

History of the Land: Booker T. Washington Park

1001 Preston Ave, Charlottesville, VA 22903

A HISTORY OF INJUSTICE

The history of Booker T. Washington park reflects the deeply racist history of Charlottesville and the surrounding land. This underscores the pervasive legacies of colonization, systemic racism, white supremacy, and racial injustice that have historically and continuously affected Black people, Indigenous people, and other people of color. To truly acknowledge the history of the land, we must first recognize the original stewards of the land, the Siouan tribes of the Monacan and Manahoac Indigenous nations, who were forcibly displaced by European colonizers in the 1500s (Cultivate Charlottesville, The Land We're On). The system of violence and control enacted by white European settler colonization laid the foundation for the institution of slavery and the Atlantic Slave Trade.

Booker T. Washington Park lies on land that played a role in racist systems of harm and injustice as part of John H. Craven's 400-acre Rose Hill Plantation, perpetuating the institution of slavery and the forced, stolen labor of enslaved African people (The City As a Park, 98). As one of the large farms in the area, John H. Craven purchased the plantation in 1820 after coming to Albemarle County to manage Thomas Jefferson's Tufton Farm in 1800. While working at Tufton, Craven leased five hundred acres and forty-five enslaved individuals (Founders Online, National Archives). By 1821, Craven owned up to 1500 acres of land in Albemarle County including the Rose Hill estate, named and built for William Wirt, and a portion of the Pen Park plantation. The Rose Hill estate was razed in 1933 but was located on current day Westwood Road, off Rose Hill Drive in Charlottesville (Edward K. Lay Papers, UVA Special Collections; Founders Online, National Archives; Monticello, Neighboring Homes & Families).



Image 1: Rose Hill Estate (Edward K. Lay Papers, UVA Special Collections, 1930)

The 2020 Pen Park Cemetery Survey, conducted by archaeologists on behalf of Charlottesville City Council, revealed that the Craven family owned and occupied the 400-acre Pen Park plantation from 1819 to 1845. Records from the U.S. Census between 1820 and 1840 showed that John H. Craven enslaved between 44 and 53 African Americans, and tax records from 1830 indicated that he was taxed for 37 enslaved individuals. John H. Craven and his descendants were buried on the property. During the cemetery survey, archaeologists discovered 43 unmarked graves on the Pen Park property. This area has been confirmed as burial grounds of African Americans who were enslaved by the Cravens and other families

who owned the property and potentially African American employees after slavery was abolished (Pen Park Cemetery Survey, 2020).



Image 2: Washington Park Map (Stowekeller, History of the Land)

After the Civil War and the abolition of slavery, wealthy white landowners such as the Cravens found they could not sustain ownership and production on such vast properties without enslaved labor. Real estate developers divided and sold the land for residential and industrial uses to companies such as Charlottesville Industrial and Land Improvement Company (The City As a Park, 98). The Cravens continued to own 35 acres around the Rose Hill plantation estate. In 1867, a total of 75 acres were taken from the Rose Hill plantation and divided into 23 lots along the Preston Avenue corridor. This included the upper portion of land previously known as “Kelleytown” and “Tinsleytown,” which, by the 1900s, would become neighborhoods for newly emancipated African Americans in Charlottesville (The City As a Park, 1998; Rose Hill Neighborhood Survey, 2017). The Rose Hill neighborhood was once part of the

Rose Hill plantation’s land (Rose Hill Neighborhood Survey, 2017). Another more southern portion, “the Grove lot,” remained in the Craven family until 1904, when the land was bought and sold to the City by James Hayden (From Private Privilege to Public Place, 1998). The Grove Lot was known as the “Pest House property” in the early 1900s, when the Scarlet Fever epidemic swept through the community. The site was proposed as a shelter to host people with contagious diseases (The City As a Park, 98; Stowekeller Timeline 2001). In 1916, the City of Charlottesville annexed 1,676 acres of county land, including what would become Booker T. Washington Park and the Rose Hill Neighborhood (From Private Privilege to Public Place, 1998; Rose Hill Neighborhood Survey, 2017).

CDP-8/6/1927 – A PARK FOR COLORED PEOPLE

In accordance with plans formulated several months ago, the city dumping grounds on Preston Avenue are being converted to a park for colored people, and the dumping grounds have been changed to a site about 1-1/2 miles from Charlottesville on the old Scottsville Road, so announced city manager Yancey today.

The road near the old dumping grounds is being graded and the property will be generally improved and planted with flowers, it was stated.

Recent complaints from residents near the grounds concerning the swarms of roaches in that section will be attended to at an early date, and the dumping ground will be covered with several inches of soil in an effort to stamp out the breeding places, Mr. Yancey stated. Kerosene, first used to attempt to rid the neighborhood of the pest, was not satisfactory, he stated.

The old ground, donated to the city by Mr. McIntire for use as a colored park, will be called Washington Park.

Image 3: Daily Progress Article 8/6/1927

As noted in a 1927 Daily Progress announcement, the Grove lot was also utilized as a dump site: “the city dumping grounds on Preston Avenue are being converted to a park” for African-American people (Albemarle Charlottesville Historical Society Daily Progress 1927; Stowekeller).

In 1926, Paul Goodloe McIntire purchased 9.25 acres of the former plantation, including the Grove Lot, from the City of Charlottesville and donated the land back to the City as “a public park and playground” for the African-American community (The City As a Park, 98). **Booker T. Washington Park was designated as the first recreational space for Charlottesville’s Black community.** In that same year, McIntire donated 92 acres of land to the City for the development of another park, which was intended exclusively for use by white people. This park came to be known as McIntire Park. Newspaper headlines referring to McIntire and Booker T. Washington park read: “One for White and One for Colored,” reinforcing the unjust segregationist “separate but equal” policies of the time established by Plessy vs. Ferguson (From Private Privilege to Public Place, 1998). In the years prior, McIntire donated Lee Park (1917), Jackson Park (1919), and Belmont Park (1921), making up Charlottesville’s initial parks reserved for white people’s use only (The City As a Park, 98). McIntire was also responsible for funding a multitude of racist statues (Robert E. Lee, Thomas Stonewall Jackson, George Rogers Clark, and Lewis and Clark). These statues were rightfully taken down on July 10 and 11, 2021, thanks to the determined activism and advocacy efforts led by Charlottesville’s Black community.

A HISTORY OF RECLAMATION

Image 4: Survey of Washington Park showing the future of “The Barn” and tennis courts. Dated 1926. (The City As a Park, 1998 from Albemarle Charlottesville Historical Society)



Central to Booker T. Washington Park’s history, the African-American community played a key role in transforming the land from a history of injustice to a history of reclamation. As Black folks navigated the unjust system of segregation, the ‘Colored Recreation Board’ was established in early 1934, ushering in a wave of renovations and improvements to the park (From Private Privilege to Public Place, 1998). The Black-led Recreation Board began attending the all-white Recreation Board meetings. Key leaders included Chairman Jerome Brooks, Vice Chairman Thomas Inge of Inge grocery store, and Secretary Rev William R. Strossner, Pastor of Mt Zion Baptist Church, Mrs. W. R. Strossner and Mrs. Minnie Tonsler (From Private Privilege to Public Place, 1998; UVA Special Collections

Parks and Recreation Papers, 1962).

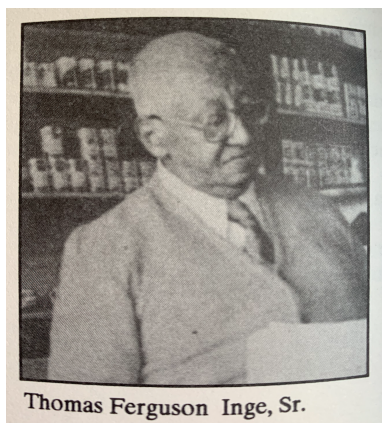
By the end of 1934, the “Colored Recreation Board” had fundraised and completed development of “The Barn” on the park property, despite the City’s unfair denial of the privilege to use the city armory for fundraising purposes, while simultaneously granting the privilege to the all-white Recreation Board

(From *Private Privilege to Public Place*, 1998). “The Barn” served a key role for the Black community, including a basketball gymnasium, music venue and meeting place (*City as a Park*, 98). Significant Park improvements led by Black community leaders were accomplished “at a time when no more than five percent of these facilities were designated for Black use nation-wide” (*From Private Privilege to Public Place*, 1998). Civic and athletic groups such as the Garden Club, the “Colored Elks” and the “Colored Mothers Club” contributed to the improvements of the park. In 1944, the park hosted a Victory Garden Exhibit showcasing over 200 exhibits of flowers, vegetables, fruits and canned goods created by Black gardeners and farmers (UVA Special Collections, Parks and Rec Papers).

Additionally, Parks and Recreation staff, directors and supervisors played an important role in shaping the early years of Booker T. Washington Park. The folks involved, according to UVA Special Collections Parks & Rec Papers during the years 1944–1956, included: Verna Gordon (playground Director 1950; pool supervisor 1956), Ada Goffney (wading pool supervisor 1952; pool supervisor 1956), Elizabeth Harrison (pool supervisor 1956), Margaret Stroud (park worker 1956; Black Recreation Director 1957), Geneva K Watson (Black Recreation Director 1947–56), Virginia Bell (park worker 1956), Clara Johnson (park worker 1956), Freddie Murray (park worker 1956), Maude Fortune (Recreation Dept staff 1944; Director of Recreation at Washington Park), Ann Brown (wading pool supervisor 1952), Viola Robinson (wading pool supervisor 1952), Richard Eubanks (sports director 1952), Mary Blakey (arts & crafts 1952), Kate Christian (Washington Park supervisor 1949), Andrew Arnold (sports director 1949), and Fredina Payne (Director at Washington park).

“From Porch Swings to Patios: An Oral History of Charlottesville’s Neighborhoods 1914 to 1984”

documents residents’ reflections of their time growing up in Charlottesville’s neighborhoods and their memories of Booker T. Washington Park. Ella Baylor, who grew up in “Kelleytown” and was “sharply aware of the needs of the Black community,” recalls: “Important to the community is Washington Park. Mr. McIntire gave the park to the Black people” (*From Porch Swings to Patios*, 44).



Thomas Ferguson Inge, Sr.

Image 5: Photo of Thomas Ferguson Inge, Sr. (From Porch Swings to Patios, p48)

Thomas Ferguson Inge, Sr. received the Inge grocery store on 4th St NW & West Main Street in Vinegar Hill from his father. He recalls growing up with Booker T. Washington coming to visit and staying with his family above the store due to “the absence of public boarding accommodations in Charlottesville” for Black people. Mr. Inge reflects on McIntire’s park donation: “he bought the old city dump which was to be improved for the Black people to use. He and my father decided it would be called Booker T. Washington Park, but the city ended up naming it after George Washington. Maybe that was because of George Washington Carver, I don’t know. That’s unwritten history” (*From Porch Swings to Patios*, 48–49).

A 1927 Daily Progress article declared: “the old ground [...]will be called Washington Park.” The “City as a Park” account references an informal City record that claimed the park to be named after Booker T. Washington and cited the name being in use by 1930 (The City As a Park, 98).

Karen Waters-Wicks recalls that “Virginia Daugherty questioned whether it should be named for Booker T. Washington in the late ‘80s, early ‘90s,” and it was officially renamed in 2001 at the African-American Cultural Arts Festival (Waters-Wicks; Stowekeller). The City record from August 20, 2001 reads: “Be it resolved by the Council of the City of Charlottesville that the City park known as ‘Washington Park’ on Preston Avenue is hereby formally renamed ‘Booker T. Washington Park’ in honor of the renowned African-American educator, philosopher, and social scientist.”

Image 6: Quote from Linwood Chisolm (The Daily Progress, 1998)

Booker T. Washington Park has experienced various phases of park improvement, due in large part to Charlottesville’s African-American community that lived nearby and advocated for necessary improvement to the park, especially during the years of segregation and the years beyond. In a 1998 Daily Progress article, Linwood “Chuck” Chisolm, a Charlottesville native states, “Everything that we had to do in the Black community, we did at Washington Park” (Albemarle Charlottesville Historical Society).

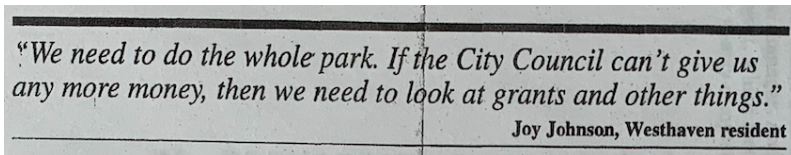
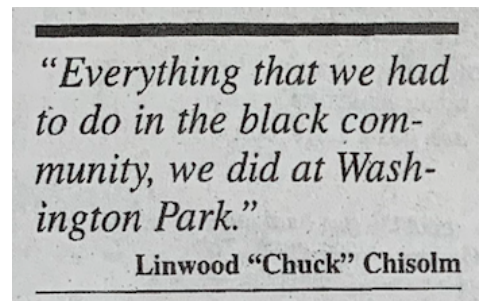


Image 7: Quote from Joy Johnson (The Daily Progress, 1997)

In a 1997 Daily Progress article, community advocate and resident Joy Johnson was quoted advocating for necessary renovation and investment in Booker T. Washington Park, “We need to do the whole park. If the City Council can’t give us any more money, then we need to look at grants and other things” (Daily Progress, 1997, Albemarle-Charlottesville Historical Society).

At two different phases, in 1968 and 1998 pool construction marked two key milestones for Booker T. Washington Park. During these renovations, poisonous remnants from the old dump site resurfaced (Stowekeller). In 1999, Partners for Washington Park group set out to highlight the history of Booker T. Washington Park and raise funds for additional improvements (Albemarle-Charlottesville Historical Society). In an interview, Karen Waters-Wicks reflected on the importance of the pool’s development for the community and how the pool usage has begun to shift from a recreational amenity for the Black community to a swim team that is increasingly attracting white people’s attendance (Waters-Wicks, 2021).

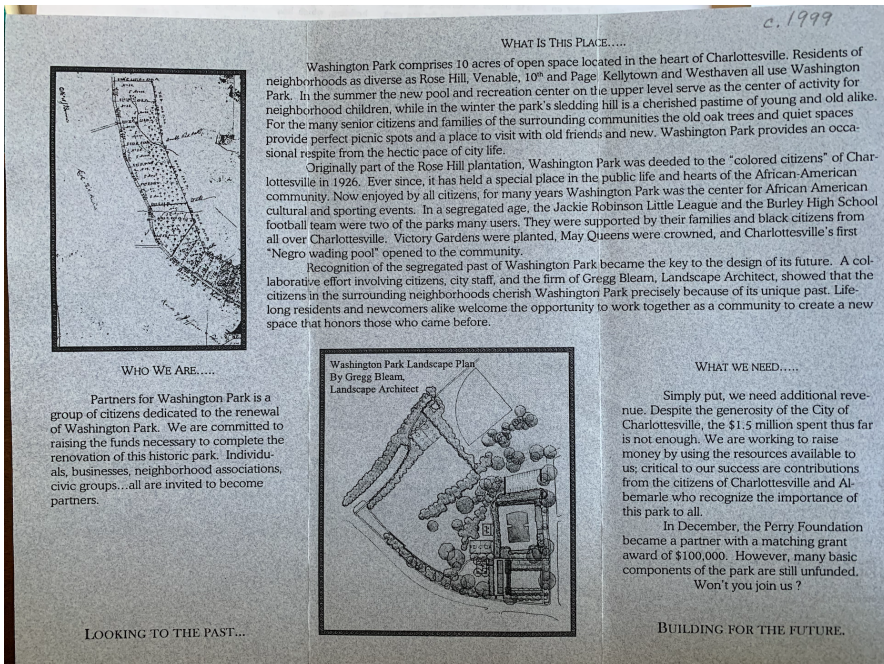


Image 8: Partners for Washington Park Brochure, Albemarle-Charlottesville Historical Society, 1999)

Booker T. Washington Park's history informs our understanding of past injustices that continue to impact present-day inequities for the Black community in Charlottesville. As we acknowledge the history of injustice on the land and honor the African-Americans who made Booker T. Washington Park what it is today, we continue the work to build racial equity across the Charlottesville community.

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