

Table of Contents

Introduction

Reference Map

Tour One: Watts Going On 7

Tour Two: The Heights 13

Tour Three: Reading, 'Riting, Relaxing 21

Tour Four: Jay Walking 29

Tour Five: Surf 'n' Turf 40

Tour Six: Sour Water 47

Tour Seven: Mansions and Mystery Mountain 51

Authored by the University of Virginia Community History Project:

Daniel Bluestone
Sarah Eissler
Kalia Ellis
Frances McMillen

Blythe Rowe
Thomas Salaki
R.R.S. Stewart
Josi Ward

Introduction

An Introduction to Watts Branch

Watts Branch is an area of Ward 7 in northeast Washington, DC. Watts Branch refers to a creek that flows into the Anacostia River, to the public park surrounding the creek (renamed Marvin Gaye Park in 2006), and it can also refer to the broader community made up of distinct residential neighborhoods including Burrville, Lincoln Heights, Capitol Heights, Kenilworth, and Deanwood. This guidebook explores the history of the area along Watts Branch. It pays particular attention to the architecture, the landscape, and to some of the notable people who developed the area including engineer and civic activist Howard D. Woodson, pioneer educator Nannie Helen Burroughs, and inspired lily farmer Walter B. Shaw.

In the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries much of the land in this area was used for agricultural production. The valley bottomland, flanking Watts Branch, was occasionally enriched when the creek flooded over its banks. Both free and enslaved people worked the land. In the 1870s, proposals for rail lines in the area east of the Anacostia River prompted developers to begin subdividing farmland for suburban homes. The loose geometry of rectangular blocks and lots tended to ignore the presence of Watts Branch, failing to use the creek as a feature to be thoughtfully incorporated into the new settlement pattern. Many real estate maps of the area even failed to show the course of the creek. When residential development filled the area, a series of destructive floods made the consequences of ignoring the stream increasingly obvious. Floods frequently overran the developing modest suburban landscape, greatly inconvenienced residents along the creek. Both African American and white residents settled along Watts Branch; many worked in a variety of positions as government clerks and laborers and service employees in central Washington and in the nearby Navy yard.

In the 1920s officials of the National Capital Park and Planning Commission, including planners John Nolen, Frederic Delano, and Charles W. Eliot II, envisioned a very different form for the Watts Branch Valley. They advocated purchasing or condemning a strip of land nearly two miles in length along the stream to create an innovative linear park and parkway system that could promote flood control by removing residences and other buildings from the flood plain. They also saw this park plan as preferable to the more expensive and less scenic solution of running a closed storm sewer through the entire length of the valley.

The purchase of hundreds of parcels of land and the unsettling of hundreds of residents for the park development began in 1938 and continued into the 1940s. People participating in various Depression-era federal work relief programs completed the initial work on the park landscape. World War II prompted a major housing boom that significantly changed the form and style of the area's suburban residences while increasing population density. This was followed in the 1950s and 1960s by the development of large public housing estates built in part to accommodate residents displaced by urban renewal and highway building in the center of Washington DC.

The extraordinary linear park along Watts Branch has gone through cycles of neglect and rejuvenation, even as the stream itself has grown increasingly polluted. In 1965, the park provided an important focal point for a Laurence Rockefeller funded park restoration pursued as part of Lady Bird Johnson's Capital Beautification Campaign. After another period of neglect, Washington Parks & People, a non-profit network of community park partnerships, began a multi-million dollar revitalization of the park in 2001. Thousands of community volunteers removed millions of pounds of debris from the park and inaugurated a significant park planting program, understanding that the health of the park is directly connected to the health and beauty of the surrounding neighborhood. This guide explores Marvin Gaye Park within the context of the broader Watts Branch community. So take a look, we're sure you'll find a lot of history worth exploring here.

Credits: The Community History Workshop at the University of Virginia's School of Architecture produced this guide in the Spring of 2007. This research expanded upon the summer 2006 Watts Branch Design Study led by UVA Professors William Morrish and Julie Bargmann, funded by the Casey Trees Endowment and the Anacostia Waterfront Corporation and supported by Washington Parks and People. It also reflects the collaborative research and design project that took place in Fall 2006 between the Elissa Rosenberg's UVA landscape architecture studio and Daniel Bluestone's Watts Branch Community Public History Seminar. It was printed with the help of Brooke, Bob, and Ben Rhodes at James River Press, Richmond, Virginia. The Watercolor featured on the Guidebook's cover and used as the basis for the Workshop's digital maps was created by Mary Belcher for Washington Parks & People.

Walking Tours

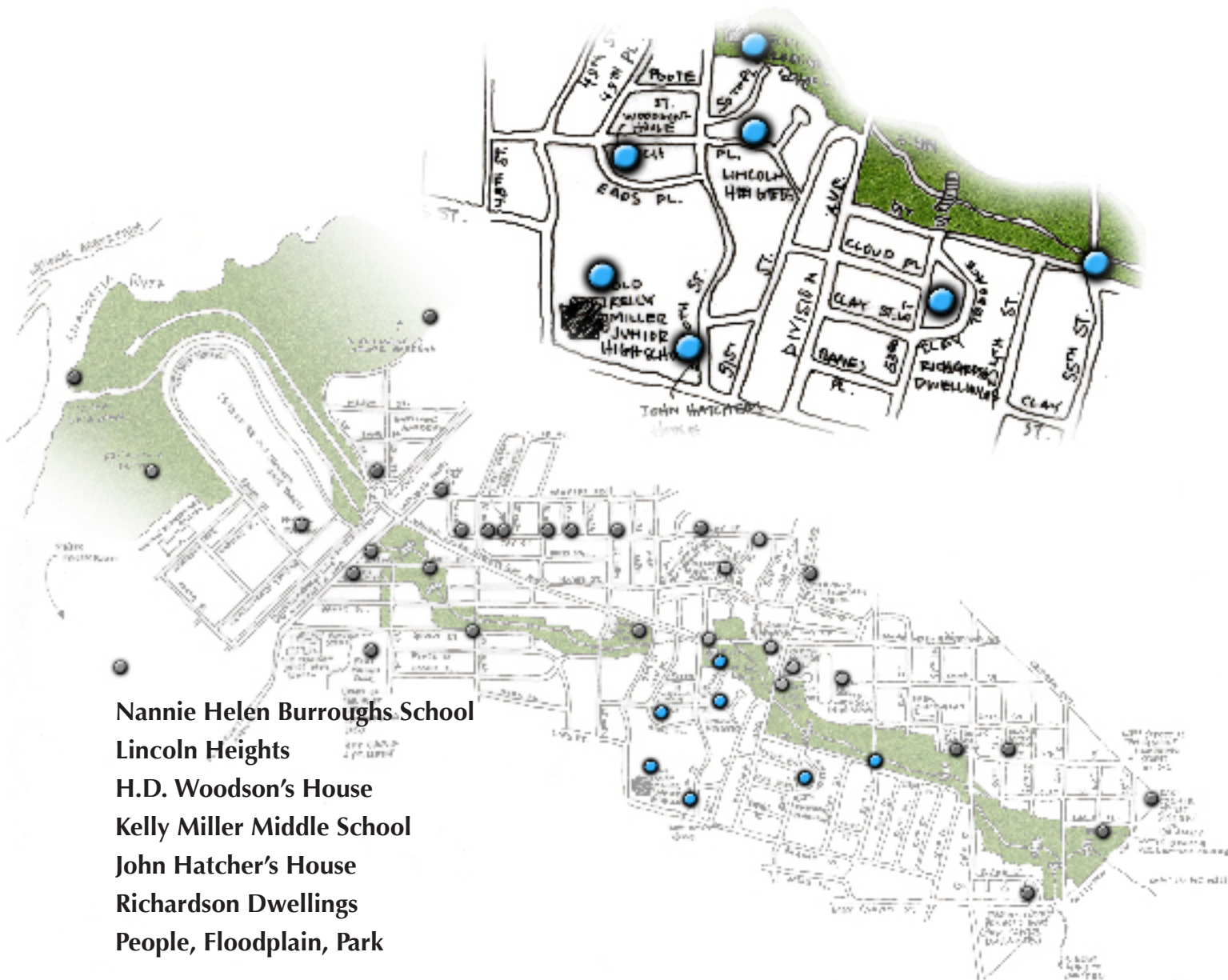
Walking Tours



- Watts Going On
- The Heights
- Reading, 'Riting, Relaxing
- Jay Walking
- Surf 'n' Turf
- Sour Water
- Mansions and Mystery Mountain

The Heights

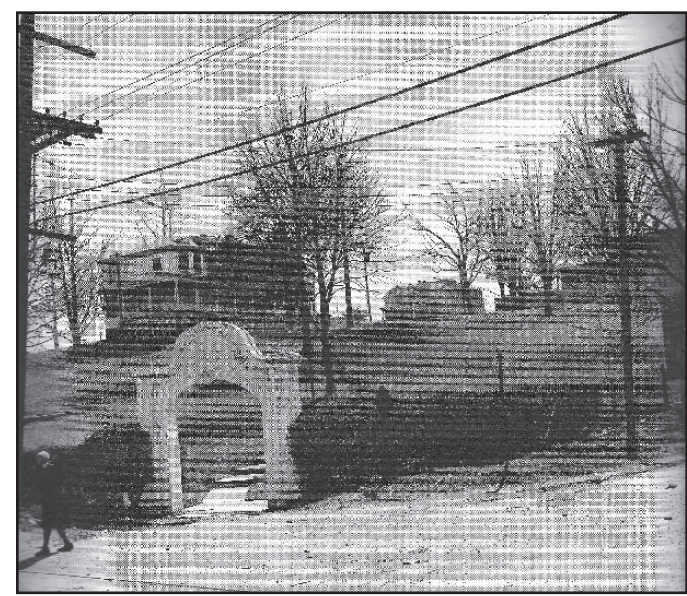
Tour Two: The Heights



- Nannie Helen Burroughs School
- Lincoln Heights
- H.D. Woodson's House
- Kelly Miller Middle School
- John Hatcher's House
- Richardson Dwellings
- People, Floodplain, Park



Nannie Helen Burroughs School
601 50th Street



Nannie Helen Burroughs (see page 26) founded the National Training School for Women and Girls at this site in 1909. Burroughs' school was the first national school dedicated to the education of African American women to be opened outside of the Deep South. Burroughs liberal arts curriculum prepared students for work as teachers, missionaries, and domestic servants. The school also featured courses in African American history, a rarity at that time.

The School began in a modestly converted farmhouse and barn on the hill, but by the 1920s this building had been torn down and replaced by a campus including a Community Service Building containing a library and store; a laundry where students who needed financial assistance could work to earn money; a memorial home named after Mary C. Burdette; a hall named after Maggie Lena Walker, the first black female bank president; several other halls; and dormitories for 8 teachers and 102 students, ranging in age from 14 to 39. In 1933, the school expanded to include a middle school for students aged 8 to 14.



In recognition of the broad education Burroughs provided her students, the section of the school for older students was granted Junior College status in 1939 and its name was changed to the National Trade and Professional School. In 1964, the high school and college were replaced by a Baptist elementary school named the Nannie Helen Burroughs School. As the site changed its educational role, the architecture changed in response, with the original buildings being gradually replaced. The oldest building on the site today is chapel from the 1940's. The 1956 dormitory now functions as a community center. The current School building and the National Headquarters of the Progressive National Baptist Convention were built in the 1980's.

The National Training School in the 1920s, The Nannie Helen Burroughs School in 2007

Lincoln Heights
215 - 529 50th Street

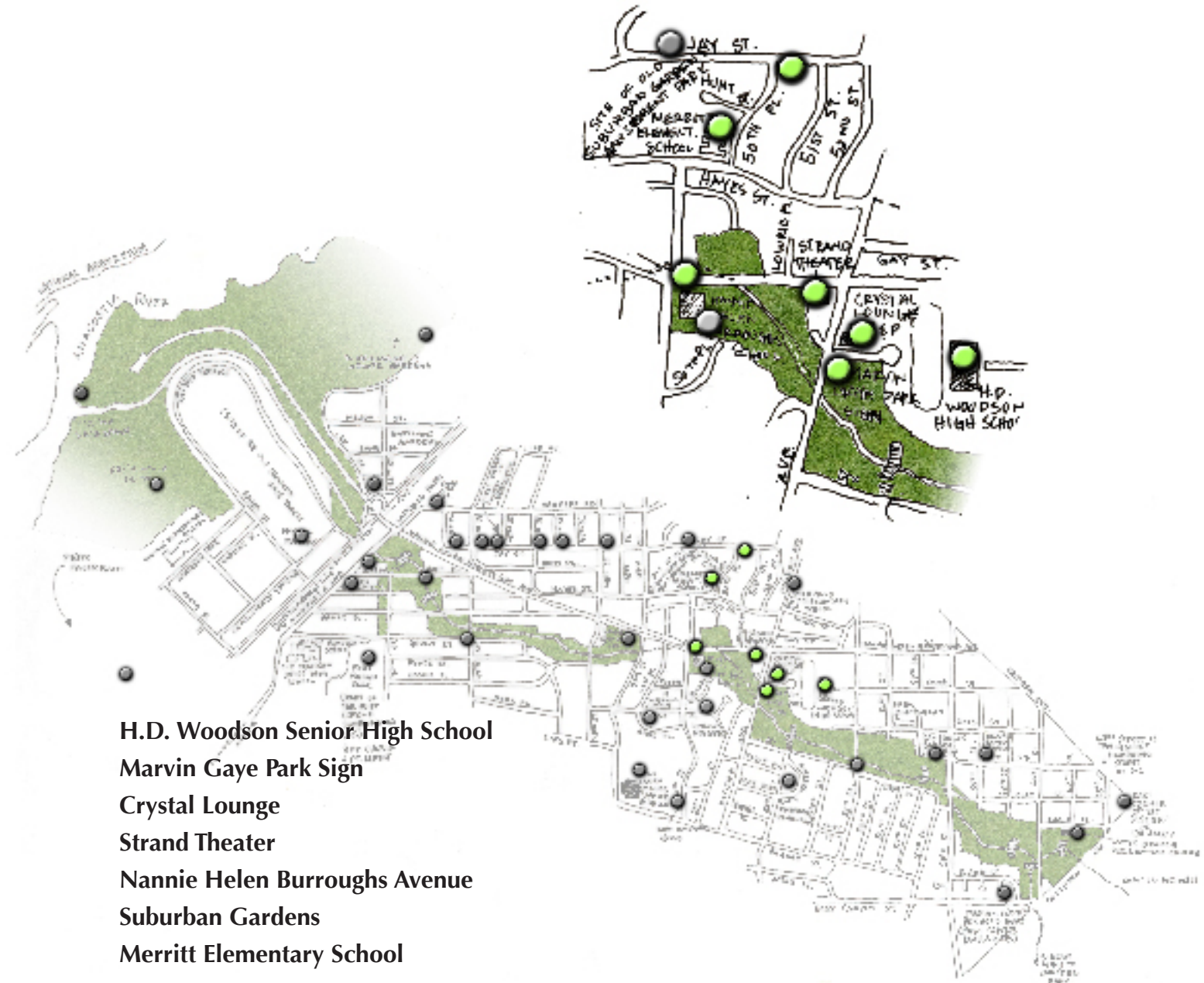


This modern style 400-unit public housing project was constructed in 1945 to accommodate African American war workers and their families, but was quickly converted to public housing following the end of WWII. It offered both duplex houses and apartments that stepped up the hill's dramatic climb from Watts Branch creek. Roads curve up the hill and staircases accommodate more direct pedestrian access through the site. The development takes its name from the neighborhood it was built in: Lincolnville, christened by freed slaves who settled in the area after the Civil War. The solidity of the brick construction and the density of the development contrasts with the modest frame residences and scattered houses that made up the area's nineteenth century residential landscape.

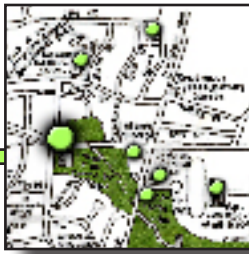
In the 1950s, Lincoln Heights was the site of a landmark civil liberties case that challenged the right of the housing authority to evict residents who refused to sign an oath stating they were not members of subversive organizations. The case of John and Doris Rudder made its way to the US Court of Appeals, where in July 1955, the Court ruled that refusal to sign an oath is not proof of membership in a subversive organization, nor cause for eviction.

A decade later, Lincoln Heights became part of Lady Bird Johnson's general renewal of Watts Branch (see the entry on John Hatcher's house, page 18). Over the years, poor maintenance and neighborhood strife in Lincoln Heights have prompted residents and city officials to call for either redevelopment or demolition of the Lincoln Heights project. The area currently provides housing for over 1500 people.

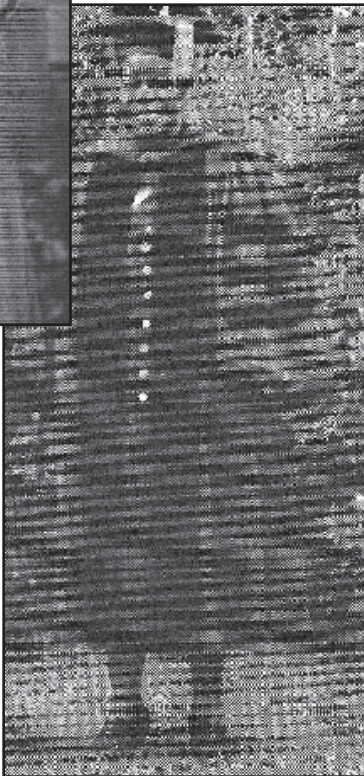
Reading, 'Riting, Relaxing
Tour Three: Reading, 'Riting, Relaxing



- H.D. Woodson Senior High School**
- Marvin Gaye Park Sign**
- Crystal Lounge**
- Strand Theater**
- Nannie Helen Burroughs Avenue**
- Suburban Gardens**
- Merritt Elementary School**



Nannie Helen Burroughs Avenue



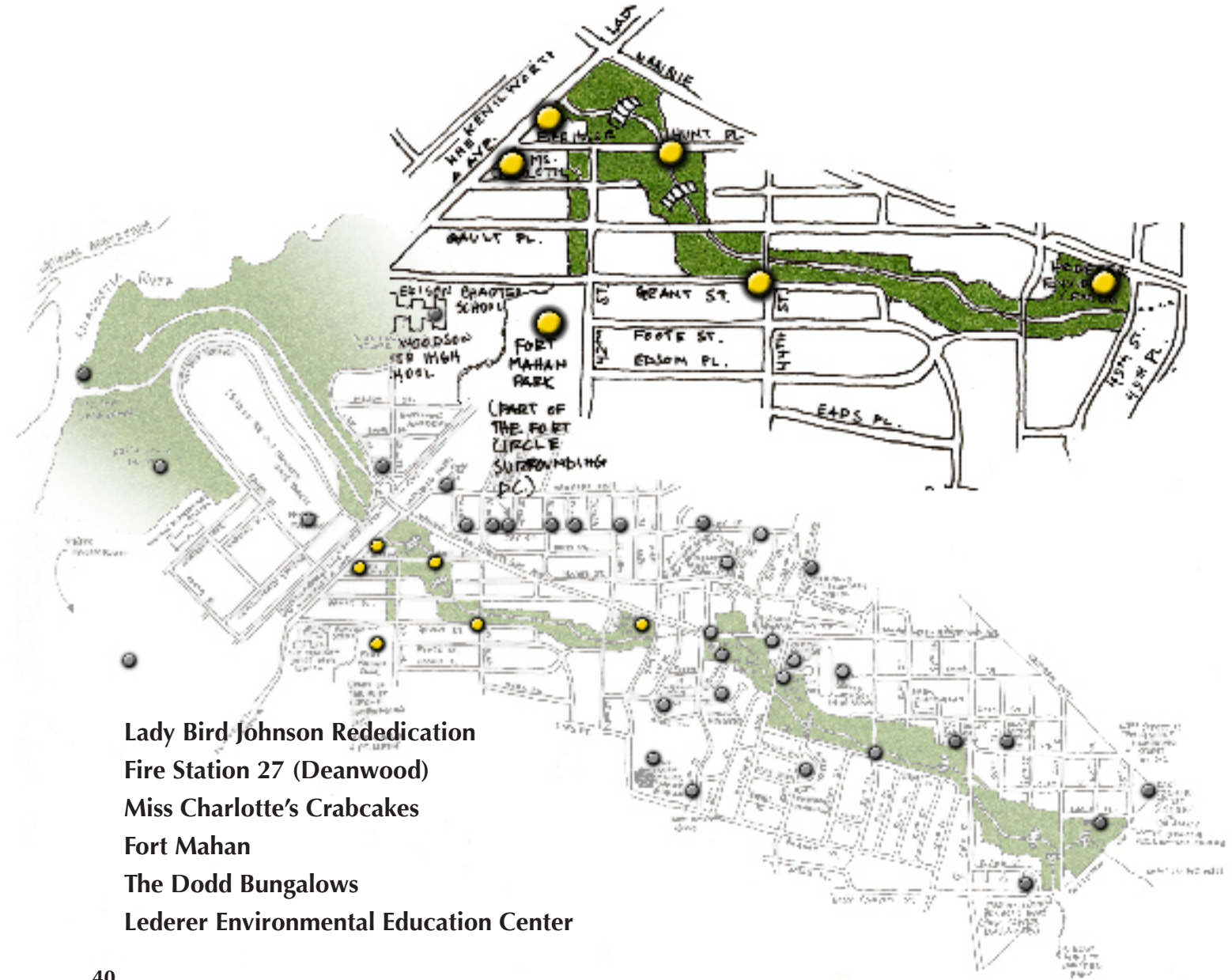
In 1976, Deane Avenue and a portion of Grant Street were renamed Nannie Helen Burroughs Avenue. Burroughs, a pioneer in the education of African American girls and women, founded the National Training School for Women and Girls in 1909 on Deane Avenue (see page 14). Burroughs was born on May 2, 1879, in Orange, Virginia. Her mother brought her to Washington, DC, to take advantage of the superior local schools. Attending the District's African American high school, Burroughs studied with Anna Julia Cooper and Mary Church Turrell, two educators and social activists with whom Burroughs would later be compared. After she graduated from high school, Burroughs applied to assist her former domestic science teacher. She was told she was too young, but some historians have suggested the real reason was that her skin was too dark and she did not have the right family background. This experience may well have shaped her vision for the National Training School.

Working with the National Baptist Convention's missionary organization in Louisville, Kentucky, Burroughs became an advocate for women's full voting participation in the Convention. In 1900 at the age of 21, she began to promote her vision of a school for African American females of all demoninations. As she honed this idea, Burroughs selected a site on Deane Avenue with an old farmhouse in which she eventually opened the National Training School for Women and Girls. The school enjoyed great success over the years. A member of the National Association of Colored Women, Burroughs was appointed by President Franklin D. Roosevelt to a commission on African American Housing in the 1930s. In 1944, she received an honorary degree of Doctor of Law from Shaw University. Burroughs died on May 20, 1961. In 1975, May 10 was declared "Nannie Helen Burroughs Day" in Washington, DC.

Young Nannie Helen Burroughs, Dr. Burroughs receiving her honorary doctorate in 1944.

Surf 'n' Turf

Tour Five: Surf 'n' Turf



- Lady Bird Johnson Rededication
- Fire Station 27 (Deanwood)
- Miss Charlotte's Crabcakes
- Fort Mahan
- The Dodd Bungalows
- Lederer Environmental Education Center



Fire Station 27 (Deanwood)

4201 Minnesota Avenue



This area of Washington, DC, east of the Anacostia River did not get its first fire station until 1908, when the Benning station (now called the Deanwood station) opened with a horse-drawn seven-year-old chemical engine (a stop-gap measure for an area without many fire hydrants). The station was designed by Leon Dessez, who also designed Station 26 (Brentwood), Station 10 (Mount Vernon Triangle), and the building that now serves as the Vice-President's house. As a handsome civic monument built of brick, two stories high, Station 27 is typical of fire stations of the period, with the firefighter's living quarters occupying the upper floor. The Garage doors on the street facade were remodeled in the '70s to accommodate the larger size of modern day equipment. Today, the station houses Engine 27, Medical Unit 27, and Ambulance 27. In 2006, they received a total of 5,232 combined fire and medical calls.

By 1955, the population of the neighborhoods around Watts Branch had grown enough to require a second station. Engine Company 30, Truck Company 17, Medical Unit 30, and Ambulance 30 were organized and placed in service at 50 49th Street. In the 1990s, this station was one of the busiest in the District. Currently, Station 27 proclaims itself "D.C.'s busiest single house".

Fire Station 27 (Benning) shortly after it was built; Station 27 (Deanwood) today.

Miss Charlotte's Crabcakes

4193 Minnesota Avenue



Located just down the street from Station 27 is Miss Charlotte's Crabcakes. Miss Charlotte's Crabcakes is memorable not just for the shocking green paint that graces the exterior of the former home turned restaurant. Her signature crabcakes, sweet potatoes, and greens are just a few of the unforgettable culinary delights the Deanwood chef serves up. Considered by many to be the best crabcakes in DC, Miss Charlotte's opened in 2000 in a converted home built in 1907 by George L. Morse for his wife. If you order just crabcakes, it is served on a bun with a side of mustard. This crabcakes sandwich was indeed very good. You can also request a variety of sauces and toppings. Miss Charlotte's isn't all about crabs. Combos encompass a variety of seafood and chicken served with fries and a drink. Platters (fish, crab, shrimp, scallops, chicken tenders, or various combinations) come with fries, coleslaw, and a drink. Dinners are served with two sides and a drink. Sides range from fries, to beans, sweet potatoes, yams, other southern favorites, and even sweet things, like cheesecake and rice pudding. Drinks are limited to ice tea, lemonade, fruit punch, mixes of the previous, and soda pop. Make sure you say hello to the real Miss Charlotte if you stop by!

Sandwiches \$4-6.50, Combos \$5.75 - \$8.75, Platters \$11.50 - 17.75, Dinners \$8.75 - \$ 20.95, sides only \$1.50 to \$2.50. There's also a kid corner with prices from \$1.95 to \$6.25.

