

## PRESERVING MEMORIES

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- Correction: The following correction was published on February 2, 1997: An item in Saturday's Observer about the Dred Scott decision incorrectly suggested that Missouri had freed Scott, a slave, and that he had moved to Virginia to sue for his freedom. Scott sued for his freedom in Missouri and lost.
- Readability: 5-6 grade level (Lexile: 940)

Juan Whipple developed a tour. Ruth Sloane wrote a play. The Rev. D.G. Burke, educator Elizabeth Randolph and former uptown library manager Pat Ryckman helped create photo essays.

All had the same goal: preserving Charlotte's African American history.

“Charlotte has a habit of tearing down historical sites, which I can understand. You have to make way for progress,” said Whipple, who created the Black Heritage Tour in 1992. “But there's not a lot of landmarks left. People have a tendency to forget over the years where things were located.”

Now is the perfect time to be reminded, since February is Black History Month.

Whipple and the other chroniclers help keep the memories alive. His 2-1/2-hour tour takes patrons to 15 sites, including historically black Johnson C. Smith University, McDonald's Cafeteria and Inn, the Charlotte Post newspaper and the statue of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

He developed his tour after hundreds of hours of research and whittling down the list of sites, he said.

“There was so much information, but I didn't want to make it too long, or too short,” Whipple said. “I did want to give a feel for the economic prosperity that used to exist among blacks here. One thing I noticed in my research was how entrepreneurship wasn't a problem back then.”

Blacks owned their own stores and businesses because segregation prevented them from shopping at places whites patronized. Old photos of the city's black neighborhoods - First Ward, Brooklyn, Third Ward, Cherry, Biddleville, Griertown, Washington Heights and Greenville - show busy streets of black-owned businesses.

Some of those neighborhoods remain; others were destroyed by urban renewal in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Many blacks were displaced from uptown to the city's westside. But memories of the old days linger.

The neighborhood that has received the most attention is the gone-but-not-forgotten Second Ward, better known as Brooklyn. It's an area now occupied by the Convention Center, government center and other buildings.

Playwright Ruth Sloane spent countless hours interviewing and reading about the neighborhood before creating her 1996 play “The Second City.”

The play chronicles daily life in Second Ward, a neighborhood that served as the social hub for Charlotte's African American residents. Brooklyn was wiped out by urban renewal.

“People are hungry for our history,” said Sloane, who grew up in the Greenville neighborhood and has written poetry on black people who lived in Charlotte at that time. “There are a lot of people who've done some great things and their stories aren't recorded.”

A number of people have compiled remembrances of Brooklyn. The book “Plum Thickets and Field Daisies” is a memoir of the neighborhood by Rose Leary Love, who grew up there. The memoir by Love, who died in 1969, was published last year and is available at the library.

Brooklyn has received more attention than other neighborhoods, perhaps.

“If you didn't go to Second Street (in Brooklyn), then you didn't really go to Charlotte,” Burke explained.

In the 1980s, he helped put together a photo essay called “The Brooklyn Story,” also available at the library.

“Brooklyn had something for everyone. The YMCA was there, the churches, the parks. And you can't forget the liquor houses,” Burke said. “But at the end it had run down. Some of it was a disgrace what happened to it.”

And the Second Ward Alumni House keeps yearbooks, trophies and other items from Second Ward High School, the city's first black high school. It closed in 1969, after 46 years. Members expect to begin tours of the house later this year.

But the other neighborhoods haven't been neglected.

The Afro-American Cultural Center focuses on art, but its nod to history is evident in the two shotgun houses that sit behind the center.

Shotgun houses, which take their names from ``sho'gans," an African word that means ``house of assembly," were a style of home predominant in the South and mill towns. They were narrow, one-story structures that often had tin roofs. The center's houses were originally on Bland Street, in Third Ward.

Photos from that neighborhood and others can be seen in ``An African American Experience: The Black Experience in Charlotte and Mecklenburg County." Elizabeth Randolph, a retired educator, edited the 1992 book developed by Union County Library Director Pat Ryckman.

``After it came out, we had people who were calling us up, asking why we hadn't asked them for pictures," Randolph said. ``They're just memories that are preserved forever."

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WANT TO GO? The Black Heritage Tour is available by appointment to groups of 10 or more. For reservations, call Juan Whipple at 566-0104.

``The Brooklyn Story," ``Plum Thickets and Field Daisies" and ``An African American Experience: The Black Experience in Charlotte and Mecklenburg County," are available at the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Public Library, 310 N. Tryon St. For library hours, call 336-2066.

The Afro-American Cultural Center is at 401 N. Myers St. For information, call 374-1565.

The Second Ward Alumni House is at 1905 Beatties Ford Road. For more information, call 398-8333.

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### Dred Scott Decision

Chief Justice Roger Taney ruled in 1857 that neither free nor enslaved blacks are citizens and laws banning slavery had no force over black people returned to slave states. Dred Scott was born into slavery in Virginia, but had moved to Missouri where he became a free man. He returned to Virginia where he sued for his freedom.

SOURCE: Black Saga: The African American Experience

- Caption: Photo-3Photos: 1. MARK B. SLUDER/Staff / Playwright Ruth Sloane has written a play set in Brooklyn, one of Charlotte's old black neighborhoods. 2. T. ORTEGA GAINES/Staff / Juan Whipple's 2 -1 / 2-hour Black Heritage Tours take patrons to 15 sites around Charlotte. 3. Dred Scott
- Memo: An information box appears at the end of this story \* ``Black History Month"

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