otto, *Public School System of Savannah and Chatham County*, Vol. 3; Duggan, Table CXXIV.
- <sup>27</sup> Dorothy Courington, WSDP-OH.
- <sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>29</sup> *Public Schools in Chatham County, Georgia*, 152-53.
- <sup>30</sup> Fell Avenue PTA to Board of Education, 18 February 1946, Fell Avenue School Bids and Contracts File, SCCPS.
- <sup>31</sup> Otto, *Public School System of Savannah and Chatham County*, Vol. 3; Moses Jackson School File, SCCPS.
- <sup>32</sup> *Public Schools in Chatham County, Georgia*, 152-53.
- <sup>33</sup> Moses Jackson School File, SCCPS; Rose Harris, WSDP-OH.
- <sup>34</sup> Moses Jackson School File, SCCPS; SH, 10 November 1956.
- <sup>35</sup> SH, 17 March 1955; 4 May 1957; 30 May 1959.
- <sup>36</sup> SH, 30 April 1942; 10 May 1956.
- <sup>37</sup> SMA Contract with the Bishop of Savannah, 1907, African Missionaries Files, SMA Box, CDSA.

- <sup>38</sup> ST, 14 August 1909.
- <sup>39</sup> Ibid., 2 October 1909; Sister M. Julian Griffin and Gillian Brown, *Tomorrow Comes the Song: The Story of Catholicism among the Black Population of South Georgia, 1850-1978* (Savannah: Catholic Diocese of Savannah, 1979), 47.
- <sup>40</sup> ST, 18 December 1909.
- <sup>41</sup> Ibid., 28 September 1912; 12 October 1912.
- <sup>42</sup> Evelyn Daniels, WSDP-OH; Gary W. McDonogh, *Black and Catholic in Savannah, Georgia* (Knoxville, TN: University of Tennessee Press, 1993), 230.
- <sup>43</sup> Saint Anthony Church File, Savannah Deanery, CDSA.
- <sup>44</sup> Herman Allen, WSDP-OH.
- <sup>45</sup> McDonogh, *Black and Catholic in Savannah*, 116-17.
- <sup>46</sup> Saint Anthony School File, 1937-1959; *Bulletin of the Catholic Laymen's Association of Georgia*, 18 December 1948, CDSA.
- <sup>47</sup> McDonogh, *Black and Catholic in Savannah*, 114.
- <sup>48</sup> Harold Franklin, WSDP-OH.
- <sup>49</sup> SMN, 26 March 1993.
- <sup>50</sup> Woodville-Tompkins High School Hall of Fame First Induction Ceremony Program, 2004.
- <sup>51</sup> Moses King, WSDP-OH.
- <sup>52</sup> Roland James, WSDP-OH; Woodville-Tompkins High School Hall of Fame First Induction Ceremony Program, 2004.
- <sup>53</sup> Clarence Grant, WSDP-OH.
- <sup>54</sup> Roland James, WSDP-OH.
- <sup>55</sup> Woodville-Tompkins High School Hall of Fame First Induction Ceremony Program, 2004.
- <sup>56</sup> SMN, 26 March 1993.
- <sup>57</sup> Biographical Sketch of Sophronia Tompkins, courtesy of Angela Stone, Tompkins Middle School; SH, 22 May 1955, 15 September 1956.
- <sup>58</sup> *1954 Wolverine*.
- <sup>59</sup> Rose Harris, WSDP-OH.
- <sup>60</sup> Ibid., Harold Franklin, WSDP-OH; Conversation with Thelma Honeyblue.
- <sup>61</sup> Sophronia Tompkins Elementary School File, Tompkins High School File, SCCPS.
- <sup>62</sup> Dedication Program, Tompkins High School File, SCCPS.
- <sup>63</sup> Scott Junior High School File, SCCPS.
- <sup>64</sup> Petition to Board of Education, 12 September 1956, Moses Jackson School File, SCCPS; SH, 15 September 1956; 8 October 2003, 14; Elise Hilton and James Jackson, WSDP-OH.
- <sup>65</sup> Petition to Board of Education, 12 September 1956, Moses Jackson School File, SCCPS.
- <sup>66</sup> Moses Jackson School File, SCCPS.
- <sup>67</sup> Bids and Contracts File, Fell Avenue School, SCCPS; SEP, 26 January 1962.
- <sup>68</sup> Pamela Howard-Oglesby, WSDP-OH.
- <sup>69</sup> Bartow School File, SCCPS; SEP, 22 May 1963.
- <sup>70</sup> SH, 30 May 1959; SMN, 16 May 2004, 4-6A.
- <sup>71</sup> SMN, 30 March 1997, 1E.
- <sup>72</sup> Ibid., 2E; SMN, 16 May 2004, 4A.
- <sup>73</sup> SMN, 30 March 1997, 2E.
- <sup>74</sup> Ibid., SMN, 16 May 2004, 4A.
- <sup>75</sup> School Board Meeting, 17 August 1994, Desegregation Files, SCCPS.
- <sup>76</sup> *Southern Cross*, 1 May 1969, CDSA.
- <sup>77</sup> Father Frank Higgins, "St. Anthony's Parish: A History /Profile," April 1979, typescript, 2, CDSA.
- <sup>78</sup> National Catholic Education Association Data Bank Information, 1969-1970, CDSA.
- <sup>79</sup> Tompkins Elementary School File, SCCPS.
- <sup>80</sup> SNP, 12 June 1993, 1A, 8A.
- <sup>81</sup> Moses Jackson School File, SCCPS; SH, 8 October 2003, 14.

<sup>82</sup> Board Meeting, 17 August 1994, SCCPS.

<sup>83</sup> Tompkins High School File, SCCPS.

<sup>84</sup> SMN, 23 March 1989.

<sup>85</sup> Pamela Howard-Oglesby, WSDP-OH.

<sup>86</sup> *Savannah Chatham County Public Schools Desegregation Plan – Semi-Annual Report, October 1999.*

<sup>87</sup> Conversation with Mrs. Ernestine Jones.

<sup>88</sup> Programs to the First, Second, Third and Fourth Induction Ceremony, Woodville-Tompkins High School Hall of Fame Association, 2004, 2005, 2006, 2007.

<sup>89</sup> SH, 8 October 2003.





LEISURE

*Rufus Bryant, Sr. and Bernice Wade Bryant.  
Courtesy of Bernetta Anderson.*

**THE FIRST EXCURSION TRAIN** of the 1952 spring season left Savannah for a day trip to Augusta on the first Sunday in May. On board were members of the Independent Order, Brothers and Sisters of America, better known as the Stone Lodge. The West Savannah Lodge No. 4 was well represented among the ten lodges traveling that day. If the fare of three dollars stretched some pocketbooks, it was a special occasion to visit Augusta in the company of lodge sisters and brothers and travel in style on the Central of Georgia.<sup>1</sup>

Train excursions had been a favorite activity of clubs and church groups since the 1920s and by the 1950s bus cruises and motorcades had also been added to the social calendar of organizations. A motorcade to Hardeeville or Wilmington Island, a bus cruise to Brunswick or Jacksonville, and especially a train trip to Augusta was an event to look forward to. The workaday world set the pace for living most of the week but leisure kept the demands of jobs or school or family responsibilities in perspective.

## SOCIAL CLUBS

Outings across town or across the state were one way that social clubs strengthened ties among friends and neighbors in western Savannah. The number of members in each club might be large or small, but membership often represented a commitment that lasted for decades or even a lifetime. Ophelia Julian, for example, joined the Rosary Social Club in the 1970s, and as she put it, "I fell in love with that club." More than thirty years later, she is still a member.<sup>2</sup> A club reflected a special interest of its members, such as religion or sewing. Clubs naturally grew up among employees of the same company. Neighborhood groups or sometimes people who just had a good time together created their own clubs. Whatever their origin, clubs knit neighborhoods together.

The Evergreen Sewing Circle, established in February, 1930, was one of the oldest clubs in West Savannah and it remained active into the 1960s. Women of the community met together at each other's homes to sew, to sing, and enjoy refreshments. A loyal membership included Anna Wilson of Richards Street, Eva Johnson of Scarborough Street, Mabel Black of Newell Street, Mary Davis of Augusta Avenue, Mrs. C. Hankerson of Lincoln Avenue, and Mrs. C. Vandross of Jenks Street.<sup>3</sup>

Members of the sewing circle tended to entertain in their homes, celebrating club anniversaries and hosting parties there. Other clubs, such as the Night Hawks Social Club, combined meetings at homes and at the Star Café on West Broad Street with an active calendar of parties and outings. For example, they held a pre-Easter Dance at the Lincoln Inn in 1952, a Buckeroo dance at the Tremont Inn the next year, and a Mexican hop in 1954 again at the Tremont Inn.<sup>4</sup> The club even hired a bus to take members to Fernandina Beach for a Labor Day excursion in 1954 and a summer holiday in Beaufort, South Carolina the following year.<sup>5</sup>

**MOONLIGHT BOATRIDE**  
Given By The  
**NIGHTHAWKS SOCIAL CLUB**  
To  
**DAUFUSKIE ISLAND, S. C.**



**SUNDAY, MAY 19, 1957**  
On The S. S. VISITOR  
Good Music — Refreshments

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Fare: Adv. \$1.50 — At Boat \$1.75

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Boat Leaves Bull Street Dock at 8:00 P.M.

Tickets can be purchased by contacting the following persons:  
Herbert Williams, 1213 1/2 Second Street, AD 3-9318; Booker T. Natson, 1032 W. 38th St. AD 3-2718; Charlie Woodley, 202 Maple St. (Water Works); Walter Graham, 10-10A Joe St.; Willie Smith, 1321 Church St., AD 6-8906; Paul Hymon, 428 Felwood Homes, AD 6-2051; Sam Savage, 237 Eagle St., AD 2-0237; Roosevelt Parris, 1010 McKelvey Ave.; Jessie Williams, 109 Baker St.; Richard Fulton, 109 Baker St.

*Fig. 1: In 1957, the Night Hawks chartered the S.S. Visitor for an evening cruise to Daufuskie Island. A cruise on the Visitor was a favorite outing for several western Savannah groups. The PTA of Saint Anthony School also sponsored an afternoon sail to Beaufort in 1957.*

The Herald, 4 May 1957. Courtesy of The Herald.

Members in the Night Hawks Social Club came mainly from West Savannah but a few men joined from Woodville and even as far as the Cuyler-Brownville and eastside neighborhoods. In the same way that the club reached out to members, it also worked to establish ties with other clubs. Members invited the Mohawks Social Club, the Imperial Dukes, the Master Keys Social Club, the Ebonettes Social Club, and the West Savannah Aristocrats to join them at a yard party in 1955. Likewise they visited the Papaya Club in West Savannah. In 1952, they signed a contract with the Master Keys Social Club as a club partner to acknowledge the close relationship existing between the two clubs.<sup>6</sup> Among the most active members were Paul Hymon of Scarborough Street, Roosevelt Parris of Fair Street, Willie Smith of Church Street, Jesse Williams of Baker Street, and President Herbert Williams of Love Street.

Employee clubs brought co-workers together for socializing. Even though a number of the industrial plants sponsored barbecues or other get-togethers for their workers, these clubs were wholly the creation of the employees themselves, a way of continuing friendships outside the workplace. Both male and female employees belonged to the Pierpont Social Club and the Southern Cotton Oil Employees. Obviously the Longshoremen Ladies Auxiliary had women members only and so did the Dixie Crystals Social Club. Generally the clubs held their meetings and parties at the homes of individual members, although the Longshoremen Ladies Auxiliary had the union hall at their disposal.<sup>7</sup>

Fundraising was an important activity for almost all of the clubs. Fifteen cents in 1940 bought a plateful of oysters at a Union Bag Social Club oyster roast on Newell Street. By the 1950s clubs had fewer backyard supper events and more dances at a nearby club, the Tremont Inn. The Count Club, the Master Keys, and the Comets Social Club featured dance parties as part of their regular calendar of events. Each club seemed to find its niche in community fundraisers that friends and neighbors supported. Prices were kept within affordable limits; forty cents for a chicken dinner prepared by the Belledonians Club in 1948 was comparable to restaurant prices. One indication of the success of these fundraisers was the annual report of the Jolly 12 Club in Woodville that collected \$596.84 in 1948, the result of many hours of hard work throughout the year.<sup>8</sup>

The value of these clubs, however, cannot be calculated in dollars and cents. Clubs were an important layer of social relationships within neighborhoods that kept people connected. In addition to having fun, club members attended to the needs of the sick and the bereaved within their circle, as well as addressing the needs of the community. The visiting that occurred between clubs ensured that social networks grew even larger, not smaller, by joining a club. Finally, clubs built pride. The Unique Elites Social Club, for example, chose orange and green as their club colors, a way of boasting of their affiliation to all their friends and neighbors in West Savannah.<sup>9</sup>

### BENEVOLENT SOCIETIES AND FRATERNAL ORGANIZATIONS

Before social clubs became popular, benevolent societies and fraternal orders were the most common social organizations in western Savannah. Peter

Jackson founded the best known benevolent organizations in the 1920s – Saint Philip’s Society and the Golden Links Society. A storeowner and Woodville resident since the early twentieth century, Peter Jackson earned the respect of his neighbors because of his integrity and quiet leadership. He started these benevolent societies to help people save money for funeral expenses. Each member contributed twenty-five cents weekly so that at his/her death family members received \$50 to pay for a dignified burial. Curley Milton of Woodville remembers that not everyone was allowed to join, specifically “people...known to be troublemakers or ‘scrapiron’ (bootleg whiskey) drinkers.”<sup>10</sup>

The hall where the Saint Philip’s and Golden Links Societies met still stands at the corner of Fair and Alfred Streets in Woodville. The hall is “raggedy” now, in the words of Curley Milton, but he recalls when it was a social center. People turned out to buy fish dinners or chicken suppers there as part of the societies’ fundraising efforts.

When Peter Jackson died, Curley Milton succeeded him as president of the



*Fig. 2: Once a center of social activity, Saint Philip’s Hall now stands empty.  
Photograph by Lily Keber.*



Fig. 3 : The Eastern Star and the F.&A.M. Masons of the Savannah District announce their presence at their current meeting place on Drayton Street.

Photograph by the author.

Saint Philip's and Golden Link Societies but time was running out for benevolent societies. People stopped contributing money after World War II. The societies had outlived their purpose.<sup>11</sup>

Saint Philip's Hall, however, was resurrected as a Masonic hall. Curley Milton remembers that the general public was allowed to come in to the ground floor of the hall but the second floor was reserved for members only.<sup>12</sup> The Independent Free and Accepted Modern Masons have had a presence in western Savannah since the 1950s. Two chapters of the Order of the Eastern Star

existed by 1957, the Esther Chapter No. 15 and the Sharon Chapter No. 2, and in more recent years Ruth Chapter No. 3 has been created.<sup>13</sup> George W. Wade, Worshipful Master of Clearview Lodge No. 14, was an early leader of the F&AM Masons in Hudson Hill. As Supreme Recruit Deputy and Captain, he had the authority to organize new lodges and chapters.<sup>14</sup>

### VAUDEVILLE AND JAZZ CLUBS

Although West Broad Street had the well-deserved reputation as the entertainment district for the African American community in Savannah for many years, the westside showcased popular entertainers at local clubs and theaters since the beginning of the twentieth century.

Lincoln Park, centrally located for West Savannah, Woodville, and Hudson Hill residents on Augusta Road near West Lathrop Avenue, was the first entertainment complex in the area. Originally it was a warm weather venue with lawns and a vaudeville theater. When Lincoln Park reopened for the 1909 summer season, a brass band played an open-air concert for the crowds who

**Concert and Dance**  
**CAFE LINCOLN INN**  
Savannah

POPS 4 TO 5:30	W D A R	<b>SUNDAY NITE</b> <b>February 5, 1950</b> 10 P.M. Until ???	JIVE FROM 3 TO 5	W F R P
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**EARL BOSTIC**  
AND ORCHESTRA  
PLAYING AND SINGING

Who Snuck The Wine in The Gravy  
8-45 Stomp — Many More New Records  
Nay Nay Go Away — Sugar Hill Blues

**ADVANCE 1.25 — TICKETS — AT DOOR 1.60**

Dave's, Gaston, W. Broad, 3-0278, Hall, E. Broad, Duke's Record Shop, White House, Waters Cor. Wheaton, The Herald, Lincoln Inn, Gus Lounge

Fig. 4: The Cafe Lincoln Inn featured musicians such as Earl Bostic and his Orchestra, but also comedians and even the occasional contortionist.

The Herald, 2 February 1950. Courtesy of The Herald.

took the street car or walked to the event. The Pekin Theatre at Lincoln Park specialized in vaudeville, featuring comedians and singers. The crowds grew even larger on Wednesdays, Fridays, and Sundays when the shows were free.<sup>15</sup> The theatre also boasted that it was "The House of High Class Pictures" and "The House of Feature Films." Each night a different movie was shown, with westerns seemingly special favorites. "A Frontier Child," "In Old Wyoming Days," and "Bison" headed the play bill in 1912. The theater owner noted in an advertisement that his films were "hand colored," adding "the performers, the patrons, the proprietor, are so by nature. Glad of it, aren't you?"<sup>16</sup>

With vaudeville shows, films, a dance floor, and picnic tables, Lincoln Park had something for everyone in the early days. By the 1940s and 1950s, it became a jazz club under a new proprietor, Gus Hayes. The club was known as the Lincoln Inn and later as the Cafe Lincoln Inn, with a stage large enough for singers and orchestra, ample seating space, and an imposing bar. Gus Hayes worked to bring acts from New York to Savannah, such as the Southern Sons who had played the Apollo Theater in Harlem.<sup>17</sup> Other headliners included The Four Southern Sons, vocalist Phillis Smiley who sang with Duke Ellington, and Big Jay McNeely and his Cool Cat Deacons.

Another reason for the club's popularity was that it was large enough to accommodate private parties. The Redeemers Sporting Club held a BeBop Hop at the Cafe Lincoln Inn in February 1950, and just a few days later the Omega Psi Phi fraternity hosted a cabaret dance as a scholarship fundraiser.<sup>18</sup> Every week organizations booked the Cafe Lincoln Inn for dances, suppers, or special occasions.

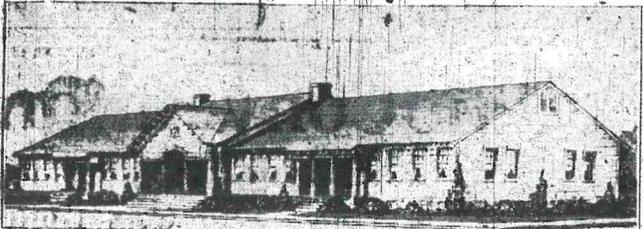
The Hollywood Casino at the corner of West Lathrop Avenue and Bay Street tried to attract all age groups. Families with children could enjoy the air-conditioned dining room, clubs rented the facility for parties, and the floor show for night owls began after midnight. During its heyday in the 1930s, the Hollywood Casino competed head-on with the Lincoln Inn with dancing every night for only a fifteen cents cover charge. They worked hard to attract club functions by hiring out their orchestra for fifteen or twenty dollars per night. It was a good enough deal that the Starlight Pleasure Club could not resist holding their gingham dress dance there in 1936.<sup>19</sup>



Fig. 5: Rufus Bryant Sr., second from the right, was a member of this foursome at the Cafe Lincoln Inn in the late 1940s.

Courtesy of Bernetta Anderson.

## Hollywood Casino Calendar



**Special Sunday Dinners**  
Served from 2 to 9 P. M.

PRICES:  
**25c to 40c**

Concert from 4 P. M. to 8 P. M.

Bring Your Family and Enjoy the Afternoon With Us. Forget the Heat and Keep Cool in Our Cool Dining Room.

### WEEK OF JULY 5th, 1936

<p><b>SUNDAY NIGHT, (12:15 A. M.)</b> Floor Show. Admission 25c</p> <p><b>MONDAY NIGHT, JULY 6</b> The Married Men's Club Outing Admission 25c</p> <p><b>TUESDAY NIGHT, JULY 7.</b> LADIES' NIGHT</p>	<p><b>WEDNESDAY NIGHT, JULY 8</b> Novelty Night.</p> <p><b>THURSDAY NIGHT, JULY 9</b> Hollywood Casino Revue, featuring Thurnell and Jesse, renowned Tap Artists; Mamie and Nelson. Sophisticated Dance Team; Calista Mae Simmons, well known Blues Singer; Billy T. Out-</p>	<p>land, the Georgia Sunflower; Elsie Miller, the Girl with a Golden Voice; Margaret Hampton of West Palm Beach, Fla., will also be featured.</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>RESERVE YOUR TABLE IN ADVANCE</b></p> <p><b>FRIDAY NIGHT, JULY 10</b> Country Store Night</p>
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**Don't Forget Our Breakfast Dance, July 4th, 1936 from 11 A. M. to 3 P. M.**

Ask us about the **PROFIT SHARING PLAN** for your Club Dances, including our Orchestra, at only \$15 or \$20 Per Night. Let us assist you with any form of entertainment at a reasonable cost.

**LOCATED—STILES AVENUE, NORTH OFF BAY ST EXTENSION.** P. O. BOX 243, SAVANNAH, GA.  
Telep. Home 9523      ARTHUR S. GIVENS, Prop.

Fig. 6: With a breakfast dance on the fourth of July, Sunday dinners, and late night revues, the Hollywood Casino was ready to please its guests morning, noon, and night. Savannah Tribune, 2 July 1936. Courtesy of the Savannah Tribune.

Several other clubs operated in the same West Lathrop Avenue/West Bay Street vicinity as the Hollywood Casino and the Cafe Lincoln Inn – the Millhaven Paradise in the 1930s, the Manhattan Club on Bay Street in the 1940s, the Sunset Inn in the 1950s, and The Palms in the 1960s.<sup>20</sup> “Gunnie” Greene’s Tremont Inn on Telfair Road, across Louisville Road and adjacent to Woodville, rivaled the popularity of the Cafe Lincoln Inn and had a longstanding tradition of good music and good food. In addition to these clubs, there were neighborhood spots that enjoyed a loyal following as well. In Woodville, for example, Georgia Cannady ran the Hideaway Club on Darling Street, and Lora Lee McNeil operated “The Hole” on Wright Street.<sup>21</sup>

## CHILDREN AT PLAY

Children always find a way to have fun. Boys, then and now, play ball. Herman Allen recalled that he and his friends made their own balls and gloves out of canvas. Harold Franklin's best memories of childhood go back to playing baseball at the Springfield Terrace ball field. It seemed like his grandmother always called him to come home too soon. When he wasn't playing baseball, there was sandlot football.<sup>22</sup> Floyd Adams Jr., a fine baseball player himself, also remembers that Mackey's Pool Hall on Augusta Avenue reserved special times during the day when young boys could shoot pool.<sup>23</sup>

There were still woods to play in as late as the 1940s and children loved to go there. Climbing trees and making slingshots occupied Harold Franklin for hours when he went to the woods as a youngster. Other boys brought BB guns for hunting, not just for sport.<sup>24</sup>

Camping trips were rare for city boys in the 1930s, so the invitation from the *Savannah Tribune* to take all its newspaper carriers on an overnight excursion was a special treat. For a trip to Bradley Island in 1936, the paper announced to its young employees, "we will pack all our troubles in a paper bag." Actually, the boys packed whatever food they wanted to eat in the paper bag, but otherwise there was no cost. No doubt the newspaper announcement was on target when it predicted, "Boys, you and I are gonna have a bag of fun."<sup>25</sup>

Ollie Jones remembers cranking a gramophone to hear her favorite tunes as a girl. On Friday nights there were dances at neighbors' houses where the young people could enjoy themselves dancing to the piano.<sup>26</sup> For Mae Ola Mason, the radio provided entertainment. The "Grand Ole Opry" was a Saturday night favorite and the "Shadow" highlighted the weeknight schedule.<sup>27</sup>

In more recent years, neighborhood organizations have stepped in to provide safe areas for children to play. In the 1960s the residents of Hudson Hill founded the Hudson Hill Neighborhood Association and one of their priorities was a playground. Milton Rahn received the permission of Bub Albritten, the owner of the OK Tire Company, to turn one of the company's empty lots into a ballpark.<sup>28</sup> The success of that project could be measured on any summer afternoon when the children were putting their batting and fielding skills to the test.

The City of Savannah worked to provide community centers in Hudson Hill, Woodville, and the Clarence Grant Center in West Savannah in recent years. These centers give young people a place to play basketball and other sports,



Fig. 7: Emmett Prescott, above, and Malik Brown are on top of the world at Charlie Bryan Park in the summer of 2005.

Savannah Morning News, 28 August 2005. Courtesy of Savannah Morning News.

enjoy after-school programs, and interact with caring adults. The Charlie "Sad" Bryan Park was also built in Woodville as a playground. It is a fitting memorial to a Woodville community leader whose special joy was helping children.<sup>29</sup>

## WEST SAVANNAH WHIPPERS AND WHIPPERETTES

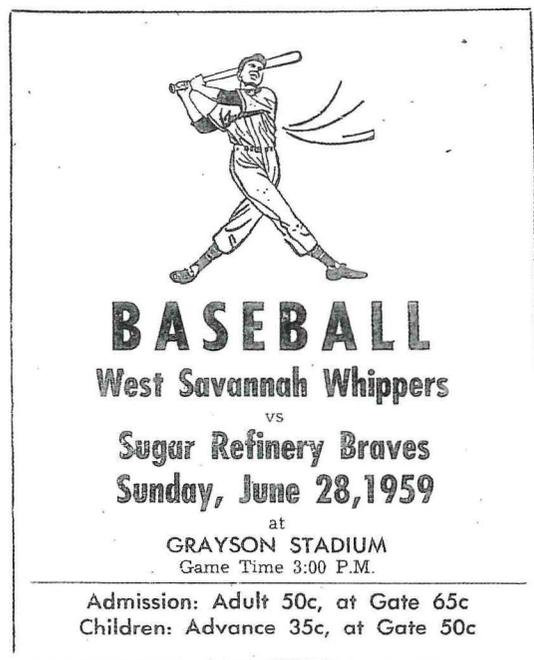
For many girls and boys, the best days of their youth were spent playing ball for Coach Clarence "Cool Blue" Grant. He lived his life loving sports and teaching young people how to play the game and become better people doing it. Born on the eastside, his family moved to Fellwood Homes in 1949. His favorite color was blue as a little boy and "Blue Boy" dressed in blue every chance he got. As a teenager, he called himself "Blue" and "Cool Blue" and all the nicknames stuck.

"Blue" Grant was a student at Woodville High School when he founded the West Savannah Whippers in 1951. That baseball team attracted young men from the sugar refinery, from the eastside, from Woodville and Hudson Hill.

Within a few years the Whippers fielded four teams, from eight-year-olds to adults. Soon the Whippers included football and basketball teams in their rosters.<sup>30</sup>

What teams learned from Coach Grant was not only basic technique but also execution on a high level. In football, Coach Grant designed about forty plays for his older teams, based on the playbook of the University of Michigan Wolverines and Woodville High School. When he passed on his players to Woodville Coach Joe Turner for high school football, they were already familiar with the offensive and defensive schemes.<sup>31</sup> In baseball, players were thoroughly grounded in the fundamentals of the game and competed with the best. As one columnist noted, “the Whippers will give you a real hard time anytime.”<sup>32</sup>

It was the string of victories at the baseball diamond that people remember best about the Whippers. In 1956 the Whippers went 30-2 for the season.



**BASEBALL**  
West Savannah Whippers  
vs  
Sugar Refinery Braves  
Sunday, June 28, 1959  
at  
GRAYSON STADIUM  
Game Time 3:00 P.M.  
Admission: Adult 50c, at Gate 65c  
Children: Advance 35c, at Gate 50c

Fig. 8: The Whippers rarely advertised in the newspapers in the early years, but The Herald publicized this big game in 1959.

The Herald, 27 June 1959, 9. Courtesy of The Herald.

Perhaps the most impressive single-day performance turned in by the Whippers was on June 2, 1957 when the team played the East Side Swallows, the Pooler Tigers, and the Royal Hornets in a tripleheader, defeating each team, respectively, 5-1, 16-1, and a 9-0 shutout.<sup>33</sup> The coach also went out of his way to compliment good performance. When the team for eleven- to fifteen-year-olds came back from a heartbreak 6-5 loss to the Tompkins Wolverines to shutout the Carver Village Braves and the Tatum Village Blue Jays in 1959, he singled out the improvements of players Floyd Adams Jr., Leon

Wesley, and Marion Flowers for special mention.<sup>34</sup>

The adult team featured “Blue Boy” Grant as pitcher and manager, and he could swing the bat, too. In the opening game of the 1961 season, the Whippers “blasted” the DeRenne Tigers 20-2. There were fifteen base hits and five home runs in the game. Joe Greene had four hits in four at-bats, including two home runs. Clarence Grant had four hits to his credit in five trips to the plate, and Charley Robinson was three for five. According to the *Savannah Herald*, “the Whippers are out to prove they are still the best baseball club in the city.”<sup>35</sup> Playing at Grayson Stadium at least part of the schedule gave the team the opportunity to showcase its talents.

Financing the teams required a community-wide effort. Parents, friends, and businesses donated money and supported team fundraisers to pay for uniforms, equipment, and travel expenses to Hardeeville, Beaufort, Hilton Head, and as far away as Tifton, Georgia and Jacksonville, Florida. Moses Jackson and Edward Johnson were known to transport the players to games in their trucks. Hot dog parties and chicken dinners raised as much as \$1,000 in a season. West Savannah businesses, such as the Sumpter Wesley Confectionary and Harry Williams’ Piggy’s Barbecue, contributed regularly to the Whippers, as did larger enterprises such as Bradley’s Plywood, Georgia Pacific, Great Dane, International Longshoremen’s Association, Mingleddorf Shipyard, Savannah Electric, Savannah Sugar Refinery, and Union Camp.<sup>36</sup>

In 1956, Shirley Green organized an adult women’s softball team known as the Whipperettes. Playing teams in Hilton Head, Sandfly, and Thunderbolt, it became a “dynasty that’s awesome in power and finesse.” Gladys Brannen was a formidable presence on the field as pitcher, often leading the league in the number of strikeouts. In a no-hitter against the Tatemville Globes, for example, she had thirteen strikeouts while surrendering no runs, no hits, and only two walks. For teenaged girls, there was also a Youth Whipperette team that “Blue” Grant coached in the late 1950s and early 1960s. As a member of the Girls’ Athletic Association, the Whipperettes were usually the dominant team of the league.<sup>37</sup>

Coach “Blue” Grant spent his life giving girls and boys a love of sports. In addition to his work with the Whippers and Whipperettes, he coached Tompkins High School B-team football, Frank Callen Boys & Girls Club Football, Saint Pius X High School Football, the Carver Heights Youth Baseball Teams, and many more. The lives that he touched number into the thousands; among the proud alumni of the Whippers and Whipperettes are



*Fig. 9: Meeting at the Woodville Community House, Troop 65 consisted of twenty-one girls in 1956-57 when this photograph was taken. Faculty members Mrs. Celestine Williams served as Troop Leader and Mrs. Matilda Rivers was the Assistant Leader. 1957 Wolverine. Courtesy of Enoch Mathis.*

Pinckney “Bo” Brannen, James German, James Holmes, Roland James, Moses King, Thomas Mackey, Calvin “Chick” Roberts, Ricky Santos, Sam Stewart Jr., Ben Wesley, Leon Wesley, and Leroy West.<sup>38</sup> Because of his many contributions to West Savannah, Mayor Floyd Adams Jr. established the Clarence Grant Center on Richards Street in honor of his former coach.<sup>39</sup> When Clarence Grant passed away in January, 2006, his funeral notice included a last wish: “Request from Dean Clarence ‘Cool Blue Scout Coach’ Grant, on Saturday at 10 a.m., dress casual in blue and white. Please tennis shoes is [sic] more than fine.”<sup>40</sup>

### GIRL SCOUTS

The legacy of Juliette Gordon Lowe was a tradition of scouting for Savannah girls that began in 1912. That legacy was not extended to African American girls until 1942 when the first two troops were organized. Within ten years there were twenty-eight troops in the African American community, with 375 girls participating.<sup>41</sup>

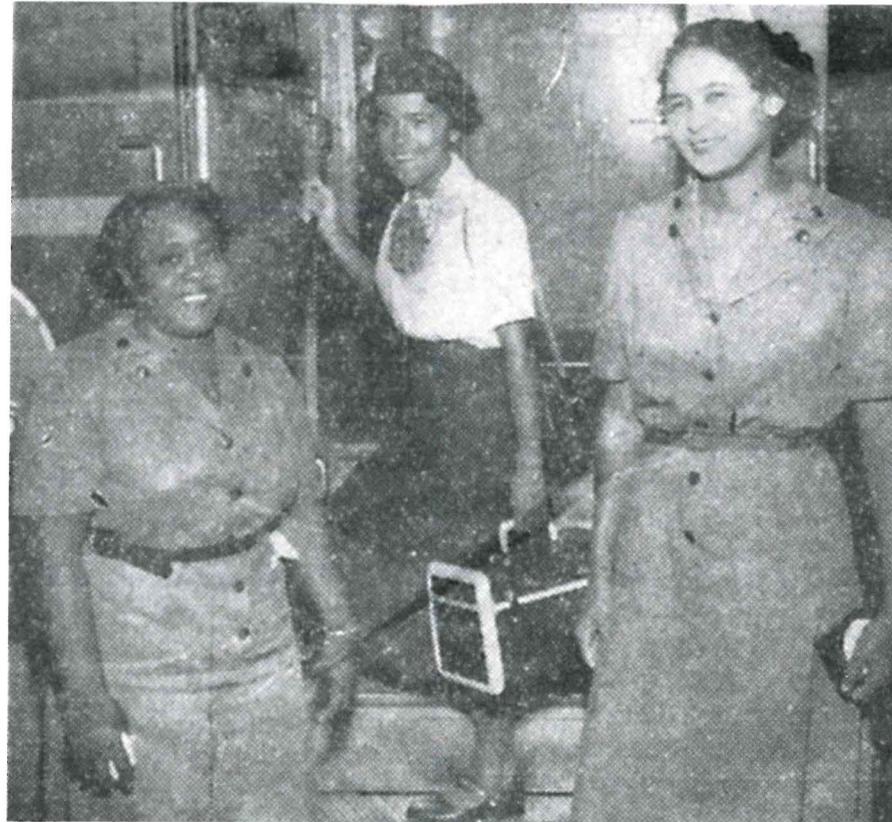


*Fig. 10: Much of the fun at Log Cabin Camp was the chance to meet girls from across the state. At camp, the girls put into practice the words of the Girl Scout song, “Make new friends/But keep the old/One is silver/And the other’s gold.” Courtesy of Girl Scout First Headquarters Archive.*

Bayview Homes was the first group to sponsor a full slate of Girl Scout troops, Brownies for girls seven to nine years of age, Intermediates for the ten- to fourteen-year-olds, and Senior Scouts for high school girls up to age eighteen. In 1948, Mrs. Roy B. Moon, president of the Bayview Homes Woman's Club, worked with other women at Bayview to organize and lead the three troops.<sup>42</sup> During the 1950s and 1960s, troops were established at West Savannah School/Moses Jackson Elementary (Brownie Troop 63 and Intermediate Troop 67), Woodville/Tompkins High School (Senior Scout Troop 65), Saint Anthony School (Intermediate Troop 80), Fellwood Homes (Brownie Troop 82 and Brownie Troop 160).<sup>43</sup>

A corps of dedicated neighborhood women provided the leadership for these troops. Many of them accompanied their daughters as the girls moved from Brownies to Intermediates, and occasionally worked with two troops at once, like Anna Stephens of Fellwood Homes who served simultaneously on the Troop Council for the West Savannah Brownies and Intermediates in 1957-58. In four years, Essie Clements served one year on the Troop Committee for the Tompkins Senior Scouts, two years as Assistant Leader, and one year as Troop Leader, but she brought with her two years experience sitting on the Troop Committee for the West Savannah Intermediates. Doretha Williams brought continuity of leadership to the West Savannah Brownies in the late 1950s, serving as Assistant Leader two years followed by two years as Troop Leader. The faculty of Woodville/Tompkins High School also supported the Girl Scouts at their school by sitting on the Troop Committee. Mrs. Sophronia Tompkins set the precedent that the principal was always a member of the committee, a tradition that James Lutten followed as well. Other faculty who were frequently members of the committee included Mrs. Lillie Blount and Mrs. Thelma Lee.<sup>44</sup>

For the girls, scouting was simply fun. Summer day camp was one of the most exciting activities held all year and the girls looked forward to it. In the 1950s, day camp for African American girls was held at the Montgomery Community Center where they enjoyed crabbing, hiking, outdoor cooking, singing, crafts, acting in plays, and games. Trips to the city swimming pool were a special treat. Buses picked up the girls, whose camping gear included sturdy shoes, shorts, and a pocket knife. The girls brought their own "nose bag" lunches. The cost for transportation, milk, handicrafts supplies, and swimming lessons started at \$1.50 in 1948, rising to \$2.00 in 1952. Two girls of Troop 160 had their way paid by the Progressive Circle of Fellwood Homes in 1961 to ensure that they did not miss out on the opportunity.<sup>45</sup>



*Fig. 11: The adventure begins as Rose Harris leaves for Wyoming. Summer 1954. Clipping courtesy of Rose Harris.*

Some girls attended Log Cabin Camp in Hancock County near Sparta, the camp designated for African American scouts. Benjamin Hubert, President of Savannah State College, donated the land for the camp in the 1940s and when it opened in 1945, it had accommodations for seventy-five girls and twenty adults.<sup>46</sup> The accommodations that Rose Manigault Harris remembers from the late 1940s were tents on wooden foundations as well as outhouses for the campers. One of the most memorable lessons she learned in her seven summers at Camp Log Cabin was when she decorated the lodge with boughs of poison oak!<sup>47</sup>

As a senior scout from Troop 65 at Woodville, Rose Harris was chosen to attend the Girl Scout All-State Encampment at Cody, Wyoming in 1954. This

was an honor reserved for outstanding scouts between the ages of fifteen and eighteen. Her selection was the first time that an African American scout had been chosen from the Georgia, Florida, North Carolina, and South Carolina region. Scouting had always been part of her life, having joined a Brownie troop at Fellwood Homes in 1946 and a West Savannah intermediate troop in 1948.<sup>48</sup>

Service projects allowed Girl Scouts to contribute to the community. Troop 67, Intermediate Scouts at Moses Jackson School, took this responsibility to heart under the direction of veteran Leader Mary Bailey and Assistant Leader Marie Watts during the late 1950s. The girls provided babysitting for small children during the PTA meetings, filled Thanksgiving baskets for the needy, and assisted in the TB Seals drive.<sup>49</sup> Senior scouts from Woodville earned senior service pins by completing fifty hours of community service. They volunteered to work at the Carnegie Library, the Yamacraw Branch Library, Charity Hospital, and Hodge Memorial Nursery.<sup>50</sup> The annual spring cookie sale was a way that the girls could help other African American scouts enjoy a camping experience as all profits were designated for the upkeep of Camp Log Cabin.<sup>51</sup>

Foremost on the scouts' calendar was March 12, the anniversary of the founding of the Girl Scouts. Obviously, for Savannah scouts, this birthday celebration had special importance. However, the girls of the "Negro District" held separate programs from their sister scouts who were white. Troops from western Savannah came together with other African American troops to award prizes and hear stirring words with friends and family. Ironically, the girls traditionally sang, "Girl Scouts Together," before closing the ceremonies with "Taps."<sup>52</sup>

## BOY SCOUTS

During the 1930s the first African American Boy Scout troops were established in Savannah, thanks to the determination and leadership of J.W. Hubert, J.S. Delaware, Prof. R.W. Gadsden, and others. Community leaders Moses Jackson and J.C. Carmichael were among the first to organize a troop. In the late 1940s, James Jackson, Moses Jackson's grandson, remembers being a Cub Scout in the pack where his grandfather served as Cubmaster with Mr. Carmichael. James Jackson grew up in the movement, becoming a Boy Scout in his teenage years.<sup>53</sup>

After the death of Moses Jackson, Earl Sanders became the Scoutmaster of Troop 299, with Mr. Carmichael as adviser. The boys joined eleven other African American troops from Chatham County and Liberty County for a Camporee at Fort Stewart in 1959. Riding on tanks and watching the tanks maneuver were treats beyond the usual camp activities but the troop distinguished itself at the Camporee when its own bugler Wesley Williams was chosen to play "Reveille" and "Taps" during the encampment.<sup>54</sup>

Clarence Grant also served as scoutmaster to a number of troops including one sponsored by Fellwood Homes. It was a perfect match between a scout leader and boys because everyone respected "Blue" Grant's ability to work with young people. According to a columnist in the *Herald*, the coach was "blessed with natural talent, a good handler of boys, one who expects and gets respect from his players, gifted with boundless energy."<sup>55</sup> It was no surprise that his scouts were among the best.

W.W. Law, a former Boy Scout himself, enlisted the help of scouts in the 1950s for voter registration drives. This effort was certainly one of the most important scouting service projects for the African American community. Boys from western Savannah and from black troops throughout the city played a role in the civil rights movement in this way. As early as 1952, scouts distributed leaflets to encourage neighbors to register. In the critical presidential election of 1960, boys concentrated on getting voters to the polls by placing liberty bell hangers on door knobs a week before the election. Upwards of 15,000 African American homes were contacted. On the morning of election day, scouts acted as "bell ringers for freedom" to signal to the community the importance of voting.<sup>56</sup>

As the years have passed, the Boy Scout tradition continues in western Savannah where churches and community centers sponsor troops. Woodville Community Center chartered Cub Scout Pack and Boy Scout Troop 15 in 2001; Moses Jackson Community Center established Venture Crew 59 in the same year. Jerusalem Mission Baptist Church sponsored Cub Scout Pack and Scout Troop 92 in 1992. That year also found Fellwood Homes working in collaboration with Savannah Police Department to establish Cub Scout Pack and Boy Scouts Troop 19.<sup>57</sup>

## CONCLUSION

In World War II, leisure time for some Fellwood Homes residents was the chance to welcome and entertain soldiers with a community sing. Sixty years later, another Fellwood Homes resident, Shannon Maurice Harmon, used his free time to sing rap and is now a recording artist under the stage name of Gimini.<sup>58</sup>

Tastes in leisure time activities change over the years but the value of that time is never in doubt. Leisure lifts the humdrum out of everyday life. Whether that time is spent in an organized activity with others or relaxing with friends, whether it is the opportunity to perfect a skill or simply enjoy it, leisure adds variety and meaning to life. That lesson was not lost on the neighbors of western Savannah who found fun, friendship, satisfaction, and achievement in leisure.

## FOOTNOTES

- <sup>1</sup> SH, 10 April 1952, 12.
- <sup>2</sup> Ophelia Julian, WSDP-OH.
- <sup>3</sup> ST, 11 January 1940; 22 February 1940; 29 January 1942, 7; 14 May 1942; SH, 8 October 1960.
- <sup>4</sup> SH, 12 March 1953, 25 February 1954, 6.
- <sup>5</sup> SH, 2 September 1954, 12; 21 July 1955.
- <sup>6</sup> SH, 7 May 1953, 14 April 1955.
- <sup>7</sup> ST, 21 March 1940, 19 March 1942, 8; SH, 8 March 1956, 22 March 1956, 12 April 1956.
- <sup>8</sup> ST, 19 February 1940; SH, 25 November 1948, 23 December 1948, 3 April 1952, 23 July 1953.
- <sup>9</sup> SH, 25 March 1961, 1.
- <sup>10</sup> Curley Milton, WSDP-OH.
- <sup>11</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>12</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>13</sup> SH, 23 March 1957; Ophelia Julian, WSDP-OH.
- <sup>14</sup> SH, 25 March 1961, 1, 4.
- <sup>15</sup> ST, 10 April 1909.
- <sup>16</sup> Ibid., 22 June 1912, 7.
- <sup>17</sup> Ibid., 12 August 1943, 8.
- <sup>18</sup> SH, 2 February 1950, 10.
- <sup>19</sup> ST, 2 July 1936, 2; 30 July 1936, 5; 27 August 1936, 2.
- <sup>20</sup> ST, 6 August 1936, 23; ST, 15 August 1943; SH, 11 August 1956; SH, 29 July 1961, 9.
- <sup>21</sup> Berneta Mackey, WSDP-OH; Curley Milton, WSDP-OH.
- <sup>22</sup> Harold Franklin, WSDP-OH.
- <sup>23</sup> Floyd Adams Jr., WSDP-OH.
- <sup>24</sup> Ibid., Herman Allen, WSDP-OH.

- <sup>25</sup> ST, 30 July 1936, 2.
- <sup>26</sup> Ollie Jones, WSDP-OH.
- <sup>27</sup> Conversation with Mae Ola Mason.
- <sup>28</sup> Milton Rahn, WSDP-OH.
- <sup>29</sup> Curley Milton, WSDP-OH.
- <sup>30</sup> Clarence Grant, WSDO-OH.
- <sup>31</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>32</sup> SH, 27 June 1959.
- <sup>33</sup> Ibid., 8 June 1957.
- <sup>34</sup> Ibid., 9 May 1959.
- <sup>35</sup> Ibid., 13 May 1961, 7.
- <sup>36</sup> Ibid, 17 June 1961, 8; Clarence Grant, WSDP-OH, Floyd Adams Jr., WSDP-OH.
- <sup>37</sup> Clarence Grant, WSDP-OH; SH, 11 July 1959, 25 July 1959, 27 May 1961, 6.
- <sup>38</sup> Clarence Grant, WSDP-OH; Obituary for Clarence Grant, <http://www.legacy.com/Savannah>.
- <sup>39</sup> Floyd Adams Jr., WSDP-OH.
- <sup>40</sup> SMN, 14 January 2006.
- <sup>41</sup> FHQ, 1953 Scrapbook.
- <sup>42</sup> FHQ, News Clippings 1948.
- <sup>43</sup> GHS, MS 2000, Box 15, Folder 201, 203, 205; Box 16, Folder 218, 220; Box 18, Folder 289.
- <sup>44</sup> GHS, MS 2000, Box 15, Folder 201, 203, 205.
- <sup>45</sup> FHQ, News Clipping 1948, News Clippings 1950-1952; SH, 10 June 1961, 8.
- <sup>46</sup> FHQ, 1953 Scrapbook.
- <sup>47</sup> Rose Harris, WSDP-OH.
- <sup>48</sup> ST, 8 April 1954, 1, 7.
- <sup>49</sup> SH, 1 December 1956.
- <sup>50</sup> FHQ, News Clippings 1950-1952.
- <sup>51</sup> SH, 15 May 1952, 4.
- <sup>52</sup> Ibid., 1 April 1961, 7; Annual Birthday Party Programme, 12 March 1954, MS 2000, Box 1, Folder 8, GHS.
- <sup>53</sup> James Jackson, WSDP-OH; SMN, 15 January 1950, H4.
- <sup>54</sup> SH, 4 April 1959, 2 May 1959.
- <sup>55</sup> Ibid., 29 April 1961.
- <sup>56</sup> Ibid., 3 April 1952, 1; 29 October 1960; 5 November 1960.
- <sup>57</sup> Information furnished by Melvin Stockton and the Savannah office of the Boy Scouts of America.
- <sup>58</sup> ST, 26 March 1942, 1; <http://www.savannahnow.com/stories/071503/LOCCORRIGANCOLUMN.shtml>



FAITH

*Saint Anthony Gospel Choir, 1993,  
Savannah Deanery File. Courtesy of the  
Catholic Diocese of Savannah Archives.*

ON SUNDAY MORNINGS, the sound of joyful singing is never too far from homes in western Savannah. There are dozens of churches in Woodville, West Savannah, and Hudson Hill and it is not uncommon to find two churches located in the same block. The numbers alone suggest the importance of faith in these communities but it is the work of the church within neighborhoods and the spiritual fulfillment that congregations experience that underscore their significance.

### EARLY CHRISTIAN LEADERS IN WESTERN SAVANNAH

The teaching of the Gospel in these neighborhoods cannot be fully documented in the earliest period of western Savannah's history. But it is quite possible that the slaves of Vale Royal Plantation received passes to attend the sermons preached by Andrew Bryan in Yamacraw at the site of the First Bryan Baptist Church or perhaps even to the barn on Brampton Plantation where Bryan, a slave at that time, held his first prayer meetings in the 1780s.<sup>1</sup>



Fig. 1: From its location on Weldon Street, Friendship Baptist Church continues its second century of service to Hudson Hill.

Photograph by Colin Douglas Gray.

Christian doctrine was commonly taught to slaves and there is no reason to suspect that the slaves at Vale Royal were excluded.

In the late nineteenth century, Rev. John Herman Henry Sengstacke emerged as one of the first religious leaders clearly connected to western Savannah. An unusual early life eventually brought him to Woodville. His father, Herman Sengstacke, was a German sea captain who was so appalled at a Savannah slave auction that he purchased one of the young women, Tama, and married her. Settling in Savannah, he bought a grocery on Fahm Street. When his wife died in childbirth, Herman Sengstacke sent his son John and his daughter Mary to Germany to be raised by his relatives there.<sup>2</sup>

At age twenty-one, John Herman Henry Sengstacke returned to Savannah in 1869, well-educated and fluent in five languages. Briefly he held a position at the *Savannah Morning News* as a translator until the newspaper discovered that he was mulatto. Soon he found that his true vocation was to be a minister and he was ordained in 1876 as pastor of the Pilgrim Congregational Church of Woodville.<sup>3</sup>

Sengstacke also was a community activist. He established the Sengstacke Band of Hope, a benevolent society to help defray burial expenses for members of his congregation. He recognized the importance of education for African Americans and acted on his beliefs. He taught students in his home and later in the basement of his church with the support of the American Missionary Association. For four years, he also served as a teacher at the public Woodville School.<sup>4</sup> In the 1880s, he founded the *Woodville Times* to give a voice to the black men and women who lived outside of Savannah.<sup>5</sup>

Rev. Sengstacke died in 1904 but his legacy lived through the work of his children. His daughter, Rebecca, continued his educational mission by serving as principal of the Sengstacke Academy, located at the corner of West Bay and Roberts Streets. A graduate of Savannah State College, she also taught at Woodville School and other Chatham County public schools. Her brother, Alexander, assumed pastoral duties at Pilgrim Congregational Church. However, it was their stepbrother, Robert Sengstacke Abbott, who made the most profound impact. Robert Abbott founded, edited and published the famous *Chicago Defender*, the most influential African American newspaper of the early twentieth century.<sup>6</sup>

## HISTORIC PROTESTANT CHURCHES

Among the many churches that have a long tradition of service in western Savannah, there are three that illustrate especially well the role of the church in the community. Combined they represent nearly three centuries of ministry to residents of western Savannah.

Twelve residents of Jasperville established Friendship Baptist Church on March 15, 1895. Rev. Hudson was the first pastor, serving a small but stalwart congregation for thirteen years. He was such a dynamic force in the community that people referred to the area as “Hudson Hill.” Thanks to the vision of these early founders, the church was built on a large lot, giving it the space to expand over the years.<sup>7</sup>

Evangelist Mae Ola Mason first attended Friendship Baptist with her grandmother and joined the church in 1942. There were morning and evening services on Sunday. “That’s all we knew was church and it was pleasure to come to the church.” The sanctuary she remembers as a child had wooden



*Fig. 2: In the summer of 2005, Evangelist Mae Ola Mason greets young people attending Friendship Baptist Vacation Bible School.*

*Savannah Morning News, 28 August 2005. Courtesy of the Savannah Morning News.*



*Fig. 3: At New Zion Missionary Baptist Church, Sunday services in the 1930s included an early morning prayer meeting, Sunday School at 11 a.m., followed by the pastor’s sermon at noon. There was also a prayer meeting on Tuesday evenings and another sermon Thursday night.*

*Cordray-Foltz Collection, VM 1360, Box 5, Folder 14. Courtesy of the Georgia Historical Society.*

floors and wooden pews, warmed by a pot-bellied stove in the winter and cooled by breezes from open windows in the summer. One task given to the children was to clean the varnished pine floors, washing them with a mixture of kerosene and water to make them shine. Their reward was a cup of hot chocolate that simmered on top of the pot-bellied stove during the cold months.<sup>8</sup>

The changes that have come to Friendship Baptist in the past fifty years have been substantial. As the membership grew, the congregation needed more room for social functions. By the 1950s, an annex had been added to the back of the church to accommodate gatherings. Even when the annex was expanded, it could not meet the needs of a growing congregation. Rev. Joseph Fields, who has pastored Friendship Baptist Church since 1980, determined that a social hall built on the east side of the sanctuary, was the solution. His vision was realized in 2004.

Rev. Fields enlarged the staff of associate pastors to seven and, significantly, four of those pastors are women. Traditionally women who worked on church programs were called “missionaries,” but only men served as ordained ministers. That changed in 1990 when Mrs. Mason was the first female ordained. As she points out, the news of Jesus’ resurrection was brought by women, an indication of the important role women play in the faith.<sup>9</sup>

Friendship Baptist also encourages young people to participate in the church. The second Sunday of the month is Youth Sunday when the planning of the service and the delivery of the sermon is wholly the work of younger people. Their participation ensures a strong future for the church but also strengthens the community by providing a strong religious base for youth.<sup>10</sup>



*Fig. 4: Part of the congregation comes together for a group photograph in September, 1954. "New Zion Missionary Baptist Church: Centennial, 1901-2001." Courtesy of Thelma Honeyblue.*

Even as a young church, Friendship Baptist took seriously its responsibility to spread the word. In 1901, it established a sister church in Woodville, working in concert with Woodville residents W.M. Smith, Andy Smith, T.J. Williams, and James Washington. The first pastor, Rev. H.A. Bradley, led the congregation under the name of New Zion Baptist Church. The close ties between the two churches have lasted more than a century. Revivals and anniversaries are celebrated jointly by the congregations.<sup>11</sup>

The first church building erected on Fair Street was dedicated during the pastorate of Rev. W.M. Beck, the second minister who served the church between 1909 and 1933. Rising water from a sudden storm flooded the wooden structure in the 1930s and it was torn down.

A second church constructed in the 1940s proved too small for the growing congregation. The current sanctuary was built in 1973 under Rev. Thomas Scott. The modern brick church symbolizes the change experienced by the congregation during its century of service to Woodville. In the early days,



*Fig. 5: Rev. Scott, working closely with Chairman of the Board of Deacons Curley Milton, began the planning for this third church in 1969. Unfortunately, Rev. Scott did not live to see the mortgage burning ceremony in 1980.*

*Photograph by the author.*

baptisms were held in the Savannah River and those preparing to profess their faith walked over the fields and railroad tracks to the riverbank. Today a baptismal pool is located inside the church building.<sup>12</sup>

Rev. Scott, "a dynamic man of God," led the congregation to active participation in the missionary movement. The church joined the Progressive Baptist Union, the National Home and Foreign Baptist Mission, and the National Baptist Convention USA, Inc. His passing in 1975 was a great loss to the church.

The growth of New Zion Baptist Church is due in part to the inspired leadership of its pastors and also because of the hard work and support of its members. The Milton family has been one of the mainstays of the church throughout its existence. When Curley Milton joined the church in 1929 at the age of fifteen, New Zion was already the church home of his family. His father had helped to build the first wooden sanctuary. Curley Milton served as Chairman of the Board of Deacons for thirty-eight years. His son, Dr. William

Milton, is currently the Assistant Chairman for the deacons and his daughter, Catherine Jackson, is the Financial Secretary. His sister, cousins, and aunts have all been members. As Deacon Emeritus and the oldest member of New Zion, Curley Milton says, "I'll be in church until the good Lord comes and gets me."<sup>13</sup>

In West Savannah, Townsley Chapel has been a force for social change for many years. The church was founded in 1911 and named in honor of Rev. Luther Alexander Townsley, one of the most influential leaders of the African Methodist Episcopal Church in Georgia in the early years of the twentieth century. From 1908 until 1913 he pastored Saint Philip Monumental Church on West Broad Street and brought 1,128 new members into the fold during his tenure there.<sup>14</sup> The example of growth and service that Rev. Townsley represented served as a model to the young church on Eagle Street.



*Fig. 6: The congregation of Townsley Chapel gathers outside the church after Sunday services on October 29, 1950.*  
 Cordray-Foltz Collection, VM 1360, Box 5, Folder 19. Courtesy of the Georgia Historical Society.



*Fig. 7: An interior view of the chapel as the congregation flanks the pulpit.*  
 Cordray-Foltz Collection, VM 1360, Box 5, Folder 19. Courtesy of the Georgia Historical Society.

One example of community outreach sponsored by Townsley Chapel was its collaboration with the Savannah Health Center in the 1920s and 1930s. The health center held "Well Baby Stations" every Wednesday afternoon at the chapel. Nurse Evelyn Richards, an African American public health nurse, provided check-ups for infants and helped mothers give the best of care to their children.<sup>15</sup>

During the civil rights movement, Townsley Chapel and its leadership demonstrated its support for equal rights in meaningful ways. At a mass meeting at Saint Pius X High School, Rev. Martin of Townsley Chapel urged people to contribute to the cause during the Broughton Street boycott.<sup>16</sup> In fact, Townsley Chapel was chosen to host one of the mass meetings. The chapel may not have had the visibility of First African Baptist Church or an auditorium as large as that at Saint Pius, but its selection was a clear indication of the church's importance on the westside. On November 13, 1960,

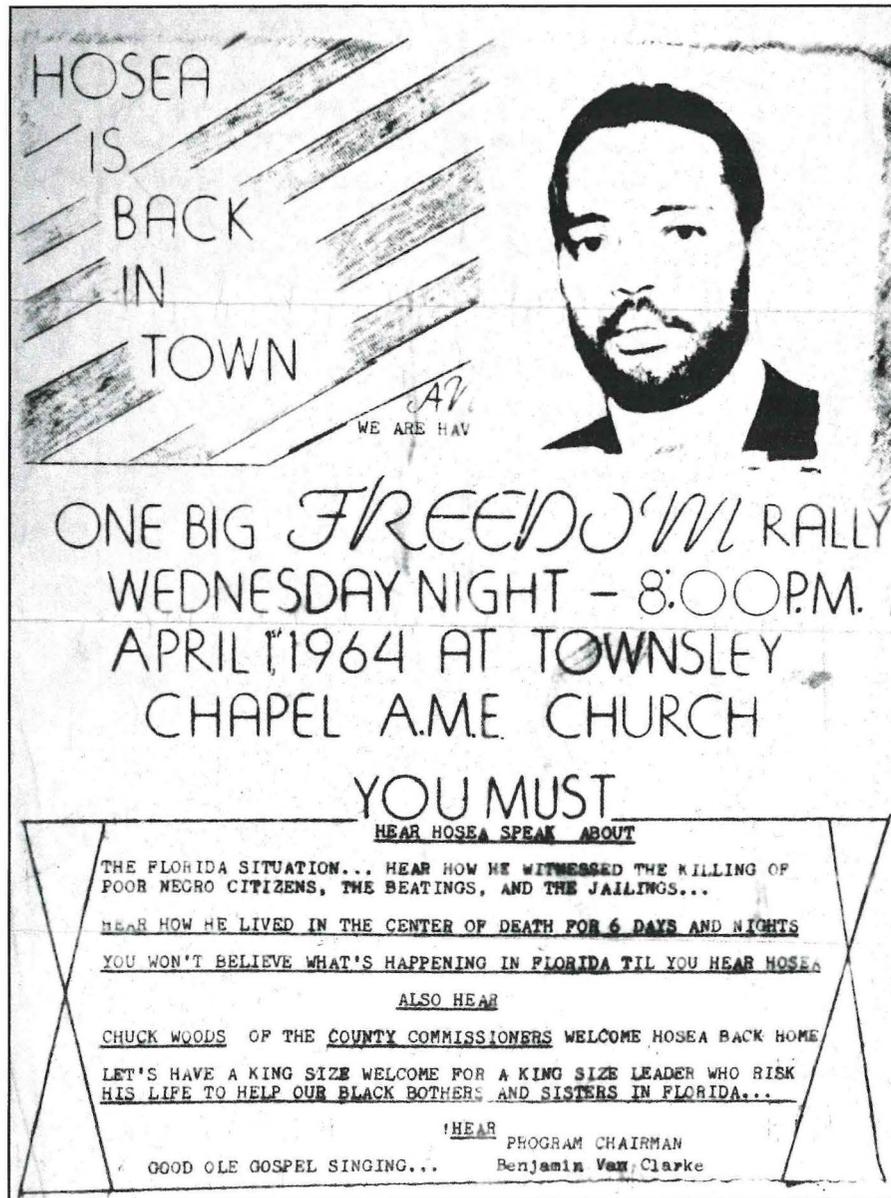


Fig. 8: Flyers invited a community hungering to hear about the movement. Meeting Flyer, Vertical Files, Afro-Americans-Civil Rights. Courtesy of the Georgia Historical Society.

NAACP members and supporters crowded into the church and the pews were overflowing.<sup>17</sup> On yet another occasion, the chapel opened its doors for a Freedom Rally with Hosea Williams. It was an opportunity for members of the Chatham County Crusade for Voters to see Hosea, who had gone to Atlanta to work with the Southern Christian Leadership Conference. It was an emotional homecoming for him as he returned to his native Savannah on that April evening in 1964 and the crowds turned out to welcome him.<sup>18</sup>

Townsley Chapel continues its work to reach out to young people in the community. In 2006, the Wesley Learning Center opened, featuring a computer lab where students can work on school projects. Tutoring is also available so children can get a helping hand with reading, math, or other learning skills. The center itself is a tribute to the generosity characteristic of the congregation. The late Sumpter and Earline Wesley, longtime residents of West Savannah, funded the center through their estate. In time, the center may have a more ambitious agenda. According to Earline Wesley-Davis, "I hope we have to add another building to make [the center]...a place for everyone in this community."<sup>19</sup>



Fig. 9: Students at Saint Anthony School play in front of the original wooden church building and the rectory in the early twentieth century. SMA Box. Courtesy of the Catholic Diocese of Savannah Archives.

## SAINT ANTHONY OF PADUA/ RESURRECTION OF OUR LORD CATHOLIC CHURCH

Unlike the Protestant churches that were built to house existing congregations, Saint Anthony of Padua Catholic Church was erected with the conviction that people would come to fill its pews. The vision for this new church was that of Father Ignatius Lissner. As a member of the Society of African Missions (SMA), Father Lissner came to Savannah from Benin on Africa's west coast. Bishop Benjamin J. Keiley invited Father Lissner to take over the ministry to African Americans in the diocese. Saint Anthony of Padua was the third mission Lissner established in Savannah. It had a school and a mission church as the foundation of the new parish. Four acres on Fell Street provided room for future expansion.<sup>20</sup>

Saint Anthony School opened its doors to the children of West Savannah in October 1909 and the first mass was celebrated at the new church on Christmas morning. An invitation published in the *Savannah Tribune* was extended to "all our friends and true Christians...no matter to which religious denomination they belong" to attend Sunday morning services.<sup>21</sup>

The land Father Lissner bought for the parish had originally been a farm and, despite the construction of a church and school and the conversion of the farmhouse into a rectory, the acreage still fit into the rural character of West Savannah in the early twentieth century. Two cows grazed in the field and an orchard yielded peaches, pears, plums, figs, and pecans. The SMA priests raised chickens, planted a vegetable garden and maintained beehives on the property. At City Market they sold milk, eggs, vegetables, and honey and what one priest called his "little industries" helped defray parish expenses.<sup>22</sup>

Slowly the number of communicants grew. By the end of 1910 there were two baptisms, eight the next year, nineteen in 1914 as a family of ten joined the church.<sup>23</sup> Sugar refinery workers arriving from Louisiana in 1917 were delighted to find a Catholic church nearby and their numbers boosted membership.<sup>24</sup> By 1936, the congregation numbered 415, with another 283 people baptized between 1941 and 1956. Protestant children who attended Saint Anthony School sometimes embraced the catechism they learned in the classroom and converted, often bringing their families with them. With the growing number of communicants, the small wooden church that had served the mission for more than forty years was inadequate and a new sanctuary was consecrated in 1957. The new church was, in the words of one priest, a "miniature Cathedral" in comparison to the old one.<sup>25</sup>

The mature church that emerged in the 1960s and 1970s had much to celebrate. Its calendar was filled with social and religious events that attracted all members of the parish. A February social and covered-dish supper was followed by Lenten home masses, Holy Week observances and an Easter egg hunt. The summer offered boat rides and the fall featured a food drive that coincided with Thanksgiving. In the analysis of Father Frank Higgins written in 1979, the parish was blessed with strengths that included its genuine concern for its members and a sense of purpose to do God's work. He singled out the women of the parish who contributed so much of their time and talents. Moreover, it was a parish blessed with many young people; half of its members were less than forty years of age.<sup>26</sup>

Despite these positive developments, this period was a time of transition and adjustment for Saint Anthony Church. The departure of the SMA fathers in 1968 and their replacement by diocesan priests was a shock to the parish, particularly painful because of the transfer of Father Dennis J. Begley, beloved by all.<sup>27</sup> Even more disruptive to the parish was the closure of Saint Anthony School. So much of the parish's identity was tied up in the school that its loss was like a death in the family. The arrival of Sister Julian Griffin to the parish that same year helped to move the church towards an agenda of social activism and the congregation continued to thrive. By 1985, parishioner Joe Lloyd summed up the spirit of Saint Anthony Church.

We grew up in this church and attended Saint Anthony's School before it closed down. Louie Bowers, Willie Polote, Robert Wilson and myself, just to name a few, have seen Saint Anthony's become a family oriented church. Since Fr. [Mike] Smith has been with us, there seems to be a constant flow of love through the church.... Because of the love and unity of the church,...we have become one great big Godly family.<sup>28</sup>

In 2000, the congregations of Saint Anthony and Most Pure Heart of Mary merged and chose as their new name, "Resurrection of Our Lord Catholic Church." Father Robert Chaney, the priest at the united parish, called the merger "an act of faith" by both congregations. After a year of careful evaluation, it was decided that the Fell Street sanctuary would become the permanent church home for the parish.<sup>29</sup>

Father Chaney, a native Savannahian who grew up in Saint Benedict the Moor Parish, is the first African American priest in a Savannah parish. Ordained in

1988, Father Chaney had worked at Most Holy Trinity parish in Augusta, which was the result of a merger of three congregations in 1971. He welcomed the opportunities and challenges represented by the new parish.<sup>30</sup>

The congregation he pastors has at its core Savannah residents but also members who drive from Effingham, Bryan, and Liberty counties, and even Beaufort and Hilton Head. In recent years, workers from Mexico and Central America also attend. Symbolic of the common ground shared by all communicants is the planned construction of a new church building. It cements the merger of 2000 as well as bringing together the congregation's diverse membership to work for a greater good.<sup>31</sup>

### THE FAITH COMMUNITY

Despite the number of churches and different denominations, there has been a cordial and productive relationship among the congregations. The closeness existing between neighbors encourages visiting back and forth between churches. Children attend the revivals and church services of their playmates as part of the social life of the neighborhood. Ophelia Julian remembers that her friendship with the pastor's children at Townsley Chapel led her to join that church even though her mother was a staunch member of Zion Hill Baptist Church. When her own children decided to follow their grandmother to Zion Hill, Ophelia Julian joined the rest of the family.<sup>32</sup> Mrs. Belle Robertson Pringle, a parishioner at what was then Saint Anthony of Padua, once was asked by the priest why she attended mass regularly and the occasional service at the Protestant churches. She replied,

Ah, sure, Father, I get lonesome sometimes for the singin' and the clappin' and that movement of the spirit all over – so I go along for the fun of it. ...What's the difference, Father? They only give you a bit of bread and warming mouthful of wine. There's no harm, is it?<sup>33</sup>

Congregations also visit one another. Members of Resurrection of Our Lord Catholic Church and Townsley Chapel, for example, exchange visits and youth choirs from time to time.<sup>34</sup>

All the churches, large and small, work diligently to improve life in their community. This tradition of service is faith in action. At times it may take the form of social activism, as seen in the civil rights movement. For example, the ministers were challenged in 1957 by West Savannah's Leroy Wilson to register



*Fig. 10: To commemorate African heritage, Father Robert Chaney and his congregation dressed in traditional African clothing during Black History Month in February 2006.*

*Courtesy of the Catholic Diocese of Savannah Archives.*

as many members of their congregations as possible during a voter registration drive.<sup>35</sup> Outreach to young people figures importantly in the agenda of all churches in western Savannah, whether it is through after-school tutorials, sponsoring Girl Scout and Boy Scout troops, scheduling Youth Day programs, or planning excursions to the circus or theme parks. The needs of the sick, the bereaved, and the aged are also the day-to-day mission for these churches.

### CONCLUSION

“Love people and treat people right. Above all I love God because He was good to me. If you do right, you might live longer.”<sup>36</sup> Ollie Jones ought to know. She was 102 years old when she spoke those words. But her words underscore the most basic truth of church teachings. Congregations provide the moral compass for communities. In Hudson Hill, Woodville, and West Savannah, neighbors act on the belief that they are their brother's keeper. From individual acts of kindness to organized efforts by congregations, neighbors put faith into action.



Fig. 11: On an Easter morning in the 1950s, neighbors walk to church on Lewden Street.

Courtesy of Pamela Howard-Oglesby.

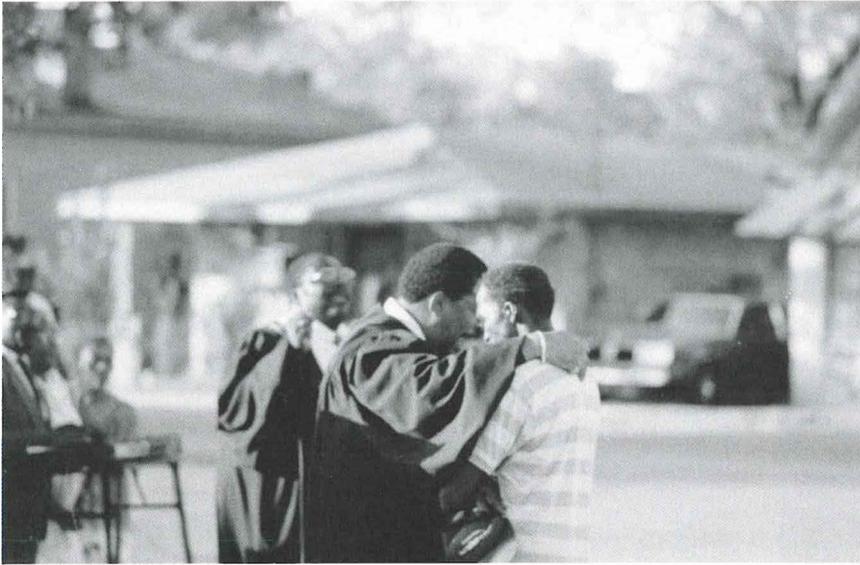
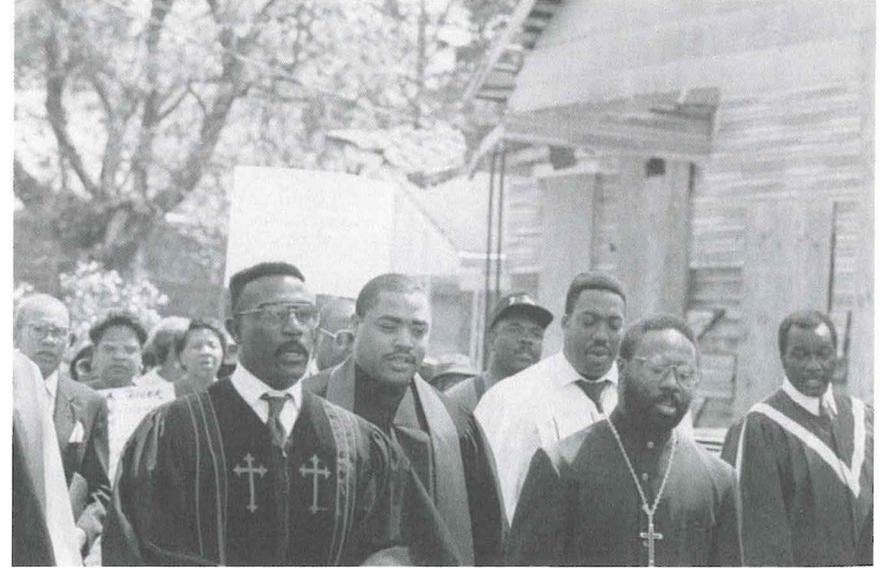
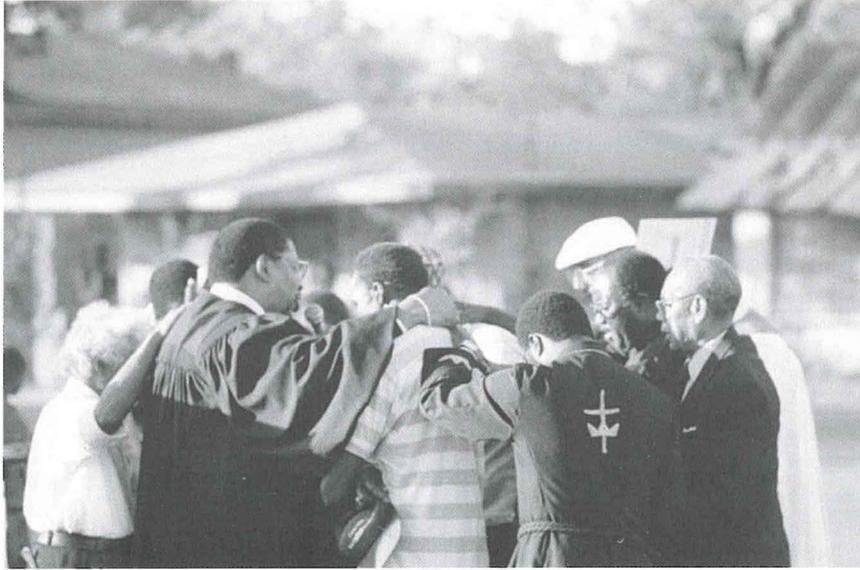
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- <sup>8</sup> Mae Ola Mason, WSDP-OH.
- <sup>9</sup> Ibid.
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- <sup>14</sup> *History of American Negro*, Georgia edition, (n.p., 1920), 2: 56.
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- <sup>20</sup> Sr. M. Julian Griffin and Gillian Brown, *Tomorrow Comes the Song: The Story of Catholicism among the Black Population of South Georgia, 1850-1978* (Savannah: Catholic Diocese of Savannah, 1979), 47; SMA Contract with the Bishop of Savannah, SMA Box, CDSA.
- <sup>21</sup> ST, 18 December 1909, 8 January 1910.
- <sup>22</sup> *Bulletin*, 20 December 1920, 9; Fr. Frank Higgins, "Saint Anthony's Parish: A History/Profile," April 1979 (typescript), 1, Saint Anthony's Church File, CDSA.
- <sup>23</sup> Bishop Keiley to the Cardinal Prefect of the Propaganda, 9 May 1921, SMA Box; "75th Anniversary: St. Anthony's Catholic Church," Saint Anthony Church File, CDSA.
- <sup>24</sup> Father Robert Chaney, WSDP-OH.
- <sup>25</sup> "75th Anniversary: St. Anthony's Catholic Church," Saint Anthony Church File, CDSA; McDonogh, *Black and Catholic in Savannah, Georgia*, 171.
- <sup>26</sup> Higgins, "Saint Anthony's Parish: A History/Profile," 3, CDSA.
- <sup>27</sup> "75th Anniversary: St. Anthony's Catholic Church," Saint Anthony Church File, CDSA; McDonogh, *Black and Catholic in Savannah, Georgia*, 173-74.
- <sup>28</sup> SH, 12 June 1985.
- <sup>29</sup> Father Robert Chaney, WSDP-OH.
- <sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, McDonogh, *Black and Catholic in Savannah, Georgia*, 185-86.
- <sup>31</sup> Father Robert Chaney, WSDP-OH.
- <sup>32</sup> Ophelia Julian, WSDP-OH.
- <sup>33</sup> "75th Anniversary: St. Anthony's Catholic Church," Saint Anthony Church File, CDSA.
- <sup>34</sup> Father Robert Chaney, WSDP-OH.
- <sup>35</sup> SH, 15 December 1956.
- <sup>36</sup> Ollie Jones, WSDP-OH.

# A Faithful Community

*All photographs  
are provided  
courtesy of  
LaVera Wilson.*



# Neighborhood Churches

*(left): Grace  
Full Gospel.*

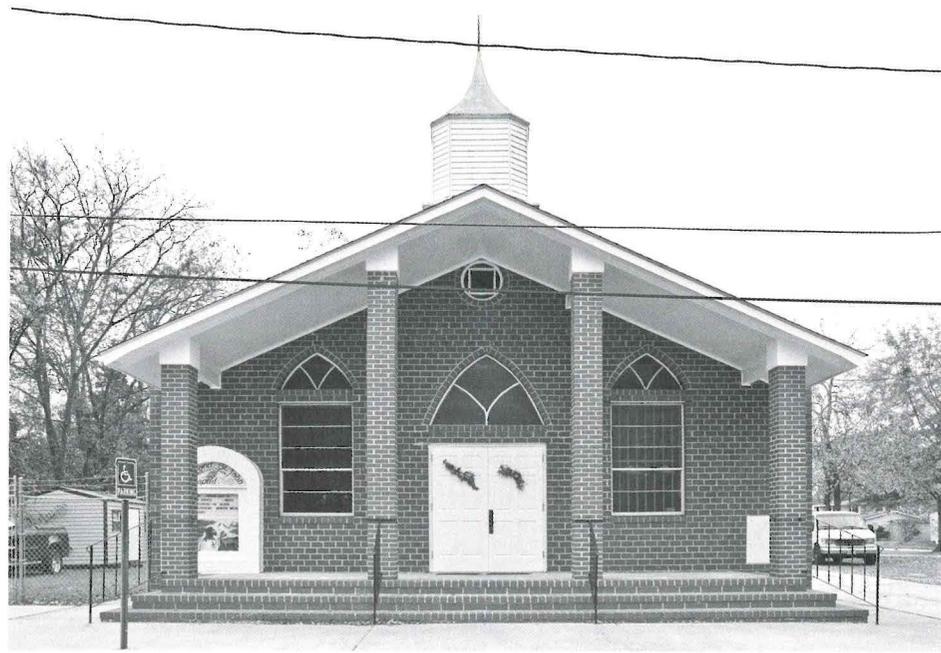
*(right):  
Little Bryan  
Baptist.*

*(below left):  
Taylor AME.*

*(below right):  
Royal Church  
of Christ.*

*All photos by  
Colin Douglas  
Gray.*





*(left):  
Mt. Zion  
Independent  
Methodist.*

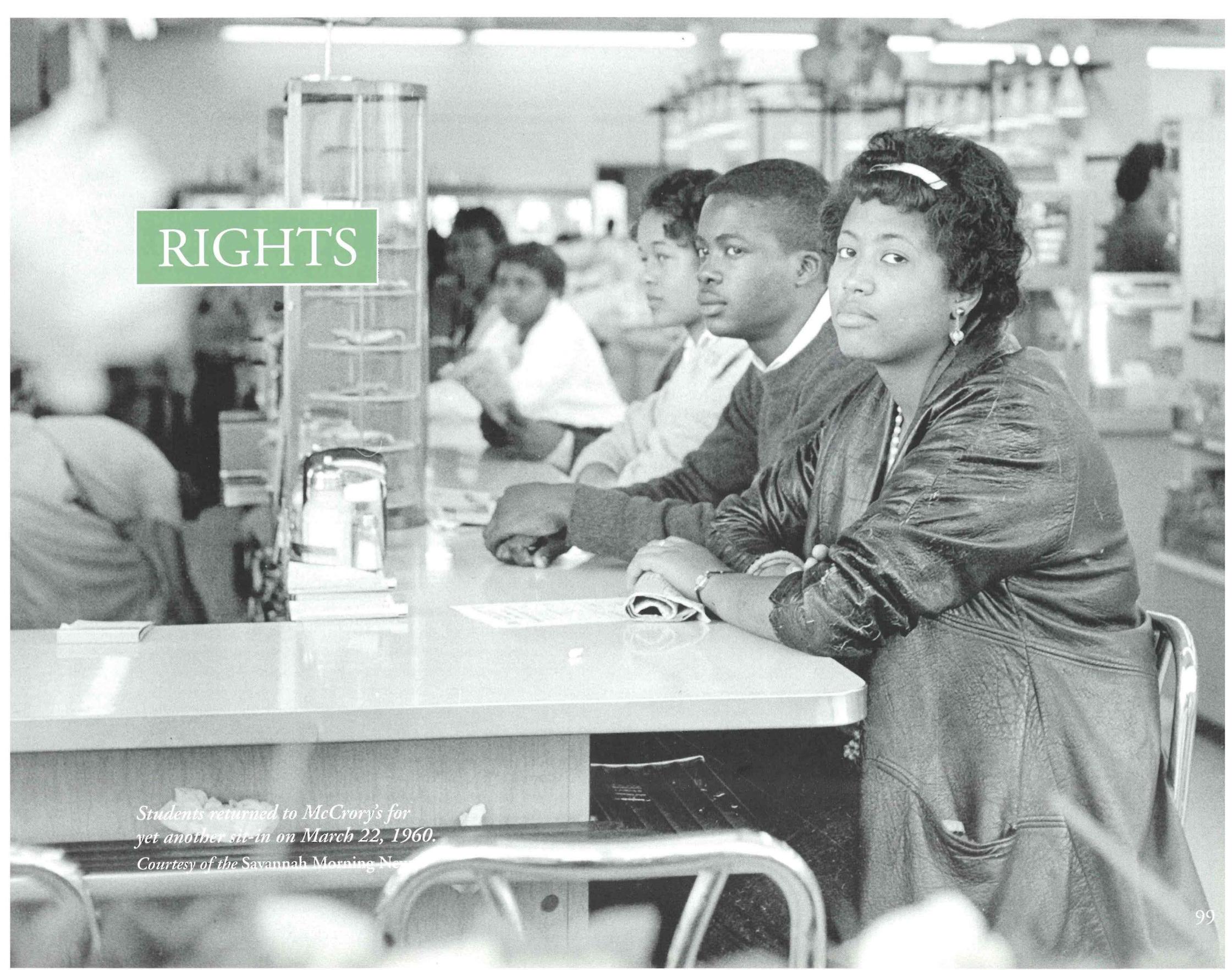
*(right):  
2nd St.  
John Baptist  
Church.*

*(below left):  
St. James  
Baptist.*

*(below, right):  
Woodville  
Holiness.*

*All photos by  
Colin Douglas  
Gray.*





# RIGHTS

*Students returned to McCrory's for  
yet another sit-in on March 22, 1960.*

*Courtesy of the Savannah Morning News*

NEW YEAR'S DAY is a fresh start, a new beginning. On January 1, 1863, Abraham Lincoln issued the Emancipation Proclamation that freed the slaves living in the Confederacy. In honor of that proclamation and the start of a long journey to equality, Moses Jackson organized a parade to celebrate Emancipation Day in the 1930s. In West Savannah, people walked and sang, bands played as the parade wound its way from Cumming Street to the heart of the neighborhood, Augusta Avenue. At Millen Street, the parade turned and moved north towards Bay Street, where the crowd turned again and marched on what was ordinarily a busy highway. After passing Fellwood Homes, the parade circled back to Cumming Street via Ferrill.<sup>1</sup> Moses Jackson, a man who was so much the soul of West Savannah, did not live long enough to see how the struggle for rights impacted the lives of his family and his neighborhood, but this annual parade was one step of many in search of equality.



Fig. 1: Elise Hilton, Moses Jackson's youngest daughter, remembers walking in the Emancipation Day parade led by her father. Photograph by Colin Douglas Gray.

### GROWTH OF THE NAACP

Often it is the small acts of daily living that become the battleground for equality. Jim Crow laws at the beginning of the twentieth century segregated society and tried to impose an inferior status on African Americans. In 1906, the Savannah City Council passed an ordinance creating separate cars for black and white passengers on streetcars. For more than thirty years, the streetcars had been integrated, thanks to an 1870 law banning racial discrimination in public transport. An early attempt to segregate Savannah streetcars failed in 1872 when African Americans boycotted the streetcars. For

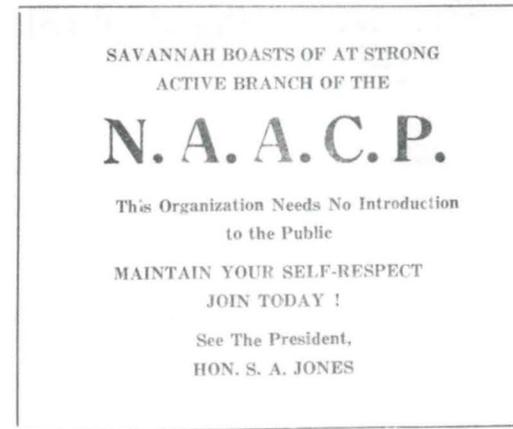


Fig. 2: 1934 NAACP advertisement from Year Book of Colored Savannah.

Courtesy of the Georgia Historical Society.

In 1917, just ten years after the boycott, a Savannah branch of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People was established. The issues of concern included official conduct towards black streetcar passengers and defendants in court. Annual dues of \$1 were set in hopes of attracting a wide membership from the African American community.<sup>3</sup>

Unfortunately membership dropped off so sharply by the end of the 1930s that the national office revoked the Savannah charter in 1939. Questions of racial equality seemingly faded with the onslaught of the Depression. In 1934, the *Year Book of Colored Savannah* stated, "Savannah Negroes do not worry about 'social equality.' These Negroes are too busy trying to acquire those things that are so fundamentally more necessary in the building of a race."<sup>4</sup> It was the arrival of a new pastor at First African Baptist Church in 1942 that sparked the revival of the NAACP in Savannah.

Dr. Ralph Mark Gilbert was a natural leader. A superb speaker, his sermons and speeches moved audiences. His charisma drew followers to him and he understood the necessity of excellent organization to achieve goals.<sup>5</sup> Shortly after his arrival from Detroit, he informed the national office of the NAACP of his interest in re-establishing a branch in Savannah. He called for a mass

that reason, the president of the Savannah Electric Car Company opposed the 1906 segregation plan, but a determined City Council insisted that policemen enforce the Jim Crow ordinance on the streetcars. A boycott followed in 1907.<sup>2</sup> Although the boycott failed to stop the segregation policy, it bled \$50,000 of revenue from the company. No doubt many black residents from western Savannah hired a hack or walked to town rather than board the Mill Haven streetcar.

meeting in February 1942 inviting “all interested citizens” to show their support for a reinvigorated NAACP presence in Savannah.<sup>6</sup> Dr. Gilbert saw the potential of the mass meeting to rally public opinion and that technique became an important weapon in the civil rights movements in Savannah in the 1960s. The national office of the NAACP created a new branch with the urging of Dr. Gilbert and other concerned Savannahians. To no one’s surprise, Dr. Gilbert took charge of the new branch as president, a position he held from 1942 to 1950.<sup>7</sup>

Much of the energy of the NAACP in the 1940s focused on voter registration. Dr. Gilbert was tireless in his efforts to give black Savannahians political power through the vote. By 1948, 20,000 black men and women had registered in the city and block voting assured that their voice would be heard.<sup>8</sup>

Dr. Gilbert also courted the younger generation. The Youth Council was a means to bring teen-agers into the movement.<sup>9</sup> Their energy was a resource of great value to the NAACP and in time young people who worked in registration drives would become voters themselves. High school chapters and theater parties sponsored by the Youth Council attracted students. In 1948, for example, *The Herald* advertised a special showing of “The Voice of the Turtle” for students at the Dunbar Theater. The invitation to join the fun on West Broad Street also included another call: “Register to Vote and Join the NAACP at once.”<sup>10</sup> Dr. Gilbert was known to direct plays himself to spread the word. His embrace of youth participation showed his insight into one of the most dynamic parts of a mass movement. By 1943, the Youth Council in Savannah was the largest of any NAACP branch in the country.<sup>11</sup>

Building such a movement and arming it with the vote gave the NAACP the muscle to press for change. The integration of the Savannah Police Department was one such issue. Dr. Gilbert pushed Mayor John Kennedy to hire black policemen and on May 1, 1947 nine African Americans joined the Savannah Police Department. It was considered such a radical step that great effort had been made to keep the decision under wraps until the last moment. As early as February, sixteen men qualified for training, which was conducted in secret two times weekly for three months. The trainees received no pay. Then the group of sixteen was honed to the nine best men, dubbed the “Original Nine.”<sup>12</sup>

Among the “Original Nine” was Leroy Wilson Sr., a West Savannah resident who lived on Richards Street. He and his fellow recruits learned that black

policemen patrolled only black neighborhoods and arrested only black suspects. Racial considerations still restricted their assignments and authority to West Broad Street. They had no contact with white policemen or the Police Barracks on Habersham Street. Instead they had separate barracks on West Waldburg Street.<sup>13</sup> Even as more black policemen joined the force, integration was still only “skin deep” at the Savannah Police Department. Nonetheless it was a significant step, a starting place for future progress.

His service with the police department launched Leroy Wilson into the role of community activist. He headed a neighborhood committee that petitioned the Board of Education for improvements at West Savannah School.<sup>14</sup> As President of the Citizens Democratic Club in the 1950s, he worked for the betterment of the African American community in Savannah. The club lobbied for more jobs for black policemen and black matrons, as well as more paved streets and running water in black neighborhoods. In 1957, he chaired a community registration drive that set the ambitious goal of signing up 10,000 new voters.<sup>15</sup>



*Fig. 3: The men who broke the color line at the Savannah Police Department in 1947 were, from left to right, John A. White, Leroy Wilson Sr., W. N. Malone, Frank Mullino, Howard J. Davis, Milton Hall, James Nearly, Alexander Grant, and Stephen Houston. Lt. Truman F. Ward stands at attention on the right.*

*Courtesy of the Savannah-Chatham Metropolitan Police Department.*

In 1948, a new county ordinance invalidated the roll of registered voters, forcing black citizens to take literacy tests intended to deny them voting rights. With the 1948 Dixiecrat campaign of Strom Thurmond, segregation intensified across Georgia and the South. Ralph Mark Gilbert, in failing health, resigned from his post of president of the Savannah NAACP in 1950, and Westley Wallace Law succeeded him.<sup>16</sup>

W.W. Law joined the Youth Council as a high school student and was elected its president in 1946 while attending Savannah State College. Thanks to Dr. Gilbert, the movement that W.W. Law inherited was active and organized, despite the recent setbacks. He added his own brand of charisma that energized the Savannah branch.

Like his mentor, Law believed in the Youth Council. “Membership [in] the youth council,” he said, “became a badge of honor and practically every student in the school joined.”<sup>17</sup> Recruitment was constant. In 1954, a radio program on WDAR featured addresses by Youth Council members aimed at their peers. Yvonne McGlockton spoke on “The Importance of Youth in the NAACP,” followed by Mildred Young’s comments entitled “Integration Can Work.”<sup>18</sup> Slogans made it clear that youth were essential to the movement: “We need the youth, the youth need us. Join us!” And for fifty cents annual dues, young people from twelve to sixteen years old could sign up; older youth between seventeen and twenty-five paid one dollar in dues.<sup>19</sup> In 1961, the Savannah branch proudly counted 650 members in the Youth Council.<sup>20</sup>

### WESTERN SAVANNAH YOUTH IN THE 1950s

In western Savannah it was the young people who responded most quickly to the NAACP. They learned about the NAACP Youth Council at school, scout meetings, or from their friends. One of those young people was Curtis Cooper, a 1951 graduate of Woodville High School. He was quiet and unassuming, but his achievements spoke for themselves. Active in the New Farmers of America, he was elected as National President of the organization in 1952. Money was tight at his home on Love Street because his father was disabled from a stroke and could no longer work at Union Camp. To help his family, Curtis worked at a grocery on weekends.<sup>21</sup>

At Savannah State College, Curtis Cooper was elected president of the campus NAACP Youth Council. His awareness of racial injustice grew out of everyday experience.



*Fig. 4: As President of the New Farmers of America, Curtis Cooper, seated, third from the left, attended a leadership conference with other national officers.*

*Courtesy of Constance Cooper.*

During those days I rode the city bus a lot and I used to come down on Broughton Street when I was a kid coming from the supermarket where I worked over on the east side. I used to come through there and I would see sailors from foreign countries having lunch at the lunch counter and I would see other kinds of people from other countries and I was a young college student, you know, impressed with democracy and freedom and all that and it just, there was something everytime I saw it. Some sort of rage came inside of me.<sup>22</sup>

His degree in biology brought him to the United States Department of Agriculture as a Research Technician, but he continued to be active in the movement. For eight years, he hosted a weekly radio broadcast called “NAACP in Action” on WSOK.

The NAACP’s message created not only the hope for change but an impatience to move forward. The restrictions of a segregated society weighed heavily on all, but there was a growing expectation, especially among the youth, that the time for action had come.



Fig. 5: A fine speaker, Curtis Cooper became the voice of the NAACP on radio in Savannah.

Photograph by Frederick C. Baldwin. Courtesy of Constance Cooper.

A college student and graduate of Tompkins High School, James German of Lathrop Avenue spoke for his generation: “It was really rough, because that was all you knew, segregation and all that, when you were coming up. You don’t go here, you don’t do that. So, you don’t do it! Until somebody broke out and said, this is wrong.”<sup>23</sup>

### SIT-INS

Student sit-ins in Greensboro, North Carolina in February 1960 rallied Savannah youth to action. The Youth Council began planning a sit-in at Broughton Street lunch counters, but a West Savannah group outside of the Youth Council had the same strategy. James Jackson, nineteen-year-old grandson of Moses Jackson, led the group as president; Benjamin West was vice-president. Before setting the date for their sit-in, James Jackson took the precaution of asking W.W. Law to bond his group out of jail. Mr. Law advised the group to wait because the chapter did not have enough money to post

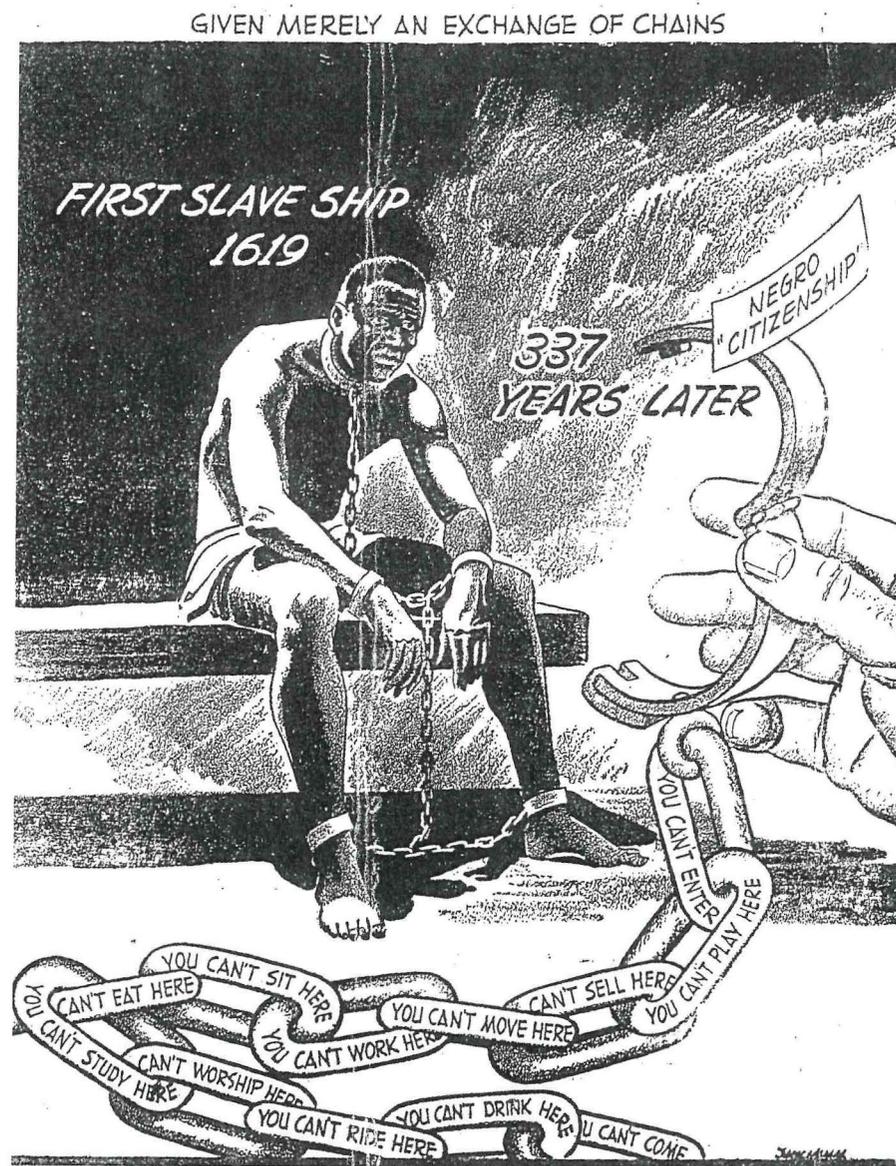


Fig. 6: The Herald, 3 May 1956.

Courtesy of The Herald.

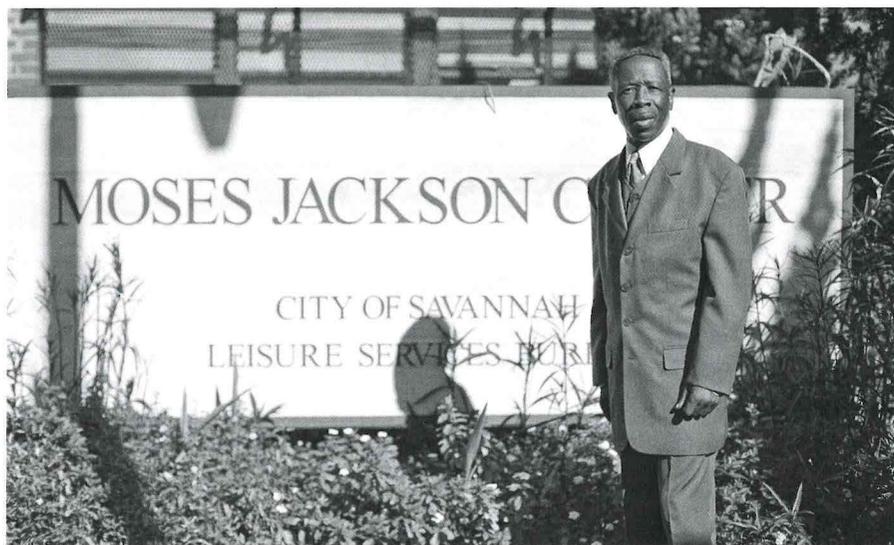


Fig. 7: James Jackson.  
 Photograph by Colin Douglas Gray.

bond for students arrested. He and Hosea Williams, second-in-command of the Savannah NAACP branch, visited James Jackson at his home on Cumming Street to confirm the group's willingness to wait.<sup>24</sup>

On March 16, 1960, members of the Youth Council took the initiative. Groups of students walked into Broughton Street stores and asked for service at the lunch counter. Police turned away the students at Silver's 5¢ and 10¢ store, but the young people were undeterred. The students made their way down the street, stopping at McCrory's, Kress, Livingston's Drug Store, Woolworth's, W. T. Grant's, and Walgreen's. Lunch counters closed as soon as they sat down. Finally, police arrested Carolyn Quilloin, Ernest Robinson, and Joan Tyson for trespassing when they sat down at the lunch counter at the Azalea Room in Levy's department store and requested service. Jailed overnight, the students stated that their actions were their own, not the result of prodding by the NAACP.<sup>25</sup>

The significance of that first sit-in may not have registered in Savannah's white community at first. The *Savannah Morning News* on the following day focused on Saint Patrick's Day festivities, and the report of the sit-ins and arrests was buried in the interior of the paper. But the news electrified the African

American community and spurred the NAACP Executive Board to take up the students' crusade. Curtis Cooper said of the students, "they had disobeyed their parents so to speak and had gone out anyway. And I guess it was just a case of a little child leading us. Or little children leading us. 'Cause when they did it, they got in jail, we began to respond."<sup>26</sup>

The NAACP trained young people in non-violence. Whatever the provocation might be – name-calling, spitting, shoves, or slugs – the young people turned the other cheek. "We had to make sure we didn't send out any hotheads," said Curtis Cooper, or "you just defeat the purpose."<sup>27</sup> Benjamin West, a Tompkins graduate who belonged to James Jackson's group, was known as a man who could take the abuse. At one sit-in at Kress, he was unmoved when whites spat on him. Even when someone slugged him and broke his jaw, he refused to retaliate.<sup>28</sup>

Despite fierce opposition, the sit-ins continued. Woolworth's, McCrory's, Kress, and Levy's were targeted repeatedly. The protesters were so familiar to employees that they closed down the lunch counter before the young people said a word. At times there were twelve or fifteen protesters sitting at a closed lunch counter so that no one else could sit there either.<sup>29</sup>

## THE BROUGHTON STREET BOYCOTT

It quickly became apparent that the sit-ins alone were not going to change the segregation policies of merchants. The NAACP leadership realized that the time had arrived to press for change on a much wider scale. African Americans wanted more than service at lunch counters. They wanted jobs in retail; as customers, they wanted to be addressed respectfully as "Mr." and "Mrs." instead of by first names; they wanted to use rest rooms, water fountains, and dressing rooms in stores; and they wanted the same access to restaurants, movie theaters, and hotels as whites.<sup>30</sup> The Broughton Street Boycott began in late March, 1960. Black shoppers cut up their charge cards and vowed to stay away. Even the tradition of new clothes for Easter was forgotten that spring by many black families.

The NAACP's Boycott Committee, chaired by Curtis Cooper, organized picketing. Legally only two picketers carrying placards were permitted at a time, but "silent picketing" was a way around the law. People wearing a black ribbon walked up and down the street. They carried no signs or posters, but they helped to enforce the boycott.<sup>31</sup> One target was the Bargain Corner on

Bay Street, a grocery and general store where many black families from western Savannah shopped.

Although almost all of the picketing took place on Broughton Street, stores serving western Savannah were not exempt. At the Westside Shopping Center on Bay Street, Woolworth's, Liggetts-Lane Drug Store, and Hogan's were singled out for picketing because they were branches of Broughton Street stores. At the drug store, three Tompkins High School students staged a sit-in at the lunch counter and were promptly arrested. Among those picketing were Constance and Curtis Cooper, Judson Ford, James Milton, Robert Nelson, Lonnie Pinckney, Ernest Robinson, Charles Smart, and Annette Smith.<sup>32</sup>

The demonstrators then moved the picketing to the Traffic Circle Shopping Center. Judson Ford and Robert Nelson picketed the H.L. Green store where police arrested them.<sup>33</sup>

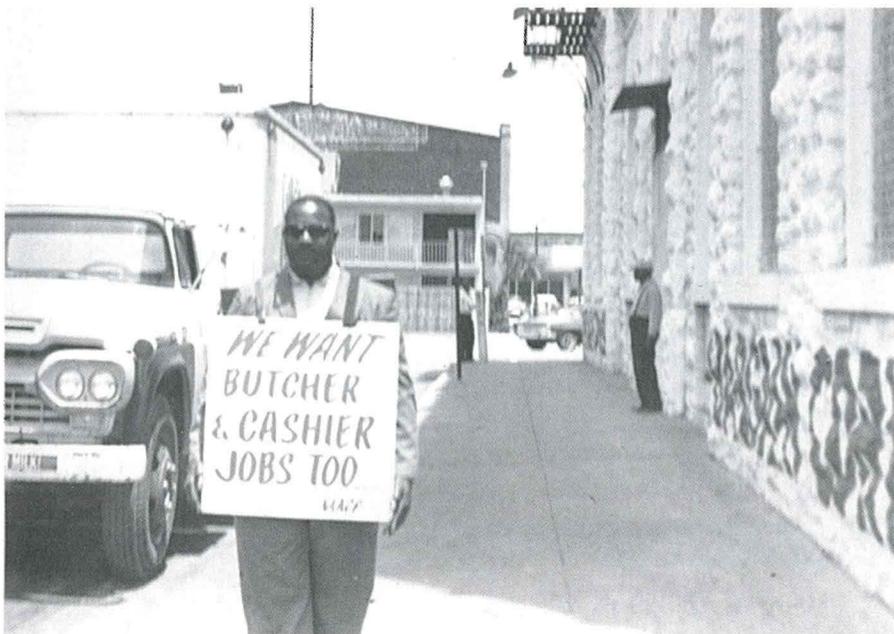
The boycott that began in the spring lasted month after month, and the sit-ins continued as well. In the summer there was a "wade-in" at Tybee to protest segregated Savannah Beach. A "kneel-in" followed in October as students tried to attend Sunday services at white churches. There were also "ride-ins" on the buses and "stand-ins" at the movie theaters.<sup>34</sup>



*Figs. 8, 9, 10: Western Savannah residents were among the best customers of the Bargain Corner but they upheld the boycott.*

*Fig. 8: Savannah Morning News, 15 January 1950. Courtesy of the Savannah Morning News.*

*Figs. 9, 10: Courtesy of Constance Cooper.*



The boycott took its toll on Broughton Street merchants. A few went out of business, but all suffered significant losses in revenue. At the negotiating table, the NAACP sat down with the merchants, as well as city and community leaders. A settlement gave African Americans desegregated lunch counters, courtesy titles, and free access to rest rooms, water fountains, and dressing rooms. The merchants promised more jobs. In October 1961, the boycott ended after eighteen months.<sup>35</sup>

### VOTER REGISTRATION

Voter registration had been a priority for the NAACP since the days of Rev. Ralph Mark Gilbert and it continued in the 1950s even after obstacles such as literacy tests were designed to keep black citizens off the voting rolls. The registration drive intensified in the 1960s. The young people recruited their own in the high schools.

As soon as a student turned eighteen, she or he was encouraged to register immediately.

In West Savannah, James Middleton Sr. of Ferrill Street committed himself to the movement because his son, James Jr. was involved. Although some older people were reluctant to join for fear of losing their jobs, James Middleton did not hesitate. "If I lose this [job at Union Camp], I'll find another one."<sup>36</sup> Voting rights, he believed, were the key to the future. "All I wanted to do was get people registered. 'Cause I knowed [*sic*] if we could get enough people to vote,

we could change things."<sup>37</sup> So he and his wife went door to door, canvassing the neighborhood, encouraging people to register. "I took my car. I bet you, I must have hauled more than five hundred to the polls myself."<sup>38</sup>

In addition to James Middleton's car there was the ballot bus that picked up people and took them to register. Some people needed transportation in order to register, others were afraid to go alone. "Big Lester" Hankerson drove that bus and inevitably filled it with prospective voters. Student activist Benjamin Van Clark remembered him this way:

He loved the Ballot Bus. And guess what? I have seen him go on the corner and grab dudes – say, 'Looka here man!' He say, 'You register to vote?' 'No.' 'Come on – get in.' 'Lester, I can't go nowhere with you right now!' 'You GONNA GET IN HERE!' Now, that's his. You don't ever take that from him 'cause that's his!<sup>39</sup>



*Fig. 11: These students came in a group to the court house to register. Photograph by Frederick C. Baldwin. Courtesy of the Telfair Museum of Art.*

A rough-talking, hard-living bully of a man, "Big Lester" converted to non-violence but he never lost his powers of persuasion. He worked on his fellow longshoremen at the union hall of Local 1414 and convinced many ILA men to register.

One way or another, the people of western Savannah heard the appeal to register.

### THE CCCV AND THE MARCHES

Leading the successful voter registration drive was Hosea Williams, Rev. Pickens A. Patterson of Butler Presbyterian



*Fig. 12: "Big Lester" Hankerson, in overcoat, reaches out to longshoremen in 1964. He and "Trash" Brownlee, in white jacket, worked the union hall together. Photograph by Frederick C. Baldwin. Courtesy of the Telfair Museum of Art.*

Church, and the Chatham County Crusade for Voters (CCCV), the political wing of the NAACP. This campaign climaxed an effort that had been ongoing since the early 1950s and by 1962, over 17,000 black voters had registered, representing 57 percent of all the adult African Americans in the county.<sup>40</sup> Gradually a difference in tactics emerged between W.W. Law and Hosea Williams, between the NAACP and the CCCV.

Mr. Law preferred to work through the courts and through negotiation but Hosea Williams built a base among the young people and the poor by calling for action. The CCCV declared its independence from the parent organization in October, 1962, although the two groups stood united to the outside world.<sup>41</sup>

The NAACP took a more aggressive stance to compete with Hosea Williams and his followers but the long, hot summer of 1963 belonged to the CCCV.<sup>42</sup> When the movie theaters withdrew their promise to integrate in June, protesters demanded that segregation must end, not just in theaters but everywhere in Savannah. The tactic used by the CCCV was to overload the court system and the jails with arrested marchers and protesters.

CCCV members Sage Brown and George Shinhoster, Tompkins students who would help integrate Groves High School in the fall of 1963, spent the summer in and out of jail cells. Their first arrest was at Anton's Restaurant at the corner of Bull and Broughton, after failing to rouse any attention at Morrison's Cafeteria. They sat down at a table at Morrison's, not realizing that they needed to go through the cafeteria line to be served.<sup>43</sup> Both young men participated in protest marches. "We knew if you marched, you were going to jail," remembered George Shinhoster. "It was like a badge of honor." Part of the attraction of the CCCV was its call for action. "It was not adults," said Sage Brown. "It was young people. It was a street movement, and it gave us a chance to be involved."<sup>44</sup>

In fact, adults marched under the banner of the CCCV, too. James Middleton managed to combine marching and working.

I was one of the men who attended the [CCCV] meetings all the time so when they got ready to march, I told them I could march but see I was working swing shift in the afternoon. In the morning I could march...but at 3 o'clock I had to go to work, you see, at Union Camp. So there's some of the foremens [*sic*] out there and officials out there seeing me marching, they just never did bother me, I don't know why. Never did say nothing to me, I went right on with it.<sup>45</sup>

James Middleton marched on the Pirate's House and the DeSoto Hilton, and helped boycott stores that refused to hire black cashiers.<sup>46</sup> "Big Lester," who was older than Hosea, summed up the efforts of the CCCV: "We went to jail about a thousand. We kept the city and county jails full. We marched morning, noon, and night."<sup>47</sup>

It was the night marches that had the greatest potential for violence. As many as 3,000 people marched in an evening demonstration, protesting the court orders that barred them from disrupting business for restaurant owners or movie theaters. Some of the NAACP leaders feared that outside troublemakers might use the march as a cover for criminal activity or that the crowds might get out of control.<sup>48</sup> James German, who joined a couple of the night marches, remembered the crowd preparing for a march at the Flamingo night club on Gwinnett Street when the police arrived to arrest them. "I think we did get kind of violent that night. It wasn't no lick-spat, I think we turned the paddy wagon over and everybody escaped."<sup>49</sup> In another incident, Hosea Williams was arrested and stayed in jail for a month when his bond was set at the impossible sum of \$30,000. The marches continued every night.

The sobering example of the violence in Birmingham and a genuine effort on the part of black and white leaders to come to a settlement ended Savannah's long, hot summer. By the fall of 1963, restaurants, movie theaters, golf courses, libraries, and hotels opened their doors to all. Businesses welcomed blacks as customers and as employees. Even if the settlement was imperfectly implemented at times, Savannah had a policy of integration months before the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964.<sup>50</sup>

## INTEGRATION OF THE SAVANNAH FIRE DEPARTMENT

The year 1963 proved to be a watershed year on several fronts. Not only was a policy of desegregation of public facilities put into effect, but the Savannah-Chatham County Public Schools began integration with the enrollment of black twelfth-grade students at Groves and Savannah High Schools. Another longstanding issue, the integration of the Savannah Fire Department, came to the fore.

Hiring black firemen seemed to be a logical step forward after the integration of the police department in 1947. But the issue was complicated by the fact that it was not just a question of black and white men fighting fires together; firemen lived together in tight quarters at the fire house. In the 1950s the



Fig. 13: At the wheel was Porter Screen, Cordell Heath in the center, Lewis Oliver, standing; at the rear of the truck, from left to right, Purdy Bowers, Warnell Robinson, and Theodore Rivers.

Savannah State Bulletin, *Alumni Issue 1963*. Courtesy of Savannah State University Archives.

African American community lobbied for an integrated fire department. At one point there was a plan to construct a new fire house where only black firemen worked, thus skirting the sensitive issue of sharing living space. Nothing came of the plan.<sup>51</sup> A 1959 editorial in the *Herald* railed against the political subterfuge that delayed any action. "Meanwhile," the editorial concluded, "there are no negro firemen in the city, negro homes still burn and lives are lost."<sup>52</sup> Ironically, it was slaves and free men of color who fought Savannah fires before the Civil War, and some black fire companies existed as late as the 1870s.<sup>53</sup>

Mayor Malcolm Maclean made an election pledge to hire black firemen and he fulfilled that promise in 1963. Six men, Purdy Bowers, Cordell Heath, Lewis Oliver, Theodore Rivers, Warnell Robinson, and Porter Screen, joined the fire department on May 1 at Station #4 on East Lathrop Avenue. The choice of Station #4 in the predominantly black neighborhood of West Savannah was intended to isolate the firemen from white Savannahians in distress. The new recruits were further isolated with separate quarters. They had a separate bath, bedroom, kitchen, and television on one side of the fire house. Gradually the racial barriers eased as men from both sides of the station shared a meal or watched a game on television together.<sup>54</sup>

THE WHITE HOUSE

WASHINGTON

May 1, 1991

Dear Battalion Chief Oliver:

Congratulations on your retirement as Battalion Chief of the Savannah Fire Department after 28 years as a firefighter.

The importance of our nation's firefighters cannot be overestimated. You have shown a willingness to risk your life for the sake of others, and I am proud to commend you for your efforts to help your fellowman.

Barbara joins me in thanking you for a job well done. We send our best wishes for every future happiness.

Sincerely,

Fire Battalion Chief Lewis Wilson Oliver  
Savannah Fire Department  
Savannah, Georgia

Fig. 14: Courtesy of Lewis Oliver.

Five of the first six black firemen left for other jobs but Lewis Oliver made a career in the department. Within five years of his arrival he was promoted to engineer and in 1970 he and Ulysses Allen were the first two African Americans to be named captains. In 1979, he achieved the rank of battalion chief, once again the first black man to lead a fire battalion. He held that position until his retirement in 1991.<sup>55</sup> On the day he left the department, President George Herbert Walker Bush wrote him a letter of congratulations marking the end of his trailblazing career.<sup>56</sup>

### RACIAL TENSIONS WITHIN WESTERN SAVANNAH

For decades, whites and blacks lived on Hudson Hill and in West Savannah in relative calm. Both came to the area in search of industrial jobs or commercial opportunity, and both wanted to own homes and get ahead in life. If their children attended segregated schools, free time might bring the children together as playmates. Milton Rahn's family moved to Hudson Hill in 1942 and he recalls the fun he and his black friends had playing in the mounds of dirt piled up when sewer lines were put in. Moses King also remembers white playmates who lived in West Savannah.<sup>57</sup>

The interracial character of these neighborhoods changed in the 1960s, and the first flare of racial tensions occurred over housing. The Housing Authority of Savannah announced in 1960 that the all-white Francis Bartow Place would become a development for black families only. White tenants were furious at the prospect of being relocated to a different facility. It was not simply a matter of changing addresses, it was the loss of a close-knit community. Some friendships dated back a decade or more. The residents hired an attorney who argued that the Housing Authority had no right to uproot families except in the case of a "national emergency."<sup>58</sup>

White homeowners nearby took up the cause of the Francis Bartow residents. Ned Kennedy, who lived on Augusta Avenue, owned two houses and two businesses near Francis Bartow. He feared for the value of his property if black renters moved in. "We have our life savings invested in our homes," he said. Hollis Price, a white homeowner on Chester Street, reiterated Kennedy's concerns. He had no complaint with his black neighbors who were property owners like himself, but he promised to sell his home if the Housing Authority converted Francis Bartow to black residences.<sup>59</sup>

**THE RAVENS  
SOCIAL CLUB  
BACK TO SCHOOL  
HOP**  
at the  
**PALMS CLUB**  
**Tuesday, Sept. 6, 1960**  
**7:30 P.M. until?**

---

**Advance 60c; At door 75c**

**Notice: The management of the Palms Club has made the following rules of conduct: NO TEENAGERS will be permitted in the bar. The Ravens Club will have use of the ballroom ONLY and no one will be allowed in any of the other rooms, such as the bar, etc. If any person leaves the ballroom he will not be permitted to enter again. The members of the Ravens Club will appreciate the cooperation of everyone.**

*Fig. 15: To defuse the volatile situation, the management of The Palms banned teenagers from the club.*

The Herald, 3 September 1960. Courtesy of The Herald.

Park neighborhood on the eastside. In the years that followed, more and more whites left West Savannah and Hudson Hill because of school desegregation, job losses, or other factors. This "white flight" left western Savannah virtually an all-black residential area.

A new black nightclub, The Palms, opened at 2600 Augusta Avenue in the midst of the controversy and served as a flashpoint in the neighborhood. Nearby white homeowners objected to the noise from the club and Francis Bartow residents complained that blacks parked their cars inside their community. When the police charged the Palms owners with selling beer to a minor, angry whites were said to be arming themselves against trespassers.<sup>60</sup>

Fortunately no violence occurred. Even so, a confrontation of this intensity signaled rising tempers in the neighborhood just as the Broughton Street boycott was entering its fourth month. White families moved out of Francis Bartow Place and black families moved in. Hollis Price, true to his word, moved away by 1961 and settled in the Magnolia

## CONCLUSION

The civil rights movement profoundly changed western Savannah. Its young people worked actively for the cause. Although far from the frontlines of Broughton Street, picketing and protests also occurred on the westside. The energy of the movement flowed at the Townsley Chapel mass meeting and a number of residents closed ranks behind Hosea Williams in the Chatham County Crusade for Voters. With “white flight,” the interracial character of the area largely disappeared.



*Fig. 16: Mayor Floyd Adams Jr. Courtesy of the City of Savannah's Public Information Office.*



*Fig. 17: Gwen Goodman passed away in 2004 and was remembered by Mayor Adams as “patient, loving, courageous, and a fighter.”*

*Courtesy of the City of Savannah's Public Information Office.*

The struggle for civil rights took significant strides in the 1960s and continued in the courts in later decades. School desegregation was the most visible battle fought, but other suits attacked ongoing discrimination in the police department and industry. W.W. Law continued to direct the NAACP's efforts to promote economic opportunity for the black community. In 1976, he stepped down as president of the Savannah branch. Curtis Cooper, a member of the young activist generation of the 1960s, succeeded Mr. Law as president and held that position for over twenty years.

The vote empowered African Americans to play a larger role in local politics. Floyd Adams Jr., who grew up on Newell Street in West Savannah, was elected the first African American mayor of Savannah in 1995 and again in 1999. His administration brought desperately needed flood relief to West Savannah with new pumping stations and a buyout of homes in harm's way. His roots are deep in West Savannah; he attended Saint Anthony's School, played ball for the West Savannah Whippers, and is a communicant at Resurrection of Our Lord Catholic Church. He is proud to be “a West Savannah resident at heart.”<sup>61</sup>



*Fig. 18: Dr. Priscilla Thomas was the first woman and the first African American to hold the position of Vice Chairman of the Chatham County Commission.*

*Courtesy of Chatham County Commission.*



*Fig. 19: A native of Brooklyn, New York, Alderman Johnson received his undergraduate degree from Savannah State College and his master's degree from Georgia Southern University.*

*Courtesy of Van R. Johnson II.*

Gwen Goodman, an educator for thirty-four years with the Savannah-Chatham County Public Schools, saw the difference that teachers could make in the lives of their students. She credited Coach Joe Turner at Woodville High School for helping her to go to college. She said he taught her “to improve ourselves academically so one day we could take our rightful place as citizens.”<sup>62</sup> She lived those words, as a teacher and principal, and then as an alderman for the City of Savannah. First elected in 1991, she twice won re-election. Her political success was due in no small part to her early years in West Savannah and to the respect earned by years of classroom teaching.

Dr. Priscilla Thomas saw Savannah's civil rights movement unfold in her grandparents' living room where W.W. Law conducted strategy sessions. She participated in the Broughton Street protests and wrote pamphlets for the movement while serving western Savannah as a teacher at Tompkins Elementary School, the same school she attended as a child.<sup>63</sup> She spent thirty years as a teacher and principal in the Savannah Chatham County Public School System.

In 1990, she began a new phase of community service, representing District 8 on the Chatham County Commission. The needs of children and young adults continue to be her highest priority as evident in her founding of the Chatham County Youth Commission in 1992.<sup>64</sup>

Part of a new generation of leadership in western Savannah is Van R. Johnson II who was elected as District 1 alderman for the Savannah City Council in 2003. He won his second term as alderman in 2007. Recognized for his expertise in public administration, he holds the position of Vice Chairman of the Council.

## FOOTNOTES

- <sup>1</sup> Elise Hilton, WSDP-OH.
- <sup>2</sup> John W. Blassingame, "Before the Ghetto: The Making of the Black Community in Savannah, Georgia, 1865-1880," *Journal of Social History* (1973): 479-80; Robert E. Perdue, *The Negro in Savannah, 1865-1900* (New York: Exposition Press, 1973), 33-34; Stephen G. N. Tuck, *Beyond Atlanta: The Struggle for Racial Equality in Georgia, 1940-1980* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2001), 46.
- <sup>3</sup> Charles Lwanga Hoskins, *Out of Yamacraw and Beyond: Discovering Black Savannah* (Savannah: The Gullah Press, 2002), 15.
- <sup>4</sup> Kermit O. Smalls, ed., *Year Book of Colored Savannah* (Savannah: The Savannah Tribune, 1934), 51.
- <sup>5</sup> Tuck, *Beyond Atlanta*, 47.
- <sup>6</sup> ST, 19 February 1942.
- <sup>7</sup> SMN, 29 January 2005, 5A.
- <sup>8</sup> Stephen Tuck, "A City Too Dignified to Hate: Civic Pride, Civil Rights, and Savannah in Comparative Perspective," *Georgia Historical Quarterly* 79 (Fall 1995): 557-58.
- <sup>9</sup> Tuck, *Beyond Atlanta*, 48.
- <sup>10</sup> SH, 25 November 1948.
- <sup>11</sup> Tuck, *Beyond Atlanta*, 48.
- <sup>12</sup> Vertical Files, Afro-Americans – Civil Rights.
- <sup>13</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>14</sup> Petition to the Board of Education, 11 December 1953, West Savannah School File, SCCPS.
- <sup>15</sup> SH, 15 December 1956, 1.
- <sup>16</sup> Tuck, "Civic Pride, Civil Rights, and Savannah," 547, 558.
- <sup>17</sup> Tuck, *Beyond Atlanta*, 48.
- <sup>18</sup> SH, 16 September 1954.
- <sup>19</sup> Ibid., 4 April 1959.
- <sup>20</sup> Tuck, *Beyond Atlanta*, 133.
- <sup>21</sup> Constance Cooper, WSDP-OH; SH, 1 May 1952.
- <sup>22</sup> Frederick C. Baldwin Interviews: Curtis Cooper, Tape 1, 1-2, TMA.
- <sup>23</sup> Frederick C. Baldwin Interviews: James German, 4, TMA.
- <sup>24</sup> James Jackson, WSDP-OH.
- <sup>25</sup> SMN, 17 March 1960.
- <sup>26</sup> Frederick C. Baldwin Interviews: Curtis Cooper, Tape 1, 1-2, TMA.
- <sup>27</sup> Ibid., Tape 1, 20.
- <sup>28</sup> Frederick C. Baldwin Interviews: James German, 2-3, TMA.
- <sup>29</sup> Frederick C. Baldwin Interviews: Curtis Cooper, Tape 1, 15; Frederick C. Baldwin Interviews: James Middleton, 7, TMA.
- <sup>30</sup> Frederick C. Baldwin, "... *We ain't what we used to be.*" (Savannah: Telfair Academy of Arts and Sciences, 1983).
- <sup>31</sup> Frederick C. Baldwin Interviews: Curtis Cooper, Tape 2, 2-3, TMA.
- <sup>32</sup> SH, 6 August 1960.
- <sup>33</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>34</sup> SH, 3 September 1960, 8 October 1960; Tuck, "Civic Pride, Civil Rights, and Savannah," 546.
- <sup>35</sup> Frederick C. Baldwin Interviews: Curtis Cooper, Tape 1, 3-5, TMA; Tuck, *Beyond Atlanta*, 127, 134.
- <sup>36</sup> Frederick C. Baldwin Interviews: James Middleton Sr., 1, TMA.
- <sup>37</sup> Ibid., 12.
- <sup>38</sup> Ibid., 13.
- <sup>39</sup> Baldwin, "... *We ain't what we used to be,*" 6.
- <sup>40</sup> Tuck, "Civic Pride, Civil Rights and Savannah," 547.
- <sup>41</sup> Ibid., 547-48; Frederick C. Baldwin Interviews: Hosea Williams, 15-16, TMA.
- <sup>42</sup> Tuck, "Civic Pride, Civil Rights and Savannah," 548; Frederick C. Baldwin Interviews: Sage Brown, 2, TMA.
- <sup>43</sup> Frederick C. Baldwin Interviews: Sage Brown, 2, TMA.
- <sup>44</sup> SMN, "Quest for Equality," 2.
- <sup>45</sup> Frederick C. Baldwin Interviews: James Middleton Sr., 3, TMA.
- <sup>46</sup> Ibid., 5, 8-9.

- <sup>47</sup> Frederick C. Baldwin Interviews: Lester Hankerson, 2-3, TMA.
- <sup>48</sup> SMN, 2-3; Frederick C. Baldwin Interviews: Curtis Cooper, Tape 1, 12, TMA.
- <sup>49</sup> Frederick C. Baldwin Interviews: James German, 1, TMA.
- <sup>50</sup> Frederick C. Baldwin Interviews: Curtis Cooper, Tape 1, 9-10, TMA; Tuck, "Civic Pride, Civil Rights and Savannah," 542.
- <sup>51</sup> SH, 4 April 1959, 4.
- <sup>52</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>53</sup> James E. Chase, "History of Savannah Council No. 1 of the Georgia State Council of American Firemen, also the Savannah Fire Department," (Savannah: The Morning News Printing Houses, 1898), 57-61; John E. Maguire, "Historical Souvenir: Savannah Fire Department," (Savannah: Presses of M.S. & D.A. Byck, 1906), 16-17, 23. Both sources are available at the Georgia Room, Bull Street Branch of the Live Oak Public Libraries.
- <sup>54</sup> Lewis Oliver, WSDP-OH.
- <sup>55</sup> Vertical File, Savannah Fire Department, GHS.
- <sup>56</sup> President George Herbert Walker Bush to Battalion Chief Lewis Oliver, 1 May 1991. Courtesy of Lewis Oliver.
- <sup>57</sup> Milton Rahn, WSDP-OH; Moses King, WSDP-OH.
- <sup>58</sup> SMN, 19 July 1960.
- <sup>59</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>60</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>61</sup> Floyd Adams Jr., WSDP-OH.
- <sup>62</sup> SMN, 26 March 1993.
- <sup>63</sup> Conversation with Dr. Priscilla Thomas, 13 November 2007.
- <sup>64</sup> <http://old.savannahnow.com/stories/121505/3496915.shtml>





# COMMUNITY

*Mrs. Sophronia Tompkins, center, stands in her favorite place – surrounded by her students.*

*Courtesy of Rose Harris.*

WHEN A SUMMER THUNDERSTORM came up suddenly, people in West Savannah were known to take in a neighbor's laundry hanging on the clothesline. Not only did they rescue the clean clothes but they also shut the windows to keep the rain from blowing into the neighbor's house. These are the memories of Ernestine Manigault of Scarborough Street. No one would think of asking a dime for this favor; neighbors helping neighbors was simply a way of life in West Savannah.<sup>1</sup>

Spontaneous acts of kindness are characteristic of a community that operates in the best interests of its members. There is a sense of belonging and a sense of responsibility for those in need. Residents become neighbors as they work, raise families, and worship together. These are the ties that bind people together to create caring communities.

This tradition of caring still exists in Hudson Hill, West Savannah, and Woodville, although crime and other problems work to undermine it. The challenge facing residents is to revitalize housing and economic opportunity while strengthening and expanding the caring community.

### EVERYONE'S CHILD

One measure of a community's strength is its concern for children. Pamela Howard-Oglesby remembers that "growing up in West Savannah was a beautiful experience." Caring for children did not fall only to parents and grandparents. Neighbors functioned as a kind of extended family who took a personal interest in the children who lived nearby. As more women began working outside the home in the 1960s and 1970s, Pamela Howard-Oglesby recalls that "there was always a mother home that looked after the children in the neighborhood." Mealtimes often found children at their playmates' homes eating with the family and no one considered it an imposition. Children were always welcome.<sup>2</sup>

When a child's behavior got out of hand, the extended family stepped in to correct it if the parents were not present. Rose Harris remembers her neighbor, Miss Sally, doing just that. "When we were growing up, if we got in trouble at all, Miss Sally could spank us just as easily [as our parents.] Then we would go tell Mom or Grandma [who would say,] 'Oh, [Miss Sally] did [that]! Well, I don't think she did it enough!' and we'd get another spanking."<sup>3</sup>



*Fig. 1: Three-year-old Rose Harris was on her best behavior carrying her mother's purse on a shopping trip to Broughton Street.*

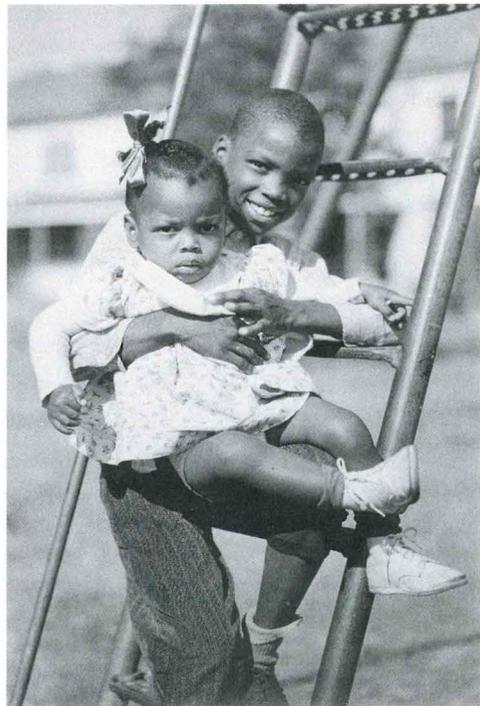
*Courtesy of Rose Harris.*

Men in the neighborhood sometimes acted as role models for boys without fathers at home. When Curley Milton's father died unexpectedly in 1929, his mother's cousin, Peter Jackson, helped to fill the void left behind. As Curley Milton put it, "he helped raise me" and "kept me busy."<sup>4</sup> Other boys in Woodville at this time turned to James Washington, whose store was located at the corner of Fair and King Street. There neighborhood boys gathered to play checkers. Mr. Washington welcomed the boys, knowing that a game to occupy their time and an adult to take some interest in the youngsters helped to keep them out of trouble.<sup>5</sup>

Clarence Grant, coach of the Whippers and the Whipperettes, operated on the same belief. For more than fifty years, he encouraged girls and boys to play sports. Under his tutelage, the young people experienced the fun of the game and the satisfaction of earning a victory. They also learned what "Blue" Grant called the five best slogans: good morning, good evening, good night, please, and thank you. Courtesy was mandatory on Coach Grant's teams and it was part of the discipline he instilled in all of his players.<sup>6</sup>

Teachers subscribed to the belief that their responsibility towards students did not end when the afternoon school bell rang. Dedicated teachers at Woodville/

Tompkins, West Savannah/Moses Jackson, Saint Anthony, and Bartow volunteered their time to lead Brownie troops, Cub Scout packs, and teenage scouts. The alliance between teachers and parents to provide wholesome activities for after-school hours demonstrates the strength of their commitment to children. At Woodville, Mr. James Lutten heard Curtis Cooper's beautiful voice and recruited him to join the New Farmers of America quartet. Curtis Cooper hesitated; the quartet toured extensively and he had no suit to wear. In fact, he routinely stuffed his shoes with paper to make them fit. Mr. Lutten loaned him the money to buy new shoes and a jacket.<sup>7</sup> James Lutten was one of many teachers such as Mrs. Sophronia Tompkins, Coach Joe Turner, Mrs. Thelma Lee, Mrs. Celestine Williams, Mrs. Matilda Rivers, and Mrs. Lillie Blount who gave their time and even their money to help students.



*Fig. 2: Children such as these at Fellwood Homes in the 1950s benefited from families who joined the Parents' Club and the Mothers' Club to plan activities for youngsters and to raise money on their behalf.*

*Georgia Historical Society Photograph Collection, VM 1361 PH, Box 6, Folder 23. Courtesy of the Georgia Historical Society.*

### EVERYONE'S GRANDMOTHER

When the flood waters rose on West Savannah's Baker Street in September 1994, resident Tyrone Furlow spent two hours carrying his elderly neighbors to safety through the waist-high water.<sup>8</sup> Concern for the oldest residents in western Savannah is not limited to emergencies. Neighbors look in on seniors, take them to the doctor or the hospital, help with the grocery shopping, and bring in meals. Family friendships forged by decades of living side by side ensure that the widowed and the ailing are not forgotten.

Unfortunately, as job layoffs forced some working families to move out of the neighborhood, the proportion of elderly

residents in Woodville, West Savannah, and Hudson Hill has grown in the past thirty years. As a result, there are fewer people to check on older neighbors. The City of Savannah has helped to address the needs of seniors with Golden Age Centers in each neighborhood. For example, to help seniors keep active, exercise is essential. Dancing, stretching, walking, playing ball are part of a daily program designed for active seniors. Crafts, such as sewing, quilting, and ceramics, engage hands and minds in creative projects and the results are impressive. Wreaths, jewelry, pillowcases, door stoppers, quilts, embroidered pillows, and even a plaster of Paris "Last Supper" are proudly displayed at "friends and family" parties at the centers. Seamstresses model their creations in a fashion show or put together costumes on a "Roaring 20s" theme. Golden Age Centers arrange day trips and other outings for seniors, with shopping trips to Wal-Mart being a favorite for all. To give back to the community, seniors at the Golden Age Centers do their part. Knitting caps for children at Safe Shelter, making hearty breakfasts for the children attending summer camp, crocheting lap robes for nursing home residents, or sending a basket of food to a sick friend show that caring for others knows no age limit.<sup>9</sup>

Florence Gibson of Hudson Hill was one senior who never stopped working on behalf of her community. As a widow living alone, her neighbors on Rankin Street looked out for her, but she repaid them in kind. She planted several beds of okra for her "cousins," as she called her neighbors, despite the fact she had no taste for okra herself. Coca-Cola and Sprite packed her refrigerator for the workmen and visitors who stopped by. Some of those visitors included local politicians. Florence made sure that they knew what Hudson Hill needed – paved streets, bus service, mosquito spraying – and some of the credit for those improvements goes to her. When she died in 2005, the funeral procession fittingly traveled from the funeral home and circled her block as if to touch base with home and her "cousins" once last time.<sup>10</sup>

### COMMUNITY ORGANIZATIONS

If Florence Gibson waged a one-woman campaign to help Hudson Hill, other residents took a more broad-based approach. The creation of neighborhood associations from the 1960s through the 1980s is the most recent development of grass-roots community organizations, an effort that originated decades earlier.



*Fig. 3: Setting the bar for a challenge at the Moses Jackson Golden Age Center are participants in the City's programming.  
Photograph by Colin Douglas Gray.*

Woodville has always drawn much of its prestige from the Woodville/Tompkins Schools and the Wolverine spirit is still strong. As the neighborhood recovered slowly from the Depression, Mrs. Sophronia Tompkins wanted to address the needs of the adults as well as those of children. With help from the Works Progress Administration, the Woodville Community House was erected in 1938, a pioneering effort in neighborhood outreach. Job training was an important function of the Community House, but it also served as a hub for neighborhood activities. A council of residents worked in tandem with school officials so that programs at the Community House reflected the interests and concerns of the neighborhood. In the opinion of one educator writing in the 1930s, “there is probably nothing like this project anywhere else in the south.”<sup>11</sup>

Among the many successful projects undertaken by the Community House was the cannery. Begun in 1940 by agricultural teacher Mr. James Lutten, the cannery was a non-profit community operation run by students in the National Youth Organization. Each summer, families from all parts of the city brought the harvest from their gardens to be canned. The profits from shelling, blanching, and canning the produce went to pay the students a respectable salary. For more than thirty years, the plant turned out canned fruits, vegetables, soups, and even Brunswick stew.<sup>12</sup>

In 1968 a neighborhood association, the Woodville Community Action Organization, was established. Woodville, at that time, was still beyond the city limits and city services so the group stepped in to work in behalf of the residents. During the 1960s it succeeded in bringing natural gas to the community, street lighting, and some street paving. More recently, the organization, working with the Chatham County and City of Savannah governments, opened the Charlie “Sad” Bryan Park in 1992.

The Woodville Community Action Organization, under the leadership of Pastor Juanita Edwards from 2004 through 2006 and Tyrone Ware beginning in 2007, consists of an engaged group of residents who meet monthly to identify problems, propose solutions, and plan social activities. At the Community Center on Darling Street, there are dancing and ceramic classes for the children, after-school tutoring sessions, computer instruction, a chorus, and a seasonal rotation of sports, including basketball, baseball, golf, and football. The neighborhood association also looks after home-bound seniors with a “Meals on Wheels” program, house repairs, and lawn care.<sup>13</sup>

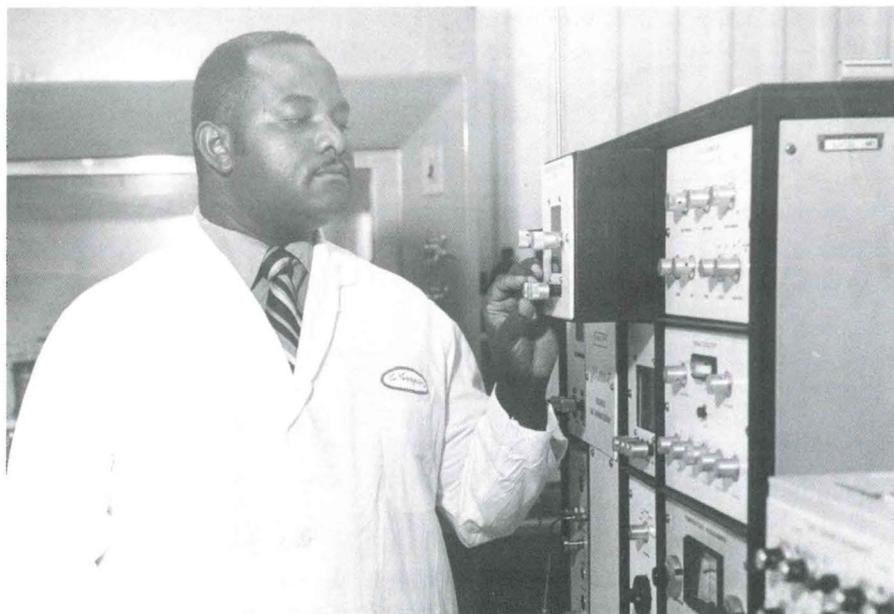
In West Savannah, a Community Club operated as early as the 1940s. Moses Jackson served as president of the organization and it met monthly at Second Saint John Baptist Church. It worked to bring together residents for the purpose of planning neighborhood improvements.<sup>14</sup> It proved to be the forerunner of neighborhood action groups.

On November 1, 1988, residents established the West Savannah Community Organization to voice neighborhood concerns and to collaborate with the City. It worked to involve residents in “family and friends day” activities, rally support for marches and clean-up campaigns, and to build community pride. Symbolic of that pride was the naming of the Richards Street Center in honor of Clarence Grant during the administration of fellow West Savannahian, Mayor Floyd Adams Jr. This gym provides recreational space especially for young people.<sup>15</sup> In 1999, the Moses Jackson Center was rededicated to a social and educational focus. Pairing the Clarence Grant Community Center with the Moses Jackson facility makes Richards Street the heart of the West Savannah community.

Kenneth Dunham moved to West Savannah from McIntosh County fifty years ago. He found reason enough to get involved in community life at his feet – litter and trash in the streets. Over the years he has worked to improve life in West Savannah and was elected president of the West Savannah Community Organization in 1994, a position he continues to hold in 2008. One of the major efforts he has directed in West Savannah was a beautification project, funded by the City of Savannah. With shrubbery furnished by the city, neighbors volunteered to landscape East Lathrop Avenue, Augusta Avenue, and West Lathrop Avenue. LaVera Wilson, Barbara Chisholm, John Cata, and Frank Williams are among the many hard-working supporters of the West Savannah Community Organization’s goals. As for Kenneth Dunham, there is ample satisfaction as he drives through West Savannah and waves to his neighbors.<sup>16</sup>

The community center at Hudson Hill dates to the 1960s. Neighbors first met at Mother Brown’s Sanctified Church on Hudson Street and discussed the needs of the community, such as paved streets and a playground for the children. As a result of that meeting, the Hudson Hill Neighborhood Association was founded, with Milton Rahn elected as president.<sup>17</sup>

The neighborhood association continues to identify problems in Hudson Hill and to search for solutions. More than any other neighborhood in western



*Fig. 4: By the time the health center opened in 1974, Curtis Cooper had already devoted three years preparing feasibility studies and a grant application to make the clinic a reality. Courtesy of Constance Cooper.*

Savannah, Hudson Hill lives in the shadow of industry. That proximity raises concerns about air pollution and chemical spills. Under the leadership of Frank Polite and beginning in 2007, Bernetta Anderson, the association has pressed for answers about air quality and evacuation plans in case of a massive chemical mishap. Moreover, the association has lobbied for a buffer of vegetation to shield the residential area from the industries that loom on Hudson Hill's northern and western borders. The neighborhood association is vigilant to protect residents from encroachment by industry.<sup>18</sup>

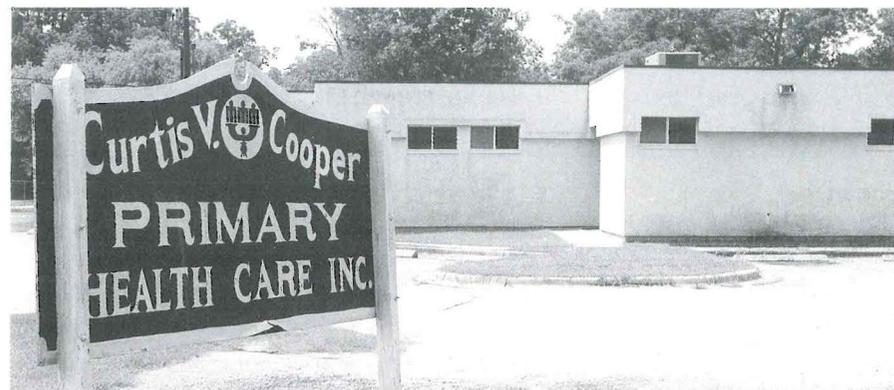
## COMMUNITY BUILDERS

In addition to neighborhood community centers, leaders have emerged in the last thirty years to follow in the steps of community builders such as Moses Jackson. The crisis in medical care brought one leader to the forefront. By the late 1960s, residents had few options for health care on the westside. In 1971 concerned citizens formed a committee to investigate the possibility of

opening a clinic with federal funding provided through the Economic Opportunity Authority (EOA). The need was critical and funding was granted in 1972. Two years later, the Westside Comprehensive Health Center opened its doors in temporary quarters on West Bay Street. The executive director named was the man who had shepherded the grant application through funding channels, Curtis Cooper. He left his position as a research technician with the United States Department of Agriculture to lead this community health center in West Savannah, the neighborhood where he grew up.<sup>19</sup>

Because the need in the community was so great, a more spacious facility was required. A new building located at 2 Roberts Street in Woodville was dedicated in 1976. In 1981, the Westside Comprehensive Health Center merged with the Urban Health Center on East York Street, and the two facilities operated under the name of the Westside-Urban Health Center with Dr. Cooper serving as Executive Director for both.<sup>20</sup> After his untimely death in 2000, it was only appropriate that the Roberts Street office and a new facility on East Broad Street erected in 2003 should bear his name. These two health centers and a branch located in Hitch Village are known as Curtis V. Cooper Primary Health Care Inc. in honor of this man's many contributions to the civil rights movement and to public health in Savannah.

Another voice that worked on behalf of the health center was Sister Julian Griffin V.S.C. at Saint Anthony of Padua Church. She lobbied on behalf of the health center and worked with planners once funding was assured. Her



*Fig. 5: In the past thirty years, the quality health care provided at the Roberts Street office has been a critical component in the stabilization of the community during a time of dramatic economic and population changes.*

*Photograph by Lily Keber.*



*Fig. 6: Sister Julian is pictured. Courtesy of the Catholic Diocese of Savannah Archives.*

activism in West Savannah was the culmination of a life dedicated to social change.

Sister Julian was born Norma Fae Griffin in Columbus, Georgia in 1936. She converted to Catholicism after attending a parochial high school and took her final vows as a Vincentian Sister of Charity in 1968, the first African American member of the order. At that time, her commitment to activism had already been tested. As a young teacher in Montgomery, Alabama in the 1960s, she participated in the civil rights movement and worked with Martin Luther King Jr.'s Montgomery Improvement Association. She lost her teaching job as a result. Soon after her arrival in the Saint Anthony parish in 1970, she spoke out against domestic abuse, worked with women in prison, and campaigned to get more streetlights installed and streets paved in the neighborhood. In

1975, Bishop Raymond Lessard appointed her Vicar for Social Ministry for the Diocese of Savannah.<sup>21</sup>

Her new responsibilities did not minimize her work at Saint Anthony or in West Savannah. She used her graduate training in adult education to start evening classes for working adults and opened a parish library for children and their parents. She organized a choir to sing at mass, established a church bulletin, worked to create a credit union in the parish, and promoted activities to highlight African American achievements in history.<sup>22</sup>

Sister Julian's life was cut short in 1985, but her commitment to helping those in need had been recognized long before her death. She received an award as a "Woman of Achievement" in 1981 by the Port City Business and Professional Women's Club of Savannah. She was an active member of the West Savannah Community Organization and the Saint Martin de Porres Society. The Sister Julian Griffin Memorial Scholarship is awarded annually to a deserving student by the Holy Name Society.<sup>23</sup>

Pamela Howard-Oglesby's aggravation with the noise and rowdy behavior at a club and liquor store near her home in West Savannah led her to become a community activist. Her complaints to City Council forced the closing of the club, but the liquor store continued to attract crowds of loud and disorderly people especially on weekend nights. Vandalism, petty theft, and more serious crimes threatened homeowners nearby.

Ms. Howard-Oglesby became a member of the Crime Task Force and she plotted the location of liquor stores in the area with the incidence of crime.<sup>24</sup> One weapon she found to combat liquor stores and nuisance businesses was zoning. As a result, the Metropolitan Planning Commission rezoned West Savannah, Hudson Hill, Woodville, and the Brickyard in order to keep commercial land uses out of these residential areas.<sup>25</sup>

In 2005, Ms. Howard-Oglesby and other West Savannah residents lobbied city government for a rodent abatement plan to force owners of properties overrun with rats to exterminate the vermin. She successfully persuaded a developer to build a new house where a dilapidated structure had stood. New construction was an important step forward in a neighborhood where neglected and abandoned homes had become increasingly common. As Ms. Howard-Oglesby said, "this one new house, it's our beacon of hope."<sup>26</sup>



*Fig. 7: In this 1975 photograph, Sister Julian, right, works with a kindergarten student at Saint Anthony School. Teacher Evelyn Daniels stands at the left.*

*Saint Anthony School Files. Courtesy of the Catholic Diocese of Savannah Archives.*

## NEIGHBORHOOD CHALLENGES

Pamela Howard-Oglesby's willingness to speak out against problems in her neighborhood and to partner with the City of Savannah to search for solutions represents the kind of community involvement needed to meet the challenges in West Savannah, Hudson Hill, and Woodville. All three neighborhoods confront serious issues that threaten to undermine community life.

Abandoned and deteriorating houses are a cancer to residential areas. Whether a house is left vacant with the death of the homeowner or a landlord fails to maintain rental properties or families move away, the result is the same. Vacant and rundown housing make it difficult for stable homeowners to keep value in their property. Potential homebuyers and homebuilders are reluctant to invest money and energy in the area and rental units, often substandard, multiply.

Crime infiltrates wherever the community is most vulnerable. With vacant buildings plentiful, crack houses follow. Drug pushers make deals on the street. Violent crimes as well as crimes against property erode confidence in neighborhood safety. According to statistics compiled by the Savannah Police Department in 2004, Woodville had a lower than average rate of both property and violent crime when compared to the other ninety-eight neighborhoods in the city. Hudson Hill scored slightly higher than average in both categories, but West Savannah was markedly higher in property and violent crime. In fact, West Savannah is one of the eleven Savannah neighborhoods with the highest concentration of homicide, rape, robbery, and aggravated assault.<sup>27</sup> Sobering statistics such as these document the problems residents and police face in taking back the streets for law-abiding citizens.

Crime flourishes in tandem with unemployment and underemployment. With the loss of industrial jobs over the past thirty years and the decline of small neighborhood businesses, the unemployment rate has grown. Data extracted from the 2000 census pegs the unemployment rate at 9.3 percent on Hudson Hill, 9.9 percent for Woodville, and 14.9 percent in West Savannah. Not surprisingly, the percentage of families living below the poverty line is high: 26.5 on Hudson Hill, 34 in West Savannah, and 41.6 in Woodville. The unusually high rate of poverty in Woodville is explained by a demographic imbalance; the neighborhood has a higher proportion of children and young adults under nineteen years of age and a comparatively small proportion of adults in their prime working years.<sup>28</sup>

The City of Savannah is addressing these problems in West Savannah with a neighborhood revitalization plan. In 2003 a Mini Urban Redevelopment Plan was adopted with the intent of buying and razing dilapidated and abandoned houses and replacing them with affordable homes. Two years later, the City of Savannah entrusted the Boston firm of Goody, Clancy, & Associates with the task of designing a master plan for West Savannah. In 2005, six months of dialogue between residents, city officials, and Goody Clancy consultants resulted in a consensus on the future of West Savannah. The essential points of the revitalization plan include the revival of Augusta Avenue as a commercial and neighborhood center; infill housing to bring in new residents without displacing long-time homeowners; parks and green space; a rebuilt Fellwood Homes featuring a mix of apartments, duplexes, and single family units; job training and support for small businesses; zoning and land use plans to protect the integrity of the neighborhood. In addition, crosswalks across Bay Street and gateways between neighborhoods will forge stronger ties with Woodville and Hudson Hill.<sup>29</sup> Public meetings and workshops for young people have ensured that West Savannah's revitalization plan incorporates input from the residents who look forward to the changes that will reshape the community.



*Fig. 8: Buildings that had been homes for more than sixty years fall to rubble with the demolition of Fellwood Homes in 2006.*

*Photograph by the author.*

One teenager voiced the hopes of West Savannah succinctly when he said, “Just make sure change happens.”<sup>30</sup>

A drive down Bay Street in the spring of 2008 shows that change is indeed happening. Fell-Jenks Park, with its newly planted trees and shrubs, is an attractive green space that welcomes community activities at the gazebo. Most important, the demolition of Fellwood Homes and Fellwood Annex begun in July 2006 is a prelude to realizing a bold vision for public housing. Within a few years, hundreds of families will reside in new apartments and single-family homes. Commercial structures at West Bay and DeLyon Streets will be neighborhood-friendly serving local interests.

Thanks to generous grants from the Lady Bamford Charitable Trust, the City of Savannah, and the United Way of the Coastal Empire, one wing of the Moses Jackson Center has been transformed into an early childhood education center. Children as young as six months old and up to the age of five have enrolled, but this facility offers more than day care. It teaches children skills to help them become better learners in elementary school. The concept originated with Lady Carole Bamford, wife of JCB’s founder, Sir James Bamford. She hopes to build similar centers near all JCB plants worldwide. The children of West Savannah benefit greatly from this progressive approach to early childhood training.<sup>31</sup>

The plans for West Savannah revitalization are promising for the future of that neighborhood, but Hudson Hill and Woodville will need comparable commitment to ensure that change is substantive throughout the area.

## PAST AND FUTURE

In the span of a century, western Savannah has grown from a rural, sparsely settled area to well-defined neighborhoods in the City of Savannah. Thanks to industrial development along the river and the growth of the railroad, jobs brought families to western Savannah. There they built homes and churches, first along Augusta Road, Lathrop Avenue, and Louisville Road, then filling in the triangular tracts of West Savannah, the open fields of Hudson Hill, and Woodville’s stands of oak and pine.

Jobs laid the economic foundation for these neighborhoods but the character of Hudson Hill, West Savannah, and Woodville was shaped by the residents and by their distance from the city. The pioneering residents who settled here

were hard-working black and white families. They built modest homes in the styles of the day and expanded them as much as time and money allowed. Parents had high hopes for children and put great faith in the schools to prepare them for a better future. Lives were anchored in family and faith, and reinforced by a social network of clubs, church groups, school organizations, and neighbors.

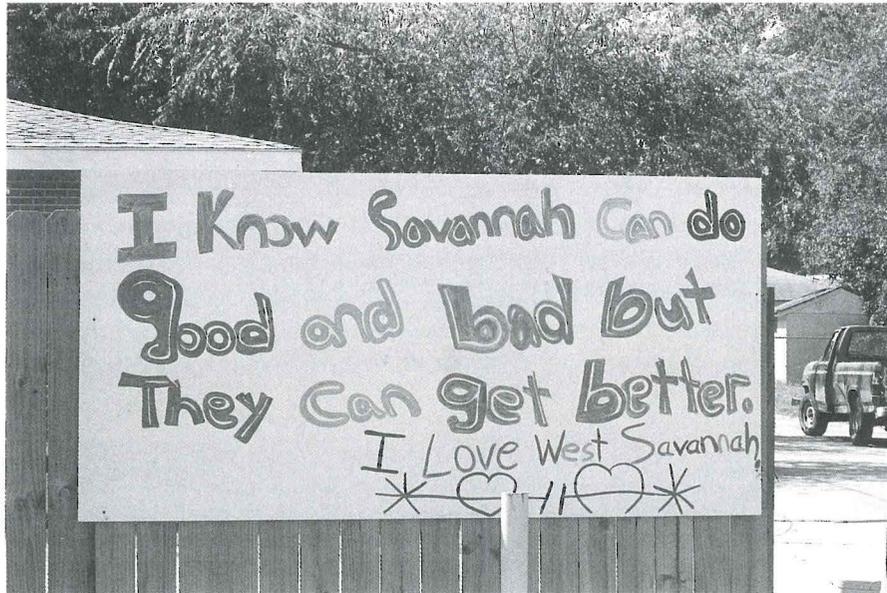
Although streetcars, buses and roads connected the neighborhoods to the heart of Savannah, residents lived apart from the city. Annexation to Savannah came slowly from east to west, first in Hudson Hill and West Savannah and finally to Woodville. City services accompanied annexation, but once again slowly and sporadically. Residents had grown accustomed to neighborhoods that were to a large degree self-contained with jobs, schools, churches, and entertainment close by. As a result, neighborhoods had strong identities.

The heyday of Woodville, Hudson Hill, and West Savannah came in the 1950s and the early 1960s, as small businesses flourished, employment opportunities were good, and Woodville/Tompkins High School became a continuing source of community pride. The young people brought the civil rights movement home to western Savannah including the mass meeting at Townsley Chapel in 1960.

With desegregation of the public schools, however, whites moved from the area in the late 1960s and early 1970s, ending the interracial nature of the neighborhoods. The 1970s brought the first crack in the economic foundation with job losses and layoffs. Small businesses in the neighborhoods, an unintended casualty of the civil rights movement, suffered as their customers increasingly shopped downtown or on the southside. As more jobs were lost in the 1980s and 1990s, the downward spiral accelerated. Even the unifying force of Tompkins High School was lost when it was closed in 1987. The growing number of neglected and vacant homes reflected hard times.

Community organizations and the City of Savannah under Mayors Floyd Adams Jr. and Otis S. Johnson, Ph.D. worked to reverse the fortunes of these neighborhoods. The plan to revitalize West Savannah is a great step forward and it is built on the dedicated work of community leaders and extensive neighborhood participation. Another promising sign for the future is the passage of the educational sales tax in 2006 which has direct and positive benefits to the westside with the creation of a new technical high school. Thanks to community support and the efforts of the Woodville Alumni

Association, the new school that opened in the fall of 2007 was named “Woodville-Tompkins Career Technical Center” to carry on Wolverine tradition. As more Latinos move into the area, the community may once again recapture its interracial past and embrace a multi-ethnic future. The resiliency of residents in the face of problems and their determination to preserve the unique character of these neighborhoods promises to be the basis of vibrant, growing communities in West Savannah, Hudson Hill, and Woodville.



*Fig. 9: While acknowledging the problems that exist, the unknown author of this sign posted on Augusta Avenue in 2006 has faith in a better future. Photograph by the author.*

## FOOTNOTES

- <sup>1</sup> Ernestine Manigault, “Memories of West Savannah,” 4, WSDP.
- <sup>2</sup> Pamela Howard-Oglesby, WSDP-OH.
- <sup>3</sup> Rose Harris, WSDP-OH.
- <sup>4</sup> Curley Milton, WSDP-OH.
- <sup>5</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>6</sup> Clarence Grant, WSDP-OH.
- <sup>7</sup> Constance Cooper, WSDP-OH.
- <sup>8</sup> SNP, 4 September 1994.
- <sup>9</sup> Conversations with Rebecca Middleton, Barbara Moon, and Tina Hicks, Golden Age Centers of (respectively) West Savannah, Woodville, and Hudson Hill.
- <sup>10</sup> Daves Rossell, “ ‘This Here’s the North Pole,’ Florence S. Gibson and the World She Gave Us,” Southeast Chapter of the Society of Architectural Historians Annual Meeting, 2005, 10-11.
- <sup>11</sup> Albert S. Otto, *The Public School System of Savannah and Chatham County*, Vol. 3.
- <sup>12</sup> SEP, 8 July 1972.
- <sup>13</sup> Conversation with Juanita Edwards, Woodville Community Action Organization; Conversation with Barbara Moon, Woodville Golden Age Center; “Woodville Community Action Organization 39th Anniversary Program,” (2007), 1,3,5-6.
- <sup>14</sup> ST, 14 March 1940, 26 February 1942, 14 May 1942.
- <sup>15</sup> Kenneth Dunham, WSDP-OH; City of Savannah, “West Savannah Urban Redevelopment Plan,” (1993), 11.
- <sup>16</sup> Kenneth Dunham, WSDP-OH.
- <sup>17</sup> Milton Rahn, WSDP-OH.
- <sup>18</sup> Conversation with Frank Polite, Hudson Hill Neighborhood Association.
- <sup>19</sup> “History of Westside-Urban Health Center,” courtesy of Constance Cooper.
- <sup>20</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>21</sup> Biography of Sister Julian; “Port City Business and Professional Women’s Club of Savannah,” 1981, CDSA.

- <sup>22</sup> Biography of Sister Julian; Saint Anthony of Padua 90th Anniversary Pamphlet; “Let’s Hear It for Ladies!: Some Women of Note in the Savannah Diocese,” *Southern Cross*, 26 October 2000, CDSA; Gary W. McDonogh, *Black and Catholic in Savannah, Georgia* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1993), 176.
- <sup>23</sup> “Port City Business and Professional Women’s Club of Savannah,” 1981, CDSA; SH, 17 September 1986.
- <sup>24</sup> Pamela Howard-Oglesby, WSDP-OH; SMN, 28 August 2005, 4E.
- <sup>25</sup> Pamela Howard-Oglesby, WSDP-OH.
- <sup>26</sup> SMN, 28 August 2005, 4E.
- <sup>27</sup> Savannah Chatham Metropolitan Police Department, “2004 Neighborhood Crime Statistics.”
- <sup>28</sup> Demographic Profiles of Hudson Hill, West Savannah, and Woodville, 2004, Community Planning and Development Department, City of Savannah.
- <sup>29</sup> Goody Clancy & Associates, West Savannah Revitalization Plan Draft, 2005, 10-11.
- <sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, SMN, 28 August 2005, 4E.
- <sup>31</sup> SMN, 20 September 2005, 1A, 6A; 1 March 2006, 1B, 6B.



## ABBREVIATIONS USED

CCCH	Chatham County Court House
CDSA	Catholic Diocese of Savannah Archives
FHQ	Girl Scouts First Headquarters Archives
GHS	Georgia Historical Society
LOPL	Live Oak Public Libraries
MPC	Metropolitan Planning Commission
MRL	Municipal Research Library
SCCPS	Savannah-Chatham County Public Schools
SEP	<i>Savannah Evening Press</i>
SH	<i>The Herald</i> (Savannah)
SMN	<i>Savannah Morning News</i>
SNP	<i>Savannah News-Press</i>
ST	<i>Savannah Tribune</i>
TMA	Telfair Museum of Art
WSDP	Westside Documentation Project
WSDP-OH	Oral History Collection, Westside Documentation Project

## ARCHIVES AND DOCUMENT COLLECTIONS CONSULTED

Catholic Diocese of Savannah Archives  
 Chatham County Court House  
 City of Savannah Clerk of Council  
 Georgia Archives  
 Georgia Historical Society  
 Girl Scouts First Headquarters Archives  
 Hargett Rare Book & Manuscript Library, University of Georgia Libraries  
 Housing Authority of Savannah  
 Live Oak Public Libraries – Carnegie Library  
 Live Oak Public Libraries – Georgia Room, Bull Street Library  
 Municipal Research Library  
 Savannah State University Archives  
 Telfair Museum of Art

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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The “voices” that speak throughout this history are two dozen individuals interviewed by Dr. Charles Elmore or myself, who shared their memories on tape. We are indebted to them for their knowledge of Hudson Hill, West Savannah, and Woodville in the past and their willingness to share their hopes for these neighborhoods in the future. Their life stories below are intertwined with these neighborhoods.



Photograph by Colin Douglas Gray.

### FLOYD ADAMS JR.

Like his parents and grandparents, Floyd Adams Jr. has deep roots in West Savannah. His childhood home was located on Newell Street, around the corner from the Demmond Street home of his grandparents, Rosa and William Anderson. He attended Saint Anthony School and played baseball for the West Savannah Whippers.

He began a distinguished political career with his election as Alderman of the City of Savannah in 1982. In 1996, he took office as the first African American mayor of Savannah and was re-elected without opposition. As mayor, he was instrumental in relieving flood dangers in the Bay Street area and in initiating the West Savannah Revitalization Project.

His accomplishments did not go unnoticed outside of Savannah. He served as President of the Georgia Municipal Association and as a member of the National League of Cities Board of Directors. *Georgia Trend* magazine named him one of the most influential Georgians for two consecutive years.

Following in the footsteps of his father Floyd Adams Sr., Mayor Adams is the publisher of the *Savannah Herald*, a post he has held since 1984.



Photograph by Colin Douglas Gray.

### HERMAN ALLEN

Herman Allen's family settled on Hudson Hill in 1940. He remembers growing up in the neighborhood playing baseball with canvas gloves and a homemade ball, swimming in the Savannah River, and hunting in the woods. He attended Saint Anthony and graduated from Woodville High School in 1954.

After one year at Savannah State College, Mr. Allen received a Presbyterian scholarship to attend Stillman College in Tuscaloosa, Alabama. Later he and his wife, Eudora Moore

Allen, spent several years in New York City but returned to Savannah where Mr. Allen joined the Savannah Police Department.

For five years during the 1960s, he was the police community liaison in West Savannah. He set up a Youth Council and identified a vacant building on Richards Street with potential as a community center. The West Savannah Community Organization eventually converted Mr. Allen's idea into reality as the Richards Street Community Center.

In 1994, Mr. Allen retired from the Savannah Police Department. He has managed several political campaigns, notably Floyd Adams' successful bid for mayor in 1995. He and Mrs. Allen are active members of Butler Memorial Presbyterian Church.



Photograph by Colin Douglas Gray.

### FATHER ROBERT CHANEY

Friends of Robert Chaney were not surprised when he decided to join the priesthood. He grew up in Saint Benedict the Moor parish on Savannah's eastside and attended Saint Benedict School, Blessed Sacrament School, and Benedictine Military School. After graduating from Savannah State College with a major in sociology, he entered seminary and was ordained in 1988 in the Cathedral of Saint John the Baptist by Raymond Lessard, Bishop of Savannah. He was the first African American Savannahian to be ordained in the diocese.

After assignments in Augusta, Albany, and Warner Robins, he returned home to Savannah in 1996 to serve as priest at Saint Anthony of Padua Catholic Church. He took on the additional responsibility of pastoring the congregation of Most Pure Heart of Mary in 1999 to prepare for a merger of the churches. After a year of collaboration and prayer, the two congregations came together in 2000 as the Resurrection of Our Lord Catholic Church with Father Chaney as pastor.

The needs of young people are a special concern for Father Chaney. He organizes mission trips to New York, Atlanta, and New Orleans to introduce youth to the wider world. In a congregation he describes as “welcoming” and “committed,” he leads by example of “putting the Good News into practice.”



*Photograph by Colin Douglas Gray.*

### CONSTANCE COOPER

The daughter of Alice and Walter Hartwell, Constance Hartwell Cooper grew up on West 38th Street and graduated from Beach High School. At the time she began her studies in practical nursing at Savannah State College, she became acquainted with a young man named Curtis Cooper who sang in her church choir. They were married during her sophomore year and soon settled at Fellwood Homes.

A member of the NAACP since high school, Constance Cooper was active in the Savannah civil rights movement in the 1960s. She and Curtis participated in lunch counter sit-ins and picketing during the Broughton Street boycott. Despite the taunts she endured, she remembers “feeling safe” with her husband at her side.

In her nursing career, Mrs. Cooper worked in orthopedics and the special care nursery during her twenty years at Memorial Hospital. Her husband, too, served in the medical field as Executive Director of the Westside Comprehensive Health Center.

She lost her “soulmate” in 2000 when Dr. Cooper passed away, but she is very close to her son and daughter. She has a special circle of friends in the Signs of the Zodiac Club and they travel together several times a year.



*Photograph by Colin Douglas Gray.*

### DOROTHY COURINGTON

“I’ve always had a lot of energy,” says Dorothy Waters Courington. Today a successful Savannah realtor, she has close connections to western Savannah that date back to her teen-age years. She was the only teacher at Edna Moon School, a private primary school run by Union Bag soon after the company opened the Savannah plant in 1936.

Without prior teaching experience, the eighteen-year-old from Statesboro taught about forty white first-, second-, and third-graders in what was probably the best-equipped classroom in Chatham County. She added nature hikes, singing, and public performances to the usual elementary school lessons. Although the school was open for only five years, its impact on the children who attended was great. Many times former students have told her, “almost everything I ever learned in school, I learned in your school.”

With energy to spare at the end of the school day, Miss Waters worked in the employee village at Union Bag. She showed houses to new buyers, planned

landscaping, and even suggested alterations to homes to accommodate larger families. This interest led to a career as a realtor and the eventual establishment of her own real estate company.



*Photograph by Colin Douglas Gray.*

### EVELYN DANIELS

Evelyn Daniels came to Savannah from her native South Carolina as a young child. She and her family settled on Hudson Hill, within walking distance of Saint Anthony of Padua Catholic Church. Both the church and the school played important roles in her life.

She was a student at Saint Anthony, the same school where her mother, Eugenia Haig Daniels, taught first and second grades. Ms. Daniels continued her schooling at Saint Benedict the Moor and graduated from Beach High School in 1942. She found her seven years teaching kindergarten at Saint Anthony in the 1970s especially rewarding. Today she begins her days as she always has – with prayer.

In her retirement, Ms. Daniels has been one of the most loyal and active seniors at the Golden Age Center on Hudson Hill. She attended the center’s opening day in 1995 and continues to call it her “second home.”



Photograph by Colin Douglas Gray.

### KENNETH DUNHAM

Kenneth Dunham came to West Savannah from Harris Neck in rural McIntosh County in 1953, looking for better job opportunities. For the next thirty-one years, he worked for the Georgia Ports Authority, Kennickell Printing Company and spent more than twenty years of his career with Kaiser Chemical.

His first home in West Savannah was on Comer Street. In 1972 he, himself, completely finished a new home on Stratford Street once the framing was complete. He and his wife, Frances, noticed that not everyone in the neighborhood had their sense of community pride. In the 1980s, they became active in the West Savannah Community Organization.

Since Mr. Dunham became president of the organization in 1994, a number of neighborhood projects have been successfully implemented. Shrubs were planted as part of a beautification plan for Augusta Avenue and a campaign to make house numbers visible began. Communications within the neighborhood improved with newsletters and block captains set up by Mrs. Dunham. He credits the hard-working members of the West Savannah Community Organization for the many positive improvements already achieved.



Photograph by Colin Douglas Gray.

### HAROLD FRANKLIN

Harold Franklin grew up on Cornwall Street in a house next to Springfield Terrace Elementary School. On the school playground, he found his talent and love for sports and the outdoors. As a youngster, he played softball and pickup football and roamed the woods nearby to hunt. As an adult, he bowls in a league and tries to match his all-time high score of 297. He keeps family and friends well supplied with fish he catches at Hilton Head.

Mr. Franklin graduated from Woodville High School where he remembers the concern the teachers showed to their students. After four years in the Air Force, he took a program of study in brick masonry at Savannah State College. He passed the post office exam and that led to a forty-two year postal career.

He and his wife raised two sons, today both college graduates. Their lives revolve around family, especially since the arrival of grandchildren. For Harold Franklin, a day fishing with his sons is just about perfect.



Courtesy of Angela Grant.

### CLARENCE "BLUE" GRANT

The child from the eastside who loved to dress in blue grew up to become the beloved Coach Clarence "Blue" Grant of West Savannah. He attended Woodville High School where he was greatly influenced by Coach Joe Turner.

In 1951, at age fifteen, he organized the West Savannah Whippers. By the early 1960s, the Whippers fielded four baseball teams for boys and adult men, the Whipperettes in women's softball, as well as basketball and football teams.

Although he played semi-professional baseball, his life's work was helping young people, on and off the playing field. He was a scoutmaster for boys at Fellwood Homes and several churches, and he coached Frank Callen Boys & Girls Club Football, the Carver Heights Youth Baseball Team and many other teams. It was fitting that Mayor Floyd Adams Jr. renamed the Richards Street Community Center in his honor.

Just a few months before his death in 2006, he was inducted into the Woodville-Tompkins High School Hall of Fame. He was, in the opinion of many in West Savannah, a "giant" in the community.



Courtesy of Rose Harris.

### ROSE HARRIS

Rose Marie Manigault Harris' life has taken her far from the home on Scarborough Street where she grew up. She attended Saint Anthony and West Savannah Elementary Schools, then graduated from Woodville High School. She was a fine student at Woodville while still finding the time to participate in a wide range of extracurricular activities. She competed in the Junior Oratorical Contest, sang in the glee club, and was a member of the Girl Scouts. In fact, she was the first scout chosen to represent the Savannah council at the National Girl Scout Encampment. She attended Savannah State College on an academic scholarship and graduated with honors.

In 1958 she married Frank M. Harris. In his thirty-year military career, they traveled throughout the country and overseas. Mrs. Harris taught thirty-six years in schools from Savannah to Guam. Now retired, the couple live in Maine but spend several months each year in Savannah. Mrs. Harris is still an active member of Second Saint John Missionary Baptist Church.

### ELISE HILTON



*Photograph by Colin Douglas Gray.*

The inspirations that have guided Elise Jackson Hilton throughout her life are her family and her church. A lifelong resident of West Savannah, Elise Hilton is the youngest daughter of Moses Jackson. She has worked with friends and family to ensure that Moses Jackson's legacy endures in West Savannah.

She attended West Savannah School as a child, the school that her father founded. Today she is an active member of the West Savannah Alumni Association, an organization that meets monthly for social and service activities. Among the contributions of that group was the erection of a monument to Moses Jackson in 2003 near the door of the school and center that bears his name.

In 1963, Mrs. Hilton and her husband, Porter J. Hilton, built their Cope Street home where she still resides. She continues to be an active member of Townsley Chapel, her spiritual home for more than fifty years.

### JAMES JACKSON



*Photograph by Colin Douglas Gray.*

James Jackson learned from his grandfather, Moses Jackson, to be involved in his community. That tradition of service led nineteen-year-old James Jackson to work in the civil rights movement. Some of his classmates from Tompkins High School joined the activist group that James organized. Not long after the Greensboro sit-in in February 1960, James Jackson planned the first sit-in for Broughton Street lunchrooms but agreed to the request of W.W. Law to delay the protest until the NAACP was prepared. James Jackson participated in the sit-ins and was arrested at Livingston's Pharmacy on March 19, 1960. As he said at the time,

"changes have to come."

For his pioneering efforts in the Savannah civil rights movement, he received the Lay Organization Annual Roots Day Award from his home church, Townsley Chapel, in 2004. His photograph is also displayed at the Ralph Mark Gilbert Civil Rights Museum.

### WILLIAM B. JACKSON

Much of William Jackson's life has revolved around the Savannah-Chatham County Public School System. His earliest school years were spent at East Broad Street School near his home on East Gwinnett Street. He also attended West Broad Street School and Cuyler Junior High School before graduating from Beach High School. At Savannah State College, Professor J. B. Clemmons encouraged him to use his math degree in the classroom. Mr. Jackson's teaching career in Savannah began in 1952. Seven of his most rewarding years were spent at Sol C. Johnson High School with an outstanding faculty and a progressive principal, Alflorene Cheatham. It was at Johnson High School that Mr. Jackson began working in administration as assistant principal.

As the school system began to desegregate in the 1960s and 1970s, Mr. Jackson was given challenging assignments as Assistant Principal of Savannah High School and later as Assistant Superintendent of Personnel. For a man who first joined the NAACP in junior high and had marched with Julian Bond in Atlanta, it was a great opportunity.

Mr. Jackson retired in 1984 after thirty-two years of service. He lives in the Augusta Avenue house that has been the Jackson home for more than fifty years. He continues as a strong voice for education: "Don't neglect the public school," he says. "It is our future."



*Photograph by Colin Douglas Gray.*

### ROLAND JAMES

An athlete and an educator, Roland James traces much of his success in life to friends and teachers he met at Woodville School. His family moved to Carver Village in 1948 and the next year Roland began seventh grade at Woodville. Lifelong friendships with Henry Wesley, Sumpter Wesley, and Moses King began at that time.

Woodville's legendary football coach, Joe Turner, persuaded Roland James and Moses King that they had the speed and the hands to play on his team. In his junior and senior years, Roland James was the starting quarterback. He also ran track and played basketball and baseball.

An athletic scholarship took him to Savannah State College and a career in education. After teaching nineteen years in Chicago, he returned to Savannah in 1980. He worked as assistant principal of Groves High School and then served as principal of Shuman Middle School for eleven years.

Roland James was elected to the Greater Savannah Athletic Hall of Fame in 1997 and to the Woodville-Tompkins High School Hall of Fame in 2004.



*Courtesy of The Savannah Morning News.*

### OLLIE JONES

Ollie Jones, still feisty at 105 years of age, has seen more than ninety years of change in West Savannah. She remembers nickel fares on the streetcar, listening to music on the gramophone, and lighting kerosene lamps in the days before homes had electricity.

She came to Savannah from Columbia, South Carolina when she was ten or twelve years old. She attended West Broad Street School and Cuyler School. In 1921, she married George Anderson on the front porch of her parents' home, the Cope Street house where she lives today. Widowed at an early age, she raised two daughters by working in service for two dollars per week. She later married Robert Jones, who she calls a "good-looking" man.

Mrs. Jones has been a member of First Union Baptist Church as long as she has lived in Savannah. Although she cannot get out to attend services now, her pastor visits regularly. Her friends and neighbors know Miss Ollie is not shy about sharing her opinions; after all, she says, "I got good sense."

### OPHELIA JULIAN

A native of West Savannah, Ophelia Julian, has balanced family, work, and church in her ninety years. She married William F. Julian in 1936, the same year she graduated from Beach High School. They raised three daughters and one son, and she continues to reside at the Church Street home that she and her husband built in 1945. She worked in food service for the Savannah-Chatham County Public School System for twenty-six years, retiring after assignments at Henry Street School and Mercer Middle School.

Zion Hill Baptist Church has been an important focus of her life and she has devoted sixty years of service to that church. In recognition of that service, she was named Church Mother in 2006. She continues her membership and her support of Eastern Star and her social club, the Rosary Society.



*Photograph by Colin Douglas Gray.*

### MOSES KING

A natural athlete, Moses King found in every sport an opportunity to excel. Born in West Savannah, his family moved to Carver Village in 1947. There he found other young men who shared his love of sports, notably Roland James.

At Woodville High School, Moses King believed that he was too small at 135 pounds to play football, but Coach Joe Turner thought otherwise. Moses became an offensive threat running or catching the ball on Coach Turner's team. His speed helped the Woodville track team win the 440-yard relay at the state championship in 1955.

During his years at Savannah State College, he ran track and played football, basketball, and baseball, lettering in each sport. He was honored as first-team all-conference running back in 1956, the same year that the Tigers brought home the Southeastern Athletic Conference football championship.

After his collegiate sports career ended, he worked at the Savannah Sugar Refinery. In 2004, he was voted a member of the Greater Savannah Athletic Hall of Fame and the Woodville-Tompkins High School Hall of Fame.

### BERNETA MACKKEY

Berneta Mackey's roots in Woodville run deep. Her great-grandmother lived on King Street and her grandfather, Rev. Jasper Smith, was the pastor of Taylor Chapel, one of Woodville's oldest churches.

Rev. Smith and his wife, Tina, raised their granddaughter Berneta in their home on Darling Street, across the street from the chapel. She attended Tompkins Elementary School and graduated from Tompkins High School. She shared her musical skills in the Tompkins marching band playing the French horn.

After attending Savannah State College, she married Thomas Mackey. Their two sons and one daughter are now grown, and their son Torrey continues the tradition by living in the family home on Darling Street.



Photograph by Colin Douglas Gray.

### MAE OLA MASON

In December 1990, Mae Ola McNeil Mason was the first woman ordained into the ministry at Friendship Baptist Church on Hudson Hill. A journey of fifty-eight years brought her to this important moment in her life.

It was her grandmother, Elizabeth Linder, who shaped Mae Ola's childhood in Woodville. Mrs. Linder taught her granddaughter to love flowers, music, and church, and together they attended Friendship Baptist. Mae Ola was a student at Woodville School and graduated from Beach High School at age sixteen. The next year she married John Mason,

a longshoreman, and together they raised eight children and one adopted granddaughter.

Despite family responsibilities and a part-time job singing for services at Sidney A. Jones Funeral Home, Mrs. Mason made time for church activities. She sang in both church choirs and served as first secretary of the Sunday School and President of the #2 Choir. When she was called to the ministry, her pastor, Rev. Joseph Fields, supported her in her mission. Since 1990, three more women have been ordained at the church.

Mrs. Mason calls her church a "beacon on the hill." She helps keep the light shining.



Courtesy of The Savannah Morning News.

### WILLIAM "CURLEY" MILTON

"Curley" Milton was born in 1914 in Woodville. At the age of fifteen, he became the sole support of his mother and sister when his father died. His first job was at Reliance Fertilizer Company where he earned ten cents an hour. He spent most of his working life at the Pierpont Box Factory, retiring in 1976 after thirty-seven years with the company.

Although Mr. Milton never finished high school, he and his wife Lorine saw to it that their children had the chance to go to college. His son, William Milton, became a physician and his daughter, Catherine Milton Jackson, was the principal at Esther Garrison Elementary School.

Mr. Milton joined New Zion Baptist Church in 1929 and is now the oldest member of the church. He served as chairman of the Board of Deacons for more than three decades. New Zion has been the church home for the Milton family dating back to the time of Mr. Milton's father.

"Curley" Milton has been in many ways the "unofficial mayor" of Woodville, speaking at the high school commencement, leading parades, and attending many funerals of friends and neighbors at Woodville Cemetery.



Photograph by Colin Douglas Gray.

### PAMELA HOWARD-OGLESBY

Pamela Howard-Oglesby's first memory was the day that an eye doctor told her mother, "This child is blind, she'll never do anything." She has spent every day since proving the doctor wrong. Despite her very limited vision, she was an excellent student, graduated from Tompkins High School, and received an A.S. degree from Gupton-Jones College of Mortuary Science in Atlanta. She was the first woman to hold an embalmer's license in Chatham County and served as Mortician Manager at Sexton-Hall Funeral Directors until her deteriorating vision forced her to stop working.

Her transformation into community activist began when the crowds and noise from a nearby liquor store left her and her ill mother unable to sleep. Ms. Howard-Oglesby spoke out against the problems she saw in her West Savannah neighborhood, including drugs, crime, and dilapidated housing. She worked with the Metropolitan Planning Commission to rezone West Savannah and helped the elderly obtain medical care and home repair. Because of her ability to focus attention on neighborhood problems and to propose solutions, she was recognized by the *Savannah Morning News* as one of 2005's "People of Impact" and she received the prestigious Jefferson Award for Public Service from WSAV, also in 2005.



*Photograph by Colin Douglas Gray.*

### LEWIS OLIVER

Lewis Oliver, a native of Girard, Georgia, came to Savannah in 1951, a sixteen-year-old determined to continue his education. He finished high school and then enrolled at Savannah State College as an Industrial Education major. In his junior year, however, he and five other Savannah State College men interrupted their studies to integrate the Savannah Fire Department.

Assigned to Station #4 in West Savannah, Mr. Oliver and the other African American firefighters had separate living quarters. In time, black and white firefighters began to talk, share meals, and play cards together.

Mr. Oliver was promoted to the rank of engineer in 1968, captain two years later, and battalion chief in 1979. He retired in 1990, the only one of the original six black recruits to make a career in the Fire Department. President George Herbert Walker Bush congratulated him on “a job well done” at the time of his retirement.

Today, Mr. Oliver owns and operates Lewis Auto Repair on Martin Luther King, Jr. Boulevard.



*Photograph by Colin Douglas Gray.*

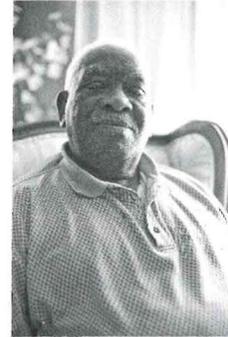
### MILTON RAHN

Milton Rahn has been a businessman on Hudson Hill for more than fifty years as well as a community activist. From his early days growing up in an interracial Hudson Hill to the present, he has acted on his beliefs in racial equality.

After eight years in the Navy, he opened a fruit stand on West Bay Street. It was a success because of the long hours he and his wife Betty put into the business and also because of the good service they gave to all customers. In time, he started a laundromat and other commercial ventures on West Bay Street.

Milton Rahn worked with residents of Hudson Hill to establish the Hudson Hill Neighborhood Association in the early 1960s. He served as president of the organization even after he and his family moved away.

An early participant in the Unitarian Fellowship in Savannah, Mr. Rahn participated in the civil rights movement with other members of his church. He also served on the Chatham County Council of Human Relations. Descended from the Salzburgers who came to Ebenezer, Georgia in search of religious freedom, he is the founding president of the Historic Effingham Society.



*Photograph by Colin Douglas Gray.*

### BENJAMIN WEST

Hard work came naturally to Benjamin West, a native of South Carolina. After two years in the Civilian Conservation Corps, he worked at a saw mill in Hardeeville and then as a cement finisher at a Port Wentworth shipyard. He took a pay cut to become a longshoreman in 1944 and stayed with the job for thirty-seven years. He still meets monthly with other retired longshoremen of Local 1414.

The house that he and his wife built on Church Street was home to six children. Both parents supported their children’s activities, whether it was son Ben’s participation in the civil rights movement or raising money for Leroy’s baseball team, the West Savannah Whippers.

Mr. West’s house is only a few steps away from Townsley Chapel, where he was Superintendent of the Sunday School. Taught by his father to attend church faithfully, Mr. West would be in his pew even after working on the river all night. He even made a round-trip drive of one hundred miles five nights in a row to attend a revival. It was a joy to be in church, he says, because “the Lord has been good to me all my days.”

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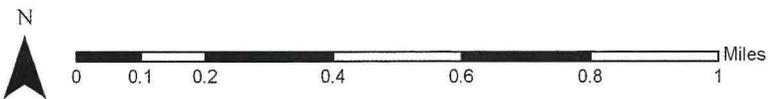
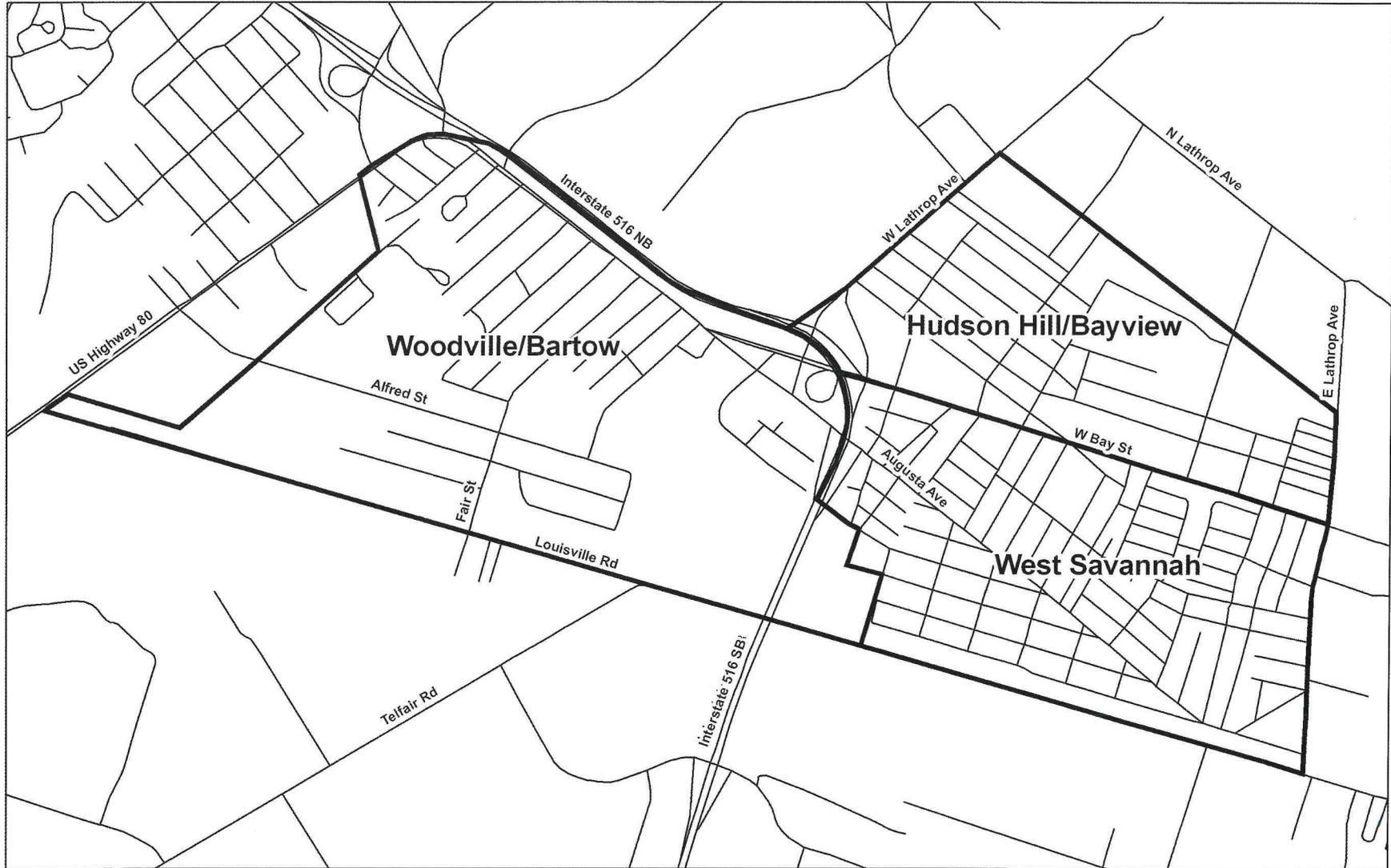
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*Children on a summer day take turns on the playground equipment at Fellwood Homes in 1949. Courtesy of Housing Authority of Savannah.*

# Neighborhoods in Western Savannah





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