

RAPP ROAD

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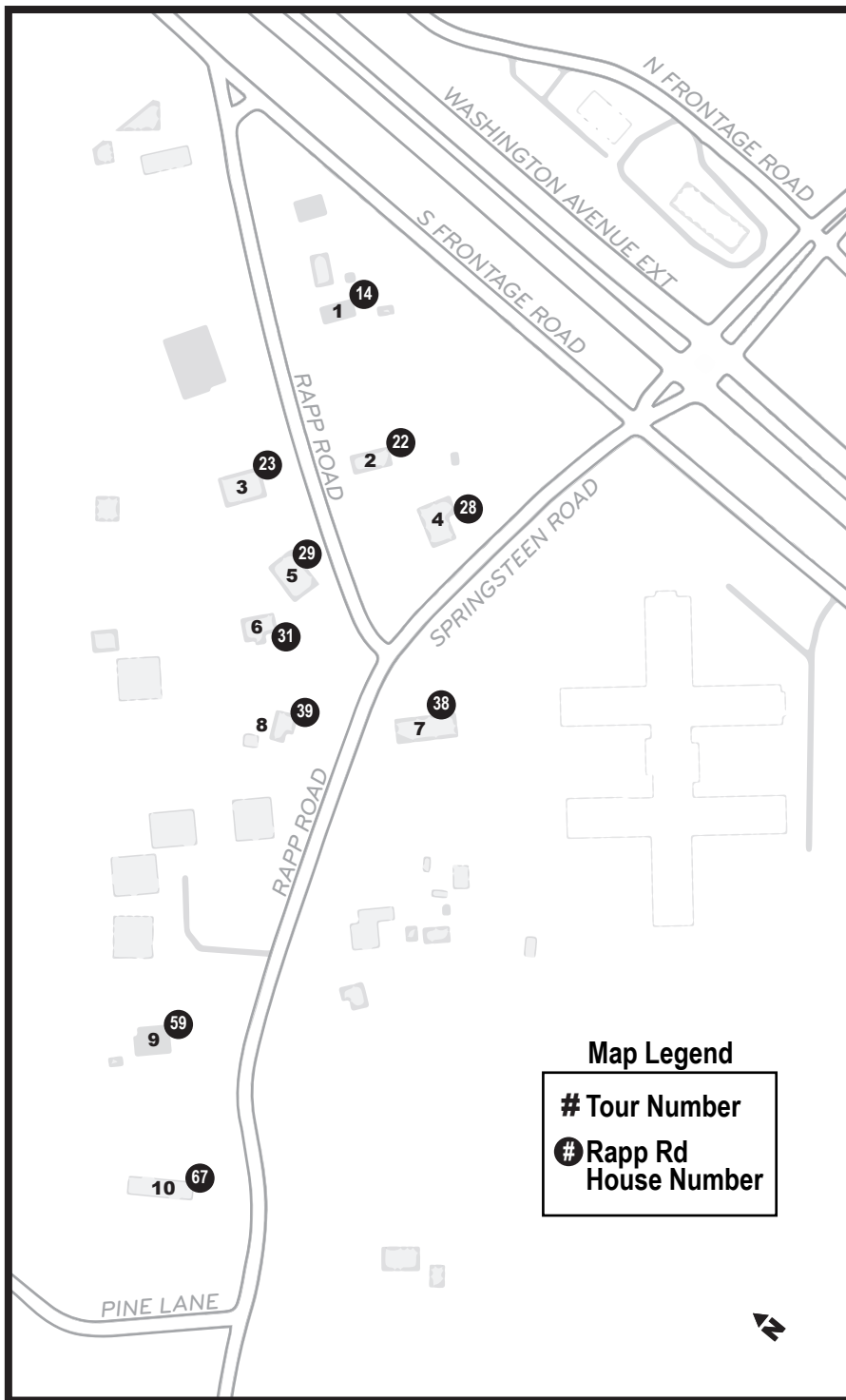
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The Rapp Road Community

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Located on the western edge of the city of Albany in an area known as the Pine Bush is a small African American enclave known as the Rapp Road community. This community was the result of the Great Migration and a vision by a small group of churchgoers from Shubuta, Mississippi. The Great Migration was the movement of seven million African Americans out of the southern United States between 1910 and 1970 to industrial centers in the North, Midwest, and West. Migrants moved hoping to find higher-paying wages, decent housing, less discrimination, and improved education for their children. In short, migrants wanted an overall better life than what the South offered.

Some African Americans looked to Albany, New York for this new and better life. During the 1930s and 1940s, African Americans were able to find work in the area railroad yards, large manufacturing companies (Albany Felt, Albany Packing Company, and Ludlum Steel Company), day work at the Port of Albany, and as domestic workers for white families. However, although average wages were higher in Albany than in the rural South, African Americans were given the worst jobs possible.

When migrants arrived in Albany most were relegated to the South End and Arbor Hill neighborhoods. It was difficult for African Americans to find and rent decent housing. At that time, the poorest residents of Albany lived in the South End, which primarily consisted of the newest European immigrants and African Americans. This area was also home to many bars, gambling houses, and brothels. Even though Albany was not perfect, it was a better alternative than living in the South where discrimination could become violent. Migrants moving to Albany came from South Carolina, North Carolina, and Virginia as most railroad lines ran in a north-south direction. However, a large group came from Shubuta, Mississippi because of one man's vision.

Louis Parson (1902-1940) was a part-time preacher and laborer in the logging industry in Shubuta. He received a large cash settlement as the result of a work injury. Parson purchased an automobile and moved north in 1927 with

his wife, Frances. With only the North as a destination, the couple ended up in Albany because of a chance meeting with a small group of women holding prayer meetings in the South End of Albany. Since the group needed a pastor, the Parsons joined the women and established the First Church of God in Christ located at 40 Franklin Street in Albany's South End.

After the church was established, Parson returned to Shubuta and the surrounding area to recruit members for his Albany congregation. He enlisted family, friends, and congregation members from the South because he felt the North offered a better life for them. According to interviews, Parson made multiple trips between Albany and the Shubuta area. As a result, most of the people he brought to Albany settled in the South End and became members of his congregation. A fellow congregant named John "Jack" Johnson followed in Parson's footsteps and purchased a bus to transport migrants out of Mississippi. Between 1937 and 1957, Johnson was responsible for "rescuing" more than one hundred Blacks from the South and driving them to Albany.

Some of the Mississippi transplants were unhappy living in Albany because of the unhealthy living conditions. Most were deeply religious, used to rural life, and did not like city living. Parson set out to remedy the situation. In May 1930 Parson and fellow church member, William Toliver, purchased 28 acres of land from Charles Smith in the western extension of the city of Albany in an area known as the Pine Bush. The road that traversed this area was named Rapp Road after the Rapp family who had lived and farmed the area for decades. The plan was to sell plots of land on rural Rapp Road to members of Parson's church community. Even though Louis Parson passed away in 1940, his wife Frances, continued to sell the land. Twenty-three church families bought land on Rapp Road until the mid-1960s.

Before families could move to Rapp Road, the land had to be cleared and houses built. During this era, it was uncommon for Blacks to be awarded mortgages, so each family had to build their house on a "pay-as-you-go system." As a result, most families built their own homes with the help of neighbors and family members in the same architectural elements used in their southern homes.

The Rapp Road families recreated their southern life on Rapp Road where they were also able to grow fields of vegetables, raise animals, and embrace a

rural life in the city of Albany. The residents on Rapp Road all worshiped in the same church, moved to Albany from the same part of the country, had similar upbringings, and settled on Rapp Road around the same time. As a result, the community was close-knit. Long-time resident, Emma Dickson recalled, "Everyone out on Rapp Road did everything together. You took care of each other's children. They went to church together, they had prayer meetings together. Whatever had to be done, you got together and did it."

As this strong sense of community developed the Rapp Road residents felt the need to celebrate. Looking at their southern experiences, they decided to hold a yearly reunion for family and friends. The Rapp Road reunion began in 1957 by Alfred and Leola McCann Woodard, Daniel McCann, and Willie McCann when one of their relatives from Mississippi was visiting Albany. As the tradition continued to grow, Daniel McCann built a small smokehouse on his property at 38 Rapp Road specifically for roasting pigs at the family reunion. The reunion continues today.

While the community remained unchanged for decades, the area surrounding Rapp Road developed. Washington Avenue Extension was built in 1971 which opened the area to commercial and residential development. The new road cut into the Rapp Road Community. At one point Libbie Toliver's house sat in the middle of where Washington Avenue Extension is today. According to interviews, Toliver was told by state officials she had two options: sell it or move it. She opted for the latter. Her house was moved west about one hundred yards. It sat on the end of Rapp Road at house number 8 until 2010 when it was demolished. However, the foundation is still present. By the late 1990s more than half of the original settlers still lived on Rapp Road and younger generations began moving back to the community to live. In recent years the community has diminished as the first and second-generation settlers have passed away, but currently, there are second-, third-, and fourth-generation generations living on Rapp Road.

In 2003 the Rapp Road Community was placed on the New York State and National Historic Registers because of the work of Emma Dickson, who grew up at 14 Rapp Road and, in her adult years, at 28 Rapp Road. In 2006, the Rapp Road Historical Association was established to help preserve the history of the community and led by Beverly Bardequez.

Homes on Rapp Road

Most of the homes on Rapp Road were built between the late 1930s-late 1950s, by the owners of the property and their family and friends. Houses were built over time as materials were not always available and mortgages and large loans were rarely awarded to African Americans at the time. Families lived in apartments in downtown Albany until their homes were constructed enough to move in. Additionally, some families purchased plots of land to have garden space on Rapp Road while living in the city.

14 Rapp Road

1948



Wood frame, single-story bungalow style dwelling with small frame shed.

The original owners and residents were Samuel and Isabel Coleman. The Colemans moved to Albany before 1933. The couple was originally from Savannah, Georgia, but moved to New York because Samuel had a brother in Brooklyn. The couple resided on Green Street when they first moved to Albany. Samuel Coleman began building this house in the early 1940s. The land was purchased from Francis Parson (Louis Parson's wife) on January 27, 1942. Girlie Ferguson, daughter of Alfred and Leola Woodard (first-generation Rapp Road residents), bought the house in 2004 and sold it to her daughter, Beverly Bardequez. Bardequez lived there until she died in 2022. The house remains in the family.

22 Rapp Road

1945



Wood frame, single-story bungalow style dwelling

The original builders and residents were Alfred and Leola Woodard. Alfred Woodard was born in Clarke County, Mississippi and Leola was born in Wayne County, Mississippi. The couple moved to Albany in 1939. Alfred and Leola bought land on Rapp Road on July 8, 1946, although they started building two years prior in 1944. Because of World War II, it was difficult to get materials, and building the house was a long process for Alfred. As a result, Leola started building a smaller shotgun-style house so the family would not have to pay rent in Albany. The family lived in the little house until 1949 when the big house was suitable. The Woodards had eight children and lived in the house until their deaths. Alfred died in 1994 and Leola died in 1991. The house is owned by the Rapp Road Historical Association.

23 Rapp Road

1948



Wood frame ranch style home with partial brick facing

The original residents were Willie and Tempie McCann and their daughter, Juanita. They arrived in Albany, New York, from Shubuta, Mississippi, in 1937. Upon their arrival, they first lived at 30 Dongan Avenue before moving to 39 Dongan Avenue. Willie McCann purchased land from Francis Parson on July 17, 1944, and immediately began building the house while the family continued to live in the South End of Albany. When the family moved to Rapp Road only the kitchen and bathroom were completed. Willie McCann had masonry skills; he built 29 Rapp Road and helped build 22 Rapp Road, 39 Rapp Road, and 38 Rapp Road. 23 Rapp Road was one of the houses used for collateral when the First Church of God in Christ (Wilborn Temple) bought 121 Jay Street, Albany, New York for the new church site in the 1960s. The house remains in the family.

28 Rapp Road

1978



Modern split-level ranch home

Emma Dickson had this house built in 1978. The land was subdivided from Alfred and Leola Woodard's property next door at 22 Rapp Road. Emma Dickson is Alfred and Leola Woodard's youngest child. Before Dickson's house was built, the property was barren fields. In 2016, the City of Albany re-named Springsteen Road, which runs alongside this home, Emma Dickson Way in honor of Dickson's work to preserve the community. The house remains in the family.

29 Rapp Road

1940



*Wood frame, single-story bungalow style dwelling.
Later expanded with a garage extension. Home faced with brick.*

Willie McCann built this house between 1940 and 1942 for his son, George Thomas. The house is owned by the Rapp Road Historical Association.

31 Rapp Road

1947



Wood frame, single-story bungalow style dwelling with side wings.

Elbert and Susie Farley, from Greenwood, Mississippi, purchased this lot from original Rapp Road resident Benjamin Nixon in 1946. The Farleys constructed this home in 1947. The house is still in the Farley family.

38 Rapp Road

1950



Wood frame house, single story ranch style home

Daniel and Sarah McCann, both from Shubuta, Mississippi, lived on Dongan Avenue in Albany before purchasing land on Rapp Road on March 10, 1944. Daniel and his three oldest sons, Frederick Douglass, James Earl, and Samuel Lewis along with Willie McCann and Labor Johnson helped build the house piece by piece beginning in the spring of 1949. The family moved into the

unfinished house in the fall of 1949. The oldest brother, Frederick Douglass, drew the blueprints for the house. The support beams in the house were from logs on their parcel of land. The house remains in the family.

Smoke House at 38 Rapp Road

1957



This small outbuilding was built in 1957 by Daniel McCann specifically for roasting pigs at family reunions.

39 Rapp Road

1945



Brick and wood frame, single story bungalow style dwelling

Labor Johnson and his wife, Clara, moved to Albany in 1933 from Shubuta, Mississippi. The couple came with Louis Parson on his fourth trip back to Mississippi. Johnson bought land on Rapp Road in 1944 and began building in 1945. He brought building materials in his car trunk every day and never worked on the house on Sundays. By 1947, the house was built, and the Johnson's lived there for over six decades until they passed. The home is currently owned by a non-related Rapp Road resident.

59 Rapp Road

1951



Wood frame, single story bungalow style dwelling

Bishop William Wilborn built this house in 1951 and lived here with his wife, Frances Parson Wilborn until their deaths (William in 1974 and Frances in 1982.) After the death of Louis Parson in 1940, Wilborn took over Parson's church,

which was eventually known as Wilborn Temple Church of God in Christ. The home is currently owned by a non-related Rapp Road resident.

67 Rapp Road

1949



Wood frame, single story bungalow style dwelling with later additions

This house was constructed by the Fantroy Family. Sammie Fantroy was born in Evergreen, Alabama in 1922 and his wife, Henrietta was born in Pine Land, South Carolina around the same time as her husband. Sammie and Henrietta moved to Albany in 1943 and lived at 55 Bleecker Street. The couple bought this Rapp Road property from Deacon Caesar Moore in 1946, when Sammie came home from serving in WWII. Sammie began building the house in 1949. One year later, in 1950 the family moved into their house. The Fantroys raised five children on Rapp Road. The home is currently owned by a non-related Rapp Road resident.

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