

# HISTORY AND DEVELOPMENT OF HISTORIC DORSEY RIVERBEND AND CITY VIEW

**06** *In the 1920s and 1930s, Historic Dorsey Riverbend and City View became popular residential areas for prominent Black entrepreneurs and civic leaders. During this time, many Black residents moved to*

## **EARLY HISTORY**

The northwest neighborhood is situated within the Tequesta subarea of the non-agrarian Glades Culture. Prior scholarly investigations have delimited the early habitation periods within Broward County from 2000 B.C. to 1700 A.D. By 1783, Spain had regained control of Florida after a brief loss of control to Great Britain starting in 1763. Visitors to the region noted the cultivation of non-native crops such as limes, oranges, lemons, sugar apples, coconuts, and guavas on the land. These plants were likely introduced to the Fort Lauderdale area by early homesteaders like Frankee Lewis and her family.

In 1788, non-native settlers were documented within the area of the New River. In 1821, Spain ceded Florida to the United States. Around this time, the New River area was inhabited by a community

primarily composed of Bahamian settlers who sustained themselves through salvage and fishing activities. Legislator Richard Fitzpatrick established a plantation using enslaved individuals from South Carolina to cultivate coconuts, plantains, citrus fruits, and sugarcane.

An 1825 survey of present-day Broward County indicated there were two non-native settlers within the New River area William Cooley and David Williams. By 1830, the New River settlement was home to approximately fifty residents. The Seminole Indians were also newcomers to the Broward County area during this period. Originally Creek Indians from Georgia and Alabama, the Seminoles had migrated to South Florida by the late 18th century and had established a presence in the region by the early 19th century. Between the mid-1830s and the mid-1850s, there were ongoing skirmishes between the United States military and the Seminoles marking a period of time known as the Seminole Wars.

Testimony garnered from long standing residents of the region, such as Mrs. W.S. Holloway, and historical documentation, including annotations from studies conducted by archaeologist Bob Carr, substantiate the presence of Seminole Indians in the vicinity during the 19th and 20th centuries, with references to an “Indian Trail” along the contemporary route of SW 6th Avenue.

Concurrently, archaeological endeavors along the New River bank yielded an increasing array of artifacts that affirm the protracted duration of human occupation and corroborate narratives of indigenous lore. The sustained inhabitation of these domiciliary sites for over seven decades, particularly along NW 5th and 6th Avenue, furnishes ample research pertaining to Black material culture in the 20th Century.

Noteworthy is the inaugural settlement registered in the 1890s, initiated by the Philemon Bryan family, who enlisted four hundred Black laborers to construct the Florida East Coast Railway (FEC) railroad along the New River. Impressively, the earliest residential configurations have endured through time, shaping the fabric of the “Near Northwest” community, which, although expanding northwestward, remains demarcated by the arterials of Broward Boulevard (formerly North 4th Street) and the FEC railroad tracks.



Seminole camp on New River - Fort Lauderdale, Florida (c. 1900) , Source: Florida Memory



Seminole Indian camp : Fort Lauderdale, Florida (1917), Source: Florida Memory

Annie Jumper Tommie, a respected Seminole matriarch, along with her family, established a Panther clan camp around 1902 near the north fork of the New River, east of today’s Broward Boulevard bridge. Known as Annie Tommie’s Camp, it was the final enduring Seminole settlement within Fort Lauderdale. Annie and her husband, Doctor Tommie, resided there with her mother, Mammy, brother Willie Jumper, and their children, including Tony Tommie, who were familiar figures to the local community.

The camp featured several chickees including a cooking chickee, work and sleeping chickees, and an area for activities and boat landings along the New River. Nearby, young Seminole boys practiced baseball on a makeshift diamond, preparing for matches against local schools. Annie Tommie’s Camp became a notable tourist destination, especially renowned for Annie’s innovation in crafting and selling Seminole Indian dolls, which later became a significant industry for the tribe.

Just west of the Annie Tommie site lies a city-owned park marked at 200 NW 18th Avenue, known as the “North Fork of the New River – The Historic North Fork.” This park is noted as one of the few remaining sections of the New River that still exists in its natural state. North

Fork Riverfront Park spans approximately three-and-a-half miles of shoreline, winding through communities in Broward County. It is a habitat for endangered plants and native wildlife, reflecting the area's enduring natural history.



Image: Dana Albert Dorsey, Source: HistoryMiami

The Historic Dorsey Riverbend neighborhood is named in honor of Dana Albert Dorsey, a prominent figure in early South Florida history. Upon his arrival in Miami in 1897, Dorsey initially pursued truck farming and swiftly transitioned to investments in real estate. He acquired parcels of land near the former Seaboard Station at NW 7th Avenue and NW 19th Street, purchasing lots initially priced at \$25 each and gradually expanding his real estate holdings. By 1914, Dorsey was recognized as the sole African American real estate agent in Miami. Dorsey's acquisitions extended to Elliot Key and Fisher Island, where he facilitated access to public beaches for the Black community. His entrepreneurial pursuits culminated in the creation of the largest real estate portfolio ever amassed by a Black individual in Dade County. Beyond his business ventures, Dorsey was instrumental in founding South Florida's first Black bank, The

Mutual Industrial Benefit and Saving Association. Later, he assumed leadership as Chairman of the Colored Advisory Committee to the Dade County School Board.

### **COMMUNITY AND WORSHIP**

Black churches have emerged as highly influential institutions within their communities, serving as hubs for social, cultural, educational, and political activities. In contexts where public assembly was restricted, worship and religious instruction provided the sole legal means for community gathering. Within the Dorsey Riverbend community, churches not only served as cornerstones but also as gathering places for prominent leaders and families during the early 20th century. They continued to be pivotal in Civil Rights activism through the mid-20th century and remain central to ongoing civic leadership efforts for Black representation today.

Scholarly discourse extensively recognizes the pivotal role of churches in Black history and culture. In the development of Historic Dorsey Riverbend, these churches played a particularly critical role. As noted by August Meier, churches and fraternal organizations held significant importance within the Black community, surpassing their counterparts in White communities in 19th century America. Churches and fraternities provided opportunities for social interaction and leadership development without the constraints faced elsewhere. Many distinguished Black leaders have emerged from ministerial roles.

While church buildings primarily served as places of worship, they also functioned as centers for educational and civic activities. For instance, churches accommodated Sunday school sessions for children, facilitated political

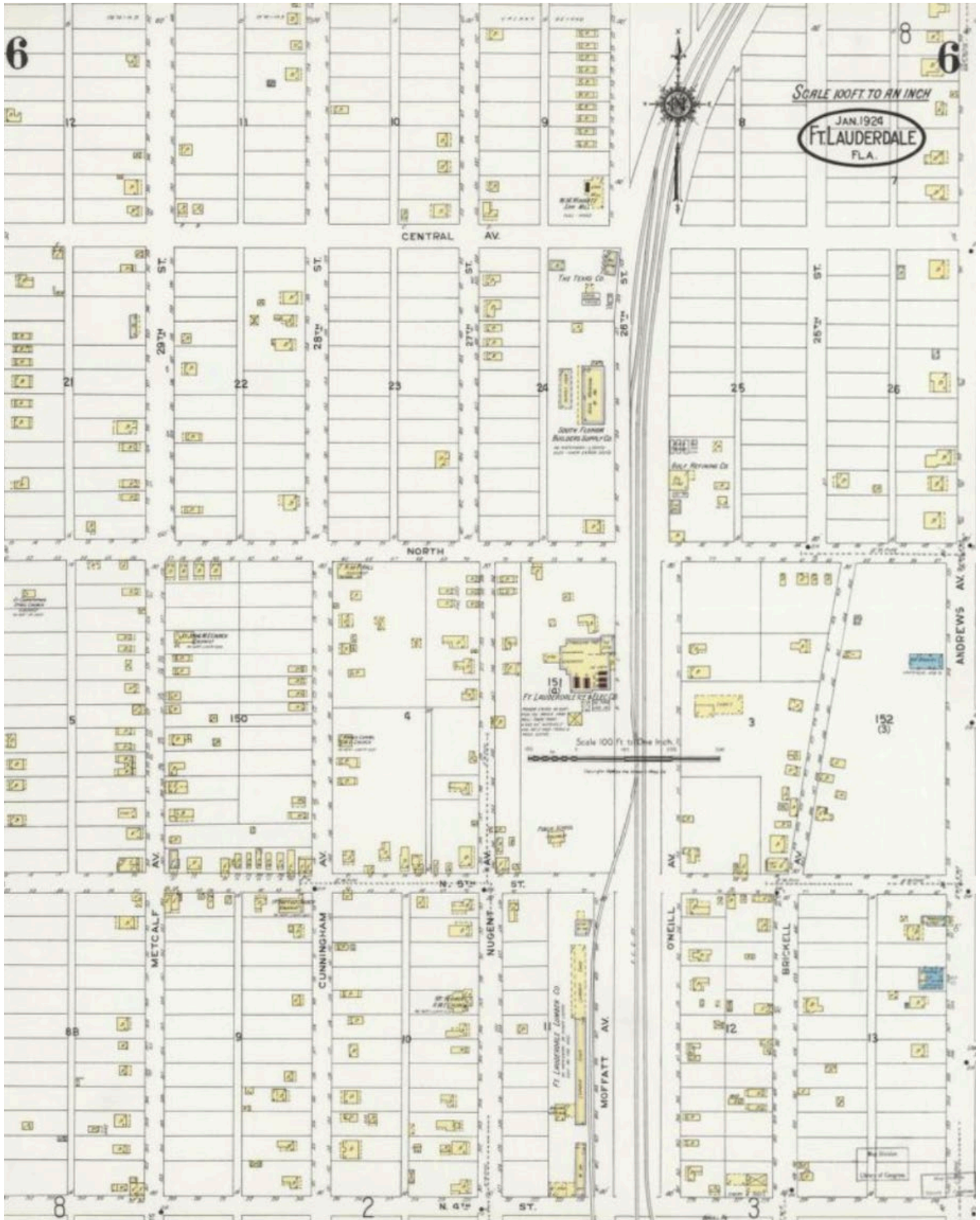


Image: Sanborn Map, 1924 (Plate 6)

activism, and hosted community fundraising events. Thus, beyond their religious functions, churches in Dorsey Riverbend served as multifaceted institutions that actively contributed to the social, educational, and civic life of the community.

The Sanborn maps delineating the Five Block Area reveal the presence of some of the earliest frame structures, notable among which are various ecclesiastical edifices. In the early 1900s, a limited number of churches were established, including Mount Hermon African Methodist Episcopal (AME) and Piney Grove Missionary Baptist Church. Another early establishment was St. Luke Baptist Church, followed by St. John's CME Church. These churches served as focal points for community activities, initially sharing facilities with Mount Hermon and Piney Grove alternating services on Sundays.

Piney Grove Missionary Baptist Church was founded in 1904 under the leadership of Reverend B.F. Goodin, initially conducting services under a bush arbor at the corner of Northwest Second Street and Brickell Avenue. The location also served as a schoolhouse for its members. A permanent structure was erected by the congregation within Block 10 on NW 4th Avenue, but was sold in 1911. In 1941, the current church property was acquired during Reverend Robert L. Holley's tenure, with dedication taking place in March 1951. The church was formally incorporated as First Baptist Church Piney Grove in 1968. The congregation occupied the NW 4th Street building until 2005, when growth prompted the construction of a new facility in Lauderdale

Lakes. Piney Grove has notable historical ties, including the membership of Mr. Andrew DeGraffenreidt, the first Black elected commissioner in Fort Lauderdale. Despite its continued existence, the property was deemed ineligible for historic designation in 2017 due to significant alterations that compromised its historical integrity.

By the year 1924, this compact neighborhood accommodated three such institutions: St. Christopher's Episcopal, established in 1916; Pine(y) Grove, alternatively known as First Baptist Church, situated on NW 3rd Avenue and 2nd Street; and St. John's M.E. Church. Additionally, a Knights of Pythias Hall, a fraternal organization, was situated within this geographical enclave.

In the Dorsey Riverbend neighborhood, three churches potentially eligible for individual nomination include St. Christopher's Episcopal School (1939), located at 318 NW 6th Avenue, a Neo-Gothic structure; Mount Olive Baptist Church (1946), situated at 401 NW 9th Avenue, also in a Neo-Gothic style; and Mount Hermon AME Church (1959), a Modern structure located at 401 NW 7th Terrace, also known as 711 NW 4th Street.

Mount Hermon AME Church has been associated with several notable members who have made significant contributions to Fort Lauderdale's civic and judicial arenas. These include Mr. Nathaniel Wilkerson Sr., the first Black candidate for the Office of City Commissioner, Judge Thomas J. Reddick, the first Black Public Defender, and Alcee Hastings, the first Black Juvenile Judge appointed by President Jimmy Carter, later becoming a Congressman.

The founding of Mount Olive Baptist Church by Reverend Henry Bragdon, Sr., brought together a community including the Bragdons, Peoples, James Thurstons, Henry and Fannie Jackson, Lewis and Georgia Clark, G.T. Stafford, Eva Taylor, and Mae Liza Williams. The church played a pivotal role in advocating for low-rent public housing in the Dorsey Riverbend



Image: Mount Olive Baptist Church, Fort Lauderdale Historical Society

area, significantly impacting community growth and development.

### **BOOMTIME AND SEGREGATION**

During the period of economic prosperity, Fort Lauderdale's Black community experienced both favorable and adverse transformations. The upsurge in construction activities engendered a surge in employment opportunities within domestic, construction, and hospitality sectors, wherein individuals secured positions as waitstaff and domestic aides. However, concurrently, the municipality implemented legislative measures delineating racial segregation. Notably, in 1922, Fort Lauderdale enacted its initial ordinance instituting a racial demarcation, aiming to confine Black inhabitants within a demarcated sector delineated by the FEC Railway tracks. By 1927, access to the beach for the Black populace was restricted to a demarcated area situated north of the city's perimeters, notably distanced from Las Olas Boulevard. Furthermore, the municipality adopted

a grid-quadrant zoning system in the same year, thereby confining nearly one-fourth of the city's population, predominantly comprised of Black residents, to homes within the northwest quadrant. The enforcement of stringent curfews further curtailed nocturnal mobility for the Black community.

Access to healthcare among Black citizens was notably constrained, exacerbated by the reluctance of numerous local physicians to extend medical care. Addressing this critical lacuna, Dr. James Sistrunk assumed a pivotal role upon his arrival in Fort Lauderdale in 1922. Although not the city's inaugural Black physician, Dr. Sistrunk emerged as the sole practitioner for an extended period, embodying the archetype of the "country doctor." Notably, he provided essential medical services to the community, undertaking the delivery of over 5,000 infants.

Concurrently, infrastructural enhancements

aimed at improving educational facilities for the Black populace were undertaken. A significant milestone transpired in 1924 with the construction of a new masonry two-story educational establishment designated as the "Colored School," meticulously designed by architect Peterman, and situated on Northwest Fourth Street. Subsequently, in 1930, the institution was renamed in honor of Dr. James Hardy Dillard, a white philanthropist renowned for his dedication to ameliorating educational opportunities for Black children. The building was sold to the School Board for one dollar by pioneers Frank and Ivy (Cromartie) Stranahan who provided the land and covered construction cost. This would be the first permanent school in Broward County, purposefully established for the education of children from the Black community.

The Sanborn maps of 1924 reveal a substantial proliferation of frame dwellings within the Tuskegee Park vicinity, emblematic of the northwestern extension of the Black community. Noteworthy is the presence of several prominent Black individuals residing and contributing to the inaugural redevelopment precinct, including Sylvia Aldrige, James Bass, George W. Benton, J.F. Sistrunk, Von D. Mizell, and Nathaniel Laramore.

In the vicinity encompassing Historic Dorsey Riverbend and City View, a notable trend emerged during the 1920s and 1930s, wherein several prominent entrepreneurs and civic leaders of the Black community opted to establish their residences. Moreover, during this period, a discernible shift occurred as domiciles were relocated to Dorsey Riverbend

**OF COURSE YOU WISH YOU HAD BOUGHT**

**TWO YEARS AGO  
A YEAR AGO  
LAST MARCH  
LAST MONTH  
LAST WEEK**

Of course you wish you had bought two years ago—a year ago—last March—last month—last week—you now see how you could have made a big profit had you only bought property at any previous time.

Now we do know that some who bought in Seminole Forest have already sold at a profit. Those who have recently bought have made a profit and now if you buy you will make a big profit in the next few months—Why wait?

Lots in Seminole Forest will continue to increase in value and make owners money—if profits can be made in this close in development before the improvements are put in what will the profits be when the SIDEWALKS, STREETS, WHITEWAY, ELECTRIC LIGHTS and WATER are put in.

"Watch Seminole Forest—Advertisement," Fort Lauderdale News, July 14, 1925

**42 LOTS!**  
**Sold Yesterday**

**WEDNESDAY, JULY 22**  
Leaving only 41 lots in Seminole Forest out of the original 250 lots.

**You Must Hurry If You Get One!**

There have been 200 lots sold in Seminole Forest in 30 working days. We are proud of this record but it only shows that the purchasers have realized the great values being offered in Seminole Forest. With only 41 lots left it will pay you to hurry if you would get one of these beautiful building lots located

**Only 4,500 Feet From Andrews Avenue**

**We Are Selling House Them**

Only 4500 Feet from Andrews Avenue

**SEMINOLE FOREST**  
Lauderdale's Close-in Home and Business Section

<p><b>LOCATION</b></p> <p>Seminole Forest is located on N. W. Fourth St. It is opposite the new magnificent water plant and ball park. It will be the main artery of traffic west. Drive out Fourth Street today and see this new, close-in development, then come to our office and select your lot.</p>	<p><b>AN IDEAL RESTRICTED RESIDENTIAL SECTION</b> <b>IN THE IDEAL CLOSE-IN LOCATION</b></p> <p>Just think of it—A sub-division right close-in on the West Side. Builders are going up and a program that will place 25 new homes in Seminole Forest in the next 90 days. Right in the midst of much building activity where values are jumping over night. A New York capitalist bought a whole block—A Kentucky capitalist bought a whole block. Local people here bought and bought heavily. There are only a few lots left. Hurry.</p> <p>Office 216 N. W. Third St.</p>	<p><b>IMPROVEMENTS</b></p> <p>Complete high class improvements that include WHITE WAY, WATER, ELECTRICITY, SIDE WALKS and PAVED STREETS.</p>
---	---	--

**LOTS AS LOW AS \$2,000 EASY TERMS**

**ZIEGLER BROS., Inc., Owners and Developers**

Capt. J. W. Ziegler, President      R. J. Squires, Secy.-Treas.      E. Clair Ziegler, Vice President

"42 Lots—Advertisement," Fort Lauderdale News, July 23, 1925.

properties. Concurrently, the trajectory of residential development for the White population manifested a westward progression along Las Olas Boulevard. The era witnessed a surge in construction activities, with a notable aspiration to erect “one home each week” within the Seminole Forest neighborhood. Simultaneously, infrastructure enhancements, including the installation of streets and sidewalks, were undertaken within the northwest precinct to accommodate the burgeoning housing developments. Noteworthy is the brisk pace of real estate transactions, particularly evidenced by the sale of over 250 lots within the Seminole Forest district between the months of June and July in 1925.

### 1930S: DEPRESSION ERA AND NEW DEAL

The economic downturn of the depression era posed formidable challenges for residents of South Florida, many of whom had previously experienced the affluence associated with prosperous periods. Alleviating the dire circumstances, various initiatives under the New Deal framework were instrumental in providing relief measures. Notably, the Federal Emergency Relief Agency played a pivotal role in dispensing aid, distributing provisions such as food and vegetable seeds, and inaugurating canning facilities. Concurrently, the Works Progress Administration spearheaded an extensive employment program, engaging numerous local inhabitants in the execution of diverse infrastructure projects across the region.

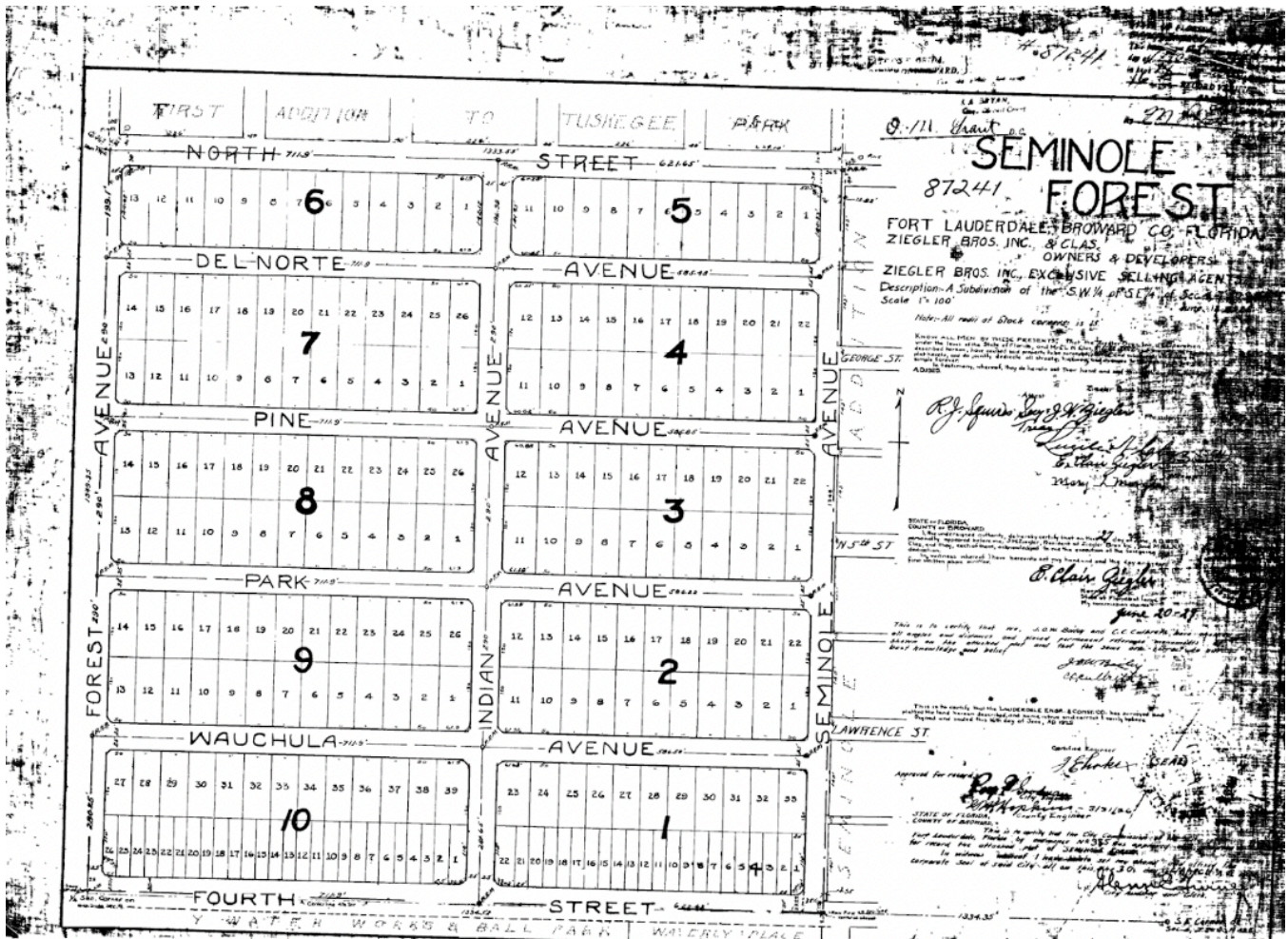


Image: Seminole Forest Plat Map

These endeavors included the construction of significant edifices such as the East Side School, the municipal tennis courts situated within Hardy Park (also known as Davis Field), and the principal U.S. Post Office located at the intersection of Southeast First Avenue and Second Street. Moreover, the New Deal initiatives facilitated critical civic improvements, encompassing the clearance of the New River from the invasive water hyacinths, the realization of a comprehensive sewer system, and the construction or enhancement of vital bridges and highways within the locality.

In 1937, the enactment of the Murphy Act by the state legislature facilitated the statutory forfeiture of lands in instances of tax delinquency. This legislative measure afforded taxpayers within the state the opportunity to reconcile substantial arrears of taxes for nominal sums, thereby effectuating the reinstatement of approximately 60,000 parcels of land onto the active tax registers.

At the same time, while the Caucasian community established itself along the banks of the New River, adjusting their lifestyles to fit the economic circumstances, the Near Northwest district quickly grew into a prominent enclave for the Black

community within the county. Its institutional infrastructure, comprising churches, educational establishments, and commercial enterprises, assumed a pivotal role in catering to the multifarious needs of the Black populace countywide.

Despite the prevailing economic downturn of the Depression era, tourism retained its significance as a linchpin of the local economy. Subsequent to the cessation of Prohibition, a burgeoning array of entertainment options emerged for both local denizens and visitors alike. Noteworthy among these was the inauguration of the Trianon Ballroom, situated discreetly behind Brownie's Bar on South Andrews Avenue, under the proprietorship of Brownie Robertson in 1935. Club Brownie, operational until the onset of World War II, played host to an illustrious roster of entertainers of the era, including luminaries such as Ella Fitzgerald, Duke Ellington, Cab Calloway, and Louis Armstrong, among others. In the era of racial segregation, these luminaries patronized the Hill Hotel, owned by John H. Hill II and situated at the intersection of Northwest Seventh Avenue and Fifth Street, which notably stood as the premier hospitality establishment within the Black community.



Image: Hill Hotel at Northwest 7th Avenue and Fifth Street, demolished 1980s,  
Source: Hill Family Collection

The architectural landscape associated with recreation and entertainment in Fort Lauderdale reflects the historical impact of segregation, which necessitated the creation of spaces for Black community members to enjoy leisure activities. Despite being sought-after performers, Black entertainers were often barred from staying overnight in segregated accommodations. As a result, venues in the Dorsey Riverbend neighborhood became pivotal locations for after-hours entertainment. These structures serve as crucial repositories of social and cultural history within the Black community. Regrettably, few of these sites have

endured over time.

Ironically, the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, while a landmark achievement, indirectly contributed to the decline of Black entertainment venues. Increased access to integrated establishments led to a shift in patronage and revenue away from these once-thriving venues. Consequently, many of these establishments faced economic challenges that ultimately led to their closure and eventual demolition due to neglect.

In addition to the prevailing economic hardships encountered by the majority of individuals during this era, Black Floridians grappled with pervasive manifestations of systemic oppression and racial discrimination throughout the 1930s. Florida notably emerged as one of the foremost “lynching states” per capita black population within the Southern region. Law enforcement officials, including sheriffs across the state, were implicated in the abuse of state peonage laws, effectively subjecting Black citizens to conditions akin to indentured servitude.

Against this backdrop, in 1937, the municipal administration established a hospital commission with the objective of mobilizing funds for the establishment of the county’s inaugural public hospital. In 1938, Broward General Hospital commenced operations within the renovated premises of the Granada Apartments on South Andrews Avenue, a location it continues to occupy to the present day. Notably absent prior to this establishment was any such medical facility catering specifically to the needs of Black residents. Although Broward General Hospital accommodated black patients, it maintained a policy of barring black physicians from practicing within its premises. Consequently, a consortium of local citizens undertook the initiative to establish Provident Hospital within a refurbished residential property on Southwest Sixth Street, presently

the site of the L.A. Lee YMCA/Mizell Community Center. Dr. Mizell assumed the mantle of medical director, while Dr. Sistrunk served as the chief of staff. Provident Hospital continued its steadfast service to the community until the process of integration, which culminated in 1964 with the assimilation of Broward General Hospital and other medical facilities.

During the 1930s, Fort Lauderdale’s segregated environment provided limited healthcare options for its African-American residents. Activists from both black and white communities united to establish Provident Hospital on the north side of Northwest Sixth Street and Fourteenth Avenue in 1938. Over the years, this modest hospital expanded until integration occurred at Broward General in 1964, leading to the closure of Provident Hospital. In 1990, the city commemorated the legacy of



Senator Claude Pepper at Dixie Court cornerstone laying ceremony



Laying corner stone at Dixie Court, December 29, 1929. Source: Fort Lauderdale Historical Society

Provident Hospital by naming a park across from its former location in its honor.

Moreover, living conditions within segments of the Black community during the 1930s deteriorated to alarming levels. A 1938 survey revealed that out of 950 families in Fort Lauderdale, representing almost one-third of the city's population, 875 were Blackhouseholds, the majority of whom were renters. Alarming, 95 percent of these households



Image: NW 2nd Street, Looking East, 1940. Source: Fort Lauderdale Historical Society

were documented as residing in substandard living conditions. Following concerted advocacy efforts by municipal authorities, Fort Lauderdale succeeded in securing the support of the recently established New Deal agency, the Public Housing Authority. Subsequently, the Dixie Court Housing Complex



Image: NW 2nd Street, Looking East, 1940. Source: Fort Lauderdale Historical Society

for Black residents was completed in 1940, representing a significant milestone in addressing the housing needs of the marginalized community.

By 1936 Fort Lauderdale and the nation were coming out of the Great Depression slowly but surely. Boomtime developers began to return to the community. City agencies were once again solvent, and house construction became an important industry once again.

## **WORLD WAR II**

At the onset of the war, the Chamber of Commerce and City Commission collaboratively instituted a Military Affairs Council. Confronted with challenges in garnering the endorsement of the USO, they endeavored to establish the Fort Lauderdale Service Men's Center, situated within the erstwhile Pioneer Department Store edifice positioned at the intersection of Southeast First Avenue and Las Olas Boulevard. This facility served as a vital resource for over two million servicemen and women statewide throughout Florida. However, amidst the era of segregation, Black soldiers were notably absent from the Fort Lauderdale Service Men's Center. Instead, they availed themselves of accommodations provided at John H. Hill II's commercial complex, situated at the intersection of Northwest Second Street and Fifth Avenue.

Originally constructed during the 1920s as single-family residences, a significant transition occurred in the subsequent decade as these properties evolved into tourist homes. Later, during the wartime period, they assumed the role of boarding homes catering to American servicemen. Even during the 1950s, the expanded District economy found stability through commercial activities along SW 2nd Street east of 4th Avenue, complemented by homestyle hotel accommodations to the west.



Image: Thomas J Walker Residence, 441 NW 9th Avenue, 1965. Source: Fort Lauderdale Historical Society

Although constraints such as gas and tire rationing imposed limitations on travel, Fort Lauderdale continued to attract visitors and servicemen. Modes of transportation, including trains and buses, operated at full capacity. Despite the military occupation of the beach, tourists persisted in patronizing hotels. The conclusion of the war heralded a palpable sense of relief, prompting spontaneous celebrations to ensue across the City.

## **POST-WORLD WAR II**

Throughout the 1940s, Broward County retained its predominantly agricultural character. At Dillard High School, the sole educational institution serving Black students, the academic calendar spanned seven months, with a hiatus from November to Easter to facilitate student availability for the local bean harvest. This arrangement necessitated the employment of children as young as nine, who provided labor at nominal wages for the region's principal crop in the northern county. The disparities



Image: Charles Seiferman Residence, 745 NW 2nd Avenue, 1954

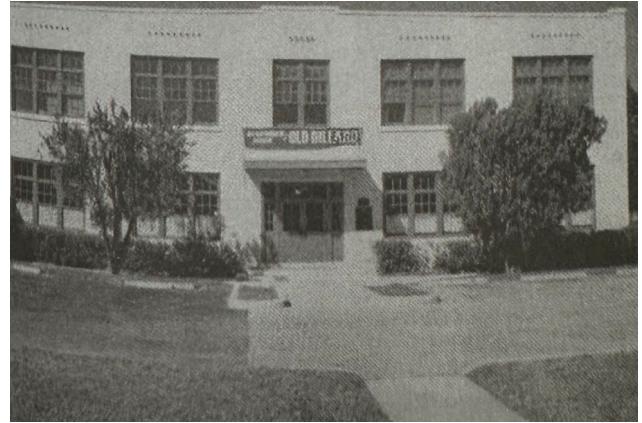


Image: Dillard High School, Source: Across the Tracks, pg. 43

inherent within the segregated educational framework engendered considerable resentment within the Black community. While the Dillard School attained accreditation, Black students in north Broward were not afforded a nine-month academic year until the year 1952. In 1952, the erstwhile Dillard School was supplanted by a new high school. The elementary school remained in the original building subsequently christened Walker Elementary in homage to Clarence C. Walker, the former president of Dillard High School, in the year 1960.

The denouement of the war precipitated a host of burgeoning challenges for the residents of Fort Lauderdale. Despite the withdrawal of military presence and the concomitant cessation of funding it provided to the community, the city witnessed its most prosperous tourist season on record during the winter of 1945-1946. With a resident population of 26,000 at the conclusion of the war, the city found itself inundated by an influx of 65,000 visitors. The discontinuation of wartime rationing policies catalyzed a surge in production activities and consumer spending. Travel restrictions were rescinded, facilitating the return of servicemen accompanied by their families seeking residence. The city, however, found itself ill-prepared to contend with the heightened demand for expansion in housing,

sanitation facilities, educational institutions, and other essential services.

In tandem with the burgeoning demographic expansion necessitating augmentations in housing and essential amenities, the trajectory of social transformation was also discernible on the horizon for the residents of Fort Lauderdale. Despite the



David Larrimore Residence, 417 NW 8th Avenue



Gilbert Apartments, 801 NW 3rd Street Source: Fort Lauderdale Historical Society

advent of the 1950s, the city remained deeply entrenched within the confines of racial segregation, wherein delineated racial boundaries persisted. Black inhabitants found their residential mobility restricted by ordinances promulgated as early as the 1920s. However, propelled by concerted advocacy endeavors within the Black community, albeit gradual, the winds of change began to sweep through Fort Lauderdale.

A pivotal milestone marking the onset of incremental change unfolded in 1951 with the inauguration of Sunland Park by the City. Notably, this park stood as the inaugural municipal park designated for the utilization of the Black community, situated on West Sunrise Boulevard. Subsequently, in 1954, a significant addition took shape with the introduction of a swimming pool, thereby broadening the recreational amenities available to Black residents.

In 1956, the Fort Lauderdale Golf and Country Club, which operated as a municipal course at the time, refused admission to four Black men. Subsequently, they pursued legal recourse by filing a lawsuit in federal court, ultimately emerging victorious. The court adjudicated that they possessed the lawful entitlement to utilize the golf course. In 1957, this judicial decision was reaffirmed upon appeal by the Appellate Court. In response to these legal developments, the city commission opted to divest ownership of the club, opting for sale rather than confronting the imperatives of integration. The paramount concern of safeguarding the tourism industry, deemed critical to the city's economic vitality, precipitated this decision. As the 1960s unfolded, Fort Lauderdale commenced a process of adaptation to the evolving sociopolitical landscape, thereby reflecting a nascent willingness to accommodate changing norms and values.

**1960S: INTEGRATION AND UNREST**

The quest for integration gained momentum, propelled by the concerted efforts of Black activists who strategically employed nonviolent resistance tactics such as “eat-ins” at segregated lunch counters, “sit-ins” at bus stations, along with boycotts and pickets. Concurrently, local businesses commenced the implementation

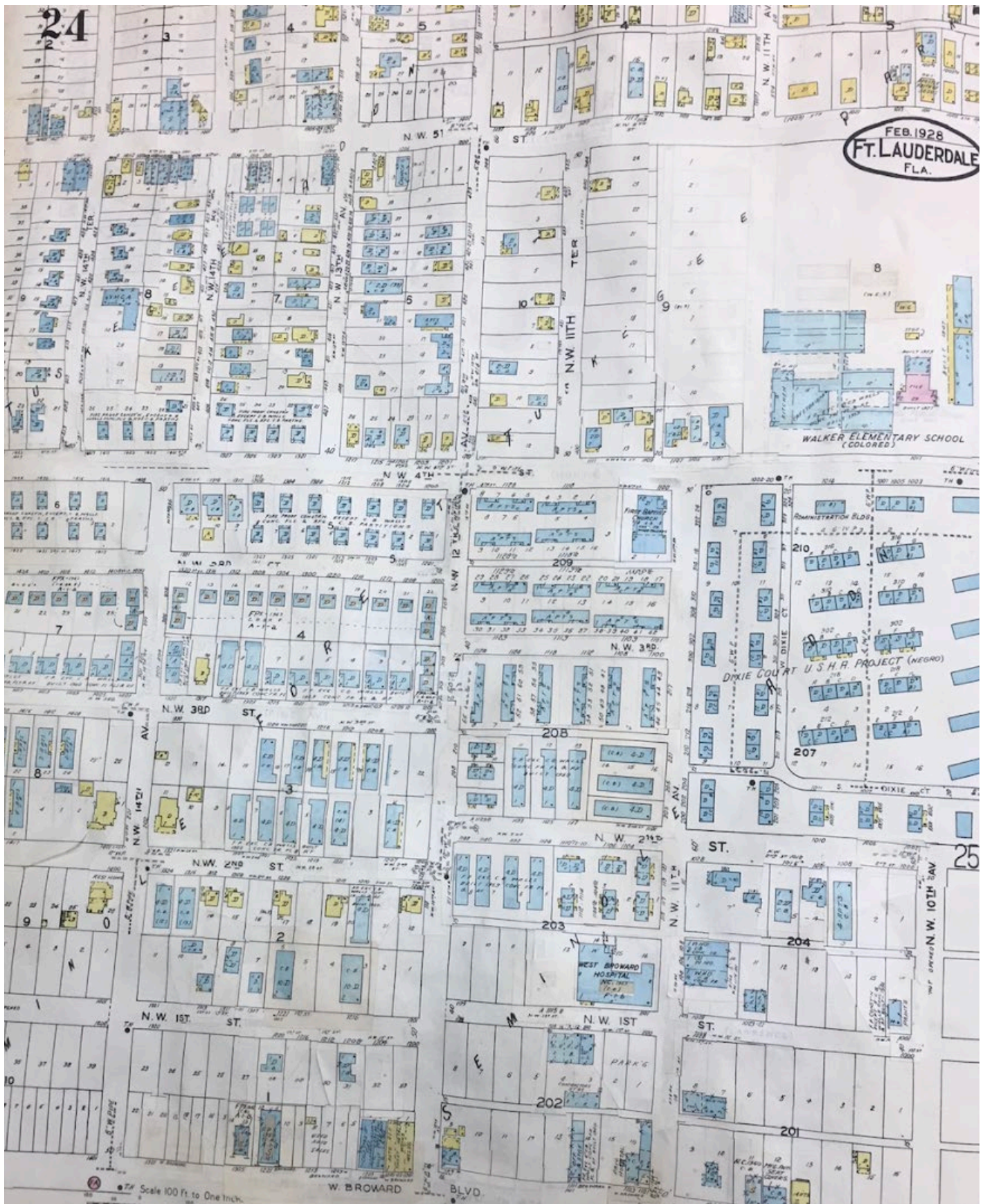
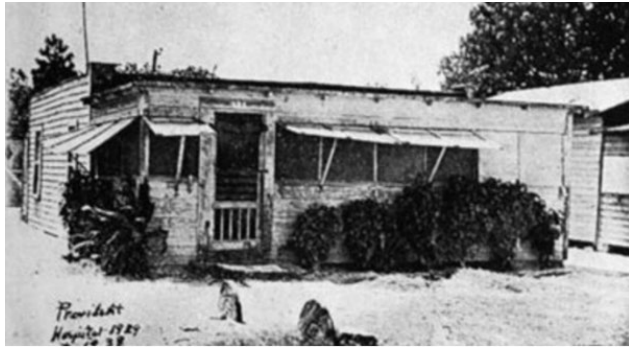


Image: Sanborn Map, 1965 (Plate 24)



Image: Reverend Ivory Mizell, Source: A History of Black Fort Lauderdale, pg. 81



Provident Hospital, 1938



Provident Hospital, 1960. Source: Fort Lauderdale Historical Society

of desegregation policies, indicative of a gradual shift in societal attitudes. A pivotal figure in these endeavors was Eula Gandy Johnson, whose arrival in Fort Lauderdale dates back to 1935. Following the untimely demise of her husband, she assumed



Image, 401 NW 5th Avenue, 1960s. Source: Fort Lauderdale Historical Society

the responsibility of supporting her three children by operating a gas station. In 1958, her steadfast commitment to justice prompted her assumption of the presidency of the local chapter of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP).

Another notable figure in the struggle for the rights of Black citizens in Fort Lauderdale was Von D. Mizell. In addition to his tenure at Provident Hospital, he was instrumental in the establishment of the Fort Lauderdale NAACP chapter in 1945. Mizell's advocacy extended to electoral pursuits, as evidenced by his candidacy for the Broward County School Board in 1948, wherein he narrowly missed victory in the primary, owing to limited voter turnout among Black residents. In 1964, Provident Hospital underwent integration into Broward General, prompting Mizell and five others to file lawsuits against the Broward Medical Association, seeking admission as members to facilitate their practice within the institution.

In juxtaposition to the opulent urban developments proliferating within the City, by the 1960s, the northwest neighborhood, constituting the residence of Fort Lauderdale's Black populace, had become conspicuous for its dire circumstances, garnering recognition among locals as necessitating urgent

intervention. Characterized by substandard housing conditions coupled with exorbitant rents, prolonged forty-year home mortgages, inadequate sanitation facilities, unpaved thoroughfares, and a dearth of recreational and childcare amenities, the neighborhood stood as a microcosm of systemic neglect. These conditions incubated a volatile environment conducive to racial unrest, which erupted into riots and disturbances during the summer of 1966. In August of that year, a cohort of Black youths faced arrest for pelting police cruisers with rocks and bottles. Subsequently, local black leaders leveled accusations of police harassment, particularly highlighting instances where detainees were compelled to sleep on cot beds devoid of mattresses. Although charges against the apprehended youths were eventually dropped, tensions within the community remained palpable.

Against this backdrop, the city commission, in December 1966, sanctioned an urban renewal initiative aimed at ameliorating the plight of the Black community. However, conservative backlash against the proposed federal funding precipitated a city-wide referendum on the issue. Despite the City's establishment of an urban renewal office and the identification of 600 acres encompassing dilapidated residences and 2,000 residents in need of assistance within the northwest neighborhood, opposition to the initiative culminated in the rejection of several million dollars in federal funding, leading to the closure of the agency. Consequently, race relations remained fraught with tension throughout the remaining years of the decade.

### **1970S TO PRESENT**

The local chapter of The Links, Inc., a civic and social organization, spearheaded the compilation of one of the earliest publications detailing the history of the Black community: "Black Pioneers in Broward County." Concurrently, collaborative

efforts between the City and the Fort Lauderdale Historical Society yielded the production of a self-guided tour map and waterways tour, showcasing numerous local landmarks of historical significance. The bicentennial commemoration engendered heightened national consciousness regarding the preservation of historic properties. Motivated by the imperative to address the rapid socio-cultural transformations underway, the City proactively formulated a historic preservation ordinance, thereby establishing a framework for the creation of a historic preservation board.

Since the 1950s, the City of Fort Lauderdale has overseen the operations of the Wingate landfill, situated in the western periphery of the city within



Image: Garbage Disposal Plant, 1901 NW 6th Street. Source: Fort Lauderdale Historical Society

a primarily Black neighborhood. In the 1960s, a new incinerator was erected on the site. The operational procedures of the incinerator entailed the extraction of cooling water from on-site wells, subsequently discharged into an unlined lagoon. By the 1970s, residents in the vicinity began to harbor suspicions regarding a potential correlation between the Wingate facility and community incidences of cancer and other ailments, thereby levying accusations of environmental racism against the City and policy makers. Consequently, in 1978, the landfill operation was terminated.

The late 1980s witnessed significant political transformations within the City of Fort Lauderdale. In 1988, the municipal electoral laws underwent revision, resulting in the establishment of an at-large mayoral position, alongside four commissioners representing distinct geographic districts within the City. Prior to this revision, the City Commission had been predominantly dominated by the more affluent east side. The implementation of the new districting system facilitated a more equitable representation of the western neighborhoods, including the predominantly Black northwest areas. Additionally, during the decade, the city police department intensified efforts to recruit Black police officers. Fort Lauderdale continued its trajectory of enhancing residents' quality of life by attracting new businesses, expanding community services, and augmenting cultural facilities.

Established in 1918 within Fort Lauderdale's Black enclave, the congregation of Mount Olive Baptist Church has been a steadfast presence in the community. A significant milestone in the church's trajectory occurred in 1979 with the dedication of its latest sanctuary, a structure erected at a considerable cost of \$1.2 million (equivalent to approximately \$5.2 million in 2024). Throughout the 1990s, Mount Olive further augmented its community engagement endeavors by expanding its ministries and programs, thereby solidifying its position as one of the preeminent Baptist congregations in South Florida.

Fort Lauderdale's Black community persevered in its endeavor to effectuate enhancements

within the northwest neighborhoods. A notable repercussion of formal segregation was the emergence of a thriving business district along Northwest Fifth Avenue. However, the advent of integration precipitated transformative developments, notably the expansion of Sistrunk Boulevard and the construction of Interstate 95, which catalyzed the decline of the northwest area. By the 1970s and 1980s, the erstwhile bustling business district underwent demolition to accommodate urban renewal projects. Partial amelioration materialized in the late 1990s with the establishment of the Regal Trace apartments, the construction of new residences in the Dorsey-Riverbend neighborhood, and the inauguration of a new post office on Seventh Avenue. Despite these strides, a substantial cohort of longstanding residents opted to relocate to neighboring communities in pursuit of improved housing options.

In 2024, Fort Lauderdale has a total population of 183,412 with an estimated 8,842 people residing within the boundary of this survey area. Majority of the area is residential with a mixture of housing types including both single-family and multi-family



Image: Mount Olive Baptist Church. Source: Fort Lauderdale Historical Society

structures with less than 25 percent owner-occupied. The area is largely populated with 70 percent or more of those who have identified themselves as Black or African-American with most of the survey area. Within the 33311 zip code, which includes this survey area, has a total population of 69,413. The median household income for this area is \$48,020 and has a median age of 34.2.

Sistrunk Boulevard, along the northern boundary of the survey area serves as a primary corridor for commercial activity serving the local population. This area has been improved with medians, wide sidewalks, and a cohesive design for street lighting, street furniture, paving, as well as bus stops. It is also part of a Community Redevelopment Agency (CRA) that has continuously provided funds to make these improvements and to provide funding to local businesses. Over the years these investments have spurred new activity to this area which continues to be a primary hub for locals to meet.

A masterplan that serves the majority of this area, referred to as the Northwest Regional Activity Center (RAC), provides guidelines for new development within the area. New development that has been proposed and constructed in recent years has included a range of types including mixed-use developments, typically with an affordable housing component, community services such as the Y.M.C.A that has recently opened on Sistrunk Boulevard, as well as several restaurants.