

MAY WE ALL  
REMEMBER WELL

VOLUME II

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EDITED BY ROBERT S. BRUNK

Sociologists are fond of studying social cohesion, especially the values and behaviors which bind people together in the midst of economic hardship. This study examines the lives of families who lived in Stumptown, a small neighborhood of black people who lived adjacent to Pearson Drive in Asheville from the 1880s to about 1970. In the last half of the 20th century, the lives of many poor black people in Asheville revolved around Federal programs and agencies; Public Housing, Urban Renewal, Public Welfare, Public Health, and Model Cities. Urban renewal changed the physical landscape of Stumptown in the late 1960s. The leaning houses, dirt yards, and streets without sidewalks and curbs were replaced with tennis and basketball courts, a baseball field and a community center. This study, based on interviews conducted by the author, documents the vibrant social structure of this community which now exists only in the memories of a few individuals. —R.B.

On fewer than 30 acres of sloping ground where the Montford Community Center now stands in Asheville, North Carolina, there was formerly a community known as “Stumptown.” This strong church-oriented community, nestled in a jog in the boundaries of Riverside Cemetery, was home for as many as 250 families and created a legacy still felt in the larger community today.

The area was given the name “Stumptown” for the tree stumps that remained after the land was first cleared. This area, bounded by the cemetery to the west and the woods between the homes and Pearson Drive to the east, housed black residents from the 1880s to the 1970s. The children and grandchildren of early residents now gather each month in the community center, a portion of which stands on property where once there were houses and apartment buildings, gardens and chickens, and children playing games in the unpaved streets. When former residents stand in front of the community center today and look across the parking lot and tennis courts, they recall a neighborhood from a special time and place that exists only in their memories.

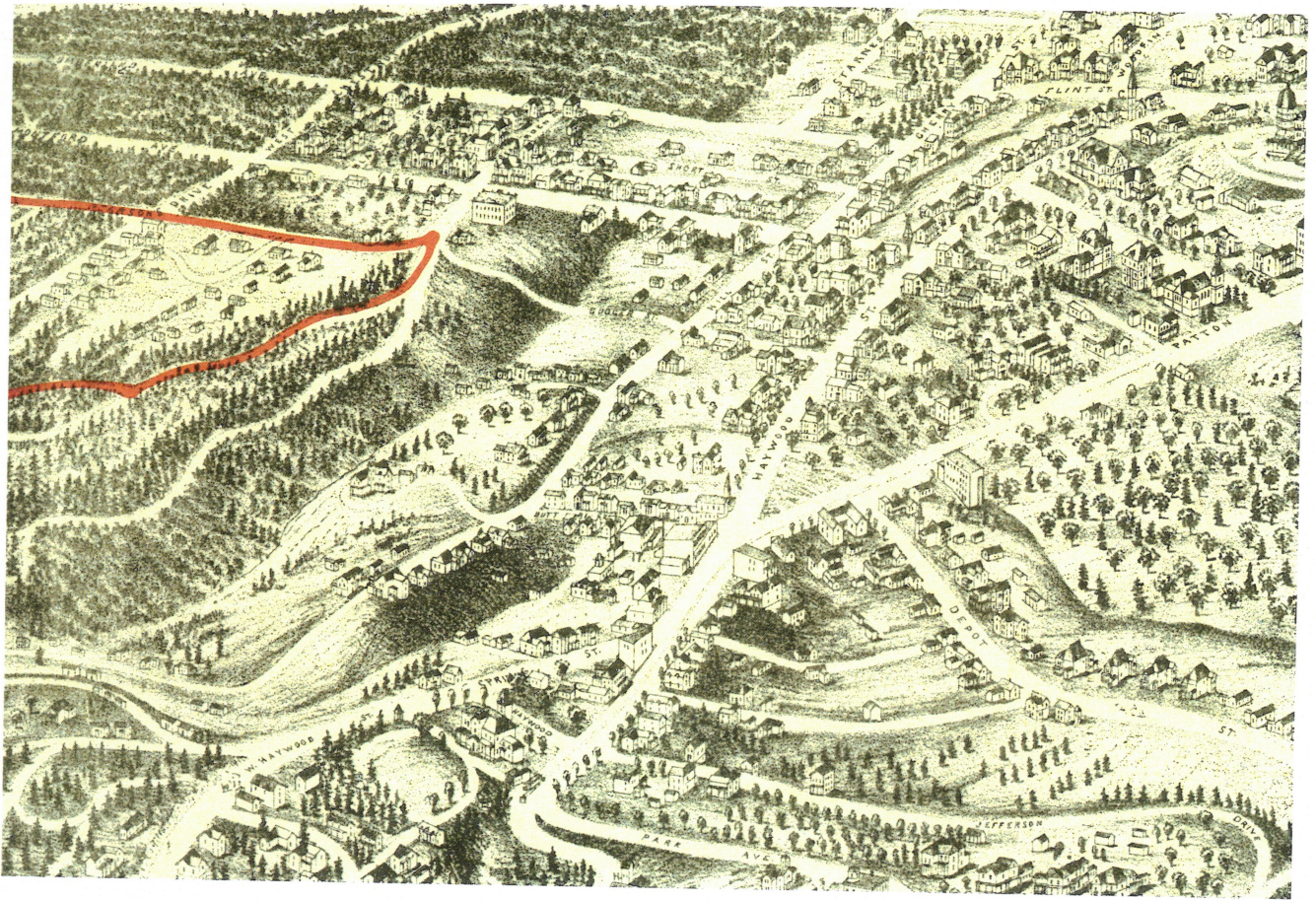
# Growing Up In Stumptown

By Pat Fitzpatrick



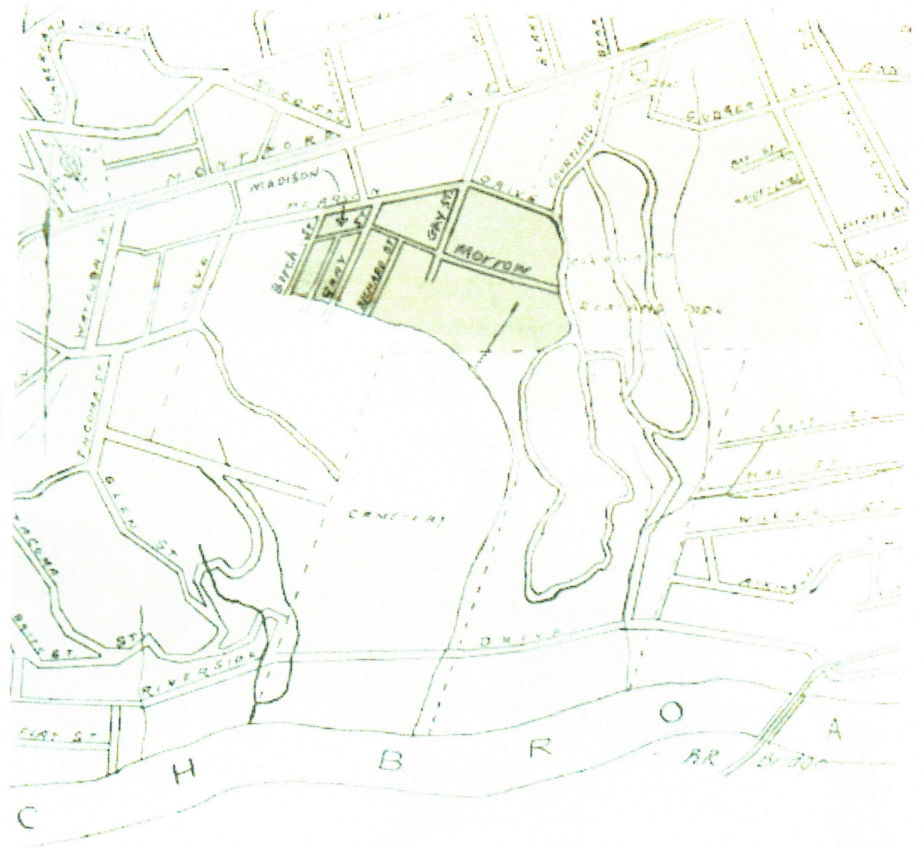
Top. This view taken in March, 2000 from the rear of the community center shows the ball field in the center and Riverside Cemetery in the distance. The lights are in “the hollow,” “Red Hill” and the former coal yard rose between the ball park and the cross street. The cross street through the center of the photo is old Morrow Street. (Photo, the author.)

Bottom. Betty Jean Dozer poses on Morrow Street in 1958. The house in the upper left is approximately the site of the new community center, and the house in the upper right is located near the site of the new tennis courts. (Courtesy, Phyllis Sherrill.)



The Stumptown community existed in a small area, about 30 acres. These two early maps indicate the relation of the small black neighborhood to the city of Asheville. The Montford area to the east of Stumptown developed as a suburb of Asheville in 1890-1910. Many Stumptown residents worked at the Battery Park Hotel (slightly to the southeast) and other nearby hotels, in affluent homes in the Montford area, and at the Riverside Cemetery to the west. The boundaries of Stumptown (shown in red) were Pearson Drive to the east, Courtland Drive to the south, Birch Street to the north and Riverside Cemetery to the west. Above. This "Birdseye View of Asheville 1891" shows several rows of homes in the south area of Stumptown. (Private collection).

Right. This later 1916 "Map of the City of Asheville, North Carolina," indicates a more developed neighborhood, but several streets and their names are omitted. (Courtesy, North Carolina Collection, Pack Memorial Public Library, Asheville, North Carolina.)



*We were happy. There was no fear, no enemies. We were all like one family. If you did something bad, another mother might give you a spanking and you knew you would get another one when you got home. You had to be on the porch when the street light went on or be yelling, "I'm coming, Mama."... There were 200 to 250 families. Many had big families and most had two parents. Many lived in "shotgun" apartment buildings with four units to a building. You could see the back door when you entered the front door. We had a three-room house. If anybody needed help, neighbors just pitched in. Nobody needed to ask them. They all got together and worked things out, whatever happened. First, we were working together to get our streets paved.... My grandfather was head deacon of the church and my grandmother, the mother of the church. There was always a hubbub of activity around the church—food on the grounds, singing. We would go to church two or three times on Sunday and also go during the week. Church is a whole other subject. Church played a big part in our lives as well as the children's recreation. Everything revolved around church, school and family. My grand-daddy would sponsor a trip for us every year to Charlotte to what's now Carowinds. That's where we could take our boyfriends and get to sit with them on the bus. And we'd have quartet singing, and we had dinner on the grounds some Sundays. Everybody would bring something and we ate downstairs. Those were the good wholesome fun things.*

— Phyllis Sherrill  
(1998), former Stumptown Resident

Although there may have been blacks in Eastern North Carolina in the late 17th century, there were few blacks in Western North Carolina until the late 18th century and early 19th century. Many large farms and businesses in Western North Carolina had slaves during the early and mid 19th century. James Alexander who built a hotel, tanyard, wagon factory and ferry on the Buncombe Turnpike in the 1830s had many slaves he housed in his "Negro Quarters."<sup>1</sup> The Patton family, one of the largest slave-owning families in Asheville owned 78 slaves in 1860.<sup>2</sup> The coming of the railroad in the 1880s and the growing tourist

industry also prompted black people to move to the mountains in the late 19th century.<sup>3</sup>

Discrimination against blacks by legal sanction and traditional mores persisted throughout the 19th and 20th centuries until the Civil Rights Legislation of the 1960s. Discrimination in Asheville was similar to restrictions in other North Carolina communities including segregated schools and public buildings with separate drinking and bathroom facilities. Asheville's many restaurants and hotels served only white or black patrons. In train stations black passengers had separate waiting rooms.<sup>4</sup>

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"WE WERE HAPPY. THERE WAS NO FEAR, NO ENEMIES.  
WE WERE ALL LIKE ONE FAMILY."

By 1910, the city's population was over 18,000 of which over 5,000 were black.<sup>5</sup> Blacks lived in segregated neighborhoods just southeast of downtown (Eagle Street), south of downtown (South French Broad), West Asheville (Burton Street) and just west of Montford Avenue (Stumptown). Substandard and inexpensive housing prevailed in these black neighborhoods.<sup>6</sup>

The death rate for blacks in North Carolina in the late 1880s was more than double the rate for whites. The poor living conditions of the majority of blacks in Asheville, insufficient food and clothing, lack of firewood, inadequate health care, and very cold winters account for the high death rate. Acute bronchitis, pneumonia, and measles were the main causes of death among the blacks in Asheville during the late 1880s.<sup>7</sup>

Many black residents worked for Asheville's wealthier home and business owners who were mostly white. Although there were some black businesses and offices, most were "crowded into dilapidated buildings in the Eagle Street area." And a few black residents "owned a small percentage of the properties within their neighborhoods."<sup>8</sup> In 1896, there were nine black churches in the downtown area and a black newspaper, the *Colored Enterprise*,



*Many blacks moved to Asheville to work in the resorts and hotels which were built in the area following the completion of the railroad to Asheville in the early 1880s. Seen in this undated photo are black waiters, bellboys and other employees of the Grove Park Inn soon after it opened in 1912. (Courtesy, The Heritage of Black Highlanders Collection, Ramsey Library Special Collections, University of North Carolina at Asheville.)*

located on S. Court Square.<sup>9</sup>

The majority of employed blacks in the 1880s worked in the fields of domestic and personal service, and fell into six general categories of occupation "...barbers and hairdressers, laborers, laundresses, nurses and midwives, restaurant and saloon keepers and servants."<sup>10</sup> Early Asheville city directories listed the black population separate from the white population and indicate specific jobs blacks held at the turn of the century. They provided services in hotels and restaurants, schools, hospitals and churches, dairies, nurseries and grocers, the tannery and the coal yard, the Vanderbilt estate, the railroad, the cemetery and the newspaper. Men listed their skills as laborer, gravedigger, office boy, hosteler, elevator boy, driver, stonecutter, musician, teacher, barber, blacksmith, janitor, grocer, yard man, coachman, harness maker, woodworker, carpenter,

brick mason, pastor, waiter, butcher, bell-boy/man, teamster, drayman, fireman for a specific business or inn, shoemaker, undertaker, painter, plasterer, furniture repairman, horse trader, chiropodist, brakeman, railroad station hand, newspaper pressman and bootblack. Although a few black women worked as nurses and teachers, and in businesses as cooks, waitresses, chambermaids or housekeepers, laundress or seamstress, most worked in the homes of white families and listed their occupation as house girl, servant, waiting maid or cook.<sup>11</sup>

*My mother did domestic work. A lot of it was right up here on Montford. She worked for those people for years. They died out, she worked for their sister, and she worked for a lady right across from the police place out here. And then she worked at Highland Hospital. At that time, I remember rent being about \$4 a*

month for one of those apartments. Besides 10 [Morrow] where we lived, we also lived at 4 Morrow. I went to work at Highlands. I also worked for Dr. Carroll. He was one of the founders of Highland Hospital and I worked in their home. They lived out on Midland Drive. So I worked out there as a downstairs maid and as a waitress. I went to school in the morning and then came back home and went back in the afternoon. I would serve dinner and that sort of stuff. And I worked at Highland Hospital and the department store, but I'd always go back to Ms. Carroll. After I came out of the service, I went back to her. I quit that because I hated to iron.

— Geraldine Hill  
(1999), former Stumptown resident

My grandmother worked as a maid up on Lakeshore Drive, for a doctor. She worked for them for years as a cook. I haven't seen anybody make homemade cakes like she did. Oh, it was the most delicious thing you ever put in your mouth. She cooked. That was all she did. Wasn't a housekeeper worth 15 cents.... My grandfather worked for the City of Asheville. But he worked building Biltmore Forest, Biltmore House out there. He dug the roads and stuff for 25 cents a week. A week! He found out that wasn't what he wanted to do and then he applied for a city job as a maintenance person, a garbage person, or whatever. And he started out in the maintenance department and then he moved up to elevator operator. So he retired from the city as an elevator operator, but in the meantime he was perhaps among the first minority entrepreneurs in the city starting with his own little sweet shop in a room next to his house in Stumptown. And he told me he didn't go any further than the fourth grade, but if you would talk to him you would think he was a college graduate.... My father applied for the service. He didn't pass, they said his heart was funny or something. At that time, if you didn't pass the physical, then you had to do something here to help the war effort. And he was assigned to a defense plant in New Haven, Connecticut. So he went there, he was up there maybe eight or nine months. I still have letters that he wrote to my mom. It was just amazing. And letters she wrote to him. So he was up there and sent for us. We stayed maybe two or three years. When we came back here to live he worked at a flower shop,

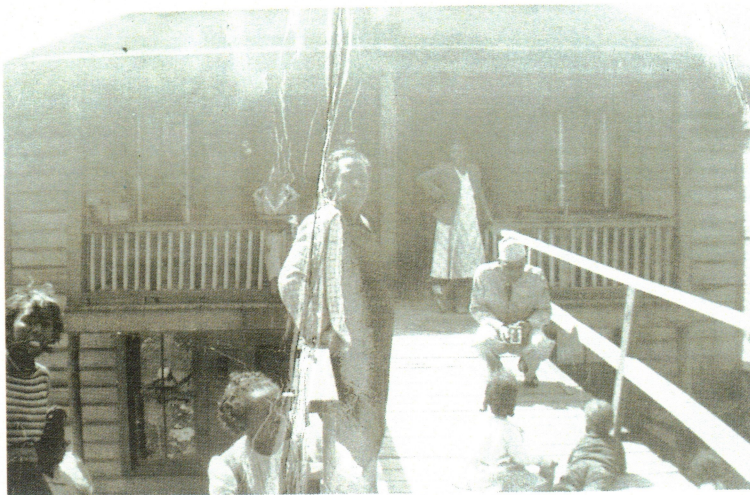
Whitehead's Flower Shop in the Flatiron Building, right there at Wall Street, right there where it's a jewelry store now. He worked there for about 16 or 18 years, and then he worked for Southern Railway for years. Then when they discontinued the railroad service here, they wanted him to move to Greensboro, Washington, or Nashville, Tennessee, I believe. He didn't want to go anyplace.

— Phyllis Sherrill



Mr. and Mrs. Wells and their daughter Audrey planting in their garden in the "flats" where the community center now stands. Photo dates from the early 1940s. (Courtesy, Phyllis Sherrill.)

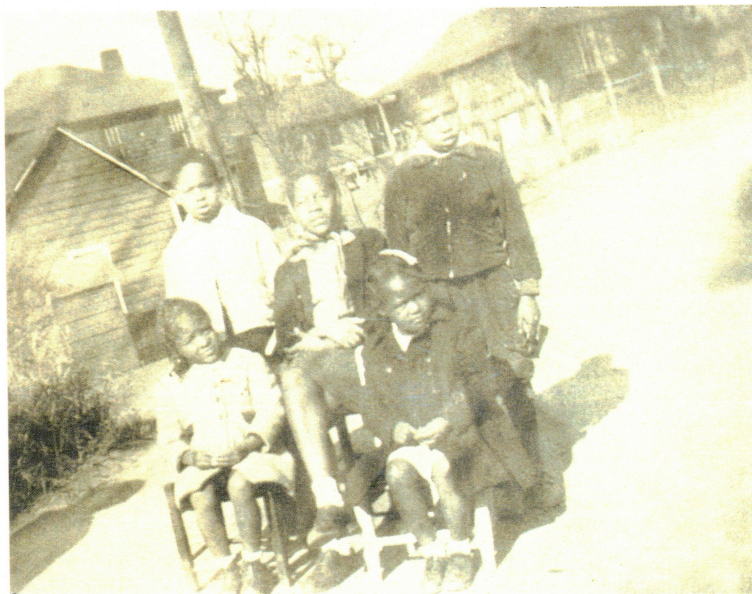
# “THE OLD STOMPING GROUND — STUMPTOWN”



## 20's, 30's, and 40's

Born, reared here in northwest Asheville, maybe considered centrally located; bordered by Pearson Drive, Birch Street, Riverside Cemetery, and Courtland Avenue.

Memorable landmarks at the time were “The Red Hill” between Madison Street and Morrow Street and “The Hollow” at the end of the neighborhood bordered by Riverside Cemetery where caucasian



*(Photos, courtesy Geraldine Hill (above, 1952) and Phyllis Sherrill (below, mid-1940s.)*

neighbors pastured their cows and where the kids played ball. Also, “Campbell Woods” across Courtland Avenue where we took a shortcut to school (old Hill Street) in good weather. Otherwise, we had to pass the nearest school all white Randolph (formerly Montford School) to reach our school.

There were the neighborhood grocery stores - Pack on Pearson Drive; Jack Pack Book Store on Gray Street; Morrow Street Corner Store; Mr. Howard's Store on Gay Street; and don't forget Shigley's Drug Store and the grocery store next door on Montford Avenue.

Neighborhood churches - Welfare on Madison Street; Rev. Mason's church on Gray Street; and Elder Perkins church on Morrow Street. Other Ministers - Rev. Mills and Rev. Beasley went out of the neighborhood to their churches and some neighbors went out of the neighborhood to church.

Gray Street was the first to be paved (we skated there on the hill). All others were unpaved. Few people had telephones; very few refrigerators (most families had ice boxes); not all families had electricity anyway. Coal or wood stoves to heat and cook; tin tubs for baths; flat irons to iron; almost no cars - we depended on the old square styled buses with \$.06 fares for transportation (always sitting in the back).

We made it regardless - men and some women worked; all children went to school when time came (all black schools). Everyone (children) could read, write, and do arithmetic. Teachers, neighbors, and any adult could discipline us. There were few problems. After elementary school (Hill Street), we went to Asheland Avenue School across town on Asheland Avenue for grades 7 & 8, then to Stephens-Lee High School where most graduated, matured, married, and reared families. Some went on to higher education, worked, and survived.

## 50's, 60's, and 70's

There was little or no mass public assistance, no public housing, but we made it.

After streets were paved, more cars, and telephones, came better homes with other modern

conveniences. Children still went to segregated schools until the mid 60's when things began to change. Many moved north, others moved out of the neighborhood to other parts of town.

The city began acquiring land from Pearson Drive to Riverside Cemetery, bordered by Gay Street and Jersey Street to build Montford Center with all of the facilities there - tennis courts, playground, ballfield, amphi-theater, etc. Schools were desegregated.

#### 80's and 90's

Only memories afford one a vision of where they once lived. Some areas of Gray Street, Richie Street, Madison and Gay Streets still exist. Courtland and Pearson Drive are almost predominately Black.

The trusted and long standing Welfare Church is still there and active. All of the neighborhood stores are gone. A corner store/drug store now exists on Montford Avenue where the drug store was and adjacent to that is a laundromat and the Community Watch Police location.

Our old Hill Street School on the Hill gone, replaced by a new facility (50's) and now has become another named Isaac Dickson housing grades kindergarten through 5th (integrated from all over Asheville). Montford School (now William Randolph) is integrated housing students from the immediate neighborhood and students bused from north Asheville for grades pre-kindergarten through 3rd. Isaac Dickson was named for the first Black member of the Asheville City Board of Education in the early 1900's.

Very, very few, if any, of the early residents of "Stumptown" remain. The name (I don't know where it really came from) is rarely heard, only on occasions like this where we come together to celebrate our heritage. The memories linger on.

"LONG LIVE THESE MEMORIES."

By: Lettie Wilson Polite

(From booklet prepared for the 3rd Stumptown Community Reunion held in 1997.)

Asheville experienced tremendous physical growth from 1910 to 1930 and the population grew from 18,762 in 1910 to 50,193 in 1930.<sup>12</sup> Prosperity and growth in the white community stimulated development in the black neighborhoods. The roots of this growth for the Stumptown area lay in the development of the village of Montford. While Stumptown was bounded on one side by the hills of Riverside Cemetery rolling down to the French Broad River, the boundary to the east and north was Montford. "Montford's present-day street pattern was established by 1894. The number of dwellings in the neighborhood increased by fifty percent between 1896 and 1900, and then more than doubled by 1910."<sup>13</sup> More sophisticated in architecture than homes being constructed at the same time elsewhere in the city, Montford's homes reflected a "more cosmopolitan population."<sup>14</sup> Residents of these homes occupied by the more affluent of Asheville's population depended upon the availability of laborers in Stumptown for employment as cooks, butlers, yard men, drivers and household help.

*Pearson Drive went all the way down to Riverside Drive, and that was part of our recreational activity. We would get skates or wagons or bicycles or something and down Pearson Drive we'd have business, down them old curves. And we also had Trash Road. That's now been cut off but it was real curvy, and we'd go down there on skates. We used to do some dangerous stuff and see who could get down there the quickest. It was fun for us but you couldn't pay me to do it now.*

— Phyllis Sherrill

Bordering Stumptown on a ridge of land above the French Broad River, Riverside Cemetery was created in August of 1885. Consisting of 55 acres, it was first incorporated as the Asheville Cemetery Company.<sup>15</sup> "The most remarkable landscaping in the [Montford] district can be found in the Riverside Cemetery, a large informal cemetery containing the graves of numerous notable North Carolina





In 1967, most of the physical landscape of Stumptown had not yet been changed by Urban Renewal and other Federal programs. This 1967 photo shows Stumptown children and Dr. Mary Frances Shuford in front of the community center on Madison Street. Dr. Shuford owned the building and converted it to the "Stumptown Neighborhood Center." (Courtesy, Asheville Citizen Times.)

*Phyllis Sherrill (1998), former Stumptown resident:*

*Dr. Shuford, the white lady doctor, she gave penicillin for everything, she was somebody that was well respected in the black community, not only for her assistance when they needed medical attention, but she owned houses there, too. She owned several homes in Stumptown. I rented from her. And if something came up and you had sickness and you didn't have all your rent or anything, she just said, "Give me whatever you got, Honey. Don't worry about it." Or "Just wait till next month." And in the house, if you needed anything, or if you needed a little something to eat, she would say, "Well, here, go get you something to eat." At that time, we used to have an A&P grocery store on Montford Avenue, and we had a drugstore.*

citizens."<sup>16</sup> Grave sites are arranged alongside "picturesque curvilinear drives that wind through trees and clumps of foliage and along the steep slopes and ravines of the cemetery."<sup>17</sup> Development of the cemetery depended upon the availability of black men and youths in Stumptown for digging graves and landscape maintenance.

*We were right there at the cemetery. The cemetery was in our backyard and it was our playground, too. My grandfather would catch possums in the cemetery. He'd put one under an overturned washtub and feed it popcorn to "clean it out." When they were ready to cook it, my grandfather would hit it in the head. My grandmother*

*would have a big pot of boiling water ready, boil it and scrape it. She'd put apples in its mouth and stuff it with apples and roast it overnight. We had other preachers at supper every Sunday, and they'd eat the possum.*

— Phyllis Sherrill

The location of Stumptown was advantageous to both the cemetery and the Montford residential area and was a ten-minute walk for those employed downtown. Stumptown grew in population during the first three decades of the 1900s and became a vibrant community of 250 families former residents speak of as "one big family," where residents looked out for one another in times of need. The residents lived in apartment buildings, other multi-family dwellings and some single-family homes on streets named Madison, Morrow, Richie, Gray, Gay, James and Jane, separated from Pearson Drive by woods. A few of the homes had businesses on the premises.

*My grandfather had his little sweet shop over there, Mr. Howard's Snack Shop or Sweet Shop, or something like that, in a room next to his house in Stumptown. 86 Gay Street. He sold all kind of candy, chewing gum, and drinks, stuff like that, chips, and he would get shoe polish and things like that people might need. And at that time we used Royal Crown hair dressing, and stuff we used for our hair. But he didn't do too much — he didn't sell like eggs or anything like that. Had a little table in there where he and his boys would gather when they would talk about the cares of the world. And then he always kept some kind of whiskey. He had a pint of whiskey and a lot of times he had to get him a little toddy. "A toddy for the body." And he'd have just one little nip at night before he went to bed.... We had a coal yard right next door to my house — Alonzo and Blondie. They owned it and he sold coal. He was another entrepreneur in the neighborhood. And he would go to the Virginia mines, sometimes kids would get to go along and fill up his coal truck and come back here, break it up and sack it up, take it around and sell it to people. He would get like boulders and he would pay — fellows would get up there and just throw them on the ground. It was fun to us. We'd get one and hit it up against*

*another and it would break it loose. And he'd give us two dollars or 50 cents or something.*

— Phyllis Sherrill

Prior to the Civil War, there was little formal education for black people in Western North Carolina. In 1880, black people had no public schools they could attend in Asheville but there were several schools founded by churches, missionaries and private individuals.<sup>18</sup> In 1887 the Allen Industrial Training School employed many white teachers and was founded by the Woman's Home Missionary Society of the Methodist Episcopal Church primarily for black girls of elementary school age. The school, located on College Street, later added higher grades, dropping the lower ones, and became an accredited high school. Many black girls from communities in Western North Carolina without high schools for black children came to the Allen High School in Asheville for their education.

The first public school for blacks in Asheville opened on Beaumont Street in 1888 in an abandoned building that had been repaired.

The school began with three black teachers who were paid \$25.00 a month and 300 students in grades one through five. The school could not accommodate the 657 school age [black] children in Asheville, so many returned home crying. In 1890, the enrollment reached 1,200 students but it was not until May 4, 1891 that a bond election provided for the purchase of a lot on Catholic Hill where Catholic Hill School was built.<sup>19</sup>

In 1901, Hill Street School opened as an elementary school for blacks and most of the children of Stumptown received their early education there. By 1907 there were five black schools in Asheville—Catholic Hill, Victoria, Academy, Hill Street and Mountain Street.<sup>20</sup> A fire destroyed the Catholic Hill School and it was replaced in 1921 by Stephens-Lee High School, a nineteen-room building constructed on



*Street Monday, 1954*

William Howard beside his home and sweet shop, 86 Gay Street, corner of Gay and Madison, 1954. (Courtesy, Phyllis Sherrill.)



Hattie "Mutt" Howard stands beside the coal and kindling house on Madison Street in this 1962 photograph. The Welfare Baptist Church, one of the few older structures remaining in Stumptown can be seen in the background. (Courtesy, Phyllis Sherrill.)



Stephens-Lee High School was a center for black activities until the public schools were desegregated in 1965. Seen here are members of the Crown and Scepter Honor Society at Stephens-Lee in the mid 1950s. (Photographer unknown, possibly from the school newspaper "The Skylighter.")

Catholic Avenue.<sup>21</sup> Today the gymnasium of the former high school houses a community center.

The youth of Stumptown attended Stephens-Lee High School from 1921 until it was closed when the school system was integrated in 1965. Stephens-Lee High School was the meeting place for cultural activities for blacks throughout Asheville and Buncombe County.

Many honors were bestowed upon students while attending Stephens-Lee. [Principal] Walter Smith Lee emphasized a curriculum built around Shakespeare, dignity and self-help. There were courses in music, drama, carpentry, radio repair, cosmetology, welding, home economics and English.... Paul Dusenberry and Madison Leonard were the leaders of the famed Stephens-Lee marching band known throughout the southeast for its achievements for over 30 years.<sup>22</sup>

Children living in Stumptown seldom left the area. Teens went to revivals on the other side of town or to teen dances, 10 cents a dance. They had jukeboxes where you put in a quarter for so many songs. I guess that's how they made their money. The kids always walked there and back and had a good time doing it. The YMCA was where the YMI is now. The YWCA was on College Street.... On the Fourth of July my grandfather would roast a pig and it was one of the highlights of the summer. He would go down to the market, right off of River Road, and slaughter a pig. He'd make his own barbecue sauce. He went to his grave with that recipe. But he would roast that pig over coals in the ground and he could sing. He had a beautiful voice and he very seldom sang, but when he did, everybody just listened and would want him to sing. That was one night he sang all night long and slap that hog, and he'd turn it. That's one night they'd let us stay out all night. And there'd be about seven or eight of us and we'd have our blankets and stuff and we would sit there with him and he'd tell us stories. Just so full of wisdom. He would slap that hog and sing. And he sold it. It was a money-maker for the church. Before 12:30 or 1 o'clock, he had no more pork. They were in line. I never will forget.... My birthday was before Halloween but my mama would always give me a party on Halloween because she said if anything

Until the Civil Rights Legislation of the 1960s, black students from Stumptown went to segregated public schools. One of the first schools in Asheville for black girls was the Allen Industrial Training School founded in 1887 by the Methodist Episcopal Church and seen with a different name in this 1914 advertisement in the city directory. (Asheville, North Carolina City Directory, 1914, Vol. XIII, "Special Advertiser's Directory," p. 21.)

SPECIAL ADVERTISERS' DIRECTORY 21

ESTABLISHED 1887

### Asheville Academy and Allen Industrial Home for Colored Girls

Under the auspices of the Woman's Home Missionary Society of the Methodist Episcopal Church.

Spacious Buildings with modern equipment. All grades from primary through normal.

Music. Domestic Science. Dress-Making and plain Sewing.

Home care for the girls. Fine climate. Rates reasonable.

**MISS ALSIE B. DOLE, Superintendent**

241 College St. Asheville, N. C.

When writing advertisers mention the directory.

*happens or if anything serious goes down, I'll know where y'all are. You'll be at my house. And she'd always have hotdogs and hot chocolate.*

— Phyllis Sherrill

Reverend Levonia C. Ray Sr. now pastor of Greater New Zion Baptist Church in Fletcher, North Carolina believes that there was an “overall strength of community, an energy” in Stumptown that he has not observed elsewhere. The children learned through the ways they were taught and by the examples of those in Stumptown. The fruits of these lessons are seen in the lives of their children and grandchildren today. Many grew up to be influential in the politics and services of the greater Asheville community.<sup>23</sup>

*There were more black doctors then, than now. You didn't run to the doctor for everything. Most mothers could doctor quite a bit or they knew of another woman that would know what to do. There were also black dentists...more black-run shops. I think back to things that were unhygienic, but they didn't think so at the time: kerosene was sold from barrels in the stores and big cookies were sold from containers, two for a nickel; the men in the stores would handle the kerosene and then hand out the cookies which would then have the faint odor of kerosene on them.... A group of boys would share a soda and run their grubby finger into the mouth of the bottle between swigs thinking they were cleaning the bottle before drinking from it. Overall, they were healthy.... There were two drug stores in Montford and although we could go in to make a purchase, we could not sit in the booths, so a lot of courting was done walking in nearby Riverside Cemetery.*

— Rev. Levonia C. Ray Sr.  
(1998), former Stumptown resident

The upward growth and prosperity Asheville had experienced at the beginning of the 20th century peaked during the early 1920s and took a downward turn a few years later. By November 1930, Central Bank and Trust Company, the largest bank in Western North Carolina, closed its doors.



Geraldine Hill (left) in 1953 with Frank and Shirley Clemmons on Morrow Street. (Courtesy, Geraldine Hill.)

## GERALDINE HILL (1999), FORMER STUMPTOWN RESIDENT

I guess I joined [the service] to get away from home. And the Bugg family had a girl that was in the Women's Army Corps. And when she came home in this white uniform—she was in the medic, and I was always fascinated by that uniform. And I wanted to do it.... I wanted to be a nurse and I wanted to go in the same as she and get my medical training. But medical school was all full. And I had three choices: I could go to typing school, cooking school or for clerk-typing and I chose it.... They took me to Charlotte for the test, the examination and all.... I enjoyed being in the service. I guess without that I probably wouldn't have seen the few places that I did see. It was learning to live with people. These girls, all races and everything, and we got along fine. Exchanged clothes, you know, like if you had something I wanted to wear I'd borrow it and I had something—we just exchanged clothes. We did real well.... At Fort Sill, Oklahoma, I worked in the officers' training center printing songbooks, test papers and all this. I had the whole office and the only time I saw my boss was once a month. He would come in and find out what supplies I needed for the month. [1952-1954]

Others followed, taking about \$8 million the city and county had on deposit, forcing the city at one point to pay its employees in scrip.<sup>24</sup> “The economic life of Asheville ground to a near halt. A bankrupt Asheville defaulted on its debts; on paper and otherwise, fortunes vanished; [and] families lost homes and livelihoods.... An era had ended in economic paralysis, and a sobered, desperate Asheville faced the long ordeal of depression and war.”<sup>25</sup> The previously affluent hired fewer household workers and some of the larger homes in Montford became rooming houses. Businesses that survived operated with as few employees as possible.

Although the 1953 Asheville city directory shows well over 100 heads of household in the area called Stumptown, urban renewal of the 1960s and '70s, or “urban removal” as some of the previous residents refer to it, soon claimed the close-knit community. There had been a steady decline in the condition of the buildings in Stumptown as younger people moved on and the older residents did not have the money to improve the properties. As government funds came into the community to build public housing complexes, landlords did not improve rental properties.

Certified letters arrived warning residents they had only a few months to find a new home. Bulldozers took house after house in the name of eminent domain. Where formerly there was “deteriorated” housing comprising an intact residential and social fabric, there is now vacant land, a ball field, tennis courts and a community center.

*We played horseshoes in “the flats.” And we played in “the hollow,” which is where the ball field is now. We made sculptures from clay at the bottom of the hollow. We had a place called “the red hill,” right behind the center, the street that goes straight out. The hill went up and over, right there where the playground is now. The coal yard was at the top of the hill. And when you came around the corner, and then you’d turn right, you’d go up the hill, and my house was right here — straight was my little street. It’s hard to even — when I go over there now — Just to show you what the wonders of machinery could do to a place.*

— Phyllis Sherrill

Red Hill, the flats and the hollow, the playgrounds of Stumptown, no longer exist. But the bulldozer’s blade lays bare more than earth; it makes perfectly clear the fragile nature of our cultural landscape.

*Stumptown families gather for the 1997 Stumptown Reunion, August 26-27. (Photo, Benjamin Porter.)*



Notes

1. Dr. F.A. Sondley, LL.D, *A History of Buncombe County North Carolina*, Vol. II (Asheville: The Advocate Printing Co., 1930) p. 746.
2. Douglas Swaim, Ed., *Cabins and Castles, The History & Architecture of Buncombe County, North Carolina* (Asheville: Historic Resources Commission of Asheville and Buncombe County, 1981) p. 74.
3. Helen Moseley-Edington, *Angels Unaware: Asheville Women of Color* (Asheville: Home Press, 1996) p. 1.
4. Swaim, p. 41.
5. Swaim, p. 41.
6. Ibid.
7. Frenise A. Logan, *The Negro in North Carolina 1876-1894* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1964) pp. 198-199.
8. Swaim, both quotes p. 41.
9. *Asheville City Directory For 1896-1897* (Atlanta: The Franklin Printing and Publishing Co., 1896) pp. 82-84.
10. Logan, p. 87.
11. *Asheville City Directory For 1896-1897* (Atlanta: The Franklin Printing and Publishing Co., 1896) "Classified Business Directory of Asheville," Vol. I.
12. Swaim, p. 42.
13. National Register nomination prepared in 1977 by Sarah Upchurch, consultant, and McKelden Smith, survey specialist, N.C. Division of Archives and History as quoted in Swaim, pp. 83-84.
14. Ibid. p. 84.
15. Buncombe County, North Carolina Register of Deeds, Deed Book 47, p. 583; Deed Book 151, p. 28; Deed Book 151, p. 96; Deed Book 202, p. 85.
16. Swaim, p. 207.
17. Ibid.
18. Moseley-Edington, p. 1.
19. Ibid, p. 2.
20. "Dedication Hill Street School," March 29, 1953, brochure, p. 4.
21. Moseley-Edington, pp. 1-2.
22. Ibid., p. 2.
23. Reverend Levon C. Ray Sr., author interview, 1998, quote and information.
24. Swaim, p. 44.
25. Ibid.



*John Wesley Jones Jr. makes a snowball near the corner of Madison and Gay Streets. This site is now a playground adjacent to the basketball courts. (Courtesy, Phyllis Sherrill.)*



*Mary and Martha Brown pose with their bicycle on Morrow Street, mid-1940s. (Courtesy, Geraldine Hill.)*



*Community Reunion  
26-27, 1997*

*Benjamin Foster 1997  
Asheville, N.C.*