



The Williston Industrial High School class of 1939.¹



Fire Station No. 2, which sits on the corner of S. 5th Avenue and Castle Street, is now used as a residence and studio.

SouthSide History

Dry Pond

The Dry Pond area developed in the mid- to late-1800s to accommodate the poor white population and immigrants that arrived in Wilmington seeking employment. At that time, Dry Pond was located on the city's southern edge. Dry Pond was characterized by small homes and was seen by upper-class residents as an undesirable part of town.⁵ The origin of the name "Dry Pond" is often a point of curiosity. Elizabeth F. McKoy offers the most commonly documented explanation as she describes the area along S. 3rd Street in her book, *Early Wilmington Block by Block*:

In this section there were hills, not really high at all and between the hills were hollows in which rain water gathered. These were our 'sand hills.' In the hollows were shallow ponds. As time went on and as people built homes farther to the south these shallow ponds disappeared and the section was called 'Dry Pond.'⁴

Exactly where the boundaries of the Dry Pond neighborhood lie has long been debated. Various accounts indicate that the term "Dry Pond" did not necessarily refer to a specific geographic area, but to a socio-economic label. The general consensus is the area's boundaries were fluid and as poverty moved southward, so did the name "Dry Pond." Gathering from various historical accounts, the only agreed upon boundary is the northern boundary, which is usually defined as Castle Street.

In the late 1800s and early 1900s, Castle Street served as Wilmington's hub for retail, containing numerous locally owned stores and larger-scale retailers. It was also home to the Palace Theatre, which opened in 1947. The corridor flourished into the 1960s before suffering an economic decline. In recent years, however, Castle Street has seen a resurgence of commercial activity.^{3, 5}

The Bottom

Nestled between Market and Castle streets, The Bottom neighborhood dates back to the 1800s and has historically been a predominately African-American neighborhood. Because the neighborhood was developed approximately 200 years ago and extensive redevelopment has not occurred, the area is rich with historic sites and structures. Many single-family homes in this area date back to the 1800s, as well as structures used by the community as a whole, such as the Gregory Congregational Church of Christ, located at 614 Nun Street and built in the 1870s and 1880s.

One of the most recognizable structures in the South-Side area, the Williston High School building, is located in The Bottom neighborhood. Constructed in 1913 and initially named Williston Industrial High School, the school remains a symbol of African-American history in Wilmington. The school opened in January 1915 and the first class graduated in 1923. Williston's motto was "the greatest school under the sun," and the school had a reputation for academic excellence. While new buildings were constructed over the years and expansions made, the main building, built in 1931 and rebuilt in 1938 after a devastating fire, still stands on S. 10th

Street. In 1968, in response to federally mandated integration, funding for the Williston High School was discontinued and the students were sent to New Hanover or John T. Hoggard high schools.

Once slated for demolition, the building is currently occupied by the first elementary magnet school opened in New Hanover County, the Gregory School of Science, Math and Technology. The building is currently undergoing extensive renovations and technological upgrades. The name “Williston” now belongs to the neighboring middle school, which opened in 1993.

Across S. 10th Street from the Williston building is the location of one of three local prisoner of war (POW) camps. From October 1944 to April 1946, approximately 550 members of Rommel’s Afrika Korps were held at the camp. Robert Strange Park and the Martin Luther King, Jr. Community Center now occupy this land.^{1, 2, 3}

Located at 1406 Orange Street is the Hubert Eaton House, which was used by the African-American community as a recreation center in the 1940s and 1950s. Dr. Hubert Eaton used the grass tennis court on the property to teach-up-and coming junior tennis players such as Althea Gibson. Gibson went on to win five Grand Slam tennis tournaments and was the first African-American player to win the prestigious Wimbledon singles title and the U.S. National title in the same year. Dr. Eaton was also instrumental in ensuring that all medical hospitals in the city were integrated and fought to upgrade segregated schools in the county after the Brown v. Board of Education Supreme Court decision.¹⁴

Lake Forest

Originally constructed by the Federal Public Housing Authority as a United States defense housing project, a project sponsored by the federal government that provided affordable housing for defense workers, the land and homes that make up Lake Forest were purchased in 1947 by Lake Forest, Inc., a group chartered by veterans of World War II. Lake Forest, Inc. had the express purpose of providing housing to veterans, by way of a cooperative ownership system. Preference in membership to the cooperative was first given to veterans of World War II, followed by veterans of World War I, and finally to other members of the community.

The neighborhood consists of 249 masonry structures, many of which are divided into multiple units. Today, Lake Forest is a private community and is still operated as a housing cooperative.

Just south of the Lake Forest neighborhood is Greenfield Park and Gardens. In 1918 Howard-Wells Amusement Company purchased 158 acres of land that was part of the old Greenfields plantation and opened Lakeside Park. It was later purchased by the City of Wilmington and opened as a municipal park and playground in 1925. During the Great Depression, construction workers built the five-mile drive around the lake as part of a Works Project Administration attempt to put a portion of the numerous area unemployed to work. Once home to Overlake Pavilion and a petting zoo, the park now boasts many amenities, including tennis courts, a multi-use path, paddle boat and canoe rentals, and a skate-park.^{3, 6}



Paddle boats are among the many amenities offered at Greenfield Park and Gardens.



Homes in the Lake Forest neighborhood.