

# Walking Around the World:

African American Landscapes and Experience  
in Transylvania County, North Carolina

Michael Ann Williams

Sydney Varajon

## Thanks to:

- North Carolina State Historic Preservation Office (Annie McDonald)
- National Trust for Historic Preservation
- Transylvania County Office of Planning and Development, Joint Historic Preservation Commission (JHPC)

## CLG Sub-Committee

- **Edith Darity**, Transylvania Citizens Improvement Organization and liaison to the Mary C. Jenkins Board
- **Maurice Jones**, Brevard City Council
- **Kierra Jordan**, Brevard College student
- **Nicola Karesh**, Rosenwald community representative and organizer of Morning Glory Inspirations and the African American Storyline Project
- **Linda Gash Locks**, Frog Bottom representative and contact for Glade Creek
- **Rebecca Suddeth**, JHPC member and Curator of the Transylvania County Heritage Museum
- **Marcy Thompson**, JHPC Chair and Local History Librarian
- **Tenesha Tucker**, greater Transylvania County representative



Interviewees:  
L. C. Betsill  
Edith Darity  
Sheila Mooney  
Keith Norman  
Wilma Lewis  
Clarabelle Smith  
Mary Alice Mooney  
Tim Ballard  
Kate Neckolaishen  
Luretha Knox  
Morris Young, Sr.



Phone Interviewees:  
Charles Young  
Clifford Outlaw



Special Thanks to Our Teachers



Mac Morrow  
Patty Stahl  
Edith Darity  
Nicola Karesh  
Wilma Lewis  
Tim Ballard  
Ann Stone Cleveland  
Keith Parker  
Jamie Cantrell

and Our Guides

## Existing Resources

- The Colored People of Transylvania County, 1861-1961, Nathaniel B. Hall
- TCIO, Reflections: TCIO Celebrates 40 Years of Community Service (2000)
- Transylvania Comprehensive Survey materials, 1990-91, Deborah Thompson
- *The Brevard Rosenwald School*, Betty J. Reed
- Morning Glory Inspirations, African American Storyline Project, Nicola Karesh
- Transylvania County Library, Rowell Bosse North Carolina Room, Marcy Thompson
- Documentation of Bailey, Cooper's, Shady Grove, and French Broad cemeteries, Marlu Guest Jones



## I. African Americans Before the Civil War

- People of African descent are known to have entered western North Carolina in 18<sup>th</sup> century
- Slave holders in what became Transylvania County arrived in early 19<sup>th</sup> century
- Transylvania did not become a county until eve of Civil War; Henderson and Buncombe counties had higher percentage of slaves than elsewhere in southwestern North Carolina
- In 1862 there were 447 slaves and 3 free people of color living in Transylvania County



- Most material remains of the lives of African Americans before the Civil War are now in the realm of archaeologists
- Unmarked slave burials also believed to exist at St. Paul's in the Valley, Cooper's, Catheys Creek and Davidson River cemeteries





Johnstone-Hume Slave Quarters (Raxter House)





## II. Creation of African American Institutions, 1865-1910

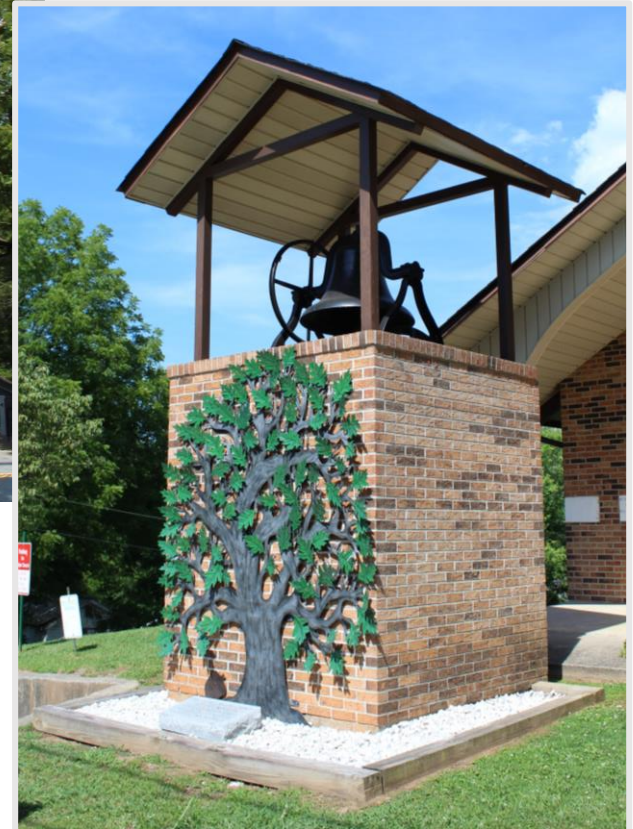
After the Civil War, African American communities developed particularly in the French Broad and Glade Creek areas and at Shady Grove

# Churches



French Broad





Bethel



Glade Creek





Bethel A



# Cemeteries



French Broad



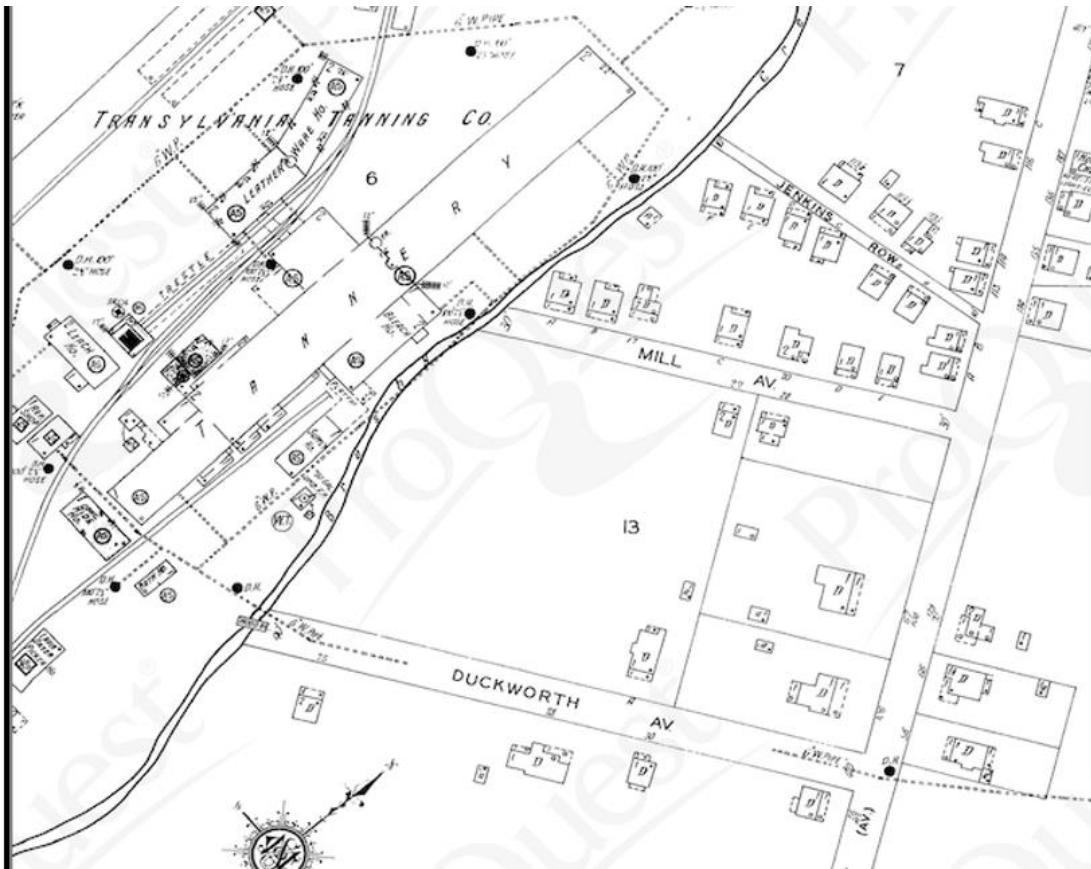
Coopers

Also Shady Grove  
and Baileys





Davidson River Cemetery

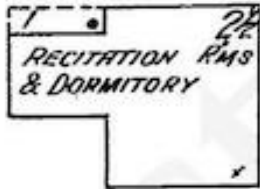


- Building of Industrial School and Rosenwald School
- Construction of tannery in Brevard

### III. Industrialization and the Growth of African American Communities, 1910-1963



**COLORED INDUSTRIAL SCHOOL**  
HEAT: STOVES - LIGHT: OIL



Located 1/2 Mile W. of Court Ho.

# Industrial School

Brevard News, October 1909

*"a 3-story building has grown up among us unheralded and almost unknown to our citizens." 40x50 ft. 3 stories*

*"another and larger building for boys is contemplated and among the industries to be taught is the making of brick."*

*"J. H. Johnston, M. D., a colored physician from Knoxville, Tenn., is occupying with his family the residence built by Jim Aiken on Oak Lawn avenue. Johnston's particular business here is to build and open the colored industrial school now under construction in West Brevard."*

# Julius Rosenwald

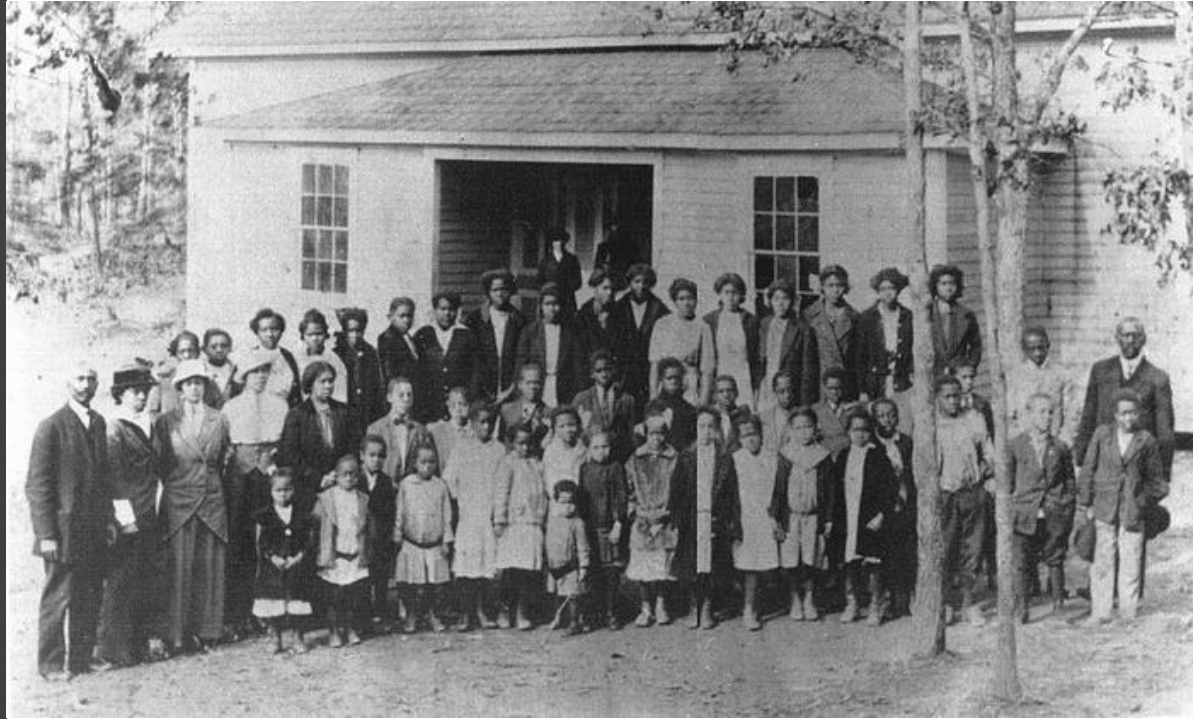
Inspired by Booker T. Washington, Rosenwald, the President of Sears Roebuck, established a fund in 1913, to provide seed money for the building of African American elementary schools in the South.

The Brevard Rosenwald School is listed in the Fisk University records as being built in 1920-21, “under Tuskegee.”

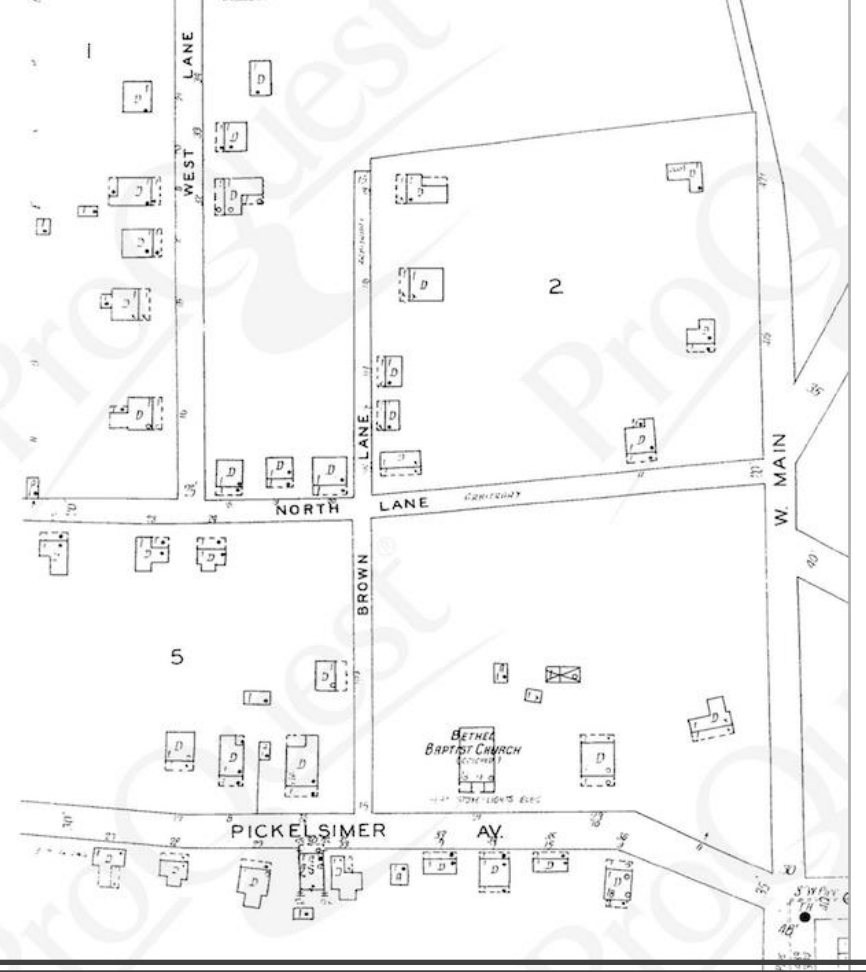
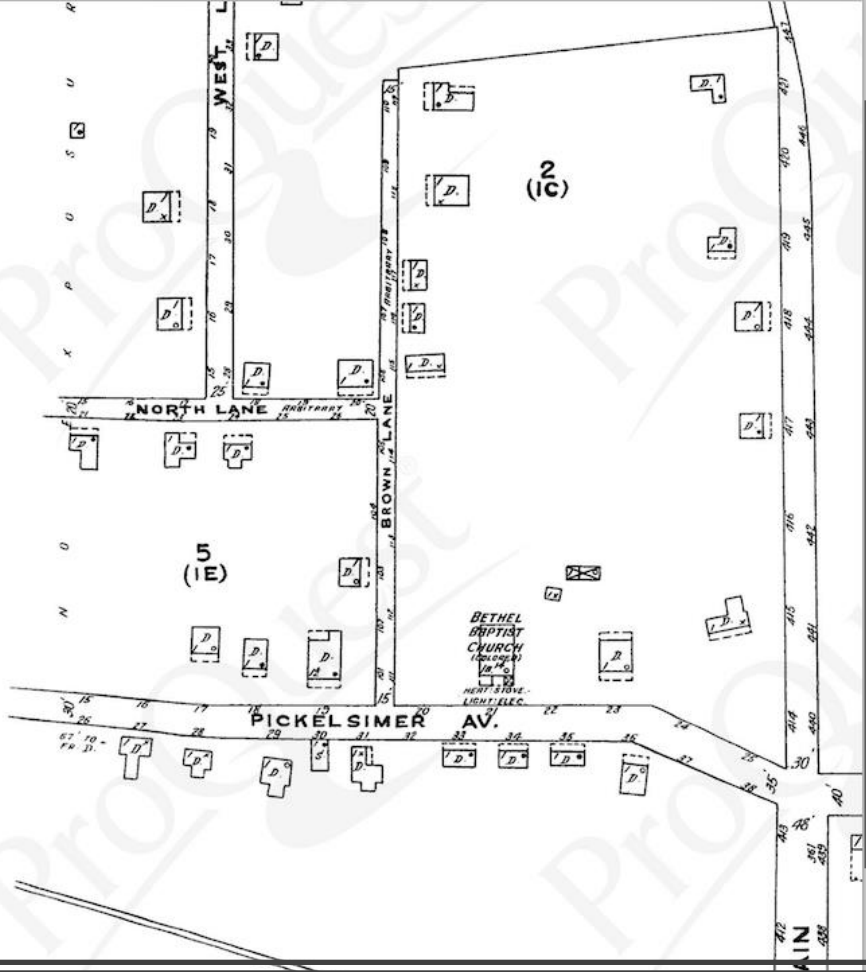


*“The Rosenwald schools stand as a “testament to the struggle, perseverance, and grassroots efforts of the state’s African American communities for equality in and through education, as well as for the successful collaborative and interracial efforts of philanthropists and communities in helping to facilitate one of the largest, most successful education initiative for African Americans ever realized.”*

North Carolina Multiple  
Property Nomination Form







Growth of Community: Rosenwald  
(1924-1931)



Jip Mills Store

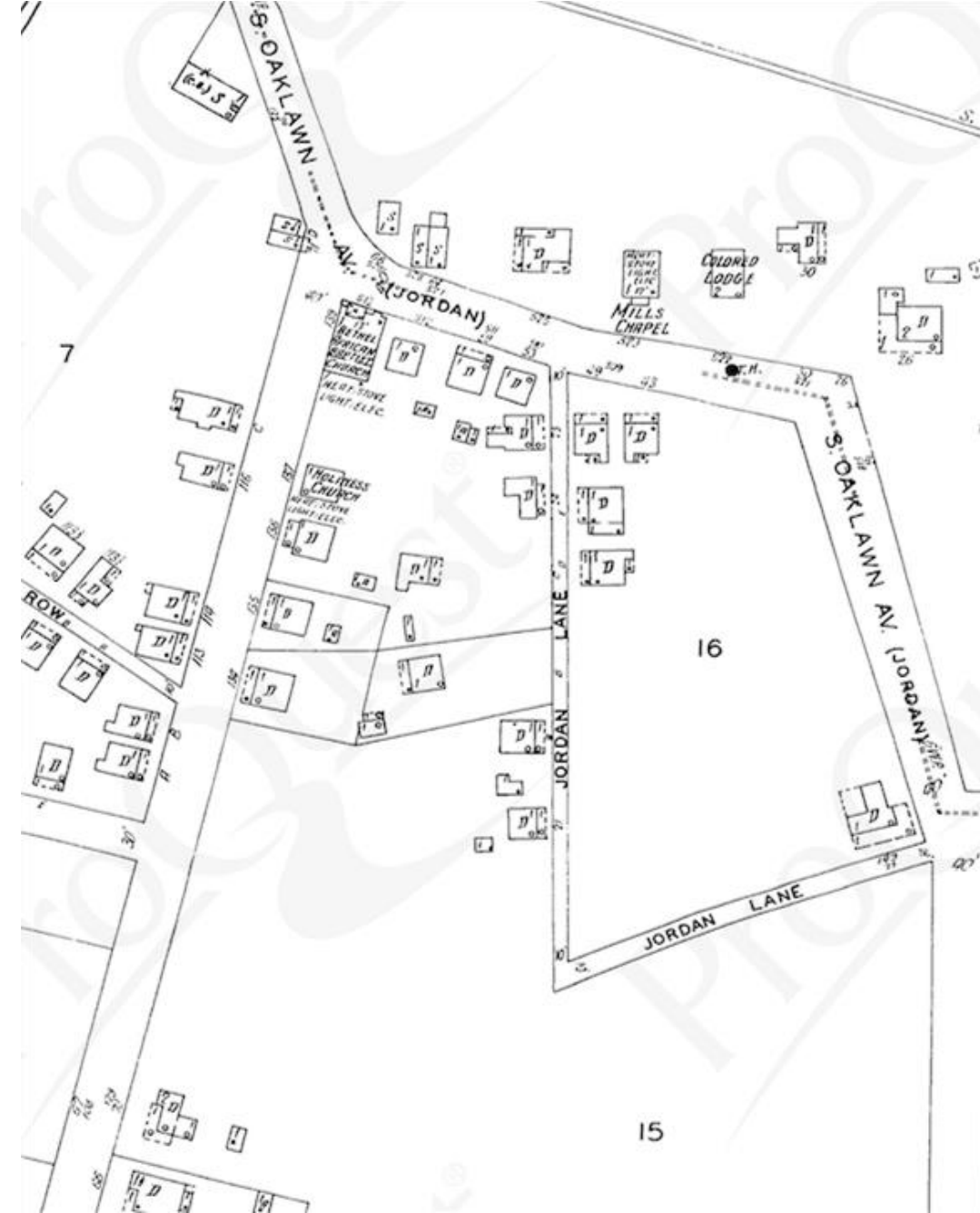




Jip Mills House



Tom Wynn House



Transylvania Tannery

1931

The tannery actively recruited African Americans from South Carolina and Georgia in 1920s



Victor and  
Lucinda Betsill  
House



Thomas and  
Eugenia Kilgore  
House

# “Greasy Corner”

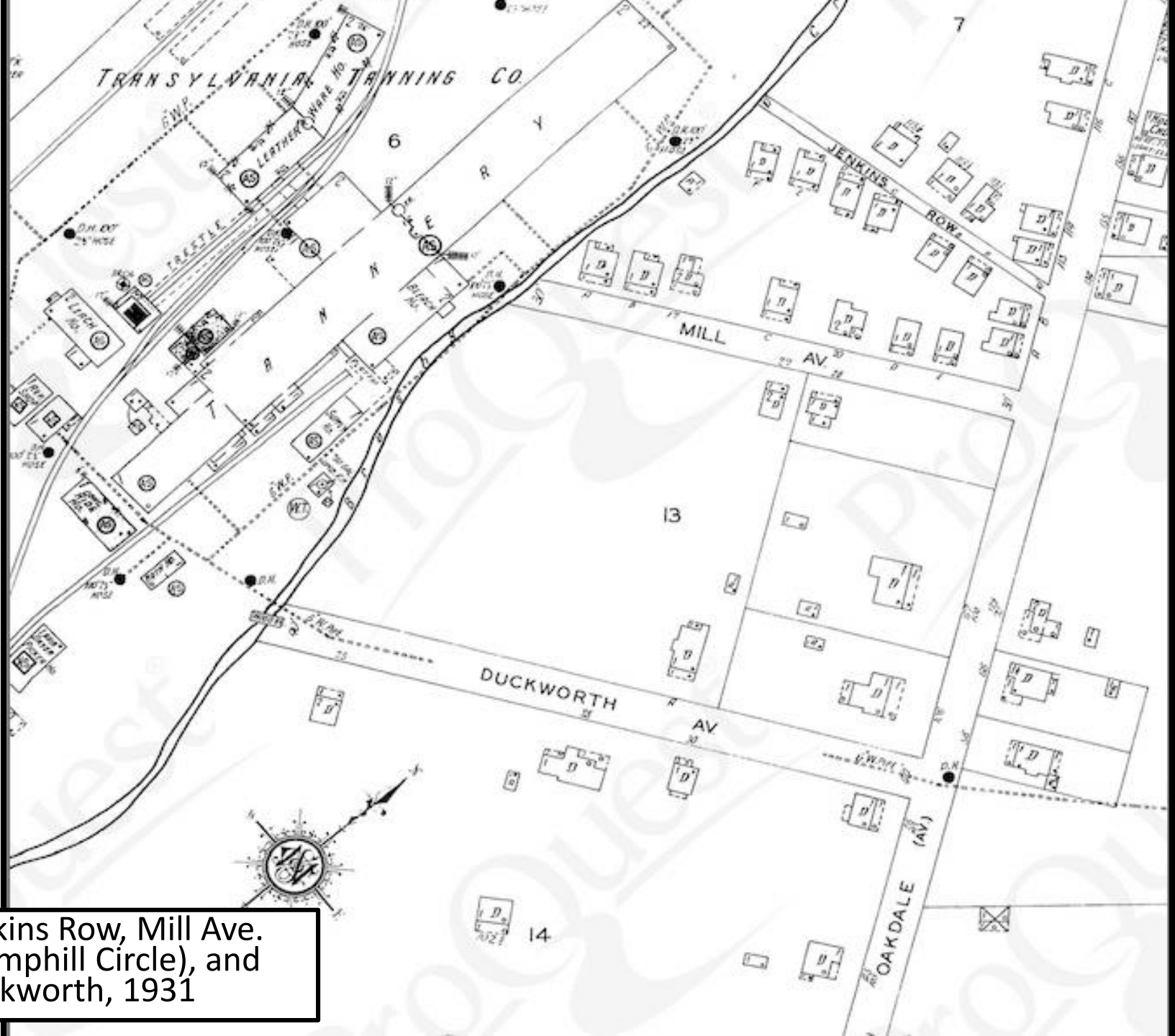
*“Greasy Corner was where all the nightlife occurred. That’s where the cafes, the stores, and the juke joints, if you were to call, exist. And also, I believe, Bethel A was right in the middle of it. As to why they were called those sections, I can’t think of a better name because when you think, had you lived there and someone said, “Goose Hollow,” you knew exactly where it was. The Flats, the same. Greasy Corner, the same.”*

—Clifford Outlaw

*Because all I ever knew is that it was Greasy Corner, and I knew it was the hangout spot for black people. Because people used to come on the weekends, they would be down there like this [dance moves]. People come from Hendersonville, Asheville, South Carolina. And then on Thursdays, you know, they had a lot of people that came in the summer that came here who was maids and butlers. Well, most all of them had Thursdays off, so Thursdays on Greasy Corner was jumping.*

—L. C. Betsill





Jenkins Row, Mill Ave.  
(Hemphill Circle), and  
Duckworth, 1931

# Housing near the Tannery



Hattie Sanders House



"Mama Rose" Wilkes House

Howell House  
and the site of  
the footbridge  
to the tannery





*The tannery days, that's when I was born in that house, and we stayed there until my dad died. Mother received some social security from him, and we decided to build a Jim Walter home. . . . So, there was some land for sale on Hemphill Circle, and mother said, "Well, we need to get that information." And I said, "I'll go get it right now." So, I went and got the information and we called the gentleman, and he sold the land to us, and we put us a home up. And we were so happy about that. She put a basement on it, and then the home on top of it, so that gave us enough bedrooms for us to all have our own bedroom for the first time in our lives. When we were younger, we slept all in the same bedroom-- my three brothers in one bed and my sister and I in the other bed. . . So, then we moved up the hill. We carried our furniture from down the creek bank to the next house. That's how close it was. —Mary Alice Mooney*





Architecture of Domestic Service

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Cedar Mountain



## Beckwith-Hanahan House and Quarters





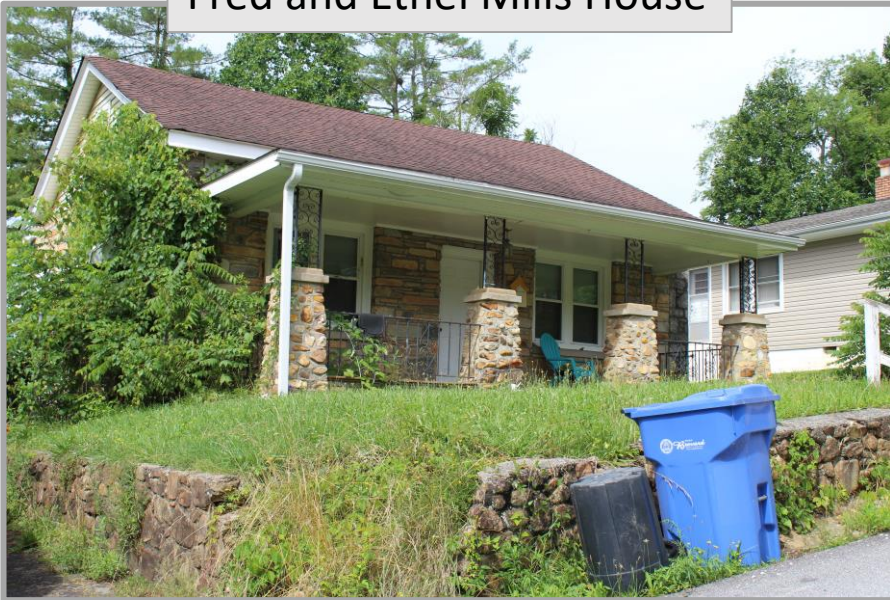
While-A-Way servant's quarters (seasonal home of Lee Freeman)



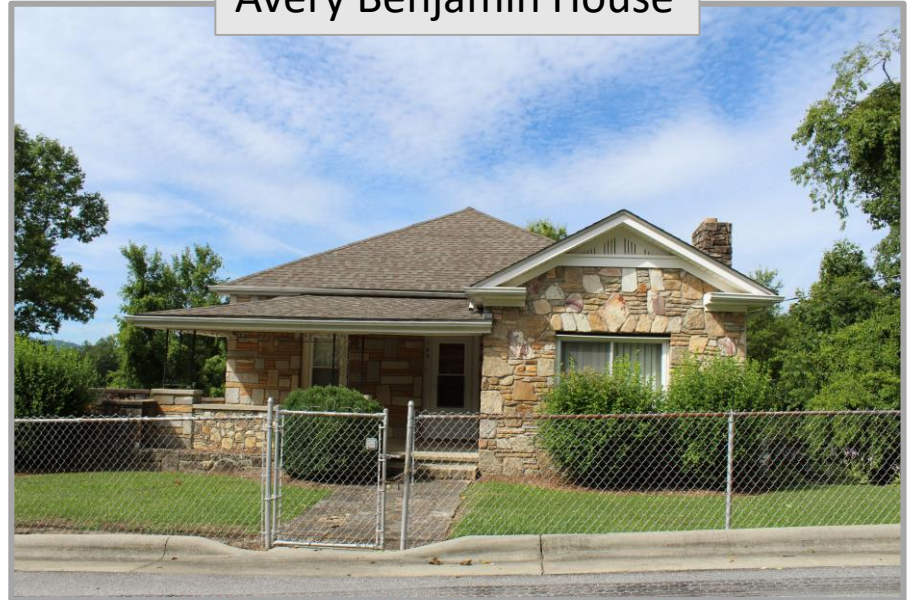
# Gathering Rock



Fred and Ethel Mills House



Avery Benjamin House



## African American Building Arts

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# Fred Mills

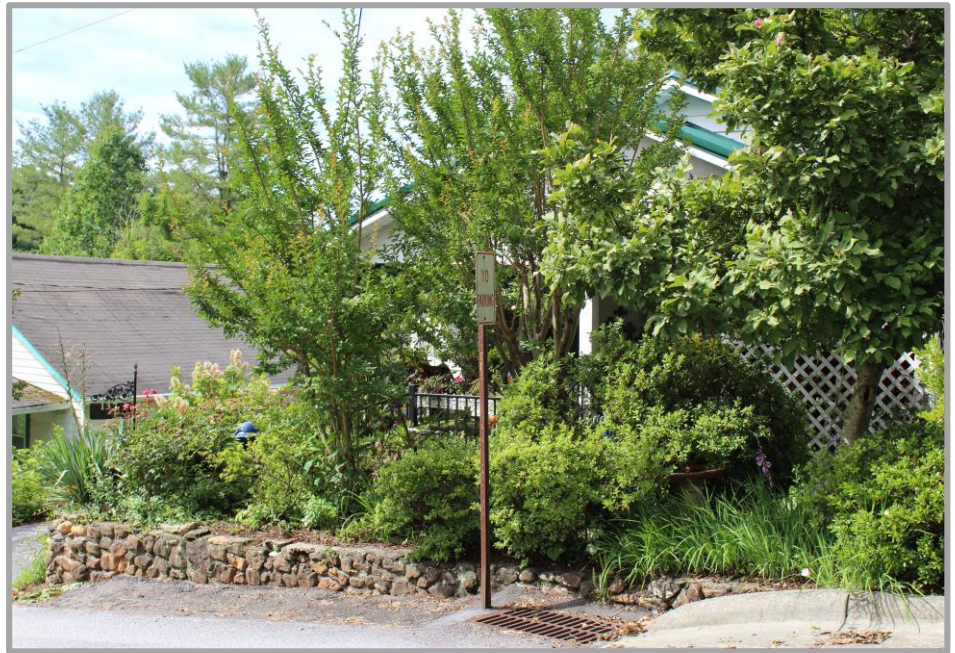


Fred Mills  
working with the  
Wright Brothers



Silversteen Park

# Landscape masonry



Fred Mills with Quillie Glaze



Mabel and Condrey Sharp Boardinghouse steps



# Bricklaying

*And he wanted to see you doing something. His thing was about neatness. He told me one day, he said, "Son," he said, "Listen. When you lay a brick," he said, "just don't lay it just to be laying it." He said, "Lay it with neatness," and he said, "Reason being you got less to clean up afterwards." And he said, "Lay it like it should be laying." He said, "When you look down a wall, you don't want to see a snake" . . . He said, "That'll speak for you." He said, "People will call you back, you know. See you're doing good work." --Morris Young*

*You didn't know whether or not you were going to go to college or not, and they had a course in brick masonry. And it seemed like all of the kids, or all the male boys from Brevard, were required to go to. . . And yes, I took masonry, and entered a state contest in laying bricks. Somewhere around here I have a trowel that was given to me as a prize, but the best mason, say, out of our class, was Max Robinson. . . He could lay some rocks, lay some bricks. Another good one was David Ballard out of Glade Creek. He could lay some rocks and bricks. Very good. --Clifford Outlaw*

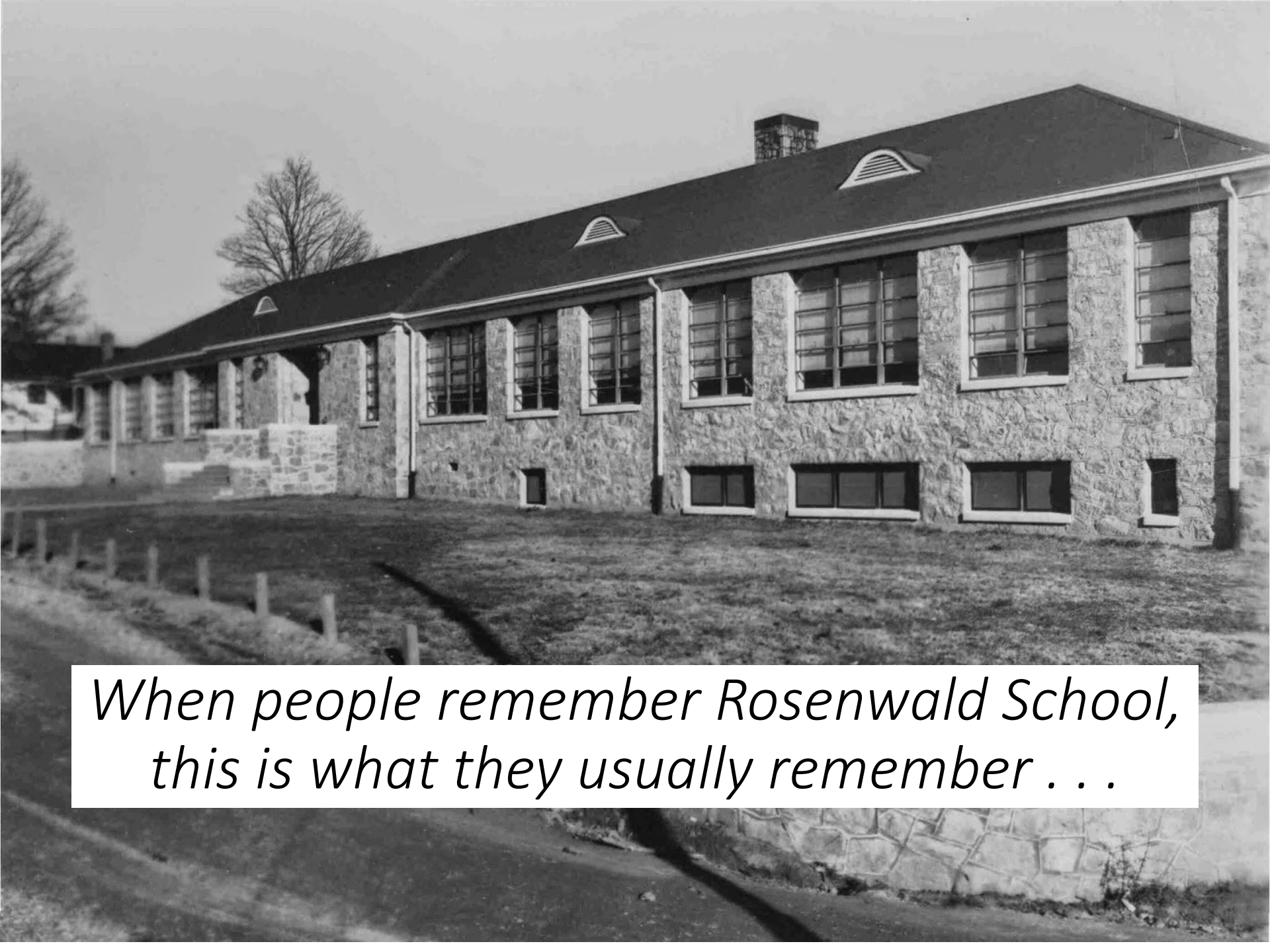
# Changes to the Rosenwald School



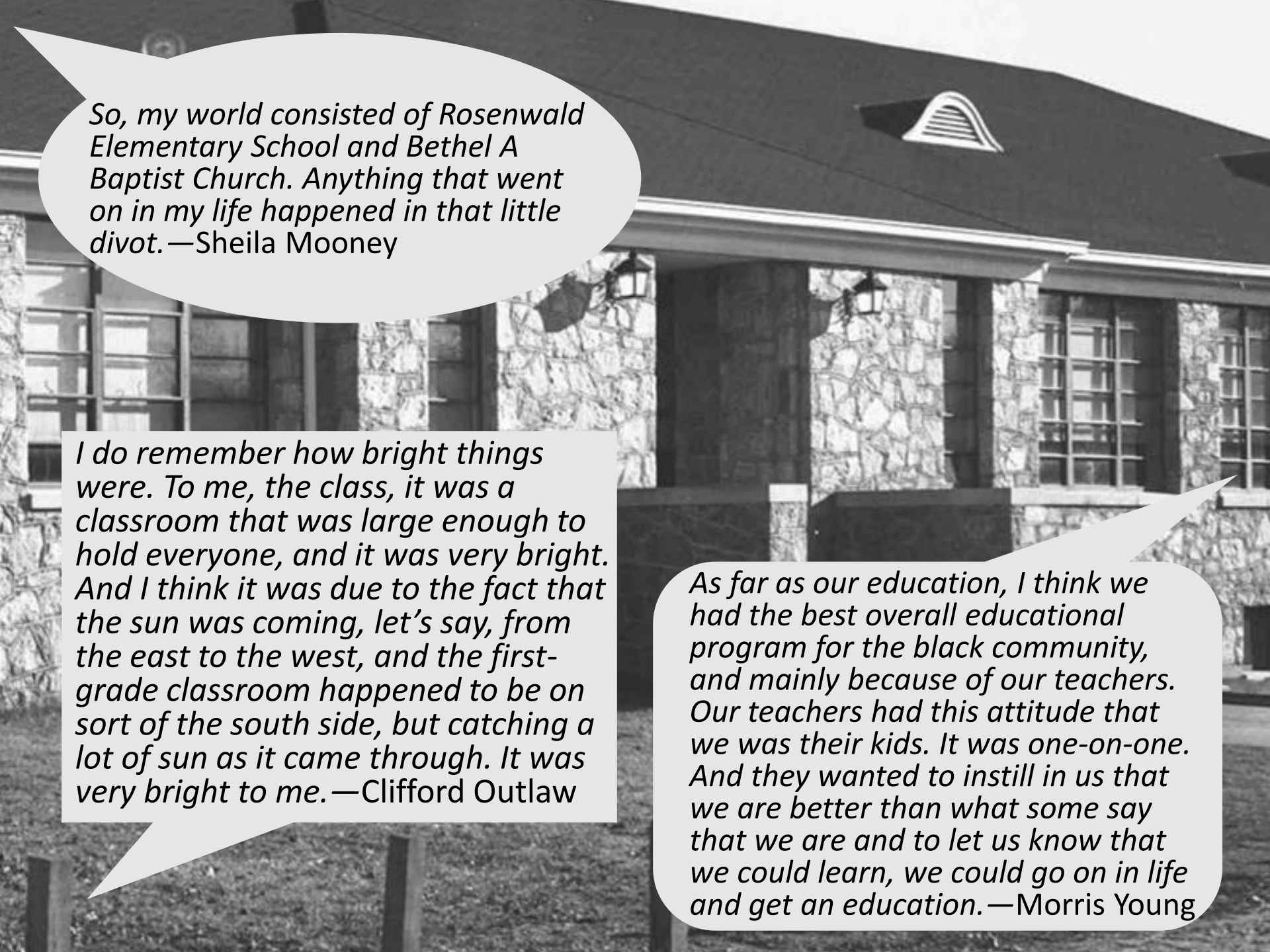
- In 1941, the original Rosenwald School was consumed by fire.
- For about seven years, African American students met at Bethel, Bethel A, and Mills Chapel AME Church



- The new stone school opened in 1948. Although named "Rosenwald," it was technically not a Rosenwald School



*When people remember Rosenwald School,  
this is what they usually remember . . .*



*So, my world consisted of Rosenwald Elementary School and Bethel A Baptist Church. Anything that went on in my life happened in that little divot. —Sheila Mooney*

*I do remember how bright things were. To me, the class, it was a classroom that was large enough to hold everyone, and it was very bright. And I think it was due to the fact that the sun was coming, let's say, from the east to the west, and the first-grade classroom happened to be on sort of the south side, but catching a lot of sun as it came through. It was very bright to me. —Clifford Outlaw*

*As far as our education, I think we had the best overall educational program for the black community, and mainly because of our teachers. Our teachers had this attitude that we was their kids. It was one-on-one. And they wanted to instill in us that we are better than what some say that we are and to let us know that we could learn, we could go on in life and get an education. —Morris Young*

After Rosenwald, there were no more options for African American students in Transylvania County.

*We went to Rosenwald from grades one to eight, and suddenly, when you're in eighth grade, you have this real decision to make. Or your parents were making it for you. And you said, "Well, you know, am I going to school at the high school?" And you know you're young, your spirit is young, because you're not coming from a big city where you're used to jumping in a car or bus and just going on your own. So, you would have to wait for their decision for you for where you're going to go.*

*There's a school in Asheville called Allen Home School, at that time for girls. . . But you either went to Allen Home, which was a private school, or you had to be bussed to Ninth Avenue, which was 21 miles away, 42 miles a day. Or you would go off to like Ohio, where JoAnn went to school; Robert Kilgore went to Wilmington, I think. L. C. [Betsill] and some of the others went to Lincoln Academy. So, there were several places that a lot of the students went down through the years, you know, just to complete their high school education.*

*Now the majority of the children, if you couldn't afford to go to a private school or had someone that lived up north or somewhere so you could go and stay with them maybe for 6 months or the school year, then we all had to go to Ninth Avenue. Some of the kids wanted to go, other kids didn't.*

***But really, most of us didn't have a choice, you know. We wanted to finish school. —Edith Darity***

# Progress and Loss

*“I do not have a problem with celebrating Ninth Avenue, but I do have a problem celebrating the idea behind Ninth Avenue.”*

—Alfred Benjamin, 2001

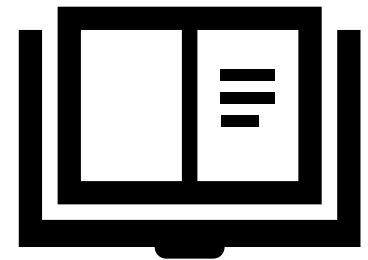
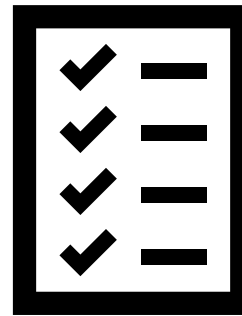
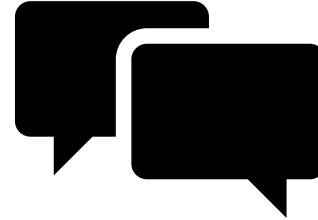
*“they say we’ve got a historical thing which is that chimney down there. I don’t find that nothing to me, except that’s got bats and rats coming out of it. . . .Our historical thing was the community center and our school. Our little area that we had with the little stores and stuff.”*

—Luretha Knox, 2019



# Documentation

- Oral histories and transcriptions
- Documentation of 86 new properties
- Updated 15 previously documented properties
- Submitted a 98-page report



What do you want  
people to know  
about your  
community?

*“And yes, life was safe. They protected us from all the misery that was actually going on. Like, we weren’t allowed to go to town without an adult to see the “coloreds only” or “whites only” and certain places we couldn’t go. So, growing up poor, safe, and protected. That’s it.”*

–Sheila Gardin Mooney



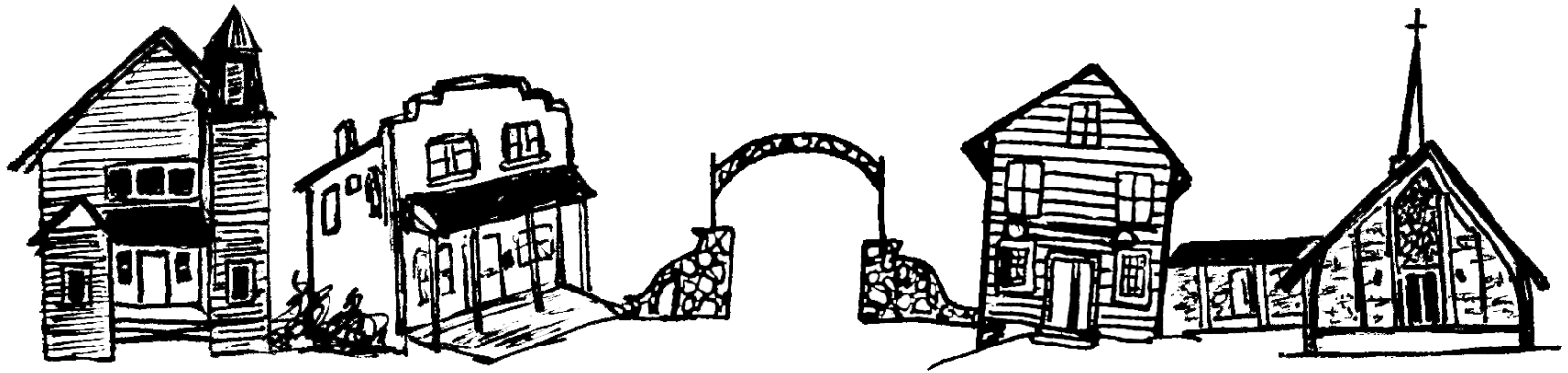


What do you want  
people to know  
about your  
community?

*“That we never give up. We never, you may knock us down, but still we rise. That we fight and we may have setbacks, but we’re always moving forward. And we intend to win whatever battle we undertake. And I can’t say that any battle we have undertaken has been anything but good.”*

–Mary Alice Mooney





Thank you!