
**HISTORIC PRESERVATION REVIEW BOARD
STAFF REPORT AND RECOMMENDATION**

Historic Designation Case No. 16-19

Kingman Park Historic District

All properties within a boundary formed by East Capitol Street, 19th Street, Maryland Avenue and M Street NE and the Anacostia River, including the following squares, parcels and reservations:

Squares 1118, 1119, 1120, 1125, 1126, 1127, 1128, 1134, 1139, 4458, 4459, 4460, 4461, 4462, 4463, 4464, 4477, 4478, 4480, 4481, 4483, 4483E, 4484, 4486, 4495, 4506, 4514, 4515, 4516, 4517, 4518, 4522, 4523, 4525, 4526, 4527, 4528; 4549, 4550, 4558 and 4559; all lots in Parcels 149 and 160; Lot 10 in Parcel 162; and Reservations 343F and 343G

Meeting Dates:	January 25 and April 26, 2018
Applicant:	Kingman Park Civic Association
Affected Advisory Neighborhood Commissions:	5D, 6A and 7D

On January 25, 2018, the Historic Preservation Review Board took up the application for the designation of a Kingman Park Historic District. The applicant, the Kingman Park Civic Association, presented the case. The Historic Preservation Office gave its report which included a series of recommendations, including reducing the extent of the district.¹ The ANC and other members of the community presented testimony. At the conclusion of testimony, HPRB asked that additional research be undertaken to support the nomination and the proposed boundaries.

Since that meeting, HPO has conducted additional research and analysis on the physical and social history of Kingman Park and developed a written narrative report detailing this history. At the request of the Board, particular attention has been paid to the history of businesses along Benning Road; to the evolution of racial demographics of the neighborhood; and to the buildings and architecture of Kingman Park.

The Board also encouraged the community to work with the applicants and HPO to ensure that the ANC has sufficient information to evaluate the application and its implications. In response, HPO developed draft design guidelines and has distributed those to the applicant and to the ANC, and has posted them to its website.

Evaluation

The January 25 staff report stated that a portion of the area proposed in the application for designation as a Kingman Park Historic District meets D.C. designation Criteria B and D (and National Register Criteria A and C). Additional research provides more support for the

¹ To Squares 4516, 4517, 4522 and 4523; Parcels 149 and 160; parts of Squares 4486, 4515, 4525 and 4550; and much of Reservation 343G (including various platted squares subsumed into the Langston Golf Course).

designation of a Kingman Park Historic District, including sufficient support for eligibility under D.C. Criterion A as well.

Kingman Park meets District of Columbia **Criteria A and B** and National Register **Criterion A** for events and history, as the site of events that contributed significantly to the heritage, culture and development of the District, and for its association “with historical periods, social movements, groups, institutions, achievements, or patterns of growth and change that contributed significantly to the heritage, culture or development of the District of Columbia of the nation.”

Kingman Park was developed between 1928 and the early 1950s for African Americans during a period of intense segregation in the city and nation. Its privately built single-family dwellings intended for African American homebuyers; its federally subsidized housing for working-class blacks; its school campus built for African-American elementary through high school students; Langston Golf Course; and its commercial enterprises and religious institutions provide an excellent example of a community that was developed for and nourished by African Americans during segregation. The working- and middle-class residents of Kingman Park lived together in an area of the city that was deliberately segregated from white Washington, an area that would become the scene of important events in the fight to end legally sanctioned racial segregation. Kingman Park was the site of demonstrations and picketing for better schools and the integration of playgrounds, and one source of legal challenges to “separate but equal” education. Activism in Kingman Park contributed to the integration of the city’s public playgrounds and to the landmark Supreme Court decision in *Bolling v. Sharpe*, a companion case to *Browne v. Board of Education*, arguably the most important Supreme Court decision of the twentieth century. *Bolling v. Sharpe* was a lawsuit filed on behalf of five students, including lead plaintiff, twelve-year-old Spottswood Bolling, later a student at Spingarn High School. It overturned a ruling in *Carr v. Corning*, a suit filed on behalf of Marguerite Carr, a student at Kingman Park’s Browne Junior High School.

Kingman Park also meets D.C. Designation **Criterion D** (Architecture and Urbanism) and National Register **Criterion C**, recognizing collections of properties that “embody the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or that represent the work of a master, or that possess high artistic values, or that represent a significant and distinguishable entity whose components may lack individual distinction.” Langston Terrace Dwellings and the education campus north of Benning Road are architecturally and historically significant and are both listed in the D.C. Inventory and National Register. Similarly, Langston Golf Course, previously listed in the National Register for its significance as the only golf course in the District of Columbia where African Americans could play, was designated a landmark by HPRB last month. The blocks making up the nucleus of the Kingman Park neighborhood represent a coherent and distinguishable group representative of the single-family housing developments and their commercial spines of the interwar period that define the physical growth of residential Washington. Block-long rows were executed in a variety of early twentieth-century styles, characterized by front porches and variations in cornices and rooflines. As a class and building type, they represent what was being constructed for the middle- and working-class buyers during the second quarter of the twentieth century, and collectively represent a significant and recognizable entity.

As noted in the previous staff report, the Kingman Park nomination lists many accomplished individuals who lived in or were educated in the community, or who became engaged with the

community through civic events and activities. While such associations may not merit designation under the criteria for association with particular persons, the more important conclusion is that collectively many accomplished individuals drew formative life experiences from the neighborhood and contributed to the history of their own community and the nation in a way that forms an essential part of the Kingman Park story. This contributes to the significance of the neighborhood under the designation criteria for history.

Period of Significance

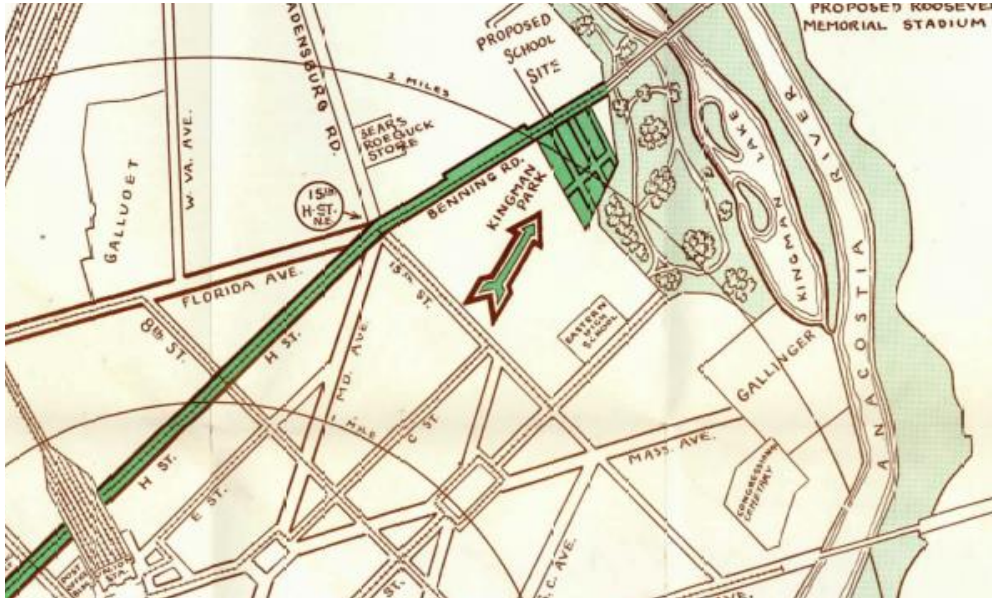
It is recommended that the period of significance for Kingman Park extend from 1928 to 1960. The beginning date corresponds to the construction of the first rows of houses in Kingman Park, sold to African Americans during a period of racial segregation when quality affordable housing for persons of color was artificially limited. It encompasses the subsequent wholesale development of the area including housing, businesses, schools, and recreational facilities built for and nurtured by African Americans. It extends through the 1940s and mid-1950s to include a decade of concerted protest and legal challenges to segregation culminating in the 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education* decision. The period of significance should extend beyond this seminal year to capture a period of desegregation and integration of public facilities, and the consolidation and reorganization of the city's segregated dual school systems. The terminal date, 1960, thus corresponds to the end date of the period of significance for the Young, Brown, Phelps and Spingarn Educational Campus. The span also encompasses the periods of significance for both Langston Terrace Dwellings (1935-1938) and Langston Golf Course (1939-1955). Finally, the 1928 to 1960 period of significance for Kingman Park represents the period of social and physical growth of the community before forces of change resulted in the demolition of notable area buildings, such as the Langston Theater, Blow Elementary School, the Columbia Railway Depot, Rosedale Playground fieldhouse, and several blocks of dwellings in Rosedale-Isherwood. The fact that most of these stood outside the recommended boundaries is a reflection of the impact of their loss to the physical and historic integrity of the neighborhood.

Boundaries

As noted in the previous report and discussed at the January hearing, the proposed boundaries of the Kingman Park Historic District application encompass a broad area with several distinct sub-areas. The application proposes boundaries that extend from 19th Street on the west to the Anacostia River on the east, and from East Capitol Street on the south to Maryland Avenue on the north. These boundaries represent a large section of the area that historically formed the boundaries of the Kingman Park Civic Association, established in 1929, to represent the needs of African American residents in the area that included several different neighborhoods.

At the previous hearing, HPO recommended revised boundaries to a Kingman Park Historic District, defined by 21st Street on the west, Oklahoma Avenue on the south and east, E Street on the south, and Benning Road on the north. Based upon additional research, HPO concludes that these boundaries are appropriate and the best physical reflection of the area's history and culture. The recommended boundaries include key sections of the neighborhood that are critically linked to the establishment of Kingman Park as an African-American community during the era of segregation. Specifically, the boundaries contain the nucleus of a larger residential neighborhood of subdivisions built for African Americans and that gave Kingman Park its name. They also envelop the architecturally significant Langston Terrace Dwellings, designed by an African-American modernist architect and built by the Public Works Administration for lower-income African-American residents. They include the formerly segregated educational campus

that served these neighborhoods, including Browne Junior High School whose overcrowding triggered an important battle in the desegregation of District public schools. They take in the adjacent landmark Langston Golf Course. And these boundaries incorporate a portion of the Benning Road commercial corridor and its businesses that served the community throughout its history.



Kingman Park, as depicted in Charles Sager’s marketing brochure of 1930.

The recommended boundaries exclude areas whose histories do not contribute directly to the theme of the establishment of Kingman Park as an African-American community during the Jim Crow era, or whose buildings are not consistent with the historic character or the sense of place conveyed by the core of residential Kingman Park. The recommended boundaries also exclude certain sites or places whose individual stories may have been integral to the social history of Kingman Park, but where no historic buildings survive to adequately tell the story, or whose physical integrity is compromised.

The following is an outline of the rationale for the exclusion of each of several areas within the boundaries proposed in the application:

Rosedale and Isherwood (C Street on south to Benning Road on north and 19th Street on the west to 21st Street on the east)

- The Rosedale and Isherwood subdivision predates Kingman Park and was initially mostly white.
- Many of the sites in Rosedale-Isherwood that gained significance in the social history of Kingman Park, such as Blow School, Rosedale Playground, and neighborhood churches, are either outside of the boundaries identified in the application, or no longer retain early buildings. In addition to the loss of the original Blow School, blocks of historic rowhouses on Clagett Place were demolished for the school’s sports fields.
- Many rows in Rosedale-Isherwood, built in the 1930s and 1940s between C and E Streets, included racial restrictions in their deeds, and were not the homes of African-Americans. While they are not architecturally distinct from Kingman Park homes and ultimately became part of a black neighborhood, they lack the primary significance of

Kingman Park, i.e., being developed and sold to African Americans during the era of segregation.

- The commercial buildings of Benning Road are secondary to the primary significance of housing developed for blacks. They supported and served the residential community, and many were ultimately by black businesses. Beyond the recommended boundaries, however, there are many vacant lots, replacement buildings and alterations that compromise the historic integrity of the commercial corridor. The 2400 block of Benning, included within the boundaries, provides the best surviving manifestation of the commercial character of Kingman Park.

East Capitol Hill

- The area between East Capitol Street and C Street east of 19th Street contains blocks of rowhouses and flats, built 1936-1938 that share the architectural characteristics of Kingman Park. But several of these rows of buildings contained racial restrictions, and are thus inconsistent with the principal historic significance of Kingman Park. Eastern High School (1921) and Eliot-Hine Junior High (1932) were constructed for white students reflecting the racial characteristics of this area.
- The nomination's proposed boundaries take in half of Robert F. Kennedy Memorial Stadium, yet that property postdates the HPO-proposed period of significance and does not relate to the neighborhood's significant historic themes.

East Side Park

- East Side Park, developed in 1925-1926, includes rows of single-family dwellings similar stylistically to those of Kingman Park. However, the East Side Park rows, built during segregation, were largely developed with racial restrictions in their deeds, and are thus not reflective of the key historical significance of Kingman Park.

World War II Era Housing North of Benning Road

- Much of the area north of Benning Road consists of large-scale housing developments. Rows of two-story brick flats, along with Carver Terrace—a complex of dozens of three-story garden-apartments with hundreds of units—defines the area north and west of Langston Terrace. Built in 1945-1950 by Preston Wire, Carver Terrace was one of the largest privately owned and operated rental housing developments for African Americans in the country. But these postwar buildings are distinct from Kingman Park in both historical origins and architectural character.

Integrity/Contributing and Non-Contributing Buildings

The recommended boundaries of a Kingman Park Historic District meet the test of integrity that is required for listing in the D.C. Inventory and National Register. Properties must possess sufficient integrity to convey, represent or contain the values and qualities for which they are judged significant. With a proposed period of significance from 1928 to 1960, it also meets the requirement for sufficient passage of time to permit professional evaluation in its historical context. Buildings that are constructed within the defined period of significance and maintain integrity would contribute to the character of the historic district, and would be considered “contributing” resources. Buildings constructed outside the period of significance, or that no longer retain physical integrity would not contribute to the character of the district, and would be considered “non-contributing.”

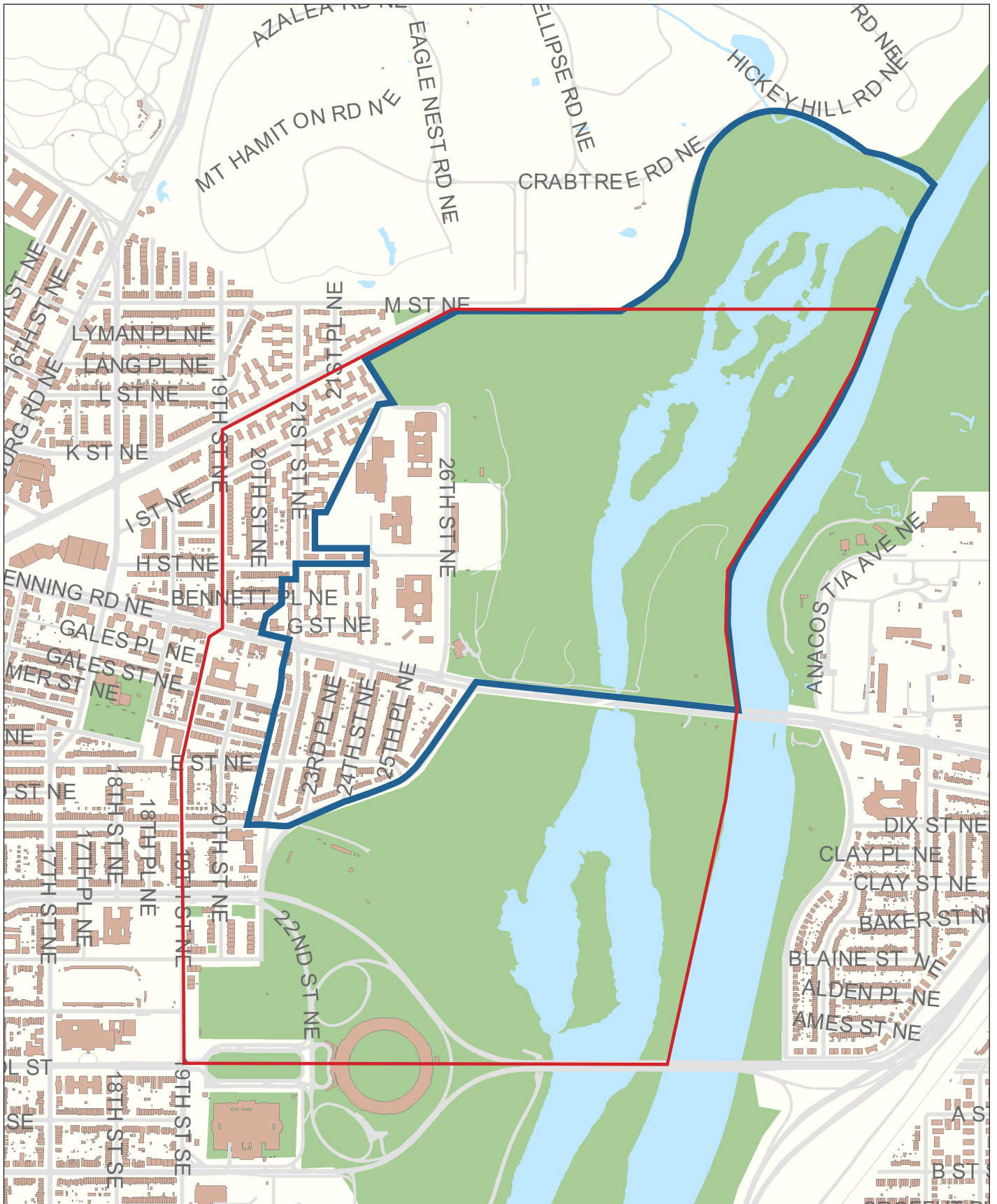
Within narrower boundaries, the proposed Kingman Park Historic District exhibits a high degree of integrity. Several buildings along Benning Road would be non-contributing because they postdate the period of significance. These include the Verizon facility at 580 23rd Place, the Hip Hop Fish & Chicken restaurant at 2301 Benning Road, the one-story commercial building at 2305 Benning Road, the 7-Eleven at 2501 Benning Road, the Exxon station at 2539 Benning Road, and the D.C. Streetcar Car Barn Training Center at 26th and Benning Road. Three buildings, the garage at 2101 Benning Road (aka 633 21st Street), the dwelling at 2417 Benning Road, and the apartments at 400 21st Street would be considered non-contributing for insufficient integrity. The building at 2417 Benning Road has been altered significantly by the removal of its porch and original roof, alterations to its windows, and the addition of a rooftop addition that is incompatible with the historic character of the building. The building at 400 21st Street has been significantly altered by a rear addition, a carved-out ground level, new windows and other alterations, but still retains its historic massing that is consistent with the streetscape.

A list of Contributing/Non-Contributing Buildings will be included in the final documentation to be forwarded to the National Register of Historic Places.

Recommendation

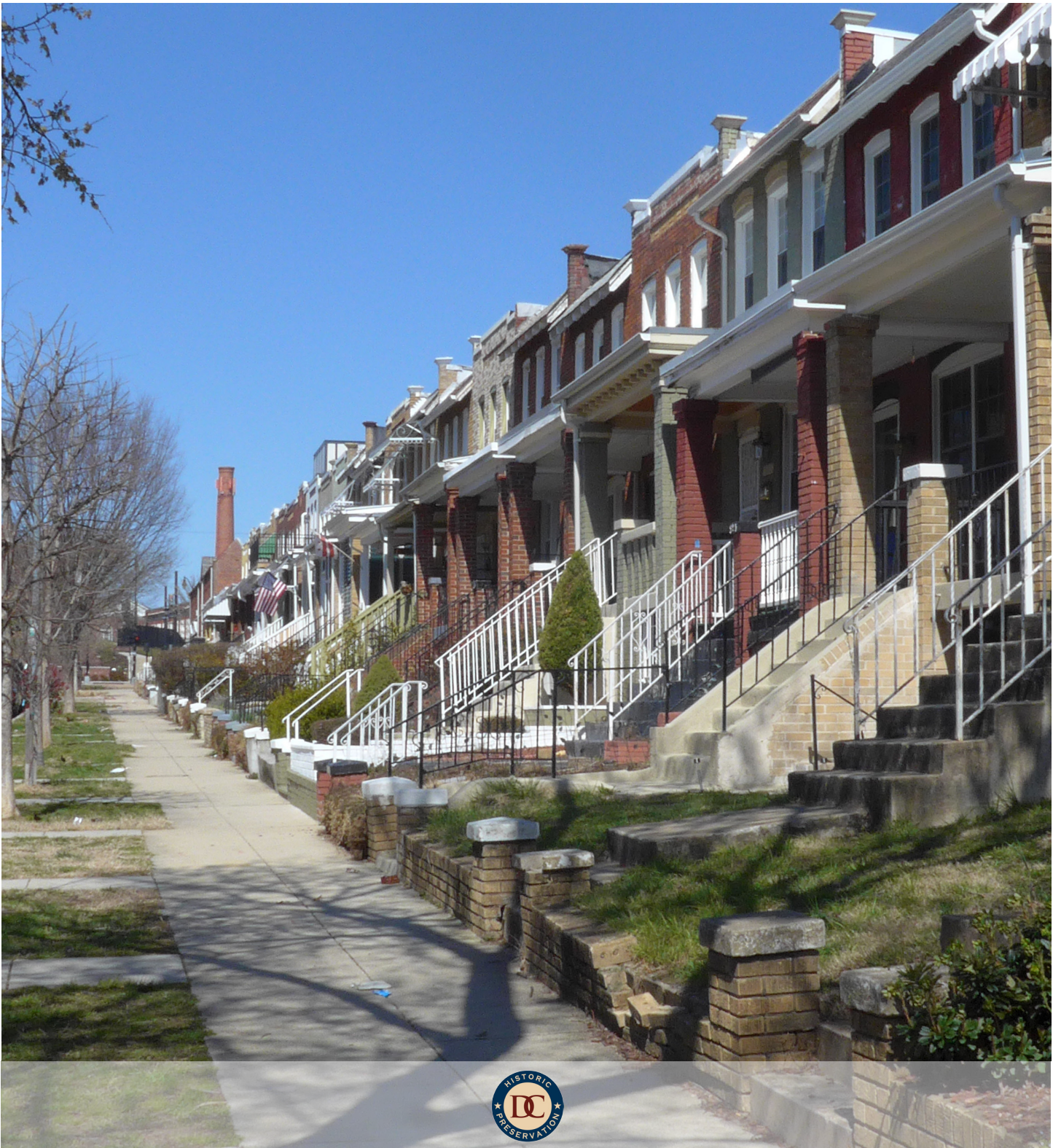
HPO recommends that the Board designate the Kingman Park Historic District in the D.C. Inventory of Historic Sites within the reduced boundaries suggested, and with a period of significance of 1928 to 1960. HPO further recommends that the Board direct staff to complete a revision of the National Register nomination form and then forward it to the Register.

Proposed Kingman Park Historic District



— Applicant's Boundary recommendation
— HPO's Boundary recommendation

Kingman Park Historic Context



Kingman Park Historical Background

Cool Spring

The area that became Kingman Park is located just outside the original city of Washington as platted in the L'Enfant Plan. It lies within the distinctive “notch” at the plan’s northeast corner, which was created at the request of prominent landowner Benjamin Stoddert who did not want his estate, “Cool Spring,” included within the boundaries of the federal city. From the time of the city’s establishment, this notch of land was bounded by Benning Road on the north, C Street NE on the south, 15th Street on the west, and the Anacostia River on the east. To begin with, only Benning Road—the main artery into and out of the city from the east—ran through the area. The private drive, Cool Spring Road (later Oklahoma Avenue), passed along the eastern edge of the property providing access from Benning Road, and running adjacent to the Anacostia flats that had developed along the river’s edge by the mid-nineteenth century. The city grid south of C Street and east of 15th Street was platted but undeveloped. By 1872, however, H Street was improved with streetcar service to 15th Street NE where it connected with the Columbia Turnpike leading across Bennings Bridge into Maryland (*Image 1*).



Image 1: Detail of Topographical Map of the District of Columbia, A. Boschke, 1861, showing the Cool Spring tract that comprises present-day Kingman Park

For the first 75 years of the city’s history, the Cool Spring tract was part of rural Washington. Abraham Young, one of the city’s original proprietors whose family owned extensive land forming the eastern part of Capitol Hill acquired Cool Spring before the end of the eighteenth century. On this and his surrounding acreage, Young farmed with slave labor, and by 1796, had begun construction of a substantial, two-story brick farmhouse and outbuildings adjacent to an older frame farmhouse where he

had been living. This brick house would remain on its elevated site near 15th and D Streets NE until 1912. At the time of its demolition, it was considered the only surviving structure “built, owned and occupied by an original proprietor.”¹ Following Young’s death, Cool Spring was occupied by his widow and her new husband, John Gibson, and was later purchased by Robert Isherwood, a merchant-cum-agriculturist.² Isherwood lived on the property until his death in 1849. During the nineteenth century, the Cool Spring tract was referred to either as Gibson Spring or Isherwood, while the homestead itself was known as Rosedale.

Throughout the mid- to late nineteenth century, the Cool Spring tract and surrounding lands remained undeveloped beyond the Isherwood home farm. During the Civil War, the property, still owned by Isherwood’s widow, was used by the federal government as an army depot, and remained in federal government use as the Eastern Branch Corrals after the war. In 1867, Congress proposed purchase of the Isherwood farm as a site for a new jail. A newspaper account described the property as “composed of one hundred acres of land, and upon it is one of the best springs of pure water anywhere to be found.”³ The federal government never made the purchase, and the acreage remained undeveloped for the next decade.⁴

City Infrastructure Improvements

Following the Civil War, a short-lived territorial government implemented a vast program for improvements to the city’s infrastructure. Alexander Robey Shepherd of the Board of Public Works initiated an ambitious plan of laying water pipes and sewers, grading and paving streets and sidewalks, and planting street trees. These improvements were intended to extend services to areas of the city that were not yet improved, or only partially developed, opening the way for residential development to house the city’s growing population. But the Board of Public Works concentrated its improvements in the northwest quadrant of the city and the vicinity of Capitol Hill, leaving the area east of 11th Street NE devoid of paved streets, water, and gas. A series of maps prepared by the Board of Public Works in the early 1870s illustrate this disparity of services. The only city service in this northeast end of the city was a sewer trunk line, built through the area that would become Kingman Park, to carry sewage from the city into the Anacostia River.

This lack of basic infrastructure inhibited widespread real estate speculation well into the nineteenth century. The only real development at this far end of the city served “undesirable” uses such as the institutions for the sick, poor and criminal, primarily housed on Reservation 13; a city dump at the

¹ Allen C. Clark, “The Abraham Young Mansion,” *Records of the Columbia Historical Society*: Washington, D.C., Vol 12 (1909), pp. 53-70; and “Raze Old Mansion, House of Eighteenth Century Gives Way to Progress,” *The Evening Star*, August 31, 1912.

² Robert Isherwood was a partner in the hardware firm of Isherwood & O’Neale until it was dissolved in 1848. Isherwood died at Isherwood, “one mile east of the Capitol” on June 1, 1849. See death notice, June 2, 1849, *Daily National Intelligencer*.

³ “New Site for District Jail,” *The Evening Star*, February 11, 1867. See also, East Capitol Hill context, footnote 138 which notes that in 1863, Martha Isherwood was unsuccessful in her appeal to the Levy Court of Washington County for “remission of taxes on [her] property for the past year as the same was in the possession of the government.” *The Washington Star*, September 10, 1863.

⁴ In 1912 when the Isherwood house was demolished to make way for development, a newspaper account noted that although the house “had for many years not been kept up” it remained in excellent condition and its walls of brick “unusually thick” and “solid as ever.” See Allen C. Clark, “The Abraham Young Mansion,” *Records of the Columbia Historical Society*: Washington, D.C., Vol. 12 (1909), pp. 53-70 and “Raze Old Mansion, House of Eighteenth Century Gives Way to Progress,” *The Evening Star*, August 31, 1912.

intersection of Benning Road and Cool Spring Road; a slaughterhouse and the Washington brick works at the intersection of H Street, Bladensburg and Benning Road; and cemeteries, including Graceland across Bladensburg Road from the brickworks. Still, there were incremental improvements to the infrastructure which property owners and investors would eventually take advantage of (*Image 2*).

The first of these improvements were transportation-related. In 1870, the Columbia Railway Company was chartered to run a streetcar line from downtown to Mount Vernon Square, then east along H Street across North Capitol Street to 15th Street NE. At 15th Street, the line turned south where it immediately terminated at the Columbia Railway barn and depot, built by the company on the east side of 15th Street. At its terminus, this horse-drawn streetcar line connected with the toll gate of the Columbia Turnpike, a toll road which continued over Bennings Bridge, across the Anacostia River and into Maryland. An electric interurban train line to Annapolis later followed the old toll road alignment. The streetcar and rail line encouraged commercial and residential development in the area.



Image 2: Detail of G.M. Hopkins Atlas, 1878. The Columbia Railway Company line is shown along H Street and its terminus on 15th Street just south the intersection with H Street.

Rosedale and Isherwood Subdivision

In 1876, a few years after the Columbia Railway Company established the streetcar line, William H. Clagett, Secretary of the railway company, along with several other individuals, platted the adjacent Cool Spring property as a residential subdivision called Rosedale and Isherwood. This development followed a trend of residential subdivisions established by investors in the city's railway companies.

The Rosedale and Isherwood subdivision extended from 15th Street on the east to 21st Street on the west and from C Street on the south to Benning Road on the north. The subdivision was divided into 32 parcels, 24 of which were blocks numbered 1 through 24 that were further divided into streets and alleys, with urban-sized residential building lots. The remaining parcels, retained by William H. Clagett

and others⁵ were large, undivided lots at the north end of the subdivision that would be re-subdivided in 1882 into blocks numbered 25 through 30. At the time of subdivision, the area included the Columbia Railway Streetcar barn and depot on 15th Street, and the late-eighteenth-century Isherwood house at 15th and D Streets. The 1887 Hopkins atlas depicts a frame dwelling located in Block 27 of the subdivision, between present-day 16th and 17th Streets north of Rosedale Street, that may or may not have existed at the time of subdivision a decade earlier⁶ (*Image 3*).

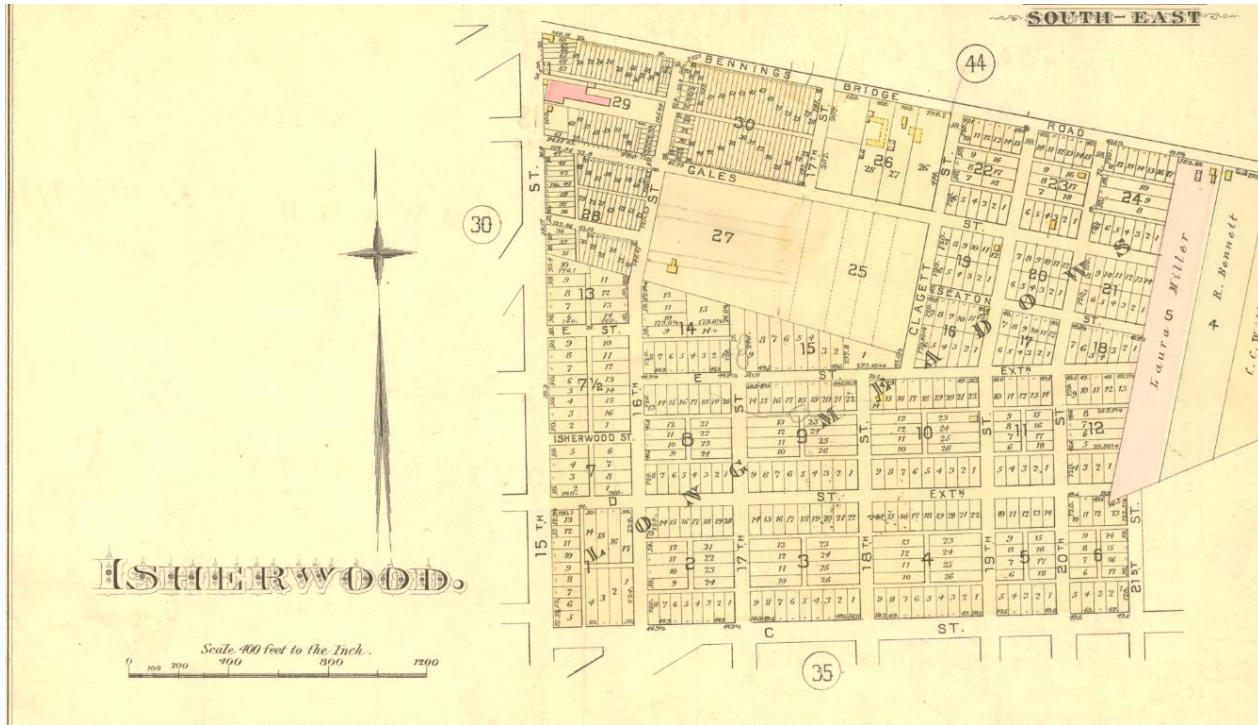


Image 3: Detail of the plat of Rosedale and Isherwood in *Surveys and Plats of Properties within the City of Washington, District of Columbia*, G.M. Hopkins, 1887.

Development within Rosedale and Isherwood proceeded slowly, limited in its first decade to commercial and semi-industrial uses that included a commercial greenhouse complex, an ice manufacturing plant, and streetcar-related buildings. By 1880, Irish immigrant and florist Robert Bowdler had established greenhouses next to his residence on the south side of Benning Road in Block 26 between 17th and 18th Streets where he lived with his wife and small children. Bowdler had come to the city in 1865, and raised flowers and evergreens on the Benning Road site from the 1880s until his death in 1923, selling them at his stall in Center Market.⁷

In 1890, the Hygienic Ice Company erected a sizeable ice plant on Block 7-1/2 of the subdivision, bounded by present-day 15th, 16th, Isherwood and F Streets, north of the historic Isherwood mansion site

⁵ There were several other persons who signed the subdivision plat, but no research has been conducted on them. See *Subdivision Books GS 12 and GS 13*, D.C. Officer of the Surveyor.

⁶ The 1887 Hopkins plat does not show the brick Isherwood house that is known to have stood on the site at 15th and D Streets NE until 1912.

⁷ During the 1890s, Bowdler regularly advertised in the *Evening Star* the sale of his cut flowers, evergreens and roses at his Center Market stall. He was also chairman of the committee on sanitation of the East End Suburban Citizens' Association. See the *Evening Star*, November 3, 1906; and for his obituary and settlement of his estate, see the *Evening Star*, December 20, 1926, and March 6, 1927.

and occupied today by the Azeze Bates apartment complex. The site was selected for the springs which produced a “vast outflow of pure and phenomenally cold water” for which the old Cool Spring Tract had been named. The company built a series of buildings that would endure on the site for decades manufacturing an “abundant supply” of “clear and absolutely pure ice.”⁸ As one of six ice operations in the city during the 1890s, the Hygienic Ice Company actively advertised its blocks of ice claiming that they “last longer than any other” no matter their size.⁹ The company’s ads not only touted the better quality and less expensive nature of its ice compared to others, but noted of its drivers: “You will find the wagon drivers courteous.” One such ice wagon driver, Frank Mitchell, was an early resident of the new subdivision. He lived at 602 16th Street NE, one block away from his place of employment. Other early residents of the emerging subdivision, such as Camdon Stotler, an oilman at the ice plant also found employment with the ice company.



Image 4: Columbia Railway Car Barn on Benning Road, built 1894-1895 (Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division)

In the early 1890s, the Columbia Railway Company, which had been operating its horse-drawn streetcars along its H Street line for two decades, was gearing up for new modes of propulsion--first cable (1895-1899) then electric (1899-1941). To accommodate the cable technology, the company built a massive and architecturally striking brick car barn and powerhouse at the end of its line in the 1500 block of Benning Road (*Image 4*). The imposing car barn, readily identified from afar by a steep hipped roof with corner towers, hipped dormers, and a central tower marking the main streetcar entry to the building, offered a more accessible entrance to the streetcars from the main tracks along Benning Road. The barn provided storage for the new streetcars that replaced 44 horsecars and 180 horses. In 1941,

⁸ “A New Enterprise,” *The Evening Star*, January 18, 1890.

⁹ “Have You Seen a Cake of Hygienic Ice?” (advertisement), *The Evening Star*, May 9, 1892

when the line was abandoned for buses, the Benning Road car barn was significantly altered for repurposing as a bus garage. Three decades later, it was demolished and is now the site of the Pentacle Group housing complex.

In the decade after its platting, a sizeable collection of dwellings stood in the subdivision, clustered on the blocks adjacent to the Columbia Railway Company depot on 15th Street. Pairs of two-story, two-bay frame dwellings were built on the north and south sides of the 1500 block of Gales Street (*Image 5*), just as several others were built around the intersection of 16th and Gales Street (1608-1610 Gales Street and 703-705 16th Street NE). Others, constructed a few years later west of 15th Street, beyond the bounds of the subdivision and within the city and its fire limits, were of brick. Residential development spread to either side of 15th Street, filling in the 1600 blocks of Gales and Kramer Streets NE and the block along 16th Street, south of Benning Road.



Image 5: 1500 block of Gales Street showing some of the first houses built in Rosedale-Isherwood during the late 1880s.

Further east, beyond the open land of Bowdler’s greenhouse complex, builders constructed rows of dwellings along 19th Street; along 20th Street and Gales Street; and along the 2000 block of Seaton Street NE (now Rosedale Street). An 1893 ad posted by B.H. Warner advertised the sale of “several small houses in Rosedale and Isherwood” with prices ranging from \$950 to \$1,100 that could be paid in “small cash payments and monthly installments.” Many of these frame dwellings still line the narrow streets of the 19th-century subdivision of Rosedale and Isherwood, distinguishing the neighborhood from those wider and adjacent streets filled with brick rowhouses that make up the streets of the city’s L’Enfant Plan.

The first residents in this still-remote eastern end of the city attracted an exclusively working-class population. Census records reveal that these early residents held both skilled and unskilled jobs, many

associated with local industries, including the ice plant, the railway company, Bowdler's nursery, the nearby slaughterhouse, and other agri-business concerns. The bridge tender for Benning Road Bridge for instance, lived at 2237 Benning Road, just steps from his place of work, while one of his sons, a day laborer and gardener, may have found employment at the adjacent greenhouses of Robert Bowdler. The local slaughterhouse operation across Benning Road likely attracted several of butchers to the emerging neighborhood, at least two of whom had recently immigrated to America. In 1900, Thomas Elah, a 38-year-old German butcher who had come to America in 1881, lived at 700 19th Street NE with his wife and children, where he owned the house, mortgage-free. Irish immigrant and butcher Daniel Dore lived nearby at 645 20th Street NE. Dore came to D.C. from Ireland in 1878 with his parents at the age of ten and four years later was working as an apprentice for a butcher. In 1900, Dore, then 33, lived at the house on 20th Street in Rosedale-Isherwood which he rented with his wife, five children and a border—a 60-year old Irish widow. Others, such as J.E. Kennedy, a foreman in a planing mill, who lived at 1522 Gales Street in 1900 with his wife, children, and his widowed father, a wheelwright, probably worked in the agricultural/industrial concerns north of Benning Road.

Largely, though, it was the booming building industry throughout the city that provided employment for the vast majority of the early residents of Rosedale-Isherwood. A number of these tradespersons in stone masonry, house-painting, window-cleaning, tile-setting, roofing, brick laying, stone cutting, and plastering lived next door to and across from each other throughout the subdivision. Fred Heidenreich, a 47-year-old German stone cutter lived at 1501 Gales; Samuel Boyce, a brick layer lived at 1511 Gales with his family, and William Newmann, a 44-year-old plasterer lived at 1517 Gales Street. Another couple who were not employed in the industry nonetheless housed three borders in their Gales Street home, including a house painter and two carpenters. In addition to those associated with the growing city, there were chauffeurs, track walkers, night watchmen, elevator operators, bakers, and grocery store managers, hostlers, butchers, engine helpers and more. These early residents generally rented, rather than owned their houses, though there were plenty who did own their houses. There is some evidence of upward mobility and more solid financial security. For instance, William H. Miller, a stone cutter who headed the household at 700 16th Street NE, had a 24-year son who was listed in the 1900 Census as a government clerk. Perhaps due to contributions from his son's government income, Miller owned the still-standing corner dwelling, somewhat larger and more ornate than the other houses in the surrounding blocks. One house, headed by Brad Usilten, a bread wagon driver at 710 16th Street NE had a live-in servant. The servant, Mary Roberts, a 54-year-old widow may have helped the Usiltens with their four children aged 3 months to four years old. Of particular note is a Mr. Hawkins, a black wagon driver who lived at 1824 Gales Street with his wife and six children. The eldest of his daughters was a D.C. public school teacher.

The Rosedale-Isherwood community consisted largely of families, including couples, their children, and extended family members such as parents, or sisters and in-laws. In many cases one or more boarders shared these modest living quarters. The early residents were mixed race, though white residents outnumbered African Americans, and most appear to have been DC, Virginia and Maryland-born, but many were from elsewhere, including foreign-born immigrants.

Although the early residents of Rosedale and Isherwood were in the majority white, individual African American residents can be found throughout the subdivision, such as the Hawkins family and their neighbors, the Burnetts, on Gales Street. Several African Americans lived along Benning Road, including the bridge tender, while a clustering of African Americans lived along the 700 block of 19th

Street, sharing the block with white residents. German-born, white butcher Thomas Elah headed the block at 700 19th Street, while African Americans occupied the group of houses from 702 to 722 and the house at 728 19th Street, and whites lived in those numbered 730 to 746. Over time, this block as well as the adjacent blocks at the intersection of 20th and Gales Street would become exclusively black-occupied.

During the mid-1890s as the Columbia Railway Company transitioned from horse cars to cable cars and then to electric cars along H Street, development in the Rosedale-Isherwood subdivision intensified. Advances in streetcar service during the 1890s corresponded with other infrastructure improvements in the area, such as water pipes and street grading. During the 1890s, Benning Road was paved with an experimental and successful combination of granite blocks and asphalt. This paving hugely enhanced travel along the road that had previously suffered from muddy and sometimes impassable conditions that contributed to accidents along the road, including the regular death of horses.¹⁰ Rosedale and Isherwood garnered some attention from the city, in the form of street and sidewalk paving, granite curbs, and sewers within the subdivision proper.¹¹ Builders responded to these improvements by constructing several blocks of residences, frame and brick.

As new houses were constructed and residents continued to move in, the area west of 18th Street coalesced as an almost exclusively white, working-class neighborhood that would remain so until the 1940s, garnering its own whites-only institutions and facilities, such as public schools, a playground and library. After 1900, however, there was a perceptible shift in the racial make-up of the area east of 18th Street. For instance, in 1900, the two blocks forming the intersection of 20th and Gales Street were occupied by white residents. By 1920, African Americans had moved into several of the dwellings, and by 1930, both streets had fully transitioned with African Americans occupying both blocks almost in their entirety.¹² A similar trend occurred in the 700 block of 19th Street NE in the block just south of Benning Road. In 1900, the street was mixed-race, but by 1930, only one white resident—a 71-year-old white tinner, George M. Jett remained in his house at 734 19th Street which he owned and occupied with his wife and stepson (*Image 6*).

New dwellings in Rosedale-Isherwood, built in the mid-1920s and later, east of 18th Street and north of E Street would be exclusively African American-occupied from the outset. For instance, the residents in the 1900 block of Gales Street, 1900 block of Rosedale Street, and the 2000 block Clagett Place were occupied by African Americans upon their completion in the 1920s. Like the residents who lived there in the previous decades, the new residents were primarily skilled and unskilled workers who either rented or owned their houses. Unlike the 19th-century frame houses that were valued at around \$1,000, these new houses cost closer to \$7,000 reflecting not just inflation, but the more substantive quality of construction. In 1965, the homeowners on Clagett Place, Gales Street and 20th Street, cited this quality of construction when they petitioned the Board of Education to reconsider its plans to construct a new Blow-Pierce School on the site of their houses. Many of the petitioners also noted that their “good” and “solid” houses had been their homes for decades and they had no desire to leave.

¹⁰ “A Substantial Roadway Thoroughfare Known as Benning Road Rebuilt from City Limits to Eastern Branch,” *The Evening Star*, December 8, 1899.

¹¹ See, “Orders for Work: Sewers and Sidewalks Listed and Proposals Accepted,” *The Evening Star*, November 16, 1897; “New Granite Curbs,” *The Evening Star*, November 25, 1901.

¹² In 1940, two of these houses had transitioned from black-occupied to white: 2009 Gales Street was occupied by an English immigrant, and 653 20th Street NE was the dwelling of a white, Polish grocer.

One notable exception to this racial demographic existed along Benning Road. Although the 1800 block saw its first African-American residents in the 1920s, the majority of the road's residents were white into the 1940s, many of them immigrants who operated commercial establishments along the route.



Image 6: Maps illustrating the racial composition of Rosedale-Isherwood and Kingman Park east of 18th Street based on U.S. Census Records from 1920 and 1930. (Greyed-out building footprints represent un-built buildings at the time of the census.)

Despite this growing population of African-American residents in the eastern end of Rosedale and Isherwood, the neighborhood's public facilities served only the white residents. In 1902, the first school, Webb Elementary at 15th and Rosedale Streets, opened to white students only.¹³ Four years later, the Henry T. Blow School was constructed at 19th and Gales Streets, and it, too, accommodated white pupils. As this eastern half of Rosedale and Isherwood transitioned into a predominantly black community in the late 1920s and 1930s, Blow School remained whites-only until 1947 when it was transferred into the black school district. Similarly, the 1906 Rosedale Station Library was also only available to white residents. Rosedale Playground, established by 1913 on the square bounded by 17th, 18th, Eames, and Gales Streets, was also only open to the neighborhood's white children. By the 1920s, it contained a coveted swimming pool, which would become a battleground in the fight for integration of the city's recreational facilities in the 1940s.

Only the area churches, established by and for African Americans in the early twentieth century, accommodated the neighborhood's black residents. The first of these, Mount Pisgah Baptist, was organized in 1906 in a private home still standing at 718 19th Street NE. In 1910, Mount Pisgah built a church building at 1829 Gales Street, across from its current building at 1818 Gales Street NE, built ca. 2017, that still serves the community. As the African American community expanded in the early 20th century, several other congregations established churches in the area, including Pilgrim AME Church (established in area in 1926), Saint Benedict the Moor Catholic Church (established in area in 1946), Peace Baptist Church (established in area in 1949), and Mt. Moriah Baptist Church (established in area

¹³ In 1898, the site at 15th and Rosedale Streets was selected for a new school. In 1899 the site was surveyed, and in 1900, after a failed first bid on construction, the school was under construction to the designs of architect Glenn Brown. Named after William B. Webb, the eight-room school opened to white pupils in 1902.

in 1958). While all of these churches have continued to serve the community since they were established in the area, most of the church buildings date from the mid-20th century or later; the oldest church structure is that of St. Benedict the Moor, constructed at 320 21st Street NE in 1946.

East Side Park

Into the twentieth century, the residential growth of Rosedale and Isherwood remained slow and generally clustered toward the western end near the terminus of the streetcar line. The land north and east of the subdivision was still undeveloped territory. In 1907, a group of out-of-town investors purchased a tract north of Benning Road opposite Rosedale and platted a residential subdivision called East Side Park.¹⁴ Despite the “excellent electric car service” noted in a sales ad for lots, East Side Park did not materialize beyond that plat for two more decades. Distance from downtown and lagging infrastructure discouraged buyers, but the largest deterrent was the insanitary condition of the Anacostia River.

The Anacostia Flats

The Anacostia River, navigable to ocean-going vessels in the eighteenth century, remained an important waterway throughout the nineteenth century. But runoff associated with construction in the city and deforestation and agricultural use upriver transformed the Anacostia’s shore into marshy wetlands of dense grasses and accumulated waste¹⁵ (*Image 7*). Extensive marsh was increasingly polluted by sewer lines dumping raw sewage into the river. The Anacostia flats became mosquito breeding grounds that contributed to high rates of malaria and other diseases. Congress began to address the unsightly, unnavigable, and unhygienic conditions of the river, with an 1890 authorization of a plan for the river’s reclamation. In 1896, the Eastern Washington Citizens’ Association’s Special Committee, tasked with planning the reclamation project reported its vision of “less unsanitary conditions, more wharfage, and deepening and widening of a navigable stream” by dredging and filling. According to the same report, the flats’ reclamation had the potential to increase development and add more than 1,000 acres of public land, “now useless, offensive, and deadly.”¹⁶ In 1898, Congress mandated the dredging of the river and the piling of the spoils on adjacent flats. The plan did not explicitly call for the creation of a park, but the 1901 McMillan Plan recommended creating a lake and recreational facilities to render the area desirable for development.

These plans evolved over time, took decades to realize, and were accomplished in phases, identified as Sections A-G, from south to north. In 1902, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers focused its initial reclamation efforts on Section A, the lower six miles beginning at the river’s confluence with the Potomac River and extending to the Navy Yard. The project would culminate in 1939 with the completion of Section G and Langston Golf Course north of the Benning Road bridge. By 1914, after years of lobbying, local residents and citizens’ associations were successful in shifting the objective of the reclamation of the flats from private development to public recreational use. In 1918, Anacostia Park was officially established, along both banks of the Anacostia River from the Navy Yard to the District line.¹⁷

¹⁴ “Will Open New Suburb, One Hundred East Side Park Lots on Benning Street to be Sold,” *The Washington Post*, April 19, 1908; and “East Side Park,” advertisement, *The Evening Star*, April 25, 1908.

¹⁵ Langston Golf Course Cultural Landscape Inventory (CLI), National Capital Parks-East, 2017, p.29

¹⁶ Langston Golf Course CLI, p. 30.

¹⁷ Langston Golf Course CLI, p. 33.



Image 7: The Anacostia flats as depicted on the 1894 G.M. Hopkins Map

Guided by this vision, the Corps of Engineers had, by 1927, filled the flats about halfway, making progress on an extensive park with its half-mile-long lake. Kingman Lake—named for Corps commander Brigadier General Dan Christie Kingman—consisted of an extensive basin along the western bank of the river, beginning upstream and ending downstream of the Benning Road bridge and bounded on the east by Kingman Island. In preparation for the reclamation of the flats around Benning bridge, the city dump at Benning and Cool Spring Roads was relocated to a site further north, and Cool Spring, later to become Oklahoma Avenue, was widened and straightened.¹⁸

The reclamation of the river flats and the establishment of Anacostia Park corresponded with the continued extension of public infrastructure into the eastern end of the city and the improvement of facilities on Reservation 13. Combined, these improvements cleared the way for speculative development during a period of major population growth in the city’s history. A post-World War I population boom produced a high demand for housing, especially moderately priced housing for an expanding government workforce. A resultant construction boom slowed after 1925 in west Washington, but development continued to march steadily eastward.

Expanding Development in Rosedale and Isherwood, East Side Park and Beyond

With the reclamation of the Anacostia flats, speculative builders, big and small, staked out the northeast quadrant of the city for block-long rows of attached, brick dwellings.¹⁹ New houses were erected in previously undeveloped East Side Park and in the many still-open squares in Rosedale and Isherwood. Upon completion of these rows, the developers would sell or rent the houses to speculators or occupants. The houses in East Side Park—two-story, three-bay, porch-fronted dwellings—attracted an exclusively white buyer or renter that was due, in part, to racial restrictions in the deeds. In 1925, C.H. Small & Co.

¹⁸ “Notice to Widen Cool Spring Road between 21st and Benning Road,” *The Evening Star*, July 9, 1927.

¹⁹ Building permits and maps indicate that Rosedale and Isherwood suffered a building hiatus between 1910 and 1925. Previously slow to develop, new construction there essentially came to a halt in the 1910s, before resuming after 1925.

one of the first developers of dwellings in the 700 block of 19th Street, placed racial restrictions in the deeds to his dwellings. C. F. Mills, builder of the houses next to and across from Small's followed suit in 1927. As other blocks were built out, a solidly white, middle-class demographic developed, with or without formal racial restrictions. In 1940, as the broader area had become largely African American, the streets of East Side Park remained a whites-only enclave.²⁰ Its residents, most of whom owned their houses, held stable, skilled, blue-collar and white-collar jobs. Nurses, teachers, mechanics, cab drivers, machinists and other workers headed East Side Park households that often included extended families and lodgers.

Rosedale and Isherwood houses of the mid-1920s were constructed of brick, rather than frame, in accordance with updated building codes, but they still followed the two-story, two-bay model of their nineteenth-century predecessors. As before, these modest houses attracted a working-class resident, both black and white. Despite the mixed-race nature of the Rosedale-Isherwood neighborhood overall, it was becoming increasingly segregated, with the streets west of 18th Street remaining home to white residents, and those east of 18th Street becoming predominantly African- American after 1920. The rows along 20th and Gales Street, built in the late nineteenth century, transitioned from white to black between 1900 and 1930, while the new residences east of 18th Street were occupied by African Americans upon completion. Several groups of dwellings, including 1901-1927 Gales Street (built 1926-1928); 1900-1926 Rosedale Street (built 1927); and the now-demolished 2000 block of Clagett Street (built 1926) within Rosedale- Isherwood further illustrate this trend, as all of them were occupied by African Americans shortly after construction. Before their foray into building in Rosedale and Isherwood, the developers of these rowhouses—the Hall-Johnson Construction Company, the Biggs-Johnson Construction Company, Paul A. Davis and the Continental Engineering Company—appear to have been largely engaged in developing streets in the emerging suburbs of northwest. During the 1920s and early 1930s, Hall-Johnson regularly advertised “quality homes” in Chevy Chase and “Ye Olde English Homes, Unique and Distinctive” in Tenleytown and Friendship Heights. In July 1927, the company advertised a row of 25 houses in Rosedale and Isherwood for rent without reference to race, but four months later offered them as “Houses for Colored.”²¹

Establishment of Kingman Park

With the reclamation of the Anacostia flats nearing completion, the development of the formerly marshy land east of the Rosedale and Isherwood subdivision became viable for real estate development. In 1927, Leslie E.F. Prince platted the first subdivision in the area between 23rd Place and 24th Street south of Benning Road. Developer Charles D. Sager likely witnessed activity in East Side Park and Rosedale-Isherwood and wanted in. Sager started with the purchase of lots in Prince's subdivision, platted in October 1927, and in December of that year, he obtained permits for a row of ten single-family brick residences along the 500 block of the newly laid 24th Street (549-567 24th).²²

Upon completion of the project at the end of March 1928, Sager began advertising the houses for sale, dubbing the soon-to-be neighborhood Kingman Park after the nearby Kingman Lake around which the “Government is about to develop a beautiful park, insuring ideal home surroundings and increased values.”²³ Sager, a white developer who up until that point had been building houses for middle-class

²⁰ United States Census, 1930 and 1940.

²¹ “Houses for Colored,” *The Evening Star*, November 4, 1928.

²² See D.C. Permit to Build #4842, December 9, 1927.

²³ “Kingman Park,” advertisement, *The Evening Star*, March 27, 1928.

whites city-wide, likely intended to attract a similar demographic to his Kingman Park neighborhood, just as builders sought to do in East Side Park. For several weeks, Sager advertised his new houses in the *Evening Star*, extolling not only the proximity to the “extensive Government park,” but the quality construction of his houses with their front and (double) rear porches, hardwood floors, hot water, and deep alley lots. The houses were offered for sale (“Why Rent a Home?”) for under \$6,000 with the assurance that more than 100 would be completed.²⁴ After a couple of weeks of advertising, Sager was either disappointed by the initial level of interest, or he simply recognized a more promising alternative market and shifted his sales’ tactics, advertising the same houses for “Colored” buyers.²⁵ For the next thirteen years until his unexpected death by accident in 1941, Sager would focus his attention on building rows of single-family dwellings in Kingman Park exclusively for African Americans.²⁶ Other than identifying “Kingman Park Development for Colored,” these ads offered the houses for the same prices and the same “easy” terms” as when marketed to whites. City-wide, African American purchasers were regularly paying significantly higher prices for houses than whites, making Sager’s Kingman Park more than attractive.²⁷

Sager found a ready market among black residents. Just three months after offering the first houses, he had already built and sold forty more.²⁸ He soon expanded upon his plan with the wholesale subdivision and development of adjacent streets, ultimately erecting hundreds of solid, two-story brick rowhouses.²⁹ Sager’s rows are representative of those that were being built in other emerging “in-town, suburban” neighborhoods. Designed by the prolific architect George T. Santmyers, the dwellings in Sager’s Kingman Park followed an attached urban rowhouse form, but they were set back on their lots with full-width front porches, and a front lawn defined by retaining walls that gave them a “suburban” feel. They featured two-story rear porches that faced deep lots and alleyways. The rows incorporate a variety of early twentieth-century stylistic elements, including Colonial, Tudor, Craftsman and Mediterranean-inspired ones (*Image 8*).

The Kingman Park development offered black workers with steady but modest incomes the opportunity to buy their own homes at a time when other areas of the city were closed to them through racial covenants, redlining and steering. In an era of codified racism, developers regularly placed racial

²⁴ “Kingman Park Development,” advertisement, *The Evening Star*, April 14, 1928.

²⁵ “Kingman Park Development for Colored,” *The Evening Star*, April 22, 1928.

²⁶ Charles D. Sager, described in 1923 as a “pioneer real estate man,” had been engaged in real estate since the early 1900s. He started as a salesman for Shannon & Luchs Company, and then he and William S. Phillips, another Shannon & Luchs salesman, established their own real estate firm of Phillips & Sager. After the firm dissolved, Sager continued in business on his own. Sager developed single-family dwellings, apartment buildings and office buildings during the boom years of the 1920s in neighborhoods throughout the city. Until Kingman Park, Sager was not responsible for the wholesale development of any single neighborhood. However, he had recently completed a collection of houses in today’s Cathedral Heights neighborhood, on Bellevue Terrace, Cathedral Avenue and Garfield Street. These houses, both single-family dwellings and duplexes were designed by George T. Santmyers and included his own house at 3839 Garfield Street. Sager died in 1941 when a tractor he was driving on his Upper Marlboro farm overturned and crushed him. See, “Sager in Fine New Four-Story Home, Pioneer Real Estate Man Buys Fourteenth Street Building and Moves Offices,” *The Washington Post*, March 4, 1923 and “Charles D. Sager Dies After Tractor Mishap on Maryland Farm,” *The Evening Star*, September 28, 1941.

²⁷ Raphael Urciolo, a real estate agent who regularly sought to sell white properties to blacks and fought the city’s use of racial covenants, admitted that apart from his philosophical objection to restrictive covenants, he also liked selling to black buyers because they paid 30 percent to 40 percent more for their homes. See *Chocolate City*, p. 295.

²⁸ “Forty Homes Purchased From Charles D. Sager, Firm Reports Active Demand for Properties in its New Kingman Park,” *The Washington Post*, July 15, 1928.

²⁹ “750 Homes Planned For Kingman Park, C.D. Sager Acquires More Land for Colored Development,” *The Washington Post*, February 15, 1931.

restrictions in the deeds of their new developments, ensuring buyers that their neighborhoods would remain white, and their investments putatively secure. Covenants could also be added retroactively by the petition by a majority of neighbors. These restrictions created an artificial scarcity of housing available to African Americans, and drove up rents and purchase prices, a situation exacerbated by the lack of financing provided to black buyers.

Click on Sign to add text and place signatures on a PDF file.

Strictly Modern Homes In A Most Desirable Environment




KINGMAN PARK HOMES
Construction of brick from cellar to roof.

These homes are designed and built with the object of sale for single family occupancy. Some of the houses have 5 rooms which include 2 bedrooms, living room, dining room and kitchen; others have 6 rooms which provides 3 bedrooms.

All of the houses have concrete cellars equipped with laundry trays; large double back porches, 10 feet deep, and concrete front porches with concrete steps; hardwood floors on the first floor; ample double floor plugs. The most modern house construction equipment is used, as evidenced by the use of steel supporting beams and girders and steel brackets for fastening stair runners and metal corner supports for plastered walls.

In the finishing of these homes, nothing but the best white lead and oil paint and enamel is used for the woodwork. Electric fixtures are chosen for their substantiality.



Another Type of 23rd Street Homes
Five Rooms and Bath, \$6,375 subject to change.

Latest Designed 23rd Street Homes
Six Rooms and Bath, \$7,250 subject to change.

COMPANYING illustrations show the front appearance, and you will notice the design varies so that the homes lack the sameness in appearance which becomes more or less undesirable in some communities. You will also note the brick retaining wall which prevents uneven terraces where the sod extends down to the sidewalk. There is the very minimum of exposed woodwork on the outside of these homes that would occasion the expense for painting. It is believed that these homes will not show the results of years as do many more costly homes.

All homes have good front yards which are handsomely landscaped and deep back yards to wide alley.



A View of 24th Street Looking South to Government Property

KINGMAN PARK is an established community. Since February, 1928, over 130 homes have been built, sold and are occupied. This represents a capital investment of about \$900,000.

Kingman Park property owners are of the better class of citizens whose thrift, prudence and desire for ideal homes have caused them to locate here.

Homes are now being built in the third addition to Kingman Park and many are being sold for delivery in from three to five months.

Kingman Park is the only fully modern restricted community of its kind.

Image 8: A page from Sager’s sales brochure illustrates the houses of Kingman Park.

In this context, Kingman Park was extremely attractive to African Americans as it provided them new and quality housing for purchase and an opportunity to create a community. Charles Sager immersed himself in his Kingman Park development, building houses in the area between 21st Street, 25th Place, D Street and Benning Road in the period between 1928 and 1938. He rigorously pursued a stable, middle-class, African-American market, announcing “restrictions” of his own: “the sale of homes in this community is restricted to colored citizens of the better class, and every effort is put forth to maintain most desirable neighborhood conditions. Home ownership and good citizenship, with ideal social surroundings, are enjoyed by all who live in Kingman Park.”³⁰ Sager pitched a sales brochure, *Kingman Park: A model community with modern brick homes for colored citizens* that offered homes “such as families accustomed to the better things in life have looked for, but have never found.”³¹ “Kingman Park Homes are being purchased by Colored Families that have been too discriminating to accept merely a house. Their ambition has been to own a home worthy of the name ‘Home’”³² (*Image 9*).

³⁰ “Kingman Park, the ‘In-town Suburb’ for Colored,” *The Evening Star*, July 19, 1930.

³¹ *The Evening Star*, August 4, 1936.

³² *The Evening Star*, September 6, 1931.

KINGMAN PARK

The "In-Town Suburb"

LOCATION
Kingman Park is ideally located, adjoining an extensive river park area, where over three million dollars are being expended for improvements by the United States Government. This uniquely favorable location offers the best possible means of recreation for both young and old, resulting in improved health.

TRANSPORTATION
All centrally located business

establishments may be reached in fifteen minutes by street car. Travel by automobile over the main traffic routes radiating from 15th and H Streets in all directions, shortens distances to the outlying sections.

SCHOOLS
Excellent schools are assured by the recent purchase of 42½ acres of ground located on the North side of Benning Road and extending from 24th Street to the Park,

ANOTHER SAGER OPERATION

for the purpose of locating three new schools, (Junior High, Health School and Platoon Grade School) all of which will be of most improved design.

TRADE CENTERS
Excellent trading facilities are furnished not only by the stores built as a part of this community but also by numerous chain stores located both on Benning Road and at 15th and H Streets. There is also the new Sears, Roebuck De-

partment Store, located only a few blocks away on the Washington-Baltimore Boulevard.

RESTRICTIONS
The sale of homes in this community is restricted to colored citizens of the better class and every effort is put forth to maintain most desirable neighborhood conditions. Home ownership and good citizenship with ideal social surroundings, are enjoyed by all who live in Kingman Park.



Image 9: Inside cover of Charles Sager's promotional brochure for Kingman Park

In general, the residents in Sager's subdivisions represented a more established and financially secure African American population than was already living in the older houses of Rosedale-Isherwood. A fair share of the heads of household in Kingman Park still held unskilled jobs often simply listed as "laborer" in the census, but skilled workers and middle-class professionals predominated, along with a smattering of professionals. Middle-class occupations included government workers such as messengers and clerks in various federal offices, chauffeurs, porters, teachers, mail carriers, merchants, waiters, store clerks, and business proprietors. One business owner who moved to Kingman Park by 1930, Charles Plummer, owned a billiards hall at 7th and S Streets NW, and another Henry Simms owned a restaurant on 4th Street, NW. Early professionals in the emerging Kingman Park neighborhood included a physician, a chiropractor, an engineer with the building department, a clergyman, and their respective families.

As African Americans filled the houses in Kingman Park, other developers capitalized on Sager's real estate success. On 25th Place and Oklahoma Avenue and D Street, developers and builders with no known connection to Sager erected rows of brick residences which they then sold to African Americans. This intact collection of houses between 21st Street and Oklahoma Avenue, south of Benning Road, soon became the stable nucleus of the African-American neighborhood of Kingman Park.

With the success of Kingman Park, developers, including Charles Sager purchased undeveloped lots of land in the eastern end of the nineteenth-century subdivision of Rosedale-Isherwood, and built rows of dwellings along its narrow streets. These new houses similarly attracted African American residents, cementing its transition from white to black-occupied. By 1940, the area east of 18th Street, north of E

Street east of Oklahoma Avenue had become occupied almost exclusively by African Americans (*Figure 10*).



Image 10: Map showing racial composition in Kingman Park based on 1940 Census

A Community Grows

The first residents of Sager’s development almost immediately established a Kingman Park Civic Association (KPCA). While the East Washington Citizens Association advocated for the “interests of residents living east of the U.S. Capitol,” the Kingman Park Civic Association (KPCA) was formed in 1929 to address the educational, economic and public safety concerns of the narrower geographic area between 15th Street and the Anacostia River, and C Street and Benning Road including the new neighborhood of Kingman Park.³³ Like other emerging civic associations city-wide, KPCA focused specifically on the needs of the area’s African-American residents. Within its first decades of existence, the civic association built an active membership, published a monthly newsletter, advocated for street improvements established a cooperative grocery and, most notably, and in conjunction with other groups and individuals, pushed for the construction of much needed educational facilities in Kingman Park. In 1956, when the civic group was highlighted in an article in the *Evening Star*, the association counted 400 members and met at Spingarn High School, a facility it fought to have built for twenty years.

³³ “Civic Group Spearheads Kingman Park Progress,” *The Evening Star*, April 11, 1956.

Benning Road Business

The character of Benning Road was principally determined by the street's function as a major artery connecting Washington and Prince George's County, a role it had played since the 1805 construction of the second trans-Anacostia bridge. At the turn of the twentieth century, the route on the outskirts of the federal city was still thinly developed. East of 19th Street, a sprinkling of detached houses and more numerous barns, sheds and greenhouses dwindled into marsh. Exurban uses could still be found even near the western end of the road, including in the 1700 block of Benning where the greenhouses of Irish florist Robert Bowdler stood, and in the 1600 block where the ring of a blacksmith's hammer could still be heard. The predominantly African-American Graceland Cemetery still lay within the angle formed with Bladensburg Road, although most of the remains had been disinterred and the property put up for sale.

The most prominent landmark, however, was the Columbia Railway Company's new streetcar barn on the south side of the 1500 block, built in 1895 to replace an older facility down 15th Street. The arrival of this terminus spurred additional development at the transportation break, but less so to the east. The intersection of Maryland Avenue with H and 15th Streets and Bladensburg Road saw considerable commercial construction after the Washington Railway and Electric Company (WRECo) bought Graceland Cemetery and built an electric powerhouse, car house, maintenance shop, storehouse, and storage yard. Already an important crossroads, the spot became a transfer point for the Washington, Baltimore and Annapolis Electric Railway, soon acquired by WRECo, and whose tracks led east out Benning Road. The line to Annapolis was an interurban—not suited to hop-on-hop-off use—so it was increased automobile ownership that promoted a construction boom in Kingman Park in the second half of the 1920s. Rural uses were sometimes supplanted by industrial ones, including the rail facilities. The corridor was home to the H.L. Ryan lumber yard from the 1910s through the 1930s, Cora Rosewag's coal yard during the 1930s, 1940s and 1950s, and a couple of fuel-oil suppliers.

Neighborhood commercial uses were disproportionately related to the automobile—sales, repair, fueling, washing, and even bus rental—and to other commercial services convenient to commuters traversing Benning Road. Gas stations appeared in almost every block of Benning west of the river: Esso, Tydol, Sunoco, Amoco, etc. These were separated by homes, of course, and by hand laundries and tailors (and later, dry cleaners), delicatessens, pharmacies, shoe-repair shops, liquor stores, and a frozen-custard stand. Geared more to local patronage were numerous small groceries, laundromats, barbershops and a billiard parlor. In addition to a miniature-golf course at the corner of 22nd Street (prefiguring the racially integrated full-size Langston Golf Course down the street), Charles Sager, developer of the core of Kingman Park, erected a two-story commercial building at 2033 Benning Road to serve his subdivision, attracting Joseph Silverman's grocery from a block west. Silverman's little shop evolved into a liquor store as supermarkets conquered food retail, and the business is still known as Silverman's Liquors today.

Silverman's was merely the longest-tenured Jewish-owned business on the corridor. Benning Road commercial properties attracted a number of Eastern European Jews, including Ukrainian tailor Nathan Tash, Polish tailor Samuel Freedman, Romanian baker Irving Honikman, Polish grocers Morris Kaplan and Leo G. Brody, and Russian grocers Nathan Rassin, Sol Aronoff and Sol Gass. Like Joseph Silverman, grocers Simon Chaikin, Morris Lebow and Irving Greenberg were second generation, but

they, too, were newcomers to Washington, like most business owners on the corridor. Cobblers Domenic Rastelli and Stanley Petrone were sons of Italy, while Francesca Zolli, wife of Philadelphia-born grocer Frank Fusco, was born in Puglia. Robert Bowdler, founder of a florist dynasty, was a native of Dublin. Paul Cheung and Sun Hee Lee, each a proprietor of a hand laundry, were among the few Asians on Benning during the mid-twentieth century, but a Chinese restaurant opened in the 1500 block by 1947, and another in the 1600 block before 1969.

White-owned businesses predominated for the first half of the twentieth century, but African-American entrepreneurs increasingly acquired their own businesses from the mid-1930s, accelerating in the 1950s. Like their white counterparts, black businesspeople were also mostly transplants from other states, largely part of the Great Migration from deeper south. Barbers Baxton H. Payne and James Russell Wiggins hailed from Jackson, Tennessee and Enfield, North Carolina, respectively. Half-brothers St. Elmo and Robert Crawford came from Jacksonville, Florida.

The south side of the 1800 block of Benning Road was the first to desegregate, and it was there that one of the earliest black businesses originated. A couple of Jewish-owned groceries had occupied 1801 Benning after its 1911 construction, but in the early 1930s Eugene Thomas opened a short-lived lunch restaurant there. It was replaced in 1935 by Mrs. Loretta M. Jones's beauty salon, which has carried on, through several owners and under various names, until the present day. Beauty shops were one path for woman entrepreneurs. None was nearly as long-lasting as Mrs. Jones's, but they made up for it in number; there were four in the 1900 block of Benning, two on the 2000 block, two on the 2400 block, and two within the Langston Theater shops. Beauty salons and barber shops frequently occupied the little shops appended to the fronts of rowhouses on the corridor.

Barbering had been an honorable and lucrative profession for African-American men since before the Civil War, and barbershops became an informal, male meeting place, like general stores or livery stables of old. The first barbershop in this area, that of Wilbur B. Townsend, disappeared almost immediately in the early 1930s. But the next Kingman Park barber shop to open would prove its most enduring. Baxton Payne first shared 2401 Benning with a small drugstore and a doctor in 1939. A couple years later, he opened his Happy Stop Valet Shop at 2029, offering tonsorial services and clothes cleaning, and he remained through the 1960s. He picked up competition from Matthew Gray's East Side Barbershop in the late 1940s, from James R. Wiggins in the mid-1950s, and from Homer L. Thurston in the late 50s. Most of these shops also survived the 1960s. James Wiggins also took over a carry-out at 2401 Benning about 1963.

Among the earliest black businesses in the area were small professional offices. Adna L. Spencer set up a dental practice at 1800 Benning Road just before World War II. Five years later, Dr. Hugh Brown hung out his shingle at 1923 Benning, followed by Dr. John W. Sebastian, a block east, in 1950, and Dr. Roger G. Thurston, across the street, in the early 50s. Dentist St. Elmo Crawford and physician Robert Crawford were sons of a nurse at Freedman's Hospital and set up offices together at 1922 Benning in the early 1950s. Their business evolved into the Northeast Prescription Center, a pharmacy with delivery citywide, and which competed with the still-older Kingman Park Pharmacy/Kingman Drugs established at 1917 Benning by dentist George Hench Butcher Sr. about 1933 and carried on by his family into the 1970s. Another of the longtime drugstores was Dr. Henry Dodford Dismukes's Langston Pharmacy, at 2401 Benning, in a shop he had once shared with barber Baxton Payne.

More area residents were blue-collar workers and tradesmen—truck drivers, sheet-metal workers, plumbers—and the Milner family ran an upholstery shop at 2013 Benning. But a different sort of painter initially worked above the beauty shop of his wife, Virginia Harrison, at 2011 Benning. Roland Harrison had an art background which he parlayed into a photography business in the mid-1950s, later known as A B C Color Reproductions. In the late 1960s, however, his shop was subsumed into a neighborhood art institution, the Hammond Cultural Center. Bernice Hammond founded her Northeast Academy of Dance next door (2009) in 1953, expanding the activities and physical presence of her school into an addition in 1962, and then into the Harrisons' former shop.

An appreciation for the fine and applied arts could be found in the contemporaneous photography studio of Theodore Gaffney at 1811 Benning, a building that also became the offices of a dentist and a small publisher. And James M. Dorsey & Sons printers succeeded Rudolph Plummer's charm school in the building at 2419 Benning. Richard A. "Rip" Naylor, a former employee of the Langston Theater, opened a "Langston" music and appliance store a block west of the movie house after the war. It did not last, presumably squeezed by the competition of chain and franchise appliance shops and, in 1952, he converted the place to Rip's Billiard Parlor, a popular hangout for neighborhood sportsmen.

The most notable entertainment spot in Kingman Park was the Langston Theater and shops at 2501-2509 Benning Road. Opened in 1945, the John Zink-designed motion picture was the last built by Abe Lichtman, whose 29-theater chain served African-American patrons. It was an example of cooperation between the neighborhood's Jewish and black merchants, as Lichtman and subsequent owners the Freedmen family leased the store spaces to African-American businesses such as Loretta Jones's beauty parlor, the Malone dress shop, Milton Chisley's flower shop, the Langston Food Shoppe delicatessen, Aristo Cleaners, and the Langston Barbershop. Unfortunately, this neighborhood landmark and business incubator was razed in the 1970s to make way for a fast-food outlet. Like other neighborhood theaters, the Langston had lost out to the popularity of television, as evidenced by the opening of the (Charles) Parker Radio & TV Service blocks away in the later 1950s.

Although more conspicuous for its absence than most smaller businesses, the Langston Theater is a potent illustration of the loss of early commercial buildings along the corridor. There are several purpose-building stores of the 1910s, 1920s and 1930s sprinkled among the 1800, 1900, 2000 and 2400 blocks of Benning, but these are separated from each other by large gaps and by the intrusion of the early residential and recent commercial construction. They would be more compelling as a historic assemblage if they were, in fact, assembled contiguously.

Among the buildings that remain are specimens of the many groceries that were mainly white-owned. African-American-helmed purveyors of food included Gordon's Supermarket, Sarge's Grocery and Ware's Fish Market, the latter two on 20th Street. For a sit-down dinner, one might drop into the Arabian Room nightclub or Garner's Tropicana Lounge. For a quick bite, there was Pete's Ro-Dale Restaurant, Sporty's Delicatessen, Wiggins's sandwich shop, and several other carry-outs. It is said that the Kingman Park Civic Association sponsored its own co-operative grocery at 1916 Benning in 1940, but there seems to be no trace of the store physically or in records, except for a brief newspaper mention. Its building was transformed by a front addition and combination with another former rowhouse next door, to accommodate the expanding Gambrell's Cleaners in 1959.

Dry cleaners and self- and hand laundries were among the more common businesses on Benning, the sort of convenience-service retail typical of major traffic arteries. Here, they grew out of a tradition of tailoring found among the first Jewish merchants. By the mid-1950s, there was at least as much money to be had from dry cleaning, and a generation of black tailors took up the trade in the 1950s, including Aaron Moore at 1813 Benning and Obie B. Gambrell right across the Street. Gambrell failed to knock off his competition for years, but outlast them he did, successful enough to combine and expand 1916 and 1918 Benning and to open two other locations before closing in the late 1980s. The guts of his flamboyant sign still hang from the aluminum façade screen.

The sorts of businesses found in Kingman Park were similar to those along the several blocks of Benning Road to the west and east. For most, there is relatively little information available to support evaluations of their individual significance. But their collective significance is to be found in their support of and association with the rowhouse subdivisions developed by Charles Sager and others. Research of the commercial corridor also provides insight into what residents considered Kingman Park's extent to be at mid-century. At the west end of the road, geographically derived business names were more likely to incorporate "Benning," as in Benning Road Auto Sales, Benning Road Auto Parts, Benning Repair City, and Benning Diner. Father east, beginning at the intersection with 18th Street, the "Kingman Park" businesses commenced: Kingman Park Billiard Parlor, Kingman Park Pharmacy, and Kingman Park Market. But "Kingman Park" contended with the more frequent "Langston"-named businesses, which honored the man, the apartment complex, the larger neighborhood around the apartments north of Benning, or all three. Between the late 1930s and late 1960s, the street contained a Langston Confectionery Shop, Langston Delicatessen, Langston Market, the Langston Service Station, Langston Pharmacy, the Langston Music and Appliance Stores, a Langston Self-Laundry, two Langston Barber Shops, Langston Realty Company, the Langston Food Shoppe, and, of course, the Langston Theater and Langston Golf Course.

The Young, Brown, Phelps and Spingarn Educational Campus

From the late nineteenth century until 1932, the African-American children of Rosedale and Isherwood and the early residents of Kingman Park had no neighborhood school. The two neighborhood elementary schools, Webb and Blow, were whites-only, leaving no convenient school for young African-American elementary school pupils to attend. The residents of Rosedale-Isherwood and Kingman Park were not alone in their predicament. A significant increase in the city's population after World War I brought a corresponding increase in school enrollment, putting a major strain on the city's public schools in both the segregated white and African American school systems. The influx of residents to the emerging neighborhoods engendered a need for new schools. In the mid-1920s, to address overcrowding, the D.C. Board of Education began implementation of a multi-million-dollar five-year plan for the construction of several schools.³⁴

In 1929, with lobbying by KPCA, the Federation of Civic Associations and others,³⁵ the Board of Education purchased a 42-acre parcel of land on the north side of Benning Road opposite Kingman

³⁴ Beauchamp, "Public School Buildings of Washington, D.C., 1862-1960," NRHP MPD, 2001, E18.

³⁵ The D.C. Board of Education meeting minutes for November 7, 1928 note that "Mr. Sager inquires if it [Blow School] will be colored." Although no response to this inquiry could be found in subsequent minutes, it can be safely assumed that Sager wanted schools for African Americans near Kingman Park and would likely have been involved in the lobbying effort. Beginning in 1930, Sager highlights Kingman Park's proximity to the proposed campus. See "Kingman Park, the 'In-Town Suburb' for Colored," *The Evening Star*, July 9, 1930, and "Kingman Park, The 'In-town Suburb,' Another Sager Operation," promotional brochure, no date.

Park, for the construction of “school buildings and playground sites.”³⁶ The Board’s September 1929 minutes indicate that the land was specifically intended to provide elementary and junior high schools for African-American students.³⁷ Construction of the first school on the site, Young Elementary was delayed by the Great Depression and a lack of funds. New Deal programs brought more workers to the District, however, increasing the burden on the overcrowded schools, and adding pressure on the government to build new ones. Two years after the purchase of the school site, the construction of Charles Young Elementary School finally began in January 1931 and opened in November. It was named for Charles E. Young, one of the first African-American graduates of West Point, a decorated Army officer, and the first black U.S. National Park superintendent.³⁸ In March of that year, a contract was let for a junior high school to honor Hugh M. Browne, a native Washingtonian and prominent African-American educator, minister, and civil rights advocate. Browne Junior High opened in 1932.³⁹ In May 1934, the Young and Brown schools were joined by the Phelps Trade School for Boys.

In the early 1930s, the Federation of Civic Associations began an extensive lobbying campaign for construction of a senior high school on the same school site. Although it would be two decades in the making, the D.C. Board of Education announced its plans in March 1935 to build the high school on the Benning Road site, claiming its intention to develop “the most extensive Negro educational center in America.”⁴⁰

Development of the educational campus boosted African-American interest in the area’s real estate. Charles Sager highlighted the schools in his promotional brochure and his many sales ads, touting the “excellent schools” all of which, he claimed, “will be of the most improved design.” During the 1930s, house sales in the Kingman Park and adjacent streets continued apace and the rows of houses that were home to working- and middle-class African Americans grew into a community. The campus, which was the only public facility beyond churches that was open to African Americans, became the community meeting and gathering place. Neighborhood children attended the schools and used the facilities and playgrounds after school hours. Residents of Kingman Park and Rosedale-Isherwood had a vested interest in the schools and served as advocates for improvement and quality of education at the campus.

Langston Golf Course

By the late 1920s, it was known that the construction of the approaches to the new Memorial Bridge across the Potomac River would mean the demise of the Lincoln Memorial Golf Course, the only course in the District where African Americans could play. A group of golfers formed the Capital City Golf Club in 1927, one of the first such clubs for African Americans. The club immediately petitioned the federal government for a replacement course open to African-American golfers and requested one within a new park being created along the Anacostia River. A committee established to study possible locations favored a newly reclaimed area north of Benning Road, known as Section G. The committee considered the site well-suited for the course, because of its proximity to African-American neighborhoods. The effort was bolstered by a 1929 National Capital Park and Planning Commission (NCPCC) recreation plan that proposed the same site to serve as a “colored” neighborhood recreation center with an “Anacostia Water Park.” But funds were scarce, and the filling by the Army Corps of

³⁶ D.C. Board of Education, “Second Meeting of the Board of Education” minutes, September 4, 1929.

³⁷ District of Columbia, *Report of the Board of Education, 1929-1930; Report of the Board of Education, 1931-1932*.

³⁸ Young Elementary School Vertical File, Sumner School Museum and Archives.

³⁹ Hugh M. Browne Vertical File, Sumner School Museum & Archives.

⁴⁰ “Proposed School Center Extensive,” *The Evening Star*, March 15, 1935.

Engineers of the muddy, marshy and noisome Anacostia flats, begun in 1902, was still underway. The golfers would have a decade to wait.

In 1935, NCPPC submitted the golf course project to the Works Progress Administration (WPA), arguing that it was worthy and “adaptable to the use of emergency relief labor.” Upon approval, the course would be the largest of six new WPA projects for the District of Columbia, and much of the grading and landscaping was accomplished by Civilian Conservation Corps crews. By June 1937, five holes had been laid out, but when the parkland-style course opened in 1939, it contained only nine, all on the west side of Kingman Lake. Over the next sixteen years, the links would be expanded to 18 holes, plus a miniature golf course. Planners had looked at placing holes even on the smaller islands within Kingman Lake. There were also plans to round out the “water park” with a recreation center, swimming pool, tennis courts and stadium, to be located between the golf course and the black public-school campus. The schools would ultimately get their sports facilities—and the golf course its clubhouse—but these plans were never fully realized.

Under construction, the property was referred to as the Benning Road or Kingman golf course. But coinciding with construction of the nearby Public Works Administration-funded Langston Terrace Dwellings, the golf facility was ultimately designated to honor John Mercer Langston, a nineteenth-century American abolitionist, attorney, Freedmen’s Bureau inspector general, founding dean of Howard University Law School, congressman from Virginia, and U.S. minister to Haiti.



Figure 11: Photo of golf pro and students at Langston Golf Course, 1979

Upon its dedication, Langston was one of only about 20 courses in the nation open to African Americans. The disparity between these and the thousands of whites-only courses was immediately apparent to golfers who had caddied on the latter. Too small to host tournament play, the course was also poorly maintained, it long lacked a proper clubhouse, and there were persistent complaints about the concessionaire who operated the park during its first 35 years. It was only with the desegregation of D.C.’s public golf courses in 1955—following the Supreme Court’s landmark school desegregation cases—that Langston and its clubhouse were completed. Still, the course is said to have been played by

Joe Louis, Althea Gibson, Jim Thorpe, Billy Eckstine, Maury Wills, Bob Hope, Gerald Ford and “every professional African American golfer except for Tiger Woods.”

Langston Terrace Dwellings

In the mid-1930s, with the site of Langston Golf Course firmly established and Kingman Park growing as a stable African-American neighborhood supported by its own schools, the federal government embarked upon a plan to build one of the nation’s earliest federally funded housing projects for lower-income residents, following three projects in Atlanta and Cleveland, only one of which was for black residents. Established in 1933 and funded by the PWA, the new project followed the European-influenced public-housing design principles adopted by the PWA, embodying the optimism of the New Deal. The government identified an 85-acre site north of Benning Road, adjacent to the school complex for African Americans, to build what became the District’s first public housing for African Americans and one of its most important examples of modern architecture.

The 274-unit Langston Terrace Dwellings, designed by Bauhaus-trained, African-American architect Hilyard Robinson, was architecturally innovative, with two-story duplexes sited around significant open spaces featuring celebratory sculptures and a terra cotta frieze, *The Progress of the Negro Race*, portraying the history of African Americans from slavery to freedom. Begun in 1935, the project was beset by delays due to financing and labor, but upon completion in 1938, it offered African American families who had been especially hard-hit by the Depression, an opportunity to improve their sub-standard living situations and enjoy the benefits of community, modern housing and outdoor space (*Figure 12*).

The desire to live at Langston, described in period accounts as a “planned Utopia” where subsidized rents were available for six dollars per month with utilities was great, making the government’s role in selecting its first 274 families out of thousands of applicants a difficult one. Many of the applicants were government employees with regular salaries, or workers who held dependable skilled and unskilled jobs, but still found affordable housing elusive. Statistically, African Americans paid significantly higher rents for housing than whites, as fewer options were available to them. In most cases, the high rents resulted in overcrowded conditions, as families shared living quarters with extended family members, or took in boarders to afford their monthly payments. In addition, alley dwellings, which were still home to many working-class African Americans in the early twentieth century were under assault by urban and social reformers seeking to eradicate alley housing leaving displaced residents with few housing options.

Applicants seeking housing at Langston made their claims in writing, often recounting personal and familial circumstances, and repeatedly mentioning onerous rents and cramped quarters. Some applicants wrote at great length while others were more succinct. In a handwritten note, one applicant Alvin Johnson who lived at 744 19th Street NE in Rosedale-Isherwood, simply wrote, “Three rooms kitchenette and bath in Langston Terrace.”⁴¹ Six years earlier, Alvin Johnson, then 16, was one of six children sharing a very modest two-story, two-bay frame house with his parents and uncle. The house at 744 19th Street stood until at least July 2014 before it was replaced by the present three-story condominium on the site.

⁴¹ Kelly Anne Quinn, *Making Modern Homes: A History of Langston Terrace Dwellings, A New Deal Housing Program in Washington, D.C.*, University of Maryland, Ph.D. dissertation, 2007, p. 22.



Figure 12: Aerial View, ca. 1952, west over the site of Spingarn High School to Langston Terrace Dwellings. Charles Young Elementary School is shown at right.

Although limited in capacity, the government-subsidized housing at Langston Terrace was a huge success. So well received was the project that federal officials often used it as a demonstration model for the potential of low-rent housing. The expansive apartment complex coalesced with Kingman Park and Rosedale-Isherwood into a predominantly African-American neighborhood.

Browne Junior High School, Rosedale Park and Playground, and the Fight for Integration

Browne Junior High School

While Langston Golf Course offered residents of Kingman Park and the broader African-American community access to golf, other recreational facilities, such as Rosedale Playground, were segregated and remained closed to blacks, prompting local residents and civic activists city-wide to take up the fight for the integration of area playgrounds. At the same time, area black schools were over-enrolled and ill-equipped to accommodate the swelling population of Kingman Park and environs, compelling parents to lead the charge for better schools. This involvement would lead directly to the 1954 landmark Supreme Court decision that rendered the segregation of schools in the District of Columbia and nationwide illegal.

Workplace segregation often had the effect of concentrating the best and brightest of the African-American community in the corps of teachers, but the separate-and-unequal schools' facilities were overwhelmed, and equipment and supplies insufficient. Between 1935 and 1947, the number of students within the black school system increased by more than 28 percent, while the number of white students dropped by 12 percent. In 1946, white schools spent roughly 27 percent more per student than black schools did. Overcrowding was ubiquitous, but at the segregated Browne Junior High it had reached critical levels. Opened in May 1932, the first junior high school in the "colored" division, the school was built to accommodate 783 students. By late 1941 1,462 students were enrolled. The numbers were due to an influx of new residents to the city during the Depression and World War II. The Board of Education introduced a "platooning" system of double shifts at Browne, but even staggering the attendance in this fashion, classrooms were still beyond capacity.⁴² By 1947, the school was operating at more than double its intended enrollment, with 1,707 students. To alleviate the overcrowding, the school board reduced instruction to part-time, whereby student instruction was altered from full-time double shifts to half-day double shifts, while teachers doubled-up on their own schedules, teaching morning and afternoon shifts with classes of as many as fifty-eight students. Furthermore, Browne had a small gymnasium and no science laboratory, while the under-enrolled white Eliot Junior High on East Capitol Hill had large, separate gymnasiums for girls and boys and vacant classrooms.

Many parents recommended transferring some of the black students to Eliot Junior High School, but the Board of Education was committed to maintaining the segregated system and proposed instead to transfer the similarly under-enrolled, white Blow and Webb elementary schools into the African American division. The elementary schools would serve as "overflow" space to Browne. The affected residents and civic associations⁴³ opposed this transfer for several reasons, but principally on the grounds that elementary schools were poorly equipped to accommodate the needs of junior-high students; moving students to and from Browne across Benning Road was unsafe and disruptive to learning; and it was unfair and demeaning that African American students should be given the "cast-off" white schools. "The parents, although against segregation, have pointed out that their squabble with the Board of Education is based on the school building problem only. They feel that Blow and Webb schools are inadequate and their transfer created a situation even worse than the part-time classes at Browne School."⁴⁴

In April 1947, Browne's Parent Teacher Association petitioned the school board to transfer black students to Eliot Junior High. Filed on behalf of Browne student Marguerite Carr, daughter of the PTA president, the petition laid out how the school's overcrowding deprived the students of adequate education. Superintendent Corning acknowledged deficiencies but refused to transfer any of the students. In response, the Carrs, the PTA, and NAACP attorneys filed a class-action lawsuit, *Carr v. Corning*, which argued that Marguerite Carr and others were denied, solely on account of their race or color, the benefits of free education required by the laws of the District of Columbia. In February 1950, the U.S. Court of Appeals decided against the plaintiffs in *Carr v. Corning*, with the majority finding no

⁴² Marya Annette McQuirter, "'Our Cause is Marching On': Parent Activism, Browne Junior High School, and the Multiple Meanings of Equality in Post-War Washington," *Washington History*, Vol. 16, No. 2, (Fall/Winter 2004/2005), p. 68.

⁴³ The Board of Education Minute for November 5, 1947 named several organizations that protested the transfer: the D.C. Federation of Civic Associations; the Central Northeast Civic Association; and the Northeast Boundary Civic Association, among others. The Kingman Park Civic Association also opposed the transfer.

⁴⁴ "Blow and Webb Parents Vote to Continue Strike," *The Evening Star*, December 16, 1947.

evidence of discrimination and ruling that school segregation was constitutional and supported by Congress.

In the interim, however, Browne parents had become fully engaged in the fight for the de-segregation of city schools. They banded together in civil disobedience, picketing the school and the Board of Education offices in the Franklin School downtown. After the Board went forward with the transfer of Webb and Blow as overflow space to Browne in December 1947, many parents boycotted the decision by withholding their children from school. These events galvanized several Browne parents to form the Consolidated Parent Group and take legal action. Gardner Bishop, a barber and father of a Browne student became the group's president, and Charles Hamilton Houston, its lawyer.

The Browne strike and legal action garnered the attention of Congress and the House District Committee which sponsored a study on the city's schools. The extensive Strayer Report, released in February 1949, criticized the woefully undersized, underfunded, and understaffed black schools and would become the most important piece of evidence cited in the decisive case against legally segregated schools in the District of Columbia.⁴⁵ It was discovered that black high schools were more than 50 percent over capacity while white schools were 25 percent under-capacity. The Strayer Report empowered activists and pressured school officials to deal with overcrowding. Gardner Bishop and the Consolidated Parent Group gathered signatures on a mid-1949 petition demanding immediate relief. The group celebrated a major victory when Central High School was transferred into the black division. Shortly thereafter, Charles Houston died, and the Consolidated Parent's Group hired James Nabrit, a Howard Law colleague. With his hire, the grassroots campaign shifted tactics, beginning a direct assault on segregation itself.

When white Sousa High School opened in the fall of 1950, the Consolidated Parent Group demanded that black students have full access to it. Gardner Bishop escorted eleven African-American students to Sousa where school officials denied them admittance. The Consolidated Parent Group then sued Board of Education president Melvin C. Sharpe on behalf of the students. One of these was eleven-year-old Spottswood Bolling whose name appeared first on the landmark Supreme Court case *Bolling v. Sharpe*. When *Bolling v. Sharpe* was finally decided in 1954 alongside four companion cases including *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka*, Spottswood Bolling was a freshman at the segregated Spingarn High School, built just two years earlier. The day after the historic Supreme Court decision was made, the *Evening Star* reported that the "gangling 15-year-old" Spottswood Bolling was more interested in playing softball with his team after school than with the momentous decision. When prodded by his mother to answer the reporter's queries later that evening, Spottswood did concede that the historic decision "will help the future of the race. Help other children. Better teaching, better space, better books." Spottswood Bolling was one of five plaintiffs that included his brother, Wannamaker Bolling a former Spingarn student; Barbara and Adrienne Jennings, then-current Spingarn students; and Sarah Briscoe who was no longer able to attend school as she, one of eight children, was helping to tend to three younger siblings at their home in the Barry Farm public housing.⁴⁶

⁴⁵ Chris Myers Asch and George Derek Musgrove, *Chocolate City: A History of Race and Democracy in the Nation's Capital*, p. 309.

⁴⁶ "Child Principals Show Little Interest in Historic Decision," *The Evening Star*, May 18, 1954.

Rosedale Playground

As residents and activists fought unfair conditions at Browne Junior High, others waged a similar battle against the city's segregated playgrounds, including Rosedale Park Playground at 18th and Gales Street NE. Rosedale, established in the 1910s as a whites-only playground, remained segregated, despite the changing demographics of Rosedale-Isherwood and an entirely African-American population east of 18th Street in Kingman Park.

The issue of racially segregated District playgrounds had gained national notoriety in 1945 when the Board of Recreation adopted discriminatory regulations governing the use of its play areas. Despite challenges from the NAACP, the Washington Chapter of the Southern Conference for Human Welfare, and the Fraternal Council of Negro Churches, the Board stubbornly implemented the rules. While these organizations fought the Board's policies in general, they also singled out specific playgrounds where such segregated policies were particularly inappropriate due to the racial composition of the neighborhoods.

In 1947, anti-segregationist Progressive Party of the District joined the fight, focusing its efforts on Rosedale. The organization picketed with a racially mixed group of people in front of the playground, encouraging the community to join in and challenge the status quo. Despite these demonstrations, the Board of Recreation renewed its commitment to its whites-only policy at Rosedale. The Board argued that the Blow school property would be opened to use by African Americans when personnel and funds were "made available," and would provide adequate play facilities for the neighborhood's black children. As it turned out, play facilities at Blow were not established until the summer of 1952. When the Board finally ended segregation at Rosedale and three other city playgrounds, the victory was not complete, as use of the Rosedale pool was still denied to blacks. As a result, children continued to swim in the unmonitored and polluted waters of the Anacostia River and in the quarry on the Washington Brick Works site north of Bladensburg Road, resulting in numerous deaths. It was not until May 19, 1954 that all District playgrounds were de-segregated.

Spingarn High School

Named for Joel Elias Spingarn, one of the first Jewish leaders of the NAACP, Spingarn High School was the last of the four public school buildings constructed on the segregated education campus overlooking the Anacostia River. Although long envisioned, it was not completed until 1952, just two years before *Bolling v. Sharpe* ended segregation of the city's schools. From the 1930s until the construction of Spingarn, black students in the area had to commute across Capitol Hill to Dunbar High School at 1st and N Streets NW. In 1939, engineer and civic leader Howard D. Woodson championed the construction of a new high school: "A senior high school at the school center at Kingman Park would be a boon to about 1,000 pupils from the northeast and southeast who live east of Eighth Street and now attend high school in the Northwest, where all our senior high schools are grouped and also overcrowded."⁴⁷ In 1941, a new school was proposed to complete the Benning Road campus, but World War II halted planning. In 1949-1950, drawings were prepared and construction begun. Many notable persons attended Spingarn's dedication, including noted historian Dr. W.E.B. Dubois, opera singer and actor Paul Robeson, and Mrs. Charles Drew, widow of Dr. Charles Drew.

⁴⁷ Howard D. Woodson, Letter to the Editor, "Northeast," *The Washington Post*, January 15, 1939.

Expanding Neighborhood

Regardless of their social standing, black Washingtonians struggled to find decent housing during the 1930s. They were largely shut out of new suburban housing developments by racial restrictions, and increasingly barred from the city's older, mostly white neighborhoods as residents placed racial covenants in the deeds. The construction of Sager's Kingman Park for "Colored," the federal government's Langston Terrace Dwellings, and the adjacent school campus for African American students attracted black residents to the area. The undeveloped blocks of eastern Rosedale and Isherwood, and the vacant land north of Langston Terrace were ripe for the development of housing for African Americans. Numerous developers and builders, including Charles Sager, moved into Rosedale-Isherwood. During the mid to late 1930s, these builders stuck to the single-family rowhouse model, but by the late 1930s and early 1940s, as the need for affordable housing persisted, they introduced multi-family flats. For the most part, these two-story flats with central entry doors, arranged in attached rows, continue the rhythm and pattern of the streetscapes of single-family dwellings. Several block-long rows of these flats are found in Rosedale-Isherwood along the 1900 and 2000 block of Rosedale, D and E Streets, and in Kingman Park along Oklahoma Avenue. All of the flats along Oklahoma Avenue were built after the 1941 death of Charles Sager as land owned by him went on the open market.

The larger-scale Carver Terrace apartments, developed by the hundreds by Charles Wire and his Wire Properties in the mid-1940s specifically for African Americans, broke this model. Designed by George Santmyers, these buildings are three and four-story buildings, organized in groups of five to eight, each staggered, or offset and arranged around central court. The arrangement, like that of public housing, provided outdoor open space, and allowed for more natural light and interior cross-ventilation. Like the single-family dwellings of Kingman Park, the Carver Terrace Dwellings fulfilled a need for housing Washington's black population. Unlike the dwellings of Kingman Park that presented rows of single dwellings with a suburban feel, the extensive apartment complex with its blocks of brick buildings is strictly urban.

As African Americans were increasingly welcomed into the greater Kingman Park neighborhood, including the eastern end of Rosedale-Isherwood, other sections of the nineteenth-century subdivision remained, or became white-occupied. The blocks west of 18th Street and north of E Street had been home to white working-class residents for decades, and although they would become majority African-American during the 1950s and 1960s, the area remained exclusively white-occupied into the 1940s. During the 1930s, as development spread northerly from the city into the southern end of Rosedale-Isherwood, the blocks south of E Street (between C and E) on both the east and west sides of 18th Street similarly developed into a white community. Unlike the older sections of Rosedale that had attracted white residents since the area developed in the late nineteenth century, housing in this southern end was restricted by racial restrictions and covenants, leaving no legal opportunity for any racial mix. As the black population grew in Washington, white residents increasingly turned to racial restrictions as a tool to protect the racial character of their neighborhood, or to dictate it at the outset. A review of property deeds in the blocks between C and E Streets, east of 18th Street (*Figure 13*) reveals that many of the area developers placed racial and other restrictions in their deeds, just as individual owners whose own deeds lacked restrictions, banded together with their neighbors to jointly place racial covenants on their properties. Owners and buyers in these blocks clearly hoped to stem the tide of black encroachment from Kingman Park. Racial restrictions are also found in the residential blocks between East Capitol and C Streets NE.

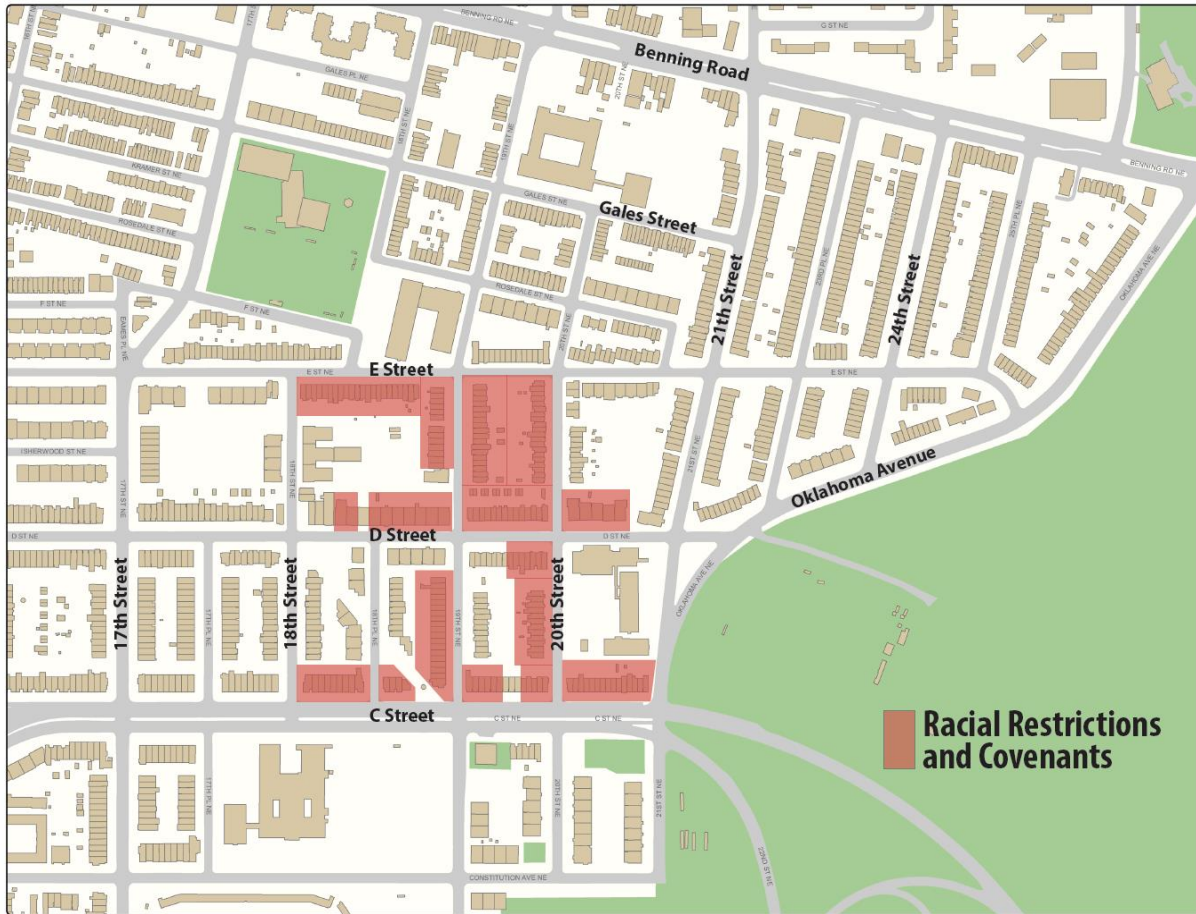


Figure 13: An examination of deeds on those properties in the blocks between C and E Streets east of 18th Street in the Rosedale-Isherwood subdivision reveal that the majority of them had racial restrictions or covenants, barring the sale, rent, or transfer of the properties to racial minorities.

Desegregation and Integration

In 1954, after a decade of concerted protest and legal challenges, most of the major legal barriers to equal access in Washington had fallen.⁴⁸ In 1948, race-based restrictive covenants lost their legal force when the Supreme Court ruled them unenforceable under the Constitution; shortly thereafter, businesses, restaurants, and theaters offered service to customers of all races; playgrounds across the city were integrating, and the first integrated public housing development, Stanton Dwellings, opened. On May 17, 1954, the Supreme Court rendered its opinion on *Brown v. Board of Education* maintaining that segregated school systems were unequal and thus unconstitutional. That same year, the city desegregated the last of its segregated playgrounds. But the road to integration would be decades in the making.

District schools were rezoned and new boundaries were drawn for an integrated school system and teachers were reassigned by need rather than race. For schools that were located in predominantly African-American neighborhoods, such as at Young, Brown, Phelps and Spingarn, this re-districting did little to alter the schools' racial composition, as there were few, if any, white students or faculty in the

⁴⁸ Chocolate City, p. 302.

years immediately after integration.⁴⁹ In other area with greater racial mix, many white families, unable to block de-segregation legally, took their children out of the public schools and/or moved away. In the two years after *Bolling*, the number of white students in the city's public schools dropped by 29 percent. Many all-white schools, including Eastern High School, became entirely black within five years. By 1965, the white student body represented just 10% of the school population, and these students were clustered in the overwhelmingly white neighborhoods west of Rock Creek Park.⁵⁰

With the legal end of segregation in the city's housing and public schools, white residents abandoned the city for the expanding suburbs. Between 1940 and 1960, the city's black population more than doubled from 187,266 to 411,737, while its white population declined by nearly one-third. As in other parts of the city, this "white flight" from the white-occupied areas of Rosedale-Isherwood and surrounding streets of the L'Enfant Plan, opened up the neighborhood for even greater African American settlement. As white residents left the rowhouses and flats south of E Street NE with the now-unenforceable racial restrictions in their deeds, African Americans moved in. Similarly, African Americans would move into the streets west of 18th Street in Rosedale-Isherwood which had been occupied exclusively by whites until at least 1940.⁵¹

Throughout the 1950s and 1960s, the larger area of Kingman Park beyond Sager's original confines and beyond the Langston Terrace Dwellings, solidified into a solidly African-American community. Residents lived, studied, worked, played, and worshipped together. During the 1940s and 1950s, several new churches established themselves in Kingman Park and new businesses emerged on Benning Road. Many persons, including business owners, doctors, lawyers, educators, ministers, entertainers, athletes, politicians, military personnel, law enforcement officials and others contributed to a vibrant society that endured for decades. The Kingman Park Civic Association continued to represent the community in its lobbying for infrastructure improvements, and city services, including street cleaning, trash pickup, police aid, bus service. During the 1960s and later, KPCA took a strong stance against unwanted development, such as construction of the stadium, and fought successfully against highway construction which would have cut through the area.

Kingman Park enjoyed a period of quietude during the 1960s, leading up to and even beyond the riots of 1968. Portions of H Street NE were burned and damaged, but most of this destruction was concentrated well west of Kingman Park's commercial core along Benning Road.

⁴⁹ Jeanne Rogers, "Most DC Schools have Integrated Classes," *The Washington Post and Times Herald*, 16 September 1954.

⁵⁰ *Chocolate City*, p. 316.

⁵¹ Based on the declining school enrollment at Webb and Blow elementary schools in the mid-1940s, it appears that the white population had already begun to disperse from the western end of Rosedale-Isherwood. After 1947, when the whites-only Webb and Blow schools were transferred into the black school system, and after 1952, when Rosedale Playground was no longer restricted to whites, the formerly white area was well on its way to becoming a black one.