**North Jackson Ward**

Richmond’s Jackson Ward neighborhood is one of the nation’s most important centers of Black culture. Jackson Ward’s geographic boundaries are generally considered to be Broad Street to the south, Belvidere Street to the west and the ravine of Bacon’s Quarter Branch to the north and east, but these boundaries have been altered physically and legally over the years, most notably by the construction of Interstate 64/95, which separated the northern portion of Jackson Ward from the southern part of the neighborhood.

In 1793 and 1810, the land comprising the larger Jackson Ward neighborhood was annexed by the City of Richmond from Henrico County. At first sparsely inhabited, as the neighborhood developed in the first few decades of the 19th century, it was populated by citizens of German and Jewish extraction, but also with some free Blacks. In 1871, a new sixth voting ward was created and named Jackson Ward, with boundaries drawn to include a majority of Richmond’s black population. As the percentage of Jackson Ward’s Black population increased, it became one of the most vibrant Black cultural and business communities in the United States, known as the “Harlem of the South” by the turn of the 20th century. Jackson Ward’s fraternal organizations, banks, insurance companies, and other institutions, all founded and run by Blacks, provided a locus of commercial activity, while social and cultural life centered around the neighborhood’s churches, theaters, hotels, clubs and restaurants.

Jackson Ward remained vibrant until interstate highway construction in the 1950s split the neighborhood into southern and northern halves. Most of the neighborhood located south of the interstate highway was listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1976 as the Jackson Ward Historic District and, in 1978, was designated a National Historic Landmark. These historic designations recognized Jackson Ward’s value to Richmond and the nation for its remarkable architecture and as one of the nation’s most important centers of African American culture. The Jackson Ward Historic District is among the nation’s largest historic districts associated primarily with Black culture. The architecture of the Jackson Ward Historic District south of the interstate highway is dominated by three bay, side passage town houses in various styles. Many have locally manufactured cast iron porches, and the neighborhood reflects the state’s richest display of ornamental ironwork. Its period of significance spans from 1800 through the Civil Rights Era.

The portion of Jackson Ward north of the interstate highway is equally rich in African American history and culture, but retains little historic architectural fabric. Homes in North Jackson Ward were typically more humble and less ornate than those in the southern portion. Many of North Jackson Ward’s homes were constructed of wood, with relatively few homes constructed of more durable masonry. The area developed piecemeal but was fully built out by 1905. See Figure 1.

This discussion focuses on a study area of four blocks in North Jackson Ward bounded by Shockoe Hill Cemetery to the north, N. 4th Street to the east, Baker Street to the south, and N. 2nd Street to the west, as shown in Figure 2 below.
Figure 1. Density in project area by 1905. Sanborn Maps and Publishing Company, Insurance Maps of Richmond, VA, 1905.

Figure 2. North Jackson Ward Study Area (outlined in blue).
**Early Development of North Jackson Ward**

Richmond’s irregular terrain, with ravines and gullies, shaped its early development. In Richmond’s early years, the area of town north of Clay Street was isolated by a gully, separating the area to the north and slowing development. Germans, Jews, and free Blacks settled in the area in the early 19th century. The area between N. 2nd Street and N. 4th Street, from Cave Street to Bates Street, was identified on the 1835 Bates map as J.H. Judah’s Addition. (Figure 3)

![Figure 3. 1835 Bates Map, (North Jackson Ward Study Area outlined in blue).](image)

In 1799, the City of Richmond purchased 28.5 acres of land at the northern end of N. 3rd Street for construction of an Almshouse for the poor. The City Council minutes no long exist and it is not known why this area was selected. Around 1814, the City established three cemeteries nearby. Shockoe Hill Cemetery became the burying ground for the City’s white population and, in 1850, it was enclosed by a brick wall. In 1814, a group of free Blacks petitioned City Council for a burying ground, one acre for free people of color and one for slaves, and this cemetery was located at the northeast corner of N. 5th and Hospital Streets. Two years later, a Hebrew Cemetery was established north of Shockoe Hill Cemetery.

Eventually, extensive regrading of the terrain filled ravines, cut off the knolls, graded the streets, and transformed foot paths into carriage paths. This work created better connections between this area and the rest of the city, facilitating the neighborhood’s further development.

In 1851, Increase Plant divided the land on N. 3rd and N. 4th Streets, north of Jackson Street, into lots and sold them. Many of the houses located in the “Plant Plan” were frame. Nearly all the homes were built by Germans as investments, and then either rented or purchased by Blacks, many of whom were mechanics and small tradesmen. By 1879, the population of N. 3rd Street from Shockoe Cemetery to Jackson Street was entirely Black.
In 1854, N. 3rd Street was regraded. As a result, many houses built before the regrading appear to sit on tall basements. The house located at 1000 N. 3rd Street, which had been built only a few years earlier in 1851, collapsed when the road was regraded. Its owner, John Lohman, a contractor, erected a new house in 1854. Diagonally across from this house, at 301 Preston Street, was another brick house built by Eberhard Lohman, also a contractor. This house originally had a step gabled roof, and was later altered to add a third story and a wood frame wing to the rear to serve as quarters for the enslaved workers. (Figure 4) This wood frame structure was the birthplace of Bill “Bojangles” Robinson in 1878.13

At the western edge of the study area lies N. 2nd Street, the primary connector between the northern and southern portions of Jackson Ward. Until the 1840s, N. 2nd Street was the only passable route of travel from the city center to the almshouse and cemeteries in North Jackson Ward. During this period, it served as both a commercial and residential corridor. Many buildings along N. 2nd Street had stores or other commercial establishments on the first floor and residences above.14 To the west of N. 2nd Street was the area originally known as Little Africa and later as “Postletown” because its streets - St. James, St. Paul, St. John, and St. Peter - were named for the Apostles.15
At the eastern end of the study area lay a neighborhood known as Navy Hill. In 1816, Wright Southgate’s farm was first advertised for development. While this development was not successful and its proposed monument to “our Naval Heroes” of the War of 1812 was not built, subsequent developments assumed its name. In 1854, this farm was laid out in lots between N. 6th Street on the east, N. 3rd Street on the west, and Jackson Street to the south, and subsequently developed.16

**Development After the Civil War**

Jackson Ward was first established as political voting ward in 1871. Its boundaries were the City’s corporate limits to the north, east and west, and an irregular boundary to the south that generally followed along Leigh Street, Jackson Street, and even Broad Street at the southeast corner. (Figure 5) In 1903, Jackson Ward was abolished as a separate voting district, but the name continued to be used to describe the neighborhood where much of Richmond’s Black population was concentrated.17 Today, the area north of the interstate highway is known as North Jackson Ward, while the area south of the highway extending south to Broad Street is recognized simply as “Jackson Ward.”

![Figure 5. Jackson Ward as a political ward outlined in red. Beers map, 1877.](image)

By the end of the 19th century, nearly every lot in the larger Jackson Ward neighborhood had been developed and the area was densely populated. In the mid-19th century and in the years following the Civil War, many Jewish and German immigrants resided in Jackson Ward. Demographics shifted in the last decades of the 19th century and, by World War I, the
neighborhood was almost entirely occupied by Blacks. By the 1930s, approximately 8,000 Black citizens called Jackson Ward home.\textsuperscript{18}

Jackson Ward became the “center of black religious life and education, it was the social, economic, and political hub of Central Virginia’s black population.”\textsuperscript{19} The community did not just live in the neighborhood, they worked, shopped, attended school and church, and sought entertainment there. In the era of segregation and Jim Crow, the Black population increased their self-sufficiency, developing social, cultural and business institutions to support itself independent of the city’s white institutions.

During this time period, the neighborhood is associated with many historic figures of significance to the Black community and the nation as a whole. In 1878, Bill “Bojangles” Robinson was born in the study area in the wooden frame structure at the rear of 301 Preston Street/915 N. 3\textsuperscript{rd} Street (Figure 6).\textsuperscript{20} By the 1890s, this house becomes the hall for the Knights of Pythias (Black). The Knights of Pythias, and its female counterpoint, the Independent Order of Calanthe, was a fraternal organization that provided social, cultural, and financial support for the Black community of Jackson Ward.\textsuperscript{21}

\textbf{Figure 6.} “Bill “Bojangles” Robinson showing his wife, Elaine, the house at 915 N. 3\textsuperscript{rd} Street.” Photograph. Richmond, VA: Richmond Times Dispatch, 1974.

In 1871, with the opening of the Baker School, North Jackson Ward was selected for the creation of one of the first three public schools to be constructed in Richmond and the first African-American public elementary school in the city. Shortly thereafter, the Navy Hill School opened nearby on N. 6\textsuperscript{th} Street.\textsuperscript{22}
Civil Rights leader, businesswoman and banker Maggie Lena Walker chartered the St. Luke Penny Savings Bank, headquartered in North Jackson Ward on St. James Street. In addition to her banking activities, which helped to expand the economic base of the Black community, she also owned several rental properties in Jackson Ward, as well as property in Frederick Douglas Court. Her North Jackson Ward properties included four duplexes at the corner of N. 4th Street and Bates Street within the study area. In an example of the self-sufficiency of Richmond’s Black community, these duplexes were rented by Walker to Black tenants on terms that she believed were fairer than those on offer by white landlords at the time.

(Figure 7) A gambrel roof cottage that had been constructed in 1790 at the corner of N. 4th and Marshall Streets was moved in 1876 to 1015 N. 3rd Street, just opposite the entrance of Shockoe Hill Cemetery. (Figure 8) This quaint cottage was owned by the same Black family for nearly 60 years. One member of that family, “Aunt Martha” Kerr, was said to have been baptized and married by the famous John Jasper. The effort to move this cottage was one of the earliest preservation efforts in the city. Sadly, this house was demolished in 1977 despite neighborhood protests.
In 1935, the Public Works Administration proposed to demolish several blocks of Jackson Ward housing to make way for the construction of low-income housing. With the formation of the Richmond Redevelopment and Housing Authority in 1940, work on three “high-standard, low-rent housing projects” was cleared to begin in 1941. The Jackson Ward project became Gilpin Court, named after African American actor Charles Sydney Gilpin. This public housing development has remained in constant use and has been expanded and altered over the years, resulting in the demolition of additional historic building stock.27

The northern portion of Jackson Ward was separated from the southern portion by the construction of the interstate highway in the 1950s-1960s. (Figure 9) The highway construction and subsequent policies isolated the northern portion of Jackson Ward and the neighborhood experienced dislocation and additional demolitions.
In 1950, in *Old Richmond Neighborhoods*, Mary Wingfield Scott expressed concern for the proposed construction of the interstate highway:

> . . . Jackson Ward is still a treasure-trove of old houses. This, we fear, will not long be true. Should the proposed Express Highway, defeated by a referendum while this book was at press, be again revived, the east-west arm alone, designed to follow Jackson Street, would destroy more than fifty houses built before 1865. . . In the destruction of old buildings, this plan will have a more far-reaching effect than any event in the history of Richmond except the Evacuation Fire.\(^{28}\)

A May 1957 article in the Richmond Times Dispatch stated: “since January two years ago, about 1,900 [black] families have been evicted from their homes . . . to make way for the Richmond-Petersburg Turnpike and other developments.”\(^{29}\) These displaced residents most likely moved to the East End. The construction of the highway isolated North Jackson Ward and economic and social activity declined. By 1966, North Jackson Ward became one of the most poverty-
stricken areas of Richmond.\textsuperscript{30} Urban renewal demolished some of the most blighted residential properties, as well as the physically cohesive community. In 1977, the City received a federal grant that was used to demolish approximately 150 houses.\textsuperscript{31} Even as businesses closed and relocated and residents moved, the Black community continued to identify with Jackson Ward.\textsuperscript{32}

Following the crash of financial, mortgage and real estate markets in 2008, North Jackson Ward experienced a number of foreclosures. Assessed values of certain parcels in the study area fell to as low as $2,000. Following the wave of foreclosures, the study area experienced another wave of demolitions. The assessed property values in the study area are now among the lowest in the city, generally less than $50,000.\textsuperscript{33}

Less isolated than North Jackson Ward, the southern portion of the neighborhood was protected from demolition by the creation of a City of Richmond Old & Historic District, and its architectural, historical and cultural significance recognized on a national level by its listing on the National Register of Historic Places and designation as a National Historic Landmark in the 1970s. In the southern portion of Jackson Ward, demolitions are rare, the architectural fabric of the neighborhood has a high degree of integrity, the cultural fabric of the neighborhood remains intact, and real estate assessments generally range between $250,000 and $500,000.
**Architectural Description**

North Jackson Ward’s architectural styles evolved from the Federal and Greek Revival styles used in its earliest structures, to the Italianate and Victorian styles favored in the late 19th century, to the Colonial Revival style used at the beginning of the 20th century. Most residential structures employed relatively inexpensive wooden frame construction. In 1977, an architectural survey demonstrated that many houses had been altered over time, with the most common alterations made to windows and siding, and as a result of the loss of cornice entablatures and similar details.\(^{34}\)

In the four square blocks of the study area, there are 77 parcels, including 61 vacant parcels with no remaining structures. The remaining structures include 12 residential buildings, one church building, two commercial structures, and one social club (originally constructed as a residence). The remaining structures are as follows:

- **208 and 210 E. Baker Street** were built as a pair of duplexes. They are identical two-story dwellings in the Italianate style. Each has a single brick arch sheltering a recessed entrance with two doors. Full width front porches, now demolished, once allowed access from the second floor. Wood frame windows have stone sills and lintels above and below with single wooden sashes. Decorative recessed bricks are above the second floor windows. A dentil and modillion cornice adorns the façade. (Constructed 1910; Residential)

- **304 Preston Street** was built in the Italianate style, as a single family dwelling. The two-story, wood frame dwelling was originally clad with wood siding and possessed a full width front porch (now demolished) with a hip roof supported by turned columns. The house had two-over-two wood frame windows and a bracketed cornice adorned the façade. An enclosed passageway to the rear yard adjoins the house at 306 Preston Street. (Constructed 1910; Residential, owned by Maggie Walker Community Land Trust)

- **306 Preston Street**, the oldest surviving structure in the study area, was built in the Federal style, as a single family dwelling. The two-story, wood frame dwelling originally had a side hall entrance covered by a simple one bay portico. Originally clad in wood siding, the house had six-over-six wood sash double hung windows and was covered with a metal side gable roof. (Constructed circa 1857; Residential, owned by Maggie Walker Community Land Trust)

- **305, 305 ½, and 307 Preston Street** were built in the Italianate style as three attached row houses. Each house is two stories tall and two bays wide. The side hall entrances are accessed by a stoop and covered with a bracketed awning. Windows were originally six-over-six, wood frame, with double hung sash. A bracketed cornice adorns the entire façade. A side passage is located in between 305 ½ and 307 Preston Street. (Constructed circa 1900; Residential, #307 owned by Maggie Walker Community Land Trust)

- **923 N. 2nd Street** is a gas station office and garage built in the Modern style. The office is a one-story, concrete building with a streamlined appearance, curved edges and
horizontal banding at the top, and a projecting center section. Originally, it would have had large glass windows. A one-story, four bay, concrete block garage is situated on the rear of the property. (Constructed circa 1950s-1960s; Commercial)

1005 N. 2nd Street is a commercial building used as a local market store. It is a one-story, brick building with metal windows. A metal awning spans the façade. (Constructed in 1910; Commercial)

905 N. 3rd Street is the Temple of God with the Last Day Message. The building is a large, one-story structure clad with a brick veneer and paneling, and covered with a side gable asphalt shingle roof. The front entrance is covered by a front gable portico supported by brick columns. (Constructed in 1996; Religious)

914 N. 3rd Street was built in the Victorian style, as a single-family dwelling. The two-story house was built using wood frame construction with a side hall entrance and a mansard roof. A projecting bay has paired windows on the first and second floor. The windows have been shortened from their original size. Lost original detailing includes a columned front portico, hooded windows, and a modillion cornice. (Constructed circa 1900; Residential)

1006 N. 3rd Street is a double house built in the Victorian style. The building is two stories constructed of brick, each half mirroring the other. The entrances are centrally located beneath a porch that is adorned with spindle work and turned columns. The house has a false mansard roof supported by brackets. (Constructed circa 1900; Residential)

910, 912 and 914 N. 4th Street were constructed in the Victorian style, as single family houses. The three houses are attached and likely were identical when first constructed. Each is a two-story, three bay, wood frame dwelling with a side hall entrance. Numbers 910 and 914 retain original front porches with turned posts, adorned by spindle work. Number 912 has been altered with a metal awning but retains original material beneath the awning. The houses have a dentil cornice and false mansard slate roof. (Constructed circa 1900; Residential)

1000 N. 4th Street was originally constructed as a dwelling but is now used as the Cobra One Motorcycle Club, a social club. It is a two-story, wood frame structure, three bays wide, with a central entrance. It was built in the Italianate style and was grander than most in the study area. It is now missing much of its original detail, including its bracketed wood cornice. (Constructed pre 1877; Residential)

While the following structures have been demolished and no longer survive, they are worthy of recognition for their architecture, history and/or association with significant historic figures:

The brick house once located at 301 Preston Street, at the corner of 3rd Street, was built in 1852 and occupied by Eberhard Lohman. In 1878, Bill “Bojangles” Robinson, was born in a frame addition at the rear of the brick structure. In the 1890s, the structure was occupied as the hall of the Knights of Pythias (Black), a fraternal organization. Both the brick structure and the frame addition have been demolished.
The Dutch gambrel roof cottage once located at **1013 N. 3rd Street** was one of the oldest gambrel roof cottages in Richmond. Originally constructed in 1790 at the corner of Fourth and Marshall Streets, in 1876 it was moved to the corner of N. 3rd Street opposite the entrance to Shockoe Hill Cemetery. In 1977, the house was condemned by the City and, despite neighborhood protests, was demolished.35

The four now vacant lots located at **1002, 1004, 1006, and 1008 N. 4th Street** once held four Colonial Revival duplexes built at the turn of the 20th century by their former owner Maggie Lena Walker to serve as rental properties. These parcels continue to be owned by her family.

[TO BE REVISED AND SUPPLEMENTED WITH ADDITIONAL INFORMATION, STORIES, AND HISTORY BASED ON COMMUNITY OUTREACH EFFORTS.

RICHMOND LAND BANK IS PLANNING A NUMBER OF COMMUNITY OUTREACH EFFORTS RELATING TO THIS NEIGHBORHOOD]
1 Mary Wingfield Scott, Old Richmond Neighborhoods (Richmond, VA: The Valentine Museum, 1950), p. 20. Scott notes that “an interesting face that emerges from the study of old land books is that apparently no prejudice existed against a free Negro’s living anywhere that he could afford to build or rent. He lived where other laborers, barbers, and blacksmiths built or rented homes.” She makes several other references to free blacks settling early in the neighborhood on pages 245, 257, 265, and 275.

2 Benjamin Campbell, Richmond’s Unhealed History (Richmond, VA: Brandylane Publishers, Inc., 2012), p. 134. The name “Jackson” has been associated with the neighborhood since at least 1835, when the area north of Broad Street was known as “Jackson’s Addition.”


4 Ibid.

5 Scott, Old Richmond Neighborhoods, p. 289.


8 Ibid.

9 The name of this burial ground, located at the northeast corner of 5th and Hospital Streets, changed over time. Its last burial was recorded in June 1879 and maps no longer record its presence by the end of the 19th century.

10 Scott, Old Richmond Neighborhoods, p. 285.


12 Ibid., p. 289.

13 Ibid.

14 Ibid., p. 292.


16 Scott, Old Richmond Neighborhoods, p. 279

17 Campbell, Richmond’s Unhealed History, p. 134, 137-138. The boundaries of the new sixth voting ward created in 1871 were drawn to include the majority of Richmond’s Black population. In 1903, when Jackson Ward was abolished as a separate voting district, its population was distributed among several majority white voting wards.

18 “Baker Public School,” Section 8, p. 15.

19 Ibid.

20 Edith Shelton Photo Collection, ca.1950, the Valentine, accessed through online collections.


22 Ibid., p. 85. Scores at the Navy Hill School were among the highest at African American schools and even better than some white schools. Richardson contemplates that “Perhaps it was here [at Navy Hill School], in the center of the Navy Hill neighborhood that Maggie Walker first understood the linkage between racial pride and cooperation with economics and property, since those things were stressed in Navy Hill School.”

23 “Maggie Walker Will Case Ends,” Baltimore Afro-American, February 9, 1935, pp. 1-2. Property Listed: 110 E. Leigh Street, 104-104 1/2 E. Clay Street, 623-625 N. Fourth Street, 907 N. Seventh Street, 1018 N. Eighth Street, 608 Preston Street, Douglass Court, lot, Howard and Brood Road-University Realty Co.; one-eighth of the entire Douglass Court, University Realty Co., 912 N. Seventh Street, lot; Washington Park, 3 lots.


25 Scott, Old Richmond Neighborhoods, p. 286.

26 “Attempt to Save House is Late” Times Dispatch, August 16, 1977.

27 “Baker Public School,” Section 8.

28 Scott, Old Richmond Neighborhoods, p. 223-224.

29 “Baker Public School,” Section 8.

30 Ibid.

31 “Attempt to Save House is Late” Times Dispatch, August 16, 1977.

32 “Jackson Ward Historic District,” Section 8.


34 In 1978, Historic Richmond Foundation conducted an architectural survey of North Jackson Ward. The survey consisted of a single image of buildings and a notecard with a brief description of the property.

35 “Attempt to Save House is Late,” and “Demolition of House Opposed,” Times Dispatch, August 16, 1977.

Bibliography
“Attempt to Save House is Late.” Times Dispatch, August 16, 1977.


Edith Shelton Photo Collection, The Valentine Online Photograph Collection.


National Register of Historic Places, Baker Public School, Richmond, Richmond City, Virginia, National Register # 16000537, August 15, 2016 (Washington, DC; U.S. Department of Interior, National Parks Service).


