

Landmark Society of Western New York African-American Landmarks Project

Evaluation report on Phase I: Community Listening Sessions

Prepared by Jim Fraser

Introduction

The African-American Landmarks Project is a new initiative of The Landmark Society of Western New York aimed at identifying landmarks of significance in the African-American history of Rochester, New York

The Landmark Society believes that this will be the basis for an effort to revitalize entire blocks or neighborhoods in the City of Rochester.

African-American Landmarks Project is a regional economic priority because it contributes to community revitalization, sustainability, and economic investment.

Goals

Although Rochester is famous for being the home of Frederick Douglass, his newspaper, "The North Star", and its pivotal role in the Underground Railroad, the places associated with other Black Rochesterians and their triumphs have not been preserved. The African-American Landmarks Project will attempt to help rectify this situation by providing funds for a committee of community members to self-identify important sites and structures and educate the public about their significance.

This project will educate the public about components of Rochester's past that are currently unknown or overlooked.

In addition to potential new tourist sites, the preservation or reuse of these historic homes and places will spark interest in revitalizing the neighborhoods in which they are located. Such preservation or reuse leads to community redevelopment and is the first step in saving neighborhoods; creating useable, affordable housing; slowing criminal activity; and contributing to the creation of communities one block at a time.

All of this activity broadens the audience to current residents and potential new residents and business owners and is part of the Regional Economic Development Council's overall strategy to redeveloping the City of Rochester.

The project compliments ongoing local governmental initiatives such as the Focused Investment Strategy (FIS) by working block by block in a rebuilding

effort that starts with structures and places that are important to the community, and culminates in tangible economic solutions that result in the creation of new housing and commercial space in some of the City's most distressed neighborhoods.

The African-American Landmarks Project relates directly to our mission, goals and vision because it goes beyond collecting and preserving history; it transforms it into something that is usable today to foster healthy, sustainable communities.

Process

The Landmark Society will network, advertise, and seek publicity for the African-American Landmark Project. It will also re-engage the original members of the Jordan African-American Historic Sites Committee and their associates to network in the Black community.

A project taskforce will be formed to conduct a series of public listening sessions, for the purpose of identifying properties or places of significance in the African-American history of Rochester.

The taskforce will seek input from a broad range of community members and their work will generate widespread excitement for the ultimate preservation, reuse or revitalization of previously overlooked neighborhoods

Results

Publicity

A promotional flyer was created to publicize the listening sessions. Copies of the flyer were mailed to over 70 faith-based organizations, mostly neighborhood churches and congregations known to have a large number of African-American members. A copy appears in Appendix B.

Two stories covering the listening sessions appeared in the Rochester Democrat and Chronicle. Copies appear in Appendix C.

Leaders within the African-American community were contacted via email, to inform them about the upcoming listening sessions, and to encourage them to inform others who might be interested in attending.

Listening Sessions

Session 1

Wednesday, July 31st, 2013
6:30pm-8:00pm
Saint Michael's Church
124 Evergreen St. Rochester

Attendees:

Larry Francer (LMS), Carolyn Haygood (LMS), Sandra Frankel (AAL), Jim Fraser (AAL), Flo Paxon (AAL), Delores Radney (AAL), Dr. David Anderson (AAL), Jacqueline Cooper, Dorothy Hall (PLEX), John (PLEX)

The focus of the first session was mainly on clarifying the goals for the project, and on planning the two sessions to follow. Carolyn emphasized that the goal was to preserve communities, not individual buildings alone. Sandra (project co-chair) added that the project's purpose was to use preservation to catalyze economic development. Jacqueline advised the task force members to inform and include communities as the project progresses, in order to extend the contributions of the African-American community beyond the scope of this project. Dorothy cautioned task force members not to rely solely on email when contacting members of the community. John from PLEX suggested using an asset-mapping methodology to document the project's work in city neighborhoods.

I. Places and information provided by the public

1. Connie Mitchel ... Dorothy Hall
 - first African-American county legislator
2. Dr. Smith, Tremont Street. Also: Dr. Jordan, Dr. Lundsford
3. Cynthia Fitzpatrick Cooperative Housing Project, Reynolds Street
4. Dr. David Hawkes ... Dr. D. Anderson
 - Neighborhood Service Center, West Side

Session 2

Thursday, August 22nd, 2013
5:15pm-6:45pm
Arnett Library
310 Arnett Blvd. Rochester

Attendees:

Larry Francer (LMS), Carolyn Haygood (LMS), Sandra Frankel (AAL), Jim Fraser (AAL), Mike Governale (AAL), Dr. David Anderson (AAL), Flo Paxon (AAL), Chuck Littman, John Curran, Tina DeCosta, Wille Roberts, Vanessa Singer, Y. Kokeitso Ferreira, Catherine Canty, Barbara Roberts, Audrey T. Davidson, Ruther B. Sheppard, Gloria S. Read, Sherri Dukes, Lewanda Dukes, Gary McLendon

The second listening session was the most widely attended and the most productive of the three sessions. Larry, Carolyn and Jim from the Task Force described the project and the information being sought from the public.

I. Places as examples, provided by the Landmark Society

1. Clarissa Street Corridor
2. Frederick Douglass / Sprague House
 - stop on the Underground Railroad
3. Mumford / Caledonia Culpepper
 - First African-American settlement in the Rochester area
4. Cynthia Fitzpatrick Cooperative Housing Project
5. Site of former Hamm House (demolished)
6. South Plymouth Avenue Corridor
7. Joseph Avenue Corridor
8. Sacred Sites
9. Montgomery Neighborhood Center
10. Baden Street Settlement
11. Barber shops, beauty salons, corner stores
12. 616 Genesee Street (why famous?)

II. Places and information provided by the public

1. Central Church of Christ ... Lewanda Dukes
 - 101 South Plymouth Ave.
 - Franklin Florence, pastor
 - Major site in Civil Rights movement
 - RIT chapel ... Dr. David Anderson
2. FIGHT organization

- 36 Sullivan Street
 - Many African-Americans worked here
3. Resources: Dr. Walter Cooper, Dan Braverman ... Sherri, Lewanda
 4. Sprague House ... Sherri
 - 271 Hamilton Street
 - Birthplace, Herbert Sprague
 - No marker at site
 - Some Douglass items found in the house
 - Candidate for listing on the National Register of Historic Places
 - Frederick Douglass believed to have lived here
 5. Episcopal Church of St. Luke and St. Simon Cyrene
 - 17 South Fitzhugh Street
 - Prominent African-American church
 6. Resource: Al Gauze of G&G Steak House ... Gary
Andre Marcel – Program Director, WDKX Radio
 7. Austen Steward House on Tremont Street
 - A stop on the actual Underground Railroad trail
 8. AME Zion Church, 1820
 - Thomas James, pastor (1907?) ... D. Anderson
 9. George Brown House on Seward Street ... D. Anderson
 - Now a church
 10. Pat Curtis (wife of Chauncey)
 - Law degree from University of Rochester
 - 2nd African-American woman to serve on police force in Rochester
 - Establish “Teens on Control”
 11. William Warfield and Thomas Warfield
 - Mount Vernon Baptist Church
 - Scholarship, Eastman School of Music
 12. Create a house tour of African-American history ... Venessa
 13. Katie’s Salon on Portland Avenue ... Gloria
 14. Shepp’s Paradise
 - Ruthord Sheppard, owner for 36 years beginning in 1968
 - West side of Clarissa Street
 15. Pythod Club, demolished
 - Delbert Thomas, owner
 - 2 doors from Shepp’s
 16. Elks Club
 - Previously Dan’s Tavern, Dan Daniels owner
 - Present site of Flying Squirrel
 17. American Legion on Joseph Avenue ... Gloria
 18. Cotton Club (entertainment venue) on Joseph Ave ... Gloria

Session 3

Wednesday, September 11th, 2013

6:30pm-8:00pm

Holy Rosary Church Campus

414 Lexington Ave. Rochester

Attendees:

Larry Francer (LMS), Carolyn Haygood (LMS), Sandra Frankel, Co-chair (AAL), Jim Fraser (AAL), Bill Johnson, Co-chair (AAL), Delores Radney (AAL)

The weather was very warm and the session was conducted out-of-doors. With no new members of the community attending, a review of existing material was given and some clarifications were offered before adjourning.

Follow-up Session

Thursday, October 17, 2013
10:00am-11:30am
Landmark Society Office
South Fitzhugh St. Rochester

Attendees:

As a follow-up to the public sessions, the task force met privately to discuss the material acquired from the public, to evaluate and prioritize sites based on the criteria presented in the grant proposal. The Landmark Society had prepared a list of sites taken from the public sessions, and asked that the task force choose three. Following a discussion of the list, a solid consensus emerged in favor of considering only corridors – major city streets and the immediately surrounding areas – as these would have the greatest impact and would enjoy the greatest support from existing community organizations. It was also pointed out that major city arteries served as places of first settlement for many African-Americans coming to Rochester (see Appendix A).

I. Places pre-selected for follow-up discussion and prioritization

1. Clarissa Street (Clarissa's/Shepp's) –
Rochester's major center for African-American social, cultural and public life in the mid 20th century.
2. Frederick Douglass/Sprague House at 271 Hamilton Street –
The only surviving house in Rochester that was owned by Frederick Douglass and served as the home of his daughter, Rosetta Douglass Sprague and her family.
3. Mumford/Caledonia's "Culpepper Connection" –
Migration of newly-freed African-American men from Culpepper, Virginia to these two communities after the Civil War, due to encouragement from Caledonia farmer stationed in Virginia during the Civil War. Many descendants continue to reside there.
4. Cynthia Fitzpatrick Cooperative Housing Project –
Located at the corner of Reynolds and Bartlett Streets. Rehabilitated 19th century commercial buildings, now apartments, named in 1980's to honor Rochester's oldest person and neighborhood activist.
5. Site of James and Bessie Hamm house –
Neighborhood activists and supporters of educational programs for African-American children, including the Ralph Bunche Scholarship program.
6. South Plymouth Avenue Corridor –
Millard Latimer Funeral Home – Rochester's oldest African-American-owned business. Kennedy Towers apartments, designed by African-American architect Thomas Boyde. Nathaniel Dett Home at 1087 South Plymouth –

first African-American to receive a degree from the Eastman School of Music. Major center of African-American community from mid-20th to early 21st century (which: Dett home or Plymouth Corridor?)

7. Joseph Avenue Corridor –
Characterized for over 150 years as a neighborhood of ethnic diversity, this area became a center of Rochester's African-American life by the mid-20th century.
8. Sacred sites (Mount Vernon, Aeon, Antioch, AME Zion, Mount Olivet, Gospel Tabernacle, etc.) –
The wide variety of houses of worship – both historic and contemporary – for Rochester's African-American community.
9. Montgomery Neighborhood Settlement House –
Established in 1922. Incorporated in 1952 in the Clarissa Street area, this center has provided important programs and services for Rochester's West Side African-American community.
10. Baden Street Settlement House –
Founded in 1900, it has been a significant part of African-American life in the city's northeast area through various programs and services.
11. Barber shops, beauty salons, corner stores, and other long-established local businesses owned by African-American residents.
12. 616 Genesee Street –
Colonial Revival style, built c.1900, present status unknown. Site of an African-American women's club dating from 1930, it became the Rochester Federation of Women's Clubs in 1968.

II. Places and priorities chosen by the selection committee

1. Clarissa Street corridor
2. Joseph Avenue corridor
3. South Plymouth Avenue corridor

4. Appendix

A. Demographic data and implications

The Second Great Migration saw a sustained increase in the African-American population in Rochester following World War II. This large, new demographic group changed the number, types and dispersal of places of significance to the African-American community.

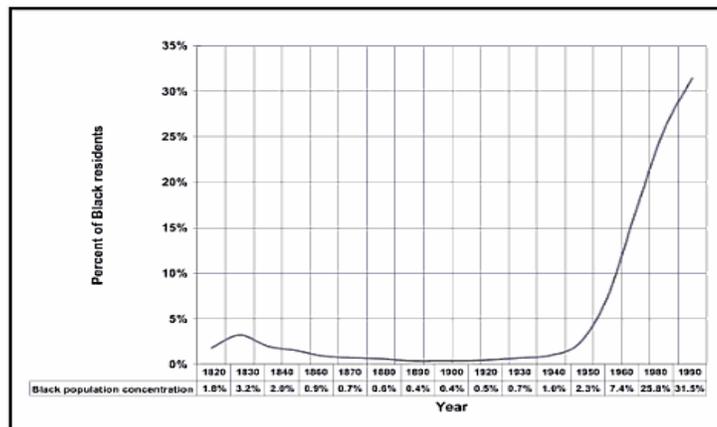


Chart-3 Black Population concentration in Rochester, 1820-1990.
Author: Mike F. Molaire. Copyright 1998, News Publications.

From Mike F. Molaire, "African-American Who's Who, Past and Present Rochester Area" p.25

According to Emily Morry, Historical Researcher for the City Historian's Office in Rochester,

"Seeking better residential, employment, and education opportunities, millions of southern Blacks migrated to northern cities in the post-war era. In Rochester, the African-American population tripled between 1950 and 1960, growing by a greater proportion than any other location in New York State.

These new migrants found themselves overwhelmingly concentrated in the city's northeast and southwest neighborhoods, such as Genesee-Jefferson, because racial barriers prohibited them from home-ownership elsewhere."

B. Promotional Flyer and Poster

The Rochester African-American Landmarks Project Needs Your Help!

Thursday, August 22nd, 2013

5:15pm-6:45pm

Arnett Library

310 Arnett Blvd. Rochester

Wednesday, September 11th, 2013

6:30pm-8:00pm

Holy Rosary Church Campus

414 Lexington Ave. Rochester

*"This is a Great Opportunity.
Please try to attend!"
-Bill Johnson, Co-chair*

The Landmark Society is reaching out to the Rochester community to gather facts, events, places, and stories that have been important in the lives of ordinary African-Americans in Rochester.

We are looking for places where African Americans have lived, worked, and raised a family, the location where an important event took place, the home of someone who was special somehow, a park, a school, a corner store, any place that you remember that was important to you at some time in your life.

We want to connect these places with the experiences of real people that make them important, to create a special interest in them that will attract investment, inspire younger generations with identity and community pride, and tell the story of people who came to Rochester and made a life, raised a family and formed a community.

Our experiences, our places

Our experiences determine who we are and what we want. The places in our lives reflect those values and connect us to each other and to our past. This project is an amazing opportunity for our community to explore, share and ultimately preserve our common heritage.

All are welcome, please join us.

The Landmark Society of Western New York

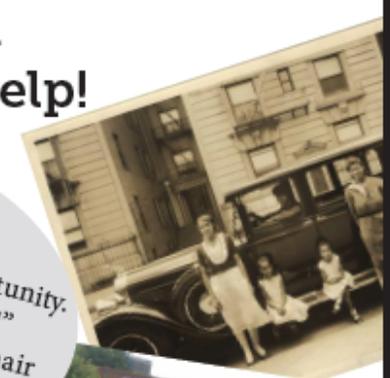
585.546.7029 X14 • lfrancer@landmarksociety.org

*Ordinary People,
Extraordinary lives*



African-American
LANDMARKS

This project is made possible by a grant from the Finger Lakes Regional Economic Development Council and the New York State Council on the Arts, with the support of Governor Andrew Cuomo and the New York State Legislature.



C. Articles appearing in Rochester's Democrat and Chronicle

Effort aims to preserve local African-American history

Gary McLendon, Staff writer 3:16 p.m. EDT August 23, 2013



(Photo: KRIS J. MURANTE)

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Preserving and celebrating African-American history can take some digging.

So, the Landmark Society of Western New York is asking African-Americans to share names, locations and their memories of places of historic importance to African-Americans in the region.

Funding for this fact-gathering portion of the initiative lasts at least through the end of the year.

About a dozen people gathered Thursday in the Arnett branch library to brainstorm, pitch suggestions and reminisce about what Rochester used to be.

"Our thought was that, if we can find some locations, some sites that are and were important to the African-American community, and we can bring some attention to those sites, we can hopefully stir some economic development within the areas where they are," said Larry Francer, associate director of preservation for the Landmark Society.

Sandra Frankel, co-chair of the African-American Landmarks Task Force, said: "The sites can relate to events, individuals, to activities, to things that were important to the lives of people. They can be famous, or they can be your next-door neighbor. There is no limit to what it can be. It just has to be of historic significance to the community."

The Landmark Society received a \$50,000 grant from the state for the program. The nature of the grant requires the Landmark Society to select sites in areas that could benefit from economic development.

The Landmark Society hopes the identification of special places will stimulate people to visit, invest in and ultimately revitalize those areas.

Areas already identified are:

Clarissa Street (Clarissa's/Shepp's).

Frederick Douglass/Sprague House (271 Hamilton St.).

Mumford/Caledonia's connection to the migration for newly freed slaves.

Cooperative Housing at Reynolds and Bartlett streets.

James and Bessie Hamm house at 301 Adams St.

South Plymouth Avenue corridor.

Joseph Avenue corridor.

Montgomery Neighborhood Settlement House.

Baden Street Settlement House.

Rochester Federation of Women's Clubs, 616 Genesee St.

Churches such as Mt. Vernon, Aeon, Antioch, A.M.E. Zion, Mt. Olivet, Gospel Tabernacle, and Central Church of Christ.

Thursday's meeting also produced several other sites for consideration. The Landmark Society intends to identify two or three areas of cultural significance, conduct studies for possible revitalization, and once successful, repeat the process with additional locations.

GMCLENDN@DemocratandChronicle.com

Local stories may hold economic potential

ROC 1:35 p.m. EDT August 26, 2013



(Photo: KRIS J. MURANTE)

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To the disheartenment of their forebears, many young people today behave and converse in ways that corrode their own roots. But an appreciation of eras past can not only inspire and motivate individuals to personal accomplishment, it can also be the seeds of sorely needed economic activity in challenged areas.

With an eye toward posterity and prosperity, the Rochester community should support a nascent initiative to capitalize on the region's hidden cultural riches.

[Shared memories](#) of meaningful yet unheralded locales — specifically, ones that helped to define the African-American experience in Rochester — might spark economic rejuvenation if a plan spearheaded by the Landmark Society of Western New York finds success.

Armed with a \$50,000 state grant, the [Landmark Society](#) hopes to conceive two or three targeted revitalization projects that might have a "catalytic impact," as executive director Wayne Goodman puts it, linking heritage and economic development.

With Rochester's significant roles played in the abolition struggle, the Great Migration and the Civil Rights Era, the African-American Landmarks Task Force should find no shortage of buildings, streets or lots ripe for rehabilitation. That is, as long as the public weighs in with stories and ideas.

According to African-American chronicler [David A. Anderson](#), sites deserving exploration include the location of the original Memorial AME Zion Church, Clarissa Street, and a house believed to have been purchased by Frederick Douglass on Hamilton Street.

There may be many more focal points of black Rochester being overlooked. Attend the task force's Sept. 11 listening session and help bring them to light.