



Mattie Jacobs Fuller

A WALK THROUGH BLOOMINGTON’S BLACK HISTORY ON THE NEAR WEST SIDE

Notable People

Historically, the Near West Side has been home to many prominent members of Bloomington’s Black community. Mattie Jacobs Fuller was one such person. Mattie became a wealthy woman working as a beautician for the elite white women in Bloomington. Mattie Fuller used her musical talents of playing the organ and singing to raise over \$12,000 and purchased the lot and paid for the foundation of Bethel AME church that was built on the corner of 7th and Rogers. Another prominent Black citizen was Preston Emmanuel Eagleson. He was the first Black man to earn a Master’s Degree at Indiana University. The Eagleson family was once known for having more degrees than any other Black family in Bloomington. Preston Emmanuel Eagleson earned his AB 1896; MA 1906, Wilson Vashon Eagleson BS 1922; MS in chemistry, and Elizabeth Eagleson Bridgwaters AB 1930, just to name a few. The Chandler family first migrated to Orange County from North Carolina and lived in the Lick Creek Settlement, before moving to Monroe County. Lick Creek flourished from about 1833 until the end of the Civil War. This community created economic, and legal independence offering protection from racial animosity, racist laws and fugitive slave catchers. The Bloomington Chandlers contributed to the City’s early jazz scene. One other notable person in the Black community was Wilbur Miller. He was a WW II veteran, graduated from Indiana University in Physical Education, but couldn’t get employment in his field. He started physical education classes in the basement of Bethel AME Church. In 1951, segregated schools were ruled unconstitutional, Banneker became the West Side Community Center. Bloomington’s Park and Recreation Department hired Miller to be the first Director of the West Side Community Center.

Historical Overview

In the late 1800s most of Monroe County’s African American population lived in settlements northwest of Bloomington including Chandlerville, Hensonburg, and The Woods. Within the city, African American life centered on an area called Buck Town, which surrounded the first Showers Brothers Furniture factory between Grant and Washington Streets.

After the first Showers Brothers factory burned, the company built a new complex that would later become Bloomington’s current City Hall. Unusual for factories of the time, the Showers Company began hiring African Americans and women in 1868, bringing growth to the city’s west side and attracting Black workers to the area. At its peak in the 1920s, the Showers Brothers Company produced more than 700,000 pieces of furniture a year, accounting for than half of the furniture made in the United States per company statements. The company bank provided home financing, helping increase home ownership in the community.

Around the turn of the century, the Near West Side became a thriving community where most of the Black residents owned their homes, and some owned their own businesses. The Black-owned businesses included barber shops, beauty salons, billiard rooms and inns, many of which were located near the levee which ran parallel to the railroad tracks for several blocks and down Morton Street. Black owned restaurants in the West Side included “Sweet Chop Smitty” on the corner of 8th and Elm and for a time the Second Baptist Church and Elks Lodge operated their own restaurants on site.

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Historical overview cont.

Following the Civil Rights Movement, opportunities opened up for better employment thanks in part to the efforts of Reverend Ernest Butler, pastor of Second Baptist Church. Rev. Butler called upon religious and political leaders including Rev. Joseph Morrison and Mayor Tomi Allison. Pioneers in public employment included a number of West Side residents such as James “Snooki” Hopkins who became Bloomington’s first Black fireman in 1965, and Charles Brown who was hired by the city in 1967 as the first Black police officer. Laverta Terry, in 1963 became the first Black woman hired as a schoolteacher. In politics, Paul Swain became the first Black city councilman and served from 1992 to 1995. Bloomington slowly began to change from 1960s through 1990s with the pressure and insistence of citizens black and white to include and recognize the diversity. The West Side’s Black community flourished through the 1970s but began to fade as broader opportunities appeared, and the local culture of lodges, clubs, and social organizations began to dissolve due to gentrification. This small community of African Americans who raised their children and worked hard to provide a living for themselves and their families in Bloomington remain a testament to this community’s achievement in the face of significant obstacles. This legacy is part of Bloomington’s shared history.



Rev. Ernest Butler



14. MARVIN CHANDLER HOUSE

(10/03/1929- 09/23/2023)

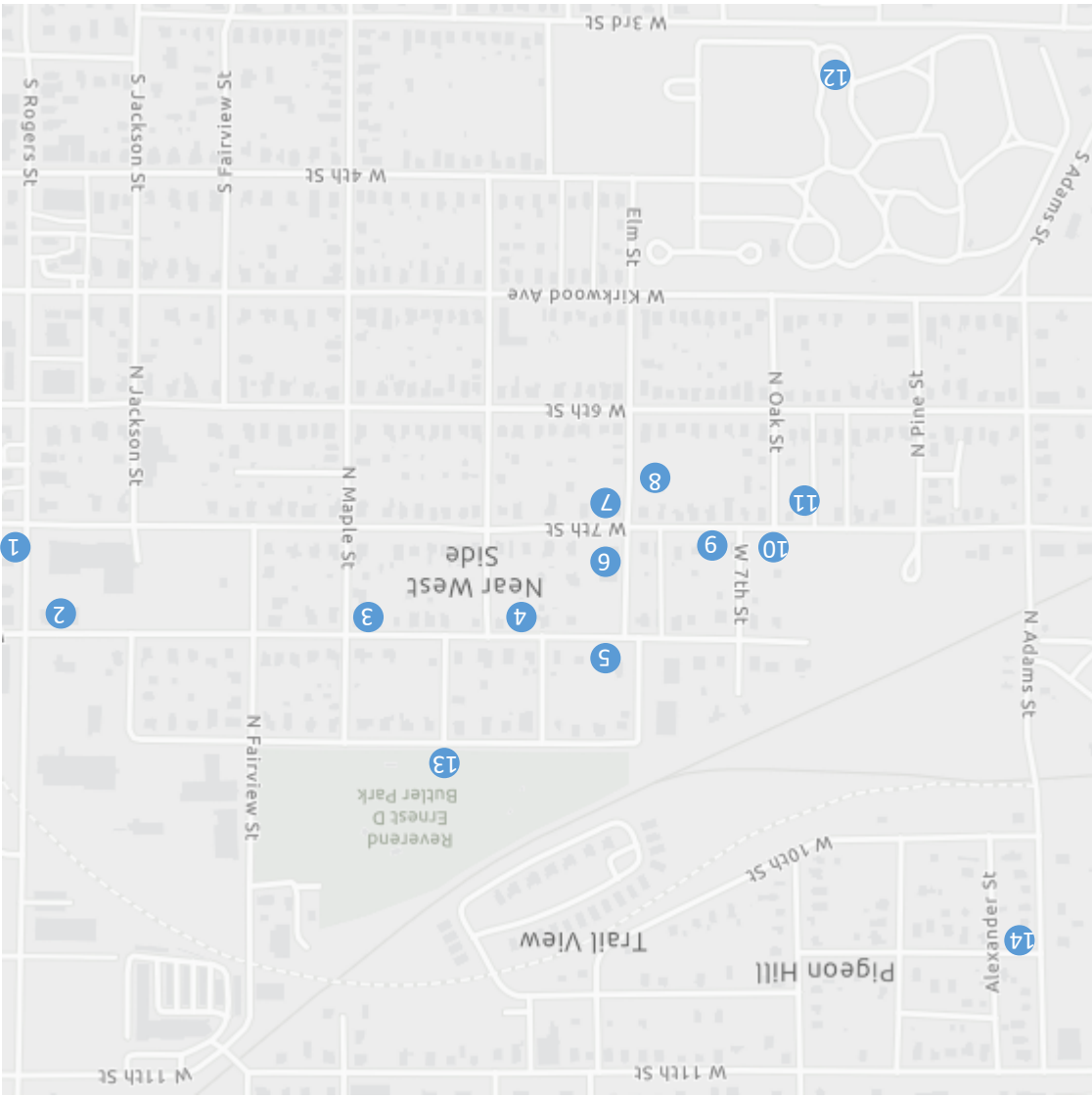


Marvin Chandler was the fifth of nine children and attended Banneker Elementary School on West 7th St. A piano prodigy, Marvin Chandler formed the Chandler Trio with his sisters, Marcella and Marlene. The Trio visited LA to perform gospel music on the African American variety show, *The Cabin Kids* in the 1930s. For ten years the Chandler Trio hosted a weekly show on Bloomington’s first TV station WTTV. In 1954 they were invited to perform on the Arthur Godfrey Show for New York’s CBS station.

At age 28 Marvin joined a band called the Big Four and played club dates around Bloomington, but only at venues that would allow integration.

Chandler attended Indiana University where he received his B. S. in Social Work and served as an assistant minister for Second Baptist Church. In 1959 Chandler and his wife, Porta, and their three daughters moved to Rochester, New York where he enrolled at the Colgate Rochester Divinity School, graduating with a Master of Divinity degree in 1963. He gained a reputation as a peacemaker and was invited to the Attica Correctional Facility to negotiate an end to the Attica Prison Riot. After Rochester, Chandler moved the family to California and became the executive director of San Francisco’s Council of Churches. Later he joined Howard Thurman, the African American author, educator, and theologian, as executive director of the Howard Thurman Educational Trust.

Marvin always had a love for music and returned to playing jazz piano. He was inducted into the Indiana Jazz Hall of Fame in 2003 and received the Ralph Adams Lifetime Achievement Award in 2010.



1. BETHEL A.M.E. CHURCH
302 NORTH ROGERS

The African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Church has its origins in Philadelphia. The founder, Richard Allen, had purchased his freedom and led a movement to secede from the Methodist Episcopal Church in 1816. The Bloomington AME church was founded in September of 1870. Members met at the United Presbyterian Church on West 6th St. for many years before building their own two-story limestone church in 1922 at the cost of \$35,000. The fundraising efforts of one woman, Mattie Jacobs Fuller (04/10/1856 – 08/23/1940), contributed significantly to the construction of the current building on the corner of 7th and Rogers Street today. Fuller bought the lot and paid for the laying of the foundation. Fuller came to Monroe County with her parents and siblings from Kentucky just after the Civil War. Following the death of her mother, Mattie and her siblings were bound out, which meant working for food and board. This constituted indentured servitude, despite the practice being illegal. Mattie worked in the home of Dr. and Mrs. Durant, who provided for her education. The Durants sent her to Louisville where she learned how to dress hair and to make skin lotion. With these skills she returned to Bloomington to work as a beautician. She had a natural aptitude as a songstress, and the Durants paid for her to have private music lessons. Mattie was gifted a Bilhorn folding organ and a silver loving cup by the Durants. Between her performances on the courthouse lawn and cosmetic work, Mattie raised over \$12,000 for Bethel AME church. The church building was designed by John Nichols, a prominent Bloomington architect. In the 1930s the church was famous for its Thursday night chicken dinners which attracted parishioners as well as white neighbors from the West Side.



4. MAUDE THOMAS HOUSE
919 WEST 8TH STREET

(03/27/1894 – 04/22/1973)
Mrs. Maude Thomas boarded Black students from Indiana University when segregation and cost limited their housing options. Thomas operated three boarding houses for IU's Black students, including her own home. In the early 20th century, it was unusual for a Black woman to own multiple properties. Thomas maintained a good relationship with many of her tenants, some of whom returned to visit her years later. Some of those students came up from the South wanting to further their education, and have fond memories of living at the Thomas home. Lehman Adams, an Indiana University professor of Oral Surgery and one of the first African Americans to enroll in IU's School of Dentistry, remembers being directed to Mrs. Thomas as a student in the 1940s because he heard that it was a place he could stay while he finished his degree. Maude Thomas was said to be a soft-spoken woman whose life centered around Second Baptist Church, where she was an organist and a member of two social groups for black women, the Happy Hour, and the Jolly Bachelor Girls clubs. Mrs. Thomas and her kindness enabled many students to obtain degrees from Indiana University.



7. ELIZABETH BRIDGWATERS HOUSE
925 WEST 7TH STREET

(06/04/1908 – 03/26/1999)
Elizabeth Eagleson Bridgwaters was born into the prominent Eagleson family in Bloomington and married Albert Lewis Bridgwaters Sr. Her father was Preston Emmanuel Eagleson, the first Black man to earn a master's degree at Indiana University. Elizabeth was a mother of nine and the first Black person elected to the Monroe County Community School Corporation, serving from 1969 to 1977, and providing leadership as board president from 1972 to 1973. She initiated changes in the board's voting procedures, and promoted reading programs for the poor. Her love and devotion to the city of Bloomington's West side fueled her many civic activities such as Bloomington's Neighborhood Development program and assisting in the creation of the West Side Neighborhood Association. She served on the board of directors of the United Way, the Area 10 Council on Aging, the Advisory Board of the older American Center, and the local branch of the NAACP. She was instrumental in the establishment of the Aurora Alternative High School which met the needs of young people who did not adjust to the regular MCCSC programs. Bridgwaters continued her work in education through service in such organizations as the National Black Council of School Board members and the Indiana State Advisory Council for vocational education. Elizabeth Bridgwaters was inducted into the Monroe County Hall of Fame in 1999 for her civic work in the African American community.



10. O'BANNON HOUSE
1026 WEST 7TH STREET

Robert and Louise O'Bannon migrated from Orange County to Bloomington and built this house in 1927. Robert O'Bannon worked for a fraternity on the campus of Indiana University and Louise Clemons James O'Bannon was born and raised in This house and was the second Black person hired by the United States Postal Service in Bloomington.



11. B.G POLLARD LODGE "THE HOLE"
1107 WEST 7TH STREET

The B.G. Pollard Elks Lodge #1242 was founded in 1947 to provide a social and fraternal atmosphere for Bloomington's Black community. The Lodge brothers purchased this lot in 1949, and in 1951 built an expansive basement as the planned lower level of a two-level community center. Nicknamed "The Hole," this underground club served as a social hub and safe haven for African Americans through segregation and into the 1990s. The Hole featured a bar, billiard table, jukebox, dance floor, and soul food prepared by the New Dawn Daughter Elks. The Elks hosted social events including fashion shows and holiday parties. In 1981, the Elks raised \$100,000 for the construction of the upper floor, featuring a meeting space with a capacity of 200. The Elks last met in this space in 2004.



2. SECOND BAPTIST CHURCH
321 NORTH ROGERS

Established in March of 1872, Bloomington's Black Baptist congregation met in the homes of church members before building a frame church in 1873 at the Northeast corner of 8th and Rogers. In 1907 the congregation designated their first official pastor, Rev. Moses M. Porter. By this time the church was dilapidated and heavily in debt. Porter helped his congregation build a new church in 1913 on the Southwest corner of 8th and Rogers by giving up most of his salary to help pay off the mortgage. The building was designed by African American architect Samuel Plato. Built at the cost of \$40,000, this was one of the first stone churches built by African Americans in Indiana. The stone was donated, and members of the congregation helped with construction. The building was one of the first sites in Bloomington listed in the National Register of Historic Places (1976.) Rev. Porter pastored Second Baptist Church until he passed away in 1952. The next distinguished pastor was Reverend Ernest D. Butler. During his 43 years as pastor of Second Baptist he became the most prominent leader of the local African American community. Butler's accomplishments changed the very nature of Bloomington at a time when Black Bloomingtonians were treated like second class citizens. He was able to forge an alliance with ministers from local white churches to encourage the political and business leaders of Bloomington to change their hiring practices. Because of Rev. Butler's effort, Bloomington hired the first Black police officer, the first Black fireman, and the first Black schoolteacher at an integrated school. Butler set his sights on rectifying the housing situation and helped to establish the Indiana Fair Housing Commission. Reverend Butler was the undisputed leader of the civil rights movement in Bloomington and a major force in the city's political and civic evolution from his arrival in town in 1959 until his death in 2003. The Rev. E.D. Park on West 9th Street was renamed in 2008 in honor of his legacy.



5. OSCAR BLAND HOUSE
1014 WEST 8TH STREET

(02/14/1907 – 07/22/1953)
Oscar Bland is remembered in the African American community as an amateur boxer and a trainer of young men, black and white. In the 1930s, he boxed under the names Kid Williams or Hard Rock Williams on the local amateur circuit. Although Bland mostly boxed in exhibition matches he once wrestled a bear for eight dollars. Later in life, Oscar Bland made a name for himself as a trainer of young boxers. He set up a ring in the backyard of the family's 8th St. home. The Kid Williams Boxing Club produced three Golden Gloves champions and its boxers fought regularly in Crane, Indiana, against young soldiers, sailors and Marines. Although Bland wasn't a professional he was respected for his talent, discipline, showmanship and later as a coach. His boxing club would eventually be sponsored by the Bloomington Police Department.



8. MERCY MISSION APOSTOLIC CHURCH
217 NORTH ELM STREET

Mercy Mission Apostolic Church was founded by Helen P. Hartfield on March 21, 1954. The church was originally based in a room located on the Square which Hartfield rented for \$12 a week. Since then, the church has moved numerous times, but it was located for about 50 years at 908 W 8th Street. Hartfield started the church with a few families and members from her previous church, Christ Temple Church. The two congregations had long shared a close relationship. In 1938, Helen Hartfield had been baptized by Sister Jessie Hauck of Christ Temple Church. In 1971, the two congregations combined to form Mercy Mission Apostolic Faith in the current Elm Street location. The building at 217 N Elm Street was originally home to Christ Temple Church, which was constructed on the property in 1940, but has undergone subsequent renovations and expansions. The denominational faith of the church, according to Pastor Cheryl Brown, is that it follows the apostle's doctrine. Mercy Mission Church gives back to the community by donating money to food banks. Mercy Mission also has a host of activities for their parishioners such as their annual summer picnic, held every June at Karst Farm Park. They have activities during Black History Month, such as presentations each Sunday throughout the month. On the last Sunday of Black History Month, they host a soul food dinner. Pastor Helen P. Hartfield passed away in 1976 and her daughter Helen L. Hartfield became pastor of the church. Helen L. Hartfield was pastor until she passed away in 2018. After her passing Bishop Willie A. Smith became pastor until he retired in 2021. In 2013 Pastor Cheryl Brown became the head of the church.



12. GEORGE "THE RABBIT" SHIVELY
ROSE HILL CEMETERY C, 23

(01/03/1893- 06/07/1962)
George Shively was born on a Kentucky tobacco farm owned by a white family named Shively. It is more than likely his father Joseph was a former slave who emigrated to Indiana in the 1890s. The 1900 census places George in Bloomington at 811 N Monroe Street. He attended the "Colored School," once located at 202 East 6th Street. George Shively started his professional baseball career in 1910 with the West Baden Sprudels and retired in 1924 from the Washington Potomacs. Shively, the lefty leadoff man, departed the Sprudels with manager C. I. Taylor and many of his teammates to play for the Indianapolis ABCs in 1914. Shively batted a cumulative .327 for the club through 1923 and scored almost a run per game. Nicknamed "The Rabbit" for his fantastic speed, Shively has been described by Indiana sports journalist Bob Hammel as one of the top 100 Negro League ballplayers. George Shively died in 1962 and was buried in an unmarked grave. A limestone monument was dedicated on his gravesite in Rose Hill Cemetery on April 4, 2015.



3. HENRY H. HAMMOND HOUSE
723 WEST 8TH STREET

(06/19/1895- 05/01/1989)
Henry Hammond was born June 19, 1895 in Louisville, Kentucky to Charles and Mary Matilda (Brown) Hammond. He came to Bloomington by train as a teenager and worked at the Showers Brothers Furniture Company and Hook's Drugstores before being hired as a maintenance man, house manager and cook for two Indiana University fraternities. Hammond also worked as a bartender for private parties hosted by IU dignitaries, such as Herman B. Wells, chancellor of Indiana University. He was a member of First United Methodist Church, downtown Kiwanis Club, a Kentucky Colonel, and an honorary member of Sigma Pi fraternity. He also served on the board of directors at the Boys Club. This house belonged to the Hammond family for several generations. Henry Hammond, at an age when most people would have retired, became a bailiff in the Monroe County court under Superior Court Judge Donald A. Rogers, and served with him for almost twenty years. He was also a jazz saxophonist, who had a band called "Seven Sticks of Dynamite." The band played in Bloomington dance halls for over 20 years and toured the region from Mitchell to Martinsville. Indiana. Jazz thrived in those days, and Hammond played with the best, including Hoagy Carmichael. Hammond was quoted as saying, "Hoagy would come up with us on stage and blow his horn, he was just a regular fellow." Hammond received several awards from civic organizations, including the Book of Golden Deeds Award in 1983 for distinguished community service. Henry Hammond died in 1989. After his passing, the Herald Telephone published not an obituary, but a lengthy editorial about his career and his integrity.



6. BANNEKER SCHOOL
1915 - 1951

930 WEST 7TH STREET
The Banneker School opened on December 7, 1915 as a segregated K-9 school with 93 students. It was named by T.C. Johnson, its first principal, for African American polymath Benjamin Banneker. Many preferred the name of Booker T Washington for the school, but their petition to the school board failed. The school gymnasium was completed in 1941 using New Deal funds from the National Youth Administration. The surrounding retaining wall was built by the W. P. A. At its height the school served over 100 students in three multi graded classrooms. Graduates matriculated to the integrated Bloomington High School. The Banneker School closed in 1951 with the integration of the school system, and in 1955 the building was acquired by the city and renamed Westside Community Center. In recognition of its historic significance, it was renamed the Banneker Community Center in 1994. In February 2005 a library was dedicated in the Community Center to honor former teachers Alice Evans and Georgia Porter. The Evans-Porter library is used by those who participate in Banneker's after school and summer literacy programs. The Banneker Community Center is individually listed on the National Register of Historic Places.



9. STONE CITY MASONS
1022 W 7th STREET

Prince Hall Freemasonry is the oldest and largest predominantly African American fraternity in the United States. Prince Hall Was one of the first Black man to be initiated into the Masonic Order in the American colonies. The date of his initiation is not definitively known, but it has been presumed to have been upon the same occasion when fourteen other "free Negroes" obtained the degrees of Freemasonry on March 6, 1775. The Caucasian brethren in Massachusetts who sympathized with the Negroes advised Prince Hall to apply to the Grand Orient of France for recognition. Prince Hall communicated with the English jurisdiction and was granted a charter to the brethren of color under the denomination of "African Lodge No. 459." The Prince Hall order was founded September 29, 1784. According to the Encyclopedia of Indianapolis, the Black community of Indianapolis once had 14 Prince Hall lodges and or groups that arose when other organizations barred membership to blacks. In the small town of Bedford, Indiana, Prince Hall "Stone City" Lodge # 54 was chartered on August 14th, 1924, as a subordinate lodge. The purpose of the Prince Hall Freemasonry in the jurisdiction of Indiana is to be a relevant, preeminent fraternity, committed to attracting, developing, and retaining men of high quality who strive for self-improvement and the opportunity to serve others. Stone City Lodge relocated to Bloomington, Indiana and held meetings twice a month at 115 ½ North College Ave from 1929 to 1932. They were not listed in the city directory from 1934 to 1935, however, they held meetings in the homes of members beginning in 1936 up until 1939. Bloomington's 1940 City Directory lists the African American women Masons' Eastern Star, St. Andrews Chapter #50 at 1022 West 7th Street. Stone City Lodge moved into the building shortly thereafter. The lodge sold the building in 2008 due to declining membership. Nevertheless, the chapter remains active, sponsoring civic and educational programs.



13. ERNEST BUTLER PARK
812 WEST 9TH STREET

Butler Park is named after Reverend Ernest Butler, who pastored Second Baptist Church, Bloomington, Indiana for more than 40 years and was the most prominent leader in the local African American community. Reverend Butler, played a significant role in the founding of the local Human Rights and Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr. Commissions. Formerly known as 9th Street Park, the park was renamed for Rev. Butler in 2005. The land was owned by the Illinois Central Railroad until 1972, and leased to the City as parkland. A longtime spot for neighborhood sporting and recreational events, the first summer concert sponsored by the Human Relations Committee was held at West 9th Street Park in the summer of 1968. The oldest built feature in the Park is a now nonfunctional WPA built spray pool at the intersection of .9th and Maple. The amenities in this park include a playground, parking, restrooms, drinking fountains, picnic shelters, a baseball/ softball field, basketball courts, fitness stations, and the 9th Street Loop Trail which intersects with part of the B Line Trail. In the southwest corner of the park at the intersection of West 9th and North John Street is a community garden with rented plots.

