

## The Gainsboro History Tour of African American Culture

- As you enter Roanoke on I-581 South, take Exit 5 onto Williamson Road. Cross the Williamson Road bridge and make a right onto Salem Avenue.
  - Taubman Museum of Art
    - Designed by world renowned architect Randall Stout
    - State-of-the-art interactive museum
    - Winner of 2009 International Architecture Award
    - Opened in November of 2009
  
- Proceed to Salem Avenue and First Street to the entrance of the Martin Luther King, Jr. Memorial Bridge
  - Roanoke is divided by the railroad tracks. These tracks cut through the city separating the neighborhood of Gainsboro from the downtown area. During segregation, the railroad tracks served as more than just a means to transport goods but as an unofficial border between African American and Caucasian citizens of Roanoke.
  
  - The Martin Luther King, Jr. Memorial Bridge, (previously known as the 1<sup>st</sup> Street or “Henry Street” Bridge), connected the Gainsboro neighborhood to downtown. During the segregationist era of the 20th century, Gainsboro, Roanoke's oldest community, served Roanoke's African American community as a separate, self-sustaining business and cultural center. It contained a hospital, doctors and dentists' offices owned and operated by African Americans, two theaters, drugstores, a bank, barber shops, beauty parlors, shoe repair shops, dry cleaners, restaurants, insurance offices, lawyers' offices, and night clubs such as the Ebony Club (now the **Claude Moore School of Culinary Arts**) and hotels such as the Hotel Dumas (currently the **Dumas Center for Artistic and Cultural Development**) and many other businesses necessary for the daily life and survival of the African American community. Gainsboro has numerous historical landmarks that provide a link to Roanoke's past, including The Hotel Roanoke, St. Andrews Catholic Church, and the Norfolk and Western administration buildings (renovated to become the current Higher Education Center), The Harrison School and the Gainsboro Library.

- Turn Right onto Gainsboro, then left onto Loudon Avenue, then right onto First or “Henry” Street
  - **Dumas Center for Artistic and Cultural Development**
    - Perhaps the single most important place on Henry Street was the Hotel Dumas, where first-class overnight accommodations were provided for African Americans traveling through the Southwest Virginia for business, entertainment, educational or social purposes. It was the place where African American clubs, fraternities, sororities, and other organizations held meetings, conferences, dances, debutante balls, and cotillions.
    - When African American musicians traveled to Roanoke to perform at The Hotel Roanoke or Star City American Legion Auditorium during segregation, they were not allowed to stay overnight anywhere except in the “colored” hotels such as the Hotel Dumas. The guest list of the Hotel Dumas includes the greatest names in American jazz such as Louis Armstrong, Count Basie, Lena Horn, Dizzy Gillespie, Fats Waller, Duke Ellington, Cab Calloway, Ella Fitzgerald, and many others. After regular shows, audiences would often accompany the African American performers back to the Hotel Dumas and other nightspots on Henry Street for all-night jam sessions.
- Turn left onto Centre Avenue to Martin Luther King Statue
  - On February 19, 2008, the Henry Street Bridge was renamed the Martin Luther King Memorial Bridge. Dr. Perneller Chubb-Wilson and members of the Martin Luther King, Jr. Committee fought to rename the bridge. Mrs. Chubb-Wilson is quoted as saying “We had to be back over the bridge at about six o’clock in the evening because African Americans were not allowed in certain parts of the city after dark.”
  - The Martin Luther King Memorial Bridge is a footbridge adorned with flowers on each end and inspirational quotes are etched into the ground. “Dare to Dream,” is the quote found at the entrance of the bridge. The 7-foot-tall bronze cast statue of Dr. Martin Luther King was designed by the husband-and-wife team of Jeffery and Anna Varilla. Excerpts of Dr. King’s speeches are broadcast in the patio area.

- Turn left onto Jefferson, and proceed to Patton Avenue to Gainsboro Library
  - In 1940, the Gainsboro Library was housed in the flood-prone basement of the old Hunton YMCA; the only place where African Americans could check out books. A local Gainsboro resident, Virginia Lee sought assistance from the City of Roanoke to build a new library; however, city officials would not pay for both the land and a new library building. Therefore, Lee mustered the nerve to walk up the hill to St. Andrew's Catholic Church, where she asked the priest to donate the land. Not only did the priest comply; in an official request to Rome, he also persuaded Pope Pius XII to give his permission as well. Ms. Lee was the librarian for 43 years. Since its inception, the collection has tripled and the space has doubled. The branch recently underwent a 1.3 million dollar Renovation.
  - Point out the St. Andrews Catholic Church
  - Point out Claytor Memorial Clinic as the general vicinity of the old Hunton YMCA
  
- Turn left onto Gainsboro, then right onto Gilmer Avenue to the Oliver White Hill Homeplace
  - Oliver White Hill, Sr. (May 1, 1907 – August 5, 2007) was a civil rights attorney. His work against racial discrimination helped end the doctrine of "separate but equal." He also helped win landmark legal decisions involving equality in pay for African American teachers, access to school buses, voting rights, jury selection, and employment protection. He retired in 1998 after practicing law for almost 60 years.
  
  - In 1913, six-year-old Oliver White Hill moved to Roanoke, eventually settling at 401 Gilmer Avenue, Northwest. His mother and stepfather worked in the hotel industry in Hot Springs. Mr. Hill lived in Roanoke, in the care of family friends Bradford and Lelia Pentecost to have access to a quality education. Mr. Oliver lived most of his childhood in that home. After Hill earned his law degree from Howard University, graduating second in his class behind Thurgood Marshall, he returned to live in his childhood home as he began practicing law. His career soon would take him to Richmond and cases that forever changed the social landscape of the United States. In the early 1950s, Hill was co-counsel with Spottswood W. Robinson, III in dozens of civil rights lawsuits around Virginia. Subsequent lawsuits later became one of the five cases decided under Brown v. Board of Education before the Supreme Court of the United States in 1954.

- Turn right onto 5<sup>th</sup> Street, then left onto Harrison to the Harrison Museum of African American Culture
  - In 1916, the Roanoke City School Board authorized the construction of Harrison High School. Public high schools for African Americans were then few and not yet welcomed with much enthusiasm by the white public. Prior to the school's completion, African American students seeking secondary education had to travel to Virginia State College in Petersburg.
  - Harrison High School was built in 1916 on Harrison Avenue. In 1917, Lucy Addison was appointed principal. Under Miss Addison, the high school curriculum was developed. Harrison High School was accredited in 1924, the same year the school had its first graduating class consisting of three students
  - Lucy Addison retired from the Roanoke School System in 1927 and was the only principal ever of Harrison High School.
  - Oliver White Hill was a graduate of Harrison High School.
  
- Turn right onto 6<sup>th</sup> Street, then left onto Patton, then left onto Gainsboro to Orange Avenue
  - Point out the Gainsboro YMCA, which replaced the old Hunton YMCA
  
  - Point out the Booker T. Washington Roanoke City Schools Administration Building
    - Roanoke's first public building to be named in honor of one of its own citizens-black or white-was this building (RCPS Admin Building). Built in 1928, the building was named after a distinguished community activist, who was also an African American educator who completed forty-one years of service in the Roanoke system, including serving as principal of the Harrison School for ten years, Miss Lucy Addison.
  
    - In 1952, the building was renamed Booker T. Washington Junior High School after one of the most well known and most decorated African American educators who was born and raised in Moneta, Virginia, which is about 45 miles from Roanoke. Mr. Washington's homeplace is now a part of the National Park System and is a national treasure located right in our back yard!

- Turn left onto Orange Avenue to proceed past Lucy Addison Aerospace Magnet Middle School
  - The new Lucy Addison High School was completed in 1952 and saw its last graduating class in 1973. In addition to her educational activities, Lucy Addison was a member of the board of the Burrell Memorial Hospital, the only African American Hospital in the city, and was an ardent church worker at the Fifth Avenue Presbyterian Church, where for 27 years she was superintendent of the Sunday school.
  - The building now served as a Middle School and was renamed the Lucy Addison Aerospace Magnet Middle School in 1999 after undergoing a \$10.8 million renovation.
  - The faculty, staff and student of Addison Middle School celebrate the legacy of Lucy Addison and have been recognized for doing so. Former Governor Tim Kaine recognized the faculty and students of LAMS during a ceremony in 2007 for the schools efforts to preserve the legacy of Miss Addison and Mr. Oliver Hill. The school was also featured in an article in the USA Today in 2008 for their security efforts in the wake of the Columbine incident.
  
- Turn left onto 8<sup>th</sup> Street, then left onto McDowell past Burrell Memorial Hospital
  - Burrell Memorial was the first medical facility in Southwest Virginia built expressly to provide medical care for African Americans. The hospital was named after Dr. Isaac David Burrell, the son a former slave who received his M.D. in 1893 from the Leonard Medical College of Shaw University in Raleigh, NC and moved to Roanoke and established a prosperous medical practice and drug store that was the only African American-owned drugstore in southwestern Virginia for many years.
  
  - In 1914, Dr. Burrell became ill. Because African American patients were denied admission to the city's white hospitals, Dr. Burrell made the 220-mile journey by train to the Freedman's Hospital in Washington, DC, where he died shortly after undergoing surgery for gallstones. Dr. Burrell's death was the impetus for African American physicians of Roanoke to form the Burrell Memorial Hospital Association with the express purpose of establishing a hospital for the 11,000 African Americans in the Roanoke area who could not seek treatment in the area's white medical facilities. The first Burrell Memorial Hospital opened in 1915 as a 10-bed facility in a 2-story frame house at 311 Henry Street in the Gainesboro neighborhood of Roanoke. As the hospital grew, it moved to an abandoned school building on the site of the current building and eventually constructed its

present facility in 1953-1955. In addition to the medical care it provided, the institution also trained African American nurses with the formation of the Burrell Training School for Nurses in 1925.

- Burrell Memorial Hospital remained a prominent African American institution until 1965 when the Civil Rights Act mandated the desegregation of hospital facilities. In 1979 the hospital closed and the building was converted to a nursing home facility. Today, Burrell Memorial Hospital is the home to the Blue Ridge Behavioral Healthcare Facility, and is known as The Burrell Center.

Proceed back to Gainsboro, turning right from McDowell

