

(below): 1940s Booker High School graduates.



12. EDUCATION

THE GATEWAY TO PROGRESS

3400 North Orange Avenue

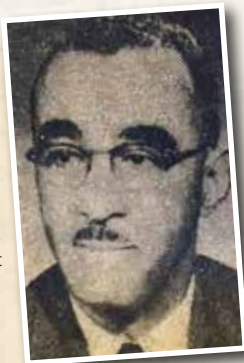
Education was a cherished possession of free African Americans who were denied the privilege of reading and writing by slave owners. In the South, opportunities to attend school were scarce. Some residents of Overtown who possessed basic literacy skills taught children in private homes and churches.

Emma Edwina Booker changed the education landscape for African Americans in Sarasota forever. The Sarasota County NAACP led protests and boycotts so that African American students could receive an equal education and access to community schools.

13. MEDICAL HISTORY OF NEWTOWN & OVERTOWN

1775 Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Way

For almost a third of Newtown's 100-year history, the African American community supplied most of their own medical care using cobwebs, cotton balls, turpentine and castor oil as internal and external cure-alls. Midwives helped pregnant women to give birth. Later, social clubs, benevolent organizations and Sarasota County public health nurses filled the treatment gap. Dr. John Watson Chenault, a board certified orthopedic surgeon was the first African American physician to receive practicing privileges at Sarasota Memorial Hospital.



(above): Dr. John W. Chenault.

14. ORGANIZATIONS IN NEWTOWN & OVERTOWN

Across the street from 2311 Maple Avenue

After the Civil War ended slavery in the South, segregationist policies and Jim Crow laws still prevented access to healthcare, education and social services for African Americans. Newtown residents developed self-help groups, such as benevolent organizations, mutual aid societies, social clubs and secret orders to address issues relating to healthcare, education and civil rights.



(above): Bethune Cookman College president Mary McLeod Bethune and The Charmettes.

15. AFRICAN AMERICAN CHURCHES OF NEWTOWN & OVERTOWN

1680 18th Street

The Newtown and Overtown communities were built on strong religious foundations. In the 1880s, Baptist, Methodist and other Christian denominations worshipped together in private homes.

As the population of communities increased, new churches were built for each denomination. Bethlehem Baptist Church established in 1899 in Overtown, is the first church built by and for African American residents of Sarasota.



(above): Bethlehem Baptist Church service.



Sarasota County markers are packed with more information about African American history. Plan a visit to:

- Booker High School
- Helen Payne Day Nursery
- Lido Beach
- Woodlawn Cemetery
- Laurel Turpentine Camp
- Bee Ridge Turpentine Camp
- Woodmere Lumber Company
- Rosemary Cemetery
- Downtown Sarasota at Five Points
- Overtown
- R. L. Taylor Community Complex
- African American Cultural Resource Center



Newtown African American HERITAGE TRAIL

The first step in your search to find out about how Newtown developed and grew is over. A team of experts made the job easier. Now, 15 historic markers pay homage to Sarasota's African American pioneers who transformed one of the town's oldest neighborhoods. Meet memorable people. Trace their transition to the north side. Follow in their footsteps to unforgettable places. (Pictured above): Mary Ellen Hughes.



FOR MORE INFORMATION:
URL: www.newtownalive.org
EMAIL: info@newtownalive.com
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NEWTOWN HISTORIC MARKER LISTINGS



(above): African American pioneer Leonard Reid.

Its growth prompted anxiety among town leaders and residents in Gillespie Park, Hillcrest and Vallencia Terrace communities.

Overtown residents were encouraged to move north to Newtown and public housing developments. A "Slum Clearance" project in 1957 started the systematic displacement of Overtown residents. By the 1970s, most residents had been voluntarily or involuntarily relocated. Most went to Newtown.

2. MAKING A LIVING AFRICAN AMERICAN LABOR

2500 North Orange Avenue

When the Civil War ended in 1865, some freed people migrated to Sarasota and Manatee Counties from north and central Florida, Georgia, Alabama, Mississippi and the Carolinas in search of a better life. Job opportunities increased with the arrival of the railroad in 1903 and Florida's 1920s land boom. African American labor built Sarasota's infrastructure, roads, bridges and highways.

3. ACTIVISTS & ELECTED OFFICIALS

2700 Orange Avenue North

Neil Humphrey Sr., a World War II veteran and an entrepreneur, was the first president of the Sarasota County NAACP, founded in 1952.



John Rivers, his assistant, was the second president. The NAACP and activists protested Jim Crow laws that denied equal representation in city politics. In a 1979 federal lawsuit, Newtown activists, led by Edward James II, successfully challenged Sarasota's at-large election system that diluted African American voting strength. After winning the lawsuit, African Americans were elected to represent Newtown on the Sarasota City Commission.

(left): Former Sarasota City Commissioner Rev. Jerome Dupree.

1. OVERTOWN & NEWTOWN EARLY SETTLEMENT

1912 North Orange Avenue

Beginning in 1884, African Americans lived in segregated Overtown, near where they worked in downtown Sarasota. By the 1920s, the community grew into a thriving residential and business district.



(below): Mule train on Celery Farm.

(below): African American soldiers of World War II socialized at the Wright Bush house.



4. THE WRIGHT BUSH HOUSE
1732 Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Way
Wright Bush, an entrepreneur, owned land and a general store. Born in Georgia in 1863, Bush moved to Sarasota and built a single-family home on Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Way in 1920. It was the first home to have electricity. Some Newtown residents connected their homes to the power lines at Bush's house. African American soldiers of World War II, stationed at an army base near the Sarasota-Bradenton airport, socialized at the Bush house. Community meetings were held there.

5. BUSTLING BUSINESS DISTRICT

1742 Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Way

Striving to better their lives, Newtown men and women worked long hours to provide for their families. To make ends meet, they patched together salaries from several jobs and supplemented their incomes by opening businesses. The Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Way corridor, then 33rd Street, was filled with more than 100 businesses.



(above): Henry Solomon, owner of a Newtown store with Jewel Phillips.



(above): Janie's Garden retail space.

6. NEWTOWN REDEVELOPMENT VISION FOR THE FUTURE

1782 Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Way

The Newtown Community Redevelopment Area (CRA) Plan was adopted to eliminate "blight and slum conditions." A comprehensive "blueprint for revitalization," based on priorities outlined by Newtown residents, was developed and is in the implementation stages.

7. SEGREGATION, DESEGREGATION & INTEGRATION

2730 Links Avenue

Florida was a hotbed of racist activity during the Reconstruction Era (1865-1877). Locally and nationwide, African Americans were subjected to a deadly wave of violence. Six unidentified men were lynched in 1896 in Manatee County.

When Sarasota and Manatee existed as one combined county, newspapers reported on "bands of whitecaps (segregationists) firing on Negroes and driving them out of the county." The lynching of Henry Thomas was reported in 1903 and Will English was lynched by a mob. Churches such as Greater Hurst Chapel A.M.E. were among the meeting places for civil rights activities such as the planning of boycotts.



(above): Herald Tribune news article.

8. CHURCH ARCHITECTURE IN NEWTOWN

2504 Gillespie Avenue

The church has always been an important aspect of life in Newtown and the best location to gauge the heartbeat of the community. The earliest churches in Newtown were simple, rectilinear (straight-lined rectangular) buildings that were a gathering place for many activities.



(above): Greater Hurst Chapel A.M.E. Church.

As the African American community developed, so did Newtown churches. The buildings became larger and more elaborate places to go for inspiration, prayer and reflection.

9. BUSTLING BUSINESS DISTRICT (2)

2431 Washington Court

Shops along the main thoroughfare in Newtown helped residents survive segregation by providing necessities when Sarasota shops were off limits. Newtown residents could live dignified lives without having to face degrading "back door" service and unsanitary "colored only" facilities.



(above): Asa Jenkins at his filling station.

10. HISTORICAL ARCHITECTURE OF NEWTOWN

3014 Dixie Avenue

Most of the historic buildings in Newtown can be described as "vernacular" architecture. The structures are built based on the traditions and experiences of local craftspeople. Many of the lots in Newtown were very narrow when originally laid out. As a result, the typical house form is rectilinear (straight-lined or rectangular). A dense pattern of historic structures is located along Dixie Avenue between 29th and 31st Streets.



(above): Charlie Jones Sr. Licensed electrician, plumber & carpenter.

11. MILITARY SERVICE

1845 34th Street, Robert L. Taylor Community Complex

Enlisting in the United States military and swearing to protect the rights of all Americans is a high calling that requires sacrifice. Newtown's most decorated officers were Lieutenant Colonel Doxey Byrd Jr., a Battalion Commander in Okinawa, Japan who later worked at the Pentagon and as a professor at Howard University teaching Military Science; and Captain Cornell McKenzie, the first African American from Sarasota to graduate from West Point Military Academy in 1976.



(above): Lieutenant Colonel Doxey Byrd Jr. served during World War II.