

Woodland Garden and Cherry Heights
Cultural Landscape Analysis for NeighborSpace
DRAFT REPORT

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2023

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1. Introduction

1.1 NeighborSpace and Woodland Garden

This report was commissioned by NeighborSpace Baltimore County, a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization that aims to enhance the livability of communities within the urban-rural demarcation line through the protection and improvement of land for small parks, gardens, trails, and natural areas (<https://www.neighborspacebaltimorecounty.org/>). Since 2004, the organization has conserved 21 sites with a total of ninety-nine acres in the Baltimore area. The group approached Towson University and BTU in 2020 with the goal of uncovering some of the history behind the Cherry Heights Neighborhood in Overlea, where they were in the process of creating a pocket park at Woodland Garden. The current TU research team was formed in the winter of 2021-2022.

The site for Cherry Heights Woodland Garden, in the 7000 block of Beech Avenue, was acquired by NeighborSpace in 2015. The park encompasses two main plot areas (see Fig. 1) – a southwestern plot (Plot 1 in the figure) gifted to the organization by the family of Helen Miller Hundt and a northeastern County-owned plot (Plots 4 and 5), for which the organization was able to secure a right of entry, thanks to assistance from Council Chair Cathy Bevins and to Assistant County Attorney Amy Grossi. The latter parcel falls within the boundaries of Cherry Heights and includes a planned “paper road” extension of Third Street that would have connected Willowdale Avenue and Beech Avenue.

1.2 The TU Team

The TU research team consists of students Colin Bates, a Geography and Environmental Planning major and minor in Geographic Information Sciences, Ja’lyn Hicks, and Art and Design major with a graphic design concentration and minor in Museum Studies, Shepsura Page, an

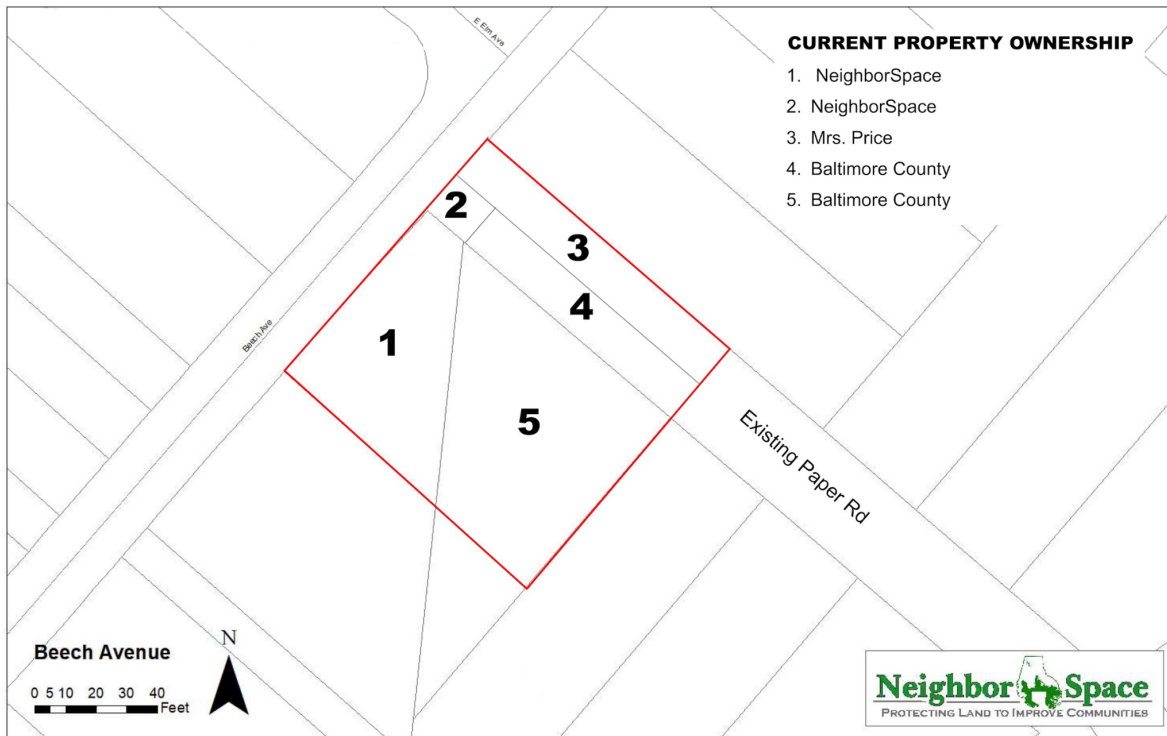


Figure 1. Map of parcels included in Cherry Heights Woodland Garden site (image courtesy NeighborSpace)

Environmental Science and Studies major and Geography minor, Tyler Roberts, a Geography and Environmental Planning major and minor in Geographic Information Sciences, and Dr. Sya Buryn Kedzior, an Associate Professor in Geography and Environmental Planning. Both Shepsura and Tyler graduated from TU during the course of this project.

The TU research team was supported by *BTU: Partnerships at Work for a Greater Baltimore*, a university initiative managed by the Office of Partnerships and Outreach (OPO) within the Division of Strategic Partnerships and Applied Research. The OPO-BTU team, led by Matt Durlington, Executive Director of Community Engagement and Partnerships, facilitated the relationship between NeighborSpace and the TU research team, and provided financial and logistical support for the project. Kathleen Crostic, Assistant Director of Partnerships and Engagement, and Tess Heron, Engagement Coordinator, helped to facilitate connections between the project stakeholders and to manage administrative and communication tasks for the team.

2. The Cherry Heights Neighborhood

2.1 Cherry Heights and Overlea History

The neighborhood of Overlea, which means "over the meadows", was first established in 1858 when Margaret Fuller brought her six children from Ohio and purchased 43 acres near Taylor and Belair Roads. They called the area "Sophie's Garden Regulated", presumably after one of Fuller's children. The land was appealing to developers – near Baltimore City amenities and transportation lines, but retaining a bucolic, "countryside" often described as having "rolling hills and overlook views". Development stretched from the city along Belair Road, attracting wealthy families who built large Victorian homes among the surrounding farmlands. Among those were the Lassahn family, who played significant roles in the business and community development of the area. In 1885, the Lassahn family helped create the first post office; the first general store, and, a year later, the first school called Fullerton School. It was initially a small, one-room log house, but was later developed into a proper schoolhouse in the 1890s. In 1895, the land around Sophie's Garden Regulated was sold to the Kennard Land Company, who quickly began residential development of the area. The streets were laid out and named after trees: Spruce, Ash, Cedar, Hickory, Chestnut, Walnut, Willow, Beech, Poplar, Elm and Linden. In 1910, a town hall was established and the neighborhood of Overlea took root.

In 1909, the Cherry Heights community plat (see Fig. 2) was drawn up by Ernest J. Jones and the Cherry Heights Realty and Construction Company (CHRCC). It was developed and marketed as the first community for African American homeowners in Baltimore County. The Sale of lots began on New Year's Day in 1910, with prices ranging from \$150-400. The CHRCC awarded a contract to H.C. Barnes for development of ten 2½ story "ornamental frame cottages" and seven bungalows, all with electricity and hot water heating. Daniel Murray, a wealthy local

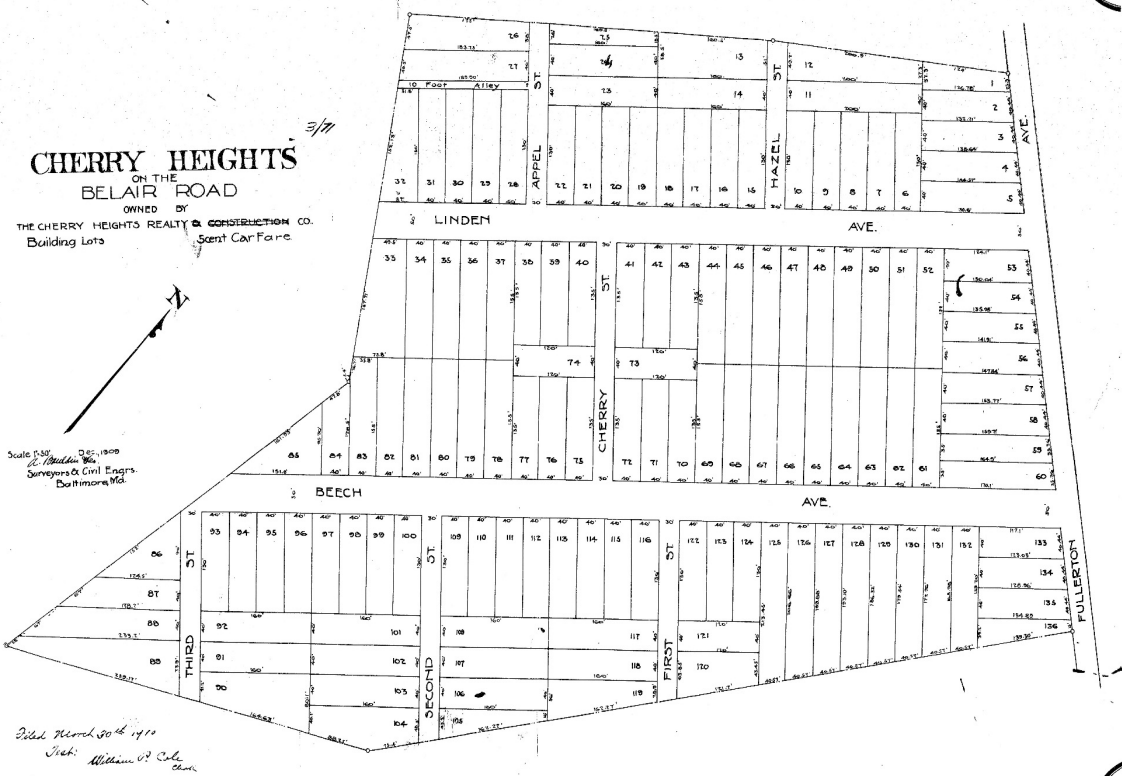


Figure 2a. Original 1910 plat for Cherry Heights

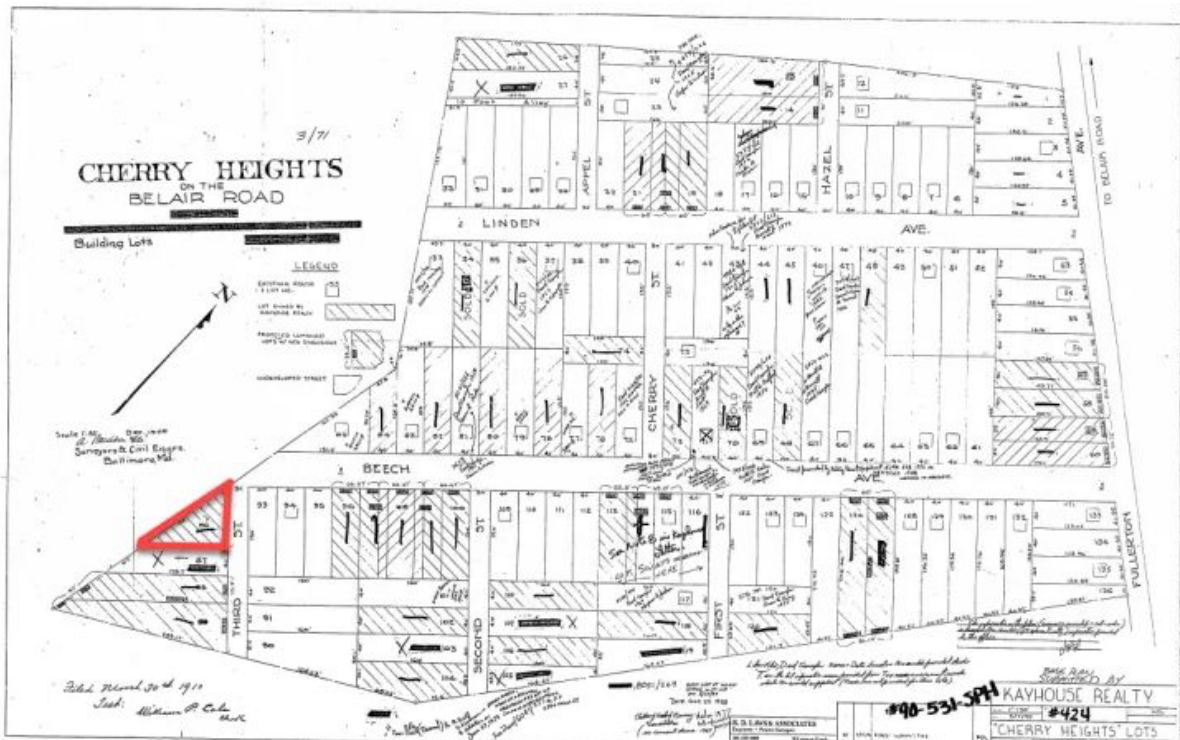


Figure 2b. Cherry Heights plat updated through 1990 (indicating section of Woodland Gardens site in red)

African American and Assistant Librarian at the Library of Congress purchased 156 of the initial lots, at least in part due to financial insolvency experienced by the CHRCC. Murray purchased an additional 75 lots in 1918 for a total of \$9000 (NAACP 1918, p. 86), cementing his position as the largest landowner in the neighborhood. Murray's deeds included the same restrictions passed on from the CHRCC to other property owners: no alcohol sales, no slaughterhouses or other "offensive operations", no keeping of swine or other "animals of offensive character", that wells would be cement-lined, and that any houses would be constructed at least fifteen feet from the street and cost at least "ten hundred dollars" (see Appendix A). The goal of these restrictions was to maintain the rural and residential character of the neighborhood.

Development of Cherry Heights occurred in within the context of, and in direct response to, the passage of segregation ordinances within Baltimore City that significantly limited housing options, and in some cases led to the legal expulsion of Black residents from White-majority areas of the city. Evidence for this relationship is clear in advertisements from the era. A 1910 article in the *Afro-American* described prohibition in suburban deeds "that preclude[d] the sale of any of them to colored people" and urged potential buyers to take advantage of the opportunity to purchase land in a neighborhood without such restrictions – "an opportunity that will not soon be duplicated" (*Baltimore Afro-American*, 7 May 1910). The Cherry Heights subdivision was promoted through local newspapers, particularly the *Baltimore Afro-American* (see Fig. 3). Most buyers self-financed the purchase of a plot on which they later constructed homes. Indeed, evidence indicates that some plots remained empty for years after purchase, until their owners raised funds to build, or that homes were constructed by relatively wealthy residents as vacation or retirement homes. Some buyers were eligible for government-sponsored loans, due to the relatively high grade assessed by the Home Owners Loan Corporation (HOLC) that indicated

Announcement Extraordinary
 A New Suburb for Colored People

CHERRY HEIGHTS

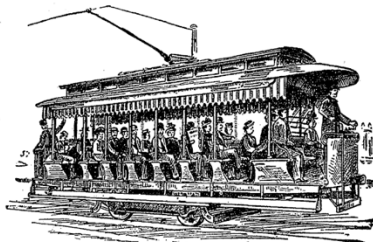
ON *The* BELAIR ROAD

..First General Sale, New Year's Day, Jan. 1, 1910...

THE CHERRY HEIGHTS REALTY AND CONSTRUCTION COMPANY has secured a twenty-four acre tract of land on the Belair Road and has subdivided the same into building lots of moderate size, is now engaged in grading streets through the same, and is ready to offer these splendid lots to the colored people of Baltimore at reasonable prices and on the most reasonable terms. Within 30 minutes of the centre of the City.

No Ground Rents...

Why spend the rest of your life fighting and fretting about Ground Rents when you can own your ground at Cherry Heights and live happy and healthy?



An Opportunity...

Once in a life-time you get an opportunity like this to buy choice lots. If you are wise you will investigate these lots at once, and if you knew their real value you would not lose a minute in getting on the ground.

First Class Settlement

This neighborhood is in the process of daily development and is inhabited by a thrifty class of people. Good water and every facility of the most advanced suburban settlement

Location

These lots fronting on the County thoroughfare, Fullerton Ave. are equal to ROLAND PARK in beauty. Come and see it yourself. There is no location so near the city that has ever been offered to our people. They can be bought on reasonable terms at very low prices for those who take the advantage to buy now. These lots will go up in prices double to what they are now.

Growth

Baltimore is growing and she is growing fast. Already her residential districts are crowded and her busy people are forced to seek places for homes in the suburbs. They are investing in lots for these homes outside, where they will have room for constructing homes of their own taste.

Ownership of Lands

OWNERSHIP OF LANDS makes you independent for life. First, establish your income of an ENHANCING VALUE. Lay this foundation close to the soil, and especially where values are sure to increase. Direct ownership of land is desired for three chief reasons. 1st. On account of natural resources as in timber or minerals. 2nd. On account of productivity under agriculture. 3rd. On account of suitability as a site for a home or a shop or some form of industrial or commercial activity. The land owned by THE CHERRY HEIGHTS REALTY AND CONSTRUCTION COMPANY presents a fine location as a home site. Nothing better can be found within a 5 cent carfare and so near a large city of 600,000 people.

Already a Suburb

This property of ours is already a suburb of Baltimore. Every car in the city transfers to the Belair Road car with a 5 cent carfare. This is why we have called it one of the most beautiful SUB-DIVISIONS that was ever offered or will ever be offered to our people. They are deprived of all opportunities for purchasing building lots where accessibility to the city is so convenient and inexpensive.

Don't Be Shoved Back

Why accept a lot with a 10 or 20 cent carfare when THE CHERRY HEIGHTS REALTY AND CONSTRUCTION COMPANY'S lots can be reached by a FIVE CENT CAR FARE. So we say to you, whatever you may have had in contemplation just come to CHERRY HEIGHTS and see these lots on our first general sale day, which will be on New Year's Day, January 1st 1910, from 10 A. M. to 4 P. M.

Investment

The most substantial New Year's investment will be a Lot at CHERRY HEIGHTS, forty by one hundred and fifty feet or six thousand square feet of land to each Lot.

TERMS

These Lots ranging in prices from \$150.00 to \$450.00 are just HALF THEIR ACTUAL VALUE. A small cash payment of \$10 down and \$1.25 per week. NO TAXES, NO INTEREST UNTIL LOTS ARE PAID FOR.

How to Get to Cherry Heights

Take any City Line and transfer to BELAIR ROAD CAR and ride to its terminus, and our representative will meet you. It is only two blocks from the cars.

Cherry Heights Realty & Construction Co., 17 E. Saratoga St.

Ernest J. Jones, President.

Hawkins & McMechen, Attorneys.

Figure 3. Advertisement for Cherry Heights lots in the *Baltimore Afro-American* (25 Dec 1909, p. 2)

Cherry Heights' status as a desirable neighborhood or sought loans from private lenders. Classified ads from the era indicate that many homeowners rented rooms or even entire floors in their homes, which may have been an avenue for supplementing mortgage loan payments.

While Cherry Heights was established as a significant Black-majority suburban community in Baltimore County, many plots were left undeveloped until later in the century. Many Cherry Heights residents continued to work, go to school, and worship in the city. Residents described efforts by surrounding community members in Overlea and broader Baltimore County to harass, exclude, and deny the rights and legal privileges of Black Cherry Heights. A 1910 *Afro-American* article references, but does not describe, the well-known efforts “made to prevent colored people getting into this neighborhood, and that the [Cherry Heights Construction and Realty] Company has opportunities to dispose of the tract at a figure above what it paid for the land, it will be seen at once that there has been some race pride at work” (7 May 1910). It continued, “Now what we want to do is to encourage this company and benefit ourselves by purchasing these lots and building home upon them and the sooner the better”. Later sources describe efforts to limit neighborhood access, prevent the construction of a local school, and to otherwise harass and threaten Black residents (cf. *Baltimore Afro-American*, 1 Sept. 1956). Within this context, successive generations of Cherry Heights residents thrived, establishing active community organizations and producing a long line of influential community leaders. These stories are written into the landscape of the Overlea-Fullerton community.

2.2 Timeline

1858	Margaret Fuller, a widow, brought her six children from Ohio and purchased a 43-acre tract called Sophie's Garden Regulated, adjacent to Taylor Avenue and Belair Road
1895	The Kennard Land Company began development of Overlea after purchasing property from the Fuller family

1909	<p>The Cherry Heights community plat (located between Fullerton Avenue and East Elm Avenue) was drawn up</p> <p>Cherry Heights was developed as the First African American Community in Overlea by Ernest J. Jones and the Cherry Heights Realty and Construction Company</p> <p>The subdivision was announced in the <i>Baltimore Afro-American</i> and through flyers, advertising building lots to go on sale on New Year's Day 1910 (original prices ranged from \$150-400)</p> <p>Daniel Murray, a local African American author and assistant Librarian at the Library of Congress, purchased 156 lots of the original Cherry Heights development</p>
1910	<p>The Cherry Heights community plat was officially recorded</p> <p>Overlea's first drug store opened its doors</p> <p>Mr. and Mrs. James T. Everett hosted the community meeting at their mansion to establish a Sunday School in Overlea. The Overlea Methodist Church was founded from that meeting</p> <p>Town Hall opened on the northwest corner of Belair Road and Overlea Avenue (the building now houses the Maryland Natural History Society)</p> <p>Cherry Heights building lots were advertised in flyers and newspapers by Attorney Larry Gibson (prices ranged from \$150-400)</p> <p>Daniel Murray and Reverend John Hurst took over the mortgage on the subdivision</p>
1911	Builder H.C. Barnes was contracted to construct 17 houses in Cherry Heights
1913	The Women's Suffrage March stopped in Overlea during the march from New York to Washington, D.C.
1915	Six dwellings were standing in Cherry Heights. Development was slow.
1917	The Maryland school for the blind located in Overlea closes and relocates
1917	The U.S. Supreme Court found ordinances like Baltimore's 1910 segregation rule to be unconstitutional by restricting the property rights of (White) homeowners to sell to whomever they wished
1918	Daniel Murray purchased an additional 75 lots in Cherry Heights
1919	<p>Parts of Overlea were annexed by the city of Baltimore, bisecting 29 properties in the neighborhood and dividing Overlea between City and County governments</p> <p>Cherry Heights Realty Company was dissolved for tax delinquency</p>
1925	George Murray begins managing the subdivision for Daniel Murray and John Hurst
1926	Overlea had all city conveniences such as electricity, gas and water
1939	The first African American High Schools opened in Baltimore County in Towson (Carver), Catonsville (Banneker), and Sparrows Point (Braggs). Prior to this, only grammar school was available to Black students in the county and only qualifying students were bussed to city high schools
1949	Cedar Avenue was changed to Cedonia Avenue

1950	Overlea United Methodist church was constructed on Cedonia Avenue The neighborhood of Ken Knoll is established south of Cherry Heights
1988	Daniel Murray's descendants sell their remaining 40 undeveloped lots to Kayhouse Realty

3. Urban Planning and Housing Segregation in Baltimore

In order to understand the patterns of housing development and community growth in Cherry Heights, we must first turn to the larger context of urban planning and segregation in Baltimore. This section describes trends in urban planning, with a focus on the early part of the 20th century in which Cherry Heights was initially developed.

3.1 Segregation and Urban Planning in Early 20th Century Baltimore

In December 1910, the Baltimore City Council passed a segregation ordinance. It stipulated “That no negro can move into a block in which more than half of the residents are White” and “That no White person can move into a block in which more than half of the residents are colored”. This law was submitted by councilman Samuel West, leading it to be referred to as the West Ordinance, although it was written by lawyer Milton Dashiell (Power 1983, p. 12). West drafted the law in response to public outcry from White residents after George W.F. McMechen moved into the entirely White neighborhood of Eutaw Place in June 1910, taking up residence at 1834 McCulloh Street (Power 1983, p. 11). McMechen rented the property from his law partner, W. Ashbie Hawkins. At this time, Eutaw Place was one of the most affluent neighborhoods in Baltimore (Glotzer 2020, p. 83). This segregation law was the first of its kind in the United States, leading to a New York Times article referring to it as a “drastic plan” and “the Most Pronounced Jim Crow Measure on record.” The article goes on to describe that while laws had been passed designating

certain areas segregated, like schools, this was the first to effectively segregate an entire city (25 Dec. 1910).

When McMechen moved into the neighborhood, residents responded violently. The first night, bricks were thrown through his windows. When more Black residents moved into the neighborhood later in the year, they were met with similar violence (*New York Times*, 25 December 1925). Unable to secure their desired results through violent means, neighborhood residents began to petition for the ordinance (Glotzer 2020, p. 83). Public hearings were held over the next several months after West presented the bill, which was signed into law by Mayor J. Barry Mahool on December 20, 1910 (Power 1983). Within the first month of the ordinance, 26 criminal cases were sent to court for violations. The ordinance was voided immediately by the court for being “inaccurately drawn”, likely because the official title of the ordinance did not reflect racial segregation (Power 1983, p. 16-17). A new ordinance was written, with changes due to complaints from realtors and White landowners. This new law only applied to blocks that were completely segregated and would not apply to blocks with both Black and White residents (until they became segregated). This law was passed in April 1911, being updated again in May to stipulate that segregated schools or churches could not be built on White blocks and vice versa (Power 1983).

Two years later, W. Ashbie Hawkins represented John E Gurry, who was accused of moving into an entirely White neighborhood. The ordinance was dismissed by the Maryland Court of Appeals because it was written in a way that made it illegal for anyone to move into mixed blocks. A fourth ordinance was enacted before the third had been formally struck down, correcting the error in writing (Power 1983). In 1915 Hawkins defended Thomas S. Jackson for violations of the newly drafted ordinance. This trial was placed on hold while the Supreme Court began to hear a related case. In 1914, Louisville, Kentucky had passed a law inspired by Baltimore’s policies.

The Kentucky law was ruled unconstitutional by the Supreme Court in 1917 in *Buchanan v. Warley*, but that ruling also ending Baltimore’s ordinance (Power 1983).

3.2 Redlining

After the loss of direct means of legal segregation, Baltimore’s leaders turned to other methods. One was the use of “redlining” (see Fig. 4). In 1933, the Home Owners’ Loan Act was passed as

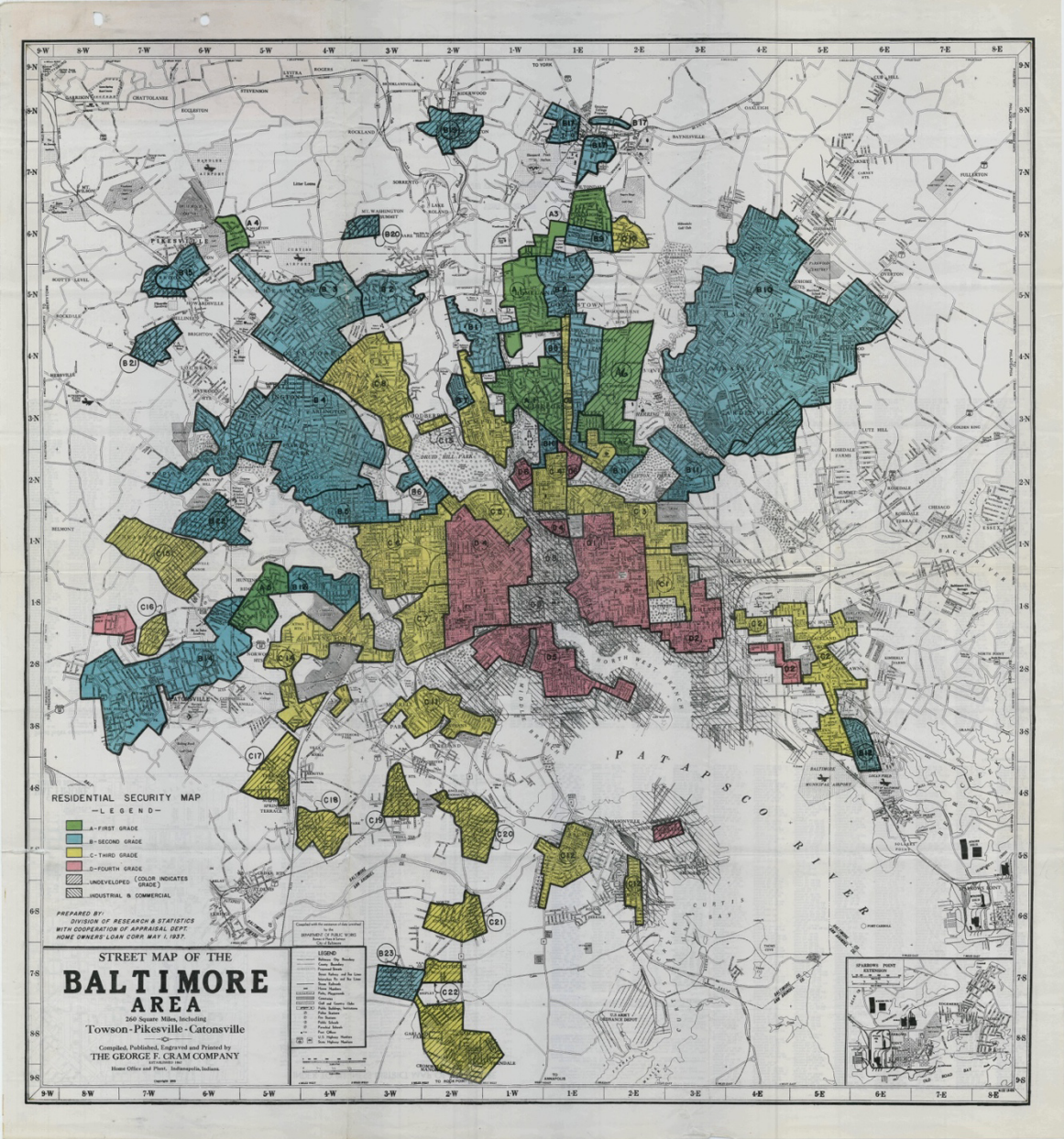


Figure 4. Redlined map of Baltimore metropolitan area, including Cherry Heights and Overlea

part of the New Deal. It created the Home Owners Loan Corporation (HOLC) to “provide emergency relief with respect to home mortgage indebtedness, to refinance home mortgages, to extend relief to the owners occupied by them and who are unable to amortize their debt elsewhere” (The Living New Deal 2016). In order to do this, the HOLC created “residential security maps” that graded neighborhoods to determine whether they would issue mortgages in each area. Neighborhoods with the lowest security ratings were delineated in red and their residents would be denied lending. The Federal Housing Administration, created in 1934, used these guidelines when insuring private loans, which lead to the denial of both public and private loans for both residential and commercial development within those “redlined” neighborhoods (Glotzer 2020).

HOLC agents were tasked to determine security grades based on several factors. HOLC considered the most valuable and safest investment to be White-owned single-family homes. By extension, the “safest” neighborhoods were those with more of those homes. HOLC used a single-page form for grading each neighborhood that included assessments of current market values and housing stock for valuations. It also included a notable section on neighborhood inhabitants, which asked for percentages of both African Americans and “immigrant” residents. Another category was titled “infiltrations” and asked agents to assess “Any threat of infiltration of foreign-born, negro or lower grade population” (Greer 2013). While not explicitly legislating segregation, this system of property assessment served to reinforce segregation by devaluing property within African American neighborhoods and preventing both property sales, refinancing, and loans for purchase. As a result, properties were devalued, and it became harder for residents to relocate.

In Baltimore, only one neighborhood listed with an African American majority population received among the highest two assessment grades, and the percentage of African Americans within that population was listed as “small”. Any neighborhood with more than 10% African

American population was given the worst security grade (Nelson et al. 2023). Historian Paige Glotzer (2020) notes that several other Black neighborhoods were ignored by assessors, including Wilson Park, and that HOLC maps “reflected the subjectivity and geographic imagination of appraisers” rather than providing an accurate representation of neighborhoods (Glotzer 2020, p. 164). Cherry Heights may have been another victim of appraisers’ imagination. The archived evaluation form from May 1937 claimed that the neighborhood had no African American residents. This was obviously false, and in direct contradiction to census data available at the time (see below). By the 1930s, Cherry Heights was well established with at least fifty African American residents (see Fig. 5). The 1937 HOLC evaluation form documented a number of favorable influences in the neighborhood, describing it as a “Desirable residential section, homogenous as to development and general type of construction. Free of bad features [with a] substantial class of people” and ultimately assessing Cherry Heights as Zone B10, the second highest possible grade (Nelson et al. 2023). The motivations driving these subjective assessments is unclear, but not limited to Cherry Heights. Morgan Park, another upscale neighborhood designated for Black residents, was similarly zoned B-10, while Wilson Park, Hampden, and Woodberry were misrepresented as having “no black residents” and designated zoned B and C. Other majority Black neighborhoods in Baltimore were left off HOLC maps entirely. Over subsequent decades, HOLC grades were used to guide the lending practices of most banks, which in turn impacted real estate values.

3.3 Baltimore’s “Slum Clearance” Programs

Another common means of achieving segregation was using so-called “slum clearance” programs to destroy African American majority neighborhoods in locations the targeted by the city. This

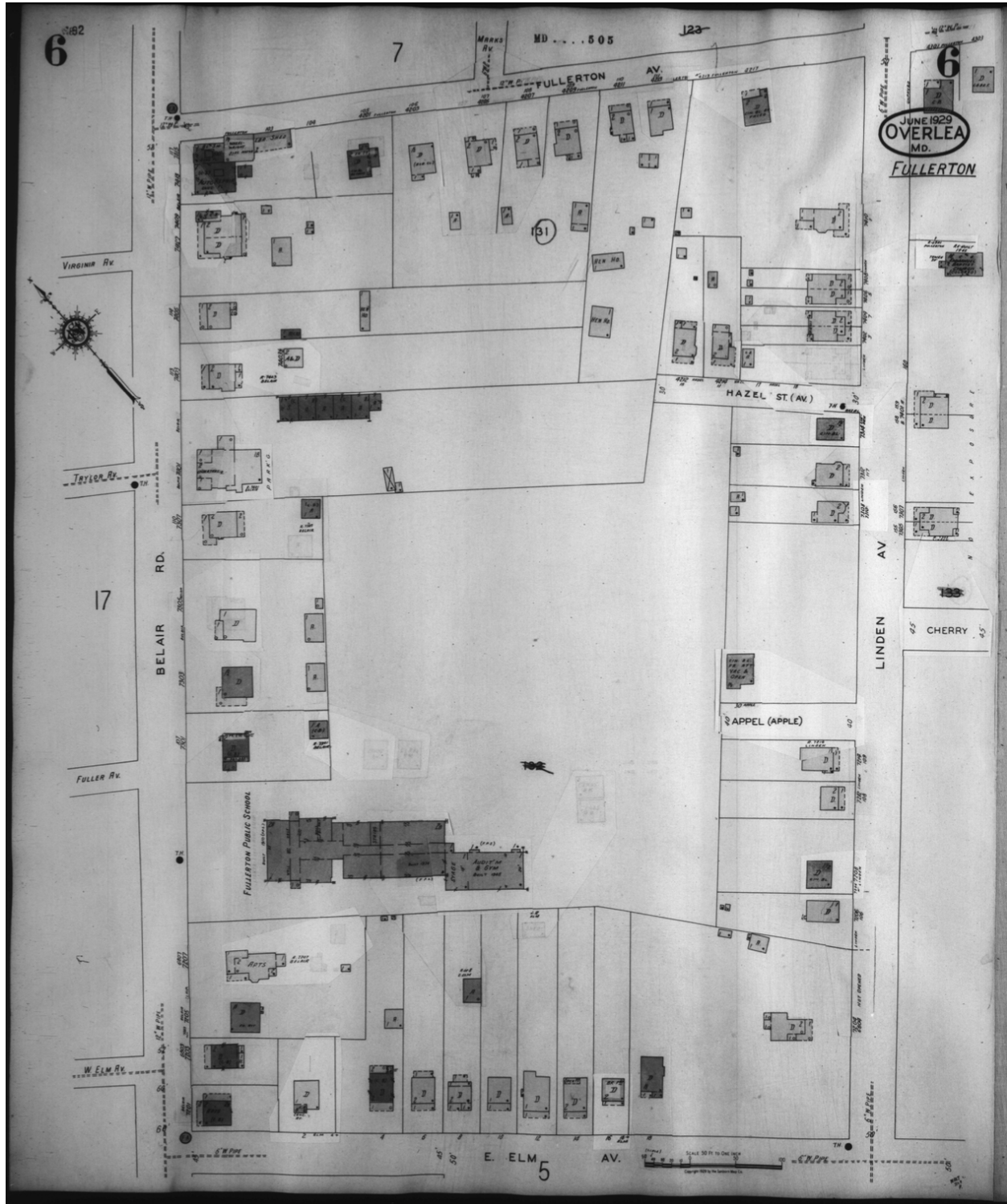


Figure 5. 1929 Map of the northeastern quadrant of Cherry Heights

practice began in Baltimore in 1914 but would become a common tactic for the next half century.

In 1933, the city found that most of the neighborhoods it deemed “blighted” were Black majority

neighborhoods. These were neighborhoods with poor housing conditions that were often disconnected from city services, including garbage collection and sewage (Power 1983). Historian Paige Glotzer (2020) notes that the term “blight” was also used to describe African Americans moving into an area and equated race with these poor conditions (p. 149). Many slum clearance projects used “blight removal” as a justification for remove the housing, along with its tenants, and replacing it with better quality housing, and new tenants. In 1934, a study performed for the city concluded that it was in the public interest to destroy such “blighted” neighborhoods solely because they decreased property values and property tax revenues for nearby White neighborhoods (Power 1983, p. 317).

In 1937, the Housing Authority of Baltimore chose five sites for a “slum” clearance project in what were designated as “blighted” areas of the city. When proposing the sites to the city, the Housing Authority presented Black occupancy data as part of the justification for its clearance program, along with an earlier report by the Joint Committee on Housing that “singled out predominantly lack areas within the ring [of blight] to be demolished and redeveloped with rental housing targeted at white suburbanites to entice them to move back to the central city” (Glotzer 2020, p. 161). All five of the proposed demolition sites were in HOLC-designated redlined neighborhoods, where four of the five multi-block sites had predominantly Black populations and the fifth site had a growing Black population. After clearance, three of the newly developed housing areas were designated by the Baltimore City Housing Authority for White occupancy through a manipulation of federal statues requiring maintenance of “neighborhood composition” that justified racial segregation in housing projects (Glotzer 2020).

The Housing Act of 1949 changed how slum clearance was performed. Under the name of urban redevelopment, residential properties were acquired in blocks through eminent domain.

These properties were then sold to private companies who could develop and sell them as they desired, with funding from local housing authorities. One positive change was that explicit racial restrictions attached to property deeds were ruled unenforceable by 1948 Supreme Court case *Shelley v. Kramer*, and so financial assistance for redevelopment efforts was withheld from companies using these restrictive covenants (Glotzer 2020). In 1953, slum clearance programs morphed into now better-known “urban renewal” efforts under President Dwight Eisenhower. Urban Renewal was a more comprehensive program that included the construction of public housing and non-residential construction. However, urban renewal still led to the widespread displacement of African Americans in Baltimore (Glotzer 2020).

Urban renewal in Baltimore City is particularly relevant to the late-stage development of Cherry Heights, as several residents moved into the neighborhood and constructed homes in response to displacement and overcrowding caused by the city’s urban renewal programs. Two cases of this appear in zoning records. First, Lucille Custis applied in 1965 for a variance to be granted from setback regulations¹ so that she could construct a house on her Cherry Heights lot. She had previously been a resident of Harlem Park and was among 733 families displaced by urban renewal in that neighborhood (Baltimore Heritage 2019, p. 23). The “hardship or practical difficulty” listed as a reason for the variance was “Having to move from my present location in Baltimore City on account of Urban Renewal Operations.” Her application was approved and she purchased a house from Fort Meade that was to be moved to Cherry Heights, but the lot still appears vacant today (see Appendix A). Another case appears in zoning records from 1975, when

¹ The original lots in Cherry Heights were drawn up prior to Baltimore County’s first Zoning Ordinance in 1945. Properties purchased before those ordinances were enacted were sometimes too narrow to accommodate later construction in keeping with the new rules regarding necessary setbacks from streets or property lines. Residents were therefore required to apply for variances, or relief from compliance with those rules.

Cora Lee Bostick was approved for a similar setback variance. For her reasoning, she described how, “Baltimore City in its redevelopment program is taking my present home. I had purchased the [Cherry Heights] lot twenty years ago with the hope of someday locating there with my family. Now, this is a necessity for I have no other alternative”. Her application was also approved, and a house was constructed on the lot, becoming 7200 Beech Avenue (see Appendix A). Setback variances were often approved by the County with little objection. A notable exception includes the 1969 application by Gerald N. Klauber for a setback variance for lots 93 and 94 at the northeast corner of Beech Avenue and Third Street, north of the current Woodland Garden site. While the request was ultimately approved by the Zoning Commission, the Baltimore County Zoning Advisory Committee requested that the granting of a variance be withheld until the County could discuss plans to improve Third Street. The Committee referenced plans to extend Third Street into alignment with East Elm Avenue so that it might serve as a “collector road” to improve residential access from Ken Knoll to Belair Road and recommends County acquisition of the “entire property” in order to further this project. The letter also describes Beech Avenue as “not improved as far as curb and gutter are concerned”, but “designated for construction by the Baltimore County Bureau of Engineering as a 30-foot closed section with flexible pavement” (Petition #70-33-A, Apx. A).

4. Cherry Heights Development and Property Sales

Development of the Cherry Heights neighborhood begins in direct response to segregationist urban policies in Baltimore. Located just outside of then city limits, the area provided convenient access to employment and amenities in Baltimore, just fell under county jurisdiction and laws related to the sale of property. Construction and development of individual plots was slow and driven largely by a small handful of influential individuals.

4.1 Cherry Heights Realty Company

Cherry Heights Realty and Construction Company (CRHCC) was founded by Ernest J. Jones, who acted as president of the company. The company and the neighborhood first appeared in a newspaper advertisement in the Afro-American newspaper on December 25, 1909. This newspaper advertisement announces, “A New Suburb for Colored People, Cherry Heights on The Belair Road” (see Fig. 3). It says the lots “are equal to Roland Park in beauty” and that “no location so near the city has ever been offered to our people” and goes on to list other benefits, such as investment opportunities, electric streetcar access, and direct ownership of land. Sales of lots started on New Year's Day, 1910 (*Baltimore Afro-American*, 25 Dec 1909).

Before Cherry Heights, a farmer named John J. Thalheimer owned the land. He first put the plot up for sale in *The [Baltimore] Sun* in May of 1908, focusing on access to the Belair streetcar as a selling point (see Fig. 6). Thalheimer and Ernest Jones wrote the deed of sale on November 15th, 1909, with Jones taking out a mortgage of \$5500 to purchase the land (Appendix A). Despite advertising under the Cherry Heights name, Ernest Jones held the land as sole owner until March 31, 1910, when he transferred 22.4375 acres to Cherry Heights Realty Company.

There are two possible reasons for the delay. First, Cherry Heights wasn't listed as formally incorporated in Baltimore City until April 2, 1910. Another possible explanation is that Ernest Jones chose not to incorporate until later to exclude his former business partner, Maurice D. Waller. Waller filed a lawsuit against Jones and CRHCC in June 1910, alleging that Jones and Waller had purchased the land from Thalheimer together, but Jones only placed the land in his name. A certificate of incorporation for CRHCC containing both men was created but never filed. Allegedly, Jones created a second certificate of incorporation without Waller, which was the



Figure 6. Early photograph of a streetcar on Belair Road in Overlea, 1910s

certificate submitted (*Baltimore Sun*, 8 June 1910). We could find no record of the resolution of this case or any other record of Waller's involvement with Cherry Heights.

Several other individuals appear involved in CHRCC. CHRCC placed an updated version of the initial neighborhood advertisement in the *Baltimore Afro-American* in April 1910 that lists Early G. Lane as the vice president and Josiah Diggs as treasurer. Hawkins and McMechen are listed as general counsel (see Fig. 3). The company appeared for several years in the Baltimore City Business Directory from 1912 to 1915, with either Jones, Diggs, or Lane listed as the point of contact. Between 1913 and 1915, the company listed 215 Courtland Avenue in Towson as its headquarters. In addition to advertising and selling empty lots, the company began contracting housing construction in the neighborhood. CHRCC contracted a builder, H.C. Barnes, to construct 17 houses in the neighborhood, described as "10 2½-story ornamental frame cottages and 7 bungalows", each "equipped with electric light and hot-water heating, with hardwood floorings,

slate roofs and concrete foundations” (*The [Baltimore] Sun*, 11 April 1911). At the same time, *The Sun* reported that the company developed the “new boulevards, walks, and pavements” in the neighborhood (25 April 1911). Aerial photography shows that this likely only included Linden Avenue and Hazel Avenue, as Beech Avenue did not appear to be developed until sometime after 1938.

The company faced financial issues early on with the mortgage used to purchase Cherry Heights. By October 1910, they were facing foreclosure. Ashbie Hawkins was able to stall the foreclosure while finding new investors. Reverend John Hurst and Daniel Murray were brought in and took over the \$5,500 mortgage on Cherry Heights. Both were prominent figures in the region.

4.2 The Murray Family and Early Land Sales

Hurst was the financial secretary for the African Methodist Episcopal Church, and Daniel Murray was an assistant librarian at the Library of Congress at this time (*Baltimore Afro-American*, 22 Oct 1910). The exact details of the agreement between Murray, Hurst, and CHRCC are unknown, but both received land in the neighborhood. Daniel Murray received five lots. Today those lots are 4311 Fullerton Avenue (the empty lot at the corner of Beech and Fullerton) and 7424 Beech Avenue (see Appendix A). Hurst also received five lots, which today are 4301, 4303, and 4305 Fullerton Avenue (see Appendix A). Like other suburban developments, CHRCC lists land use restrictions for properties transferred to Hurst and Murray. The full text from Murray’s deed is as follows:

“Conditions and Restrictions: Heed it is hereby agreed by and between the parties hereto, that the said party of the second part, heirs and assigns, will not erect or maintain any building for the sale of malt or spiritous liquors; will not erect or suffer any slaughterhouse, swine dressing, or bone boiling establishment, glue, soap, candle, chemical or starch manufacturing, or other building for any offensive operations to be erected or used upon any part of the land hereby agreed to be granted, also that no part of said ground shall be used for the keeping of swine or other animals of like offensive character, deed further that

all privy wells dug on or in the said ground shall be cemented and made and left watertight, and that no house erected on said lot of ground shall cost less than ten hundred dollars, and that the building be erected at least fifteen feet from the street or building line.”

Over the next decade, Murray and Hurst became the primary proprietors of Cherry Heights.

In September 1916, an equity lawsuit occurred in Baltimore County between Cherry Heights Real Estate Company and Murray (*The [Baltimore] Sun*, 29 Sept 1916). Besides the detail that Murray is the defendant, we could find no additional information regarding the lawsuit. In June 1918, *The Crisis* reported that Murray and Hurst purchased 75 lots for \$9000 (NAACP 1918, p. 86). This purchase made them the primary holder of land in the neighborhood, holding at least 75 of 136 total lots, not including any original lots from 1910 that were possibly unsold.

Ernest Jones and the Cherry Heights Realty Company disappear from records shortly afterward. In September 1919, the company appeared in the *Baltimore Sun* on a list of companies having their charters dissolved for being delinquent on state taxes for two years (*The [Baltimore] Sun*, 15 Sept 1919). Ernest Jones was convicted in 1921 while working as a bondsman. He took \$1,100 from a man to secure his bail but never secured his release and could not pay back the man when he was released. After being released on bail, he absconded to New Jersey (*The [Baltimore] Sun*, 13 May 1921).

Daniel Murray’s son, George Murray, became the primary figure in the neighborhood after this, managing the properties of his father and Hurst. In 1925 he began placing advertisements in the *Afro-American*, selling lots and cottages in the neighborhood (see Appendix B). His father and John Hurst passed shortly after, leading to legal troubles between George Murray and the Hurst estate in 1931. George Murray claimed that Hurst had owed him \$10,000 for constructing a house and acting as an agent for his properties. Murray lost the case after his attorneys failed to file briefs. He had signed a contract to work as “the exclusive agent for the management and sales of lots for a period of five years.” Murray claimed that Hurst had given him a lot to construct a model house

in the neighborhood that Murray could show to improve sales. Murray built a house on the lot for \$2,650, although Hurst only provided \$400. He had to use personal funds to release a mortgage on the lot. Murray claimed he was not paid any of the money he was owed from Hurst for either the construction or mortgage (*Baltimore African American*, 5 Sept 1931). He ultimately lost the suit in February 1932, after his lawyers failed to file briefs. Hurst's heirs stated that he had tried to acquire Hurst's property to the detriment of the estate and that he spent more money on improving his father's properties when it was supposed to be done equally (*Baltimore African American*, 6 Feb 1932). A week later, he sent a letter to the *Baltimore Afro-American*, stating that the Hursts had paid the costs of the suit to him after admitting liability to the loans taken to build the house (13 Feb 1932). The house still stands at 7212 Linden Avenue (see Table 1 and Fig. 7).

In 1950, Anna Murray, the widow of Daniel, signed a contract to install electric lines over her five lots along Beech Avenue (see Appendix A). These lots were a part of a set of 40 undeveloped lots sold in 1988 by the third generation of Murray's descendants to Kayhouse Realty, starting a zoning dispute in the community. The developer planned to construct houses on these properties, but the community wanted to

Address	Year Built
101 E Elm Ave	1924
103 E Elm Ave	1936
105 E Elm Ave	1924
107 E Elm Ave	1918
7009 Linden Ave	1923
7005 Linden Ave	1921
7003 Linden Ave	1931
7001 Linden Ave	1920
7016 Beech Ave	1924
7014 Beech Ave	1924
7012 Beech Ave	1924
7010 Beech Ave	1924
7008 Beech Ave	1924
7002 Beech Ave	1905
7000 Beech Ave	1920
7011 Beech Ave	1939
7009 Beech Ave	1918
7007 Beech Ave	1908
7005 Beech Ave	1907
7001 Beech Ave	1911
1 E Elm Ave	1919
3 E Elm Ave	1919
9 E Elm Ave	1917
11 E Elm Ave	1923
13 E Elm Ave	1923
15 E Elm Ave	1923
17 E Elm Ave	1923
19 E Elm Ave	1928
7107 Belair Rd	1920
7201 Belair Rd	1920
4 E Elm Ave	1923
6 E Elm Ave	1925
8 E Elm Ave	1927
10 E Elm Ave	1923
12 E Elm Ave	1923
14 E Elm Ave	1925

Table 1. Homes constructed in Cherry Heights prior to 1940

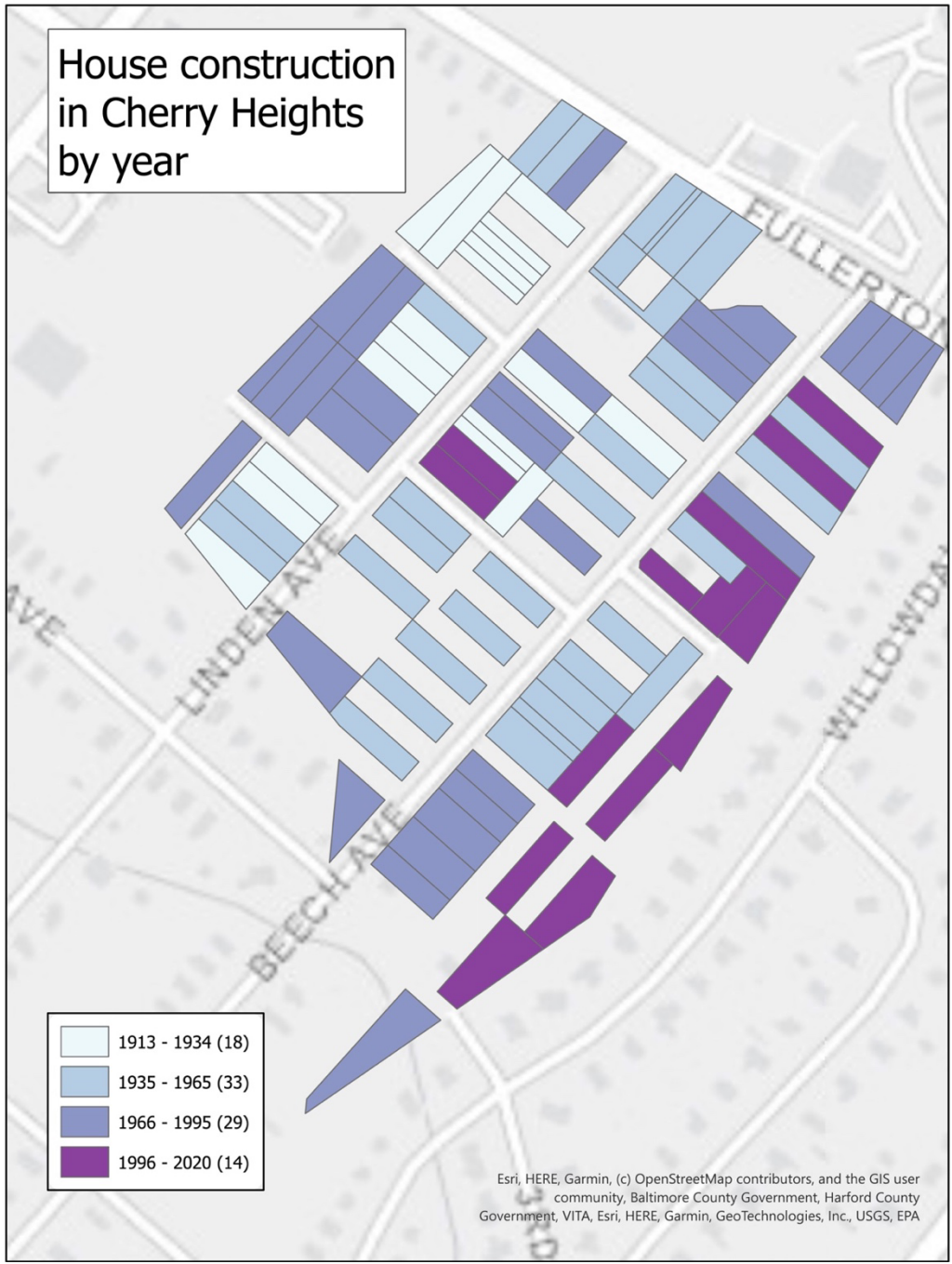


Figure 7. Construction in Cherry Heights by parcel and year (map by Colin Bates)

preserve the character of the neighborhood and prevent construction that could “double the number” of homes in the neighborhood. The Cherry Heights Committee of the Overlea Community Association, chaired by resident Julia Chestnut, contested the issuance of building

permits to the developer, citing previous assurances by the Murray family that the small plots would not be sold. According to Chestnut, many residents had planted gardens and built sheds on the empty lots. Another point of contention was that other community members had previously been prevented from constructing new houses on their own similarly small lots, which were smaller than the minimum lot size required for single-family zoning. The original Cherry Heights plots had been laid out in 1909 and 1910, long before the Zoning Ordinances were first established in 1945, and owners of the still-undeveloped small plots had been denied new construction permits. In order to resolve the issue, Baltimore County purchased 17 of the lots that bordered existing houses and allowed Kayhouse Realty to combine the remaining lots into 11 building lots in order to meet minimum zoning requirements (Carson 1990, see Fig. 8). This sale the last recorded involvement of the Murray family in Cherry Heights.

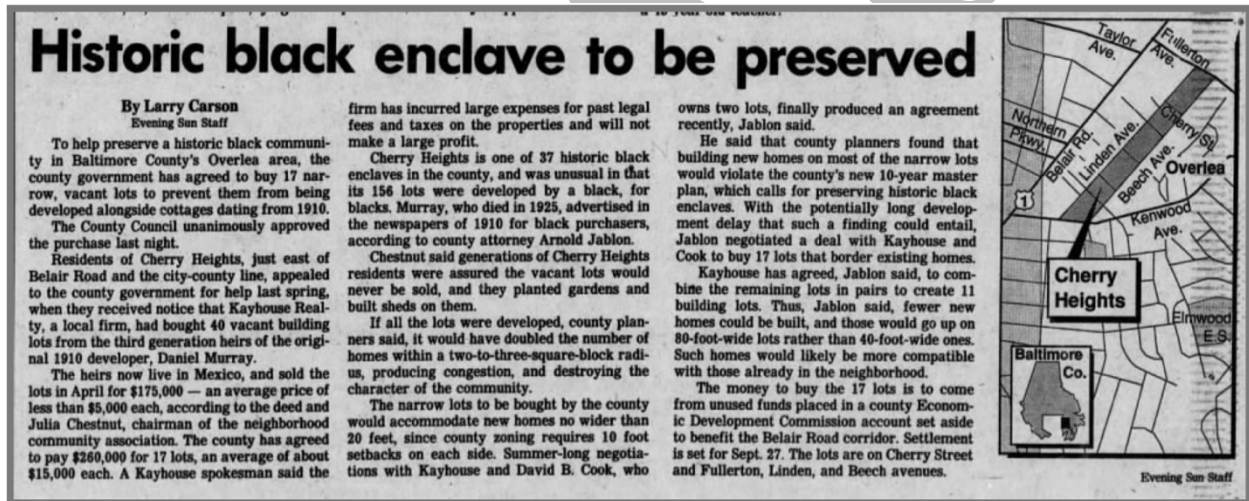


Figure 8. Article reporting 1990 sale of Cherry Heights lots to Baltimore County (Carson 1990)

5. Urban Planning and Segregation in Cherry Heights

Located in Baltimore County, Cherry Heights was not directly subjected to the segregationist ordinances and policies enacted in Baltimore city. Indeed, the city's policies and practices provided motivation for the establishment of Cherry Heights and its marketing to Black homeowners and

helped to drive migration from the city to the county. However, residents of Cherry Heights experienced different efforts by county administrators and surrounding residents to isolate the community and discourage widespread community development. These efforts helped to stifle population growth in the neighborhood during the first part of the 20th century.

5.1 Segregation via “Dead Ending”

There is strong evidence of multiple methods of segregation taking place around Cherry Heights. Our earliest primary source for this comes from a 1919 newspaper column, “Difficulty of Establishing New Colored Neighborhoods” in *The Evening Sun* (see Fig. 9). An anonymous reader wrote in response to a pro-segregation column that argued that African Americans should build new neighborhoods rather than move into all-White neighborhoods. Cherry Heights was used as an example of the difficulty faced in establishing Black communities, with the author saying, “After the colored people had acquired this site the White neighbors blocked them in for some time; they would not even accept a part of it as a public road” (*Evening [Baltimore] Sun*, 15 April 1919). The exact manner of this “blocking in” remains unclear. Later aerial photographs from 1927 indicate that Linden Avenue connected through to both Fullerton and Kenwood, though Linden appears less developed north of Elm Avenue as it continues through Cherry Heights. None of the cross streets laid out in the original 1910 plat were connected to either Belair or Beech Avenue. Both Hazel and Apple Streets end far short of their original layout, and neither Second nor Third Street were ever constructed. While some locals cite grading or drainage issues as the cause for Third Street’s absence, the neighborhood as a whole does present evidence of truncation or dead ending of side streets.

Difficulty Of Establishing New Colored Neighborhoods.

TO THE EDITOR OF THE EVENING SUN:

Sir—Kindly allow me to answer "North Stricker Street Resident" again. Again, "North Stricker Street Resident." I shall have to say that in your letter of April 7 you have made some true statements. I will admit it is quite true about "some colored tenants using wood finishings for kindling," etc.; but there are thousands who would not dream of doing such a thing. I can give the names of hundreds of colored tenants who repair fences, paint floors, woodwork, steps, and some paper rooms of their own accord, that they might have clean, neat homes.

Then you ask what would I think of a white man who would rent a house in an entirely colored settlement. I happen to know of a case where a white man bought a house in an entirely colored neighborhood and is still living there. He reared his children there and all of the colored neighbors esteem him highly. He was criticized by his white friends, but he told them that his colored neighbors were of the highest type, but that he was not able to buy a house in the neighborhoods of whites where he desired to live.

Then you ask why we do not acquire some of the undeveloped territory annexed to Baltimore city and build houses, etc.

Do you remember recently what Morgan College went through to acquire her present site?

Also, Cherry Heights, a colored settlement on the Harford road? After the colored people had acquired this site the white neighbors blocked them in for some time; they would not even accept a part of it as a public road. These colored people were all law-abiding citizens, well educated and refined.

Then, too, have you considered that the great mass of our race are domestics and laborers? If they moved great distances in the country, how could they get to work on time?

We are all anxious to acquire homes without agitation, but, no matter how we try, there is always some objection. I am willing to meet personally any association to help work out a scheme that would be satisfying to all.

COLORED CITIZEN.

Baltimore, April 9.

Dead ending streets is a well-established method used throughout the suburbs to both exclude outsiders and insulate residents from surrounding areas. By funneling traffic onto a limited number of arterial roads or pathways, dead ends increase the distance between points in a journey and often make it difficult for residents to access adjacent neighborhoods (Distel 2015). Throughout the suburbs, both dead-end streets and cul-de-sacs have been associated with insularity, local exclusiveness, and territorialization, as they discourage residents of surrounding communities from accessing the neighborhood unless it is the location of their final destination.

Dead end streets were built into the design of Baltimore neighborhoods like Guilford, developed by the Roland Park Company, in order to limit accessibility from major thoroughfares like York Road and to separate the development from the surrounding

Figure 9. Editorial on the "Difficulty of Establishing New Colored Neighborhoods" (*The Evening Sun*, 15 Apr. 1919, p. 16)

neighborhoods (Glotzer 2020, p. 91). While it would certainly not have been impossible for an early Cherry Heights resident to walk the short distance to neighboring Willowdale or Linhigh, access would have been restricted to a few intersections on Elm and Willowdale Avenues, funneling travelers to Belair Road. Residents of Cherry Heights, often drawn to the neighborhood for easy access to transportation located on Belair Road, would have been forced to travel north or south on Linden, and later Beech, in order to enter or exit the neighborhood via Fullerton or Elm Avenues. Dead end roads would have not only discouraged Cherry Heights residents from accessing surrounding neighborhoods, but also discouraged surrounding residents from traveling through Cherry Heights in order to access Belair Road, further segregating the communities.

Early property development in Cherry Heights appears to be clustered in the northern part of the neighborhood, closer to Fullerton Avenue, where surrounding farmland was not yet developed into residential neighborhoods but was owned or occupied by White residents. Antero Pietila, a long-time reporter with the *Baltimore Sun*, documented the use of dead-end roads, specifically First Avenue and Hazel Avenue, as an effort by Baltimore County administrators to ensure that the roads in Cherry Heights “did not connect to [those] surrounding White farms” (Pietila 2010, p. 57). Indeed, it is more likely that purposeful dead ending played a role in the truncation of First Avenue and elimination of both Second and Third Street. Both Apple Street and Hazel Avenue were likely never intended to connect through, as lands on the eastern side of Belair Road were well developed with permanent construction in the 19th century. The 1898 Bromley Atlas shows a number of structures on the land between Cherry Heights and Belair Road and later aerial images provide good evidence of informal walking paths connecting Apple Street² and Hazel Avenue to Belair Road (see Appendix A).

² The Lassahn family owned multiple plots between Linden Avenue and Belair Road, just south of Fullerton Avenue, long before the development of the Cherry Heights neighborhood. Property records indicate that, starting in 1889 and

Farmland to the east of Cherry Heights remained largely undeveloped until 1950. On the original 1910 Cherry Heights plat, all three streets were planned to connect Cherry Heights to this land once developed. First Avenue was the only one developed. But the intention to construct both Second and Third Streets seems to have continued for decades. A 1942 map, included with John J. Cole's application to rezone the Ken Knoll farmland east of Cherry Heights for semi-detached homes, clearly shows all three streets, along with Willowdale Avenue, dead ending against surrounding property (see Appendix C). The 1950 plat for the Ken Knoll subdivision does not include connections to First or Second Street but interestingly shows a planned connection to Third Street and Willowdale Avenue, at the southern terminus of the Cherry Heights neighborhood (see Appendix A). Third Street was later constructed to connect Willowdale and Greenwood Avenue to Kenwood Avenue, but was not connected through Cherry Heights. Today, Third Street dead ends on the eastern side of Cherry Heights Woodland Garden. A zoning request from 1969 is the last recorded mention of Third Street. The zoning request was held up due to a proposed street widening. However, the county Bureau of Engineering noted that it was an unimproved street that only appeared on paper. The request was held "until the various County agencies involved can meet to discuss the need for relocation and improving Street" (see Appendix C). That planned development of Third Street was never implemented.

5.2 Segregation via Racially Restrictive Covenants

As neighborhoods surrounding Cherry Heights were developed, their White residents often took significant measures to ensure that African American residents were restricted to Cherry Heights.

continuing through 1912, the Lassahns sold lands west of Apple Street to the Baltimore County School Board for the purposes of constructing a frame school to replace the earlier one-room log house. The original Fullerton School opened in 1890 and is now the site of the Fullerton Community Center.

One way that we know this occurred is through evidence of the extensive use of racially restrictive covenants in nearly all surrounding neighborhoods. Racially restrictive covenants were a form of segregation that was used nationwide. The practice involved adding clauses into individual property deeds that prevented African Americans, or all non-White people, from owning, purchasing, renting, or otherwise occupying the property. This form of segregation became widespread in Baltimore after they were first used in the Guilford neighborhood in 1913. In the case of Guilford, the covenants were in a separate agreement from the deed (Glutzer 2020, p. 87-89). The Roland Park Company, which developed Guilford, spread the practice across the country by sharing copies of their deeds. Developers, including those surrounding Cherry Heights, began to use the deeds in suburban developments (Glutzer 2020, p. 95). These clauses remain on many deeds across the country today but are no longer legally enforceable.

An example of this kind of covenant around Cherry Heights can be found in the Willowdale subdivision. This is the subdivision directly south of Cherry Heights, where Willowdale and Dale Avenue meet, approximately 200 feet south of Cherry Heights Woodland Garden Park. In 1938, a property sold by County Homes Corporation to Julius Requard and his wife (at what is today likely 313 Willow Avenue) included a clause in the deed that states, “That none of the land subject hereto nor any building or improvement erected thereon shall be owned or occupied by or leased or conveyed to any negro or person of negro extraction this provision however is not intended to prohibit the occupancy by negro domestic servants or other negroes while employed in or about the premise by the owner or occupant of said land” (see Appendix A).

In addition to Willowdale, there is evidence that at least two other subdivisions used similar covenants. Linhigh, the subdivision northeast of Cherry Heights across Fullerton Avenue, used

similar language in its deeds. Developer Henry Kolb leased a house in this subdivision in 1926, with a contract including the language:

“That said Lessees their executors administrators or assigns do not sell or assign the land hereby conveyed or any part of it to or for a negro or person of negro descent nor permit excepting as house servants any negro or person of negro descent to occupy any said land.” (see Appendix A)

A lease from the subdivision of Belmar, another Kolb developed subdivision, used similar language in a restriction from 1926. Belmar is located south of the intersection of Kenwood Avenue and Linden Avenue. Overlea Manor, a subdivision encompassing Manor Road and West Elm Road, also used the same restrictions. This lease was dated 1941, and Kolb also developed the subdivision (see Appendix A). Kolb had earlier been involved in the development of Overlea Park (located between Elm and Overlea Avenue and between Linden and Belair Avenue, and surrounding St. Michael the Archangel Church). We were unable to find restrictions on any of the deeds examined from this subdivision, possibly because Overlea Park was developed prior to Cherry Heights. However, this explanation is likely incomplete at best, as racially restrictive covenants could have been added to deeds by property owners during later sales, lease, or transfer of individual property. Taken as a whole, the pervasiveness of such covenants (see Appendix A) would have significantly restricted Black ownership of property in neighborhoods surrounding Cherry Heights and likely contributed to the isolation of African American residents within the neighborhood.

5.2 Segregation in Education and School Provision

School systems in both Baltimore County and City were segregated when Cherry Heights was founded in 1910, contributing to segregation of residents in and around Overlea. While there were more than 25 so-called “colored schools” throughout Baltimore County at that time, they only provided students with education through grammar school (through 7th grade). Early in the

neighborhood's development, residents began to petition for a school to be built in Cherry Heights. A *Baltimore Sun* article from 1921 explained that, "Petitions were received for a new school building at Cherry Heights for colored pupils" (7 July 1921). In 1924, 1.5 million dollars were approved by Baltimore County voters for constructing 30 new school buildings in the County, including at a "colored school" in Cherry Heights (see Appendix B). According to Baltimore Historian Louis Diggs, children residing in Cherry Heights were barred from attending the Fullerton School, located just outside of the neighborhood boundaries. They instead attended classes at a small church on Belair Road or commuted long distances to attend segregated schools in the city. Longtime resident Selma M. Jackson recalled playing baseball and flying kites with both Black and White children on the fields at the Fullerton School, all while she travelled miles to attend school in the city at Dunbar Elementary (Hare 2009).

By 1927, the Cherry Heights school had not been constructed, despite repeated rounds of funding for "colored schools" by state officials and Baltimore County taxpayers. William Johnson, organizer of the County-Wide Parent-Teachers Federation (PTF) accused school officials of "breaking faith" with county residents when they "refused to build a high school for colored children and promised to pay the tuition of all eligible in the Baltimore City High School instead" (*Baltimore Afro-American*, 13 Aug 1927). When the number of eligible students increased from 69 in 1926 to a possible 120 in 1927, officials mandated a "last minute unexpected [eligibility] test" that Johnson and others believed was "designed... cut down the number of children to be sent to high school" (*Baltimore Afro-American*, 13 Aug 1927). Of 89 eligible students, the 79 who did not pass the test were required to pay their own \$90 per student tuition. Appeals to the school board, along with community fundraising, led the school board to qualify an additional 30 students. Cherry Heights residents were among the most vocal opponents of these "elimination exams"

(*Baltimore Afro-American*, 13 Aug 1927). Ms. M.A. Jackson, PTF member and Cherry Heights resident, helped to organize appeals to the County Board of Education to reallocate some of the one-million-dollar budget for new school construction. Baltimore County school officials instead allocated funds to construction of a new White high school (*Baltimore Afro-American*, 15 May 1929). The elimination exam continued to be administered to Black students from County schools and those who passed were eligible to attend Douglass or Dunbar High Schools in Baltimore City but were responsible for their own transportation. In exchange, the same number of White students were bussed from city schools to county schools, although the County paid the costs of their transportation.

In 1935, a Black student named Margaret Williams applied to attend Catonsville High School and was denied. Thurgood Marshall, working as the local N.A.A.C.P counsel, represented her in the proceeding court case. In addition to his argument that discrimination based on race was unconstitutional, he pointed to the lack of available high schools, the elimination exams, and the lack of transport as evidence of unequal treatment (*Baltimore Afro-American*, 18 Jul 1936). Ultimately, the school board won the case, with the court ruling, “The fact that a colored child is subjected to an unauthorized or defective test as a preliminary to admission to a colored high school does not entitle the child to admission to a White high school, since separate education of the two races is the normal treatment in Maryland, and admission of a colored child to a White high school could be required only on a showing that equality of treatment is not obtainable separately” (Williams v. Zimmerman 1937). High schools for the county’s Black students were not constructed until 1939, when schools in Towson (Carver High), Catonsville (Banneker High), and Sparrows Point (Braggs High) opened to 101 students (Team BCPS 2020).

Evelyn Chatmon, a Cherry Heights resident in the 1950s, discussed her experience in segregated schools during an interview with Baltimore County Public Schools in 2020. She also described the frustration of being unable to attend Fullerton Elementary school, located at that time directly adjacent to Cherry Heights, and of having to travel an hour by bus to Lorely Elementary School, 6.5 miles away. Lorely School had only two teachers who taught five grades in a two-room schoolhouse described as “cramped, rundown”, and “dilapidated” – lacking indoor plumbing. Ms. Chatmon described her Cherry Heights community as a “small, secluded enclave of black families” where she recalled the “strange experience” of being both “surrounded by the warmth of her close-knit family and the surrounding black community” and at risk of being “accosted with ugly racial epithets and ... occasional cross burning” if she “strayed too far from the neighborhood”. She described growing up “somewhat confused” and not understanding “why she had to travel miles to... school when she could stand on her front lawn and see white children her age going to the huge school nearby” (Diggs 2007, p. 63-67). After fifth grade, Ms. Chatmon attended Carver High School in Towson and later Coppin State University, before eventually serving as Assistant School Superintendent for Curriculum and Instruction in Baltimore County.

6. The Cherry Heights Community

After The Cherry Heights community plat was officially recorded in 1910, Overlea began to add even more community buildings. The community saw its first drug store and Town Hall open in the same year. The Town Hall opened on the northwest corner of Belair Road and Overlea Avenue, now the location for the Maryland Natural History Society. Before the opening of the Town Hall, the community used the local mansion of Mr. and Mrs. James T. Everett to host events, including Sunday School and community parties. The Overlea Methodist Church was founded from those

meetings and served as a new location for Sunday School. While there is no evidence that the Black residents of Cherry Heights worshipped at the Overlea Methodist Church (or Overlea Chapel UMC), other community churches were important centers of worship, community building, and (at times) served as neighborhood schools during segregation.

6.1 Churches and Community Organizations

Dowden Chapel (see Figs. 10 and 11) served as a small African American church and school building for the Overlea-Fullerton community. Founded as a church for enslaved people in 1849, the Chapel and cemetery stand in their original location today, just off Belair Road at Ridge Road. The property was deeded to a group of five African American trustees in 1853 with the intention of expanding the presence of the Methodist Episcopal Church's presence among the area's Black



Figure 10. Dowden Chapel (Montcalmo 2020, photo via Councilman David Marks)



Figure 11. Interior of Dowden Chapel (Montcalmo 2020, photo via Councilman David Marks,

population (Montcalmo 2020). Reportedly part of the Underground Railroad, the building is no longer in use as a church, but is maintained by its Trustees and opened each October for an intergenerational Homecoming service for its members. In 2020, Councilman Marks recommended that the lot on which the Chapel, an historical landmark, is located will be downzoned (Montcalmo 2020). Selma Jackson described the chapel as a small, wooden one-room church with no restroom and mentions that it is where African American children attended elementary school in the early 1900s (Diggs 2007).

Leadenhall Street Baptist Church is an historic church in Baltimore's Sharp-Leadenhall community, where many Black citizens worshipped before the city's segregation ordinance went into effect. The "Sharp-Leadenhall" neighborhood, just west of the Harbor, was one of the first to become predominantly African American residents among the city's largest free-Black population in America in the late 19th century. Before housing segregation, most of Baltimore's "free citizens of color" lived amidst the White population in the small compact town. Built and financed by the predominantly "colored" Maryland Baptist Union Association and is the second oldest Black church edifice in Baltimore and home to one of the city's most prominent African American congregations. Due to the city's segregation ordinance, many African American churchgoers moved out of the city into Baltimore County but commuted to the city on Sundays for church. Some community members from Cherry Heights would take the Number 15 Belair Road streetcar line to travel into the city for church. The waiting station that marks the terminus of the streetcar line at Overlea Avenue and Belair Road, just south of Cherry Heights, was first constructed in 1917 and continues to serve as a bus stop and loop today (see Fig. 12).



Figure 12. Photograph of Overlea Waiting Station (photo by Allen C. Browne, 2015, HMDB)

Emmanuel Baptist Church was the first African American Church located in Overlea and the only church established within Cherry Heights. The church's location on Linden Avenue, just south of Fullerton, was far more convenient for community members, particularly older residents, than Dowden Chapel or other Baptist churches in the city. The church was named "Emmanuel" after the man who built it, and it underwent many renovations over the years. Over years, the church has been expanded to fit a music room, added a lightning rod to protect the bell from storms, and installed a new sign. As a main community center, the church was known for hosting community events and celebrations, including an Easter Egg Hunt for the children of Cherry Heights (see Fig. 13). In April 2005, the Emmanuel Baptist Church was accepted into the Baltimore Baptist Association. This association unites churches in the Baltimore area and provides aid to churches in need. The Emmanuel Baptist Church is still a thriving church in the Cherry Heights-Overlea community.

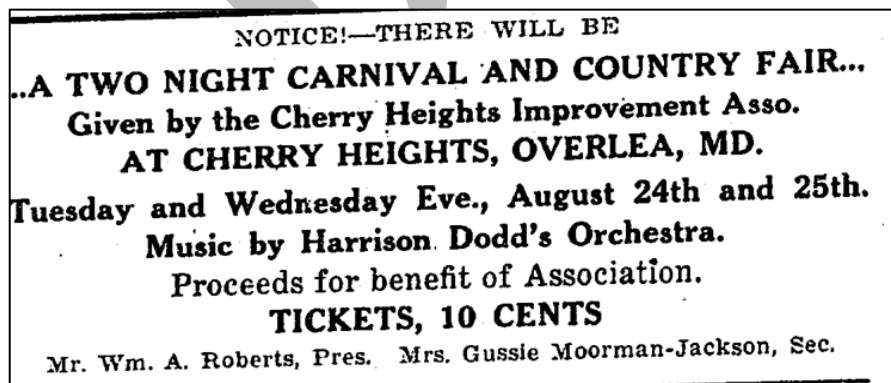


Figure 13. Emmanuel Baptist Church (Diggs 2007)

The Overlea Chapel United Methodist Church, founded in 1910 to establish a community Sunday school, was an important center of the early Overlea community. Other churches were soon established in the area. St. Michael the Archangel, founded in 1914, served the small number of Catholic residents from Cherry Heights. Kenwood Presbyterian Church, founded in 1927, primarily served the White communities surrounding Cherry Heights. All remain an active part of the Overlea-Fullerton neighborhood today.

The Overlea Improvement League worked, in the very early 1900s, to improve living conditions such as electric, sewage and walkways.

Cherry Heights Improvement Association (1912-1953) was a neighborhood association involved in improvement projects, community events, and raising funds for flood relief. Some of the main activities included an annual carnival on Linden Avenue for two nights each year that attracted residents from many surrounding communities. The association also arranged neighborhood outings, including booking a steamer ship cruise on *Brown's Grove*, "the only steamer and the only park in the state on Maryland run exclusively for Colored People and by Colored People" (*Baltimore Afro-American*, 17 April 1926). Members of the Association were leaders in the community who organized community events (see Fig. 14) and actively petitioned for the



establishment of a school
in Cherry Heights.

Figure 14. Advertisement for Cherry Heights Improvement Association fundraiser (*Baltimore Afro-American*, 20 Aug. 1920)

6.2 Census Data

Census records (see Appendix D) allow us to reasonably accurate accounts of demographics in Cherry Heights from the first 40 years following establishment of the neighborhood, as census records are made publicly available by the National Archives 72 years after each decennial census. Access to these public census sheets enables us to view individual, household, and block-level records from Cherry Heights from 1910 to 1940. Data from later censuses (1950 to 2020) is only available at the aggregated scale of a census tract or block.

Records from the 1910 census show that John Thalmeier, who sold the original land for Cherry Heights to Ernest Jones, still resided on Fullerton Avenue. There is no other evidence of Cherry Heights in this census, as the land had just been sold four months prior, with no time for construction of new houses. By 1920, 66 residents had moved into 14 households across the neighborhood. Half of those households were renter-occupied, and the other half were owner-occupied, with five out of those seven households under a mortgage. There is an even split between married and single residents, at 31 each, with four widows residing in the neighborhood.

By 1930, Cherry Heights experienced a slight decrease in its total number of residents, but an overall increase in the number of households. There were 51 total residents across seventeen households. Between 1920 and 1930 censuses, only eight original residents remained in the neighborhood, indicating significant residential turnover within the neighborhood. This decline in the total population may be due to smaller families moving into the neighborhood, increased occupation by older or younger (childless) residents, or an occupation pattern of initial clustering of larger, extended families followed by later distribution across the neighborhood, county, or beyond. In 1920, 22 residents were children under the age of 18 (about 33% of the total population), while in 1930, that number fell to only 12 people (or just over 23% of the total

population). During that period, the average age of Cherry Heights residents increased from 28.2 to 33.7 years. The neighborhood also shifted towards primarily owner-occupied homes, with 12 of 17 households being owner-occupied. In 1930, 33 of the 51 residents were married, while 16 were single-unmarried, one was a widower and one a divorcee.

In 1940, the neighborhood's population grew and again became younger, with the average age decreasing to 29.8 years. There were 59 residents in the neighborhood in fifteen households, with 20 of the residents being children under 18. The decrease in households may reflect lower occupancy rates at the time, rather than a decline in available housing. During this time, the neighborhood shifted to being primarily rentals, with nine rental households and six owner-occupied households. We also see a return to an equal ratio of single and married individuals, with 28 married residents, 27 single-unmarried residents, two widows, and a divorcee. The 1940 census stands up from others, as it delineates and identifies Cherry Heights as separate from the surrounding neighborhoods. Census takers visited Cherry Heights three weeks after the rest of Linden and Beech Avenue. They listed the street as "Linden Avenue Cherry Heights" rather than simply listing its name like every other street in the area. The purpose of this differentiation, and of the separation of Cherry Heights in the 1940 census, is unclear.

Census records also reveal details on the occupations of Cherry Heights residents. In 1920, the primary occupations were listed as driver (6), laborer (6), laundress (4), and cook (3). Ernest Jones is represented as a land seller, but we also see other occupations like preacher, carpenter, photographer, and seamstress. In 1930, the primary occupations were laborer (9), mechanic (3), and domestic worker (2). Walter A. Washington appears listed as a teacher. In 1940, the primary occupation was listed as housework (10), laborer (6), helper (4), and waiter (2). Helper appears to be differentiated from laborer through industry, with helpers working in garages or trades like

carpentry. In contrast, laborers are listed as members of the Work Progress Administration or under general contracting.

Early censuses provide evidence of reasonably robust resident turnover. Between the 1920 and 1940, only two families appear on all three censuses: the Jacksons (Thomas, Julia, Romuel, Selma, and William) and the Stevens (Arthur and Mary). The 1920 census listed 66 Black residents in the neighborhood, only eight of whom were recorded as still residing in Cherry Heights on the 1930 census, when the population declined to just 51 residents. While the total population of Cherry Heights rebounded to 58 residents by the 1940 census, only 13 of those remained from the 1930 census. A number of factors could have contributed to these turnover rates, including impacts of the Great Depression and the reputation of the neighborhood as an idyllic area for retirement.

Population counts from the 1950 census reflect changes in the demographics of areas surrounding Cherry Heights. The census records a total of 87 Black residents within Cherry Heights, but a total of 137 Black residents in the larger census tract, which may reflect shifting demographics or other discrepancies. This is the first census to provide proper addresses, showing that most of the neighborhood's residents (52 total) lived on Linden Avenue, while Hazel Avenue only had nine residents and Beech Avenue had twenty-six. Several of the properties, particularly those on Beech Avenue, had multiple families residing in separate apartments. The 1950 census also provides a good example of inter-generational stability in Cherry Heights, as the Maith family transitions from being listed as occupying a single-family home in 1940 to having a son establish a second Maith residence by 1950 just down the street.

6.3 Prominent Figures

Daniel A.P. Murray was one of the original developers of Cherry Heights. A librarian at the Library of Congress (see Fig. 15), he was involved in the sale of the property in 1910. Murray, an African American, created 156 lots in the original Cherry Heights development. Born on March 3, 1852, in Baltimore, he was the son of formerly enslaved parents. When education was inaccessible to young African Americans, Daniel Murray attended public and private schools, tutored by notable Black educators such as James Lynch. Lynch was known for becoming the first Black secretary of state in Mississippi. Murray graduated in 1869 from Unitarian Seminary and began his long career working for the Library of Congress at age nineteen.

Daniel Murray created a legacy of being one of the first African Americans to work as a librarian at the Library of Congress in 1871. His career spanned many years until his retirement in 1923. Murray also became a notable bibliographer and historian. His long and accomplished life is featured in books such as "The Original Black Elite: Daniel Murray and the Story of a Forgotten Era" by Elizabeth Dowling Taylor. Along with Murray's 1909 involvement in the development of the Overlea, he also sold a property in the neighborhood on October 22, 1910 (see Appendix B).



Figure 15. An undated photograph of Daniel A.P. Murray (Library of Congress)

Ernest Jones was a professional bondsman and President of the Cherry Heights Realty Company in 1910 (*Baltimore Afro-American*, 13 May 1921).

Josiah Diggs lived on Druid Hill Avenue in 1903. Served as secretary of Cherry Heights Realty Co. from 1910 to at least 1915. NAACP community leader and owner of Baltimore's first Black-owned "moving picture theater", the Dunbar Theater in East Baltimore.

Reverend John Hurst, an accomplished Haitian immigrant, moved to Baltimore, MD, where he later resided in the Cherry Heights community. Hurst was born in Port-au-Prince, on May 10, 1863. He attended the school of Lycee National de Port-au-Prince and graduated from Wilberforce University in 1886. After being ordained in 1886 with St. Paul's Church, Port-au-Prince, he was sent to the United States as the first secretary of the Haitian Legation at D.C. by President Hyppolite of Haiti in 1888. Reverend Hurst, also known as *Bishop Hurst*, became Pastor at local Baltimore churches, including the Bethel Church (1898-1903), Waters Church (1903-1908), and A.M.E. Church from (1908-1912). Hurst also was a financial Secretary for the A.M.E. Church and bishop of the A.M.E. church of Florida (1912-1928) and South Carolina (1928 - till death).

Reverend Hurst was an early and active member of the NAACP, later serving as Director of one of the organization's branches. He often recruited community members to join the NAACP while preaching. In 1910, Hurst and George Murray, in a deal brokered by E. Ashbie Hawkins, took over the mortgage of Cherry Heights in order to save the development from foreclosure and later faced a lawsuit for \$5000 when a D.C. construction worker claimed Hurst failed to pay him for the labor of constructing a house on the lot. Hurst died in May 1930, after a long career of preaching and fighting for the betterment of African Americans with the NAACP. He willed 20

acres of land on Belair Road near the city boundary line to his son and wife (*Baltimore Afro-American*, 31 May 1930).

Dr. Reverdy M. Hall was a prominent African American doctor in the Baltimore, Maryland, area. Hall was the son of a wealthy farmer, William H. Hall, and educated at Bridgewater Normal School. Later, Hall studied medicine at Howard University, graduating in the first class in 1912. For over 20 years, Dr. Hall ran his practice on 842 South Sharp Street in Baltimore, before getting involved in Provident Hospital, which began as a 10-bed clinic in northwest Baltimore founded by a group of Black doctors. The hospital opened in 1894 to provide medical treatment and training for Black nurses and doctors. Motivated by the progressive work at the hospital, Dr. Hall joined and served on the hospital's Board of Directors.

After building his legacy practicing medicine, Hall served on city and federal grand juries before retiring to travel. Hall was also known as one of Baltimore's wealthiest African American citizens. Vacationing often in Cherry Heights, he later bought a summer home where he spent his last days. The well-known physician passed away at age 70 in his Overlea property on September 7th, 1917.

William Ashbie Hawkins (see Fig. 16) was born in Lynchburg, Virginia, on August 2, 1862. He became one of Baltimore's first Black lawyers after graduating from several higher education institutions, including Centenary Biblical Institute (later Morgan State University) in 1885, Maryland University in 1891, and Howard University in 1892. Hawkins became involved with the independent Republican movement in 1897, making speeches at over 100 meetings, and was almost selected by the Republican Party as a running candidate. In his career, he served as a public

school teacher (1885-1892) before taking the Maryland bar in 1897 (*Baltimore Afro-American*, 12 April 1941).

Around 1905, Hawkins joined forces with George W.F. McMechen in the law firm of *Hawkins and McMechen*, later located on 14 E. Pleasant Street. He successfully fought cases against Baltimore's segregation ordinances and, though unsuccessful in court, sued the Chesapeake and Atlantic Railway for poor conditions of Black ferrymen, leading to improvements in working standards (Maryland State Archives 2006). In August 1920, Hawkins was nominated to be a U.S Senator (*Baltimore Afro-American*, 20 Aug 1920).

William Ashbie Hawkins was often recognized in local Cherry Heights as the local attorney for hire (see Appendix B). He was on the counsel for the local Baltimore NAACP chapter and served as counsel for the newspaper *Afro-American*. Hawkins's legal career included multiple Cherry Heights property sales (*Baltimore Afro-American*, 22 Oct 1910), the fight for an end to racial housing discrimination (*Baltimore Afro-American*, 24 Dec 1910), and Baltimore Segregation Case that went to the Supreme Court. Hawkins remained a lawyer with McMechen until his death in 1941 at Provident Hospital.



W. ASHBIE HAWKINS

Figure 16. Portrait of William Ashbie Hawkins (image courtesy Wikitree)

George W.F. McMechen was a prominent attorney in Baltimore for 51 years, known for his law practice with partner William Ashbie Hawkins. McMechen was born October 29, 1871, in Wheeling, Virginia. He later attended Morgan State University (then Morgan College) after it changed from a Biblical Institute to a university and received an AB degree (*New York Times*, 25 December 1925). After graduating from Yale law school in 1899 (see Fig. 17), McMechen practiced law in Evansville, Indiana, before moving to Baltimore and opening a practice with Hawkins. McMechen placed ads in the local Baltimore newspaper advertising his law office and services (see Appendix B). From 1921-1939, McMechen served on Morgan College's Board of Trustees. He was the first Black citizen in Maryland to serve on the Board of School Commissioners in 1944.

In 1910, the Mayor of Baltimore passed a segregation ordinance after McMechen purchased a home in a previously all-White neighborhood. The Baltimore City government reacted by adopting a residential segregation ordinance, restricting African Americans to designated blocks (*New York Times*, 25 December 1925). McMechen was listed as attorney in the first ad for the sale of property in Cherry Heights (*Baltimore Afro-American*, Dec. 25, 1909). He passed away on February 22, 1961, after practicing law for 57 years. His impact was so widely felt that more than 1,000 Baltimore citizens came to mourn him at his funeral (*Baltimore Afro-American*, 11 Mar 1961).



Figure 17. George W.F. McMechen's undated Yale Law School yearbook photo (courtesy Tania Araya)

Selma M. Jackson, born September 22, 1915, was the longest-living resident of Cherry Heights on record. Her family was one of the first to purchase land and build a home in the neighborhood. They were familiar with the area, as Jackson's maternal grandfather owned a farm nearby. Jackson was born in her house on 4212 Hazel Avenue when the neighborhood was still in its early stages of development. Barred from attending nearby Fullerton Elementary, Jackson commuted to Dunbar Elementary School, then Dunbar Junior High, and later Douglass High School. Jackson left the neighborhood for two years in order to attend Temple University in Philadelphia, where she studied journalism before transferring to Morgan College (Diggs 2007). There she studied Diplomatic History before returning to Philadelphia to graduate from Central Business College in 1914. Upon graduation, Jackson returned to Cherry Heights, where she worked as a bookkeeper at the local establishment, Young's Drug Store. After her boss, Mr. Young, passed away, Jackson continued her bookkeeping career at the *Baltimore Afro-American* newspaper. She later left to care for her ageing parents.

In Louis S. Diggs's (2007) book, *Our Struggles: Historic African-American Communities in Southeast Baltimore County, Maryland*, Selma Jackson gave insight into what life was like in the Overlea neighborhood. She recalled the full slate of original streets in Cherry Heights, including never-constructed Second and Thirds Streets, along with the experience of living in their brand-new home on a nearly empty street without water, plumbing or electricity. Jackson described Overlea as a relatively affluent community and described how many Black and White kids would fly kites, do homework, and play ball in an empty lot together. According to her, there were very few African American children in the neighborhood. They all attended a one-room schoolhouse on Putty Hill or commuted to other schools in the city and county (Diggs 2007). Jackson explained that there were no Black-owned business in Overlea during her younger years and that most

African American men in Cherry Heights worked at the Bethlehem Steel Mill at Sparrows Point, while many African American women work in the kitchen at the Maryland School for the Blind on Taylor Avenue. Jackson did incidents of racist harassment and violence from Baltimore City residents that she experienced while living in the community and describes damage done to her home, such as broken windows, screen doors being slashed, and her yard being lit on fire with gasoline. Nonetheless, she described Cherry Heights as a “wonderful place to live”. Selma M. Jackson lived in Cherry Heights until her death on April 7, 2007, at 91 years old (see Fig. 18).

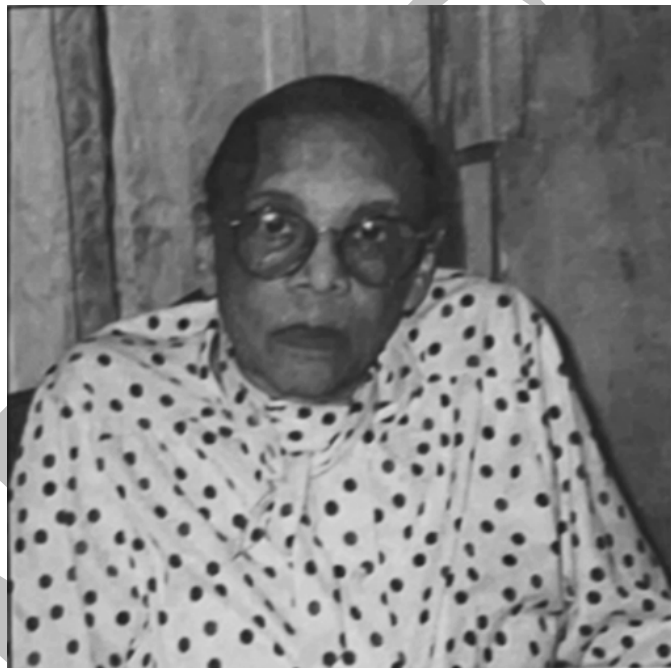


Figure. 18. Photograph of Selma M. Jackson (Diggs 2007)

William Roberts was a resident of Cherry Heights. He served as President of the Cherry Heights Improvement Association.

Walter A. Washington was a resident of Cherry Heights. He was a schoolteacher who was Chairman of the Executive Committee of the Maryland State Colored Teachers Association.

M.S. Fayman was born in Louisiana 1850 and kidnapped into slavery at age ten while at boarding school in Baton Rouge. She returned home in 1864, completed high school and graduated from Fisk University, and lived in Washington and New York before eventually settling in Cherry Heights in November 1937.

Evelyn Chatmon (nee Jarrett) moved to Cherry Heights in the 1940s when she was in second grade. During her early schooling years, Chatmon rode a bus to Loreley Schoolhouse, an hour away, as she was legally barred from attending Fullerton Elementary, a school she could see from her home. At that time, schools in Baltimore County and across the nation were legally segregated. Her story, documented in *A Promise In Progress: Evelyn Chatmon's Story from student in segregated schools to assistant superintendent* (Team BCPS 2010), traces the arc of development in Baltimore County Schools through the second half of the 20th century. Chatmon recalls the differences between the conditions in her school for Black children versus the schools for White children. Overlea's Fullerton Elementary was a large building, three stories tall and kept up to date, while Loreley was a two-room schoolhouse with no running water or bathrooms. Despite these conditions, Chatmon stated that her teachers were "extraordinarily talented". Chatmon only had Black teachers through her education from primary school through her time at Carver High School in Towson.

After high school, Chatmon attended Coppin State College and was determined to teach in Baltimore County when other Black educators were often sent to teach in the city. In 1965, Chatmon interviewed for her first teaching job at Victory Villa Elementary School in Essex, where she worked for five years. Chatmon expressed that she enjoyed her time at the school despite being the only Black teacher for most of her years there (Team BCPS 2010). In 1973, Chatmon went

back to school and received a master's degree in education from Johns Hopkins University and later served as Principal at several elementary schools in the county. In 1983, she became the first Black woman to serve as Assistant Superintendent of Baltimore County Schools (see Fig. 19). After retiring in 1997, Chatmon spent the last 20 years of her life developing an archives and artifacts ministry for her 165-year-old church, Union Baptist Church. Her story inspired the documentary, *Voices of Baltimore: Life Under Segregation* (Homana 2019), in which she is featured.



Figure 19. Evelyn Chatmon as a student (left) and later as Assistant Superintendent of Baltimore County Schools (right) (Team BCPS 2020)

BIBLIOGRAPHIC NOTE: Articles from the *Baltimore Afro-American* (<https://afro.com>) and *Baltimore Sun* newspapers (<https://www.baltimoresun.com>) served as the primary sources for data included in this report. Full citation for relevant source material from these newspapers are provided in text and made available in Appendix B. These sources were supplemented by the bibliographic references listed below.

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8. Appendices

NOTE: Appendix resources are available at the links listed below

Appendix A. Leases, Deeds, Maps, and other Documents:

https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1gjqE7vL5Z0EOwHhDRBoR3Kz0Dt4w0Awe?usp=share_link

Appendix B. Newspaper Articles:

https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1dfllrO-3mTTuO1nGasUmQ6nqjpUUvMIN?usp=share_link

Appendix C. Zoning Documents:

https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1-z6A84Np5h0YkbsUHdP8356wdJGCuH-q?usp=share_link

Appendix D. Census Forms:

https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1rC9_VQ1HuiXH17aDiQuHH0Nc08wRynj5?usp=share_link