

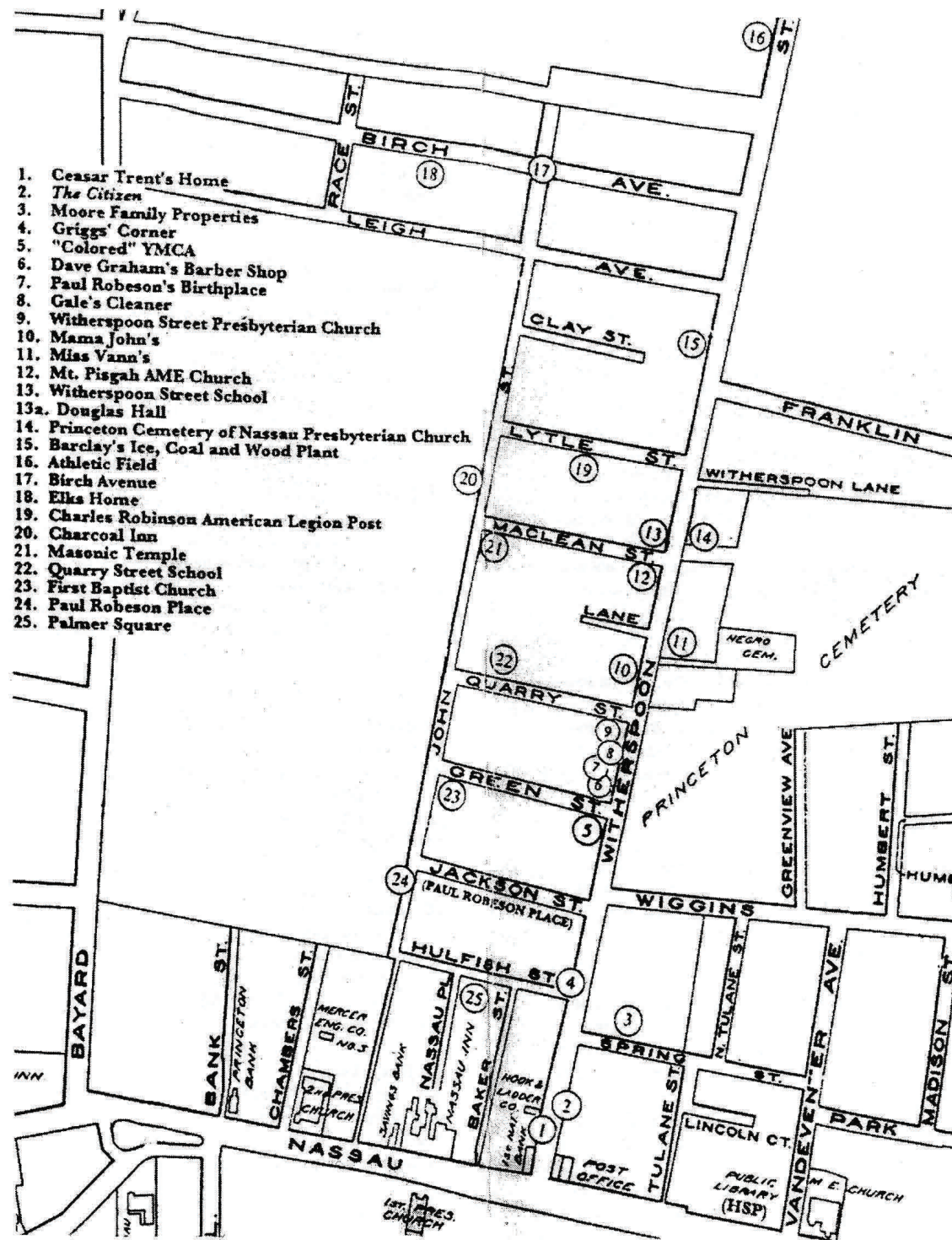
The Albert E. Hinds Memorial Walking Tour: African-American Life in Princeton



Baker's Alley, ca. 1925
Historical Society of Princeton

A Self-Guided Walking Tour

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Map of the Borough of Princeton. published by Wm. L. Ulyat. 1917

African Americans in Princeton have been a vital community presence dating back to the late seventeenth century when Blacks worked as slaves on large farms and in homes. (There was also a free Black community in Princeton dating from about 1687.) Under the Gradual Abolition of Slavery Law (1804), Black males born into slavery were to be freed upon their twenty-fifth birthday, and females, at their twenty-first birthday.

Employment opportunities developed as the College of New Jersey, which had moved to Princeton in 1756, grew from a small college into a major institution of higher learning. Increasing wealth in the community created a high demand for labor and service positions that were generally filled by African Americans. By about 1910, there was also an extremely active Black business community; florists, barbershops, candy stores, beauty parlors, restaurants, clothing stores, and taxi services were owned and run by black entrepreneurs.

In 1929 Edgar Palmer announced plans to develop a commercial square in the heart of town. The construction called for the shifting of a neighborhood which housed primarily Black residents. Houses were moved and new ones were built on Birch Avenue to accommodate displaced residents. Housing continued to be a problem for the African American community up to the 1950s when an Urban Renewal Plan proposed tearing down homes and building public housing. Residents defeated the plan.

Churches acted as the backbone of the African American community, as they provided a center for personal and spiritual development. Community schools offered instruction during an era where unequal access to education opportunities was legal and common. The increasing availability of housing and jobs with private businesses gave many residents a feeling of permanence and a stake in the development of their community.

Princeton's African American community has withstood segregated schooling and theaters, limited employment opportunities, escalating housing costs, and the subtle but powerful effects of racial discrimination. Today, many African Americans still express concerns over issues such as the rising cost of housing, which has pushed many people outside of the community, and discrepancies in education and employment opportunities. The memories of struggle, and of past accomplishments, remind everyone that progress is an on-going process that must be taken on by new generations to come.

Albert E. Hinds

Albert E. Hinds was born in Princeton, New Jersey on April 14, 1902. He and his siblings attended the Princeton segregated school, Witherspoon School for Colored Children, and he continued his education at Talladega College in Talladega, Alabama.

Mr. Hinds' services to the Princeton community were numerous. In 1925, he along with another resident of Princeton, reopened the Colored YMCA that had been closed for a number of years. He served as the Y's physical director and in 1933 was the playground director for both Hightstown and Princeton. Another not able accomplishment was helping to pave Nassau Street, transforming it from a simple dirt road to a major thoroughfare.

Over the years Mr. Hinds was a member of the Zoning Board, a trustee of the Mt. Pisgah AME Church, and on the advisory board of the Historical Society of Princeton. An invaluable member of the community, Mr. Hinds passed away in Princeton at the age of 104.

1.Ceasar Trent’s Home

Ceasar Trent was the first Black property owner in Princeton, ca. 1795. His residence was at the site of the present day Bank of America.

2. *The Citizen*

9 Witherspoon is the address of the publisher of *The Citizen*, a newspaper “dedicated to the moral, intellectual, and industrial improvement of the Negro race.” W.H. de Paur published the paper, with Henry J. Auston as editor.

3. Moore Family Properties

Numbers 4, 6, and 10 Spring Street were owned by William Moore, a native of Hillsboro, North Carolina. Known as “Sport,” he was a successful owner of a second-hand clothing store, also dealing with furniture and antiques. University students would sell him new clothes to finance their trips to New York. These buildings were later used by his daughter, Christine Moore Howell, who operated a beauty salon in the 1920s-40s.

4. Griggs’ Corner

58-60 marks the site of Griggs’ Imperial Restaurant which Burnett Griggs ran for 42 years until his retirement at age 83. During “urban renewal,” Griggs was offered \$109,000, but claimed he would not sell his property for a million dollars because he saved every penny to purchase the land.

5. “Colored” YMCA

The YMCA at 102 Witherspoon Street served as a recreational club for youths and young adults. Originally informally maintained in private homes, the YMCA and the YWCA met briefly at other locations, like the Odd Fellows Hall, before becoming branches of the national YMCA in 1917 and moving to this residence. Activities included Summer Vacation Bible School, sports, recreation programs, education trips, and “wholesome activities under Christian supervision.” In addition to churches, the Y was a focal point of the Black community until the 1950s when a new building was built on Avalon Place and the Y became integrated. This building, which now houses the Arts Council of Princeton, was built in 1938-39, replacing the original Y building which was destroyed in a fire.

6. Dave Graham’s Barber Shop

At 108 Witherspoon Street, Dave Graham ran one of the earliest Black-owned barber shops. Located at 7 Hulfish Street in 1935, and at 8 Lytle Street in 1937, in 1940 the shop was located in the basement of the house where Paul Robeson was born.

7. Paul Robeson’s Birthplace

Born in this house in 1898 at 110 Witherspoon Street, Paul Robeson became one of Princeton's best known residents. Son of a runaway slave, the Reverend William Robeson of the Witherspoon Street Church, Robeson achieved fame as an athlete, a singer and actor, a scholar, a law school graduate,

and a political activist, for which he was persecuted during the McCarthy era. He eventually quit his film career because he was dissatisfied with the types of roles that were available for Black performers. He lived abroad in voluntary exile for five years, returning to the United States in 1962.

8. Gale’s Cleaner

Located at 114 Witherspoon Street, Gale’s was the first Black-owned dry cleaner in Princeton. The shop moved several times. Fannie Reeves (now wife of former Princeton mayor Jim Floyd) was among the young people who worked in the shop. Gale was an active member of the Witherspoon Street Presbyterian Church.

9. Witherspoon Street Presbyterian Church

The Witherspoon Street Church at Number 124 is known for the role it has played in working towards social justice. Dating back to 1840, church leaders and members spoke out against slavery, assisted with the Underground Railroad, and later were active in the Civil Rights Movement. The church’s greatest achiever was Rev. Benjamin Anderson, who led the effort to build Princeton's first integrated housing development in the 1950s. Anderson also helped area restaurant and hotel workers to unionize. Today the church’s members remain committed to important social issues.

10. Mama John’s

At 158 Witherspoon, this restaurant was run by “Mama John,” but current residents cannot recall the origin of the owner’s nickname or if “Mama” was a man or a woman. Mama John’s was a hangout with a juke box. This site housed two other restaurants over the years—a rotisserie and a restaurant owned by the Smith brothers.

11. Miss Vann’s

Miss Vann ran an ice cream parlor out of her house at 165 Witherspoon Street. She stayed in business until her death in the 1940s. Many small businesses were operated in private homes.

12. Mt. Pisgah AME Church

Named after a mountain ridge in ancient Palestine mentioned in the Old Testament, this 1832 Methodist Church, at the corner of Witherspoon and Maclean Streets, is the oldest black church in Princeton. Organized by Samson Peters, a preacher in the Trenton AME Church, the congregation met in a frame house on Witherspoon Street until 1835 when the first church building was constructed. The present structure was built in 1850. A tiny cemetery in the yard has tombstones dating back to the 1850s. In 1971, Rev. Leon Gibson Sr. felt his greatest contribution to the church was his role in keeping the family of Mt. Pisgah together in the face of the high cost of living, scarce housing, fewer jobs, and an aging population.

13. Witherspoon Street School

184 Witherspoon Street was the first home of the Witherspoon Street School, started in 1858 as the first public elementary and middle school for African American children. If children wished to continue their education past this level, they had to attend high school in another community. The Witherspoon Street School was the first integrated lower school under the Princeton Plan in 1948. At that time, it was designated as a middle school for all ethnic groups. After the school was relocated to 35 Quarry Street in 1908, this building became known as Douglass Hall, after Frederick Douglass. Until about 1915 the Princeton Public High School was segregated.

13a. Douglass Hall

Douglass Hall, at 184 Witherspoon Street, has housed a wide variety of activities since the Witherspoon Street School vacated this building in 1908. Since the early part of the century, the building has been home to a Pentecostal Church, a laundry, a movie house, a dance hall, a lodge, a social club, and was the interim meeting place for the YM-YWCA after the original Y building burned down. Now it is subdivided into apartments.

14. Princeton Cemetery of Nassau Presbyterian Church

On Witherspoon Street between Wiggins and Franklin, the Princeton Cemetery was one of about five public graveyards in town. Through a provision in the will of Dr. Thomas Wiggins, the African American community inherited a piece of land adjacent to the cemetery which became known as the Negro Cemetery. Many well-known families have plots here, including the Hoaglands, the Reeveses, the Howells, the Moores, and the Robesons.

15. Barclay's Ice, Coal and Wood Plant

Number 232 Witherspoon Street was the residence of George Barclay, co-owner of Barclay’s Ice, Coal, and Wood Plant. With help from his partner, Andrew Teague, Mr. Barclay provided families with large blocks of ice for their ice boxes, and delivered loads of ice by truck for restaurants. The plant was located at Gordon Park, midway down Clay Street.

16. Athletic Field

At 137 Witherspoon Street, the site of the present-day Community Park School, lay the neighborhood athletic field. Moses Taylor Pyne, then owner of Drumthwacket, purchased and donated this field to the African American community. Its grounds were used for many YMCA activities over the years.

17. Birch Avenue

After the construction of Palmer Square, many residents were moved from upper John and Baker Streets to Birch Avenue. The moves created inconveniences for many residents, for example, forcing them to walk further distances to their jobs at the University.

18. Elks Home

In 1937 the Elks moved from 30 Maclean Street to their present location at 124 Birch Avenue. They purchased this building in 1948. Membership in fraternal organizations such as this was

common among African Americans, who were barred from joining all-white groups and denied services in many restaurants and bars.

19. Charles Robinson American Legion Post No. 218

The membership of this branch at 28 Lytle is African American. It is named after Charles Robinson, a World War I soldier who was the first Princetonian to lose his life in the armed services. Before women served in the armed services, they were not able to join the Legion, but instead formed auxiliary clubs.

20. Charcoal Inn

Owned by William Teague and William Green, the Charcoal Inn at 184 John Street was also known as the meeting place of Nemderloc (“colored men” spelled backwards). Primarily a social club which served alcohol, it solicited new members by invitation only.

21. Masonic Temple

This building at 30 Maclean Street was built by the Elks Club in 1913 and later taken over by the Masons. All Black Masonic Temples are descendents of the Prince Hall organization begun in Boston.

22. Quarry Street School

30 Quarry Street marks the second location for the Witherspoon Street School, relocated here in 1908.

23. First Baptist Church

The Bright Hope Baptist Church, now located at 32 Green Street, began as a prayer group in 1880 at the home of Mr. and Mrs. Frederick Jackson, at 11 Green Street. Two years later, the congregation moved to the Pat Riley House on Witherspoon Street. The next meeting place was at the site of the Odd Fellows Hall, also on Witherspoon. Determined to build their own church, the congregation purchased a plot for \$1400 with a 6-room house which they converted into a parsonage. In 1885 the cornerstone was laid for the Bright Hope Baptist Church. In 1930 the name changed to the First Baptist Church.

24. Paul Robeson Place

Jackson Street was demolished in the late 1950s and rebuilt at a different location as Avalon Place. However until the 1970s the African American residential area was still known as Witherspoon-Jackson, referring to the streets which once formed the boundaries of the community. After the death of Robeson in 1976, Avalon Place was renamed Paul Robeson Place.

25. Palmer Square

In 1929 the commercial development of Palmer Square called for demolition of much of the historic Black neighborhood and the relocation of its residents. Running parallel to Witherspoon, Baker Street (residential road) and Nassau Place (a service road for horses and carriages) were eliminated when the square was built.