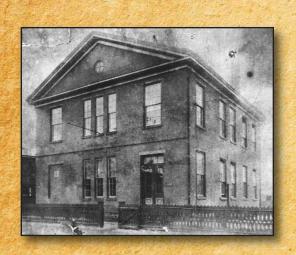
Three Centuries of African-American History in Trenton: Significant People and Places









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by Jennifer B. Leynes

Prepared for Trenton Historical Society

With funding from
New Jersey Historical Commission

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Cast of the Lincoln School's 1941 production of The Mikado.

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Introduction

In 2011, the Trenton Historical Society (THS) received a project grant from the New Jersey Historical Commission, a division of the Department of State, to inventory sites related to the city's African-American history. The results were reported in *Three Centuries of African-American History in Trenton: A Preliminary Inventory of Historic Sites* (Richard Grubb & Associates, Inc. 2011). THS was subsequently awarded a second grant from the New Jersey Historical Commission to expand its research on the Spring Street neighborhood and to publish the findings of the project's first phase for distribution to the public. The former project is documented online on an interactive map on the THS website (www.trentonhistory.org); this publication fulfills the latter project goal.

This booklet documents known sites and notable individuals associated with the long and productive history of Trenton's African-American population. This is not intended as an exhaustive list, but rather a starting point for understanding Trenton's African-American history. Some of the information will be familiar to long-time residents, while other people and places may have been forgotten with the passage of time. A small number of sites have been lost in the name of progress, but many others are being preserved by individuals and groups with an interest in passing on the legacy of Trenton's Black history to future generations.

The sites have been grouped into categories based upon their type and/or primary period or area of significance: Churches and Cemeteries; Schools; Social and Community Organizations; Sports; and Neighborhoods. Although many sites represent more than one of these areas, the categories nevertheless provide a framework for understanding some of the major themes in the history of the African-American community in Trenton. A separate section is devoted to people who have made significant contributions to the Black community; these entries are limited to individuals who were deceased prior to publication.

Addresses are provided for buildings that are still standing; however, this booklet is not intended as a tour guide, as most of the properties included are privately owned.

Historic Overview

African-Americans have been integral to the history of New Jersey's capital since the Colonial period, when the first Blacks were brought to Trenton as slaves of early settlers. The wills of Trenton's most prominent early settlers, Mahlon Stacy (d.1704) and William Trent (d.1724), both included slaves of African descent among their property at the time of their deaths. This small group of slaves worked in a variety of capacities, making the small settlement on the Delaware River a viable and, eventually, thriving community. While little is known about their lives and struggles, these men and women formed the nucleus of Trenton's Black community in the Colonial period.

By 1810, the earliest year in which data on race was reported to the United States Census, Trenton counted 435 African-Americans among its more than 3,000 residents. The Black community remained fairly constant as a percentage of the town's total population during the early decades of the 19th century. It was during this early period that African-American residents began forming institutions to serve and support their small community. Mt. Zion African Methodist Episcopal (A.M.E.) Church was one such organization that has survived to the present.

As the century progressed, the city established its first school for African-American children in a building on Hanover Street in 1832. A quarter-century later, the Board of Education built the Higbee Street School, the first building in the city – and among the earliest in the state – constructed specifically for the free public education of Black children. The Board of Education built two more schools to serve the city's growing African-American population during the late 19th century.

Black residents founded a number of social clubs and service organizations, as well as several new churches, during the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Perhaps one of the most interesting of these groups was the Eclectic Club, founded in 1877 by the city's Black elite. With rooms in a commercial building on North Broad Street, the club hosted social events and guest speakers, including such national leaders as Frederick Douglass.

At the turn of the 20th century, Trenton's African-American population numbered 2,158 people. Although the largest total in the city's history up to that point, Black residents represented less than three percent of the total population because of the city's rapid industrial growth during the second half of the 19th century. By 1900, Trenton's total population numbered more than 73,300. This increase was due in part to the annexation of heavily populated neighborhoods like Chambersburg, which had a predominantly European immigrant population.

Despite its minority status, the Black community was on the verge of a population explosion of its own. During and after World War I, the Great Migration brought thousands of African-Americans from the rural South to the industrial Northeast and urban areas throughout the United States in search of job opportunities and greater freedom. In Trenton, this migration led to substantial increases in the African-American population, from 2,500 in 1910 to more than 8,000 in 1930. New residents came from every Southern state, but the largest numbers arrived from Virginia, North Carolina, and South Carolina.

Trenton's Black population was spread around the city during the first half of the 20th century, but during the 1920s a nucleus of the community emerged on Spring Street between Willow and Calhoun Streets. It became a home to the city's Black middle class residents, including a number of doctors, lawyers, and other educated community leaders. It was also a center of Black-owned and operated businesses, a place where African-American residents could visit a beauty salon or barber shop, dine out in a restaurant, and buy groceries, clothes, and other items. In the age of segregation, the businesses on Spring Street provided Trenton's Black community with the goods and services necessary to modern life.

As the Black population grew, community members began to agitate for equal treatment under the law, in particular in the city schools. The opening of Trenton Central High School in 1932 led to a lawsuit by the local chapter of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) for equal access to the swimming pool. In 1944, the NAACP supported a lawsuit challenging the segregation of all city schools. The *Hedgepeth-Williams v. Trenton Board of Education* decision by the New Jersey Supreme Court desegregated the Trenton public schools and served as a legal precedent for the landmark *Brown v. Board of Education* case in the United States Supreme Court a decade later.

This booklet focuses on places and people associated with Trenton's African-American history from its beginnings through the Civil Rights era. The 1950s and 1960s were a period of change and upheaval in Trenton and throughout the United States as African-Americans fought for equal rights under the law and equal treatment in public places. This period began locally with the infamous Trenton Six case of 1948, in which six Black men were convicted by an all-White jury of murdering a city shopkeeper and sentenced to death, despite a lack of compelling evidence in the case. The convictions were later overturned, but the case brought national attention to the unequal treatment of African-Americans under the law. The Civil Rights era culminated in Trenton in the riots of April 1968, following the murder of Martin Luther King, Jr. About 300 people, mostly young African-American men, were arrested in the violence, and a 19-year-old student at Lincoln University, Harlan Bruce Joseph, was struck and killed by a policeman's bullet in the chaos. When the riots ended, more than 200 businesses had suffered losses estimated at \$7 million dollars, and many abandoned Trenton's downtown in the years that followed. These events of the Civil Rights era deserving of additional research and their own treatment in future works on the city's African-American history.

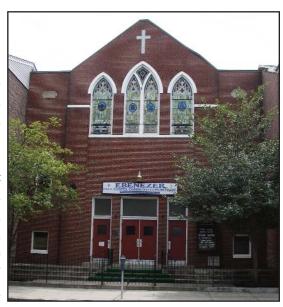
Churches and Cemeteries

Religious institutions have been integral to the Black community in the United States from the arrival of the first African slaves in the 18th century. In Trenton, free Blacks formed the Religious Society of Free Africans, predecessor to Mount Zion A.M.E. Church, in 1811. As the 19th century progressed, a second A.M.E. church and two Baptist churches were formed to meet the needs of the growing population. During the early 20th century, Black members of the city's Episcopal and Catholic churches successfully lobbied to establish their own congregations. These churches provided not only spiritual guidance but also practical assistance to their members and to the community at large. Not surprisingly, the pastors often provided leadership outside of the church walls, particularly during the Civil Rights era.

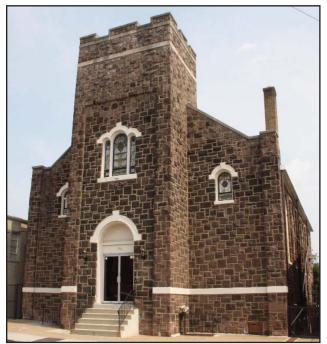
Mount Zion A.M.E. Church

135 Perry Street

The Religious Society of Free Africans of the City of Trenton was founded in 1811 as the city's first African-American religious organization. In 1817, the church was reorganized by Bishop Richard Allen and joined the African Methodist Episcopal (A.M.E.) Conference, becoming one of the state's earliest A.M.E. congregations. After worshipping in the cooper shop of Sampson Peters for several years, the congregation purchased a lot on Perry Street in 1818 and erected a church building a year later. The name was changed in 1834 to Mount Zion. In 1849, the church hosted a statewide convention for Black voting rights. The first church building was enlarged in 1858 and replaced by the existing building in 1876. The new church was referred to in contemporary sources as "the cathedral of the New Jersey Conference" of the A.M.E. church. Although the Mount Zion A.M.E. congregation moved from this location in 2010, the building continues to serve an African-American congregation.



Former Mount Zion A.M.E. Church.



Former St. Paul A.M.E. Zion Church.

St. Paul A.M.E. Zion Church

306 Willow Street

St. Paul A.M.E. Zion Church was founded in 1840 by a group of African-American Methodists. The church's first edifice on Allen Street was built with the financial support of the United Daughters of the Conference of the A.M.E. Church. In 1867, the church moved to North Willow Street, and in 1880 the cornerstone for a new brick church was laid. The existing stone building was erected in 1923. The church was instrumental in the organization of a local chapter of the Afro-American Council in 1900 and the New Jersey State Federation of Colored Women's Clubs in 1915. The St. Paul A.M.E. Zion congregation relocated to Ewing Township in 2011, but the historic church still stands on Willow Street.

Shiloh Baptist Church

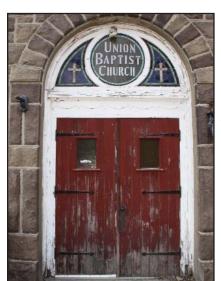
340 Calhoun Street

Shiloh Baptist Church is the city's oldest African-American Baptist congregation. The first groups of Black Baptists were formed in the city around 1880, with Shiloh formally organized in 1896. The congregation did not have a church building until 1902, when a one-story building was constructed on Belvidere Street, at the rear of the present church lot. In 1918, a new stone edifice was constructed on Calhoun Street. Four years later, an adjacent house was purchased and converted for use as the Trenton Colored Day Nursery, which in 1929 reportedly provided childcare services to approximately 350 children monthly. The program was one of only five of its



Shiloh Baptist Church.

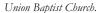
kind in the state in 1932. Shiloh Baptist has had only three pastors since 1904, most famously the Reverend S. Howard Woodson.



Union Baptist Church

301 Pennington Avenue

The Union Baptist Church was founded around 1887, when a group of African-American residents began meeting in rented rooms on Academy Street. The congregation was formally organized as the Union Baptist Church in the following year. For a number of years, the church occupied a building at 42 Belvidere Street, reportedly a former one-room schoolhouse. In 1925, the congregation laid the cornerstone for a new, stone building on Pennington Avenue. The stained glass windows were installed circa 1950.



St. Monica's Episcopal Church

93 Spring Street

St. Monica's Mission for Colored People was established in 1919 as a mission congregation of Trinity Church. In 1920, the church purchased property on Spring Street, worshipping in an existing building on the site. An adjacent parcel was purchased in 1925. By 1929, the congregation numbered about 150 members. In 1935, a three-story dwelling located on the church property was removed and the existing one-story church constructed. St. Monica's was the first Black Episcopal congregation in Trenton. The congregation merged with that of St. Michael's Episcopal on Warren Street in 1955.



Architect's rendering of St. Monica's Episcopal Church, published in the Trenton Evening Times, 1935.



Former Our Lady of the Divine Shepherd Catholic Church.

Our Lady of the Divine Shepherd Catholic Church

44 Pennington Avenue

The building at 44 Pennington Avenue was constructed in 1928 as the state headquarters of the United Grand Lodge, Free and Accepted Masons, Prince Hall Affiliation, a Black Masonic organization. In 1941, the building was sold to the Catholic Diocese of Trenton, which had formed an all-Black congregation in the same year at the request of its African-American members. Our Lady of the Divine Shepherd was one of two all-Black congregations in the Diocese, the other located at Asbury Park. Two years later, Our Lady of the Divine Shepherd School opened, operating as the city's only Black Catholic parish school until 1997, when it merged with the school at St. Mary's Cathedral.

In 2005, the Diocese consolidated the Catholic parishes in Trenton, and Our Lady of the Divine Shepherd was merged with the Church of the Blessed Sacrament. In 2008, the merged congre-

gation moved all services to Blessed Sacrament. The building is now occupied by Mount Zion A.M.E. Church, continuing its long association with the African-American community.

East Hanover Street Cemetery

East Hanover Street (no longer extant)

The East Hanover Street Cemetery was the earliest known burial place in the City of Trenton for African-American residents. Located adjacent to the Friends Meeting House, the earliest mention of this burial ground is in a 1779 deed for the property. The Religious Society of Free Africans (later Mount Zion A.M.E. Church) assumed responsibility for the graveyard soon after its inception in 1811, and its members were buried here and in the churchyard until around 1860. In that year, the graveyard was sold and a new African-American burial ground, known as Locust Hill Cemetery, was established on Hart Avenue. When the YWCA was constructed on East Hanover Street in 1925, news stories referred to the existence of a slave cemetery on the site.

Locust Hill Cemetery

Hart Avenue

The Locust Hill Cemetery was established in 1861 by the Mount Zion A.M.E. Church to replace the East Hanover Street Cemetery, which the community had outgrown. Burials from the earlier cemetery were reportedly disinterred and reburied at Locust Hill. In 1873, the Locust Hill Cemetery Company was incorporated to administer the graveyard. When the Mount Zion A.M.E. Church expanded its sanctuary in 1876, the remains of those buried in the churchyard were moved to Locust Hill Cemetery. The cemetery appears on late 19th century maps of Trenton, but by 1910 it had fallen into disuse. The former cemetery property is now owned by the City of Trenton.

Schools

Around 1832, the Trenton Board of Education established the city's first public school for its African-American children. The school was held in Jackson Hall, a building on Hanover Street that served as a meeting place for the city's Black residents. By the 1850s, the student population numbered around 60 children, and the building's condition had deteriorated to the point that it was commonly known as "Nightmare Hall." In 1855, this early schoolhouse was razed, and the new Higbee Street School opened on present-day Bellevue Avenue (then called Higbee Street) two years later. The growth of the African-American population necessitated construction of the Bellevue Avenue School in 1883 and the New Lincoln School in 1923. In the mid-20th century, Trenton's public schools became a focal point for the Civil Rights movement in the city.

Higbee Street School (John T. Nixon School)

20 Bellevue Avenue

The Higbee Street School was the first educational institution specifically constructed for the free public education of African-American students in Trenton and among the earliest such schools built in New Jersey. The Trenton School Board built five Greek Revival-style schools in 1856, employing design concepts promoted by contemporary education reformers. As such, the Higbee Street School is distinguished among the state's few surviving schools for Black children because of its progressive design. In 1872, the student population outgrew the facility and moved into temporary quarters while the new Ringold Street School (no longer extant) was under construction.



Highee Street School, c.1920.



Bellevue Avenue Colored School.

Bellevue Avenue Colored School (Lincoln School)

81 Bellevue Avenue

By 1883, the city's Black student population had outgrown the Ringold Street School, and a new building was erected on Bellevue Avenue. Notably, the school was built after the New Jersey Legislature passed the School Desegregation Act of 1881, which gave Black parents the option of enrolling their children in previously Whiteonly schools. The construction of the two-room Bellevue Avenue school only two years after passage of the act reflected the reality of a segregated school system for African-American children in Trenton. The school was expanded in 1888 and renamed Lincoln School in 1891. In 1923, the building was replaced by the "new" Lincoln School at Brunswick Avenue and Montgomery Street. By 1928, the population of the Lincoln School was overflowing, and some stu-

dents were moved back into the Old Lincoln School. The school continued in use as a facility for Black children until the public schools were desegregated. The building was acquired by the King David Lodge in 1949. The Lodge, which is affiliated with the Prince Hall Freemasons, was formed in 1875 and met during the early 20th century at the first Shiloh Baptist Church building on Belvidere Avenue. Thus, the building continues to serve the African-American community as a Masonic lodge.

New Lincoln School

400 North Montgomery Street

The Lincoln School was erected in 1923, the fourth and final school building constructed exclusively for the education of African-American children in Trenton. The school initially served both elementary and middle school students; those who continued their education beyond ninth grade attended Trenton High School. By 1928, the school could no longer accommodate the city's population of Black school-aged children, and the elementary students were moved back to the old Lincoln School. These schools continued to serve all of the city's African-American children until 1944, when the New Jersey Supreme Court outlawed segregated educational facilities in the landmark *Hedgepeth-Williams v. Trenton Board of Education* case. Two years later, the first



New Lincoln School.

White students were admitted to the New Lincoln School. Principal Patton J. Hill, an African-American, remained at the integrated school until his retirement in 1958, becoming one of the nation's first Black principals to serve a school with White students.



Trenton Central High School.

Trenton Central High School

Chambers Street

When the new Trenton Central High School opened in 1932, the school accepted both White and Black students, as had its predecessor. Problems arose quickly around the segregated swimming pool, however, as the school policy limited the accessibility of the pool for African-American students. In 1933, Black leaders filed a lawsuit to gain equal access to the pool, with Robert Queen as one of the attorneys. The New Jersey Supreme Court ruled in favor of the Black students. The case was a first step toward desegregating Trenton's public schools. Trenton Central High School was razed in 2015.

Junior High School #2 (Hedgepeth-Williams School)

301 Gladstone Avenue

In 1943, Junior High School #2 was a White school within the Trenton Public Schools segregated system, and the Lincoln School served the community's African-American children. In that year, two African-American mothers, Gladys Hedgepeth and Berline Williams, attempted to enroll their children in their neighborhood school, Junior #2. The Trenton School Board denied the request, and the women filed suit, with local NAACP attorney Robert Queen litigating the case. In January 1944, the New Jersey Supreme Court ruled that the public schools could not deny enrollment based on race. The decision served as a legal precedent for the United States Supreme Court's *Brown v. Board of Education* decision. The Hedgepeth and Williams children were subsequently admitted to Junior #2, and about 200 other African-American students also transferred from the Lincoln School to formerly White middle schools around the city. In 1946, White students began enrolling in the Lincoln School.



Junior High School #2.

Social and Community Organizations

Much like churches, a variety of social and political organizations served to build up and support the African-American community throughout its long history. Although the names of many of these groups have been lost, the available information on those that survive provides glimpses into the community's growth and development.



The Eclectic Club had rooms in the upper floors of this commercial building at 4-6 Broad Street from c.1877-1915.

Eclectic Club

4-6 North Broad Street (private)

The Eclectic Club was founded by prominent African-American city residents in 1877. Incorporated the following year, the club was notable as an early social organization for the Black elite. The Eclectic Club occasionally hosted guest speakers, including Frederick Douglass in 1888. The clubhouse was originally located in rented space at 4 North Broad Street, above G.W. Grant & Son dry goods store; in 1891, the club moved to the third floor of 6 North Broad Street, where it remained until closing in 1915. At the time, the Eclectic Club was reportedly the oldest Black social club in the United States in continuous existence, as well as the oldest club in the city. Notable members included R. Henri Herbert and his brother, John, each of whom served as the organization's president. From 1880-1883, the offices of *The Sentinel*, a Black newspaper published by R. Henri Herbert, were located on the second floor of 4 North Broad Street.

YWCA Montgomery Branch

336-338 Montgomery Street (private)

The Montgomery Street Branch of the YWCA opened in 1927 to serve the African-American community. It was one of only five Black YWCA branches in New Jersey. The property was given to the YWCA by the Bible Readers' Aid Society, which had operated the Montgomery Street Mission in the building during the early 20th century. The YWCA branch was immediately successful, attracting 170 members in the years after its opening; its leadership came primarily from the African-American community. During World War II, the Montgomery Street Branch hosted special events for Black servicemen and sent groups of young women to dances at Fort Dix on a regular basis. In 1944, the YWCA opened its main branch to all women, regardless of race, and in 1950 the Montgomery Street Branch closed and the property was sold.



Carver Center.

Carver Center

40 Fowler Street

The Carver Center has served as a meeting place for a variety of social and community organizations since its construction. The Sunlight Elks Lodge, a Black fraternal organization, met in a house at this location as early as 1913; a decade later, they built an auditorium at the rear of the site, and in 1927 they began construction of the main building. Both the auditorium and the main building were designed by prominent Trenton architect J. Osborne Hunt. The property was given to the Trenton YMCA in 1944 to replace its Community Branch, which had been established for Black residents in 1938 on Spring Street. The

Carver Center was a social center for the community from the time of its construction, hosting nationally known performers like Cab Calloway and Fats Waller and serving as a meeting place for organizations including the State Conference of the NAACP and the New Jersey Federation of Colored Women's Clubs. The latter organization, founded in Trenton in 1915, purchased the property in 1975.

Tuxedo Club

Bank Street; New Rose Street (no longer extant)

The Tuxedo Club was a social organization founded in 1936 by respected men in the Black community. In 1943, the club purchased a three-story building at the corner of Bank and Willow Streets, where the club had a lounge and meeting rooms. The Tuxedo Club served as a meeting place for social and political purposes, and its members sponsored community service projects in the city. An associated



Tuxedo Club.

ladies' group, the Tuxedorettes, was also formed. In 1960, a road improvement project forced the Tuxedo Club to move, and new headquarters were constructed on Old Rose Street. The club operated into the 1990s at the new location. In 2006, the City of Trenton purchased the building and razed it as part of the New Rose Street redevelopment area.

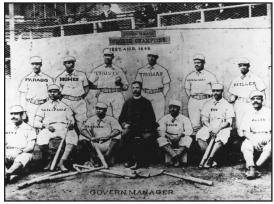
Union Republican Club

31 Bellevue Avenue (private)

During the period following the Civil War, Republican clubs were established by African-American communities throughout the nation. In Trenton, at least three such clubs existed during this period. The Union Republican Club was established around 1870 and met at 31 Bellevue Avenue; in addition to engaging in political discussions and advocating for the community's interests, the club participated in parades, picnics, and rallies. It is unclear how long the Union Republican Club was active in the community, or whether this building was owned by the club or was a private home that was used for meetings.

Sports

Organized athletic competition offered the African-American community a source of pride and leisure activity from at least the late 19th century, when the first Black professional baseball team called Trenton home. In the mid-20th century, Trenton became known for its boxing, producing champion fighters like Ike Williams and Sammy Goss; other prominent athletes raised in Trenton include Al Downing, a Major League Baseball pitcher from 1961-1977, and Elvin Bethea, who was inducted into the Pro Football Hall of Fame in 2003.



Cuban Giants, 1888.

Cuban Giants Fields

Chambersburg Grounds; East State Street Grounds (no longer extant) The Cuban Giants were the first African-American professional baseball team. Organized in 1885 in Babylon, New York, the Cuban Giants called Trenton home from 1886 to 1889. During 1886, the team played its games at the Chambersburg Grounds; in later years they played at the East State Street Grounds and at Hetzel's Grove. The team was crowned the Colored Champions in 1887 and 1888. In 1889, the Cuban Giants played in the Middle States League. The following year, the team left Trenton, playing at various locations around the country; however, it occasionally returned to play games, including a July 1899 match against the local YMCA team. The 1899

season was the team's last. Other African-American baseball teams played in Trenton during the late 19th and early 20th centuries, but the Cuban Giants were the best-known and most successful.

Dunn Field

Brunswick Circle (no longer extant)

Dunn Field was the home of the Trenton Giants minor league baseball team from 1939-1951. The team was acquired by the San Francisco Giants in 1945, and in 1950 San Francisco sent 19-year-old minor league prospect Willie Mays to play in Trenton. Mays played in 81 games with the Trenton Giants, batting .353. Mays was promoted to San Francisco's AAA team in 1951 and made his major league debut the same year. Widely regarded as one of baseball's greatest all-around players, Mays was inducted into the National Baseball Hall of Fame in 1979.



Dunn Field.



The P.A.L. Gym was located at the Stadium Playground during the late 1960s and early 1970s.

P.A.L. Gym

Stadium Playground (no longer extant)

The Police Athletic League (P.A.L.) Gym was established around 1968 and gained significance in the African-American community for its boxing program. The gym was located at the Stadium Playground, which was constructed on the site of the former city reservoir in 1908. During the Great Depression, the Stadium Playground was home to recreational programs run by the Works Progress Administration, and the Boys Club of Trenton administered the site from 1937-1954. The P.A.L. Gym operated here for about a decade before moving to various locations around the city through the mid-1990s. The Stadium Playground was razed around 1975.

Neighborhoods

Historically, Trenton's African-American population was scattered in small pockets around the city rather than concentrated in one or two large neighborhoods. Nevertheless, two mid-20th century neighborhoods stand out for their importance to the African-American community of the period: Spring Street and the Lincoln Homes.



97-99 Spring Street.

Spring Street Neighborhood

Spring Street between Calhoun and Willow Streets

Spring Street was the center of Trenton's middle class African-American community during the mid-20th century. Census records indicate that the district rapidly transformed during the 1920s: in 1920, only one family on Spring Street was identified as non-White, but by 1930, the residents were predominantly identified as "colored" or "mulatto." In 1938, the Community Branch YMCA, which served the city's Black residents, moved from Willow Street to 105 Spring Street, where it remained until the former Sunlight Elks Lodge on Fowler Street was purchased in 1944.

Spring Street remained a vital center for the community during the 1940s and 1950s. The *Negro Motorist Green Book*, a publication that assisted African-American travelers to find

accommodations during the era of segregation, included among its listings a number of tourist homes, restaurants, beauty parlors, and barber shops on Spring Street.

Residents' recollections about Spring Street reflect the importance of the neighborhood to the African-American community through the 1950s. One former resident's response to an online survey conducted by the Trenton Historical Society in 2011 captured its character well:



140 Spring Street.

Spring between Willow and Prospect was the home of many Black professionals and entrepreneurs. The street was a complete community. You didn't have to leave for services or to buy groceries or to get your dry cleaning done. You could eat at a family restaurant with linen napkins and tablecloths (Bert and Vern Carnegie), get your hair done, get a haircut at Dinkins' barber shop, buy women's clothing at Jeanette Holmes' Dress Shop, get an ice cream cone at Alec Gas' Spot. My teachers lived there (from Jr. High School #5). Dentists, doctors, lawyers lived there: Dr. Granger, Dr. Broadus, Dr. Hayling, Dr. Sullivan.

- Robin Johnson Beard

Notable residents of Spring Street included NAACP attorney Robert Queen, who argued the Hedgepeth-Williams desegregation case before the New Jersey Supreme Court, and David Dinkins, who grew up in Trenton and became the first Black mayor of New York City. In 1950, Willie Mays boarded on Spring Street while playing for Trenton's minor league baseball team, the Trenton Giants.



Spring Street, c.1930.



Lincoln Homes.

of the social attitudes of the period and the segregated character of the neighborhoods in which they were built. The Lincoln Homes were completed in 1940 and two years later had 425 occupants. A sense of community developed at the Lincoln Homes that continues to the present, as former residents gather occasionally for reunions. The Lincoln Homes are also notable as the residence of Helen Jackson Lee, a college-educated African-American woman who wrote of her experiences with racial discrimination in Trenton during the 1940s and 1950s in her memoir, *Nigger in the Window* (1978). The complex was rehabilitated in 2003 by the Trenton Housing Authority.

Lincoln Homes

Bounded by Meyer Street, Old Rose Street, Holland Avenue & Violet Street

The Lincoln Homes were one of two housing projects built by the United States Housing Authority in Trenton in 1939. Lincoln Homes was built for African-American residents, while Donnelly Homes was constructed for White residents. In both cases, existing slums were razed and replaced with new buildings in park-like settings. The Trenton Housing Authority solicited the aid of attorney Robert Queen and Louise Hayling, both residents of Spring Street, to assist the 30 families living in the existing tenements to find new homes. The construction of separate complexes for different races was common for housing projects of the era, both because



Lincoln Homes, 1940.



Lincoln Homes.

People

The African-American community has produced leaders in many areas over its long history, from one of its earliest ministers, Sampson Peters, to 19th-century newspaper publisher R. Henri Herbert, and boxing champion Ike Williams. This section highlights the stories of some of these noteworthy individuals; the selections were limited to the deceased.

Sampson Peters

(c.1771-1845)

Sampson Peters was a significant figure in Trenton's African-American community of the early 19th century for his role as a founding member and minister of the Religious Society of Free Africans of the City of Trenton, predecessor to Mount Zion A.M.E. Church. Born into slavery in what is now East Windsor Township, Peters was exposed to Methodism through his owner, Joseph Hutchinson. Peters was manumitted in 1802 and moved to Trenton, where he established a cooper shop. His shop served as the first meeting place of the Society until around 1819, when the first church building was erected on Perry Street. Peters was a member of the Philadelphia Conference of the A.M.E. church and traveled widely on the church circuit, helping to organize Mount Pisgah A.M.E. Church in Princeton in 1832. An abolitionist, he was outspoken against the American Colonization Society, which sought to return free Blacks and slaves to Africa; in 1830, he attended the first Convention of the American Society of Free Persons of Colour, held in Philadelphia. Sources place Peters' cooper shop in the area of South Trenton then known as Bloomsbury.

Augustus Washington

(c.1820-1875)

Born in Trenton to a former slave, Augustus Washington is one of a small number of documented African-American daguerreotypists. He embraced the abolitionist movement in his youth and struggled to gain an education for himself. He learned to make daguerreotypes, the first practicable photographic process, during his freshman year at Dartmouth College to offset his expenses. Despite his success, he was forced to leave college in 1844 for financial reasons, taking a job in Hartford, Connecticut, as a teacher in a school for Black students. Washington continued to practice his art successfully, but his political beliefs led him to decide that repatriation was the best alternative for African-Americans. In 1853, he moved with his wife and two small children to Liberia. There, Washington took part in the nation's political affairs, serving in both the Liberian House of Representatives and the Senate. He never regretted his decision to emmigrate to Liberia, and his death in 1875 was mourned as "a severe loss to Western Africa."



R. Henri Herbert (from New York Age, 1909).

R. Henri Herbert

(1857-1909)

R. Henri Herbert was the founder of the city's first – and one of New Jersey's earliest – Black newspapers. In 1880, Henri Herbert began publishing *The Sentinel*, a staunchly Republican newspaper, and continued until 1883, when it merged with the *Trenton Herald*. The newspaper's offices were located on the second floor of the building at 4 North Broad Street. Through *The Sentinel* and articles in contemporary publications, including the *A.M.E. Church* Review and Colored American Magazine, Herbert became an influential spokesman. He also served several political appointments, including doorkeeper of the New Jersey Senate (1881-1883) and commissioner to the New Orleans Cotton Centennial (1884) and the Pan-American Exposition in Buffalo (1901). He later owned a cigar business in Trenton. A native of Trenton, Henri was the son of Mansfield Herbert, a cabinet maker and "artistic picture framer" who counted John A. Roebling among his clients. The Herbert family was well-known and respected in Trenton during the 19th and 20th centuries. In 1879, Henri's

sister Priscilla became the first African-American to graduate from the State Normal School (today known as the College of New Jersey), and she enjoyed a long career as a educator in New Jersey and Pennsylvania. Sister Ida was also a longtime teacher in the Trenton public schools. Henri's brothers John and Gustavus were both businessmen: John owned a flooring company, and Gustavus reportedly ran the city's first Black-owned hotel. Both Henri and John Herbert were members of the Eclectic Club.

Needham Roberts

(1901-1949)

Needham Roberts was a Trenton native and hero of World War I. Roberts grew up on Wilson Street and reportedly enlisted in the U.S. Army in 1917. He was assigned to the 369th Infantry, an all-Black regiment known as the Harlem Hellfighters. The Harlem Hellfighters were among the first to arrive in France when the United States entered the war. In May 1918, while defending an isolated outpost in the Argonne Forest, Roberts and another African-American soldier, Corporal Henry Johnson, were attacked by a German unit of 20 men. Despite being badly outnumbered and wounded, the two men fought valiantly and repelled the attack. Both men were awarded the Croix de Guerre medal by the French government, becoming the first Americans to receive the honor. Roberts and Johnson returned to the United States as heroes, and a celebration was held in Trenton in Roberts' honor upon his return. Despite the initial fanfare, Roberts' heroism was largely unrecognized by the United States government, which posthumously awarded him the Purple Heart in 1996.



Needham Roberts.

Mitchell A. Davis

(1891-1918)

Mitchell A. Davis was Trenton's only African-American soldier to die in World War I. Born in North Carolina, Davis moved to Trenton as a youth and was educated at the Bellevue Avenue Colored School and Trenton High School. He studied at Lincoln University in Pennsylvania before attending law school at Howard University, where he graduated with honors. He worked for several years for a Virginia newspaper before enlisting in the U.S. Army in 1915. Tragically, Davis died of pneumonia in France only a few days after the Armistice was signed. In 1919, a group of 15 African-American veterans petitioned the American Legion to form a post in Davis's honor. Chartered the same year, members of Mitchell A. Davis Post #182 included physician Jonathan Gibbs, dentist Arthur L. Thomas, and Vincent Harvey, Trenton's first Black policeman.



Dr. Henry J. Austin.

Dr. Henry J. Austin

(1888-1959)

Dr. Henry J. Austin was significant as a Black physician and community leader in Trenton during the mid-20th century. Born in Rahway, Austin was raised in Princeton and graduated from Lincoln University in 1908. Austin earned his M.D. from Howard University in 1919 and returned to Trenton to practice medicine in 1922. In addition to his successful career as a physician in the African-American community, Austin served as a leader in a number of local organizations. In 1941, the Trenton chapter of the NAACP was reorganized with Austin as its president; he was serving as the chapter's president in 1944 when the landmark Hedgepeth-Williams school desegregation case was decided. Austin was a resident of Bellevue Avenue.

Robert Queen

(1884-1960)

Robert Queen was an African-American attorney who argued Trenton's most notable Civil Rights-era court cases. Born in Washington, D.C., Queen earned his law degree from Howard University in 1915 and worked as an attorney in Washington until 1921, when he was admitted to the bar in New Jersey. He opened an office in Trenton and became the city's leading Black attorney in the decades that followed. In 1933, Queen successfully argued against the segregation of the swimming pool at Trenton Central High School before the New Jersey Supreme Court, and in 1943 he represented Gladys Hedgepeth and Berline Williams in the landmark school desegregation case, *Hedgepeth-Williams v. Trenton Board of Education*. In addition to his significant professional contributions, Queen was actively involved in the effort to establish a YMCA to serve the city's African-American residents.



From left, Berline Williams, Attorney Robert Queen, Leon Williams, Gladys Hedgepeth, and Janet Hedgepeth.

Gladys Hedgepeth

(1901-1956)

Berline Williams

(1907-1968)

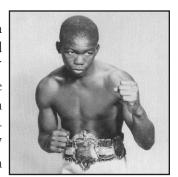
In 1943, Gladys Hedgepeth and Berline Williams filed suit against the Trenton School Board when their children were refused admission to the newly-built Junior High School #2. The new school was only a few blocks from their homes in the Wilbur section of the City, while the segregated Lincoln School was two miles away. With the assistance of the NAACP, Hedgepeth and Williams successfully fought the school district's segrega-

tionist policy, and the landmark New Jersey Supreme Court case bears their names. Gladys Hedgepeth was a New Jersey native; she and her husband Claude were parents to eight children. Berline Williams was born in Virginia and moved to Trenton in the mid-1920s after her marriage to Booker Williams. The couple had seven children.

Ike Williams

(1923-1994)

An inaugural member of the International Boxing Hall of Fame, fighter Ike Williams was born in Brunswick, Georgia, and moved with his family to Trenton in 1932. He played track and baseball at Trenton Central High School and pursued his love for boxing under the tutelage of Jesse Goss, a former prizefighter, at a local gym. Competing as an amateur, Williams won the featherweight championship at the 1938 Trenton Times Golden Gloves tournament. Known for his powerful right hand, Williams had his first professional fight in 1940. Beginning in October 1941, he won 32 consecutive bouts – 14 of them knockouts – during a period of 27 months. Williams is regarded by many as one of the top 5 lightweight boxers of all time. In 2005, a statue of Williams was erected in the Clay Street Park, and the adjacent community center bears his name.



Ike Williams.



S. Howard Woodson, Jr.

S. Howard Woodson, Jr.

(1916-1999)

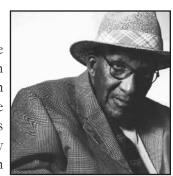
S. Howard Woodson, Jr., was the pastor of Shiloh Baptist Church, a leader in the Civil Rights movement, and the first African-American Speaker of the New Jersey General Assembly. A native of Philadelphia, Woodson graduated from Cheney Training School for Teachers and Morehouse College's School of Divinity. Ordained in 1941, he moved to Trenton five years later to become pastor of Shiloh. He became a leader of the local and state NAACP in the 1950s and 1960s. In 1962, Woodson was elected to Trenton City Council, and two years later he successfully ran for the New Jersey Assembly. When he became Speaker in 1974, he was the nation's first African-American to serve in that

capacity in any state. Woodson lived for many years on Edgewood Avenue in the city's West Ward.

Tom Malloy

(1912-2008)

Tom Malloy was a leader in Trenton's artistic community and was named Trenton's artist laureate in 2001. A watercolorist, Malloy depicted the City of Trenton in his works, including both views of well-known sites like the Battle Monument and Ellarslie, and streetscapes of urban renewal. Malloy was born in Dillon, South Carolina, and moved to Trenton in 1923, where he was educated in the Trenton Public Schools. He did not begin painting until the mid-1950s and established a studio in his home in the 1970s. In addition to his work as an artist, Malloy was a founding member of the Trenton Artists Workshop. Malloy maintained a studio on Garfield Avenue, which he called Studio 101, from around 1970 to 2002.



Tom Malloy.



Civil rights activists leaving the Carver Center.



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