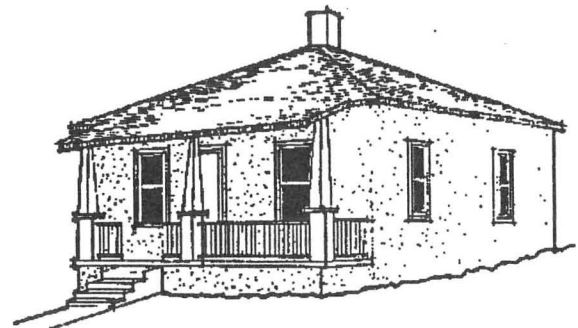


FAIRMOUNT HEIGHTS, MARYLAND



A HISTORY:

FROM ITS BEGINNINGS (1900) TO
INCORPORATION (1935)



M-NCPPC Planning Department
14741 Governor Oden Bowie Drive
Upper Marlboro, MD 20772

TITLE: Fairmount Heights, Maryland
A History: from its Beginnings (1900)
to Incorporation (1935)

AUTHOR: Susan G. Pearl, Research/Architectural Historian
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SUBJECT: History and development of Fairmount Heights, Maryland

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ABSTRACT

This report summarizes the findings of an architectural/historical survey of Fairmount Heights, requested by the Mayor and Council of the Town. The goal of the project was to prepare a history of the development of the community from its earliest subdivision in 1900.

The report describes the sequential platting, between 1900 and 1923, of the six subdivisions which make up the present-day municipality; it describes the building of some of the earliest homes, and the establishment of community institutions such as schools, churches, the social hall and citizens associations. It analyzes and compares the architectural forms of the residential buildings, and describes the community in 1935 as it achieved incorporation, at that time the largest black municipality in Prince George's County. The report is supplemented by photographs, plats and maps.

FAIRMOUNT HEIGHTS, MARYLAND

A HISTORY:

FROM ITS BEGINNINGS (1900) TO INCORPORATION (1935)

Prepared by:

Susan G. Pearl
Research/Architectural Historian
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Prince George's County
July 1991

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The Commission has three major functions:

- the preparation, adoption, and from time to time amendment or extension of the General Plan for the physical development of the Maryland-Washington Regional District;
- the acquisition, development, operation, and maintenance of a public park system; and
- in Prince George's County only, the operation of the entire County public recreation program.

The Commission operates in each county through a Planning Board, appointed by and responsible to the county government. All local plans, recommendations on zoning amendments, administration of subdivision regulations, and general administration of parks are responsibilities of the Planning Boards.

The Prince George's County Department of Planning (M-NCPPC):

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 - ...use of land including the enhancement of the physical environment, and
 - ...provision of public facilities and services.
- Works on a set of specific projects and tasks annually set forth in a work program and budget adopted by the Prince George's County Council and performs such other tasks in response to emerging issues as resources permit.
- Works under the direction of the Prince George's County Planning Board.
- Is an organization of people that is here to serve people...our elected and appointed officials, our fellow public staffs, and our citizens...individually and/or collectively. The staff will maintain a partnership with people. It will assist and advise you, and will expect your assistance and advice.
- Maintains competent and professionally able staff to perform our duties and responsibilities.

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INTRODUCTION

This final report summarizes the findings of an historical/architectural survey of the Town of Fairmount Heights conducted by the Historic Preservation Section of the Prince George's County Planning Department/M-NCPPC from July 1990 to June 1991 (FY 91). The survey was requested by the Fairmount Heights Town Council and the Honorable Ruth Brown, Mayor. The goal of the project was to prepare a history of the development of the community from its earliest subdivision in 1900, including a brief architectural analysis of the earliest dwellings.

The Town of Fairmount Heights is located in Prince George's County, near the easternmost corner of the District of Columbia; it is composed of a group of early twentieth-century subdivisions that form one of the earliest planned communities for blacks in the Washington, D. C., area. The community began with the Fairmount Heights subdivision platted in 1900, followed by five adjoining subdivisions, the last being Sylvan Vista platted in 1923. The Town was incorporated in 1935, and grew steadily through the years before World War II.

This report was prepared using descriptive and photographic survey techniques, and a variety of sources which include land and probate records, maps, plats, tax assessments, newspapers, census records and suburban directories. It summarizes the early history and development of the Fairmount Heights community; it describes the sequential platting of the subdivisions, the building of some of the earliest homes, and the contributions of some of the most active citizens who settled in the growing community. It outlines the establishment of community institutions such as churches, schools, social hall, volunteer fire company and citizens associations. It analyzes and compares the architectural forms of the residential buildings, and describes the community in 1935 as it achieved incorporation, the largest black municipality in Prince George's County. The report is supplemented by photographs, maps and plats.

Within the Town of Fairmount Heights, two individual properties are protected by the County's Historic Preservation Ordinance: the Fairmount Heights School (#72-9-9) and the District of Columbia Boundary Marker N. E. #9 (#72-9-15) are listed as Historic Resources. Two other buildings, the Samuel Hargrove House (#72-9-17) and the W. Sidney Pittman House (#72-9018) are proposed as resources in the amendment to the Historic Sites and Districts Plan, adoption of which is expected in the fall of 1991.

The FY91 Fairmount Heights survey was designed to provide the Town of Fairmount Heights and its residents with information about the history and architecture of this community. Information from this report is being used in the preparation of building maintenance and design guidelines.

Susan G. Pearl
Samuel J. Parker

June 1991

FAIRMOUNT HEIGHTS: A HISTORY

FROM ITS BEGINNINGS (1900) TO INCORPORATION (1935)

The Town of Fairmount Heights is located just outside the easternmost point of the District of Columbia in Prince George's County, Maryland; it is composed of a group of early twentieth-century subdivisions that form one of the earliest planned communities for blacks in the Washington, D. C., area. The community began with the Fairmount Heights subdivision in 1900, followed by five adjoining subdivisions, the last being Sylvan Vista platted in 1923. The Town was incorporated in 1935, and grew steadily through the years before World War II.

The land which was to become Fairmount Heights consisted, during the late nineteenth century, principally of parts of the small farms of John H. Wilson, John and Caroline Silence, Samuel Hoover, Mosby Brown and John Wiessner, all clustered around the east corner of the District of Columbia (Figure 1). In the early years of the twentieth century, these farms were bought up and subdivided by land speculators, who then began to sell individual lots to black families, most of whom worked in the District of Columbia.

The first section of Fairmount Heights was subdivided in 1900 by Robinson White and Allen Clark (both white men) out of parts of several small farms which they had purchased from the Wilson, Godfrey, Belt and Lee families. Robinson White was a lawyer and developer who resided in the District of Columbia; Allen C. Clark was a lawyer and manager of the Equitable Life Insurance Company of Washington, D. C. White and Clark had approximately fifty acres surveyed by County Surveyor Edward L. Latimer, and laid out in lots and streets radiating from the northeast boundary of the District of Columbia.¹ The deep, narrow lots were generally 25 by 125 feet; two of the streets were named for these first two developers (Figure 2). Sale of lots began almost immediately, and within a few years, dwellings were constructed and a community began to form.

¹ Prince George's County Plat JWB#5:652 (A-85), 1900; Prince George's County Deeds JB#1:787, JB#2:680, JB#4:218, JB#6:58; see also Prince George's County Tax Assessments, 1898-1908.

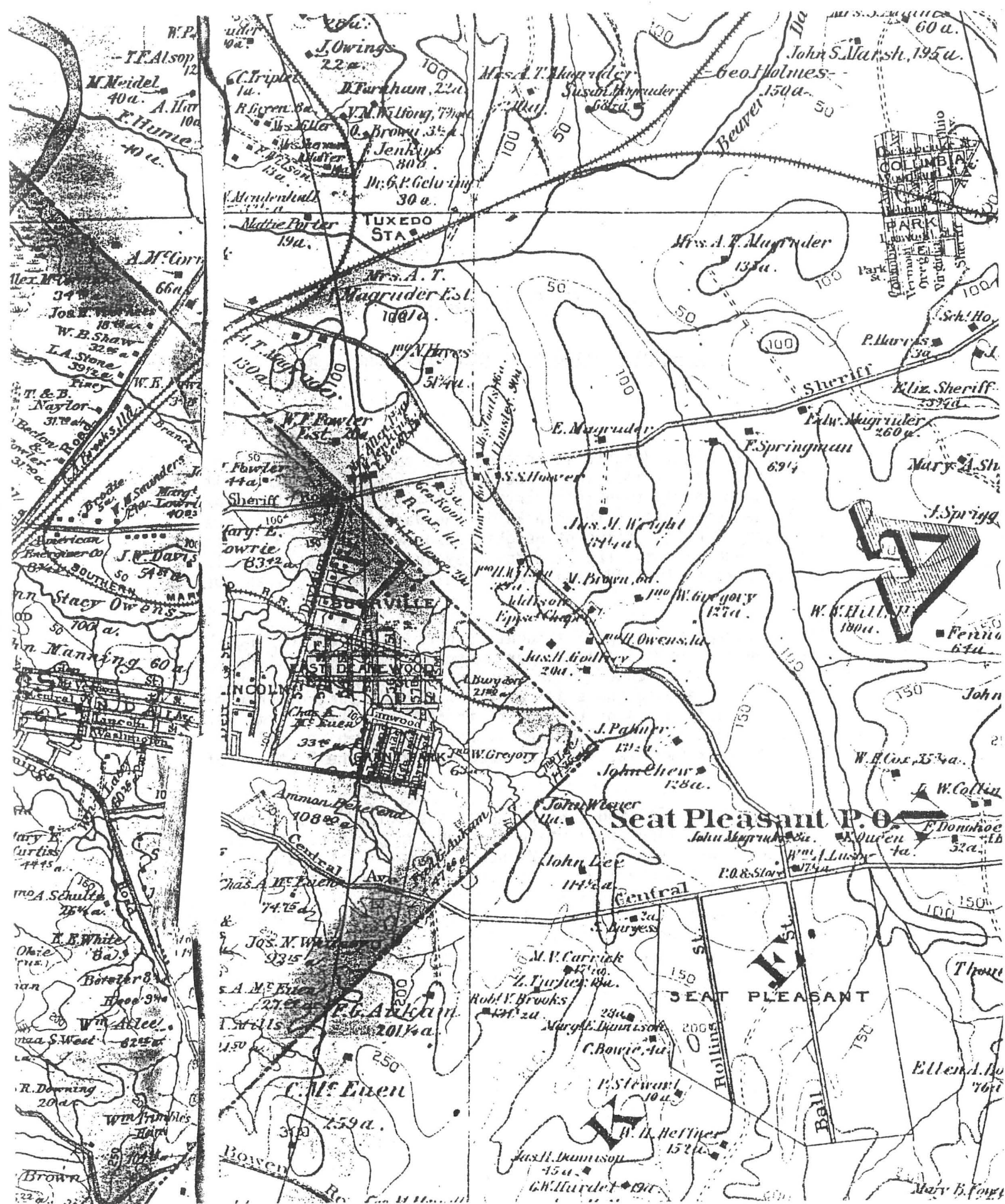
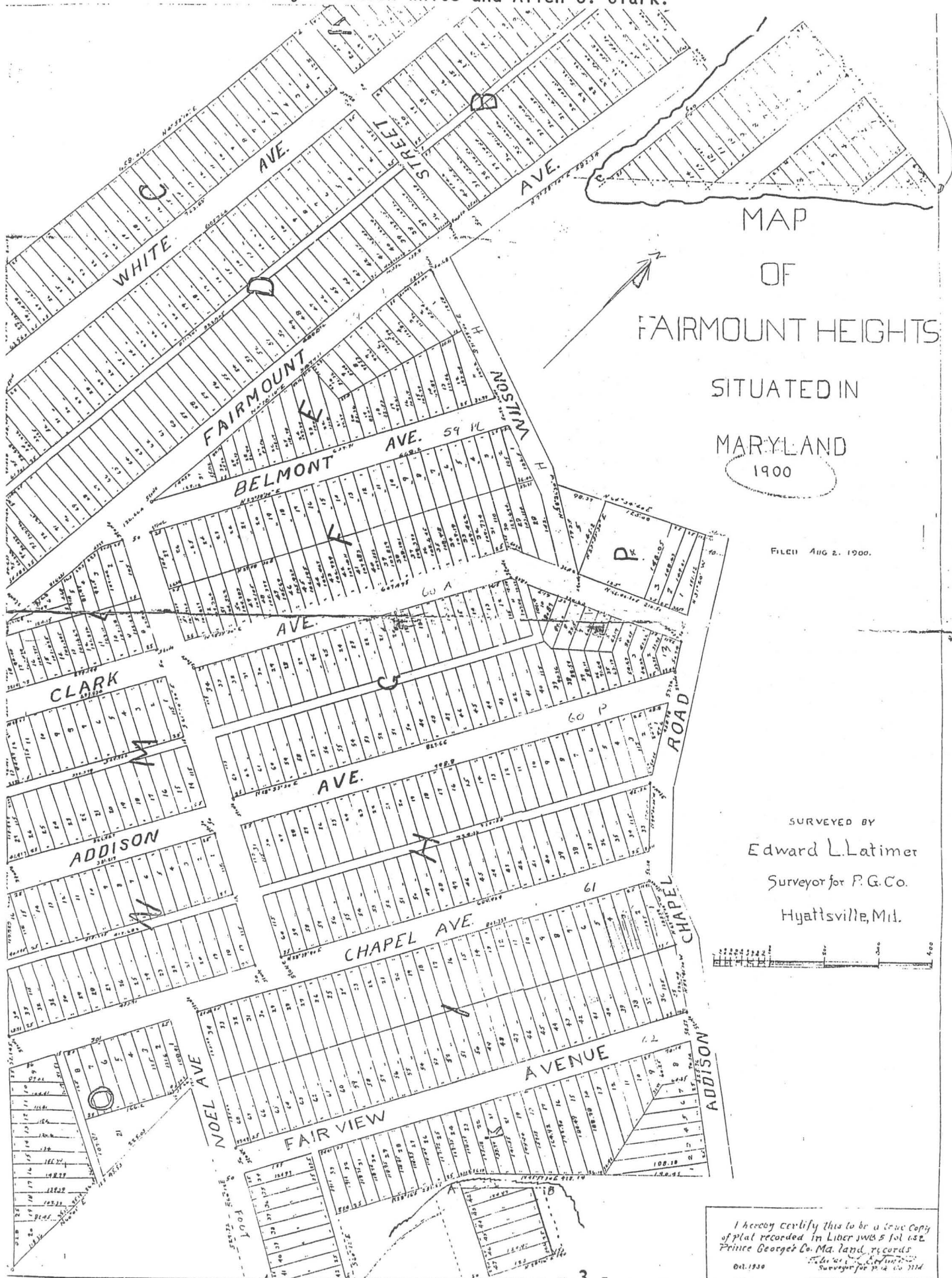


Figure 1. MAP OF VICINITY OF WASHINGTON, G. M. HOPKINS, 1894 showing area which would become Fairmount Heights.

Figure 2. FAIRMOUNT HEIGHTS SUBDIVISION, 1900
subdivided by Robinson White and Allen C. Clark.



From the beginning, blacks were encouraged to buy lots and settle in the new community. White and Clark sold the lots at relatively low prices, making home ownership attainable for black families. Most of the earliest purchasers of lots worked for government agencies; many built their own houses, or relied on friends and family to help with construction. Many families were quick to seize the opportunity to move out of the city, determined to progress, by hard work and amid healthful surroundings, toward a better life.

The earliest dwellings were of frame construction, modest in size and form, and many of these have not survived. Within a few years, however, several interesting and substantial houses were constructed for individuals who would make significant contributions to the development of Fairmount Heights.

One of the early houses built in the developing community of Fairmount Heights was built for James F. Armstrong, a lawyer educated at Tuskegee Institute and Howard University Law School. Armstrong came to Fairmount Heights in 1905 and purchased three lots in Block B on Fairmount (now 59th) Avenue; here he had his dwelling constructed in the same year.² It was a two-and-one-half story frame crossgable house, Victorian vernacular in style; it is distinguished by a wraparound porch with turned posts and jigsawn openwork brackets, and by projecting bays and well-defined pediments. Armstrong was to become active in community affairs, serving not only as Director of Manual Training in the Fairmount Heights elementary school, but later as Supervisor of Colored Schools for Prince George's County. His dwelling, still a prominent visual feature in the town (Figure 3), is a reflection of the prominence of its first resident.

At approximately the same time, Alice R. Dorsey purchased two adjoining lots in Block B, also on Fairmount (now 59th) Avenue, and had a house built for her family.³ The Dorsey house was considerably plainer than that of the Armstrong family; it had a hipped roof, an irregular Foursquare plan, and little decorative detail. This house also is a prominent visual feature in today's Fairmount Heights community (Figure 4).

In 1905, Henry Pinckney bought lots in block M, and had another Foursquare plan house built, a short distance away on Addison Avenue.⁴ Pinckney worked as steward/valet at the White House for President Theodore Roosevelt. He had brought his family to Fairmount Heights from South Carolina, and his large and substantial house must have been one of the more noticeable buildings in the early community (Figure 5).

² Prince George's County Deed #27:120; Prince George's County Tax Assessments 1904-1910.

³ Prince George's County Deed #19:588; Prince George's County Tax Assessments 1904-1910.

⁴ Prince George's County Deeds #25:227, #42:408; Prince George's County Tax Assessments 1905-1910.



Figure 3. JAMES F. ARMSTRONG HOUSE
908 59th Avenue, Fairmount Heights (Block B, lots 33,34)

Victorian vernacular frame dwelling of crossgabled plan, with wraparound porch with decorative detail, built in 1905 for James F. Armstrong, teacher and Superintendent of Prince George's County Colored Schools.



Figure 4. ALICE DORSEY HOUSE
910 59th Avenue, Fairmount Heights (Block B, lots 30,31)

Hip-roof frame house of irregular Foursquare plan, built circa 1904 for Alice Dorsey.



Figure 5. HENRY PINCKNEY HOUSE
608 60th Place, Fairmount Heights (Block M, lots 17,18)

Large frame house of Foursquare plan with projecting central crossgable, built circa 1905 for Henry Pinckney, White House steward for President Theodore Roosevelt.

One of the most noticeable houses in the community was built by Ezra and Florence Kemp on one of the highest points of ground in Fairmount Heights. In 1900 they had purchased from Allen Clark four lots in Block F, fronting on Clark (now 60th) Avenue; in 1906 they began the construction of this house.⁵ Within two years they had sold the house to William B. Coles who enlarged the house, fitted it out with a modern system of central heating, and made it a handsome and prominent landmark in the growing community (Figure 6).⁶

In 1907 J. D. O'Meara commissioned Surveyor Latimer to plat a second small subdivision on land which he had purchased from Mosby Brown; this second section, called Waterford, adjoined the Fairmount Heights subdivision on the east, separated from the first section by the road which led to Addison Chapel (St. Matthew's Episcopal Church).⁷ It consisted of only about 12 acres (Figure 7), and was slow to develop. The principal building continued to take place in the original 1900 Fairmount Heights subdivision.

In 1906, William Sidney Pittman had purchased four lots which fronted on the District Boulevard (now Eastern Avenue) which was the boundary between Prince George's County and the District of Columbia.⁸ Born in Montgomery, Alabama, Pittman had been educated at Tuskegee Institute in Alabama and Drexel Institute in Philadelphia. In 1905 he came to Washington and established his own architectural practice. The next year he married Portia Washington, daughter of Booker T. Washington, founder of Tuskegee Institute. The Pittmans purchased the four lots in Fairmount Heights and had the house built (it is not certain whether Pittman himself designed it) and moved into it in 1907 (Figure 8). Both Portia and Sidney Pittman were to have a large influence in the growing town of Fairmount Heights. Portia Pittman became a well-known and popular recital pianist, and the visits of her famous father to Washington and Fairmount Heights were always greeted with much public enthusiasm. Sidney Pittman became a well established and respected architect, in 1907 winning a national competition to design the Negro Building at the National Tercentennial Exposition at Jamestown, Virginia. In 1911 he was chosen to design the first school in Fairmount Heights; he also founded and served as president of the Fairmount Heights Mutual Improvement Company, which had as its purpose "to develop Fairmount Heights as a viable alternative to inner city ghetto living."⁹

⁵ Prince George's County Deeds #1:138,140; Prince George's County Tax Assessments, 1900-1910.

⁶ Prince George's County Deeds #41:561, #99:212; Prince George's County Tax Assessments 1905-1915.

⁷ Prince George's County Plat #2:12.

⁸ Prince George's County Deed #28:399; Prince George's County Tax Assessments 1905-1915.

⁹ Washington Bee, 6 June 1908, 12 December 1908; Prince George's County Incorporation Records JBB#1:134; Stewart, Ruth Ann, Portia: The Life of Portia Washington Pittman, the Daughter of Booker T. Washington: Doubleday & Company, N.Y., 1977; Journal of the Board of School Commissioners, April 1911.



Figure 6. WILLIAM B. COLES HOUSE
730 60th Avenue, Fairmount Heights (Block F, lots 29-31)

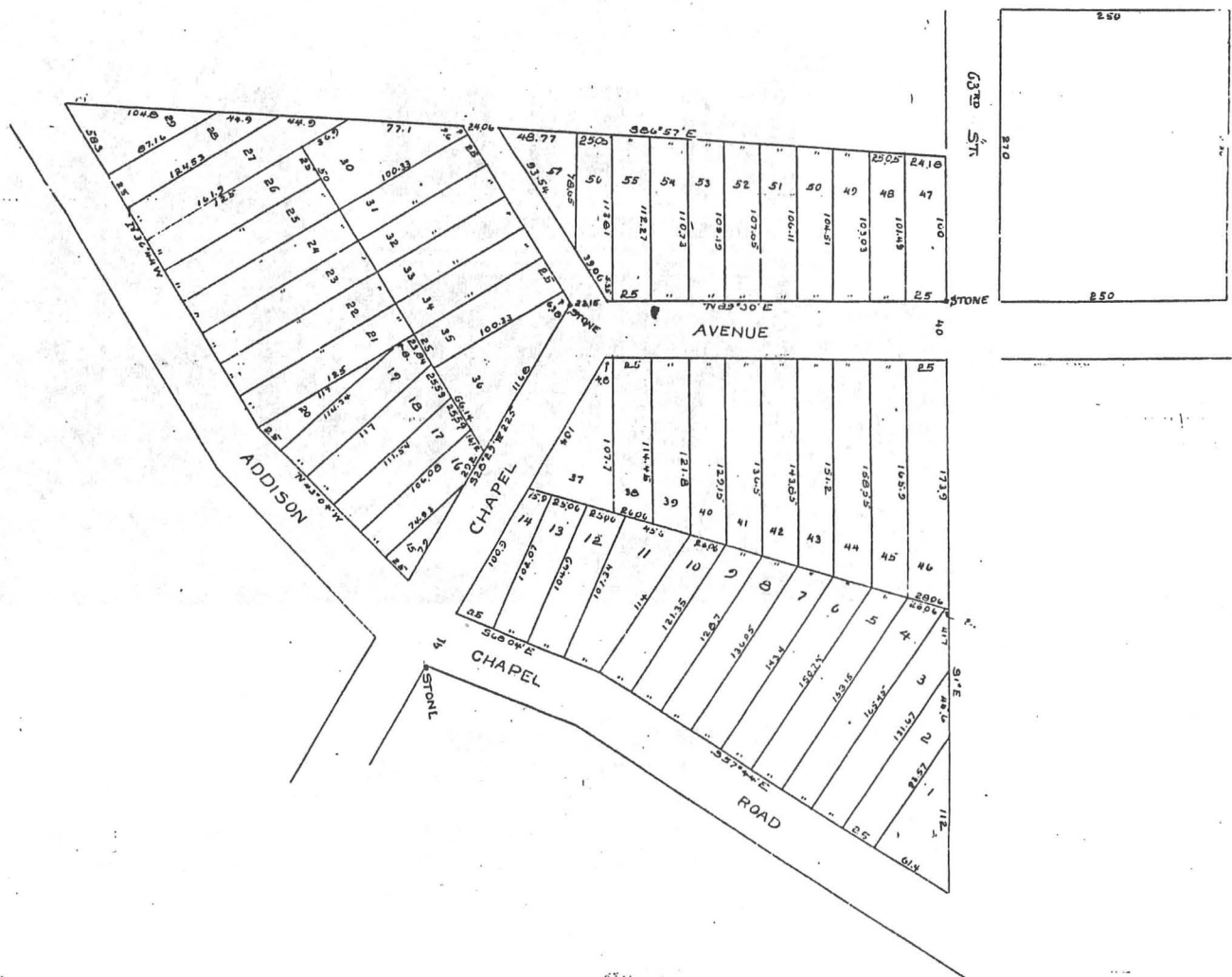
Frame crossgable house on prominent site at one of the highest points in the town, built circa 1906 for Ezra Kemp, later the home of the Coles family.

WATERFORD

J. D. OMEARAS' SUBDIVISION

— 10' —
NEAR ADDISON CHAPEL
KENT DISTRICT, PRINCE GEORGES' COUNTY, MARYLAND.

C. W. L. Co. 24-1811-



I HEREBY CERTIFY THAT THIS SUBDIVISION IS THE LAND ACQUIRED BY J. D. OMEARA OF MOSBY, BROWN AND WIFE, BY DEED DATED JULY 21, 1899, AND RECORDED IN J.W.B. 7, FOLIO 227 OF THE LAND RECORDS OF PRINCE GEORGES' COUNTY, MARYLAND, AND NOW TO BE KNOWN AS "WATERFORD". THE BOUNDARY LINES DO NOT CONFLICT WITH ANY RECORDED SUBDIVISION. STONES HAVE BEEN PLANTED ON THE MAIN STREET AS SHOWN ON THE PLAT.

ORIG. SURVEY DATED JUNE, 1907.

EDWARD L. LATIMER
SURVEYOR,
4631 Th. Ave., Wash. D.C.

Figure 7. WATERFORD SUBDIVISION, 1907
subdivided by J. D. O'Meara out of the land of Mosby Brown.



Figure 8. WILLIAM SIDNEY AND PORTIA WASHINGTON PITTMAN HOUSE
505 Eastern Avenue, Fairmount Heights (Block O, lots 17,18)

Front-gabled frame house, built circa 1908 for architect W. Sidney Pittman and his wife, Portia, daughter of Booker T. Washington.

The Fairmount Heights Mutual Improvement Company was established through the efforts of Sidney Pittman, and incorporated in 1908; the incorporation papers indicate that a principal purpose of the Company was "to purchase lots and erect thereon in Fairmount Heights, Maryland, a building to be used as a public hall for religious, charitable and other similar purposes." The original Directors of the Company included several of the individuals who had settled in Fairmount Heights and who were to play an important part in its development, e.g., Pittman himself, Charles E. Payne, James F. Armstrong, William H. Addison, and Malkiah Charity. The Company immediately purchased two improved lots in Block I, fronting on Chapel (now 61st) Avenue. On these lots the Company erected a large front-gabled hall, which was to serve not only as a social hall, but as the location of the first Methodist services before the church was built, and as a classroom until the public school was completed in 1912. In 1924, after the dissolution of the Fairmount Heights Mutual Improvement Company, the two lots were purchased by Malkiah Charity, one of the original directors of the Company. The building continued to be used as a gathering place for a variety of religious, social and charitable events, and has been known since that time as Charity Hall.¹⁰ In recent years, the building has been enlarged by both a rear wing and two asymmetrical flanking additions to the gable front. Consequently it bears little resemblance to its original historic form, but remains an important historic component in the Fairmount Heights community (Figure 9).

In February 1908 the main line of the Washington, Baltimore and Annapolis Electric Railway opened for service. This high-speed inter-urban line was built to link the cities of Washington, Baltimore and Annapolis, and twelve miles of the main Washington-Baltimore line ran through Prince George's County, running diagonally northeast from the District of Columbia boundary at Seat Pleasant to cross the Patuxent River east of Bowie. The Gregory Station in Seat Pleasant was easily accessible to residents of Fairmount Heights, and members of the Fairmount Heights citizens associations worked together with the white residents of Seat Pleasant and Capitol Heights in the erecting of passenger shelters at the stops on these lines.¹¹ Together with the District of Columbia trolley lines, the WB&A offered a new and efficient means of transportation to residents of Fairmount Heights, not only for commuting to work, but also for education and entertainment.

In December 1908, Calvin Chase, the distinguished editor of the Washington Bee (one of two prominent black newspapers published in Washington at the time), wrote an article about "Fairmount Heights: A Thriving Colored Settlement . . . Containing Beautiful Homes, Built and Occupied Entirely by Colored People." He attributed much of the progress in the community to the

¹⁰ Prince George's County Incorporation Records JBB#1:134; Prince George's County Deed #50:6, #208:273; Washington Bee, 6 June 1908, 12 December 1908.

¹¹ Pearl, S. G., "Railroads in Prince George's County, p. 32, Historic Contexts in Prince George's County: Ten short papers on Settlement Patterns, Transportation and Cultural History, M-NCPPC, 1990; Washington Bee, 13 August 1910.



Figure 9. CHARITY HALL

715 61st Avenue, Fairmount Heights (Block 0, lots 20,21)

Front-gabled frame building with many additions; originally built (1908) by Fairmount Heights Mutual Improvement Company as multi-purpose social hall, later enlarged to serve as dwelling.

efforts of Sidney Pittman, and noted the "unparalleled speed that the colored citizens out there are making in building and beautifying their homes and their surroundings. . . . Most of the residents of Fairmount Heights are employees and business men of some sort in the city of Washington, and it is easy to see from the appearance of their beautiful homes just the class of people they are." Chase went on to cite a number of the citizen activists, noting that "these men are all banded together in a strong determination to develop Fairmount Heights into one of the strongest colored settlements in the entire country."¹²

The "beautiful homes" mentioned in the Washington Bee article included, in addition to the dwellings of the Pittman, Pinckney, Armstrong, Dorsey and Coles families noted above, that of John F. Collins, soon to become the home of Robert S. Nichols. In 1908 John F. Collins acquired two adjoining unimproved lots in Block C, fronting on White (now 58th) Avenue. On these lots he built a two-part frame dwelling of complex Foursquare plan, distinguished by a wraparound porch with turned posts and jig-sawn brackets; it was certainly one of the handsomest and most substantial houses in the community at the time of its completion. The house and lots were sold in the next year to Robert S. Nichols, who had come to Maryland from Texas, and worked at the U. S. Pension office in the District of Columbia. Nichols spent many years working toward the incorporation of Fairmount Heights, and, in 1935, when the town was incorporated, he was elected as its first mayor. The handsome house (Figure 10) remained in Nichols family ownership until after Robert Nichols' death in 1960.¹³

In the next three years, three more small sections of adjoining land were platted, increasing the area of the Fairmount Heights community by approximately 56 acres. Mount Wiessner (approximately 6.5 acres of John C. Wiessner's farmland) was platted by his heirs in 1909.¹⁴ This subdivision added a section of larger (generally 50 by 125 feet) residential lots at the southeast end of the original 1900 Fairmount Heights subdivision (Figure 11). Only a little more than an acre (nine lots) of the Mount Wiessner subdivision is today included within the corporate boundaries of Fairmount Heights.

In 1910 North Fairmount Heights, which consisted of approximately 15 acres of the John H. Wilson farm, was platted by Elizabeth Haines, who had acquired the Wilson land several years earlier.¹⁵ This subdivision added eight more blocks of narrow, deep building lots on the north side of the growing community (Figure 12), and was soon the scene of increased building

¹² Washington Bee, 12 December 1908.

¹³ Prince George's County Deeds #42:509, #52:343; #99:273; Prince George's County Administration File #13525; Floyd, Bianca P., Records and Recollections, Early Black History in Prince George's County, Maryland: M-NCPPC, 1989.

¹⁴ Prince George's County Plat #1-81.

¹⁵ Prince George's County Plat #1-91.



Figure 10. ROBERT S. NICHOLS HOUSE
802 58th Avenue, Fairmount Heights (Block C, lots 8,9)

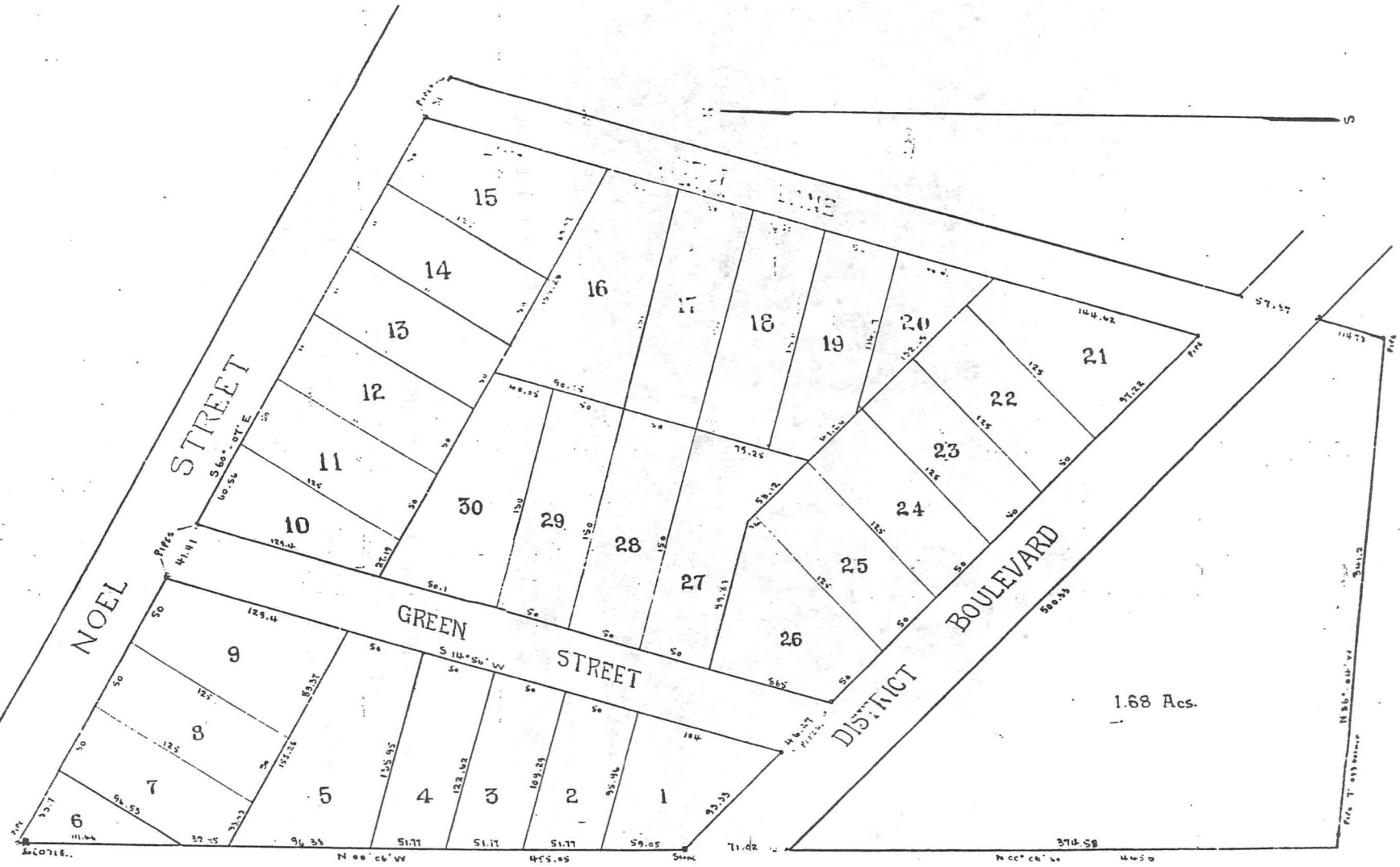
Two-part frame dwelling with hip roof, crossgable wing and Victorian wraparound porch, built in 1908; home of Robert S. Nichols, Fairmount Heights activist and first Mayor (1935-1937).

MOUNT WIESSNER

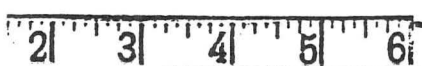
PRINCE GEORGE'S CO.

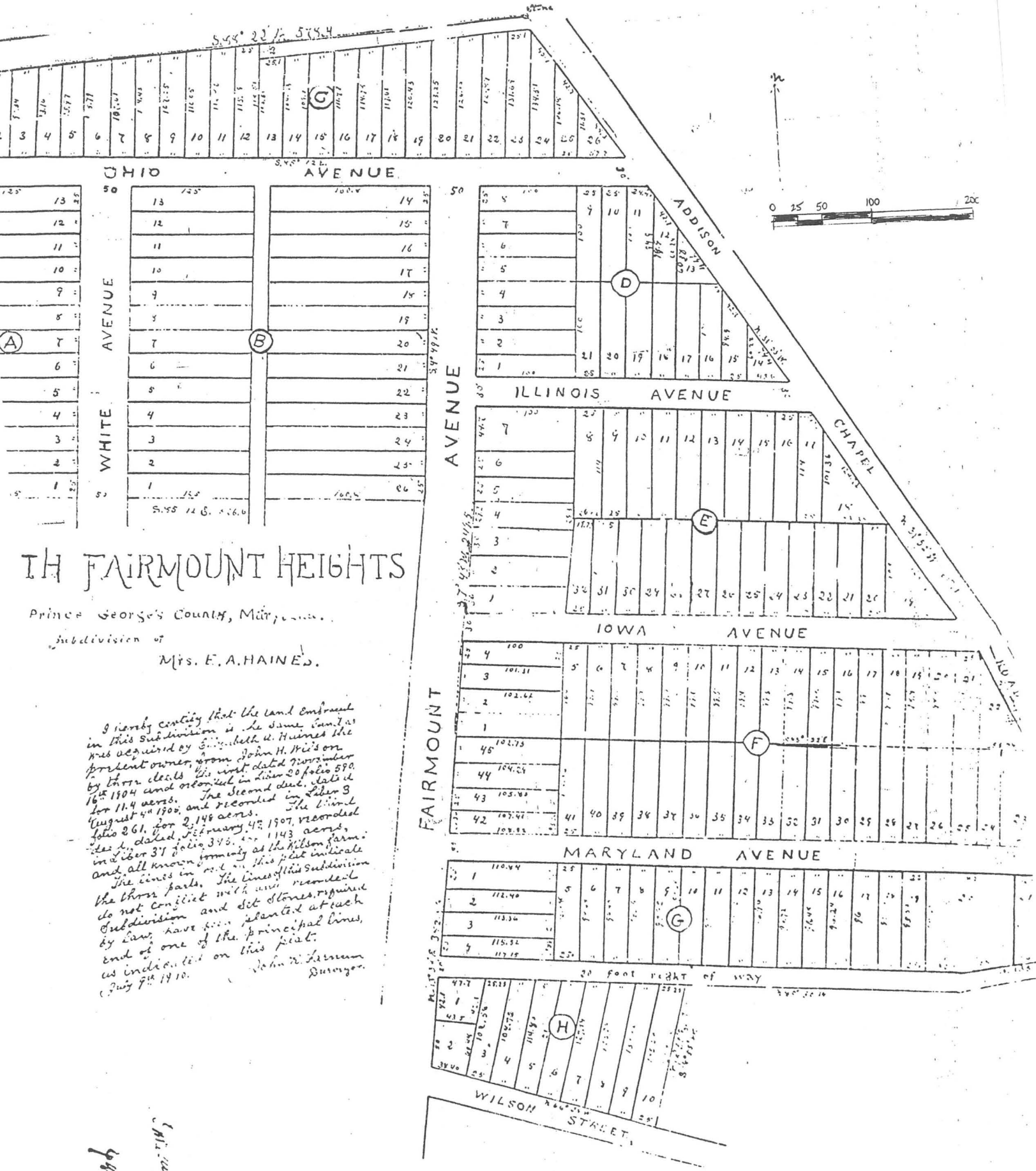
MD.

Figure 11. MOUNT WIESSNER SUBDIVISION, 1909
subdivided by the heirs of John C. Wiessner.



We hereby certify that this is a true copy of Subdivision made by E.L. Lotimer in Sept. 1904 and is the land acquired by Emily Hoffman, Emma W. Green and Mary W. Slocum by Deed of Partition between John C. Wiessner and others heirs at law of John Wiessner dec'd Dated Nov. 14, 1903 Recorded in Liber # 44 Folio # 29 Land Records Prince Georges Co. Md. This does not conflict with any recorded Subdivision and the Stones have been placed as required by law.





THE FAIRMOUNT HEIGHTS

Prince George's County, Maryland.
 Subdivision of
 Mrs. E. A. HAINES.

I hereby certify that the land embraced in this subdivision is the same land as was acquired by Elizabeth H. Haines the present owner, from John H. Wilson by three deeds, the first dated November 16, 1904 and recorded in Liber 20 folio 579, the second dated July 16, 1905 and recorded in Liber 3 folio 261, and the third dated August 4, 1905 and recorded in Liber 3 folio 261. The land is 11.4 acres. The second deed, dated August 4, 1905, and recorded in Liber 3 folio 261, for 2.146 acres. The third deed, dated February 4, 1907, recorded in Liber 3 folio 345, for 1.143 acres, and all known formerly as the Wilson farm, and all known formerly as the Wilson farm. The lines in red on this plat indicate the three parts. The lines of this subdivision do not conflict with and recorded subdivision and lot lines, required by law, have been placed at each end of one of the principal lines, as indicated on this plat.

John H. Wilson
 Surveyor

July 14, 1910.

Figure 12. NORTH FAIRMOUNT HEIGHTS SUBDIVISION, 1910 subdivided by Elizabeth Haines out of the land of John H. Wilson.

activity.

In 1911, West Fairmount Heights, or Bryn Mawr, (a 36-acre section of the Silence family farm) was platted for subdivision by the heirs of John T. And Caroline A. Silence.¹⁶ This subdivision created fourteen more blocks of building lots around the Silence family homestead, which fronted on the District of Columbia boundary line, and extended the Fairmount Heights community to its present northwest limits (Figure 13).

One of the most activist citizens during these years was Charles E. Payne, whose house on White (now 58th) Avenue no longer stands. Payne was one of the directors of the Fairmount Heights Mutual Improvement Company; in 1910 the Payne family gave a lawn fete which served as a fund raiser for improvement of streets and street lights.¹⁷ At the same time a group of women, calling themselves the Ladies Improvement Club, raised money for the laying of gravel walks along the main streets, as well as for the establishing of street lights. By October 1910, the Washington Bee could report that the town had 17 new street lights, that several streets had new sidewalks, and that more than twelve houses had been constructed during the previous summer.¹⁸

One substantial house which had been built in 1910 and which had caught the Washington Bee editor's attention was that of John and Martha Trammell, in Block E of the original Fairmount Heights subdivision. This house, still standing in good condition, is a side-gabled dwelling, Classical Revival in style, distinguished by its deep boxed cornice returned at the gable ends, and its cornice decoration of jigsaw brackets alternating with smaller modillions. This handsome house (Figure 14) remained in the Trammell family until 1937, and in 1961 became the home and office of Judge James Taylor.¹⁹

The Washington Bee also reported in October 1910 that there were three active religious groups, Methodist, Presbyterian and Baptist, in the Fairmount Heights community, and that the Methodist congregation was in the process of purchasing lots and hoped to erect a church building in the following spring.²⁰ The Methodist congregation had been formed the year before, in 1909, and held its first services in the hall which had been built by the Improvement Company. For a short time after that services were held at the home of Pastor Joshua Barnes, but after Barnes' death, the trustees acquired

¹⁶ Prince George's County Plat #2-5.

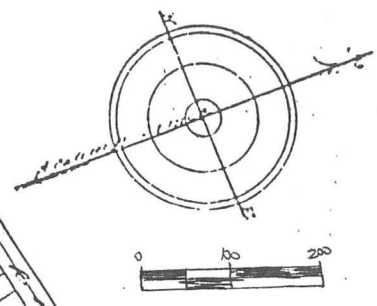
¹⁷ Prince George's County Incorporation Records JBB#1:134; Washington Bee, 13 August 1910.

¹⁸ Washington Bee, 1 October 1910, 15 October 1910, 29 October 1910.

¹⁹ Prince George's County Deeds #43:72, #480:83, ##2591:613; Prince George's County Tax Assessments 1905-1915.

²⁰ Washington Bee, 1 October 1910.

LYING IN P.G. COUNTY MARYLAND
SUBDIVIDED BY THE HEIRS OF
JOHN T. AND CAROLINE A. SILENCE



Geo. W. Jackson

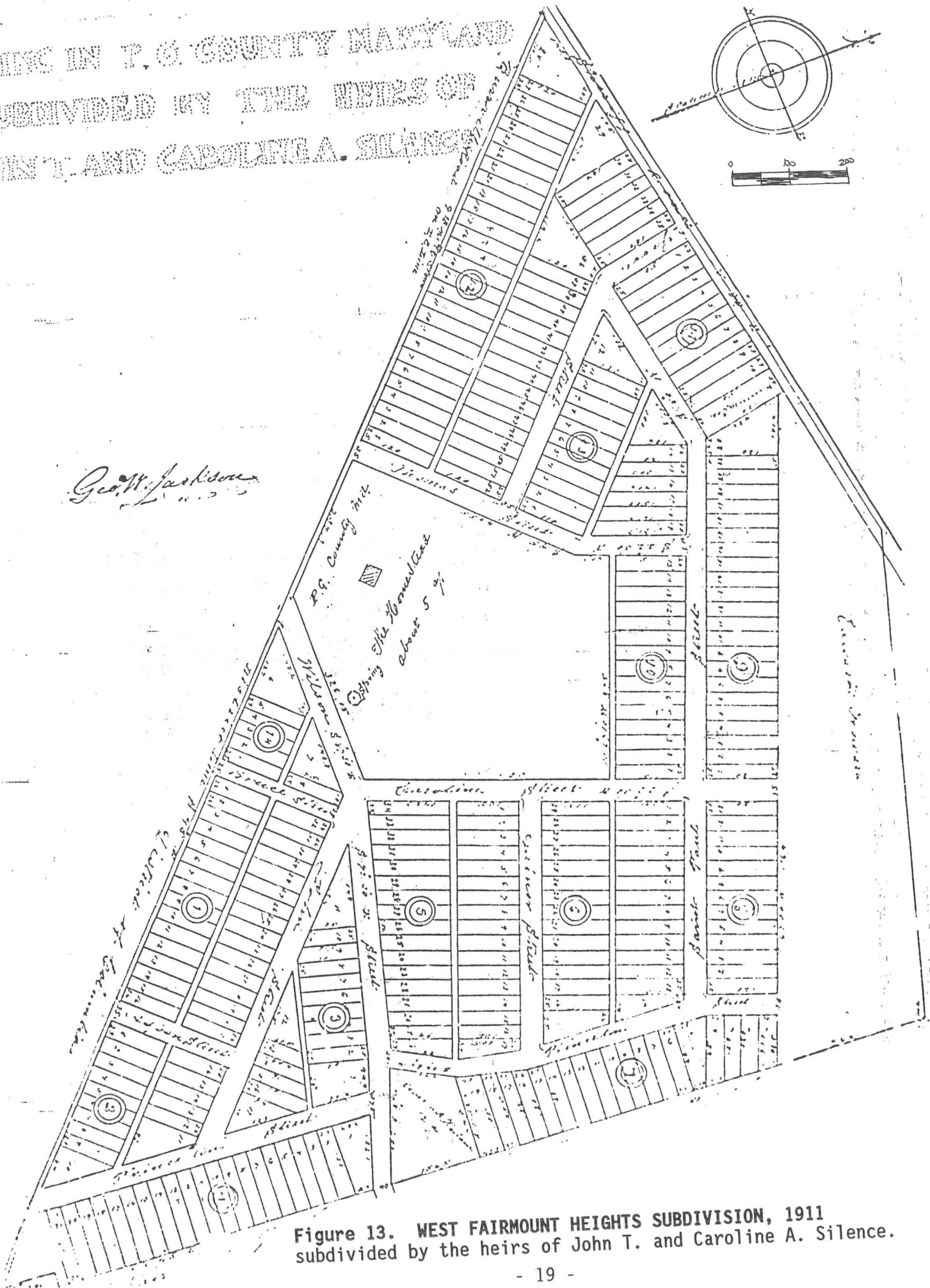


Figure 13. WEST FAIRMOUNT HEIGHTS SUBDIVISION, 1911
subdivided by the heirs of John T. and Caroline A. Silence.



Figure 14. JOHN TRAMMELL/JUDGE JAMES TAYLOR HOUSE
717 59th Avenue, Fairmount Heights (Block E, lots 5,6)

Classical Revival style frame dwelling, built circa 1910 for the Trammell family, later the home and office of Circuit Court Judge James Taylor.

two unimproved lots in block D of the original Fairmount Heights subdivision and in 1911 erected their church. This first church was a simple frame meetinghouse-style structure, with three gothic-arch windows in the principal gable front and a small belfry at the ridge. Circa 1950, under the pastorate of Reverend Edward S. Williams, the church was enlarged, the entry tower was constructed, and the entire structure was covered with stucco.²¹ The resulting Grace Methodist Church is a noticeable landmark in the town of Fairmount Heights (Figure 15).

Much of the activity in the Fairmount Heights community at this time regarded the building of a public school. By 1910 there were 100 children living in the community but there was no public school. Classes for them were being held in the hall under the supervision of a local young woman named Carrie Griffin. In the fall of 1910 James F. Armstrong and Robert S. Nichols began to put pressure on the Board of County School Commissioners to establish a school in Fairmount Heights. Influenced by their "untiring persuasion", School Commissioners Frederick Sasscer and Otway Zantzinger visited the classes which were being run by Miss Griffin in the hall. The Commissioners expressed themselves impressed with the school and with the needs of the community, and the Board agreed to the building of a public school for the town. A building committee was appointed (including W. Sidney Pittman, Robert S. Nichols and James F. Armstrong), and architect Pittman was chosen to develop the designs for the building. In September 1911, the Board purchased four unimproved lots at the corner of Chapel (now 61st) Avenue and Addison Road, and the one-story, four-room school (School #1, District 18) was constructed and ready to open by June 1912. By October 1913, the Board had authorized the school trustees to accept bids for the completion of the upstairs of the school, and when this was done, the enrollment had increased to 160 pupils, with five teachers, four classrooms, three hallways and a carpenter shop. Armstrong was Director of Manual Training, and James A. Campbell, a new resident of the town, was the shop instructor. At this time, the Fairmount Heights school had the only facilities for industrial training for blacks in the County.²²

This building was later enlarged by the addition of a rear wing; it served as the public school for Fairmount Heights until 1934, when a new eight-room brick school was built at the corner of Addison and Sheriff Roads. At this time, the old elementary school property was purchased by the Mount Zion Apostolic Faith Church, which continues to hold services there. One of the largest buildings in Fairmount Heights and its first educational structure, this building is a focal point in the community (Figure 16).

By this time there were, in addition to the Fairmount Heights Mutual Improvement Company, two citizens associations in Fairmount Heights: the

²¹ Grace United Methodist church booklet; Prince George's County Tax Assessments 1905-1915.

²² Journal of the Board of County School Commissioners, Vol. II, 1903-1921; Washington Bee. 5 November 1910, 19 November 1910, 18 March 1911, 1 May 1915



Figure 15. GRACE METHODIST CHURCH
716 59th Avenue, Fairmount Heights (Block D, lots 47,48)

Stucco-covered, crossgabled church building with corner entry tower;
built in 1911, and enlarged circa 1950.



Figure 16. FAIRMOUNT HEIGHTS ELEMENTARY SCHOOL
737 61st Avenue, Fairmount Heights (Block I, lots 1,2)

Large hip-roof frame school structure with pyramidal-roof cupola and one-story addition; designed by W. Sidney Pittman, and built in 1912; closed in 1934 after construction of larger brick school building on another site; converted to church use.

Fairmount Heights Citizens' Association organized by Sidney Pittman in 1908, and the Progressive Citizens' Association formed by Charles E. Payne in 1911. These two citizens' associations combined in June 1912 to form the United Citizens' Association of Fairmount Heights. The first president of the united body was John S. Johnson, with Cornelius Fonville as secretary; among the other members of the executive committee was James A. Campbell.²³ All three of these men had built or would soon build fine houses which stand today.

These were years of active home building in Fairmount Heights. The 11 March 1911 issue of the Washington Bee reported that "new settlers are flocking to this thriving village and erecting fine homes". One of those "fine homes" was built in that year by John S. Johnson. Johnson, who worked as a Pullman porter when he first came to Fairmount Heights, bought two unimproved lots in Block M of the Fairmount Heights subdivision in 1908. The lots fronted on Addison Avenue (now 60th Place); in 1911 Johnson had a crossgable frame house built on these corner lots;²⁴ it was distinguished by a decorative Victorian wraparound porch with turned posts and jigsaw brackets, and is still a noticeable visual feature in the Fairmount Heights community.

In 1912, Cornelius Fonville began the building of his family home. Fonville worked as a messenger for the Bureau of Engraving; in 1910 he had purchased two lots in Block M of the Fairmount Heights subdivision, and in 1912 construction of his house began. The Washington Bee reported that "Mr. C. H. Fonville has let the contract for the erection and completion of his residence, which will be a fine eight room dwelling with cellar, furnace and all modern improvements. . . . Fairmount Heights is on a boom."²⁵ One of the more substantial homes in the community, it has remained to the present in the possession of Fonville's descendants (Figure 17).

James A. Campbell had resided in Fairmount Heights since 1908, living in those early years in a house on Clark (now 60th) Avenue. During these years he worked as a messenger for the Government Printing Office in Washington, and later opened his own print shop in Fairmount Heights. In 1914 he was appointed as instructor for the Industrial Department of the new public school. Throughout this period, Campbell was active in the citizens associations. In 1916 he purchased two lots in Block I of the original subdivision, and five years later contracted with his neighbor, carpenter Louis Brown, to build a house for him there.²⁶ This handsome bungalow was

²³ Washington Bee, 18 May 1912, 1 June 1912, 8 June 1912, 29 June 1912, 13 July 1912.

²⁴ Prince George's County Deed #43:192; Prince George's County Tax Assessments 1905-1915.

²⁵ Prince George's County Deed #59:414; Prince George's County Tax Assessments 1910-1915; Washington Bee, 18 May 1912.

²⁶ Prince George's County Deed #117:270; Prince George's County Tax Assessments; Washington Bee, 1911-1915.



Figure 17. CORNELIUS FONVILLE HOUSE
602 60th Place, Fairmount Heights (Block M, lots 24,25)

Large frame dwelling of Foursquare plan, built for Cornelius Fonville in 1912.

completed in 1921; the lower story served as Campbell's print shop, with the family residence above. The house has a distinctive profile with its semi-octagonal pyramidal-roof dormer centered in the principal plane of the roof (Figure 18).

In 1920, developer Robinson White had nineteen small frame bungalows, of identical form and style, built on the lots on both sides of a block of Fairview (now 62nd) Avenue in the original Fairmount Heights subdivision. These one-story four-room dwellings closely resemble the "Rosita" style of bungalow being produced by Sears, Roebuck and Company during this period (Figure 19), and it is likely that they were all built from Sears material. Each had hipped roof and central chimney. Most were built into a slope and rested on a high basement; others were built on more level ground and rested on a simple foundation (Figure 20). Robinson White began to sell these small inexpensive dwellings as soon as they were completed; by 1926 he had sold seven of the bungalows and by 1929 three more. During the 1930s he rented to tenants some of the unsold bungalows, gradually selling all of the rest by the time of his death in 1939.²⁷ Thirteen of the nineteen original bungalows survive.

Home construction was under way in the newer subdivisions during these years. In North Fairmount Heights, Samuel Hargrove bought several lots in Block K in 1910. On these lots Hargrove, a brick mason from North Carolina, built a fine brick dwelling distinguished by elaborate molded decoration in the brick: panels with floral motifs, links, bands and beads make this house unique in the County (Figure 21). The house was completed in 1918, and is still a prominent visual feature of the community.²⁸

Also in North Fairmount Heights, John W. Blackwell purchased two lots in 1916, and within the next several years completed construction of a narrow shed-roof town house with horizontal cornice decorated with jigsaw brackets.²⁹ This type of dwelling, often referred to as a "free-standing rowhouse" was typical of the urban dwellings which were being constructed during the second decade of this century (Figure 22).

In 1921, a man named Prince Albert Washington purchased two lots in West Fairmount Heights from Eugene Silence, one of the heirs of John and Caroline Silence and developers of that family homestead. Washington had a frame bungalow built on these lots in 1924, fronting on the District Boulevard (now

²⁷ Prince George's County Tax Assessments 1917-1932; Prince George's County Deeds #294:139 and following; Prince George's County Administration File #6742; Stevenson, K. C., and Jandl, H. W., Houses by Mail, A Guide to Houses from Sears, Roebuck and Company: The Preservation Press, Washington D. C., 1986, p. 254.

²⁸ Prince George's County Deeds #20:590, #60:345; Prince George's County Tax Assessments 1905-1920.

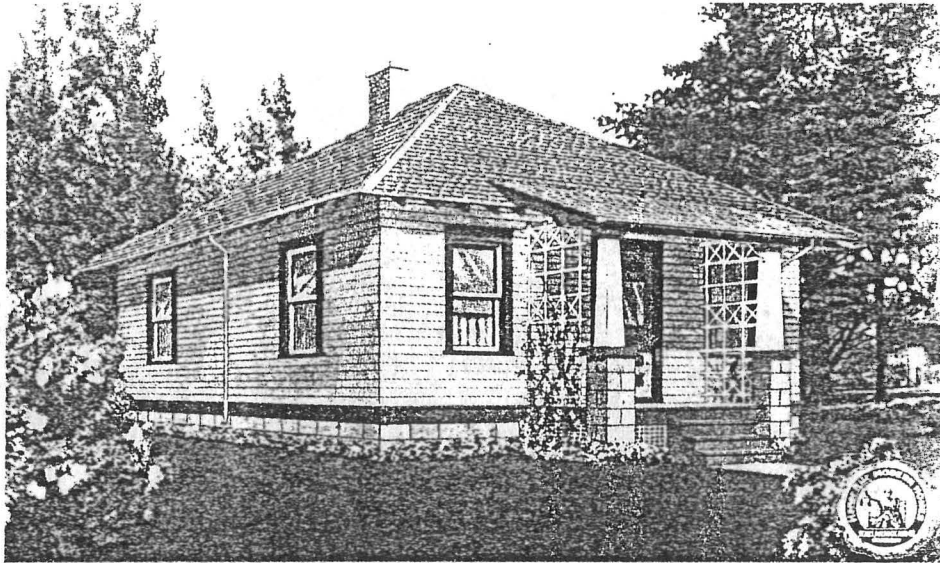
²⁹ Prince George's County Deed #127:22; Prince George's County Tax Assessments 1910-1926.



Figure 18. JAMES A. CAMPBELL HOUSE
709 61st Avenue, Fairmount Heights (Block I, lots 27,28)

Hip-roof frame bungalow with semi-octagonal dormer; built (by carpenter Louis Brown) as residence and printing office for printer James A. Campbell, first treasurer and later (1943-1955) Mayor of Fairmount Heights.

THE ROSITA



Almost anybody can own a home when the materials are furnished for these remarkably low prices. This is particularly true when, as in the present instance, the material comes already cut and fitted. This reduces the cost of expert labor. Has good wood sheathing under the narrow beveled siding and when built according to our specifications will be warm enough for any climate. The trellised porch gives it a finished appearance, and the Fire-Chief Shingle Roll Roofing, which we furnish in either dark red or sea green color, gives you protection, either from paint or stain bills, for more than 17 years.

Details and features: Four rooms and no bath. Front porch with shed roof supported by tapered square columns.

Years and catalog numbers: 1917 (2036); 1918 (2036, 2043, 2044); 1919 (2043B, 2044B); 1921 (2043B, 2044B)

Price: \$314 to \$875

Locations: Hobart, Ind.; Soldier, Iowa; Milford, Neb.; Portland, N.D.; Dayton and Middletown, Ohio

Identical to: The Kimball

Years and catalog numbers: 1925 (6015); 1926 (P6015); 1928 (C6025)

Price: \$625 to \$638

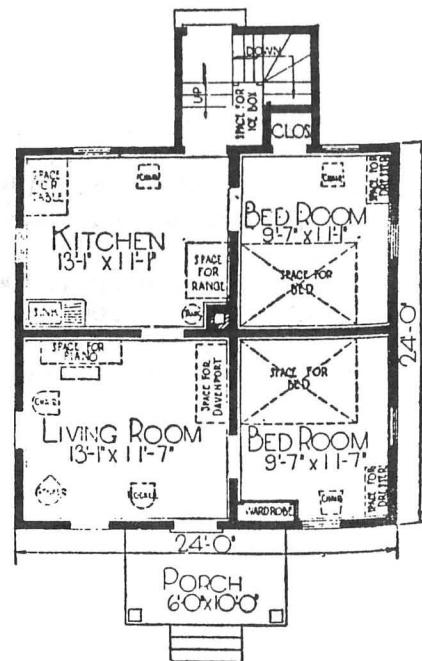


Figure 19. "ROSITA" MODEL BY SEARS, ROEBUCK AND COMPANY probable model for the bungalows of "Bungalow Row".



Figure 20. "BUNGALOW ROW"

62nd Avenue between Foote Street and Addison Road, Fairmount Heights
(Block K, lots 8-33, and Block I, lots 35-63)

Developer Robinson White built 19 identical small bungalows (one-story with pyramidal roof) on this short street in 1920; thirteen survive.



Figure 21. SAMUEL HARGROVE HOUSE
5907 K Street, North Fairmount Heights (Block F, lot 8)

Two-story brick dwelling with shallow hip roof and outstanding molded brick decorative detail; constructed in 1918 for and probably by brick-mason Samuel Hargrove.



Figure 22. JOHN W. BLACKWELL HOUSE
5700 L Street, North Fairmount Heights (Block C, lots 1,2)

Two-story frame dwelling with shallow-pitched shed roof and bracketed cornice, built in 1920 for John W. Blackwell.

Eastern Avenue).³⁰ This side-gabled bungalow with inset porch and dormer balcony strongly resembles the "Westly" model available through Sears, Roebuck and Company during this period (Figure 23), and was probably built from Sears material. The house is still owned by descendants of Prince Albert Washington, and is today one of the handsomest dwellings in Fairmount Heights (Figure 24).

Fairmount Heights continued to grow after the First World War. In 1922, 35 acres of the farmland of Samuel Hoover, which adjoined Fairmount Heights on the east, were purchased by the Weeks Realty Corporation; in the next year, the Corporation had the property platted for a subdivision called Sylvan Vista.³¹ Sylvan Vista had deep, narrow lots (generally 25 by 125 feet), but it differed from the earlier subdivisions in that it was designed around a market circle, with radiating streets and lots, and parkland reserved along the branch that flowed through it (Figure 25).

The Weeks Corporation immediately began selling lots, and construction began on small dwellings in this new section of the community. In 1925 a group of Baptists met in a rough-built brush shelter in Block K of Sylvan Vista, and by September of that year, members of the group had built a small frame meetinghouse on the property. The group had been organized by Arthur Lockett, who went on to be ordained as a Baptist minister in 1927. In that same year, he purchased from the Weeks Corporation the five lots at the corner of Maple Boulevard and Ohio Street (now 60th Avenue and L Street) which encompassed the site of both the shelter and the frame meetinghouse. Within a few more years, the small frame meetinghouse was replaced by a larger frame structure, later covered with stucco.³² The present brick Sylvan Vista Baptist Church was built in 1954 and is the most prominent landmark in the subdivision of Sylvan Vista (Figure 26).

Construction of dwellings continued in Sylvan Vista; these houses were generally smaller and more modest than some of the houses in the earlier subdivisions. The Sylvan Vista area was watered by a tributary of the Beaver Dam Branch, and the ground often tended to be wet and swampy. Residents of the "Heights" (the older, higher subdivisions) often referred to residents of Sylvan Vista as living "down in the bottom".

Meanwhile construction of houses continued in the earlier subdivisions. In 1927 Doswell Brooks purchased one of the large lots in the Mount Wiessner subdivision fronting on Noel (now Foote) Street; in the next year he had a hip-roof bungalow constructed for his family. Brooks was very active in the Prince George's County School system; he was appointed Supervisor of Colored Schools in 1922, and was instrumental in the establishment of high schools for

³⁰ Prince George's County Deed #175:5; Prince George's County Tax Assessments 1920-1926; Prince George's County Administration File #13031; Stevenson and Jandl, op.cit., p. 123.

³¹ Prince George's County Plat #2-66; Prince George's County Deed #182:8.

³² Prince George's County Deed #314:19; Prince George's County Tax Assessments 1923-1930; Anniversary Souvenir Journal, Sylvan Vista Baptist Church, 1990; interview with Mabel Washington Lockett, March 1991.

THE WESTLY



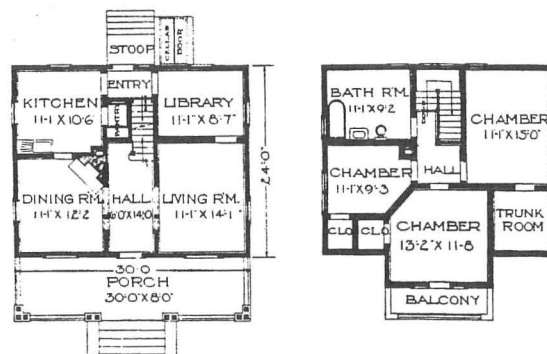
This two-story bungalow is built on a concrete block foundation and is sided with narrow beveled clear cypress siding. All rooms on both floors are light and airy.

Details and features: Seven rooms and one bath. Shed dormer opening onto balcony; full-width front porch supported by brick and wood piers; exposed roof rafter tails and knee braces; front door with beveled plate glass. Colonnaded openings off hall; corner fireplace in dining room with oak mantel.

Years and catalog numbers: 1913 (206); 1916 (264P206); 1917 (C206, C2026); 1918 (2026); 1921 (2026, 3085); 1922 (12026, 13085); 1925 (13085); 1926 (P13085); 1928 (P13085); 1929 (P13085)

Price: \$926 to \$2,543

Locations: Washington, D.C.; Aurora, Ill.; Gary, Ind.; Milford, Iowa; Boston, Mass.; Ord, Neb.; Vineland, N.J.; Fort Covington, N.Y.; Pittsburgh, Pa.; Sioux Falls, S.D.; McLean, Va.; Parkersburg, W.Va.; Kenosha, Wis.



No. 144



Similar to: No. 144

Differences: Dormer and porch design modifications

Years and catalog numbers: 1911 (144); 1912 (144); 1913 (144)

Price: \$829 to \$926

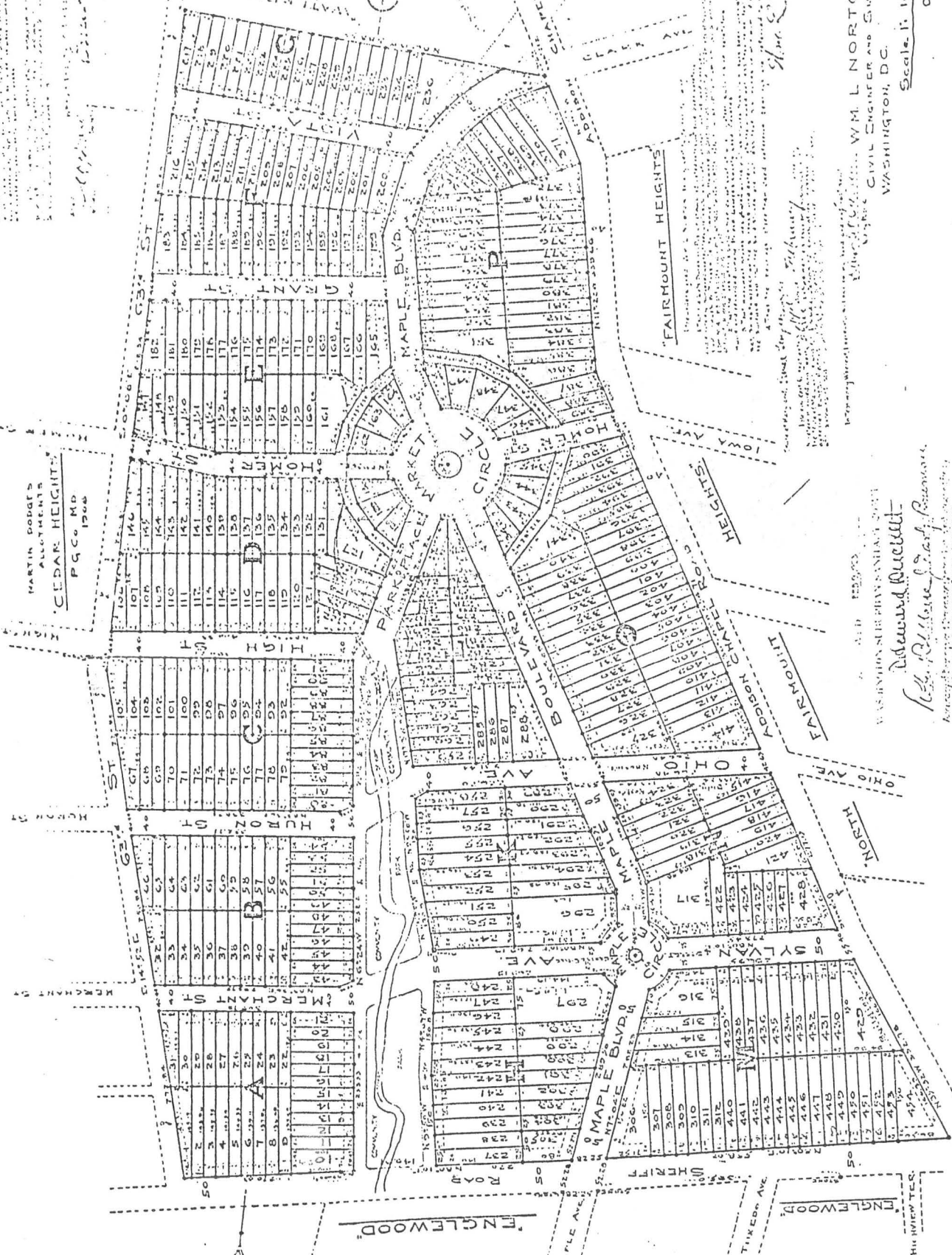
Figure 23. "WESTLY" MODEL BY SEARS, ROEBUCK AND COMPANY probable model for dwelling of Prince Albert Washington.



Figure 24. PRINCE ALBERT WASHINGTON HOUSE,
949 Eastern Avenue, West Fairmount Heights (Block 12, lots 21,22)

Side-gabled frame bungalow (possibly the Westly model from Sears,
Roebuck and Company), built for Prince Albert Washington in 1924.

MARTIN DODGE'S
ALLOTMENTS
CEDAR HEIGHTS
PQ Co MD
1764



W. M. L. NORTON,
CIVIL ENGINEER AND SURVEYOR,
WASHINGTON, D. C. JAN 23 1907
Scale 1" = 100'

Scale: 1:10000

[illegible]

Edward Everett-

Lt. R. H. P. P.

Figure 25. SYLVAN VISTA SUBDIVISION, 1923
subdivided by Weeks Realty Corporation from land of Samuel Hoover.



Figure 26. SYLVAN VISTA BAPTIST CHURCH
1103 60th Avenue, Sylvan Vista (Block K, lots 289-293)

Brick church with three-story corner entry tower and later parish hall attached, built in 1954 on the site of the first (1925) church structure.

blacks in Prince George's County. In 1956 he became the first black member of the Board of Education. He also served as a member of the Fairmount Heights town council, and as Mayor from 1955 until shortly before his death in 1968.³³ His house is a representative example of the small bungalows which were being built in the County's suburbs in the 1920s (Figure 27).

Another distinctive house was built in the original Fairmount Heights subdivision by carpenter Louis Brown in 1930. Louis Brown had grown up in Fairmount Heights. His father, Daniel Brown, had purchased two lots in Block D, at the corner of White (now 58th) Avenue and the District Boulevard (now Eastern Avenue) from Robinson White in 1905. He had built a small dwelling on the property, and, after his death his widow, Lucy, and their son, Louis, maintained their residence there. As a teenager, Louis learned the carpenter's trade, and was soon commissioned by his neighbors to build houses for them. In 1921, he built the bungalow on Chapel Avenue for printer James Campbell, and in 1930 built an English style house on the site of his parents' small dwelling.³⁴ This asymmetrical crossgable frame dwelling has considerable variety in the lines of its gables, dormers and wraparound porch; it incorporates distinctive decorative features of houses of this period and is a noticeable landmark at the entrance to the Fairmount Heights community (Figure 28).

The years after the union of the two citizens' associations were devoted to the implementation of various types of improvements in the growing community of Fairmount Heights. A volunteer fire company was formed, and in May 1917 this company acquired, with much celebration, a new chemical fire engine. A fire house was built almost immediately thereafter to house the new engine.³⁵ By the early 1920s the movement for incorporation of the town had begun, led by Cornelius Fonville. Incorporation was not achieved, however, until 1935. In May of that year, Laws of Incorporation were drawn up by Act of the General Assembly, and were approved by the citizens of Fairmount Heights. The newly incorporated town included the Fairmount Heights, North Fairmount Heights, West Fairmount Heights, Waterford, Sylvan Vista and part of the Mount Wiessner subdivisions. The boundaries began at the intersection of Green Street (now 62nd Avenue) and Eastern Avenue, ran northwesterly along the District Line to Sheriff Road, then east along Sheriff Road to 63rd Street (now Balsamtree Drive), south on 63rd Street to Cedar Road and the Addison Chapel Cemetery fence, then west across Addison (Chapel) Road to Green Street

³³ Prince George's County Deed #291:261; Prince George's County Administration File #3819; Prince George's County Tax Assessments, 1923-1932; Journal of Prince George's County Board of Education, Vol III, 1921-1940; Floyd, Bianca P., op.cit., p. 123.

³⁴ Prince George's County Deed #26:94; Prince George's County Tax Assessments, 1900-1932.

³⁵ Washington Bee, 19 May 1917.



Figure 27. DOSWELL BROOKS HOUSE
6107 Foote Avenue, Mount Wiessner (Lot 8)

Hip-roof frame bungalow, built in 1928 for Doswell Brooks, Supervisor of Prince George's County Colored Schools and Mayor of Fairmount Heights (1955-1967).



Figure 28. LOUIS BROWN HOUSE
701 58th Avenue, Fairmount Heights (Block D, lots 31,32)

Crossgable frame dwelling of the English style, built by and for carpenter Louis Brown.

and the point of beginning.³⁶ The incorporated town encompassed close to 150 acres (Figure 29).

The Laws of Incorporation called for a Mayor and Common Council of six residents to be elected by the citizens of the Town; the Mayor and Council had to be legal voters, property owners, and residents of the Town for at least one year preceding the election. A Town Treasurer was to be appointed by Mayor and Council. The first elected officers of the Town of Fairmount Heights were Robert S. Nichols, Mayor; Ernest Kirkland, Jane Atwoode, Sadie Q. Charity, A. J. Harrison and James F. Armstrong, Council Members; and James A. Campbell, Treasurer.³⁷

As the 1930s drew to a close, Fairmount Heights was a thriving community, with a new and substantial schoolhouse, four active church congregations, a fire department, several restaurants and stores, a print shop, and an active citizens' association. Residential construction continued, and more and more new houses filled in the lots, particularly on the main streets (Figure 30). As the Town entered its first years of incorporation, its citizens could take pride in their role as a progressive community, the largest black municipality in Prince George's County.

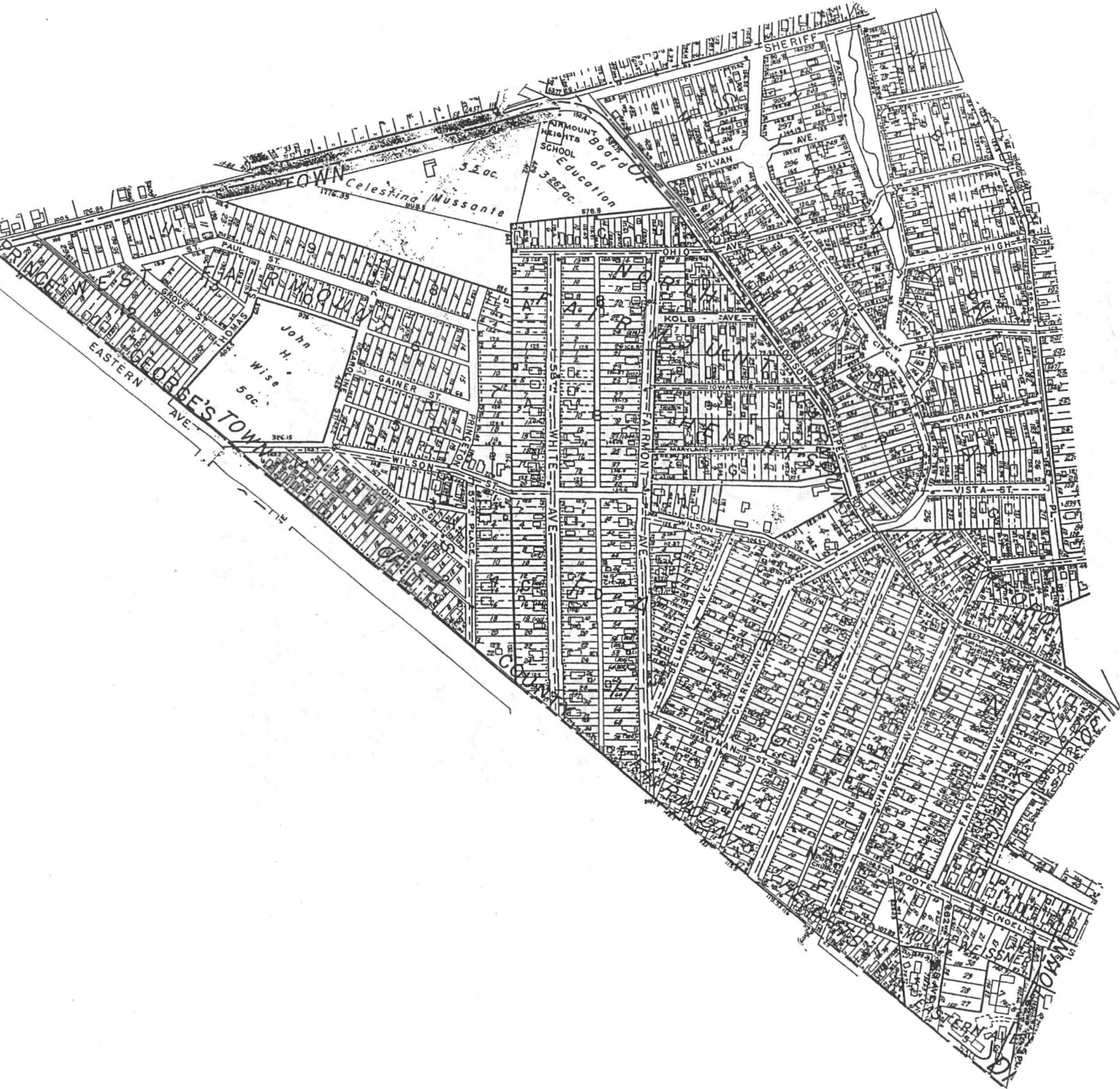
³⁶ Laws of Maryland, 1935, Chapter 199; Floyd, Bianca P., op.cit., p. 122.

³⁷ ibid.

[illegible]

SYLVAN VISTA 1923

Figure 30. MAP OF FAIRMOUNT HEIGHTS, 1940
showing residential development.



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