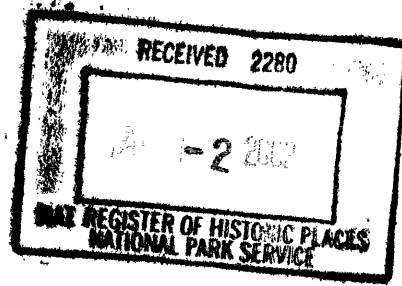


United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Multiple Property Documentation Form



Cover
793

This form is used for documenting multiple property groups relating to one or several historic contexts. See instructions in *How to Complete the Multiple Property Documentation Form* (National Register Bulletin 16B). Complete each item by entering the requested information. For additional space, use continuation sheets (Form 10-900-a). Use a typewriter, word processor, or computer to complete all items.

New Submission Amended Submission

A. Name of Multiple Property Listing

Historic and Architectural Resources of Oberlin, Wake County, North Carolina, 1865-1952

B. Associated Historic Contexts

(Name each associated historic context, identifying theme, geographical area, and chronological period for each.)

- The Freedmen's Village Phenomenon and the Early Development of Oberlin, 1865-1880
- The Cultural and Social Life of Oberlin, 1865-1952
- The Jim Crow Years: Modest Prosperity and Sense of Community, 1880-1950
- The Impact of the Civil Rights Movement and Urban Renewal, 1950-2002

C. Form Prepared by

name/title Sherry Joines Wyatt, Historic Preservation Specialist

organization David E. Gall, AIA, Architect date November 7, 2001

street & number 938 West Fifth Street telephone 336-773-1213

city or town Winston-Salem state North Carolina zip code 27101

D. Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended, I hereby certify that this documentation form meets the National Register documentation standards and sets forth requirements for the listing of related properties consistent with the National Register criteria. This submission meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60 and the Secretary of the Interior's Standards and Guidelines for Archeology and Historic Preservation. (See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Jeffrey Crow SHPD 3/5/02
 Signature and title of certifying official Date
North Carolina Department of Cultural Resources
 State or Federal agency and bureau

I hereby certify that this multiple property documentation form has been approved by the National Register as a basis for evaluating related properties for listing in the National Register.

Edson H. Beall 5/16/2002
 Signature of the Keeper Date of Action

Name of Multiple Property Listing

State

Table of Contents for Written Narrative

Provide the following information on continuation sheets. Cite the letter and the title before each section of the narrative. Assign page numbers according to the instructions for continuation sheets in *How to Complete the Multiple Property Documentation Form* (National Register Bulletin 16B). Fill in page numbers for each section in the space below.

	Page Numbers
E. Statement of Historic Contexts (If more than one historic context is documented, present them in sequential order.)	1-26
F. Associated Property Types (Provide description, significance, and registration requirements.)	27-34
G. Geographical Data	34
H. Summary of Identification and Evaluation Methods (Discuss the methods used in developing the multiple property listing.)	34-35
I. Major Bibliographical References (List major written works and primary location of additional documentation: State Historic Preservation Office, other State agency, Federal agency, local government, university, or other, specifying repository.)	36-38

Paperwork Reduction Act Statement: This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C. 470 *et seq.*).

Estimated Burden Statement: Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 120 hours per response including the time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Chief, Administrative Services Division, National Park Service, P.O. Box 37127, Washington, DC 20013-7127; and the Office of Management and Budget, Paperwork Reductions Project (1024-0018), Washington, DC 20503.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section number E Page 1

Historic and Architectural Resources of Oberlin, Wake County, North Carolina, 1865 - 1952

INTRODUCTION

In the aftermath of the Civil War, newly freed slaves from across North Carolina joined African American political leaders, including James Henry Harris, at a Freedmen's Convention in Raleigh. Held in the fall of 1865, the meeting was one of the earliest forays of African Americans into civic life beyond the struggle to meet daily needs. "We desire education for our children," the convention declared as they asked for legal protection for families, aid to orphans, and help in the reunification of families separated by slavery.¹ These goals set the practical and earnest tone for the development of African American settlements in the Raleigh area and the state generally. The establishment of their own schools, churches, and homes was a priority for the freedmen who desired to reap the benefits of freedom. Experiencing the first glimpses of freedom in refugee camps such as Camp Holmes, a mile and a half north of Raleigh and James City, outside of New Bern, freedmen usually moved on to establish permanent settlements.²

THE FREEDMEN'S VILLAGE PHENOMENON
AND THE EARLY DEVELOPMENT OF OBERLIN, 1865 - 1880

During the spring and summer of 1865, freedmen inundated Raleigh. The influx was a substantial contributor to the dramatic population growth in the city. In 1860, for example, forty-four percent of Raleigh's population (2,087 people) were African American. By 1870, however, this figure had risen to 4,094 people or fifty-three percent of the total population and Raleigh had become the state's second-largest city.³ Drawn to Raleigh after the end of the Civil War, newly free slaves sought homes, work, and aid. Many northern charitable relief agencies, such as the American Missionary Society, and the federal Bureau of Freedmen, Refugees, and Abandoned

¹Jeffrey J. Crow, Paul D. Escott, and Flora J. Hatley, *A History of African Americans in North Carolina* (Raleigh: Division of Archives and History, 1992), 78.

²Ibid, 72 and Karl Larson, *A Separate Reality: The Development of Racial Segregation in Raleigh, North Carolina, 1865 - 1915*. Unpublished Masters Thesis, University of North Carolina at Greensboro, 1983, 24-25

³James Vickers, *Raleigh: City of Oaks* (Woodland Hills, CA: Windsor Publications, Inc., 1982), 55 and Elizabeth Reid Murray, *Wake: Capital County of North Carolina* (Raleigh: Capital County Publishing Company, 1983), 637.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section number E Page 2

Historic and Architectural Resources of Oberlin, Wake County, North Carolina, 1865 - 1952

Lands (Freedmen's Bureau) established headquarters in Raleigh encouraging African American migration to the city.⁴

The work of the Freedmen's Bureau in Raleigh revolved around the distribution of rations including hardtack, pickled meat, potatoes, molasses, and clothing. This work continued well beyond the immediate post-war period and as late as 1868 the *Raleigh Sentinel* reported that "the poor, both white and black, still crowd around the office."⁵ By 1869, however, the supply branch of the Bureau was being phased out leaving only the educational branch in operation in North Carolina.⁶

In addition to basic sustenance and education, the Freedmen's Bureau in North Carolina also became involved in finding employment and homes for freedmen. In his instructions to employees, the superintendent of the Freedmen's Bureau laid out the organization's four primary goals: 1) to aid the destitute without encouraging dependence and to help acquire land, 2) to protect freedmen from injustice, 3) to assist freedmen in obtaining employment at fair wages, and 4) to encourage education.⁷ Among these goals, property ownership certainly held a high level of importance because it provided a sense of identity for the displaced African Americans.

Housing was a critical issue during the Reconstruction era because of the significant population increases occurring in Raleigh and other Southern cities. In Raleigh, the population growth brought about a residential building boom, but construction could not keep up with the population expansion. This problem was exacerbated by the poverty of many of the freedmen and the high rents that could be charged during this period of unprecedented demand.⁸

The Reverend Henry M. Tupper, who founded Shaw University in 1865, arrived in Raleigh from Massachusetts after the close of the Civil War to find throngs of freed slaves "pitiable in the extreme. They were poor and destitute; many of them were refugees who had

⁴Ibid.

⁵Quoted in Murray, 552.

⁶Murray, 552-553.

⁷Records of the Assistant Commissioner for the State of North Carolina Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen and Abandoned Lands, 1865-1970 in Jennifer Hallman, "Why is Oberlin Valuable?, c. 2001," unpublished student report.

⁸Murray, 637-638.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section number E Page 3

Historic and Architectural Resources of Oberlin, Wake County, North Carolina, 1865 - 1952

followed the army, and were literally houseless and homeless.”⁹ Freed slave Patsy Mitchner of Raleigh later recalled the problems that faced newly freed slaves in the 1870s. “Slavery was a bad thing,” she said. But “freedom of the kind we got with nothin’ to live on was bad. Two snakes full of poison....their names was slavery and freedom.”¹⁰

Residing in temporary refugee camps near many of North Carolina’s major cities after the end of the Civil War, the natural extension for freedmen was the creation of their own villages. Sometimes encouraged or established by white benefactors and at other times being the culmination of ad hoc development by African Americans themselves, the formation of all-black villages was a phenomenon of the late 1860s and 1870s.¹¹

James City, for example, grew out of a refugee camp located across the Trent River from New Bern in Craven County. The capture and occupation of New Bern by Union troops early in the war had made it attractive as a center for slaves seeking freedom and safety. The camp was established by U.S. Army Chaplain Horace James in 1863 and from then until 1900, James City “remained a cohesive black community whose inhabitants struggled collectively to secure an economic and political foothold.”¹² The success of the village was clear to Horace James who wrote in 1865, “Many of the people are laying up property, own mules, horses and carts.... They [show] no disposition to move back into the country, but being well able to support themselves here.”¹³ As the little village grew, the churches became the center of the social life attracting African Americans from other areas to their picnics and games.¹⁴

These segregated settlements on the fringe of established towns were typical of new African American communities throughout North Carolina during the post-bellum period. Howard Rabinowitz in his study of Raleigh, *Race Relations in the Urban South*, found that,

⁹Quoted in Elliott K. Wright, et. al., “East Raleigh - South Park Historic District, 1990,” National Register Nomination, North Carolina Historic Preservation Office, Raleigh, 8.2.

¹⁰Quoted in Jeffrey J. Crow, Paul D. Escott, and Flora J. Hatley, *A History of African Americans in North Carolina* (Raleigh: Division of Archives and History, 1992), 93.

¹¹Murray, 642.

¹²Joe Mobley, *James City: A Black Community in North Carolina, 1863 - 1900* (Raleigh: Division of Archives and History, 1981), introduction.

¹³Quoted in Mobley, 43.

¹⁴Mobley, 75.

**United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service**

**National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet**

Section number E Page 4

Historic and Architectural Resources of Oberlin, Wake County, North Carolina, 1865 - 1952

“black residential segregation usually resulted from a combination of black preference, white hostility, and economic constraints.” The growth of these villages was aided by the lower property costs available in outlying areas.¹⁵

Thirteen freedmen’s villages developed in and around Raleigh during the 1860s and 1870s. Within the city, communities such as Nazareth, which flourished around the lands of the Catholic diocese between Dorthea Dix Hospital and the present campus of North Carolina State University (NCSU), remained small and lacked independent institutions such as schools. Four of the freedmen’s villages however, Lincolnton, Brooklyn, Method, and Oberlin, grew outside of Raleigh’s corporate limits and became independent villages of notable size before the turn of the twentieth century.¹⁶

Lincolnton developed on the lands of William R. Crawford (present site of NCSU), a Raleigh farmer and meat supplier. The community, which had begun around 1869, comprised a store, at least one church, and about a dozen homes by 1900. In 1904, the village was obliterated by the construction of an agricultural building for the expanding North Carolina Agricultural and Mechanical College.¹⁷

Brooklyn was located northwest of central Raleigh, adjacent to the Devereux farm. This village may not have followed the typical segregated pattern and served as home to both whites and blacks. The white residents had formed a Methodist church by 1877, while many of the African American residents attended St. Augustine’s Episcopal Church. The continued growth of the village was constrained around 1905 by the development of a white suburb, also called Brooklyn, adjacent to the small African American community.¹⁸

¹⁵Howard Rabinowitz, *Race Relations in the Urban South, 1865 - 1890* (NY: Oxford UP, 1974) in Richard Mattson, “East Wilson Historic District, 1987,” National Register Nomination, North Carolina Historic Preservation Office, 8.3 and Richard Mattson, “The Evolution of Raleigh’s African-American Neighborhoods in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries, 1988,” North Carolina State Historic Preservation Office, 9.

¹⁶Larson, 24-25 and Simmons-Henry and Edmisten, 37.

¹⁷Ibid, 25-26.

¹⁸Ibid, 26-27.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section number E Page 5

Historic and Architectural Resources of Oberlin, Wake County, North Carolina, 1865 - 1952

Thus, the villages of Brooklyn and Lincolnvile lost their distinct identities as they were absorbed by expanding white communities and institutions at the end of the nineteenth century. Method and Oberlin, however, grew steadily into the twentieth century.¹⁹

Method was established in 1869 by Lewis M. Mason, an African American, three miles west of Raleigh across Hillsborough Street from present-day Meredith College. General William R. Cox sold a tract of land to Mason's father, Jesse Mason, in 1870 and, as Lewis Mason later wrote in his memoir, "They began to build some log houses, some small one-room frame houses, some slab houses with dirt floors."²⁰ The village was initially known as Mason Village or Masonville, but it is believed that the Norfolk and Southern Railroad assigned the community the new name of Method around 1890. In 1880, the population of the community had reached 268. The residents were employed as farmers, janitors, construction workers, carpenters, laundresses, domestics, and day laborers. Method grew with the addition of the Berry O'Kelly General Store, post office, churches, and a freight siding and passenger train service. Berry O'Kelly Training School, which became the first accredited African American high schools in North Carolina during the 1920s, was begun early in the village's history with the establishment of a free school by residents and culminated in the establishment of a technical school by Charles N. Hunter. Method was not annexed by the city of Raleigh until after World War II.²¹

Oberlin, originally dubbed Peck's Place, was founded in 1866 on a ridge located one-and-a-half miles northwest of downtown Raleigh along a branch of the old Hillsboro Road. Oral tradition holds that Cameron family slaves were living on land near the site of the new village and that former slaves of the Cameron, Bennehan, and Mordecai families (some of Raleigh's most prominent antebellum plantation owners and slave holders) were among the earliest settlers.²² Certainly, Stephen Stephens, one of the early Oberlin land holders, had been a slave for the Mordecai-Cameron family.²³ Documentation of the founding history of the village is difficult to discern, but Wake County historian Elizabeth Reid Murray, through her work with primary sources such as Raleigh newspapers the *Carolina Era* and the *Daily News*, in addition to WPA

¹⁹Mattson, "Evolution," 10.

²⁰Lewis M. Mason, "A Historical Sketch of the beginning of the aggressive Negro town of Method," (unpublished manuscript, n.d.) in Murray, 645-646.

²¹Murray, 646-647; Simmons-Henry and Edmisten, 2; Crow, 155-6, and Larson, 28.

²²Hallman, 7.

²³Murray, 496.

**United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service**

**National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet**

Section number E Page 6

Historic and Architectural Resources of Oberlin, Wake County, North Carolina, 1865 - 1952

slave narratives and Wake County deed transactions, was able to identify some of the earliest settlers and begin to understand the complex and ad hoc pattern of settlement. Her work was supplemented by earlier research conducted by local historian and newspaper editor Willis Briggs.

In 1866, Lewis Peck, a wealthy white grocer, divided his farm into lots measuring approximately one-and-three-quarter acres and sold these to African Americans such as Thomas Williams (a carpenter), Norfleet Jeffreys, Henry Jones, and Seth Nowell (a drayman). These lots were sold at an average price of about \$50.00 per acre. Illustrating the difficulty of finding land available to African Americans, the settlers of Oberlin actually paid several times more than the going rate for land in Wake County. At this time, land prices in Wake County averaged \$5.70 an acre, while the most expensive acreage in the state was located in Edgecombe County with prices at \$10.60 an acre. Yet, the ownership of land was still seen as a wise economic investment by early settlers who nicknamed their new village "Save Rent."²⁴

It is not known how these settlers acquired the money to pay for their property. They may have received monetary assistance from one of the several freedmen's-assistance organizations then headquartered in Raleigh. It could also have been that employment as tradesmen (such as carpenters and draymen), which were among the best-paying positions open to African Americans, may have been sufficient to make the land prices affordable. Another scenario is suggested by the 1884 transaction between Willis M. Graves, an African American brick mason and Jacob S. Allen, a white contractor. Allen financed the \$750 worth of property purchased by Graves in five yearly installments beginning in 1885 (the year after the deed date) and ending in 1889.²⁵

Whatever the means, lots in the area sold steadily throughout the 1870s and into the 1880s as other white landowners in the vicinity followed Peck's model and begin selling their land to African Americans.²⁶ Rather than a single, platted, development, Oberlin appears to have developed wherever land became available for purchase. The involvement of white men with the settlement of Oberlin is clear, but this too appears to have been ad hoc rather than a concentrated, organized effort and may have been linked to the simple goal of making a profit. Illustrating the variety of white individuals involved in the development of Oberlin are three lots along Oberlin

²⁴Murray, 643 and Willis G. Briggs, "Oberlin Village Emerged During Reconstruction," *The News and Observer*, 8 August 1948, (IV).

²⁵Wake County deed book 78, page 146.

²⁶Murray, 643.

**United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service**

**National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet**

Section number E Page 7

Historic and Architectural Resources of Oberlin, Wake County, North Carolina, 1865 - 1952

Road (located at 802, 814, and 1002 respectively). These parcels were sold to African Americans by Jacob S. Allen, a builder and contractor; George W. Mordecai of the prominent Mordecai family; and Richard H. Battle, an attorney with the firm of R.H. Battle and Samuel Mordecai.²⁷

Another white man, Wake County Sheriff, Timothy F. Lee, purchased thirty-four acres north of the Peck farm in 1869. Unlike the Peck lots, the lots sold by Lee were available at lower prices. Lee was a Union soldier, from Brooklyn, New York, who had married a local woman.²⁸ The land purchased by Lee had belonged to John S. (also referred to as William) Boylan and was sold at auction by the Clerk of Superior Court in 1869 after a court-ordered partition. The land that was eventually conveyed to Willis M. Graves by Jacob S. Allen was part of this transaction although it appears to have been property not purchased by Lee himself. The circuitous chain of title for the Graves property indicates that some of the Boylan tracts were sold to other white men and women who eventually sold it to African Americans. The motives behind these transactions are not certain, but the financing of Graves' land by Allen does suggest some degree of benevolence.²⁹ Other sections of the Boylan tract were purchased by the Cooperative Land Company.³⁰

More formally known as the Raleigh Cooperative Land and Building Association, the Cooperative Land Company was among several agencies in Raleigh during the late 1860s and 1870s that were providing financial aid to freedmen to purchase land and build homes. The other organizations included the North Carolina Land Company (begun in 1869 to promote investment in Wake County), the National Freedman's Savings and Trust Company (which failed in 1874), and the Wake County Cooperative Business Company.³¹ The Raleigh Cooperative Land and Building Association operated about ten years offering loans payable at ten dollars a month.

²⁷Wake County Deeds book 105, page 733; book 78, page 146; and book 31, page 286 and Raleigh City Directory, 1880

²⁸Murray, 643 and Briggs.

²⁹Briggs and Wake County deed book 28, page 391; book 43, page 110; book 62, page 235; and book 78, page 146.

³⁰Briggs.

³¹Murray, 562 and 643 and Briggs.

**United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service**

**National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet**

Section number E Page 8

Historic and Architectural Resources of Oberlin, Wake County, North Carolina, 1865 - 1952

Samuel Mordecai (partner of R.H. Battle mentioned above) was the attorney for this organization at its closure around 1880.³²

James Henry Harris, along with Sheriff Lee, are the only two people identified by Willis Briggs as being “promoters” of Oberlin. Harris was a prominent African American politician and philanthropist, who was involved in several of the freedmen’s financial relief agencies. Harris’ role in Oberlin and Raleigh’s African American history is succinctly described by historian Elizabeth Reid Murray:

...James H. Harris, who is thought to have received his education at Oberlin College, was a founder of the Wake County Cooperative Business Company and the Raleigh Cooperative Land and Building Association, a director of the Freedmen’s Savings and Trust Company, and a strong promoter of Wake County’s village of Oberlin.

Harris was born in Granville County in 1832. He was believed to have been born free. After an apprenticeship as an upholsterer and two years of education at Oberlin College in Ohio, Harris traveled extensively. After arriving in Raleigh in 1865 to work with the Freedmen’s Bureau, he was a charter member of the Republican Party and was twice elected to the state House (1868-1870 and 1883) and once to the state Senate (1872-1874). Harris’ interests focused on efforts for African Americans to keep political rights and gain legal equality in addition to social reforms in prisons and care for the needy through institutions such as the Colored Institution for the Deaf, Dumb, and Blind.³³ One of Harris’ endeavors, the Raleigh Cooperative Land and Building Association, already mentioned in connection with Oberlin, was active in creating African American neighborhoods throughout Raleigh. The company was highly visible in their efforts to aid the development of the St. Petersburg section, in eastern Raleigh, as an African American / freedmen’s neighborhood.³⁴

Thus, with the variety of lands becoming available and an array of financial assistance, it seems likely that each of Oberlin’s early settlers arrived at land and home ownership in a different way particular to their own needs and means. A few of these settlers were Monroe Smith, Robert and Albert Williams, S.J. Webb, Thomas Higgs, Andrew Hinton, N.C. Dunston,

³²Briggs.

³³Willam S. Powell, ed., *Dictionary of North Carolina Biography*, Vol. 3 (Chapel Hill, 1988), 53.

³⁴Simmons-Henry and Edmisten, 18 and “East Raleigh - South Park,” 8.8.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section number E Page 9

Historic and Architectural Resources of Oberlin, Wake County, North Carolina, 1865 - 1952

Allen Haywood, Balam and Richard Shepherd, Alonzo Peebles, and Willis M. Graves.³⁵ These families were joined by new settlers who purchased land just north of the original community. Unlike the previous development, this area was formally platted in 1871 as the "Planned Town of San Domingo." Located on the former Wilson Whitaker farm, the area included Grant Avenue, Wade Avenue, Butler Street (now Chester), and Baez streets. These lots were sold at prices from ten to forty dollars.³⁶ San Domingo's separate identity did not last long, and by 1872, citizens responded to a *Daily News* article that referred to the entire village variously as Morgantown, San Domingo, and Save Rent. The community drafted a letter to the editor stating that their village should be known as "Oberlin," presumably in honor of Harris's alma mater.³⁷

The *Daily News* story described Oberlin in 1872 as an area "composed almost exclusively of colored families who are represented as very industrious and thriving, and we learn has increased so rapidly within the past few months that it will soon require a municipal corporation of its own." An incorporation movement ensued in 1872, but was never brought to completion.³⁸

The lack of legal incorporation did not slow the growth of Oberlin, however. African Americans set about attaining homes, education, and positions of civic influence. The community was so well established by the end of the 1870s that it received a substantial description in the 1880 *Raleigh City Directory*. The Directory described Oberlin in this manner:

There is a growing taste for houses in the suburbs. Quite a town, composed almost entirely of colored people, has grown up a mile northwest of the city. The length is more than a mile and it has some 750 inhabitants. It has been given the name Oberlin. The houses ... are almost entirely of wood, but little stone or brick being used in the construction of dwellings. An ample space is given each dwelling, and this causes the city to cover much ground...³⁹

The positive description of Oberlin as "quite a town" was surely related to the development of churches and a school in Oberlin by the 1870s. To outsiders, these institutions gave the

³⁵Briggs.

³⁶Murray, 644.

³⁷Murray, 644-645 and Simmons-Henry and Edmisten, 18.

³⁸Murray, 644.

³⁹Quoted in Mattson, "The Evolution of Raleigh's African-American Neighborhoods,"

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section number E Page 10

Historic and Architectural Resources of Oberlin, Wake County, North Carolina, 1865 - 1952

community the vestments of middle-class stability, but to Oberlin's residents they provided a source of social strength and vibrant cultural life.

THE CULTURAL AND SOCIAL LIFE OF OBERLIN

Oberlin and Raleigh's other African American communities developed within the context of a growing African American middle class. By the mid-1870s, economic opportunity for African Americans, although improved since the immediate postwar period, was still focused on unskilled employment as laborers, barbers, laundresses, nurses, and waiters. Although more than 700 Raleigh African Americans held steady jobs in 1875-1876, the majority, 350, were employed in unskilled positions. Additionally, 200 people worked in industry or manufacturing and 150 were servants. Only thirteen African Americans were professionals such as doctors, lawyers, and ministers (although this number had increased to twenty-seven by 1880). Yet, an indication of the growing middle class were thirty-one businesses owned by African Americans including all of the city's six barber shops, as well as five restaurants, six groceries, four blacksmiths, and four dealers at the city market.⁴⁰ In Oberlin, many residents worked as tradesmen. Thomas Williams, for example, was a carpenter and Willis M. Graves was both a brick mason and justice of the peace.⁴¹

Significantly, the new middle class, as well as those employed in less prominent positions, possessed an increasing amount of civic organization and involvement. The 1870s saw the creation of organizations such as the North Carolina State Educational Teacher Association and the North Carolina Industrial Association which strove to educate the race and enable African Americans to enter the ranks of professionals. During this period, several African American men from across North Carolina held city, county, and even state elected positions.⁴² James H. Harris of Raleigh served in the General Assembly between 1868 and 1870. Wilson Morgan, of Oberlin, was a prominent Republican and served as a Wake County Representative to the General Assembly from 1870 until 1892.⁴³ By the end of the nineteenth century, however, the percentage of African Americans in servile positions had increased and the possibility of African Americans being elected to office or even being allowed to vote had been removed or hampered.

⁴⁰Vickers, 58.

⁴¹Simmons-Henry and Edmisten, 19.

⁴²Vickers, 58 - 59

⁴³Murray, 634.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section number E Page 11

Historic and Architectural Resources of Oberlin, Wake County, North Carolina, 1865 - 1952

It was apparent that the efforts of the Reconstruction period had failed to overcome the poverty and racism of the post-bellum South.⁴⁴

Defeated economically and politically, African Americans tended to band together to form churches and social clubs. Churches were often formed early in the development of African American communities. These institutions nourished the souls of their members as well as the community at large through a variety of events and organizations. Having a long history as a place of solidarity and resistance prior to emancipation, churches continued and expanded their role in the lives of African Americans during the post-bellum period.

One-third to one-half of all black North Carolinians during the late nineteenth century belonged to a church. Baptist and African Methodist Episcopal Zion were the dominant denominations with African Methodist Episcopal, Colored Methodist Episcopal, and Presbyterian also having substantial membership.⁴⁵ Southern African American churches became famous for their vibrant music and euphoric tone that was closely aligned with traditional African forms of worship. Northern black churches, however, tended to practice more codified, uniform, and intellectually-based services.⁴⁶ Reverend Morgan L. Latta, who founded Latta University in Oberlin in 1892, won no friends when he aligned himself with the northern methodology in his autobiography published in 1903. Reverend Latta wrote:

As a rule, the race goes almost crazy over religion, while other nationalities take it easy and quiet. You can readily see if the race had inherited the highest degree of civilization, they would not worship God so excitedly. You take the learned people that have inherited the highest degree of civilization: how modest they act in church and in State.⁴⁷

Three churches developed in Oberlin during the immediate post-bellum era. Of the two that still exist in the community, Wilson Temple United Methodist is believed to be the oldest. Wilson Temple was founded in 1872, but may have been loosely organized as early as 1865. The

⁴⁴Vickers, 58 - 59.

⁴⁵Crow, et al, 98.

⁴⁶Laurie F. Maffly-Kipp, "An Introduction to the Church in the Southern Black Community, 2001," electronic version, Documenting the American South website, produced by University of North Carolina - Chapel Hill, <http://docsouth.unc.edu/>.

⁴⁷Reverend Morgan L. Latta, *The History of my Life and Work*, 1903, electronic version, Documenting the American South website, produced by University of North Carolina - Chapel Hill, <http://docsouth.unc.edu/>.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section number E Page 12

Historic and Architectural Resources of Oberlin, Wake County, North Carolina, 1865 - 1952

church is named in honor of Wilson Morgan, a Wake County State Representative and minister who had donated the land for the church building. The congregation grew steadily throughout the 1890s, reaching ninety communicants by 1899. The present building was constructed in 1911 at 1025 Oberlin Road and replaced an earlier frame structure.⁴⁸ While most African American Methodists belong to traditionally black branches of the church such as the AME and AME Zion, Methodism as a whole is an important part of African American religious life. In 1923, the *Journal of Negro History* reported that Negro Methodist Church membership in the United States had reached 1,756,714 worshipers.⁴⁹

The Oberlin Baptist Church was loosely organized as a community church by the early 1870s, the church was formally established in 1880 under the guidance of former slave, Reverend Plummer T. Hall. The church began meeting in a crude, frame building in the 2000 block of Wade Avenue, but by 1880 the congregation moved to the 1200 block of Oberlin Road and became known as the First Baptist Church of Oberlin. In the early twentieth century, under Reverend Fullwilder, the congregation erected a frame church at 806 Oberlin Road. This building burned in January of 1955. The existing brick building replaced this loss in October of that same year.⁵⁰

Mt. Moriah Church was located in the 600 Block of Oberlin Road. Mt. Moriah is believed to have begun as a slave meeting house during the antebellum period. By the early twentieth century, however, Dr. N.F. Roberts, pastor at Mt. Moriah, and other leading ministers encouraged the union of Mt. Moriah and the First Baptist Church of Oberlin because they felt the community could not financially support two Baptist churches.⁵¹ The churches were united to

⁴⁸Wilson Temple United Methodist Church, *Wilson Temple United Methodist Church Centennial, 1872 - 1972: Facing the Challenges of the Next Century* (Raleigh: Wilson Temple United Methodist Church, c.1972).

⁴⁹Joseph C. Hartzell, "Methodism and the Negro in the United States," in *The Journal of Negro History*, Vol. VIII, Carter G. Woodson, ed., electronic version, Documenting the American South website, produced by University of North Carolina - Chapel Hill, <http://docsouth.unc.edu/>.

⁵⁰Centennial Committee of Oberlin Baptist Church, *Centennial Anniversary, Oberlin Baptist Church, Raleigh, North Carolina, 1880 - 1980: Reflecting a Triumph of Blessings* (Raleigh: Oberlin Baptist Church, c.1980).

⁵¹Centennial Committee of Oberlin Baptist Church.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section number E Page 13

Historic and Architectural Resources of Oberlin, Wake County, North Carolina, 1865 - 1952

become Oberlin Baptist Church on July 6, 1912.⁵² African American Baptist churches were flourishing across the country at this time. By 1922, there were 20,000 African American Baptist churches, serving about two and a half million members and holding church property valued at more than forty million dollars.⁵³

The churches in African American communities provided opportunities for education and social development. Lecture series, small clubs, and large Sunday School events were part of most communities. In Oberlin, Sunday School picnics at Pullen Park were a major community event. Claudia Morgan Johnson grew up in Oberlin during the early twentieth century and recalls how small luxuries made the picnic a special event. "I remember they bought a new tin tub every year," she stated, "and they made lemonade in it for the picnic."⁵⁴ At Oberlin Baptist Church, Sunday School was such an important function that it was held at 2 o'clock in the afternoon (until after 1936) to allow young men from other churches an opportunity to attend the young men's class taught by Charles Jones after their own church services.⁵⁵ The emphasis on Sunday School was part of a prominent interdenominational evangelical movement among urban, African American religious leaders at the turn of the twentieth century.⁵⁶

In addition to Sunday School, churches provided their members with a variety of ways to be involved in the community. Church organizations ranged from the choir and the usher board to ladies' circles, such as the Triangle Circle at Wilson Temple United Methodist Church.⁵⁷ The ladies' circles at Wilson Temple met once a month to plan activities that would be beneficial to

⁵²Hallman, 25.

⁵³Walter H. Brooks, "Evolution of the Negro Baptist Church," in *The Journal of Negro History*, Vol. VII, Carter G. Woodson, ed., electronic version, Documenting the American South website, produced by University of North Carolina - Chapel Hill, <http://docsouth.unc.edu/> .

⁵⁴Simmons-Henry and Edmisten, 24.

⁵⁵Centennial Committee of Oberlin Baptist Church.

⁵⁶Maffly-Kipp.

⁵⁷Wilson Temple United Methodist Church; Centennial Committee of the Oberlin Baptist Church; and Simmons-Henry and Edmisten, 29.

**United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service**

**National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet**

Section number E Page 14

Historic and Architectural Resources of Oberlin, Wake County, North Carolina, 1865 - 1952

the church.⁵⁸ The role of African American women in the church tended to focus around circles and missionary societies where local and even international needs could be addressed. These women's groups often promoted "traditional ideals of Victorian womanhood, respectability, and racial uplift."⁵⁹ The circles themselves seem to represent the sedate endeavors deemed appropriate to ladies and in Oberlin reflect the middle class status and ideals of many in the community.

Like church organizations, fraternal orders, clubs, and societies were also important features of African American social life. These organizations afforded their members an opportunity to develop leadership and public speaking abilities in a forum that promoted "individual character and group progress."⁶⁰ Clubs and lodges flourished in towns and cities such as Raleigh, Charlotte, and Wilmington because it was easier for people to come together here than in rural areas. The organizations included fraternal orders, service-oriented clubs, and benevolent organizations such as the Royal Knights of King David, the United Order of True Reformers, the Masons, the Odd Fellows, the Good Templars, the Sons of Ham, and the Household of Ruth.⁶¹

In Oberlin, the Odd Fellows had a distinct presence. Several Oberlin cemetery head stones dating from the early twentieth century carry a motif depicting three links of a chain. This symbol is associated with the Odd Fellows and represents the three degrees of friendship, love, and truth.⁶² The Odd Fellows had a white lodge in Raleigh as early as 1846, but the African American Virtue Lodge No. 1616 was not formed until about 1880.⁶³ It can only be assumed this was the lodge utilized by Oberlin men.

Another organizational presence in the community was the Daughters of Oberlin. From the mid-1930s through the mid-1940s, the organization was large enough to support their own lodge hall located at 713 Oberlin Road. This ladies' organization had an unknown mission, but Virginia Morgan Blount, an Oberlin native, recalled that members of the Daughters of Oberlin

⁵⁸Simmons-Henry and Edmisten, 29.

⁵⁹Maffly-Kipp.

⁶⁰Crow, et al, 97.

⁶¹Ibid., 96-97.

⁶²Information from internet site www.vintage.views.org.

⁶³Murray, 623.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section number E Page 15

Historic and Architectural Resources of Oberlin, Wake County, North Carolina, 1865 - 1952

would “turn out at the churches.” The ladies, Mrs. Blount remembers, “would sit together as the Daughters of Oberlin.”⁶⁴ The 1935 City Directory records that meetings of the group were held the first Monday of each month at 4 o’clock with Ella Howard serving as secretary.⁶⁵

The connections made between members of organizations such as the Odd Fellows were often important during times of personal need. Burial societies were common among North Carolina’s urban blacks where the need for assistance with burial costs was a pressing problem.⁶⁶ Fraternal organizations such as the Odd Fellows often had burial rites and may have assisted with expenses as well. Just as the presence of the Odd Fellows is now revealed in the gravestones of the community cemetery, the cemetery itself was an important fixture in the community life of Oberlin.

While oral tradition states that there were markers in the vicinity of the current cemetery (located on property to the rear of the YWCA in the 1000 block of Oberlin Road) prior to 1872, it is not known if this was the case or if the graves held white farmers or Cameron slaves. The community cemetery developed more fully around 1872 and fits the description of a heavily wooded, loosely grouped, African American cemetery as defined by M. Ruth Little in her book *Sticks and Stones*. When the cemetery reached its capacity in the early twentieth century, John J. Turner, son of one of Oberlin’s most well-to-do families, sold land from his family’s home place, which adjoins the cemetery, to Oberlin residents creating an additional cemetery section as a business venture.⁶⁷

Since most of North Carolina’s freedmen’s villages were founded by former slaves who had been denied opportunities for education, schools were given great importance and seen as the way to gain true equality. In fact, one of the earliest large organizations of African Americans was the North Carolina State Teachers Association. This group called a State Colored Education Convention in Raleigh in 1877 with 140 delegates from forty counties. Former legislator James H. Harris served as president of the first convention. Other prominent black politicians such as state senator G.W. Price of New Hanover County, were also intimately involved in succeeding

⁶⁴Simmons-Henry and Edmisten, 21.

⁶⁵*Raleigh City Directory* 1935.

⁶⁶Crow, et al, 97.

⁶⁷*Ibid.*, 27.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section number E Page 16

Historic and Architectural Resources of Oberlin, Wake County, North Carolina, 1865 - 1952

conventions. The presence of these influential leaders among the state's African American educators is indicative of the importance given to education.⁶⁸

In North Carolina's African American communities, the schools and school functions were a focal point. For example, each year William C. Smith, the editor of the *Charlotte Messenger*, Charlotte's African American newspaper, carefully covered the graduation exercises at black schools and colleges as well as providing endorsements for the opening of new African American institutions. In the 1880s, the paper also heralded the high quality of Charlotte's new African American schools and the large number (625) of pupils who attended the schools. Encouraging both higher education and primary education, Smith recognized the importance of schools in producing a literate population with well-educated leaders.⁶⁹

The emphasis on schools was true for Raleigh as well, where the largest freedmen's villages, Oberlin and Method, both established schools very early in their history and later became the home to institutions of higher learning. The first community school in Oberlin is believed to have opened in Wilson Temple United Methodist Church and was educating one hundred pupils by the end of the 1870s.⁷⁰

In 1877, Wake County voters approved a property tax valuation to fund the purchase of existing buildings for two African American schools: Washington School in south Raleigh and Garfield School in east Raleigh. At this time it was unusual to use public funds for white education and even more rare to fund African American schools. The 1877 referendum also funded the construction of a new building for the Oberlin Graded School.⁷¹ The Oberlin School predated Raleigh's public, graded schools for whites by seven years.⁷² The placement of the new school in Oberlin was a source of pride and was an acknowledgment of the number of African American students living in the Oberlin area as well as the good reputation Oberlin's citizens maintained among the white populace. The frame building dating from 1877 was replaced in 1916 with a brick building, which was demolished in 1968 to make way for the YWCA.

The Oberlin School was a community school in the literal sense during the early twentieth century. Many of the teachers lived in Oberlin and the parents were heavily involved in

⁶⁸Crow, et al, 100.

⁶⁹Ibid., 101.

⁷⁰Murray, 645.

⁷¹Vickers, 81.

⁷²Simmons-Henry and Edmisten, 19 and Vickers, 81.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section number E Page 17

Historic and Architectural Resources of Oberlin, Wake County, North Carolina, 1865 - 1952

the PTA. Delores Wilder, who attended Oberlin School during the early twentieth century, recalled how the school provided education and entertainment for the community. "Oberlin was a school known to have lots of play-operettas," she remembers, "and the children there learned very good speaking habits. ...Oberlin was famous for programs that were put on for parents and other people who wanted to come."⁷³ Additionally, each spring, the school participated in a glee club concert at Raleigh Memorial Auditorium.⁷⁴ Gertrude Pope, who was a native of the Nazareth community attended Oberlin School during the late 1930s and early 1940s. She recalled "teachers who believed in the three Rs" such as Mrs. Christmas (first grade), Mrs. Minnie Flagg (second grade), and Mrs. Margaret Thornton Haywood. Mrs. Haywood taught the third grade and caught the attention of the white school supervisor, Mrs. Lacy, with the indoor garden she created on the floor of her classroom. During the supervisor's visit Mrs. Pope remembers that the students "were really paraded with pride."⁷⁵

Oberlin School served grades one through eight, but older students residing in Oberlin had to attend Washington High School, which was located across town. By the late 1950s, Oberlin students were attending Ligon Junior-Senior High School three-and-a-half miles from Oberlin. Students traveling to this school passed by Needham Broughton High School near Cameron Village shopping center, this white school was only about a mile from Oberlin.⁷⁶

Higher education was also important to African American history in North Carolina. Private African American colleges were begun by religious denominations as normal or collegiate institutions that grew into four-year colleges and universities. Shaw University, in south Raleigh, became the first black institution of higher learning in North Carolina and was established by Dr. Henry Martin Tupper with the assistance of the American Baptist Home Mission in 1865. This institution was followed by Charlotte's Biddle Memorial Institute (Presbyterian) in 1867; Saint Augustine's Normal School and Collegiate Institute (Episcopalian) in Raleigh in 1867; Scotia Seminary (Presbyterian) also in 1867 in Concord; Greensboro's

⁷³Simmons-Henry and Edmisten, 28.

⁷⁴Ibid, 28 and 43.

⁷⁵Ibid, 43.

⁷⁶Wilma Cecelia Peebles, "School Desegregation in Raleigh, North Carolina, 1954 - 1964" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of North Carolina, 1984), 95.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section number E Page 18

Historic and Architectural Resources of Oberlin, Wake County, North Carolina, 1865 - 1952

Bennett Seminary (Methodist) in 1873; and Zion Wesley Institute (AME Zion) established in Salisbury in 1879.⁷⁷

The presence of Shaw and St. Augustine's colleges made Raleigh a center for African American education and culture.⁷⁸ Young professionals living south of the Shaw campus formed a prominent black neighborhood. This neighborhood along with many of the Raleigh-area African American communities enjoyed the academic atmosphere and example of success created by the university.⁷⁹

Similar to Shaw, St. Augustine's College was begun by Reverend J. Britten Smith with support from the Episcopal church. Early in its history the school focused on the preparation of teachers and ministers, reflecting the primary institutions in African American communities. St. Augustine's also provided medical, spiritual, and social opportunities for the Raleigh area and became a source of racial solidarity.⁸⁰

The Oberlin community had ties to both of these local colleges. Oberlin native, Claudia Morgan Johnson recalls that during the early twentieth century "there were just as many people out here who went to St. Augustine's as went to Shaw." Thus, the sporting matches between the two schools were the source of great rivalry and were important events to Oberlin's citizens.⁸¹

Oberlin also played a role in African American higher education with the establishment of Latta University by Reverend Morgan L. Latta in 1892.⁸² Latta possessed a strong personality and renowned fund-raising abilities. His idea in founding Latta University was to prove that an African American could "do something." Thus, his university was funded and managed by his own efforts without being supported by an outside religious or charitable organization.⁸³

⁷⁷Crow, et al, 153.

⁷⁸Vickers, 81 and "East Raleigh - South Park," 8.6.

⁷⁹Simmons-Henry and Edmisten, 53.

⁸⁰Ibid, 116-117.

⁸¹Ibid, 25.

⁸²Reverend Morgan L. Latta, *The History of My Life and Work*, 1903, electronic version, Documenting the American South website, produced by the University of North Carolina - Chapel Hill, <http://docsouth.unc.edu/>, 296.

⁸³Ibid, 37 and 42.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section number E Page 19

Historic and Architectural Resources of Oberlin, Wake County, North Carolina, 1865 - 1952

Latta University did emphasize the study of the Bible, however and the development of a "a thoroughly Christian character." The school provided industrial or vocational education, a night school, and even an orphanage.⁸⁴ The university accommodated ninety-two students during the 1893-1894 school year and had a campus of nine substantial buildings by 1903.⁸⁵

In his 1903 autobiography, Latta discusses the location of the university. Though he does not mention the Oberlin community by name, instead calling the area "West Raleigh." The location, he wrote, "is the very best that could be desired for this school, being outside the busy city, but within easy reach by means of the electric street cars, which run near the institution."⁸⁶ The property for the University was purchased in 1891 and by 1903 totaled about three hundred acres "on the suburbs of the city."⁸⁷ By the mid-1920s, Latta University was closed because of financial difficulties and the large parcels owned by Latta were sold.⁸⁸

As alluded to earlier, Oberlin was not alone among Wake County's freedmen's villages in having an institution of higher learning. Berry O'Kelly School opened in the community of Method in 1910 as a private vocational training school and in 1917 a Baltimore paper acclaimed it the "finest and most practical rural training school in the entire South." The school later developed into a public high school for African Americans, a common pattern for schools of this type.⁸⁹

THE JIM CROW YEARS: MODEST PROSPERITY AND SENSE OF COMMUNITY, 1880 - 1950

The growth of Oberlin's churches and educational facilities was in keeping with the increasing size and prosperity of the village during the late nineteenth century. The village

⁸⁴Ibid, 55-58 and 186.

⁸⁵*Second Annual Catalogue of the Officers and Students of Latta University, Oberlin North Carolina, 1893-1894* in Hallman, 18 and Sanborn Map, 1914.

⁸⁶Latta, 58.

⁸⁷Ibid, 55 and 63.

⁸⁸Wake County Grantee Index and deed book 408, page 191 and 194; book 414, page 164; book 596, page 490; and book 648, page 246.

⁸⁹Crow, et al, 155-156.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section number E Page 20

Historic and Architectural Resources of Oberlin, Wake County, North Carolina, 1865 - 1952

gained its own post office during the 1880s and by 1891, Oberlin claimed several stores, Baptist and Methodist churches, and two schools (Oberlin School and Latta University). One and two-story frame houses, often owner-occupied, lined Oberlin Road and adjacent streets to the west. The growth of Oberlin, as well as Raleigh's other African American communities was heightened in the late nineteenth century by the increasing black population. In Raleigh and its immediate environs, the African American population had risen to 6,000 (fifty percent of the total population) by the 1890s. These citizens concentrated in segregated villages such as Oberlin and suburban neighborhoods like East Raleigh - South Park that surrounded the center city.⁹⁰

Unlike some of Raleigh's urban black communities, such as Smoky Hollow, where rental property was quite common, Oberlin was a community of homeowners. Tax records indicate that in 1880 more residents in the Oberlin area owned their land than in any other section of Raleigh Township white or black. In fact, there were ninety African American landowners at this time. Each of these owners held \$200 to \$500 worth of property.⁹¹ The prosperity of some of Oberlin's residents continued into the early twentieth century. Tax rolls for four prominent Oberlin citizens in 1900 show that wealth could range dramatically. Rev. P.T. Hall, Willis M. Graves, Rev. M.L. Latta, and John T. Turner were all in their early 40s or early 50s in 1900. Rev. Hall, however, owned only \$170 in real estate while Rev. Latta, who was building Latta University during this period, owned \$1100 worth. The largest land holder of the four was John T. Turner who owned real estate valued at \$2175.⁹²

While Oberlin thrived during the 1890s largely undisturbed, the progress and prosperity of African Americans throughout the South fueled a backlash of anti-black sentiment among the white population. The tense racial conditions of the late 1890s were exacerbated by the massive urban migration of African Americans that placed additional pressure on North Carolina's cities. While no riots occurred in Raleigh as they did in Wilmington in 1898, the political restructuring, disenfranchisement, and officially-sanctioned segregation followed a period of increased anxiety within the white population.⁹³

⁹⁰Mattson, "The Evolution of Raleigh's African-American Neighborhoods," 8-11.

⁹¹Mattson, "The Evolution of Raleigh's African-American Neighborhoods," 10 and Murray, 645.

⁹²Wake County Tax Lists. State Archives, Raleigh.

⁹³Mattson, "The Evolution of Raleigh's African-American Neighborhoods," 8.

**United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service**

**National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet**

Section number E Page 21

Historic and Architectural Resources of Oberlin, Wake County, North Carolina, 1865 - 1952

The end result of these pressures was that African Americans across the South became increasingly segregated. Residences and businesses alike began to be located in separate areas according to race. Between 1900 and the mid-1920s, more than half of the businesses lining East Hargett Street in downtown Raleigh were owned by African Americans.⁹⁴ East Hargett Street played a role in the lives of most African Americans in Raleigh during the early twentieth century, even those in outlying communities such as Oberlin. Claudia Morgan Johnson recalled that the residents of Oberlin frequented Hargett Street when they had substantial shopping to do. The area was also an important gathering place. "Everybody went to Hargett Street on Saturdays," Mrs. Johnson reports.

In addition to "black main streets," such as East Hargett Street, another feature of African American businesses during this period was their multiplicity. Population growth and increased segregation created an environment where many small businesses were located within African American neighborhoods. For example, Raleigh's grocery stores were once clustered downtown on Wilmington Street, but gradually moved onto neighborhood street corners where they were often joined by barber shops and other small concerns. By the mid-1920s, Raleigh had fifty groceries, but only two of these were located downtown.⁹⁵

Growing up in Oberlin during the 1920s and 1930s, Claudia Morgan Johnson recalled that the community had "lots of little neighborhood stores" that were especially popular among the children. While most families in Oberlin raised their own hogs, chickens, and vegetable gardens, the community stores sold staple products like flour along with treats such as candy.⁹⁶ Small grocery shops located in Oberlin during the 1930s included Height's store at 1213 Oberlin Road (c.1929), Rosa Morgan's store at 1011 Oberlin Road (c.1930), Annie Hester's grocery at 1212 Oberlin Road (c.1935). Other community commercial endeavors included Shepard's meat market on Oberlin, Claude Haywood's blacksmith shop, and Curtis' Barber Shop on Oberlin Road (c.1935).⁹⁷

The development of Oberlin was such that by 1914 the Sanborn maps of Raleigh illustrated a village that was spread out along Oberlin Road between Stafford Avenue (then First

⁹⁴Ibid., 22.

⁹⁵Mattson, 29.

⁹⁶Simmons-Henry and Edmisten, 22.

⁹⁷Virginia Morgan Blount in Simmons-Henry, 18-19 and *Raleigh City Directory*, 1929, 1930, and 1935.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section number E Page 22

Historic and Architectural Resources of Oberlin, Wake County, North Carolina, 1865 - 1952

Street) north to the Oberlin School and the Wilson Temple United Methodist Church. The village's dwellings also extended west of Oberlin Road to Fairgrounds Avenue (now Chamberlain Street). The concentration of houses was particularly strong between Oberlin School and Fourth Street (now Roberts Street). By the publication of the 1949 Sanborn map, the village had extended westward to Rosemont Avenue and Latta Street.⁹⁸ This westward expansion was made possible by the purchase of additional lands (once owned by Rev. Latta and James Dodd) by several individuals and companies such as Parker-Hunter Realty Company and the Enterprise Real Estate Company.⁹⁹

The community of Oberlin was highly respected by white and black Raleigh citizens. Community members took a great deal of pride in their reputation. Rose Morgan Goode, who grew up in Oberlin during the 1930s and 1940s, recalled that "Among the black communities in Raleigh, we were different and very much respected. All the girls wanted to go with Oberlin fellows."¹⁰⁰ When Tulia Turner arrived in 1923 she believed "Oberlin was a fine community - one of the finest in Raleigh at that time. Oberlin had doctors, lawyers, teachers, nurses, and others," she continued, "it was an educated community."¹⁰¹

The educated middle class in Oberlin had evolved early in the community's history and was indicated by factors such as the high rate of home ownership. The education of the community members is also indicated in the historical record. In 1900, for example, the Wake County Tax Lists show that both Rev. P.T. Hall and Rev. M.L. Latta owned libraries valued at \$25 and \$20 respectively.¹⁰² Furthermore, a number of prominent African Americans hailed from Oberlin. Oberlin native, Frank J. Flagg, reports Oberlin's finest included: Hampton Smith, a lawyer; Professor Roberts, a professor at Shaw University; Dr. James E. Shepard, who founded

⁹⁸"Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps for Raleigh, North Carolina," 1914 and 1927 as updated through 1949.

⁹⁹Briggs.

¹⁰⁰Melinda Ruley, "Freedom Road," *The Independent Weekly*, 28 February 1996, 11.

¹⁰¹Tulia Turner in Simmons-Henry and Edmisten, 32.

¹⁰²Wake County Tax Lists.

**United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service**

**National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet**

Section number E Page 23

Historic and Architectural Resources of Oberlin, Wake County, North Carolina, 1865 - 1952

North Carolina Central University in Durham; and Professor Theodore Williams, who became principal of Oberlin School.¹⁰³

Pride in their community was derived from the village's middle-class status and prominent sons and daughters as well as the children growing up in the community. As in most close-knit communities, a strong emphasis was placed on children in Oberlin, both in terms of their education as well as their upbringing. Delores B. Wilder grew up in Oberlin and had this to say about the village. "I remember a close-knit community. We were watched by other people in the neighborhood and probably taken care of by most people in the neighborhood."

The city directories from the early twentieth century gives a broad picture of the people living in Oberlin. In 1925, for example, two domestics, a cook, and a tailor were all found living near each other on Oberlin Road.¹⁰⁴ By 1935, several additional streets appeared, including Barker, which was home to a domestic, a janitor, and a laborer. On Chamberlain Street, St. Augustine's College and the State School for the Blind and Deaf gave employment to a laundryman and a cook. In addition to laborers, there were several in the community who worked as tradesmen. John Flagg, who resided on Parker Street was a bricklayer and Thomas Cannon of 1303 Oberlin Road was a carpenter. There were also merchants, such as Grandison Turner, Jr., who was a grocer. Professionals in the neighborhood in 1935 included Dr. Peter F. Roberts, a physician and Rosabelle E. Manly, principal of Oberlin Graded School.¹⁰⁵

On Oberlin Road in 1945 one could find a stonemason, a barber, and a postal carrier. Everett Street was home to a carpenter, a janitor, a yardman, and an orderly at Rex Hospital. There were several porters living in Oberlin and unlike 1935, almost no men were listed as laborers. Women tended to be listed as maids or domestics, while the traditional employment as laundresses had faded.¹⁰⁶ These numbers reflect the trends of North Carolina's African American communities during the early to mid-twentieth century. By 1940, one-quarter of the African Americans not working on farms were employed in personal or domestic service and only

¹⁰³Interview with Frank J. Flagg in Simmons-Henry and Edmisten, 34.

¹⁰⁴*Raleigh City Directory*, 1925.

¹⁰⁵*Raleigh City Directory*, 1935.

¹⁰⁶*Raleigh City Directory*, 1945.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section number E Page 24

Historic and Architectural Resources of Oberlin, Wake County, North Carolina, 1865 - 1952

slightly more than four-and-a-half percent of non-agrarian blacks belonged to the professional classes.¹⁰⁷

The continued growth of Oberlin during the 1910s was aided by the convenient transportation alluded to by Reverend Latta. By 1912, streetcar service was available both on Hillsborough Street and at Glenwood Avenue. The roads in Oberlin were typical of the era, however. Virginia Morgan Blount, born in Oberlin in 1912, remembered, "We would play ball in the middle of the street because there was no traffic - just red, red mud."¹⁰⁸ About 1938, public transportation was improved with the initiation of the city bus line down Oberlin Road. The bus line made going "uptown" to Hargett Street to shop even easier. The city improvements, such as the bus line and the improvements in the roads that made bus service possible, as well as the installation of city sewer lines in 1924, came after Oberlin was annexed by the City of Raleigh in 1922.¹⁰⁹

The 1922 annexation of Oberlin by Raleigh proved to be an unfortunate occurrence for the village despite the added city services. The increased tax levies became a heavy burden for citizens who had been struggling to gain an economic foothold. Just as Latta University had fallen victim to harder times, the citizens of Oberlin faced serious economic problems during the Depression. The Willis M. Graves house, for example, was lost by his heirs and sold at auction in 1934.¹¹⁰

During the 1940s, the all-black suburbs of Battery Heights and College Park did develop, but most African Americans were confined to their "long-held wards and neighborhoods" by enduring discrimination.¹¹¹ Oberlin, as it became increasingly surrounded by new, white development, continued to maintain its African American, residential character. Yet, changes for the community were on the horizon.

In 1948, Oberlin was described by reporter Willis Briggs as a twelve-block village with two churches, a public school, cemetery, a meeting hall used by the Daughters of Oberlin, and

¹⁰⁷Crow, et al, 120.

¹⁰⁸Ruley, 10.

¹⁰⁹Hallman, 19.

¹¹⁰Wake County deed book 743, page 265, microfilm.

¹¹¹Mattson, "Evolution," 31.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section number E Page 25

Historic and Architectural Resources of Oberlin, Wake County, North Carolina, 1865 - 1952

about 175 homes with an estimated 1,000 residents. The village was surrounded by fashionable white subdivisions such as Fairmont to the south, Forest Hills to the southwest, and Forty Acres to the north, as well as being located within two miles of the early twentieth century suburbs in the Five Points area.¹¹²

THE IMPACT OF THE CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT AND URBAN RENEWAL, 1950 - 2002

While it is not known to what extent the youth of Oberlin moved north during the mid-twentieth century, it is certain that there was at least some degree of northern migration.¹¹³ Known as the Great Migration, the movement of African Americans from the South to northern cities began as early as World War I and continued through the 1950s. Low wages, poor schools, and discrimination in the courts and in daily life were some of the reasons that pushed relatively well- educated citizens, such as those of Oberlin, northward. Poor housing and unfair treatment from landlords were important factors for the movement of poorer southern blacks. Concentrating in the Northeast, the number of African American North Carolinians moving north reached 222,000 between 1930 and 1950.¹¹⁴ Raleigh's African American migrants tended to move to Washington, D.C. and Baltimore, Maryland.¹¹⁵

In many ways the migration was closely tied to the Civil Rights movement. Unable to endure racism any longer, young African Americans moved north in the hopes of finding lives free of injustice. Other citizens took a stand for their rights at home - even in Oberlin. Joe Holt, Jr. and his family took on a legal fight between 1956 and 1960 to allow him to attend Needham Broughton High School. The case was held up in court until after his graduation and eventually lost due to a technicality. The suit was the first attempt to desegregate the Raleigh public schools, however, and played an important role in Oberlin's social history.

Always maintaining a positive reputation among whites, the Holt's neighbors in Oberlin were afraid of the consequences of the desegregation efforts. "People knew their jobs depended

¹¹²Briggs.

¹¹³Mattson, "The Evolution of Raleigh's African-American Neighborhoods," 32.

¹¹⁴Crow, et al, 130-131.

¹¹⁵Mattson, "Evolution," 32.

**United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service**

**National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet**

Section number E Page 26

Historic and Architectural Resources of Oberlin, Wake County, North Carolina, 1865 - 1952

on remaining in good graces with their employers,” recalled Joe Holt, Jr.¹¹⁶ Tensions ran high in Oberlin as residents and dwellings near the Holt house on Oberlin Road received attacks by rotten fruits, vegetables, and eggs. Some members of the community began to back away from the family when the attacks escalated to bomb threats. Others, notably the Methodist church and its congregation, banded together to protect the family by setting up watch shifts at the Holt residence and working to collect money to help the family after Mr. Holt lost his job.¹¹⁷

Just as the Holt law suit was part on an increasing national battle for equality and civil rights, the African American community in Raleigh became increasingly effected by national government policy and ideals. The decline that began during the Depression was exacerbated by the population increase in the city at the onset of World War II. The completion in 1940 of Chavis Heights, a federal housing project in southeastern Raleigh, aimed at relieving the situation, but instead hastened the decline of African American residential neighborhoods by encouraging large-scale commercial and office activity into historically residential black areas.¹¹⁸ Urban renewal, which Chavis Heights heralded, culminated in highway construction during the 1950s and 1960s that cut across the southern and northern sides of Raleigh as well as through Oberlin. The Oberlin Road overpass spanning Wade Avenue resulted in the demolition of several homes in the late 1950s and split the community in two. Cameron Village shopping center was completed about 1950 on what had been known as Cameron Woods, an undeveloped buffer between Oberlin and the urban center to the southeast.¹¹⁹

By the late twentieth century, many descendants of the founding families have moved away as the village became less desirable with increased traffic and as commercial and office buildings disrupted its residential character. By 1983, only seventy-five families remained within the traditional boundaries of Oberlin.¹²⁰ Today, only a handful of elderly descendants of the original families remain.

¹¹⁶Ruley, 10-11.

¹¹⁷Peebles, 102-103.

¹¹⁸“East Raleigh - South Park,” 8.16.

¹¹⁹Mattson, “The Evolution of Raleigh’s African-American Neighborhoods,” 33 and Freedom Road.

¹²⁰Ruley, 11.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section number E Page 27

Historic and Architectural Resources of Oberlin, Wake County, North Carolina, 1865 - 1952

Since the village gradually ceased to grow and finally began to decline in the 1960s, it leaves no clear historical end point. Not being associated with a clear event, but rather the development over time as an African American freedman's village and later as a middle and working class African American neighborhood in the early twentieth century, Oberlin lacks a definite end to its significance. Thus, it is appropriate to utilize the standard fifty-year rule and assign 1952 as the end of the multiple property listing's period of significance.

**United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service**

**National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet**

Section number F Page 28

Historic and Architectural Resources of Oberlin, Wake County, North Carolina, 1865 - 1952

ASSOCIATED PROPERTY TYPES

Residential Buildings

Description

Of the approximately 150 buildings surveyed in Oberlin in 1989 and 1991, nearly sixty percent were constructed between the late nineteenth century and 1952. Resources dating from the late nineteenth century are primarily one-story, side-gable, frame cottages with minimal Queen Anne or classical references such as small, central gables marking the central entrance, full-width porches with turned posts, and occasionally, sawn brackets. The cottages are single-pile, but almost always have rear ells or other rear additions. This particular type is often referred to as Triple A cottages. Other typical features include two-over-two sash windows and round attic vents. The most elaborate example of this house type is the Rev. Plummer T. Hall House (c.1880) at 814 Oberlin Road, which features a gazebo porch terminus. The house at 2212 Everett Avenue, though less elaborate than the Hall House, includes some of the same decorative elements such as quatrefoil attic vents and gable returns. Common changes to houses of this type include aluminum or vinyl siding and porches that have been altered, removed, or enclosed. The most prevalent alteration is the replacement of the original porch posts with late-twentieth century, cast-iron supports or with plain wood posts. Replacement windows and doors are also frequent.

Similar to, though more substantial than the cottages, are a few examples of late-nineteenth or very early twentieth-century, two-story houses. These dwellings have details and alterations similar to the cottages although there are a few more elaborate Queen Anne dwellings such as the Turner House (c.1889) located at 1002 Oberlin Road and the circa 1884 Willis M. Graves House (802 Oberlin Road). The Turner House, for example, has a double-tier porch, while the Graves House features decorative shingles and a corner tower. Most of the additional two-story houses in the neighborhood are triple-A I-houses, such as that located at 1015 Oberlin Road (c.1890), but one notable exception is the circa 1900 house at 2303 Everett Avenue. The two-bay, side passage house has a hip roof porch and is similar to houses common among urban African American communities such as that of Wilmington.

The interiors of the late-nineteenth century houses represent two modes. First, exemplified by the Latta House and the remaining historic fabric of the Hall House, is the use of extremely simple interior finishes. Wood floors, a mixture of door styles, and simple door and window surrounds are typical. In contrast are the interiors of the Turner House and the Graves House. Here fashionable, molded mill work can be found. The use of fancy fireplace surrounds in the public spaces of the house such as the parlor is also present. These surrounds are often finished in dark tones and have classical columns, pilasters, double mantle shelves, and mirrors.

**United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service**

**National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet**

Section number F Page 29

Historic and Architectural Resources of Oberlin, Wake County, North Carolina, 1865 - 1952

In the case of the Turner House the mantels were added around 1900. Beadboard wainscoting is also used in these houses. Yet, despite the fashionable interior finishes in the parlors and dining room, the Turner and Graves houses have much simpler finishes in private spaces such as rear first floor rooms and the upstairs rooms. Mantels here feature single shelves supported by unadorned brackets. The houses also show a variety of door styles from various periods.

As a middle class neighborhood, houses in Oberlin generally followed popular architectural styles of their time. Thus, by the late 1910s the pyramidal cottage had become relatively common. An especially elaborate example (c.1910) is located at 2209 Everett Avenue and features a wrap-around porch with Tuscan columns. More typical, however, are the houses located at 601 and 613 Rosemont Avenue, both of which date from around 1915. These dwellings feature full-width, hip roof porches, central entries, and hip-roofed dormers.

The growth of Oberlin during the 1910s and 1920s is clear from the existing architectural resources. Of the 150 properties surveyed fifty-six were constructed between about 1910 and about 1930. Continuing to illustrate prevalent architectural trends, nearly half of these buildings are bungalows. The vast majority of the existing bungalows are frame. Most are one or one-and-a-half story, side gable buildings with a central, shed dormer and an engaged porch. Those without vinyl siding have German siding or weatherboards, although one (located at 2311 Bedford Avenue and dating from about 1930) is constructed of rusticated concrete block. Most of the bungalows demonstrate modest Craftsman details such as knee braces and six- or three-over-one windows. The 1000 Block of Parker Street has an excellent collection of 1910s and 1920s bungalows with details such as shed and gabled dormers and battered columns on brick piers as well as plain porch supports. Overall, the bungalows in Oberlin retain a greater degree of integrity than the late-nineteenth century cottages. Common alterations, however, include replacement siding and replacement windows. Several of these houses are in a state of disrepair.

While almost no construction occurred during the Great Depression, by the early 1940s and after especially after 1945, new houses were once again appearing in Oberlin. The appearance of postwar housing in Oberlin is important because it illustrates that the village was continuing to grow and evolve as a residential neighborhood at least through the mid-1950s. Roughly twenty-five percent of the pre-1952 housing stock in Oberlin dates from the c.1940 - 1952 period, indicating that the new residential construction was a significant part of Oberlin's development. Of the houses dating from c.1940 through 1952, perhaps one-quarter are described as Cape Cod; the remainder are Minimal Traditional or in some cases evading stylistic definition altogether.

The examples of the Cape Cod style dating from the postwar era have extremely simple Colonial Revival features, however, their massing is characterized by a central entrance and side gable roof with two or three dormers. One of the more elaborate examples is located at 718

**United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service**

**National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet**

Section number F Page 30

Historic and Architectural Resources of Oberlin, Wake County, North Carolina, 1865 - 1952

Rosemont Avenue. Dating from about 1951, this one-and-a-half-story, brick house has a small wing on each end, a central entry with gabled stoop, and two gabled dormers on the side gabled main roof.

The one-story Minimal Traditional houses in Oberlin are predominately brick with a few frame examples. Most have double-hung sash windows, but a few have metal casement windows. Vinyl siding is the most common alteration. One of the best examples of a Minimal Traditional house is the side gable, three-bay, circa 1952 house located at 1027 Oberlin Road. This dwelling has brick veneer and a small, gabled, entry porch. Similarly, 1328 Oberlin Road, also c.1952, has a side gable roof and a projecting gable bay. A side porch or carport has been enclosed on one end.

Less than five dwellings were documented that have Tudor or Period Cottage stylistic influences. One of these however, 2401 Everett Avenue (c.1947), is particularly well-articulated. This one-story, brick house has an asymmetrical, gabled entry pavilion with diamond-light window and a large facade chimney. Another, 614 Tower Street, which appears to date from around 1945, is interesting because it is constructed of smooth concrete block, but has a large brick chimney on its facade.

After about 1955, new houses being constructed in Oberlin decline rapidly, but include a few Ranch (late 1950s and 1960s), split-level (1960s), and simple gable front buildings (from the 1980s). These dwellings constitute less than one-quarter of the existing housing stock in the neighborhood.

Another facet of Oberlin's residential architecture is multi-family units. There are approximately ten apartment complexes or single apartment buildings. The majority of these are four to six units and are typically one story. Historic apartment buildings began appearing during the World War II period. The building at 1003-1009 Oberlin Road (c. 1942) is frame and exhibits strong Minimal Traditional traits such as its low, one-story appearance and its simple, gabled, entry porches for each unit. Most apartment buildings are constructed of brick or concrete block and date from the mid-1950s through the 1970s. Two-story examples date from the 1980s and 2001 (under construction).

Significance

The overwhelming majority of the historic resources in Oberlin are residential buildings, and they may qualify for listing in the National Register under Criteria A, B, or C in the areas of ethnic heritage, social history, religion, education, or architecture. Closely associated with the

**United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service**

**National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet**

Section number F Page 31

Historic and Architectural Resources of Oberlin, Wake County, North Carolina, 1865 - 1952

culture, economic means, and values of the populations they house, residential buildings in Oberlin reflect the development of Oberlin as a community of working class African Americans who were often able to own their own homes. Relatively heterogenous in its social fabric, Oberlin was also home to several African Americans of notable economic wherewithal as well as leaders active in the local institutions of the community and a few who were active in African American affairs on a broader level.

The earliest extant houses in Oberlin date from the 1880s and 1890s. These dwellings represent the development of Oberlin as a working class community with a significant number of owner-occupied houses. The one-story cottages of these citizens represent the economic and social standing of their owners in their small scale and simple architectural details. In contrast, are a small number of larger, two-story dwellings some of which have well-articulated Queen Anne and Colonial Revival details. These larger houses generally belonged to members of the middle class that developed in Oberlin during the last years of the nineteenth century and into the early twentieth century. The two-story dwellings reflect the prominent status and financial success of some of the community's early landowners and institutional leaders. These residential buildings, large and small, represent the development patterns in Oberlin and are significant under Criterion A for ethnic heritage. Furthermore, the residences of important individuals associated with the community's initial development, its religious and educational institutions, as well as with the continued prosperity of Oberlin may qualify for listing under Criterion B.

The residential buildings in Oberlin are locally significant under Criterion C because they represent the range of house types and styles that were once common in the neighborhood. Examples of vernacular and popular interpretations of Queen Anne stylistic motifs from the late nineteenth century are mixed with bungalows from the early twentieth century as well as later Minimal Traditional dwellings. The prevalence of 1920s bungalows, and postwar era Minimal Traditional and Cape Cod houses, illustrates that Oberlin was a community that continued to be in touch with current fashion and was home to many people who had the financial means to include modern stylistic references in their new homes. Yet, the simplistic and vernacular quality of many of the dwellings, especially in post-1930 houses, also suggests that the community's financial capabilities had limits.

Registration Requirements

In order to qualify for listing under Criterion A in the area of ethnic heritage or social history, residential properties must be important representations of the historical development of Oberlin. The Willis Graves House at 802 Oberlin Road dates from about 1884 and is a good example of a property that is significant as a symbol of the financial and social success that was

**United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service**

**National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet**

Section number F Page 32

Historic and Architectural Resources of Oberlin, Wake County, North Carolina, 1865 - 1952

attained by some residents of Oberlin. The interior of the Graves House is intact and bolsters the house's integrity since it illustrates the fashionable appointments that were desired by and available to Willis Graves. At the opposite end of the spectrum, properties representing the smaller dwellings of Oberlin's working class around 1900 have become rare. Potentially eligible examples include the tri-gable cottages at 1031 Oberlin Road and 2207 Roberts Street. Examples of bungalows, which housed the growing working class in Oberlin between about 1915 and 1930, are more numerous. Two 1920s bungalows that retain a high level of integrity are located at 1004 and 1007 Parker Street.

To qualify under Criterion B, residential properties must have a direct association with an individual important in Oberlin's history. The best example of this scenario is the Reverend M.L. Latta House. The house dates from about 1905. Latta was the founder of Latta University, an African American educational institution in Oberlin.

To qualify under Criterion C, residential properties must be intact examples of the important architectural styles and house types built during the period of significance from 1865 to 1952. Houses that retain the necessary level of integrity for Criterion C, are relatively rare, especially from Oberlin's development around the turn of the twentieth century. Two important examples are the Turner House (c.1889) and the Rev. Latta House. The Turner House is an extremely well-preserved I-house ornamented with a double-tier porch and modest, classical and Queen Anne references. The Latta House, also exhibits the Queen Anne style in its complex form and has notable classical influences as well. Intact interiors enhance the level of integrity at properties such as the Turner House.

To qualify for registration under Criterion A or B it is particularly important that the property retain its integrity of location, setting, and feeling in order to convey its character during the historical development in Oberlin (1865-1952) or in the case of B, its appearance during its association with the important historical person. Thus, dwellings with modest alterations such as rear additions, porch alterations, replacement siding, or interior modifications are considered eligible if the overall historic form of the building remains evident. Under Criterion C, the level of integrity is raised since it must maintain its integrity of design. Replacement siding or the removal of most of its original stylistic features will render the property ineligible. Because of the rarity of resources eligible under this criterion, modest alterations to the interior of the house will be not preclude its inclusion on the National Register.

Commercial Buildings

Description

**United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service**

**National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet**

Section number F Page 33

Historic and Architectural Resources of Oberlin, Wake County, North Carolina, 1865 - 1952

Only one commercial building in Oberlin dates prior to 1952. Currently the Community Grocery, this building, located at 901 Oberlin Road, dates from between 1925 and 1930 according to the *Raleigh City Directory*. The earliest reference to the building in the directory gives its use as "soft drinks." Presumably the building was a soda shop and by 1941 the building was occupied by Herman Starling, a confectioner. The 1947 directory lists the building as James Goodson's grocery and by 1952 it housed the Community Grocery. The one-story, frame building has a front gable roof and originally had a hip-roofed porch that has since been enclosed. The building is sheathed in vinyl siding and the original front wall of the storefront has been removed.

Significance

The Community Grocery is the only remaining example of a small-scale, corner grocery, which were once common in Oberlin and other African American communities. In fact, as many as three different groceries existed along Oberlin Road during the 1930s. The building's original use as a soda shop or confectionary is unusual among Oberlin's shops and represents a specialized food establishment. That such a business could be supported in Oberlin is indicative of the economic means of the community by the 1930s. Furthermore, the building's use as a corner grocery by 1941 illustrates the dominant aspect of Oberlin's commercial activity. The Community Grocery may be eligible to the National Register under Criterion A in the area of commerce. Under Criterion A it must be shown that the building illustrates the importance of corner groceries and shops to the understanding of Oberlin's historical development.

Registration Requirements

The Community Grocery may meet the requirements for listing on the National Register because of its status as the only example of a historic, commercial building in Oberlin. The building is quite simple and its overall form is most important in judging the integrity of the building. However, the integrity of the Community Grocery is adversely impacted by the enclosure of the front porch and the removal of part of the front wall underneath the original porch. These items and other modifications such as the vinyl siding are not irreversible, however, and their correction could significantly improve the integrity of the building. The interior of the building has not been recently surveyed and the existence of original features inside the building would improve its level of integrity. Considerations that must be made when judging the eligibility of this building are its rarity and the frequency of alterations to storefronts among commercial buildings of all types.

**United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service**

**National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet**

Section number F Page 34

Historic and Architectural Resources of Oberlin, Wake County, North Carolina, 1865 - 1952

Institutional Buildings

Description

There is only one institutional building in Oberlin dating prior to 1952. The Wilson Temple United Methodist Church (1025 Oberlin Road) is a brick, cross-gable, Gothic Revival structure with a large gothic arch window flanked by smaller gothic arch windows on each of its two principal facades. The entrance to the building is via the crenelated, corner, bell tower. The door itself is double-leaf and has a gothic arch transom. Other details include buttresses on the tower and corbeled hoods over each window. A large education wing was added in 1989 to the southwest corner (rear) of the building. The interior of the building features a T-plan, central space with the pulpit and choir loft as the focal point. Light oak pews encircle the sanctuary. Wilson Temple was founded in 1872, but may have been loosely organized as early as 1865. The church is named in honor of Wilson Morgan, a Wake County State Representative and minister who had donated the land for the church building. The present building was constructed in 1911 and replaced an earlier frame structure.

Significance

African American churches took the leading role in providing education and also served as the conduit for the neighborhood's social life. The Oberlin School was initiated by the Wilson Temple congregation around 1870. The church also provided Sunday School and ladies circles, which were important organizations in the social life of the community. Because of these strong attachments, and because of the strong ties of the church to the ethnic heritage of African Americans generally, Wilson Temple is highly significant to the Oberlin neighborhood and is eligible for the National Register under Criterion A for ethnic heritage, religion, and social history as the building represents the place of the church within the African American community and enlightens the understanding of the church's role in the development of Oberlin during the late-nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Architecturally, the church is significant as an excellent example of twentieth century Gothic Revival architecture in Oberlin. Thus, the church may also be eligible to the National Register under Criterion C as a representative example of the Gothic Revival style.

Registration Requirements

Wilson Temple United Methodist Church meets the requirements for listing on the National Register because as one of the most elaborate and architecturally significant buildings in the community. To be eligible under Criterion C, the church must be a good local

**United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service**

**National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet**

Section number F Page 35

Historic and Architectural Resources of Oberlin, Wake County, North Carolina, 1865 - 1952

representative example of twentieth century Gothic Revival design and retain integrity of design, materials, and craftsmanship. The integrity of the interior, which from c.1990 local designation report appears to be good, bolsters the integrity of the church's design. To be eligible under Criterion A the church must be shown to have had strong associations with the historic social and cultural life of Oberlin and help to illustrate what was uniquely African American about Oberlin. Under this criterion, the primary integrity issues will be the maintenance of its historic form and character and the integrity of location, setting, and feeling. These items are not negatively impacted by the modest alterations the church has undergone, nor by the more substantial rear addition.

Cemetery

Description

The only historic cemetery within Oberlin is the Oberlin Cemetery located in the rear of they YWCA at 1012 Oberlin Road. It is not clear whether the cemetery was begun for the Oberlin community or if it was the resting place of slaves or white farmers from an earlier period. The cemetery came into its most intensive use after 1872 with the establishment of Oberlin, however. The cemetery is located in a heavily wooded area. It includes approximately one hundred markers ranging from two, wooden markers to modern granite monuments and is believed to contain the graves of as many as five hundred people.¹²¹ The organization of the cemetery, typical of African American burial grounds, is ad hoc rather than formally designed with grave sites laid out without a distinct overall pattern. Individual family plots are scattered throughout the cemetery and represent small-scale design with the headstones being distinctly arranged within a plot often bordered by an edging of stone, brick, or concrete blocks. Some of the most recent graves in the cemetery are located in the Turner family plot adjacent to the YWCA's rear parking area.

According to Ruth Little who studied cemeteries of various types in her book *Sticks and Stones: Three Centuries of North Carolina Gravemarkers*, African American cemeteries are marked by an "informal and additive arrangement of family groups, with a high incidence of homemade concrete markers..." Furthermore, Little writes, that "African Americans frequently located their graveyards in overgrown woods or fields, apparently a deliberate practice relating to

¹²¹Hallman, 28, based on her survey of the cemetery.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section number F Page 36

Historic and Architectural Resources of Oberlin, Wake County, North Carolina, 1865 - 1952

traditional beliefs.”¹²² The Oberlin cemetery does retain some of its original wooded character, but the integrity of its landscape has been impacted by damage from Hurricane Fran in 1995 and subsequent clean-up efforts that have removed some mature trees and encouraged undergrowth.

Significance

The Oberlin community cemetery is eligible to the National Register under Criterion A for ethnic heritage and social history because it illustrates important aspects of Oberlin’s African American culture during the late-nineteenth and twentieth centuries and is an important part of the historical development of Oberlin. The oldest graves date from the last quarter of the nineteenth century (the period of Oberlin’s early development) and as such are among the oldest historic resources remaining in Oberlin. Additionally, many of the community’s oldest houses are no longer extant leaving the cemetery as the only place where many of the earliest families are represented. The cemetery is also eligible under Criterion C for its distinctive, ad hoc design, that is representative of African American cemeteries in North Carolina. The cemetery is also significant because of the unique grave markers it contains. The wooden markers are very rare and the many monuments hand-made from concrete are a feature of African American culture. Thus, the cemetery meets Criteria Consideration D because of its age, association with historical events, and distinctive design features.

Registration Requirements

In order to qualify for listing on the National Register under Criterion A, in the area of ethnic heritage or social history, the Oberlin cemetery must be shown to illustrate important cultural and social aspects of the historical development of Oberlin. Under Criterion C, the cemetery must illustrate the unique characteristics of African American cemeteries, as defined by Little. This cemetery, though altered by storm damage and “clean-up” efforts, retains a good degree of integrity because of the continued presence of a variety of purchased and home-made grave markers from the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries laid out in an ad hoc fashion with several defined family plots within a wooded landscape. These character-defining features make the cemetery’s ethnic associations recognizable. Furthermore, the presence of graves from the circa 1880 - circa 1915 period make the cemetery an important record of the early development in Oberlin.

¹²²M. Ruth Little, *Sticks and Stones: Three Centuries of North Carolina Gravemarkers* (Chapel Hill: UNC Press, 1998), 41.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section number G & H Page 37

Historic and Architectural Resources of Oberlin, Wake County, North Carolina, 1865 - 1952

GEOGRAPHIC AREA

The area covered by this multiple property listing lies along Oberlin Road from Park Drive in the south to Craig Street in the north (300 to 1400 Blocks of Oberlin Road). The area also includes development lying to the west of Oberlin Road. This area is roughly bounded by Everett Avenue on the south, Mayview Road to the north, and Latta Street on the west. While Oberlin grew in an organic and ad hoc manner creating a community without decisive boundaries, the above boundaries encompass most of the remaining historic resources of Oberlin and closely reflects the geographical area included in the community historically. This assertion is supported by the 1914 Sanborn map which indicates that the community was spread out along Oberlin Road between Stafford Avenue (then First Street) north to the Oberlin School and the Wilson Temple United Methodist Church (Mayview Road vicinity). The village's dwellings also extended west of Oberlin Road to Fairgrounds Avenue (now Chamberlain Street). In 1935, the *Raleigh City Directory* indicates that the area bounded by Van Dyke Avenue, Chamberlain Street, and Stafford Avenue were well-developed as was Oberlin Road from Park Drive northward beyond present-day Wade Avenue. By the publication of the 1949 Sanborn map, the village had extended westward to Rosemont Avenue and Latta Street.

SUMMARY OF IDENTIFICATION AND EVALUATION METHODS

The multiple property listing of historic and architectural resources in the Oberlin community (now encompassed by the City of Raleigh) in Wake County, North Carolina, is based upon a 1989 architectural resources inventory of African American resources in Raleigh conducted by Elliot Wright, Joyce Mitchell, Terri Myers, and Bruce Kalk with additional survey work from the 1991 comprehensive survey of Raleigh by Helen Ross. The boundaries of the Wright, et. al. survey encompassed most of the historic resources of Oberlin, bounded loosely by Park Drive, Oberlin Road, Wilshire Avenue, and Latta Street. The areas surveyed by the Wright team were determined by Rick Mattson's 1988 context report, "The Evolution of Raleigh's African-American Neighborhoods in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries" with more precise boundaries being determined by the Wright team during a reconnaissance phase of the survey. Ms. Ross, who surveyed all previously undocumented properties within Raleigh's beltline that were about 45 years old (in 1990), added a few houses along the northern part of Oberlin Road between Wilshire Avenue and Craig Street. The total number of properties covered by the 1989 and 1991 surveys is approximately 150. The architectural information gathered in these surveys was checked for overall accuracy during a 2001 windshield survey. Additionally, intensive field work was conducted on four properties proposed for listing on the National Register of Historic Places during the 2001 project undertaken by Sherry Joines Wyatt and Sarah A. Woodard of the firm David E. Gall, AIA, Architect. The field work was supplemented by architectural

**United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service**

**National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet**

Section number H Page 38

Historic and Architectural Resources of Oberlin, Wake County, North Carolina, 1865 - 1952

descriptions in local landmark designation reports (all dating from around 1990) for the four properties. This project was funded by a matching grant via the City of Raleigh and the North Carolina State Historic Preservation Office.

All of the historic resources are covered under the broad theme of historical development of Oberlin as a freedmen's village and its continued growth as an African American community into the mid-twentieth century. The period of significance for this multiple property listing begins c. 1865 with the earliest development of the community and ends in 1952 meeting the fifty year rule. The use of this rule is appropriate in Oberlin where the continued growth and development slowly declined during the 1950s and 1960s without a clear end point. Further, the community is significant for its representation of ethnic heritage, rather than a specific event with a clear beginning and ending. In addition to ethnic heritage, the historic resources of Oberlin are eligible to the National Register in the categories of social history, religion, education, and architecture as representatives of the developmental, cultural, and architectural trends within Oberlin.

The four properties nominated to the National Register during the 2001 project include the most architecturally elaborate 1880s and 1890s extant in the Oberlin community. Although the Turner House is eligible for its architectural characteristics, the other properties are significant for a variety of reasons. For example, the Latta House, is significant both for its architecture as well as for its associations with the founder of a local education institution and people significant to Oberlin's historical development. The Hall House, on the other hand is significant for its association with an early minister of the Oberlin Baptist Church and remains the only historic resource associated with this important Oberlin institution. Finally, the Willis M. Graves House is an important representation of the economic success found by some of Oberlin's residents and symbolizes the social status of its owner and his role in the development of this African American freedman's village.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section number I Page 39

Historic and Architectural Resources of Oberlin, Wake County, North Carolina, 1865 - 1952

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Briggs, Willis G. "Oberlin Village Emerged During Reconstruction." *The News and Observer*, 8 August 1948, 1(IV).

Brooks, Walter H. "Evolution of the Negro Baptist Church," in *The Journal of Negro History*, Vol. VII, Carter G. Woodson, ed., electronic version. Documenting the American South website, produced by University of North Carolina - Chapel Hill, <http://docsouth.unc.edu/>

Centennial Committee of Oberlin Baptist Church, *Centennial Anniversary, Oberlin Baptist Church, Raleigh, North Carolina, 1880 - 1980: Reflecting a Triumph of Blessings*. Raleigh: Oberlin Baptist Church, c.1980.

Crow, Jeffrey J., Paul D. Escott, and Flora J. Hatley. *A History of African Americans in North Carolina*. Raleigh: Division of Archives and History, 1992.

Hallman, Jennifer. "Why is Oberlin Valuable?, c. 2001," unpublished student report.

Hanchett, Thomas W. *Sorting Out the New South City*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998.

Hartzell, Joseph C. "Methodism and the Negro in the United States," in *The Journal of Negro History*, Vol. VIII. Carter G. Woodson, ed., electronic version. Documenting the American South website, produced by University of North Carolina - Chapel Hill, <http://docsouth.unc.edu/> .

Larson, Karl. *A Separate Reality: The Development of Racial Segregation in Raleigh, North Carolina, 1865 - 1915*. Unpublished Masters Thesis, University of North Carolina at Greensboro, 1983.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section number H Page 40

Historic and Architectural Resources of Oberlin, Wake County, North Carolina, 1865 - 1952

Latta, Reverend Morgan L. *The History of my Life and Work*, 1903, electronic version. Documenting the American South website, produced by University of North Carolina - Chapel Hill, <http://docsouth.unc.edu/> .

Little, Ruth. *Sticks and Stones: Three Centuries of North Carolina Gravemarkers*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998.

Maffly-Kipp, Laurie F. "An Introduction to the Church in the Southern Black Community, 2001," electronic version. Documenting the American South website, produced by University of North Carolina - Chapel Hill, <http://docsouth.unc.edu/> .

Mattson, Richard. "East Wilson Historic District, 1987." National Register Nomination. Raleigh: North Carolina State Historic Preservation Office.

Mattson, Richard. "The Evolution of Raleigh's African-American Neighborhoods in the 19th and 20th Centuries." Raleigh: North Carolina State Historic Preservation Office.

Mobley, Joe A. *James City: a Black Community in North Carolina*. Raleigh: North Carolina Dept. of Cultural Resources, 1981.

Murray, Elizabeth Reid. *Wake: Capital County of North Carolina*, Vol. 1. Raleigh: Capital County Publishing Co., 1983.

Melinda Ruley. "Freedom Road," *The Independent Weekly*, 28 February 1996, 11.

Wilma Cecelia Peebles, "School Desegregation in Raleigh, North Carolina, 1954 - 1964." Ph.D. dissertation, University of North Carolina, 1984.

Raleigh City Directory, 1880 - 1980.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section number I Page 41

Historic and Architectural Resources of Oberlin, Wake County, North Carolina, 1865 - 1952

Raleigh Historic Districts Commission. "Raleigh Historic Landmark Designation Application and Report for the Willis Graves House, 1993." Raleigh Historic Districts Commission.

Raleigh Historic Districts Commission. "Raleigh Historic Landmark Designation Application and Report for the Plummer t. Hall House, 1993." Raleigh Historic Districts Commission.

Raleigh Historic Districts Commission. "Raleigh Historic Landmark Designation Application and Report for the Rev. M.L. Latta House, 1993." Raleigh Historic Districts Commission.

Raleigh Historic Districts Commission. "Wake County Historic Property Designation Form for the John and Mary Turner House, 1996." Raleigh Historic Districts Commission.

Ross, Helen Patricia. "Raleigh Comprehensive Architectural Survey Final Report, 1992." Raleigh: North Carolina State Historic Preservation Office.

"Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps for Raleigh, North Carolina," 1914 and 1927 as updated through 1939.

Simmons-Henry, Linda and Linda Harris Edmisten. *Culture Town: Life in Raleigh's African American Communities*. Raleigh: Raleigh Historic Districts Commission, 1993.

Stolpen, Steven. *Raleigh: A Pictorial History*. Norfolk: Donning Company, 1977.

Vickers, James. *Raleigh: City of Oaks*. Woodland Hills, CA: Windsor Publications, Inc., 1982.

Wake County Deeds.

Wake County Grantee Index.

**United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service**

**National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet**

Section number I Page 42

Historic and Architectural Resources of Oberlin, Wake County, North Carolina, 1865 - 1952

Willam S. Powell, ed., *Dictionary of North Carolina Biography*, Vol. 3. Chapel Hill, 1988.

Wilson Temple United Methodist Church, *Wilson Temple United Methodist Church Centennial, 1872 - 1972: Facing the Challenges of the Next Century*. Raleigh: Wilson Temple United Methodist Church, c.1972.

Wright, Elliott K., Joyce Mitchell, Bruce Kalk, and Terri Myers. "East Raleigh - South Park Historic District, 1990." National Register Nomination. Raleigh: North Carolina State Historic Preservation Office.