

## 240420 BRA Black History Bike Tour St Petersburg

Start of tour; we were all asked to assemble at the wellness center located at 15th Ave., South and 22nd St. We rode our bikes from the old Northeast, which gave us a 4 mile warm-up for the tour.



From what I understood they were 25 people Total attended. It was a good group and the Tour got off to a good start. There were seven stops advertised, but we actually had eight total during the tour.





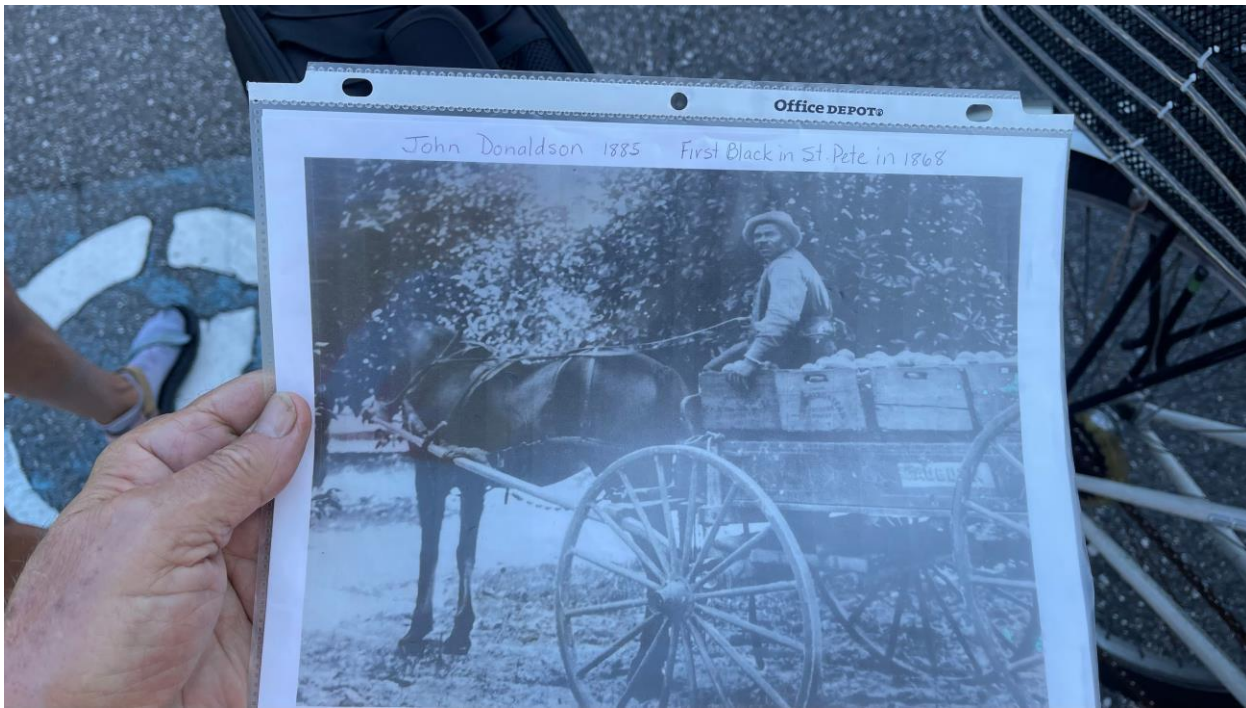


The tour was at a leisurely pace, but we did get strung out at times. Regardless, the distances weren't too great, and we were able to collect at the next stop after people, traversed streets, lights, and stop signs.



Mr John Donaldson was the first black African-American that settled in the southern part of the Pinellas Peninsula. Back in the day there were a few people no roads or railroad that serve this area so it was pretty wide open





40 acres we're purchased by Mr. Donaldson and he settled into farming. The area he purchased is now located near 31st Street South. At that time people of all races were Equally treated. But sadly, this was not the last.

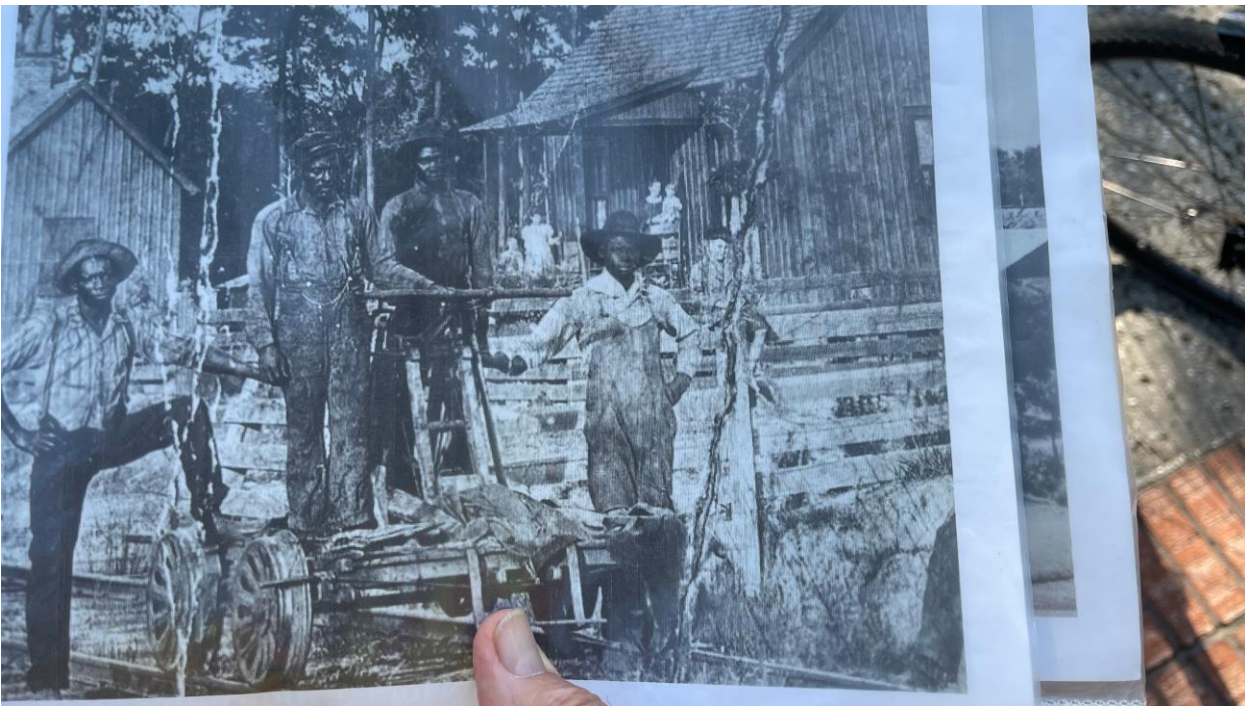
2d stop

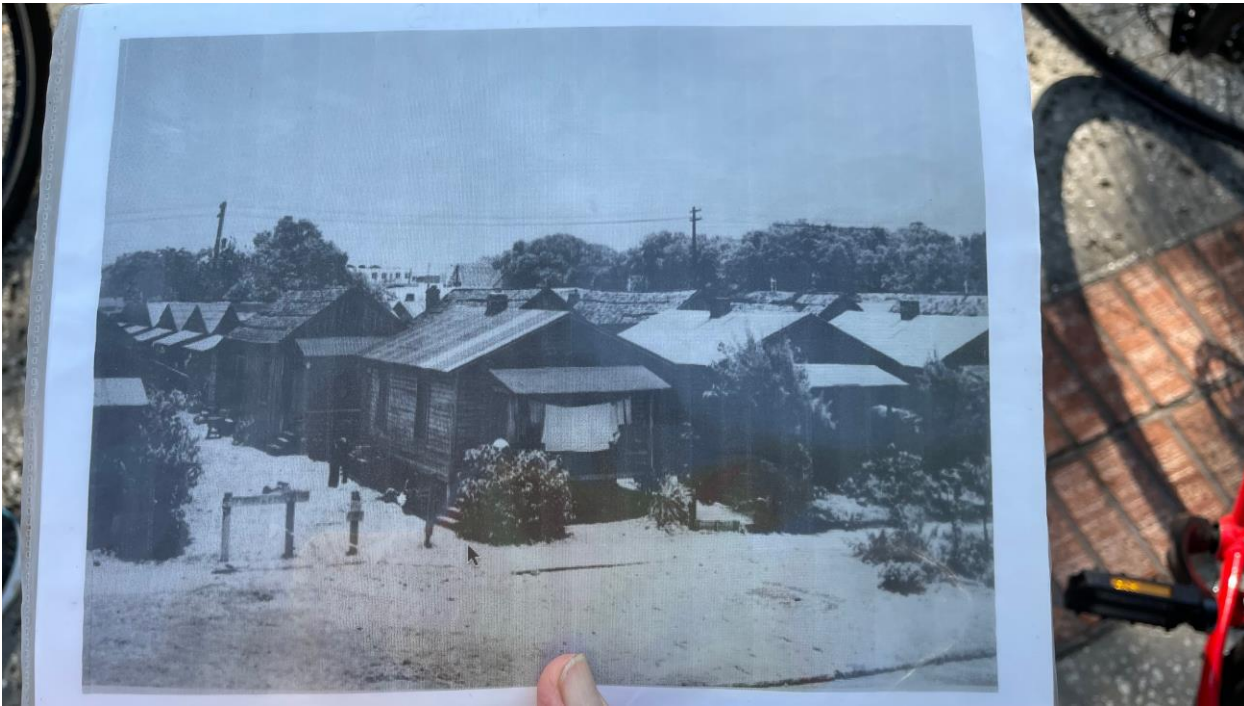
Peppertown was our next stop. This was an area where black Americans were allowed to live by the city leaders. This was a common theme that was brought out during the tour. Throughout the history of St. Petersburg, there were certain areas that were allowed or in other words required to be the area of residence for black Americans.





This area was known as Peppertown because the residence here group colored peppers, which were used and sold for cooking.





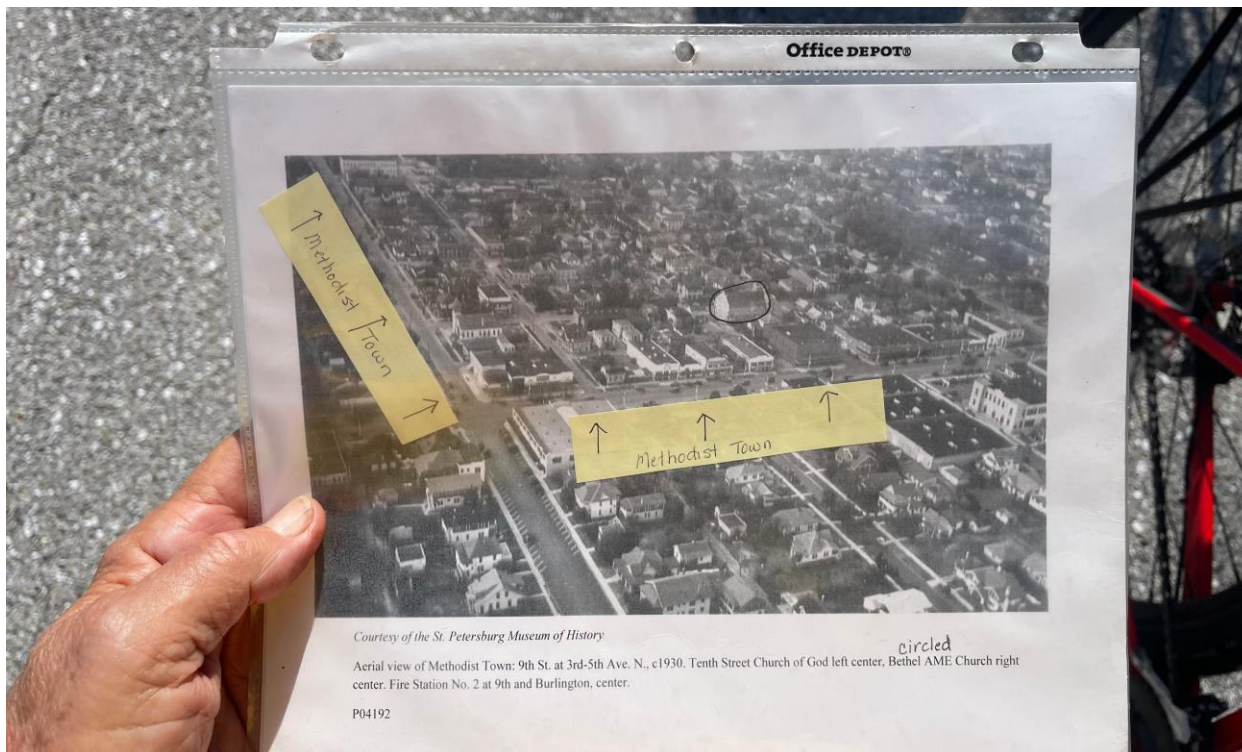
First black community; this was the original location where black Americans formed a community. It was highlighted that for much of their early history these communities were highly self dependent and relied on themselves for just about everything. They actually had very little choice. Peppertown was located at what is now 2d Ave South n 16th Street. It was stressed that they were allowed to live there and although not mentioned throughout the tour, they were renters and not owners. Separate but equal was established early and dominated the lives of black and white Americans. Although neighbors, they lived in two completely separate worlds that were anything but equal. Education was not provided. Segregation was the norm, including the famous Green benches that used to dominate and litter, the sidewalks along Central Avenue.

The Orange Line train that ran along first Avenue south, and connected the city to its Beaches was also segregated. The stores along Central were available to black Americans; yes, their dollars would spend just like anybody else's. But astonishingly they could not try on clothes in the store, but once a year. So this caused the development of tailor services to be established in the black communities. If you couldn't buy clothes that fit and try them on, you had to buy clothes that were too large and have them taken in. This was one example of the black communities coming together and solving a problem That was created by how they were treated.

### 3d stop

Methodist Town was another community in the ever westward, expanding St. Petersburg. The theme that was developed during the tour is as the city expanded the area allowed for black Americans to live in also changed. And their communities were continuously pushed west and south as the city grew. Again it was not mentioned, but this is because they were renters and not owners. This was fundamental to their inability to resist what we now know as gentrification.













Rebuilt in the 1970's the area was improved. Modern buildings took the place of old, rundown rental tenants. This appears to be an area of Apartments and there may be no ownership. But it was a vast improvement over what was there earlier.

Mr Chester James was the founder of this part of town. His name is prominently placed as it should be on many of the facilities that are now built here.

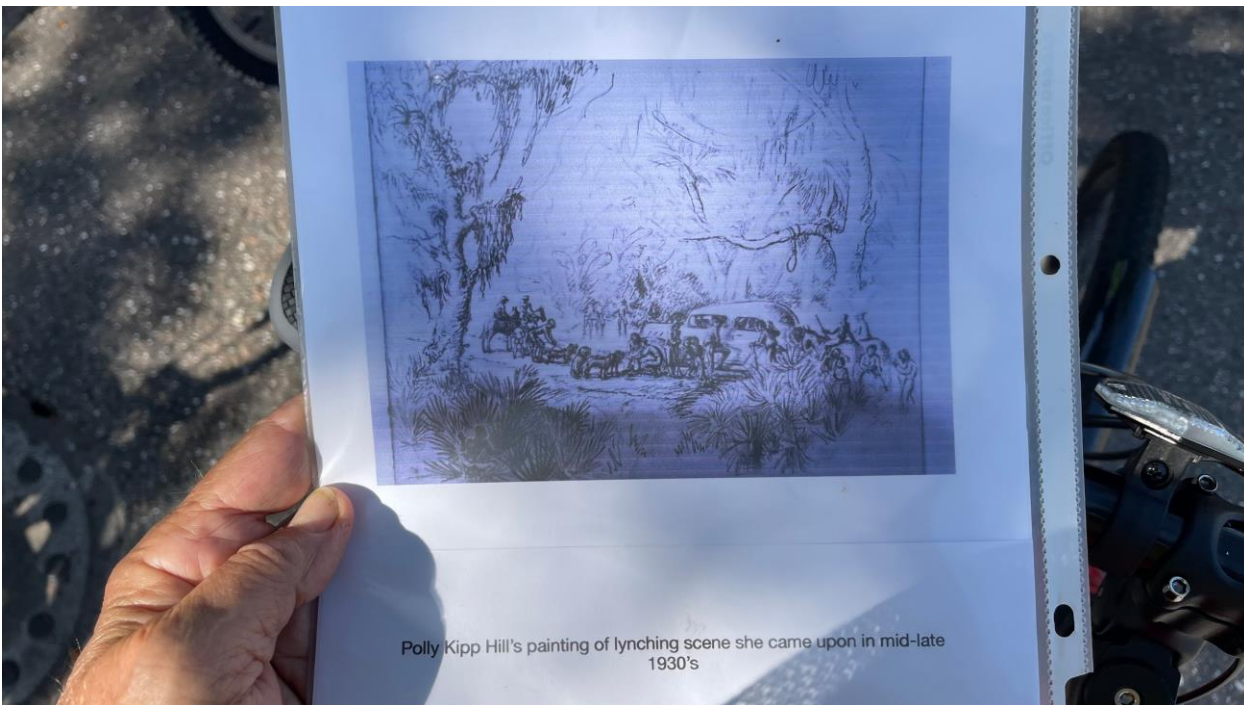


He voted in City Counsel for Federal redevelopment of the area. Removed were old homes that were considerably rundown. Considered the slum area of town, this was soon changed by the investment of federal dollars.



#### 4th Stop

Coopers Quarters was our next stop. This is located near what is the U-Haul building. There is lots of empty land there, but that was not always the case.



Polly Kipp Hill's painting of lynching scene she came upon in mid-late 1930's





*Courtesy of the St. Petersburg Museum of History*

Gas plant urban renewal, c. 1980.

P07646

This black community was located near 1st Ave South n 16th Ave So and was the western edge of town. Again, it was emphasized that as the city grew, the area where black, Americans were “allowed” to live changed. This has been a recurring, enduring and contentious theme in the history of our black residence. Because they were renters, they never were able to take advantage of the appreciation of property as the city grew. When it did they were simply pushed along and out-of-the-way. This has never been forgotten and to this day our african-American black residents are sensitive to the redevelopment of areas that they are living in. Gentrification can be seen here as early example and one starts to understand why this aspect of redevelopment is so contentious in large urban cities.

John Evan’s lynching is really a shameful part of St. Petersburg history. There’s really no excuse for this heinous crime and the group was to a person stunned that anything like this could have happened. This was an innocent man who was murdered by the KKK. History has a lot of good and bad and we need to study both aspects to put everything in balance. This is certainly one of the horrific things that happens that more people need to know about so as to never allow anything like this to ever happen again.





Extra judicial killings were carried out on a large scale throughout the south during the Jim Crow era. If you've ever read anything about this, there was really nothing you could do. You couldn't call the police because many times the police were involved. If you wanted to resist or you were a person of conscience and you were white, you would also be murdered. It was a shameful part of American history that should be studied so as to never be repeated.

## 5th Stop

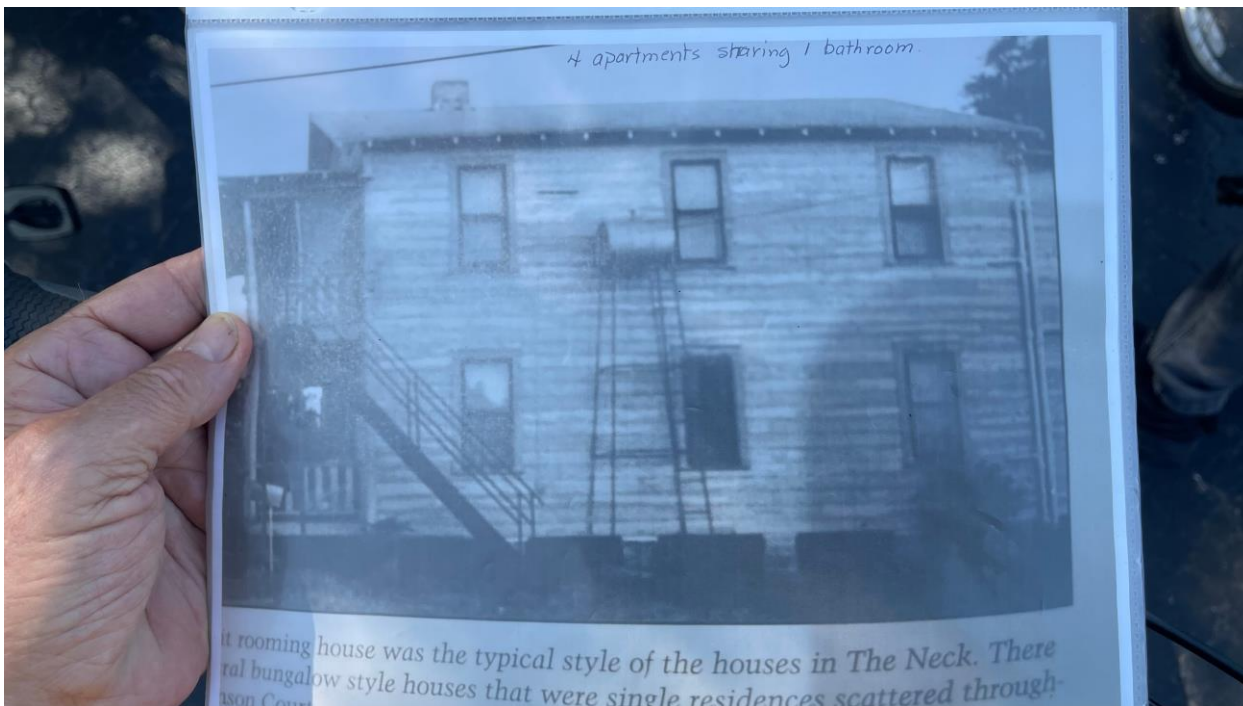
The Gas Plant area is aptly named because that's where large gas cylinders were built to store the natural gas used by the city residents. Two major gas cylinders were built here in 1914. Incinerators were also located here.

Of course, this was co-located in the area where black residents were allowed to live. These gas cylinders even in their day were polluting and must've smelled. It's not surprising them that they were built in this area as other st. Petersburg residents did not want them in their locals.





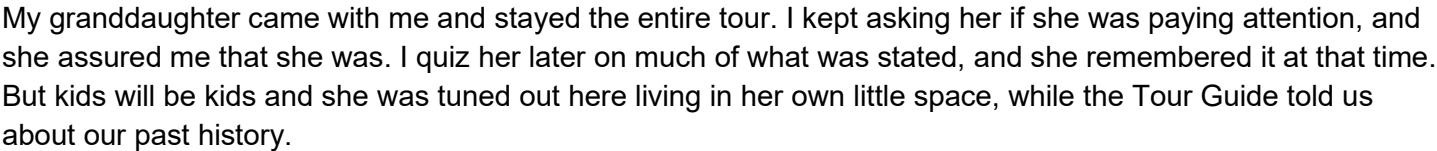
We were shown many photographs of what the tenement buildings used to look like. These were rented to black residence and barely maintained. Having no other choice, where to live, our black brethren had no option, but to live where they were told. the area was to be redeveloped, and there were plans drawn up.



Sadly, these were never completed. In lieu of rebuilding the gas plant area and providing decent living conditions. The Tropicana stadium was built in the 1980s. This was a stadium that was constructed in search of a team which took some years to locate. Again this added a continuing bitterness to the palette of our black residence in that they were once again promised redevelopment in exchange for relinquishing land only to have that land redeveloped for purposes. So at the end of the day, once the land in this area was also needed



A historical map of Peppertown, Illinois, illustrating redlining. The map is color-coded to show different levels of perceived risk and desirability for investment. A legend in the bottom left corner defines the color coding: green for 'A - Best', blue for 'B - Still Desirable', yellow for 'C - Definitely Declining', and red for 'D - Hazardous'. The map shows a grid of streets and various colored zones. Key areas labeled include 'METHODIST TOWN', 'GAS PLANT', and 'PEPERTOWN'. The map shows a grid of streets and various colored zones indicating the perceived value and risk of different neighborhoods.









## 6th Stop

Jordan Dance Hall is something of a surprise. I had no idea that this building had such historical significance.



In the speakeasy days, St. Petersburg had its share of famous locations. The dragon club is better known on 1st Ave., North. This was where Errol Flynn, and other actors of the day came to drink at the height of prohibition. I did not know that a similar speakeasy of equal fame was available to our black residence and like-minded white art lovers



I would've driven by this building 1000 times and not known what it was. It's great to see that it is being well-maintained, although empty of tenants. But this was quite a famous place back in its day..



A year after his death, this brief paragraph appeared in the paper

# NEGRO LEAVES \$3,010 ESTATE CLEARWATER, Oct. 6.—Elder

Jordan Sr., 72, negro, who died in St. Petersburg Nov. 21, 1936, left an estate of \$3,000 in real estate and \$10 in personal funds, according to the probate papers filed today. He left four sons and five granddaughters.

There was obituary upon death







**ELDER JORDAN, SENIOR**  
1848 - 1936  
The businessman who was born a slave, donated the land on which the Jordan Park housing development sits. He built Jordan Drive Hill in 1925, now named The Markham Circle.  
Jon D. Hair, Sculptor

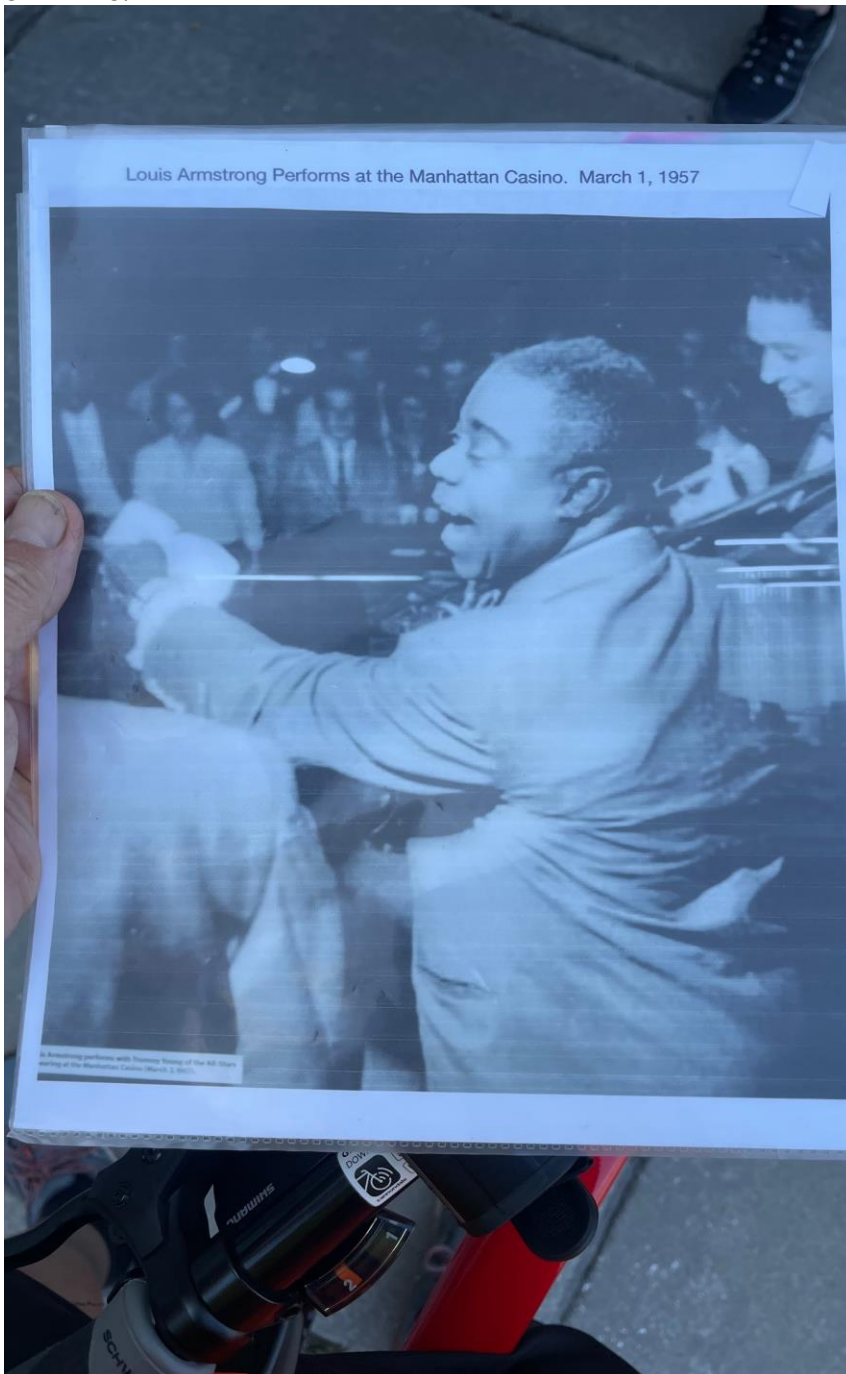


It's sad, but you would see this statue and not know what it was. You would drive by this building and wouldn't even recognize it. There is a beautiful plaque there, but you have to actually stop and read it and understand it. So this Tour did open many eyes as to what is around them. History is always interesting and it never fails to surprise.





This old casino building is located at 22d Street and 7th Ave south. Our Black community now mainly lives below 22St South. It is Heights. This was a meeting place for all who loved good music at Black culture. As mentioned Luis Armstrong performed as well as many other famous performers. This casino (which did not ave gambling) was well known and was on what was called the Chitlins Circuit.





## 7th Stop

Jordan Park and Jordan Elementary are also significant historical buildings and a key to the development of our black community in St. Petersburg Florida. The building is beautifully maintained and has a very interesting past.

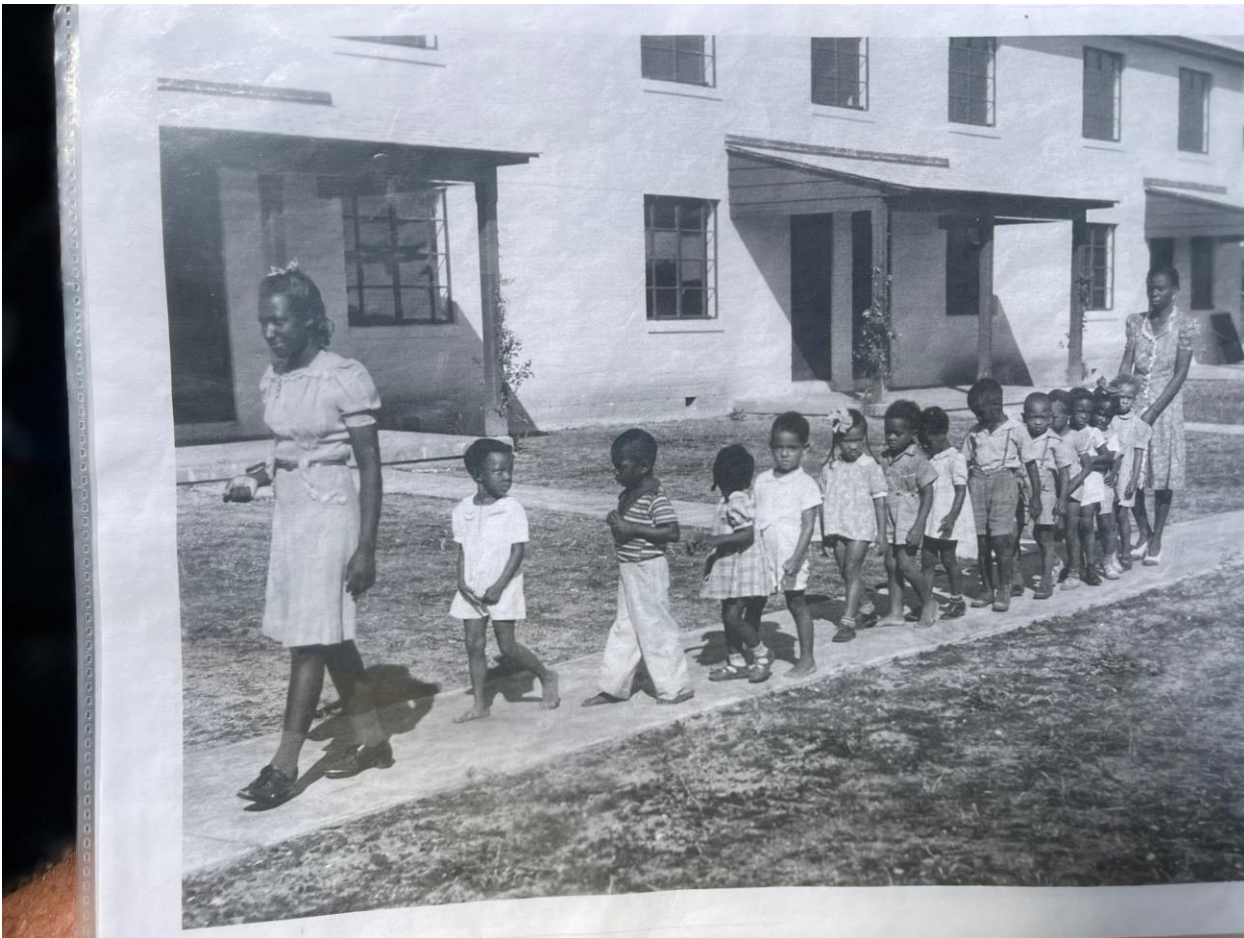


In the 1930s there was no other educational facility available to our black residence. Jordan Elementary seen above, opened in 1925. if you can believe it, this building had an enrollment of 1100 students; overflowing conditions, no doubt. How they managed to fit that many students in this building, let alone properly educate them, is anyone's guess.

Also, our black residents only had education through the sixth grade; there was no junior or high school available. Gibbs HS was built specifically for this purpose and supplemented this is small elementary school in 1929. it's astonishing to know that Pinellas County had the last school board in Florida that was integrated. This is not a great milestone to be proud of.

Also, it took time to enroll, teach the matriculate students. Astonishingly St Petersburg had to wait until the 1930's before it saw it first black HS graduate. You could imagine the disadvantage that this would place any child as it matured, entered the workforce, and tried to move up the ladder of success. Heck, there was no ladder.





Starting in 1939 housing units for phase 1 we're built in this area. Rebuilt the older homes was the primary goal. Still rental arrangements were the norm and unless I'm wrong ownership was not the primary or immediate goal. Of course this could've been very difficult if the tenants did not have the means to purchase, but ownership is the primary way to pass wealth from generation to generation. Until this happened then our black residents we're not able to keep pace with inflation and advancing time would find them just as poor as they were when they started.

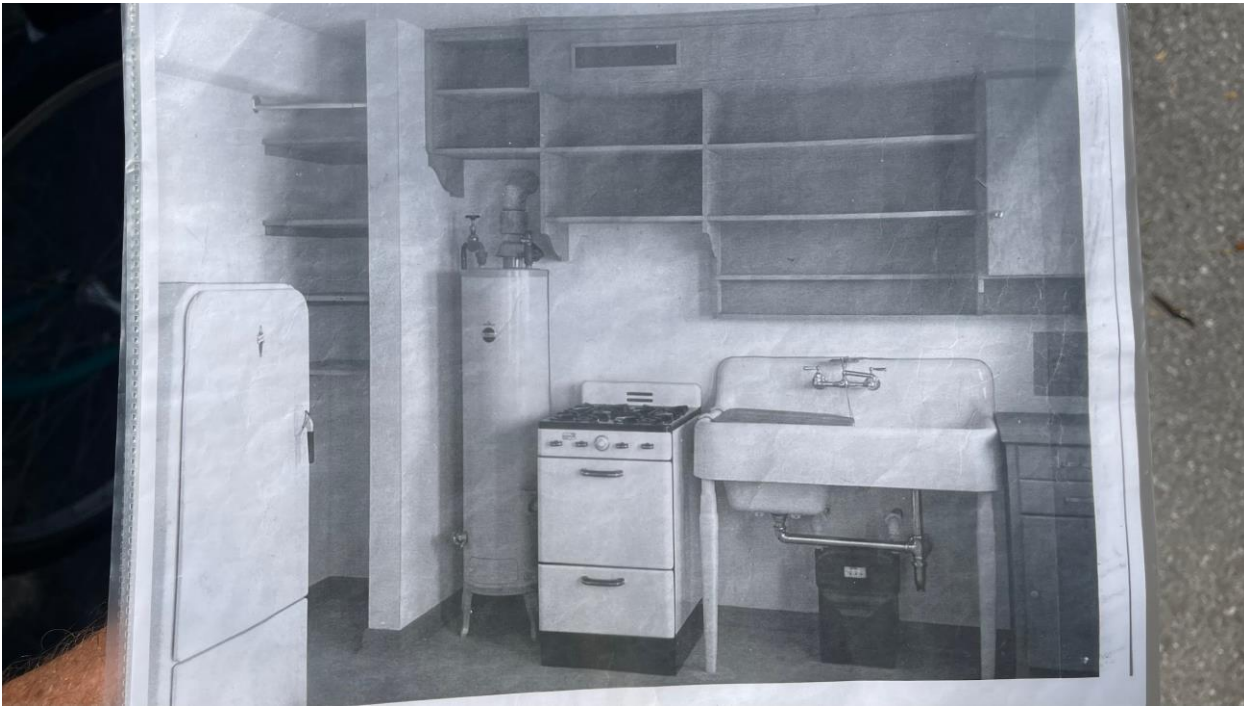


Electrical service during this phase 1 building era was generally available in the white areas of St. Petersburg vs in only 40% of our black residents homes. So there was a great divide here. Imagine the quality of life that you would have in the early 20th century without electricity in your home.

Phase 2 was resisted, resisted by our city leaders, but eventually was approved. City referendums were debated. New modern homes were developed.







Phase 1 and phase 2 can be compared side-by-side. Phase 1 was modern for its day but phase 2 is truly beautiful in its architectural and landscaping form. These would both have been great improvements over the tenement structures that our black residents were forced to live in.





## 8th Stop

Mercy Hospital was a segregated hospital that was built by the black community using its own funds. There was nowhere else for them to be taken in the event of an emergency. The hospital opened with only 20 beds.





The original building is located at 22St and 13th Avenue South. Dr and Mrs Wimbish were the founders of this hospital and they worked hard to establish it as a viable medical resource for the black community. As



mentioned when it opened, it was the only place to receive care.



Canister collection campaigns we're organized to collect funds. Small donations accumulated. Building this hospital was a complete Black community effort; they receive no help from any state or local authority. In 1913 the hospital opened but it was never accredited. How could it be. Lacking X-ray machines, testing laboratories and other facilities there was no way for accreditation to happen.

In 1946 a review by City inspectors was finally conducted; deplorable were noted which should not have been a surprise. How could the conditions be otherwise without funding? No action taken to improve the facilities, despite the dire findings of the inspection. This condition was allowed to persist and a 22 bed hospital building, not a credited, was permitted to continue in operation, even though 40% of the local population was black!



Outrageous comes to mind, but as a term it could fall short. Segregation is often thought of in terms of drinking fountains, or restaurants, but we don't see that it also included health care.



We sat down at the end of the tour and finalized our discussion. I don't think there was anyone in the group that wasn't sensitized to the past, and to the unequal treatment that our black residents and their experience. It is shocking when you look back at how things were. I am grateful that we are a long, long way from where we once were. There's always more to do but things have definitely improved. We were given tasks to consider as a residence of the city of St. Petersburg. Key among them is supporting minority businesses, and seeking equity in the workforce. There is talent and capacity in all communities and our support for it must be colorblind. Where it is found, it should be promoted and supported. This was true in the past, is the case today, and should be our guiding principal in the future.





A City council member was with us, having driven by and seeing the group, stopped to join us. He is shown in the green shirt at the left. Thankfully he thought about getting a group picture which was great. We're shown here in close proximity to the Jordan elementary school.



Keep smiling! (Yes you granddaughter)

END