



Deanwood residents at the groundbreaking for First Baptist Church of Deanwood's second building in 1909. *Photo courtesy of Elaine Bowman.*

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Deanwood History Project

**A Model of Self-Sufficiency  
in Far Northeast Washington, D.C.**



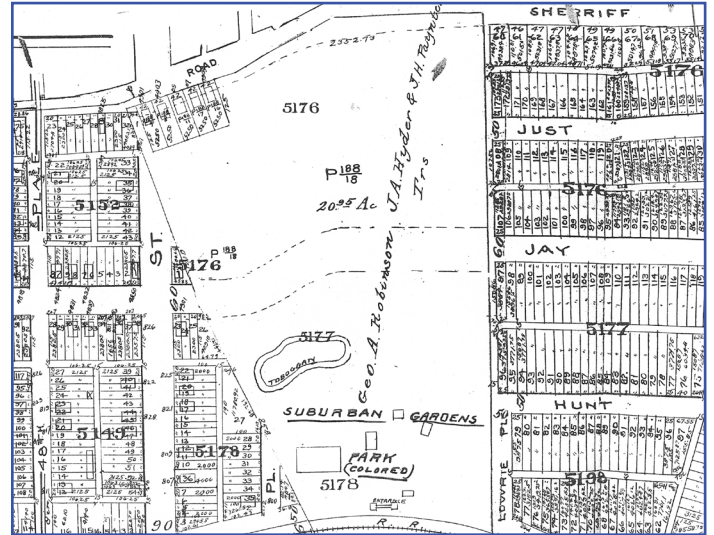
### Note on language

“Throughout this paper terms such as African American(s), Negro(es), and Black(s) will be used interchangeably to denote people of African descent who are citizens of the United States. The determination of when a specific term is used will depend upon the context of the discussion as well as the period of time being referenced.”

From: *The Journal of Negro Education*  
Howard University (2004)

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Baist Atlas map of Deanwood, circa 1920s.

Deanwood is one of Washington D.C.’s oldest African-American suburbs. It was established when white landowner, Levi Sheriff, divided farmland among his three daughters, Margaret Lowrie, Emmeline Sheriff and Mary Cornelia Dean. These three subdivisions - Whittingham, Lincoln Heights, and Burrville - came to be known as Deanwood.

Today, depending upon whom you ask, Deanwood has various boundaries: a triangular area bounded by Eastern Avenue on the northeast, Kenilworth Avenue on the northwest, and East Capitol Street on the south; or a rectangular area bounded by the B&O Railroad (Sheriff Road) on the west, Eastern Avenue on the northeast, Division Avenue on the east and Nannie Helen Burroughs Avenue on the south.

While its exact boundaries may vary, residents agree that Deanwood is an historically stable, self-reliant, self-sufficient and close-knit primarily African-American community.



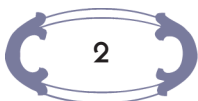


The families in Deanwood were very busy, but they honored the Scripture that says, “Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy.” On Sundays, they’d stroll to any one of seven churches in Deanwood.



Present-day Contee A.M.E. Zion Church (built in 1963). *Photo courtesy of Contee A.M.E. Zion Church.*

**Contee African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church** was built in 1885 on Division Avenue. **The First Baptist Church of Deanwood** was built in 1901 on Whittingham Place (now 45th Street). **Zion Baptist Church**, built in 1908 on Sheriff Road, now stands on Kenilworth Avenue. **Tabernacle Baptist Church** was organized in 1911 at Division Avenue and Gay Street. A year later, **Randall Memorial United Methodist Church** opened on Browning Place (now 46th Street). Deanwood’s first Catholic parish, the **Church of the Incarnation**, also opened on Browning Place in 1912, but eventually built a new church on Eastern Avenue. In 1924, **Antioch Baptist Church** joined the community on 50th Street.

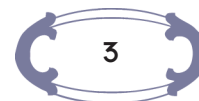


Ladies on their way to service at The First Baptist Church of Deanwood. *Photos courtesy of Alverna Miller and Tonya Talley-Smith.*

Churches held similar activities for their congregations, including Sunday School, Sunday morning worship, Vacation Bible School, Baptist Young People’s Union, and annual trips to the beach. Some churches held weekly recreation activities. Most of Deanwood’s children fellowshiped at all churches, regardless of their home denomination.



Ralph and Irene Plummer in their Sunday finest. *Photos courtesy of Tonya Talley-Smith.*

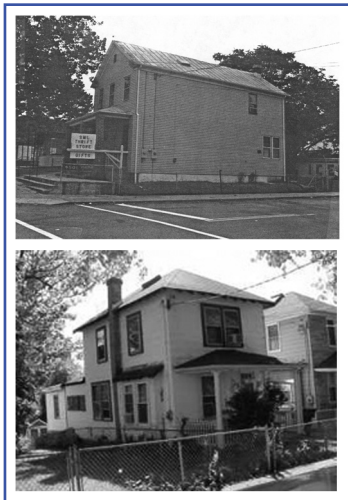




The styles of historic Deanwood houses included folk Victorian, neoclassical, colonial, revival, prairie and craftsman. Many of the earliest existing Deanwood houses and other buildings were designed and constructed by African-American craftsmen like Randolph and Jacob Dodd, H.W. Turner, and Jacob and Leroy King.

The typical turn-of-the-century Deanwood home was a free-standing, two-story, wood-framed house with a tin gable roof, a porch, door and one double-hung window in the front, and one door and window in the back. Few of the houses had side windows because, according to oral history, the lines of credit extended to black builders were limited to the purchase of essential materials, and not for amenities such as additional windows and basements. The great majority of houses built in the 1920s and 1930s were designed by African-American architects such as Lewis Giles, Sr., H.D. Woodson and George Ferguson.

Although most of the Deanwood houses are modest, they exemplify ingenuity and creativity and ultimately, achievement of the “American Dream” in the face of discrimination.



Top: Traditional Deanwood house. Bottom: Improved Deanwood house. *Photos courtesy of DC Historic Preservation Office and Cultural Tourism DC.*

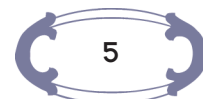
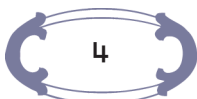
Spotlight



## Howard Dilworth WOODSON

Howard D. Woodson was one of the first licensed Negro engineers in the Washington area. In the early 1940s, Woodson and his wife, Pauline, raised their four boys (John, Harold, Paul and Granville) on Fitch Place, up the hill from Suburban Gardens Amusement Park, which Woodson developed. Woodson was nationally known as an accomplished structural engineer who designed many prominent buildings in Washington, D.C., including parts of Union Station.

Moreover, Woodson was a Deanwood activist. He founded many of the civic organizations that continue to shape this community. Among them are the Northeast Boundary Civic Association, the Far Northeast Council, the Far Northeast Business and Professional Association, and the National Technical Association. In honor of his national, city, and community service, Washington, D.C. proudly named the only high school in far Northeast after him.







The Deanwood community had public and private schools, including Burrville, George Washington Carver (formerly Deanwood), Merritt, and the Nannie Helen Burroughs private elementary school (formerly the National Training School for Women and Girls). The community eventually received a junior high school, Kelly Miller. All four schools shared a similar educational philosophy: “strong community and parental support coupled with teachers committed to academic excellence...”

Contee A.M.E. Zion Church established an elementary school in 1888 on a tract of land between Grant Street, Eastern Avenue, Division Avenue, and 56th Street. Both the school and the community in which it was located were named Burrville after the Burr family that donated the land. The Burrville School building was razed and replaced in 1912, and restructured in 1929 and 1930. In 1980, the school relocated to its current site at 801 Division Avenue.

Deanwood Elementary School was erected in 1909 as a result of an act passed by Congress on May 21, 1862 to “establish and maintain a system of free schools for the benefit of the colored people of the District of Columbia.” The original site was 43,470 sq. ft. with a value of \$29,855.34. In February 1945, the school was renamed George Washington Carver, after the famous educator and botanist. Carver School’s importance is derived from its role in the development of self-reliant students, as well as its participation in the Jeep Exercises and War Bonds efforts to help soldiers

during World War II. Built in sections from 1909 to 1930, the school’s oldest section, damaged by fire, was razed in 1969 and replaced by a new structure. Carver closed its doors in 1988. It has since reopened as IDEA Public Charter School.



Deanwood School. Photo courtesy of Charles Sumner School Museum and Archives.

The location of the Emma F.G. Merritt Public School is on the site of the former Suburban Gardens Amusement Park in a building constructed in 1943. According to oral history given by former teachers, while the site has changed, the philosophy of self-reliance has essentially remained the same. Now called Merritt Educational Center, the school is located at 5002 Hayes Street.

Kelly Miller Junior High School, opened in September 1949, was the first junior high school in far Northeast. It represented a victory following years of community efforts to get a junior high in Deanwood. The school was named after Dr. Kelly Miller, an outstanding educator, author, mathematician, sociologist, and orator, who served as the Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences at Howard University. Kelly Miller School was completely demolished in 1996, rebuilt, and reopened in September 2004 as a middle school.

*Note: Although located in Deanwood, neither Roper Junior High School nor H.D. Woodson Senior High School were mentioned in this section because they were built after the scope of time covered in this brochure.*

Spotlight

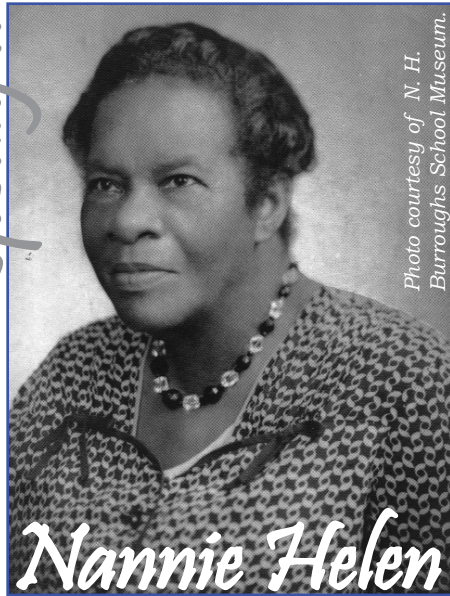


Photo courtesy of N. H. Burroughs School Museum.

Nannie Helen

# BURROUGHS

The Nannie Helen Burroughs School is the outgrowth of a dream realized by the individual whose name the school bears. Known as a religious leader, educator, political and civil rights activist, Burroughs' most challenging achievement was the founding of the National Training School for Women and Girls. Established October 19, 1909, the school's first motto was "Work, Support Thyself, to Thine Own Powers Appeal," which exemplified Burroughs' belief in work as a means to make women self-sufficient wage earners and to



Original campus of National Training School for Women and Girls. Photo courtesy of N.H. Burroughs School Museum

advance the race. The school began with a first-year enrollment of 31 students. Twenty-five years later, over 2,000 women from the United States, Africa, and the Caribbean had been trained at the

school. Briefly closed in the early 1930s, the school reopened in 1934 as the National Trade and Professional School for Women. In 1964, the trustees abandoned the trade school curriculum and reopened as an elementary school named in memory of its founder.



According to longtime Deanwood residents, self-sufficiency was alive and well among the businesses that flourished through the 1940s and 1950s. Residents rarely had to leave their neighborhood to fulfill their shopping needs. According to *Simms Blue Book and National Negro Business and Professional Directory*, in 1944, there were



Top to bottom: Suburban Garage, Suburban Filling Station, and Suburban Market, owned and operated by the Parker family. Photos courtesy of Henry Parker.

five barbershops; four beauty shops; a dry cleaners; three drugstores; a filling station; two garage/repair shops and grocery stores; a record shop; a restaurant; two shoe repair shops and three undertakers in Deanwood.

While this is an impressive number of businesses, it also underestimates and does not account for the independent entrepreneurs who sold their wares door-to-door, nor

those business owners who did not list their businesses with directories such as *Simms*. Vendors brought clothes, ice, umbrellas, medical and knife sharpening services directly to residents.



In 1957, Henry Parker rented a small market in the 4900 block of Grant Street from W. Madden, another black entrepreneur. Within five years, Parker had expanded his businesses to include an auto repair shop in the 5700 block of Grant Street, and a corner store at 46th Street and Sheriff Road, Suburban Market. Built by skilled carpenters and bricklayers who lived in the neighborhood, Suburban Market still operates today with the help of Mr. Parker's sons, Reginald and Irving.

Spotlight



Earl E.  
**KING, SR.**



Rev. Henry S. and Georgia Washington.  
*Photos courtesy of Allen C. Lester.*

Located at 4925 Nannie Helen Burroughs Avenue (formerly Dean Avenue), Washington and Sons Funeral Home was opened in the 1920s and incorporated in 1939 by Rev. Henry S. Washington and his wife, Georgia. Upon Rev. Washington's death in October 1941, Mrs. Washington took over the business. After her death, her children, Mildred Washington Pratt and Clayton Washington assumed leadership. Now in its eighth decade of service, the funeral home is being operated by the third generation.

In the areas of real estate and tourism, several black businessmen, including George A. Robinson, John A. Hyder, John H. Paynter, H.D. Woodson and Lewis Giles formed the Universal Development and Loan Company. Their most well-known project was the Suburban Gardens Amusement Park, which drew black families from throughout the region.

In 1925, Earl E. King, Sr. started an ice and coal business, a venture that developed into King's Ice, Coal, and Fuel Oil Company. This was a family business in every sense of the word. His wife, "Lizzie," and all of his children, Earlyne, Elaine, Earl Jr., Ernest, and Edith, worked faithfully in every aspect of the business. In the late 1940s, King and his sons delivered ice door-to-door when everyone in Deanwood had iceboxes. (Refrigerators were something seen only in the movies.) During the winter months, when coal stoves were most commonly used, the King family sold coal by the bushel from their backyard at 919 45th Place. When a number of Deanwood families converted to oil, King bought oil trucks to serve them.

In the late 1950s, King invested in a self-service ice machine, which operated 24 hours a day from the rear of his property at 4501 Sheriff Road. This machine was the only one of its kind in far Northeast. The volume of business was so heavy on weekends that he and his family offered half a dozen different kinds of ice, including snow balls. After 64 years in business, King retired and King's Ice, Coal, and Fuel Oil Company took its place in Deanwood history.

## and having a GRAND OLD TIME

Although Deanwood is located on the outskirts of Washington, two attractions ensured its popularity among other Washingtonians: the Benning Race Track and Suburban Gardens Amusement Park.

Opened in 1890, Benning Race Track operated for nearly 20 years along the Anacostia River between Benning Road and Kenilworth Avenue, on the current site of Mayfair Mansions. The grandstand and clubhouse brought “high society” white folks to Deanwood by the thousands in the early 1900s. Newspaper reporters and photographers often camped out at the racetrack in Deanwood to get a story for the morning edition.



Alice Roosevelt, oldest daughter of President Theodore Roosevelt and wife of Nicholas Longworth, Speaker of the House, and other white political “first ladies” of the

day were known to spend many of their social hours at the Benning Race Track, enjoying the nice breeze and beautifully manicured shoreline of the Anacostia River. Big 4th of July picnics and political parties were held on the well-kept grounds near the betting



Betting hall at Benning Race Track. *Photo courtesy of Cook Collection, Keeneland.*

booths to please the social appetite of the white upper class. Bookies were legal and bets were a dollar. Some Deanwood residents, including the famous horse trainer, Maxwell Smart, earned a living by working at the track. Other Deanwood families also operated boarding houses, restaurants, laundries and similar businesses to support the race track and its patrons.



Suburban Gardens Amusement Park circa 1920s. *Photo courtesy of Archives Center, National Museum of American History.*

During legal segregation, Deanwood housed Suburban Gardens, the city’s only amusement park. Located at 50th and Hayes Streets, the black-owned and operated park encompassed nine acres when it opened in 1921 and swelled to 20 acres before it closed in the 1940s. During its heyday, the park offered a wide range of attractions comparable to Glen Echo, its whites-only counterpart. For ten cents, patrons enjoyed a carousel, dance hall and playground in the early 1920s. Later expansions included a roller coaster, airplane swing, Tilt-a-Whirl, Skee-Ball, miniature railway, shooting gallery and swimming pool. Daredevil shows and circuses also drew large audiences. The park was eventually sold to Abe Lichtman, a white Jewish entrepreneur.

In 1928, Lichtman’s Deanwood Amusement Company built the Strand Theater at 5129-



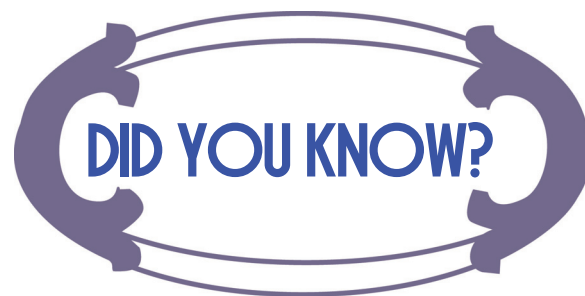
5131 Grant Street (Nannie Helen Burroughs) to serve black patrons. The two-story brick building was a combination pool room, dance hall, and theater, which could hold approximately 600 moviegoers. The Strand served the Deanwood community for 30 years. It was later converted to a convenience store, and now stands vacant.

Churches played an important role in Deanwood's social life - organizing picnics, baseball games, trips and other events. The most popular trip, to Carr's and Sparrows, two colored beaches in Anne Arundel County, Maryland, practically shut down the neighborhood for the day. Deanwood residents patronized these church-sponsored activities regardless of their personal church affiliation.

Residents also formed numerous social clubs. Some clubs of the 1950s included the purple-jacketed Latonialetts and the Junior Egyptians.

### SOURCES

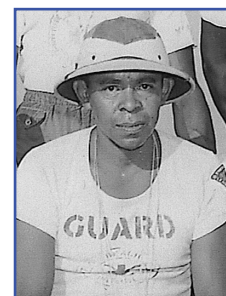
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## A Short List of Deanwood's Famous Residents

### CLARENCE PENDLETON

Clarence Pendleton, the first black chair of the US Commission on Civil Rights, was the son of Clarence Pendleton, Sr., Howard University's swimming coach. The family lived in Ivy City, but young Clarence spent most of his summers enjoying the pool at Suburban Gardens. An accomplished swimmer, he was the main drawing card for the amusement park's swimming competitions. He was also chosen to perform before the main event of some of the East Coast's biggest swimming competitions. Even though his time was never recorded, it was a known fact that at most swim meets his time was far better than the professional white swimmers of the day.



### MAXWELL SMART

Maxwell "Max" Smart, one of America's most successful horse trainers, was born and raised in Deanwood. His family was one of its early settlers. Max worked at the Benning Race Track at the turn of the 20th century and trained the best running horses of that time. His ability to prep a horse to win drew horse lovers and bettors to Deanwood by the thousands for a good time at the track. He handled horses for such white luminaries as Ambassador Breckenridge Long and Admiral Cary T. Grayson, physician to President Woodrow Wilson.



After the track closed in 1908, many people in Deanwood bought horses at a reasonable price and kept them until the early 1950s. In the late 1940s, it was common to see teenagers riding horses through the dirt streets of Deanwood. Before their deaths, the Smart brothers, Max and Raymond, gladly helped their neighbors care for their horses.

## MAJ. ANDREW D. TURNER, USAF

Major Andrew D. Turner was commissioned at Tuskegee Army Air Field on October 9, 1942, becoming the first Deanwood resident to earn this distinction. The son of Rev. Clarence W. Turner, Sr., he grew up on 46th and Kane Place. Before he was commissioned at Tuskegee, "Jug" (as family and friends fondly called him) started the Baptist Young People's Union at The First Baptist Church of Deanwood. In 1944, he was appointed Commanding Officer of the 100th Squadron. Major Turner flew 69 combat missions during his overseas service without a serious accident, only to lose his life on September 18, 1947 in a routine training flight. The family of this Tuskegee Airman continues to live in his childhood home.



## THE MURRY'S STEAK FAMILY

Al and Ida Mendelson, and her brother, Joe Lutsky, owned and operated a family grocery store at the corner of 44th Street and Sheriff Road. The Mendelsons lived above their store and their children, Murry and Sandy, grew up in the neighborhood. Mrs. Mendelson also owned a hat store and the ladies in the neighborhood looked forward to buying one of her hats for church.



The Mendelsons employed people from the neighborhood, and most of the soda fountains in the area looked forward to selling Al's famous "big burger." In the 1940s everyone in Deanwood knew that if their food budget ran short, "Al" would give them what they needed, have them "sign the book," and allow them to pay later. If the ladies needed a hat to enhance a church outfit, Mrs. Mendelson would help find a match and collect the money later.

After Murry returned from military service in the late 40s, the Mendelsons sold the grocery store and opened Murry's Steaks, now known throughout this area as Murry's Family and Fine Foods.

## OTHER NOTEWORTHY RESIDENTS

Jimmy Briscoe, boxer  
Capt. Edward W. Gantt (Ret.), USN, former  
Great Lakes Naval Training Base commander  
Col. Francis Gregory, astronaut and NASA Deputy Director  
Sharon Pratt-Kelly, former D.C. mayor  
Billy Stewart, musician  
Dr. Billy Taylor, jazz musician and educator

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Earl Simpson  
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