

Fort Totten and Lamond-Riggs: A Historical Tapestry



Co-authored by Michelle Lisa Herman, Stephanie Mills Trice, and Deborah Grimstead
Book Design and Original Artwork by Michelle Lisa Herman

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Cover and book design by Michelle Lisa Herman, Book Published via Blurb

Manufactured in the United States

Library of Congress Cataloging-In-Publication data is available upon request.

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Introduction

About the “Heritage Wall” Installation

In 2022, The D.C. Public Library System released an open request for qualifications to artists to submit a design for a permanent public artwork for the Lamond-Riggs/Lillian J. Huff Library, which would be digitally printed on vinyl and installed on the library’s “Heritage Wall.”

Fort Totten resident and artist Michelle Lisa Herman was selected for her idea of creating a digital collage in collaboration with area residents by collecting fabric swatches and photographs from them and creating high-resolution scans. The work she proposed took inspiration from the concept of a quilt which is stitched together from a variety of different fabrics. The photographs submitted were hand-traced by the artist into digital illustrations, which became focal points for the various quilt “squares.” Forty-two digital quilt squares were created and assembled into the final design. The images reflect the memories and moments shared by area residents. The completed design was printed and installed by the Library in 2023.

About this Publication

This publication was developed by Michelle Lisa Herman, Stephanie Mills Trice, and Deborah Grimstead to serve as a guide to the Lamond-Riggs/Lillian J. Huff Library “Heritage Wall” permanent installation created by artist Michelle Lisa Herman in 2023 and to showcase the rich history and culture of the Fort Totten and Lamond-Riggs area and residents. A call for participation was sent to contributors of the Heritage Wall installation, posted on local blogs, and shared with contacts and communities by Herman, Mills Trice, and Grimstead from May to August 31, 2024. Text submissions and oral history interviews were collected from those who volunteered to participate in this publication.

This project was made possible by HumanitiesDC via their Community Culture & Heritage Projects Grant, which Michelle Lisa Herman and Stephanie Mills Trice received in 2024 to develop this book. Founded in 1980, the Humanities Council of Washington, D.C. (HumanitiesDC) aims to enrich the quality of life, foster intellectual stimulation, and promote cross-cultural understanding and appreciation of local history in all neighborhoods of the District through humanities programs and grants. For information on HumanitiesDC and grant opportunities visit www.wdchumanitiesdc.org.

The original artwork excerpts of the larger installation are printed here with permission of the artist, Michelle Lisa Herman.

Opposite page: Photograph of the Heritage Wall Installation at the Lamond-Riggs/Lillian J. Huff Library. Photograph by Michelle Lisa Herman.



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Chapter 1: The History of the Fort Totten and Lamond-Riggs Neighborhoods

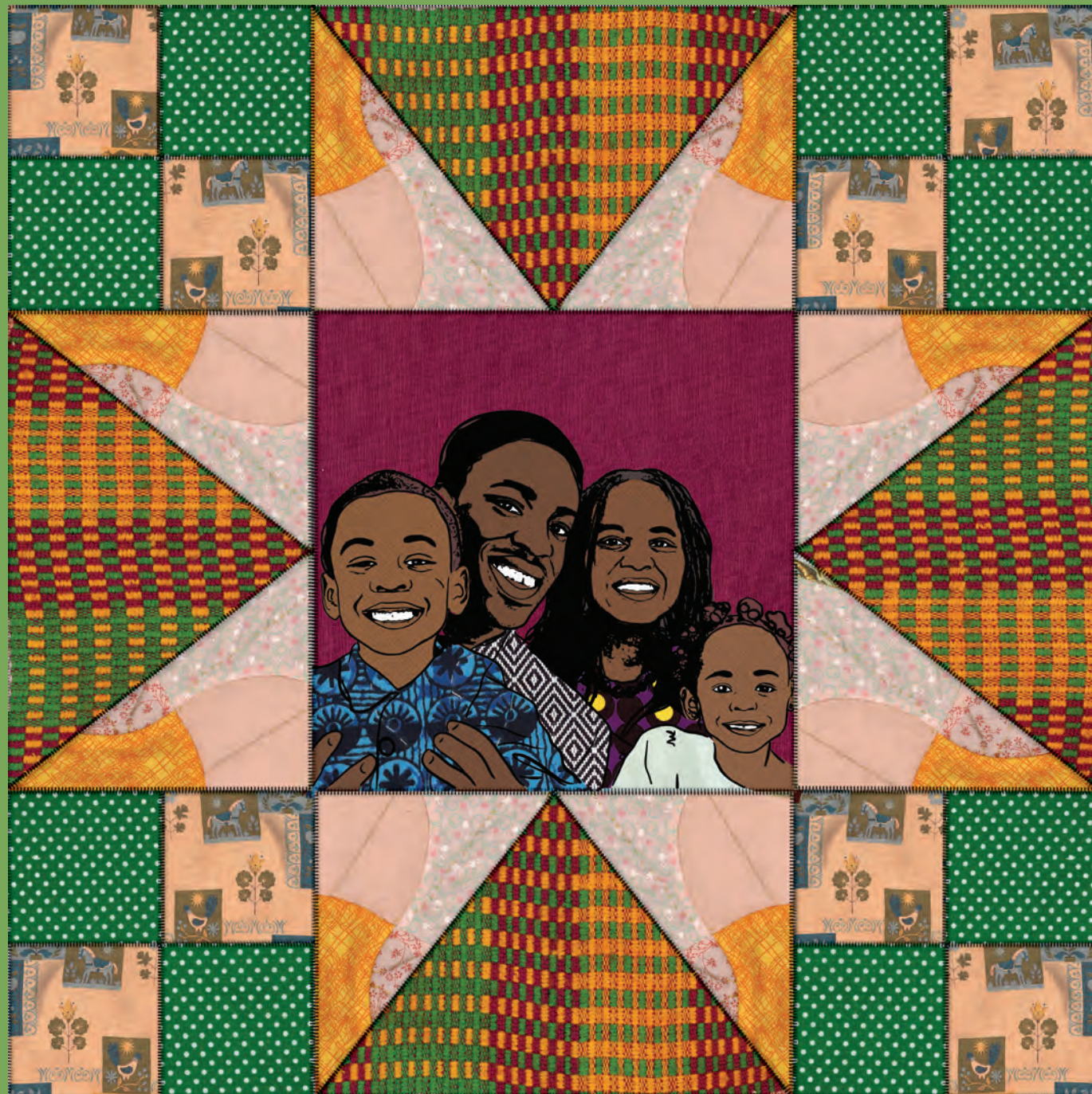
Fort Totten and Lamond-Riggs are adjacent neighborhoods in the northeastern part of Washington, D.C. in Wards 4 and 5, each with their own unique character and history.

“I submitted a fabric swatch with animals. In the early days of D.C., the blacks were intentionally segregated to Wards 7 and 8. My parents were the first of their families to move out and into Ward 5. It was a move that impacted both families. They both started to migrate to not only Ward 5 but out of state. The Ward 5 family house has housed multiple generations since 1958, especially the granddaughter of the African slave and the daughter of a buffalo soldier, Amanda. It is still admired by the latest generation. In addition, the family was largely Catholic. Consequently, moving to Ward 5 allowed the family to integrate not just their culture but their faith.”

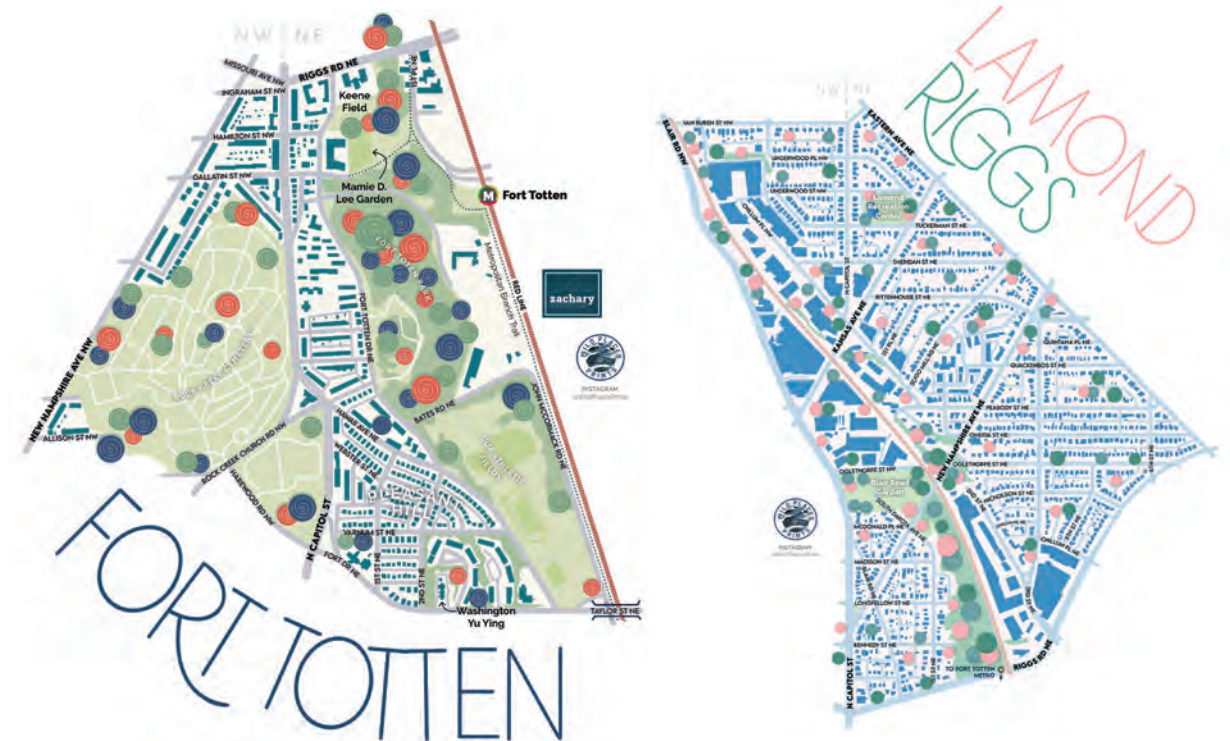
—Ms. Hamilton

“In the neighborhood, those houses that the black people moved in, most of the yards had fruit trees. It was amazing. They had peach trees, plum trees, cherry trees. Grapes. Apples. All of these yards were beautiful yards, and they all had fruit trees in them.”

—L. Gale Griffin



Square 36 of Heritage Wall Installation. Artwork by Michelle Lisa Herman. Illustration depicts a family based on photograph submitted by Deidre A. Charles. Fabric swatches include contributions from Ms. Hamilton.



Illustrated maps of Fort Totten and Lamond-Riggs created by Zachary Ammerman. Reprinted with permission of the artist. (<https://zacharyammerman.com>)

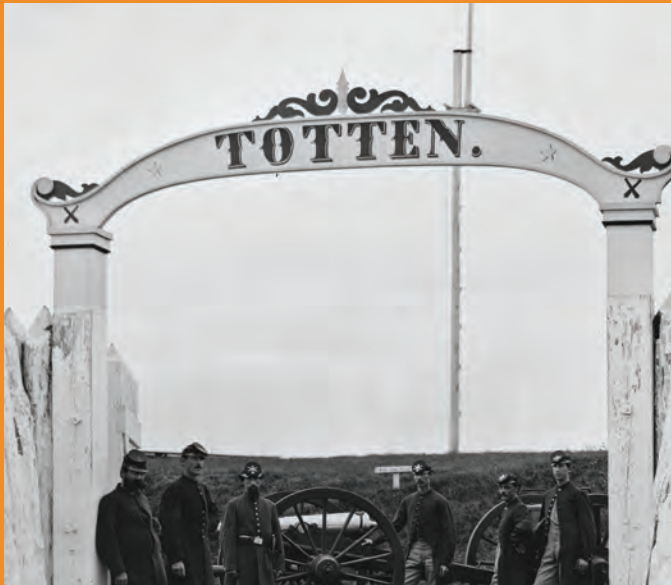


Image credit: Smith, William Morris, photographer. District of Columbia. Men and gun of 3d Massachusetts Heavy Artillery at ornamental gate of Fort Totten. Washington D.C. United States District of Columbia, 1865. [August?] Photograph. Library of Congress. <https://www.loc.gov/item/2018667055/>.



Image credit: Fort Totten, Washington, D.C., to 65. District of Columbia Washington D.C. United States, 1861 to 1865. Photograph. Library of Congress. <https://www.loc.gov/item/2016852501/>.



Image credit: Wymer, John P., photographer. Boys playing on "ruins" in Fort Totten Park. May 31, 1948. Photograph. From the John P. Wymer photograph collection. DC History Center. <https://dchistory.catalogaccess.com/photos/23151>. On bottom of page on which photos 275-278 are mounted: "Terra Cotta, D.C.", is a strip of Undeveloped territory lying roughly between Fort Totten Park and Riggs Road NE.



Image credit: Wymer, John P., photographer. Looking northwest along the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad tracks, "Terra Cotta" D.C. March 20, 1949. Photograph. From the John P. Wymer photograph collection. DC History Center. <https://dchistory.catalogaccess.com/photos/23154>.

Fort Totten

Fort Totten, a Civil War fort, was constructed in August 1861 and completed by 1863. It was originally called Fort Towson¹, but later named in honor of Brigadier General Joseph Gilbert Totten, the Chief Engineer of the U.S. Army at the time.² It was one of more than 68 forts that made up the Civil War Defenses of Washington and played a significant role in protecting the nation's capital from potential Confederate attacks.³ It has been documented that the 100 pounder Parrott rifle mounted there during the Confederate attack on July 11 and 12, 1864, provided long-range support to Fort Stevens. It also housed 20 guns and mortars, including eight-32 pounders. Geographically, it was in Washington County beyond the original boundaries of Washington City. The boys playing on the ruins in the photograph and what the Fort Totten Storytellers called the "Indian Rocks" were more than likely the ornamental gates of the fort's sallyport (rear entrance).

Washington County before the Civil War was a sparsely inhabited rural area with farms, orchards, and villages, as well as country estates owned by yeomen and gentlemen farmers like George Washington Riggs and William Wilson Corcoran. Corcoran, the founder of the Corcoran Gallery of Art, named his farm Harewood for its woods and rabbit population. His stone lodge still exists on Harewood Road Northeast. And Riggs's 200-plus-acres with his summer home (now President Lincoln's Cottage) was purchased by the government for the U.S. Military Asylum (also known as Soldiers' Home). As individual farms were sold by the original owners and demands from the busy city and politics, a cultural landscape shift with recreational venues, cemeteries, and subdivisions started popping up. The county officially became the District of Columbia implemented by The Organic Act of 1871, combining territorial governments of Washington City, Georgetown, and Washington County.⁴

Today, Fort Totten Park that was once the fort on the hill, the surrounding neighborhood, and the Metro subway station are all named after the fort. Excerpts from current and former residents' audio recordings⁵ are shared throughout this publication, capturing the warm rural suburbia of Fort Totten's humble beginnings and historical significance. It has become the largest playground imaginable for the children who lived nearby, nurturing their creativity, social skills, and lasting memories.

"When I first got there, I looked and I said, Oh my God. The Fort Totten Park itself never had I had a recreation facility that huge and large, and [my brother, [Skip', William T. Rothwell, II (DECD) and I] explored it. We always said if someone was after us, we could take any trail and lose them. We loved that park...

...To me, it was my Shangri La, it was just beautiful, and then to be able to go and walk into the park and explore, then we realized the rocks [Indian Rocks] that we were climbing on were actually foundations for the fort itself to put the cannons on. We did our little investigations ourselves and came up with that."

—Reginald T. Rothwell

"The actual fort itself played a big part. It was a place, it was our playground. We used to do a lot of things that boys do in Fort Totten Park. Play football and hide and seek and they had an area there where a big rope was tied on the tree and it was a sort of a gully there where the rope was and we used to swing on that thing.

We used to call it a Tarzan swing. That was fun. There used to be picnics there. And like I said, we used to play football up there a lot too, on Sunday evenings."

—Phillip Herndon



This Civil War centennial plaque was placed on a huge boulder in the park and visibly represents the main entrance to the fort. The Fort Totten Civic Association in the 1960s was instrumental in its installation. Mr. Robert Hall was the president of the association then.

Historical signage in Fort Totten Park. National Park Service.

Fort Totten

Members of the 3rd Massachusetts Heavy Artillery inside Fort Totten, 1865

Entrance gate to Fort Totten, 1865

Brigadier General Joseph Gilbert Totten

Built in 1861 and named after Brigadier General Joseph Gilbert Totten, Chief of the Army Corps of Engineers, Fort Totten commanded the northeastern countryside of Washington, DC during the Civil War. Heavily armed with massive cannon that could hurl 100-pound projectiles several miles, Fort Totten halted the eastward advance of Confederate invaders inside Washington, DC during the Battle of Fort Stevens in July, 1864.

Fort Totten today

By the late 1920s the historic earthworks inside Fort Totten showed significant signs of erosion which threatened the preservation of the fort. To stabilize the fort vegetation was planted. Removal of vegetation from the fort and its grounds is prohibited.

Additional information on Fort Totten available at: www.nps.gov/fort

“But my greatest thing that I loved about being in Fort Totten was when I met you (Jules Johnson). We came to camp. Fort Totten used to be a day camp. And you spent the night over the camp. And you and I were complete cutups in that camp, but we had a good time. And look where we are now. This lifelong friendship has bloomed to that...Again, the Safeway was at the corner of North Capitol and is that Missouri? And that’s where we shopped at. We went to the Safeway right there to get the food and so on like that. Clothes came in when clothes were necessary and needed. You know, we got clothes in the beginning of the school year. You got clothes for school. You got clothes for Easter. And you got clothes at Christmas. Those are the times you got them.”

—Wendell Moore

“Oh, Fort Totten Park. I loved the hills of Fort Totten Park. Running up and down the hills. I mean literally, we got some good exercise in that park. And the trails. And down in the little camp area [DC Recreation Day Camp] where they used to have camp down there in the park.”

—Patricia Smith Spencer Lee

Another area of Fort Totten was once known simply as “Terra Cotta” due to the clay-rich soil.^{6,7} An article from the *Evening Star* in 1889 states:

“Dig anywhere and there is clay. The supply is so enormous that sewer pipe and stone-ware for the entire country could be manufactured here for generations without exhausting the great beds of merchantable earth.”⁸

The red clay was reportedly discovered when the B&O Railroad, linking western Maryland with Washington, led to the establishment of the Terra Cotta Works in the neighboring industrious community of Lamond.⁹



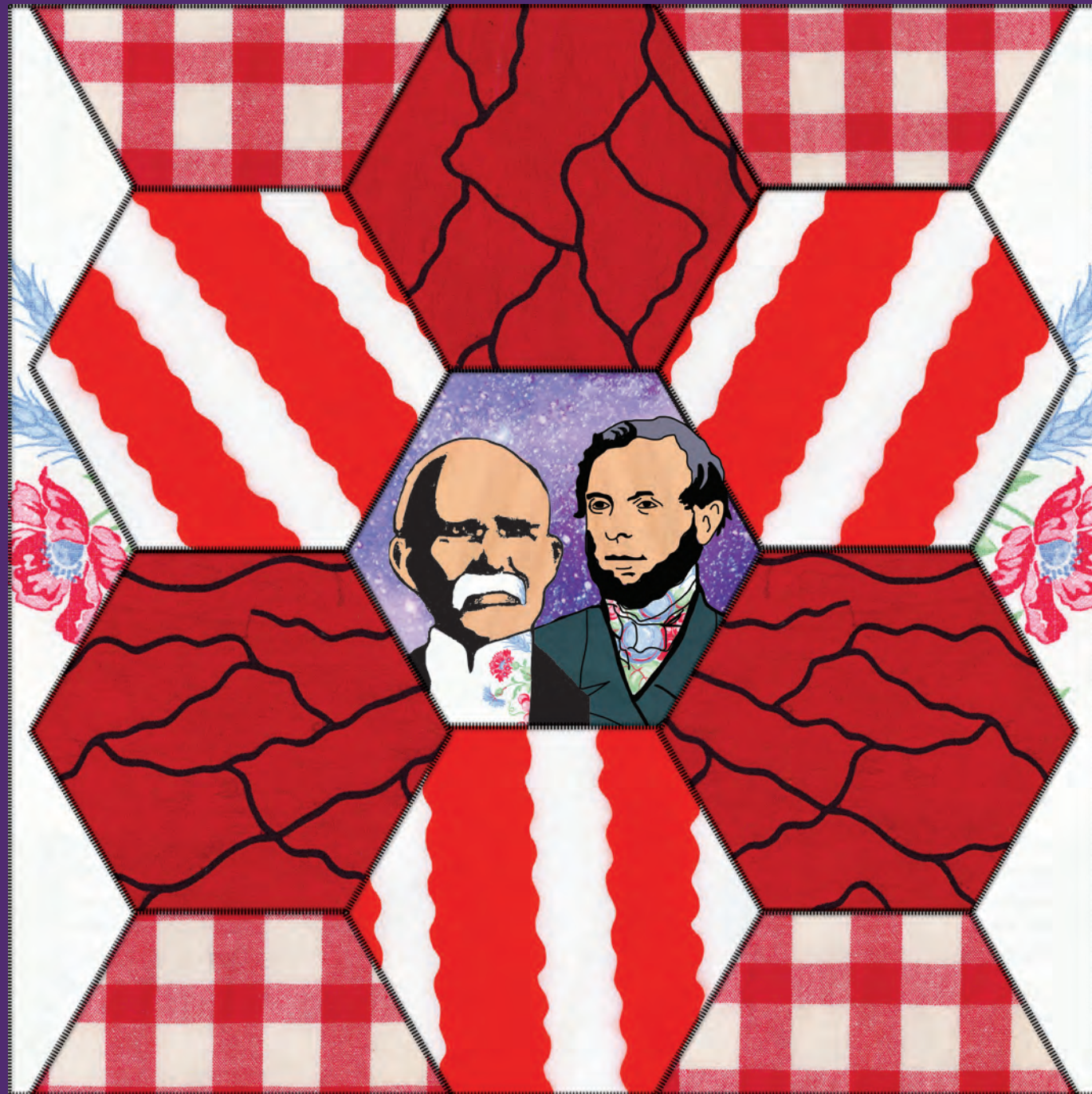
This historical marker, at the intersection of Kansas Ave. and Chillum Place NE, references the establishment of the Lamond neighborhood in 1875, and the former Terra Cotta Works. Photograph by Devry Becker Jones (CC0), June 21, 2023⁴¹

Lamond-Riggs

The name “Lamond-Riggs” is a combination of two areas: Lamond and Riggs Park, which collectively form the Lamond-Riggs neighborhood. Lamond is located near the border with Maryland while Riggs Park is located south of Lamond.

Lamond-Riggs includes Sears-designs dating from the 1920s and ‘30s¹⁰ The residences consist primarily of row houses, semi-detached brick houses, single-family detached houses, and clusters of garden apartments.¹¹ Many of these newly developed communities had restrictive covenants barring blacks from buying in.¹²

In the 1950s, Riggs Park was known as “Little Tel Aviv” due to its sizable Jewish population. By the 1960s and ‘70s, many Jewish residents relocated to Maryland, and the neighborhood became predominantly African American by the early 1980s.¹³



Square 31 of Heritage Wall Installation. Artwork by Michelle Lisa Herman. Illustration depicts Angus Lamond (left) and George Washington Riggs (right). Pattern features hexagonal shapes that reference the terra cotta tiles used in the DC Metro system.

The area of Lamond-Riggs takes its name from two historical figures: Angus Lamond and George Washington Riggs.

Angus Lamond

The founder of the Terra Cotta Works at Lamond was Scottish-born Angus Lamond. According to a 2007 article in *The Washington Post*,

*“The tile factory sat somewhere near where Underwood Street and Chillum Road now intersect, according to Historic Takoma, a neighborhood preservation group. When the Baltimore & Ohio Railroad used to stop in the neighborhood, the Lamond station was nicknamed the “Terra Cotta” station because of the factory.”*¹⁴

George Washington Riggs

George Washington Riggs was the founder of Riggs Bank, one of the most successful banking empires of its time. His palatial estate was located on what is now the Armed Forces Retirement Home, as the land was sold to the federal government by the Riggs estate in 1851.¹⁵



Illustrated map of Riggs Park created by Zachary Ammerman. Reprinted with permission of the artist. (<https://zacharyammerman.com>)

Chapter 2: The Lamond-Riggs/Lillian J. Huff Library

Nestled within the heart of the Lamond-Riggs neighborhood, the Lamond-Riggs/Lillian J. Huff Library stands as a testament to the enduring power of community, education, and civic engagement. From its modest beginnings to its current role as a cultural and educational hub, the library has been a cornerstone of the neighborhood, reflecting the evolution of the area and its residents.

Lillian J. Huff

The library was renamed in 2021 in honor of area resident and activist Lillian J. Huff (1931–2018). Huff was born in 1931 and raised in Tampa. She moved to Washington in 1953 to attend Howard University. She later settled in the Lamond-Riggs/Riggs Park neighborhood between Riggs Road NE and North Capitol Street.

Huff was a prominent community activist and civil rights advocate in Washington, D.C. Her legacy of public service and community empowerment left a lasting impact on the Lamond-Riggs neighborhood and beyond.

In the 1950s, Lamond-Riggs was a growing neighborhood with a large number of school-age children, but it did not have a library. The closest library was more than 2 miles away in Woodridge and the once-a-week D.C. Bookmobile that visited the neighborhood did not meet the community's needs, so residents met to discuss building a library. Thanks to the advocacy of Lillian J. Huff and other community members, the original Lamond-Riggs Library opened on October 24, 1983, at a cost of \$2 million.

After successfully leading the charge to bring a library to the neighborhood, Huff continued to serve the community. She was vice president of the Federation of Friends of the D.C. Public Library and the first president of the Friends of the Lamond-Riggs Library. Huff served several terms as the President of the Lamond-Riggs Citizens Association. Additionally, Huff was appointed to the White House Conference on Libraries and Information Services by U.S. President Jimmy Carter in 1978.¹⁶



Lillian J. Huff. Reprinted with permission of the DC Public Library, Star Collection ©Washington Post



Square 22 of Heritage Wall Installation. Artwork by Michelle Lisa Herman. Illustration depicts Lillian J. Huff based on photograph submitted by Rodney Foxworth on behalf of the renaming committee.



Square 38 of Heritage Wall Installation. Artwork by Michelle Lisa Herman. Illustration depicts several Members of the Committee to Rename the New Lamond-Riggs Library (with 25 total Members) based on photograph submitted by Rodney Foxworth. From left to right, Rodney Foxworth Coordinator and WD 4 Co-Convener; Danisha Lyons, Mrs. Huff's Granddaughter; Gwen Johnson-Smart; Lyndia Grant; Gloria Hightower, Committee Convener; Mayor Bowser (Friend of Mrs. Huff, not a committee member); Frank Wilds, WD5 Co-Convener; and Dianne Huff-Lyons, Mrs. Huff's Daughter from the new library's 6/27/2022 Grand Opening.



Square 23 of Heritage Wall Installation. Artwork by Michelle Lisa Herman. Illustration depicts Mrs. Lillian J. Huff with Rosa Parks (Gray Hair); C. Delores Tucker (Former PA Secretary of State); Jackie Jackson (Rev. Jessie Jackson's Wife); and Other Distinguished and Nationally Known Black Women in Politics based on photograph submitted by Rodney Foxworth.

Rodney Foxworth on Lillian J. Huff

“When I moved here in 2002, I already had community-building experience. Having been a Community Activist here and in Boston for over 21 years and having served as the president of two Civic Associations in both Cities for over 11 years. So, when I came, Ms. Huff had been the Lamond-Riggs Citizens Association (LRCA) President for over 10 years. In 2004, I was elected as LRCA’s 1st VP, served “under” Ms. Huff for 2 or 3 years where she mentored me regarding the Community, its past struggles, successes, plus its challenges and opportunities. She stressed the importance of having open and honest “two way” communication with the Community if we were to successfully represent their concerns and work together to improve Lamond-Riggs.

She was big on personal relationships, “took me in like a son” and we were “kindred spirits” given my focus on transparency and developing a community consensus. I continued to benefit from Ms. Huff’s knowledge and experiences for several years as her successor (LRCA’s next President).

So, I was aware of all the wonderful things that she did for this community, along with others whose names are “lost to history!” From being part of the leadership that fought the Federal Highway Administration’s plans to extend I-95 right through this neighborhood...to her serving as the lead advocate with DC’s Federal City Commission (before there was a DC government), in lobbying them (and Congress) to actually provide funds for the first Lamond-Riggs library that opened in 1982! She knew then what national studies proved decades later, that kids did better academically when they had a library in or near their community! Then for about 10 to 15 years after it opened, she had the foresight to...and successfully lobbied the then DC Government...for the capital improvement funds to rebuild the new Lamond-Riggs Library!

This was 20 or so years before the funds were used to build the library! She put all of this “in place” so when I became LRCA’s President for the first time, she asked that I ensure that the capital improvement funds be used to build the new library. So, I thought it was only fitting that we develop a citywide coalition, to rename the new Lamond Riggs Library for Ms. Huff. Because without Ms. Huff...there would not be a library there at all!

Square 38 includes several core members of that coalition, “The Committee to Rename the New Lamond-Riggs Library.” It was taken at the Grand Opening of the new library where I and others spoke, to honor Ms. Huff and the new Lamond-Riggs/Lillian J. Huff Library! Given the Committee’s efforts in gathering over 30 letters of support from across DC; from elected officials to local/national Democratic Women’s Organizations, from 99% of all neighboring civic assns. to Members of Congress and our “work” in publicizing the Grand Opening, the Lamond-Riggs/Lillian J. Huff Library’s opening was one of the largest grand openings for a Community Library in D.C. History! The picture included: me (Committee Coordinator and Ward 4 Committee Co-Convener), Danisha Lyons (Ms. Huff’s granddaughter), Gwen Johnson-Smart, Lyndia Grant, Gloria Hightower (Committee Convener), Mayor Bowser (friend of Mrs. Huff, not a committee member), Frank Wilds (Ward 5 Committee Co-Convener), Dianne Huff-Lyons (Ms. Huff’s daughter), and Carolyn Kennedy. The Committee’s core group were basically Community Leaders from Wards 4 and 5, who were Ms. Huff’s friends. The Committee was composed of 22 Leaders from across the city.”

—Rodney Foxworth, LRCA President 2 terms (6 years), LRCA 1st VP (7 years), Founder and 1st Chairman, LRCA’s Development Task Force, Founder and Co-Convener, the Lamond-Riggs Public Safety Group.



Square 21 of Heritage Wall Installation. Artwork by Michelle Lisa Herman. Illustration depicts Charles Irving Bryant (1928–2005), founding partner and CEO of the architectural firm Charles Irving Bryant Associates in 1965 (left), and his younger brother, Robert Bryant (1930–1995) (right). Together, they formed Bryant & Bryant, AIA, in 1969, with Charles as founding partner and CEO.

Bryant and Bryant

Architects of the Original Lamond-Riggs Library

The design/build team of architects Bryant & Bryant and A.A. Beiro Construction Company were selected to bring the original Lamond-Riggs Library to life. Coincidentally, Robert Bryant lived within a stone’s throw of the library site, while Charles lived in Crestwood just off 16th Street in NW. Both were Ward 4 residents.

In 1965, the Charles Irving Bryant Associates architectural firm was formed. In 1969, Mr. Bryant’s younger brother, Robert, joined Charles to form Bryant & Bryant, AIA.

By 1975, Bryant & Bryant, AIA had grown into the largest African American owned architectural firm in the U.S., as explained on the website <https://www.bryantmitchellarchitects.com>:

“With several million dollars in annual fee income, the firm made Black Enterprise [magazine’s] inaugural list of the top 100 black-owned businesses in the nation.”

In 1991, the American Institute of Architects (AIA) inducted Charles Bryant into the AIA’s College of Fellows, the highest membership honor in the AIA. His brother Robert was also inducted as an AIA Fellow in 1992.

Fellowship elevates architects who have achieved a standard of excellence in the profession, and made a significant contribution to architecture and society on a national level. Thus, the firm Bryant & Bryant, AIA could now distinguish themselves as Bryant & Bryant, FAIA—a status of which the two brothers were very proud to have achieved.

After the passing of Robert Bryant in 1995, Melvin L. Mitchell, FAIA collaborated with Charles from 1999–2004. The Bryant & Bryant firm reorganized in 2004 and has continued architectural services as Bryant Mitchell, PLLC (<https://www.bryantmitchellarchitects.com>). Also, the website states that by 2015:

“Having designed nearly 1,000 projects throughout the greater D.C.-Baltimore region, Bryant Mitchell is well-known as a leading architectural firm with a demonstrated commitment to advancing our community through innovative planning and design.”

The website states that currently, Bryant Mitchell, PLLC:

“continues the history of the Bryant & Bryant partnership that has been practicing in the Washington, D.C. metropolitan area for over 40 years.... Charles Irving Bryant II and Melvin L. Mitchell, FAIA, continue the legacy of the firm.”



Charles Irving Bryant (left) and Robert Bryant (right). Reprinted with permission of the Bryant family.



Square 15 of Heritage Wall Installation. Artwork by Michelle Lisa Herman. Illustration depicts long-established members of the Book Club at the Lamond-Riggs Library based on photograph submitted by Vanessa Williford. Design includes fabric swatches submitted by Reggie Elliot (square quilt) and Gwen Geddie (center quilt design).

The Book Club

“I was transferred to the Lamond Riggs Branch in June 2013. Six months later, I started the Reading the World Book Club. Many of the patrons expressed a strong interest in African literature. The first meeting was in October 2013 and the book was *Purple Hibiscus* by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie. On the Heritage Wall at Lamond Riggs/Lillian J. Huff Library is a picture of Camille Acker, author of *Training School for Negro Girls* with members of the Reading Club. Her book takes place in Northeast Washington, D.C. At that time, Ms. Acker was teaching writing at the University of New Mexico. She is the daughter of member Fay Acker. She presented her book in December 2018 and then in April 2019. The group read and discussed the work.”

—Liane Rosenblatt

The book club members featured in the artwork (opposite page, listed left to right) include:

- Karan Buster
- Eve Dickey
- Dianne Hanshaw
- Starlene Williams
- Vanessa Williford
- Jean Johnson
- Liane Rosenblatt
- Cynthia Taylor
- Fay Acker
- Unidentified
- Louise Teneyck
- Judith Oliver
- Camille Acker (seated)

The quilt in the upper half of the background of the opposite image was created in the 1960s by Caroline Richardson from scraps of material. Caroline sewed many quilts for her children and grandchildren, along with hats and dresses.

Gwen Geddie, one of Caroline’s daughters and a current member of the Book Club, brought the quilt to an in-person scanning session at the library for inclusion in the Heritage Wall.



Chapter 3: The Community

One of the characteristic traits of the Fort Totten and Lamond-Riggs area is the striking sense of community.

“My brother was the Explorer. So he went north to Allison, Buchanan, Crittenden Street, and Rock Creek Church Road. And then he came home and told me, man, there’s a lot of African American—at that time—was black families with kids our age. I said, what? Because at Hawaiian Gardens, there was about eight of us, that was enough for kids to play with. So I took the trip with him and I looked at these homes side by side brick with porches on the front and coming from where I came from, and these African American people had azaleas out front.

The lawns were cut. I was like, I was in heaven. I’m like, wow, this is really something different, and then once I got to know the families, I realized that everybody knew one another and it was community-based. There was so much going on. We had block parties back in the day and it was the parents would get together and do things, activities for us.”

—Reginald T Rothwell

“It’s meaningful because the people that are in that picture, we all grew up together. Our parents had the homes, and now we’re in the homes.

David, my next door neighbor on the right hand side, he’s in the picture, David Wood, we grew up together. Sharon, she’s much younger, but I remember when we grew up. I remember Debra and Jerome. Nadine, who lives across the street, she’s in the picture, her in-laws had the home. It was her husband’s so her husband was there and her in-laws owned the home over there.

[That] is basically everybody, and it’s right there. The rest, the other neighbor, he’s new to the neighborhood, but he’s there now. We all just, we grew up together so it’s good being back and it’s good for all of us to be there. Isn’t that something? It’s like family.”

—Lauren J. Laws

“My wife [Lillie (DECD)] and I was riding one day. This was all, at that time, a Jewish neighborhood. We saw two or three signs. It was a sign—this house, the Haydens’ [ph] house across the street, one next door, and a couple down the street. Plenty of signs. And I called the agent. Back in them days, you couldn’t move anyplace, being of color. They would even advertise white or colored in the paper, so you know not to go there. So, I just saw the sign. I called the agent. I think his name was Max Bergman [ph]. And the house was vacant, decorated. So, we made a deal. And from that deal, that’s how I became involved in real estate. Bergman said, “You’re such a good negotiator. Why don’t you get your license?” And I said, “Man I don’t know nothing about real estate.” He said, “You’ll be good.” But I got my license—no, I didn’t. I’m going backwards. I went to Washington Real Estate School [sp], which was an all-white real estate school.”

—Russell Miles (DECD)



Square 19 of Heritage Wall Installation. Artwork by Michelle Lisa Herman. Illustration depicts neighbors based on photograph submitted by Lauren J. Laws.



Square 5 of Heritage Wall Installation. Artwork by Michelle Lisa Herman. Illustration depicts two dancers. Design made in honor of the Banneker Ballroom Dance Club.

Banneker Ballroom Dance Club

Since the 1940s, the Banneker Ballroom Dance Club (BBDC) has held dance classes and has danced together as friends and as a family. When BBDC is in session September through June, it teaches a variety of American and international dance styles every Tuesday evening at a location in Chillum. Everyone is welcomed to BBDC, with or without a partner.¹⁷

“‘Ballroom dance’ is an umbrella term to describe partner dances such as the waltz, rhumba, foxtrot, tango, and swing, as well as D.C. hand dance, D.C.’s official dance derived from the Lindy Hop, which was created by Black dancers during the Harlem Renaissance during the 1920s and 1930s.

The first classes of the Banneker Ballroom Dance Club (BBDC) were held in the 1940’s at the Banneker Recreation Center, a popular recreational spot in the city for African Americans in a time of segregation. According to the BBDC website, the classes included not only instruction in proper dance technique, but also on proper dress, etiquette, and deportment. Every man attending a Banneker dance class had to wear a necktie.

The club held its first banquet at Waters’ Catering Service in Rockville, Maryland. About 29 elegantly attired attendees brightened the evening. This event started a tradition of galas with over 250 attendees and dance exhibitions that continue around the D.C. area today. Classes today are “come as you are.” It is important to wear comfortable clothing and shoes with leather soles or dance sneakers that allow you to move and turn easily. All are welcome to attend classes, and you don’t need to bring a partner. Women and men learn dance steps separately and are then partnered so that they learn how to dance with partners. It’s great fun, and people do “dress to impress” for social dances and galas.

Ballroom Club president Brenda Manley says, ‘The elegance of ballroom is a dance form we strive to keep healthy and alive within the African American community. Through professional instruction, affordability, and energetic organization the vibrance and tradition of ballroom continues to be a gem of Washington, D.C. dance culture.’”

—Lauri Williamson

Excerpt from 111 Places in Black Culture in Washington, DC That You Must Not Miss by Lauri Williamson (published 2024). Reprinted with permission.¹⁸



Square 41 of Heritage Wall Installation. Artwork by Michelle Lisa Herman. Illustration depicts Culture Coffee Too. Design includes fabric swatches submitted by Ms. Hamilton (beige rocking horse pattern), Reagan Carroll (blue and white knit), Robert Oliver (kente cloth), among others.

Culture Coffee Too

Culture Coffee Too was a cherished coffee shop and cultural hub located at 300 Riggs Road NE in the Lamond-Riggs neighborhood. Established in 2017 by Veronica “Ms. V” Cooper, the venue quickly became a cornerstone of the community, offering not only quality coffee and food but also serving as a space for art exhibitions, live performances, and community events.

In February 2023, it was announced that Culture Coffee Too would close its doors at the end of March 2023. The closure marked the end of an era for the Lamond-Riggs community, as residents bid farewell to a beloved gathering place that had significantly contributed to the neighborhood’s cultural and social fabric.¹⁹



Instagram photo from @culture_coffee_too

“Culture Coffee Too will be closing its doors at 300 Riggs Road NE at the end of March after five years of providing a space for culture, coffee, and conversation in Riggs Park. Owner Veronica (Ms. V) Cooper opened the Riggs Park location after moving from a location on Kennedy Street NW. She stated in her closing note that she has enjoyed building community in Riggs Park over the last five years and now it is time to move on. Build community she did.

A couple of years ago, I wrote a letter in support of the coffee shop for an award. The words are fitting now as I think about how much I will miss Ms. V. I wrote then:

As the owner of Culture Coffee Too, a coffee shop and arts space in the Riggs Park neighborhood in Northeast Washington, D.C., since 2017, Veronica Cooper has made it her business to make her business the cultural and community hub of the neighborhood.

Culture Coffee Too is the quintessential neighborhood small business sitting in the heart of the Riggs Park neighborhood’s commercial corridor. In the three years that Culture Coffee Too has been open, I have seen and been part of the overwhelmingly positive impact it has had on the community. When I served as president of the neighborhood civic association, I had the pleasure of speaking at the ribbon cutting ceremony to celebrate Culture Coffee Too’s opening in 2017. In 2018, Ms. V spearheaded the Riggs Park Art Crawl, bringing art and patrons to neighborhood businesses in Riggs Park. Another successful art crawl followed in 2019, making the neighborhood a little brighter with placemaking murals at neighborhood businesses.

At the end of 2018, I helped start the neighborhood Main Street. The Parks Main Street supports the commercial corridors of the Riggs Park and Manor Park neighborhoods in Washington, D.C. It was only fitting that we launched the Main Street at Culture Coffee Too, inviting neighborhood residents, business owners, and all those interested in seeing the commercial corridor of these neighborhoods thrive to join together to make it happen. With Culture Coffee Too, Ms. V. serves as a connector—connecting small business owners, connecting artists, connecting residents. Any time someone steps inside the shop for a cup of tea, a breakfast sandwich, or maybe a smoothie, taking in the artwork on the walls of that month’s featured artist, it is likely that person will leave having met someone new.”

—Uchenna Evans

Excerpt from Next Stop...Riggs Park blog. Reprinted with permission²⁰



Engine Company 14, D.C. Fire Department. Photograph from FEMS Station Locations and First Due Areas website.

Engine Company 14, D.C. Fire Department

Originally located on 8th Street NW, Engine Company 14 of the District of Columbia Fire and Emergency Medical Services Department has long served the surrounding neighborhoods. The firehouse traces its roots back to June 8, 1898, when the expanding population necessitated new stations to meet demand for emergency services. In 1945 it moved to 4801 North Capitol Street NE and the old facility was modernized in 2017 (opposite page). Over the decades, Engine 14's firefighters have responded to calls ranging from everyday medical emergencies to significant local incidents, providing a critical public safety presence. In addition to its operational importance, the station engages with the community through a variety of events.²¹

“4815 North Capitol Street was the first location we lived in, and that was right next to the firehouse. And then we moved around the corner to 4508 Fort Totten Drive (Pleasant Hills Apartments)...And the biggest thing that stood out was that we lived right next door to a firehouse, so it was getting used to the noise.”

—Frederick Hollis (Retired DC Fireman)

“My backyard met with the backyard of the fire department. And back then, before they built the Fort Totten Apartments that was behind Crittenden Street, the fire—it was an acreage of crabapple trees...And they didn't have a fence around the yard. So, my yard, I could come out of my gate and walk three steps, and I would be on the grounds of the fire department...But back then, we could run and eat. And the fire department, they didn't mind. They knew we were out there picking those little crabapples off the tree. No problem at all. Oh, and trick or treating, we would go there, and they'd give us candy.”

—Yolanda Lee



Square 33 of Heritage Wall Installation. Artwork by Michelle Lisa Herman depicts a group of old friends and neighbors reuniting after twenty years in Fort Totten Park. The event was organized by Frederick 'Fred' Hollis, Jacqueline "Jackie" Howard (DECD), Belinda Thompson Hawkins, and Stephanie Mills Trice; and took place on one of the hottest days of the summer, Saturday, August 13, 2005. Kneeling (left to right): Alonzo Grady, William "Bubba" Herndon, Jr., Philip Herndon

First row (left to right): Tony Mills, Jackie Lucas-Henderson, Stephanie Mills Trice, Jackie Howard (DECD), Wanda Butler Durant (DECD), Crystal Mills Ward, Lois Howard Moore (DECD), Michael Little, Ronald Hines
Second row (left to right): Belinda Thompson Hawkins, Freda Smith Clark, Renee Lee, Lawrence Banks, Sylvia Holland, Patricia Smith Spencer Lee, Fred Hollis, William "Billy" Robinson
Third row (left to right): Reginald Rothwell, Allen Hewitt

Fort Totten Storytellers

"Well, the picture that was published, brought a lot of old friends together, people in the neighborhood that [I] hadn't seen in a while. I think we had a little get-together that day in Fort Totten Park. And someone took that picture and wound up being the one that was selected for the tapestry, which I thought was a good idea."

—Philip Herndon

Passionate about telling the story of our childhood fun and neighborhood, Jules Johnson and I [Mills Trice] met one fall day in 2011 to brainstorm on how to best capture the memories and who to interview. Fort Totten always had a fascinating history of our parents being the first generation African Americans to purchase homes since the ease of the racially discriminatory covenants' which had been declared unenforceable by the U.S. Supreme Court in 1948. The rowhouses were developed by Morris Cafritz in the 1930s and nestled between Fort Totten Park, Soldiers' Home, and Rock Creek Cemetery. The Fort Totten and Hawaiian Garden Apartments were built in 1959.

After a seven-year hiatus and letters of support, a grant proposal of what we had created was submitted to the DC Oral History Collaborative.



A few of the parents, Mr. Samuel Mills (DECD), Mrs. Edith Kelly (DECD), and Mrs. Hilda Swann (DECD) (all seated in the middle row) came that reunion day to sit a spell and see the children who played in their yards in the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s.

"The Fort Totten Northeast neighborhood is a diamond in the rough with a rich history that must be told. It is a black middle-class community that has been a secret since the early 1950s. It's time that this history is revealed. The original children who grew up in Fort Totten are now in their 60s but some of the parents who are still living in the neighborhood, ages range up to 100 years old. We are a part of the history in Washington, D.C. and while we still have memories we must tell our story."

—L. Gale Griffin

"The memories and stories of present and former neighbors warrants the opportunity to be preserved as part of the city's rich history. Stephanie is a native of the Fort Totten community and has taken an active part in its affairs since she was a teenager. Her skills, experience, and personal contacts with former neighbors will be an asset to the project."

—Mrs. Vannie Crowder Kirby

Financial resources and training were granted in 2018 and 2019 for the project. The goal of the Collaborative initiated in 2016 was to preserve Washington, D.C. history by partnering with individuals who were interested in conducting oral histories in the city. This project responded to that need and continues to capture, preserve, record, and publish eyewitness accounts of current and former residents with a rich heritage. Although living in the Fort Totten community wasn't always viewed with rose colored glasses, many tell their truths of childhood traumas, tragedies, and addictions. The elders interviewed shared their personal experiences and civic duties with the Fort Totten Civic Association as DC Orange Hat Patrols to get rid of crime and drugs in the neighborhood. Overall, the stories revealed a loving and close-knit community and honors those who have preceded us.

Hattie Holmes Senior Wellness Center Hand-Quilting Club

The Hattie Holmes Center is dedicated to promoting the health and well-being of residents aged 60 and above. Managed by Mary’s Center and supported by the D.C. Office on Aging, the center offers a comprehensive range of services and activities tailored to seniors.²²

The Hattie Holmes Senior Wellness Center in Washington, D.C. offers a hand-quilting group that provides seniors with an opportunity to engage in the art of quilting. This activity not only allows participants to develop and refine their quilting skills but also fosters social interaction and community building among members.

The members of the group include:

- Daria Willis
- Diane Carpenter
- Barbara Allen
- Grace Eng
- Elizabeth Page



Square 17 of Heritage Wall Installation. Artwork by Michelle Lisa Herman. Illustration depicts members of the Hattie Holmes Senior Wellness Center Hand-Quilting Group based on photographs taken by Robert Oliver during the artist’s visit to the group on August 17, 2022, and made into a composite illustration. Design includes hand-made quilts submitted by members of the group during the visit.



Photographs by Robert Oliver.





Lamond-Riggs Citizens Association website. (<https://lrcadc.org/>)



75th Anniversary Luncheon Program (Lamond-Riggs Citizens Association, Washington, DC, April 22, 2023)

Lamond-Riggs Citizens Association

For more than 75 years, the Lamond-Riggs Citizens Association (LRCA) has been an influential force in promoting community development and advocating for the betterment of the Lamond-Riggs neighborhood.²³ The LRCA is a pillar within the greater community it serves.²⁴

Anti-Segregation Court Rulings

In the late 1940s and early 1950s, court rulings outlawed school segregation and the enforcement of housing restrictions. As a result, white families moved out and black families began to move—principally as homeowners—into neighborhoods that were previously off-limits due to racial covenants. Riggs Park became attractive to middle-income black families seeking homeownership in low-density neighborhoods with convenient and acceptable schools.²⁵

The Lamond-Riggs Citizens Association was originally organized June 29, 1948, as the Chillum Manor Citizens Association. On September 4, 1957, it was changed to the Lamond-Riggs Citizens Association (LRCA).²⁶

Accomplishments

From the 1950s fight to stop the proposed construction of the North Central Freeway, to the opening of the original Lamond-Riggs Library in 1983, to the renaming of its replacement Lamond-Riggs/Lillian J. Huff Library in 2021, the LRCA has been at the forefront of trailblazing efforts.^{27,28}

In the 1980s, LRCA won its battle with the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority (WMATA) over the construction of the Greenbelt extension of the Green Line. LRCA wanted a tunnel; WMATA wanted an elevated line across South Dakota Avenue, NE. WMATA compromised with “cut and cover” construction.²⁹ The involvement of the community in this process was crucial to the stability of the community.

Next Stop...Riggs Park Blog

The stop for news and commentary about the Riggs Park neighborhood, surrounding Fort Totten communities, and the District. (<https://nextstopriggspark.com>)

“I bought a house in Riggs Park in the fall of 2010. Through conversations with neighbors on my block, I became active in the neighborhood civic association (the Lamond-Riggs Citizens Association, LRCA). At the time, I was one of few young-ish people involved in LRCA. Although LRCA had monthly meetings and engaged neighbors, it did not have an online presence. At that time, my D.C.-elected Advisory Neighborhood Commission (ANC 5A) did not give notice about ANC meetings, did not have a functioning website, and did not keep accurate minutes. A lot of residents did not know what the commissioners were doing.

In December 2012, I started the Next Stop...Riggs Park blog because I did not see anyone sharing information about what was happening in the neighborhood. A lot of development was slated for Riggs Park at the time (Art Place at Fort Totten, Fort Totten Square).

But all the developers were doing this weird thing: (1) they acted like they did not know the name of the neighborhood and were calling it Fort Totten, or (2) they acted as if their development was not part of an already established neighborhood. After observing this for a couple years, I thought starting a blog would help connect the community, and in a small way tell an ongoing story of the neighborhood.

The name of the blog is a play on the neighborhood Metro station. The station sits in Fort Totten Park, hence the name of the stop (Fort Totten). But the Fort Totten stop could have been called Riggs Park, given the proximity to neighborhood. So, by creating the blog I sought to recognize that (1) people often confuse Riggs Park with Fort Totten (an actual Fort Totten neighborhood sits west of Fort Totten Park), and (2) there was a need for a place, a stop if you will, to get information about what was happening in Riggs Park.

I think Riggs Park is a great neighborhood with so much to love about it—the history, socioeconomic diversity, vast nearby national parkland, neighborhood library, proximity to transit including the Metropolitan Branch Trail, and a lot of wonderful neighbors. As Riggs Park continues to evolve with large-scale development, the blog is just one way to help residents stay informed. With information comes opportunity.”

—Uchenna Evans



Square 14 of Heritage Wall Installation. Artwork by Michelle Lisa Herman. Illustration depicts the text “Next Stop Riggs Park” made in honor of Next Stop...Riggs Park blog.



Sign installed on the side honoring the memory of Robert and Ethel Price, parents and owners. Photograph by Stephanie Mills Trice.



Shows the landscape of the property including the Sinclair gas station that was built in 1932. Photograph by Stephanie Mills Trice.



Sign identifying the grocery store. Photograph by Stephanie Mills Trice.

Price's Grocery

In most D.C. neighborhoods, there's a corner store where a variety of groceries and items can be purchased, and the Fort Totten community was no different. The backstory is that the first store at the intersection of Bates and Rock Creek Church Road NE was owned by Robert Perry, a Scottish immigrant, around 1864. It changed ownership many times with the Kelly Brothers, James E. Ray, the Donaldsons, Leonards, Berdanskys, and Cohens. Customers that shopped at the Cohen's Market in the 1960s were usually children and truck drivers driving through from the nearby brick factory as recalled by Samuel Mills, Jr. (Mills Trice's brother). Mills was 16 years old at the time and was hired to help the elderly Cohens with the children coming into the store after school to buy candy out of the enclosed glass case. Experiencing robberies and the 1968 Washington, D.C. riots following the assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr., led Hyman and Helen Cohen to give up the business.

Robert and Ethel Price then purchased the store and its surrounding property.³⁰ The entire Price family including their son, Clinton, who carries the legacy, and his many siblings, pitched in to run it. Clinton as a Fort Totten Storyteller shares his story of how he began managing it after his father retired along with the challenges and changes in the community as a small minority business owner. The Price's Grocery remains the oldest African American store in operation today in the District.

"When I moved there, there was a Jewish guy named Mr. Cohen. He owned the store on Rock Creek Church Road. Mr. Price was a cab driver, African American man. And he would help at the gas station that was there...So, when Mr. Cohen retired, Mr. Price bought the store ...And that was like a crown in our cap that, the store was owned by him and everybody knew him before he bought the store. And it became very profitable for him—quite, naturally he got all of the patronage that he could from us and his family still owns that store. Clinton Price still owns it."

—Reginald Rothwell

"The Jewish store...And it was called the Little Store. As a matter of fact, a Jewish man owned it, a big fat Jewish man. I think he sold it—they sold it to the Prices...and I remember to this day, the smallest Little Store I've ever been in.

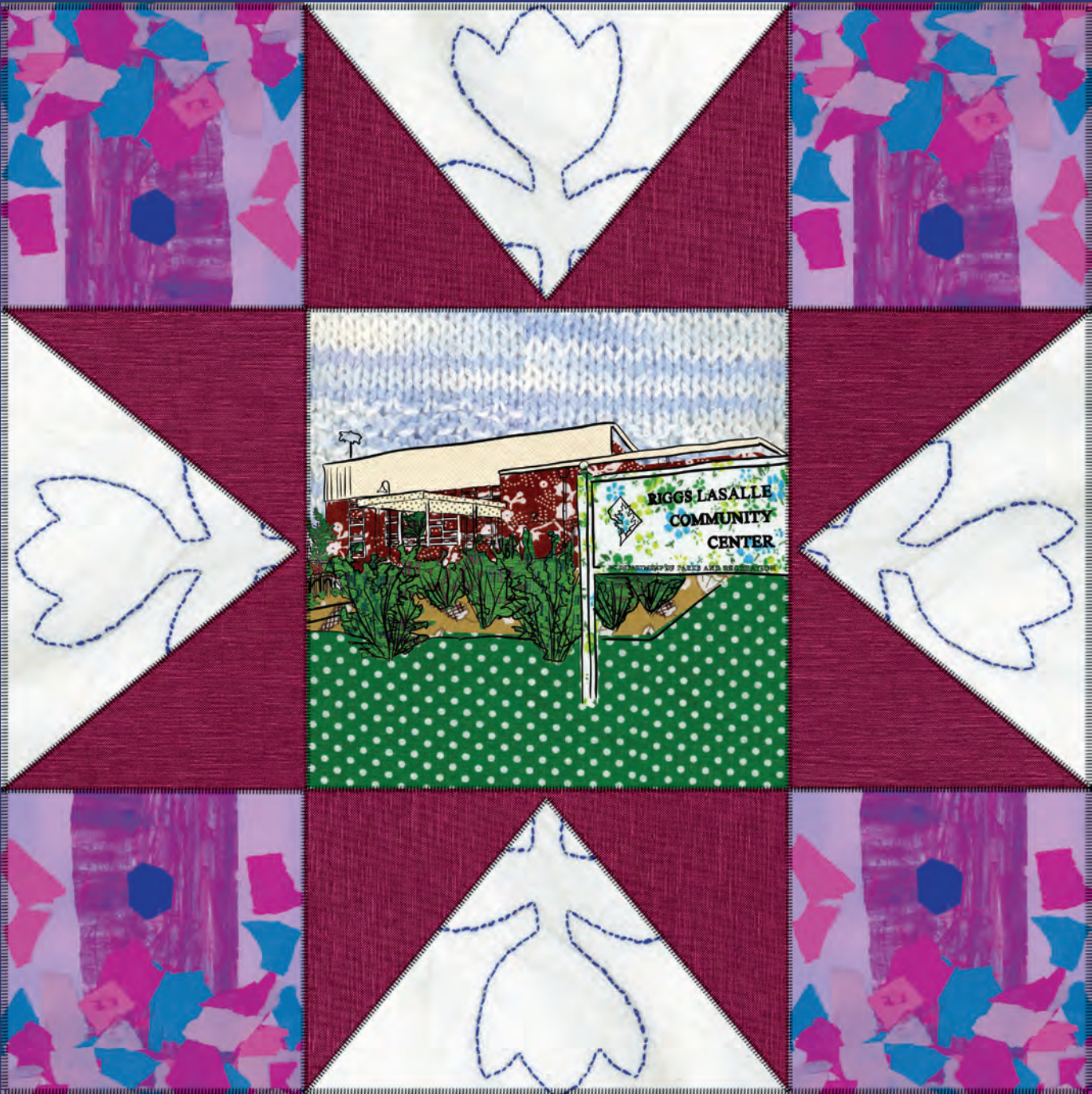
...There was a Sinclair. It had the dinosaur on the sign. But, I think the Prices bought that, too. They operated it, too, for a while."

—Phillip Purvis

"So, what happened is Jenkins [sp], the actual owner of the property, my father approached him and asked him if he could purchase the property. And he said, 'Yeah, you can purchase the property'...So, when it came up to—when the guy said, 'Sure,' they went and made a plan, made a deal, got a lawyer, notary public, and the rest is history.

So, what the Sinclair gas station was used for—my dad had a lot of friends all were mechanics, so they all would just fix their own cars in there. So, it looked like it was an active gas station, but these guys were just repairing their own cars, repairing their friends' cars and stuff like that...Because back during that time, guys had to know how to fix their cars. Been in business like 51 years now. Long time."

—Clinton Price



Square 29 of Heritage Wall Installation. Artwork by Michelle Lisa Herman. Illustration depicts the Riggs LaSalle Community Center based on photograph provided by Lamond-Riggs/Lillian J. Huff Library Branch Manager, David Gaston. Design includes quilts submitted Hattie Holmes Senior Wellness Center Hand-Quilting Group (tulip embroidery).

Riggs-LaSalle Community Center

Located a short distance from Fort Totten, the Riggs-LaSalle Community Center serves as a key resource for residents in the Riggs Park neighborhood of Northeast Washington, D.C. Operated by the D.C. Department of Parks and Recreation (DPR), this facility includes a playground, basketball courts, multi-purpose rooms for events, and youth programs. By offering a range of accessible activities for all ages, the center helps strengthen community ties and provides a safe space for learning and recreation.

Beyond its physical amenities, Riggs-LaSalle Community Center promotes civic engagement through meetings, sports leagues, and seasonal celebrations. Its proximity to Fort Totten highlights the interconnected nature of nearby neighborhoods and contributes to the area’s ongoing community development. Classes for adults and seniors, neighborhood cookouts, and after-school programs all reflect the center’s goal of meeting local needs and bringing people together in a welcoming environment.

DPR staff, along with program partners and certified volunteers, lead these offerings, creating opportunities for learning, connection, and growth. Participants of all ages can also reserve spaces within the center and the multipurpose field, making it a true community hub.³¹



Bertie Backus building, University of the District of Columbia (Formerly Bertie Backus Junior High School). Photograph by Michelle Lisa Herman.



Detail image of the 9/11 memorial located at the Bertie Backus building, University of the District of Columbia. Photograph by Michelle Lisa Herman.

Schools and Athletics

Bertie Backus Junior High School

Bertie Backus Junior High School was named after distinguished educator Bertie Backus. The institution was dedicated to providing quality education to students in grades 7 through 9.

From *The Washington Post*, 1985:

*“The Bertie Backus Junior High School, South Dakota Avenue and Hamilton Street NE, honors a woman who was called a born teacher. Backus (1889-1955) served as principal of Alice Deal Junior High School and was an ardent advocate of character training for schoolchildren. In 1934, she was appointed by President Roosevelt to direct a congressionally sponsored character education experiment to combat juvenile delinquency.”*³²

In 2023, the UDC-CC Bertie Backus Campus was renamed the University of the District of Columbia Lamond-Riggs Campus. The UDC trustees made the change to recognize the historic neighborhood while aligning the UDC campus name with the site. The building retains the Bertie Backus name to maintain the historical significance of the building to the community. (The building is also home to one of DC’s Department of Employment Services’ American Jobs Center locations.).³³

“I went to Backus, it was very competitive...and fortunately or unfortunately, they had the track system then. And it was my determination to make it to that first track. So, I did. And those kids were smart, they worked hard, I competed against them, and it was a nice educational environment. If you wanted to do well, you could do well.”

—Dr. Deborah Rollins

“That was the first public school I attended was Bertie Backus Junior High School and we had Mr. Mallard was our principal. He lived on Fort Totten Drive. And I had Mrs. Montgomery was my English teacher who thought I was the cat’s meow, she always tried to get me to be a master of ceremonies for an assembly. But I was struggling at Backus. I came home with four F’s. It was just that transition from that Catholic school to Backus kind of threw me off, but Mrs. Kelly, Yvette’s mother, and Mr. Mallard, were the ones that got me together, turned my life, my grades around.”

—Michael Brock

Bertie Backus Junior High School September 11th Memorial

September 11, 2001, was the date of the deadliest terrorist attack in U.S. history. The nearly 3,000 lives lost included six D.C. Public School students and teachers, along with two researchers from the National Geographic Society. They were en route to a field trip at a marine sanctuary in California.

Backus Middle School teacher Sarah M. Clark and 11 year-old Backus student Asia S. Cottom were aboard American Airlines Flight 77 to Los Angeles when hijackers flew their airplane into the Pentagon.

Memorials to Clark and Cottom, shown here (opposite page), are near the Backus building’s South Dakota Ave. main entrance.



Square 24 of Heritage Wall Installation. Artwork by Michelle Lisa Herman. Illustration depicts the Lamond-Riggs Athletic Association (LRAA) Steelers Cheerleaders based on photograph provided by Lamond-Riggs/Lillian J. Huff Library Branch Manager, David Gaston. Design includes quilts submitted by the Hattie Holmes Senior Wellness Center Hand-Quilting Group (dark green pattern).

Joseph R. Keene Elementary School

Joseph R. Keene Elementary School, located at 33 Riggs Road NE and named after a D.C. educator and school administrator, was a public school that served the community for decades.³⁴ Known for its commitment to academic excellence and fostering a nurturing learning environment, the school became a cornerstone of the neighborhood, shaping generations of students.

In 2015, the Joseph R. Keene Elementary building was repurposed to house DC Bilingual Public Charter School. The transition included a major renovation in 2022 and expansion to modernize the facility, adding state-of-the-art classrooms, a bilingual library, and spaces for art, music, and culinary education.³⁵



Image credit: Wymer, John P., photographer. Keene Elementary School. May 31, 1948. Photograph. From the John P. Wymer photograph collection. DC History Center (<https://dchistory.catalogaccess.com/photos/23158>).

“Grade school, I think I started at Keene in about the fourth grade. And school was interesting. I liked school. I didn’t have good study habits back then, but I liked to read. And the teachers were really, really good. I can remember the teachers really, really challenged you to learn, and they were really dedicated back then. I remember Mrs. Bush and Mrs. Clark...Mrs. Clark was a standout. She was a standout teacher. She really cared. She was a dedicated teacher, and she was a good teacher. Yeah, Mrs. Clark was one of my favorite teachers.”

—Frederick Hollis (Retired DC Fireman)

“I mean, Mrs. Clark was cool. She was really a cool, a really nice lady. And she wasn’t like she was an old fuddy-duddy teacher. Not saying that the other teachers were, but was just more kind of hip, modern. You could relate to her, because she was black like we were...and then we went down to Keene, and I kind of was trying to get on the straight and narrow. I didn’t have as many discipline problems there. And it was funny—not funny, but you know, last week, there was something in the paper about the guy who had climbed the WOOK tower back in 1969. Right, it was in the paper. They were talking about it, because it was the 50-year anniversary, because it happened in ’69. So, I was in Mrs. Clark’s class, in the sixth grade, and we were looking out the window, because she was on the top floor on that side of the building where we can see dead-on where the guy was up on the tower.”

—Tobin Smith

Keene Recreation Center

Keene Recreation Center was part of Keene Elementary, sponsored by the D.C. Recreation Department.

“Keene Recreation Center. Man, it was fun. So you had a lot of trips, a lot of things going on. A lot of things on the field. We had a real woods before the Metro system was built. So we used to run through the woods, and man, see these big giant rabbits up in there. [laugh] And

I’m like, “Where these big rabbits come from?” Right? Swung around on trees like the Tarzan branches. Messed with the hobos down there at the train tracks. [laugh] And they’d chase you about 30 feet, and you’d think they’d chase you 100 feet, so you keep running. [laugh] Getting smacked in the face by branches.”

—Clinton Price

Lamond-Riggs Athletic Association

The Lamond-Riggs Citizens Association founded the Lamond-Riggs Athletic Association to enhance recreational opportunities in the community, leading to the establishment of the first little league football teams.³⁶

LaSalle Elementary School

LaSalle Elmentary School, located in Washington, D.C.’s Lamond-Riggs neighborhood, was established in 1957 to serve the educational needs of the local community. The school provided instruction for students from kindergarten through sixth grade, focusing on foundational academic skills and personal development. Over the years, LaSalle Elementary became a central institution in the neighborhood, fostering a supportive learning environment and engaging with families to promote student success. In 2008, as part of a district-wide initiative to optimize resources and enhance educational offerings, LaSalle Elementary merged with Bertie Backus Junior High School to form LaSalle-Backus Education Campus, now serving students from pre-kindergarten through eighth grade.³⁷

“I’m a proud resident of I’m Riggs Park. Actually, my family, my journey began in Deanwood, Washington. I was born and raised here. I love D. C., wouldn’t live anywhere else. I live in the nation’s capital the capital of the free world. And my mother and father moved from Deanwood to Riggs Park.

And if you ask why, it was because of LaSalle Elementary School. My father was a policeman. LaSalle was on his beat. And he felt that his kid, kids, would get a good head start in life if we went to LaSalle.”

—Dr. Deborah Rollins

Mamie D. Lee School

Mamie D. Lee School, located at 100 Gallatin Street NE in Washington, D.C., was a specialized public school serving students with intellectual disabilities. Established to provide tailored education for grades 1 through 12, the school offered individualized attention through a notably low student-to-teacher ratio. Operating under the District of Columbia Public Schools (DCPS), Mamie D. Lee School became a cornerstone of special education in the city, emphasizing a supportive and nurturing environment for its students. It focused on enhancing both academic and life skills to empower its students to achieve greater independence.

The school was named in honor of Mamie D. Lee, a pioneering African American educator and advocate for students with special needs.³⁸ Lee’s dedication to advancing equitable education for all children left an indelible mark on the D.C. educational system. Although the school closed in 2016 as part of DCPS’s broader integration of special education services, its legacy endures through its contributions to the development of inclusive educational practices in the city. Today, the former

Mamie D. Lee School site has been repurposed, continuing to serve the community while honoring the vision and advocacy of its namesake.³⁹

“Mamie D. Lee was a school that was created by an Afro American female to take care of the needs of kids who had [mental or physical disabilities]...So they would take their time and take care of that segment of society. And some of those kids actually became pretty successful... They took the time—the teachers were very dedicated. I think the whole staff was Afro American actually.”

—Clinton Price

Rabaut Junior High School

Established in the mid-20th century, Rabaut Junior High School provided education for students in grades 7 through 9. The school was named after Louis Rabaut, a U.S. Congressman known for his contributions to education.

Roberta Flack, the celebrated singer and pianist, taught music at Rabaut Junior High School before her rise to fame. Her tenure at the school is remembered as a significant period in her early career.⁴⁰

“Rabaut is when I started liking school. First thing is our seventh grade year D.C. Public Schools introduced black history.

And this is when we got a chance to see you know, slavery, a whole lot of things that just would never have been covered in general history. And I was amazed. I was very impressed with that. And the teachers had a tremendous impact on me. When we went to school, teacher would call your house just like a neighbor would.

I don’t know if you could do that now. And I’m talking about, we went to school with 40 to 50 kids in a class, but we, but no, you got a call from your teacher. Jules is not doing well, whatever. And Roosevelt best time of my life, fastest three years. And I say three because back then D.C. public schools you went to a thing called Junior High, 7th, 8th, and 9th.

Although your 9th grade was considered high school, you were not on the campus like you are now. Okay, so when we went to high school, there was only three actual years on the high school campus. So it was the fastest three years I ever saw, best three years, little did I know that though I didn’t fully take advantage of everything then, okay, I was set up for success later.

What they gave me was embedded, and it was like a time capsule. When I was ready, it went off, and it boosted me to have some success in my life.”

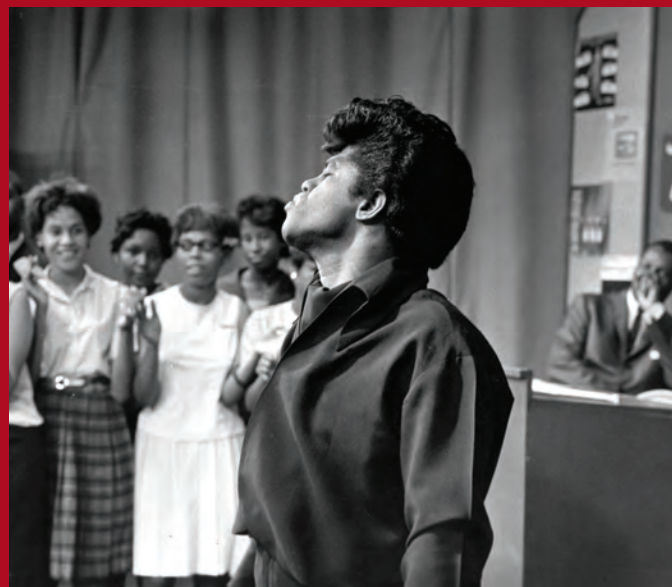
—Jules Johnson

“Then after Backus, Rabaut came along. I had to leave Backus and go to Rabaut Junior High School. So, I was in the first actual graduating class at Rabaut. And one of my teachers, Dr. Graves, was our principal, and we had, Roberta Flack was my music teacher...Mrs. Novosel, exactly.”

—Michael Brock



This 1963 photo is included in the *Teenarama Dance Party* historical marker erected in 2017 as part of the D.C. African American Heritage Trail. The marker is on the west exterior wall of the former WOOK-TV building at 5321 First Place, NE in Washington, D.C. Image courtesy of Beverly Lindsay-Johnson.



James Brown and many other performers dropped by the *Teenarama Dance Party* while in town to appear at the Howard Theater. Image courtesy of Beverly Lindsay-Johnson.



Overhead shot of Bob King with Dee Dee Sharp from *Teenarama Dance Party*. Image courtesy of Beverly Lindsay-Johnson.



Boys on the *Teenarama Dance Party* were required to wear sports jackets and ties; girls wore neat dresses. Original footage of *Teenarama Dance Party*'s 1,800 shows does not exist, but photos and other artifacts from *Teenarama* are archived for preservation and research at the Smithsonian Anacostia Community Museum (<https://anacostia.si.edu>). Image courtesy of Beverly Lindsay-Johnson.

The Teenarama Dance Party

“The era of early teen television dance shows of the 1950s and 1960s ushered in American popular culture and brought the high school sock hop and dance parties into the living rooms of households nationwide with TV shows like *American Bandstand* in Philadelphia and *The Buddy Deane Show* in Baltimore.

Still a segregated society in the 1960s, Washington, D.C. was the home of the Milt Grant Show, which allowed African American teens to dance on-air once a week—“Black Tuesday,” a phrase coined by the black youth. In response, WOOK-TV, pioneering black-oriented broadcaster, produced and aired a teen television dance program, the *Teenarama Dance Party*, designed especially for African American teens in the Washington, D.C. metropolitan area. This program became the jewel of the community. The *Teenarama Dance Party* teen television dance show ran from March 7, 1963, until November 20, 1970.

WOOK-TV was located at 5321 1st Place, NE in the Fort Totten area of Washington, D.C..

The *Teenarama Dance Party* began as the *Teenarama* radio show in the early 1960s in the studio of WOOK-AM radio. Created by teen Cal Hackett and WOOK radio personality Al “Big Boy” Jefferson, the *Teenarama* radio show featured teens from various D.C. Public High Schools, who announced the various activities taking place in their schools. They also selected the songs that would be played on the air. The segment was called “Rate the Record.” Teens would write letters to the young people hosting the show.

When Richard Eaton, President of United Broadcasting, was granted a license by the FCC to build a television station, the *Teenarama* radio show became the *Teenarama Dance Party* television show. The most popular host of *Teenarama* was WOOK Disc Jockey Bob King. Broadcasting live, five days a week (Saturday repeats) from the studio of WOOK-TV, *Teenarama* brought in teens from various high schools in the D.C. area. The teens danced the latest dance crazes and were able to meet their favorite singing groups and celebrities that came as guest performers on the show such as James Brown, Martha & The Vandellas, Kim Weston, Major Lance, Aretha Franklin, Lou Rawls, Jackie Wilson, Sam Cooke, and many others.

Historians note that *Teenarama Dance Party* is considered a precursor to *Soul Train*.

In 2017, the WOOK-TV building received an historical marker as part of the D.C. African American Heritage Trail. (<https://www.hmdb.org/m.asp?m=113223>)”

—Beverly Lindsay-Johnson, Historian and Producer, Emmy Award Winning Documentary “*Dance Party: The Teenarama Story*”

“I can remember most of us in the neighborhood...would wait on Saturday, waiting for *Teenarama* to come on...once a month or so, they had one day for pre-teens. You could go on the show, and I went one Saturday. They had a segment in the show where they would pick a birthday person. And the birthday person would dance by themselves...and they would choose somebody to dance with them. [It was] a girl's birthday and she chose me, and I froze...I could not move. I froze. I'll never forget that, and it was on TV the next week too. I was just standing there.”

—Phillip Purvis



Square 9 of Heritage Wall Installation.
Artwork by Michelle Lisa Herman.
Illustration depicts Emily and James K.
Pope based on photograph submitted by
Patricia K. Timbers.



Square 10 of Heritage Wall Installation.
Artwork by Michelle Lisa Herman.
Illustration depicts William and Martha
Evans Montgomery based on photograph
submitted by Martha Evans Montgomery.
Design includes fabric swatches submitted
by Andrew and Hermella Tekle in memory
of Abeba Habtemariam (black, red, yellow,
and blue emroidered ribbon) and Gwen
Geddie (folded multicolor quilt).

Chapter 4: The People

Fireworks

“My name is Patricia K. Timbers and the square number 9 is of my mother and father Emily and James K Pope who lived in this neighborhood for 50 years. We moved here on June 30, 1961, and my mother and father loved this neighborhood until the day they died. I submitted a photo of them to show that they loved Riggs Park, loved Chillum Place NE, and they were loved and respected by all of their neighbors. The fabrics in the square represent my mother’s love of oriental patterns. The photo that was used to make the square shows the deep love that they had for each other. They would be very proud of the Heritage Quilt and the caption Fireworks suits them.”

—Patricia K Timbers

“The photo was taken on our wedding day, December 21, 1968, following the ceremony that took place in Riggs Park, in the home of our friends, Bernard and Marie Fields. The officiant was the late Rev. R. Clinton Washington, who was at the time serving as Assistant Pastor of Jerusalem Baptist Church in Georgetown. It was the Church where Bernard and Marie were members. I believe we were the first couple he married, before being named pastor in 1969.

In 1969, we also purchased a house in the nearby Brookland neighborhood. In 1971, we welcomed into our home, to live permanently with us, our young niece and nephew, Johnna and John Wright, Jr., our heart-chosen children. Johnna and John attended the D.C. public schools in the Brookland/Riggs Park neighborhoods, including the now-closed Bertie Backus Junior High School. John was actively involved in sports at Backus and played on the basketball team. John still continues to give back to the community and neighborhood by teaching basketball skills to the neighborhood children. In 1995, Johnna purchased her first home. She found it in Riggs Park. Her daughter, Chantee’ would attend the same D.C. public schools Johnna had attended. Our other children, Tanya, Veida, and Anita did not live with us as children. As adults they have been constant visitors, bringing along the many grands and great grands to make memories during family gatherings. When Anita relocated from Atlanta a few years ago she lived in our home for a period of time, so she has had the privilege of being a short time resident in the neighborhood. My husband William and I, Johnna, her husband (Harry), and her daughter (Chantee’), and John are blessed to still have the privilege of being longtime residents, enjoying the many amenities available in the same neighborhoods.”

—Martha Evans Montgomery



Square 3 of Heritage Wall Installation. Artwork by Michelle Lisa Herman. Illustration depicts the McPherson family based on a photograph submitted by Corliss McPherson. Back row, from left: father Charles Sr., Carmen, Charles Jr., Brenda. Front row, from left: Phyllis, Mother Margaret, Corliss.



Square 39 of Heritage Wall Installation. Artwork by Michelle Lisa Herman. Illustration depicts Sarah Elizabeth Rollins submitted by Charletta Allen Rollins.

Family

“My family and I thought that it was important that we submit something for the Heritage Wall because of our history on Kennedy Street [not far from the Lamond-Riggs Library].

We grew up there—my four siblings and I—and we were one of the first black families to move onto Kennedy Street. So, we thought it was important to mark our time here; and the picture is timeless. And we’re into photography—taking pictures, saving pictures, sharing pictures—so it was a perfect submission.

I was responsible for having the photo taken—1974 or 1975. So it’s 50 years ago—it’s a little fuzzy—definitely in the 70s.

The picture was taken at a black-owned photography studio on Riggs Road, which of course is not there anymore. I don’t remember the name of the studio, but we passed it whenever we went to shop at the Giant grocery store, which was across the street [from the studio].

I remember coming home and thinking—we need a family portrait—and going in and talking to the owner to set it up. And that’s how that got started.”

—Corliss McPherson

This photograph (opposite page, bottom) of Sarah Elizabeth Rollins was submitted by Charletta Allen Rollins. Charletta grew-up in the neighborhood on Oneida Street Northeast. At the time that the photo was taken the mother, Mrs. Rollins, was 48 years old. She worked for the National Security Agency for 32 years, she grew-up in the Deanwood area and attended Armstrong High School and went to Morgan University majoring in psychology.

“My sister [Freda Smith Clark] and I have a sibling. She’s a year younger. And we grew up there in the neighborhood, in the Fort Totten area. It was truly a village. We had more than one parent. Stephanie’s mother [Hester Harris Mills (DECD)] was our mom. She would spank us just like my mama. Then she would tell our mama—and we would get another spanking!”

—Patricia Smith Spencer Lee

“We cherish our neighborhood. We kept it clean. And we, it was a good place to live. And we, people got along, even the parents. Everybody’s parents was everybody’s parents, for us children. Everybody loved one another. It was a lot of love in that community.”

—Belinda Thompson Hawkins



Square 2 of Heritage Wall Installation.
Artwork by Michelle Lisa Herman.
Illustration depicts Maleka Luthalia Sia Kamara Walls and Markia Luthalia Sia Kamara based on photograph submitted by Sia Barbara Ferguson Kamara. Design includes fabric swatches also submitted by Sia Barbara Ferguson Kamara.



Square 4 of Heritage Wall Installation.
Artwork by Michelle Lisa Herman.
Illustration depicts Ina Slaughter based on her photograph.

Milestones

“On the top row [of the Heritage Wall], the third picture in, [is] my daughter [Maleka Luthalia Sia Kamara Walls] and granddaughter [Markia Luthalia Sia Kamara] in their cap and gowns. My daughter was eight when we moved into Riggs Park and she went on to get a bachelor’s degree in early childhood. My granddaughter was born while we were living here and so she’s now gone and got a master’s degree in clinical mental health and rehab services.

So to have that picture, a part of eternal history is just very significant. It’s significant for me because growing up, my parents always had pictures to mark milestones.

My daughter was three when I came to work for President Carter. And so because of the role I was in, I was traveling to all the states all over the country. So before she was five years old, she had traveled to half the U.S. And so that’s a great opportunity and experience that so many people don’t have. Many people don’t get to have a chance to go from Southeast to Northeast. And so it’s a historical marker for them, for themselves.

The fabrics [are significant] because they represent such a long span of time. I went to the Peace Corps at 20. Liberia, and here I am right now, just after this interview on Sunday, I’m going to Ghana... That piece is a connection. It’s each one connected, but surrounded by those... kente around the boxes. And so here I am going off to Ghana in two days, where that’s where this cloth is made.

So, many of the fabrics that I have were given to me. For some of them go back to 1970. When I first went to Sierra Leone, like this piece that I have on now, 1970, and my husband was from Sierra Leone, so we went there, spent about six weeks on our honeymoon traveling around Africa, but spending time with his family and they, and people always give fabric, and they found that I will wear the African attire, so I’ve gotten a lot of that. These fabrics are part of that history that connects.”

—Sia Barbara Ferguson Kamara

“Well, that [opposite page, bottom] that’s a picture of the sixth grade me. On the day of our sixth grade, I don’t know if they call it graduation or promotion, but that’s what it was. And I got a certificate.

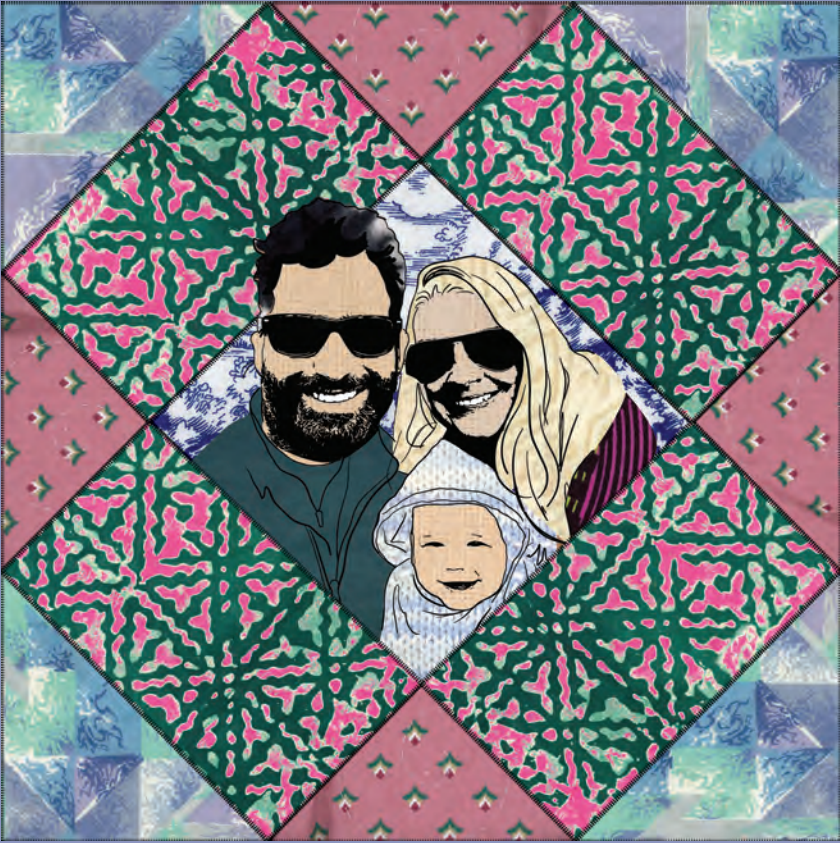
That day, you know, they gave out the awards and we had our promotion ceremony. And I remember we even had a contest where we were trying to have a class song and one of our classmates won the contest. So, we learned her song for our promotion exercise. And then I think all sixth graders went to a restaurant after our promotion to have lunch. I don’t know what time of day it was, but anyway, we went to a restaurant after the promotion.

So that was after the ceremony and we’re getting ready to go. And I was getting my picture taken with my certificate that I had that day. I was standing out by the flagpole of the school taking a picture with my certificate that I just received at the sixth grade promotion.”

—Ina Slaughter



Square 20 of Heritage Wall Installation. Artwork by Michelle Lisa Herman. Illustration depicts Portia Oliver and her dog, Xena, based on photograph submitted by Robert Oliver and taken by Phillip Buggs. Design includes fabric swatches submitted by Robert Oliver and Hattie Holmes Senior Wellness Center Hand-Quilting Group.



Square 34 of Heritage Wall Installation. Artwork by Michelle Lisa Herman. Illustration depicts (left to right) Dan Carroll, Reagan Carroll, and Sterling Carroll based on photograph submitted by Reagan Carroll. Design includes fabric swatches submitted by Sia Barbara Ferguson Kamara, Reagan Carroll, and Reggie Elliot.

Making Memories

“The work [opposite page, top] features my pre-teen daughter Portia Oliver and her dog, Xena. The fabric is needlework performed by Betty Eskew, my mother-in-law. She loved sewing and would often work on crochet projects in her spare time. My wife keeps this work in remembrance of Betty who passed away years ago.”

—Robert Oliver

“We have lived in North Michigan Park since 2020. The blue sweater fabric print on the child’s clothes [opposite page, bottom and seen repeated throughout the quilt] is from a homemade sweater made by Sterling’s Great Grandma Leah.”

—Reagan Carroll

“Back when I moved there and all through my childhood growing up there, it didn’t seem odd. Looking back, it seems odd. It’s a neighborhood. All the kids were close. Kids played there in the neighborhood. They all got along. You go to a neighborhood, you hardly see that anymore. And I don’t know what happened that’s caused that. I used to cut grass, shovel snow, and this was to make money so I could buy my Chuck Taylor’s. I look around my neighborhood now where I live in Silver Spring. There ain’t nobody coming around asking me do you need your snow shoveled, your grass cut, nothing. It’s not the same anymore. People just don’t do that. The kids are—I don’t want to say they’re lazy, but apparently, they don’t need it as bad as I wanted it. I don’t know.”

—Michael Stanley (DECD)



Square 13 of Heritage Wall Installation.
Artwork by Michelle Lisa Herman.
Illustration depicts Trinity Washington
visiting the library based on photograph
submitted by Elnora Cobham.



Square 8 of Heritage Wall Installation.
Artwork by Michelle Lisa Herman.
Illustration depicts the Lombardo family
based on photograph submitted by
Jessica Lombardo.

Visiting the Library

“I submitted a picture of my granddaughter Trinity Washington. She is four years old and loves visiting the library. We used to come to children’s storytime. She would get so excited and happy to be with the other children. This picture was taken at the temporary site while our new library was being remodeled. It was a great experience for her. The Librarian knew her by name and she learned how to socialize with the other children. She’s now in school but we still visit our beloved Lamond-Riggs Library. She was three when this picture was taken. It was such a special time for her and Grandma!!”

—Elnora Cobham

“The kids grew up here—we moved here in March 2004—before Solomon was even born and Lysander was just one. They are now 19 and 22! We spent a lot of time in the library when they were growing up—doing homework after school, getting books. As the years went on, I’d let them go there by themselves—and if they were ever out late, I could always call the library to check when they last saw them. I’ve forgotten the name of woman who worked the front desk, but her son and Lysander were a year apart, so it was always nice checking in and learning about his developments as well as the kids got older. I’m not sure she’s still there—at least I’ve never ran into her at the front desk.”

—Jessica Lombardo

Acknowledgments

In alphabetical order by individual’s last name and organization’s name.

- Zachary Ammerman for permission to print illustrated maps of Fort Totten and Lamond-Riggs (<https://zacharyammerman.com>)
- Tischa Cockrell for her role as communication liaison with the Bryant family.
- Uchenna Evans for permission to print excerpts from her blog, *Next Stop...Riggs Park*, and for her contribution to the book.
- Deborah Grimstead for her volunteer work on this publication, including conducting interviews, and doing research, writing, and editing.
- Robert Oliver, President of the friends of the Lamond-Riggs/Lillian J. Huff Library, for his support of this publication, assistance obtaining information about the Book Club, and his support of the Heritage Wall art installation.
- Lauri Williamson for permission to print the excerpt of her book *111 Places in Black Culture in Washington, DC That You Must Not Miss*.
- DC History Center for permission to print images from the John P. Wymer photograph collection.
- HumanitiesDC for awarding Michelle Lisa Herman and Stephanie Mills Trice a Community Culture and Heritage Grant which made this publication possible.
- The Lamond-Riggs/Lillian J. Huff Library.
- All of the contributors to the Heritage Wall installation and this publication.

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