

Staff/Queen City Tours(sm) and Travel

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TOUR OFFERS VIRTUAL TIME TRAVEL - TRIP TO MECKLENBURG SITES BRINGS AFRICAN AMERICAN HISTORY TO LIFE

Charlotte Observer, The (NC)-January 31, 2003
 Readability: >12 grade level (Lexile: 1310L)
 Author: LYNN TRENNING, SPECIAL TO THE OBSERVER

One of the first things Queen City Tours Director Juan Whipple explains is that he uses language that reflects what African Americans were called during certain historical times.

"When people look back at history, they are going to think negroes, coloreds, blacks, Afro-Americans and African Americans were different races," he says.

But he uses all five terms to denote the historic times in which events occurred.

The tour van pauses on Hill Street before a historical marker commemorating Good Samaritan Hospital, once one of the oldest hospitals in the country, which was torn down to make way for Ericsson Stadium. The marker claims that Good Samaritan was built for "African-Americans," but Whipple points out there was no such thing in 1891 when it opened.

"It was opened for colored people."

On the fifth annual Charlotte Black Heritage Tour/Pilgrimage 2003, which will take place this Saturday and all Saturdays this month, tourgoers will view three graveyards where slaves are buried, participate in a traditional African drumming ceremony, learn about prominent black leaders, rumors and suppositions, and the history of black neighborhoods. Whipple, a former Army paratrooper, became interested in Charlotte's history after attending an exhibit at the old Charlotte Museum of History titled "Balance of Power."

A blistering rain beats against the van window as it stops next to Old Settlers Cemetery in uptown Charlotte. It's the oldest cemetery in Charlotte, and the only one owned by the city. Because it dates from the 1770s, it is believed that slaves are buried near their owners, as was the tradition during that time. When Bank of America refurbished the cemetery in the 1990s, the graves were categorized. A plaque identifies the slave part of the cemetery with the word "servants." "The slaves have been promoted," quips Whipple.

The two other slave gravesites the tour visits are in Huntersville. The area was heavily populated by plantation owners, defined by ownership of at least 1,000 acres of land and 25 slaves. At one site, the iron gateway and "upping block" men used to mount and dismount from their horses was designed by a slave named Louis Phifer, Whipple says. The tour leads people into the side entrance of a church, where slaves were permitted access.

Other tour stops are less emotional. At the statue of Queen Charlotte in front of the International Trade Building on College Street, Whipple leads a discussion of Queen Charlotte's African features, which have led many to believe she has a strain of African blood. A PBS "Frontline" documentary has

traced her genealogy to Margarita de Castro y Sousa, of an Afro-European branch of the Portuguese royal house.

In front of the new county jail on Fourth Street there is a plaque of the Mecklenburg County Seal, which was designed by a black man named Harvey Boyd of Matthews in 1964, and was approved by the county commissioners in 1965.

The tour goes through all four downtown wards, noting that what is now Irwin Elementary school used to be Harding High School, where, in 1957, Dorothy Counts Scoggins was the first student to integrate an N.C. public school, four years after *Brown vs. Topeka*. Prior to 1869, public schools were integrated in North Carolina.

Many of the tour sites visited are tagged by the hornet's nest insignia that designate them "Charlotte-Mecklenburg Historic Landmarks."

Many others have been paved over. All that remains of other sites is oral history. The tour is a reminder that while progress may eliminate vestiges of the past, the spoken word is a means by which to remember. PREVIEW

Fifth Annual Charlotte Black Heritage Tour

A three-hour tour provides historic information about slaves and an overview of black historic landmarks in Charlotte.

WHEN: 10 a.m. and 1:30 p.m. Saturday, Feb. 8, 15 and 22.

WHERE: Begins and ends at House of Africa, 1215 Thomas Ave.

TICKETS: \$21-\$25.

DETAILS: (704) 566-0104; www.queencitytours.com.

ON PAGE 32 A complete list of Black History Month events, as well as related TV programming Black History by Ward

First Ward: The population of First Ward was 59 percent black in 1900. Two of Charlotte's most prominent churches in First Ward were the Seventh Street Presbyterian Church (now First United Presbyterian Church) and Little Rock AME Zion Church. Today, First Ward is home to the Afro-American Cultural Center. It was the site of the Earle Village projects.

Second Ward: Second Ward was home to Charlotte's most progressive early black neighborhood - Old Brooklyn. A large number of blacks from the Brooklyn, N.Y., area migrated to Charlotte in the 1940s-'50s looking for work at textile mills and settling in the neighborhood. Between 1879 and 1880, 64 percent of the population of Old Brooklyn was black. Today, Second Ward is home to the Martin Luther King Jr. statue.

Third Ward: In 1879, Third Ward boasted a black population of 54 percent, and was home to one of the oldest black hospitals in the country, Good Samaritan, which opened in 1891. The hospital closed in 1961, and the building was destroyed in 1990 to make way for Ericsson Stadium.

Fourth Ward: Fourth Ward was the least racially diverse of the wards. In the early 1900s, a trolley

line expanded the boundaries of Charlotte, and residents abandoned the neighborhood to move to Dilworth, Myers Park, Washington Heights and Biddleville. By 1978, Fourth Ward was on its way to recovery as its grand Victorian homes were bought and restored. Today, Fourth Ward is a very prominent area of uptown. Black residents include ex-Charlotte Mayor Harvey Gantt and Congressman Mel Watt.

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Source: Queen City Tours

MAP:1

Memo: Map not in database; please see microfilm. Edition: ONE-THREE Section: E+T Page: 32E
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