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A Plantation by the Sea

"Elegant" was a word often used to describe the Windsor Hotel. In the late 1800s, it was one of Atlantic City's most talked about places. Originally built in 1884 as a small boardinghouse called the Mineola, it was combined with the Berkely Hotel several years later under the name "the Windsor." The Windsor was a tony place. A small hotel, noted for its service, it had the city's first French-style courtyard and was a center of social life year-round.

Until the summer of 1893, everyone at the Windsor understood their place in resort society. That June saw the first effort by hotel workers to stage a strike. It failed miserably.

Unhappy with the meal he had been given during break time, a Black waiter in the Windsor's dining room placed an order with the kitchen for himself. When the White headwaiter learned that the meal was for one of his Black staff, the meal was canceled. The workers were told that if they wanted to eat, they could do so in the Black-only help's dining area, which was off to one side in the kitchen. At the next dinner break, the food was inedible. The waiters refused their meals and politely advised the headwaiter they would strike if they didn't receive better food. The headwaiter was unfazed by the threat. He

> … cooly told them to strike out for another job and summoned all the chambermaids attired in their knobby white caps and aprons to wait at supper and the next morning he had a new force of colored waiters.

Typical of the era, the name of the waiter who led the strike remains unknown. To White society, African-Americans, generally, were anonymous. As for the meal that prompted a strike by workers accustomed to third-rate treatment, one can only imagine how putrid it was. White hoteliers viewed Blacks as little more than beasts of burden. They were brought to town in much the same way Northern

farmers recruited migrant farm hands. Any worker who questioned a hotel's rules was replaced.

As Cape May had done years earlier, Atlantic City's hotels reached out to the Upper South for domestic servants. In a short time, the resort became a mecca for Black men and women as hotel workers. Between the years 1870 and 1915, thousands of Blacks left their homes in Maryland, Virginia, and North Carolina and ventured to Atlantic City in search of opportunity. By 1915, African-Americans accounted for more than 27 percent of the resort's population, a percentage more than five times that of any other northern city. At the same time, they comprised 95 percent of the hotel workforce. And with the treatment they received, Atlantic City's hotel industry was akin to a plantation.

Atlantic City's evolution into a plantation by the sea is a product of its unique status in the era in which it was growing from a beach village to a major resort. For nearly three generations after the Civil War, as America was shifting from an agricultural-based economy to a manufacturing economy, racial prejudice excluded Blacks from industrial employment. During the years between the American Civil War and World War II, the only occupations realistically available to Black Americans were either as a farm laborer or domestic worker. Domestic work was thought to be peculiarly "Negro work," with the attitude of most Whites being, "Negroes are servants; servants are Negroes."

African-American history is filled with many cruel ironies. Following the Civil War, thousands of skilled Black tradesmen were forced to abandon finely honed skills to become servants. During slavery, many Blacks worked at crafts and became masters. Entire families of slaves were engaged in highly skilled trades, one generation after another. Beyond farm labor, male Blacks were trained as ironworkers, carpenters, wheelwrights, coopers, tanners, shoemakers, and bakers. As for female slaves, they were capable of far more than household chores. Many were skilled at sewing, spinning, weaving, dressmaking, pottery, nursing, and midwifery. Upon emancipation, Black artisans became a threat to White workers.

When freed Black tradesmen were thrown into competition with White workers, there was often open social conflict. White workers, in both the South and North, reacted violently. They wouldn't permit one of their own to be displaced by a Black worker, regardless of

how skilled he might be. Despite their newfound freedom, few employers risked hiring skilled Blacks, regardless of how cheap they'd work, for fear of reprisals by White workers. African-American historian E. F. Frazier found that at the end of the Civil War there were approximately 100,000 skilled Black tradesmen in the South as compared with 20,000 Whites. Between 1865 and 1890 the number of Black artisans dwindled to only a handful. That such a large reservoir of talent was permitted to dry up confirms the ignorance and inutility of racial prejudice.

For Blacks who had moved North, their existence was precarious. Ill-equipped to deal with the economic and social realities of post-Civil War America, a disproportionate number of Blacks found themselves in poverty. In Philadelphia, between 1891 and 1896, approximately 9 percent of the inmates in the almshouse were Blacks, although they constituted only 4 percent of that city's population. Unable to gain a foothold in the expanding industries of the region, and the opportunities at farming limited, freed slaves and their children had little choice but to accept domestic work. Shut out of high-paying, skilled jobs, it was domestic work or the poor house.

The situation in New Jersey was typical. In 1903, of the 475 industrial concerns surveyed by the New Jersey Bureau of Statistics of Labor and Industry, only 83 employed Blacks in any capacity, mostly janitorial. An illustration of the closed doors confronting Blacks in New Jersey's industries is Paterson, which was a major industrial center not only in the state but the nation. By 1915, 50 years after the Civil War, the percentage of Black male workers employed in Paterson's factories, at any job, was less than 5 percent.

The distribution of Blacks throughout the American economy is revealing of the prevailing racial attitudes of the day. Prior to 1890, the United States Census did not distinguish occupational classes by race or color, but from that date forward, it did. In the population counts, for 1890 and 1900 upward of 87 percent of all Black workers were employed in either agricultural pursuits or domestic and personal service. The remaining 13 percent breaks down as follows: 6 percent in manufacturing and mechanical pursuits, 6 percent in commerce and transportation, and 1 percent in the professions.

In the North Atlantic region, more than two-thirds of all African-Americans earned their income in domestic work. Most Blacks hired to work in a White household were general servants. Routinely, a

family hired a single domestic servant who was required to be a cook, a waitress, and a housekeeper. The work of a household servant was hard and the hours were long. The typical general servant worked a 12-hour day and was responsible for maintaining the household seven days a week. Days off were dependent upon the generosity of the employer. Domestic service was a field of work sought out of necessity rather than choice. For most Blacks, working as a domestic servant was only a small step up from slavery. No other group in the American population—including new immigrants from Europe—had such a large proportion of its members in such menial employment.

But the menial employment in Atlantic City was different. Hotel work was an attractive alternative. There was a crucial difference between the work experience of Blacks in Atlantic City and those of other cities at the time. The work opportunities were more varied and stimulating. The hotel and recreation economy had many types of positions requiring strong backs and quick hands and feet. To keep the resort running smoothly during its peak season, hoteliers, restaurateurs, Boardwalk merchants, and amusement operators relied heavily upon the affordable labor provided by Blacks. While it was often difficult work, an employee was part of something bigger and more dynamic than were Blacks hired to perform domestic work in private homes.

Those Blacks who came to Atlantic City in search of work found they could make four to five times the wages available in the South. The Civil War had devastated the South and left it destitute. The Union Army had scarred the Southern landscape and wrecked its economy. While there was no longer slavery in the Old Confederacy, freedom had simply lifted the Black man from slave to sharecropper. Both Blacks and Whites were unfamiliar with a free-labor, market economy and upward of 90 percent of the Black population fell into the sharecropping and crop-lien system. Sharecropping produced a nasty, feudal-like economy in which the Black man was a loser. Black sharecroppers were tied to the land in the hopes their efforts would produce enough for them to survive. "Wages," per se, did not exist. To many freed slaves, any type of work in the North was better than sharecropping. Domestic service and hotel work were welcomed alternatives.

While the wages of a domestic servant in most Northern cities were comparable to that of hotel employment, work in a hotel was

easier than domestic service and more exciting, with the hours fewer and more predictable. Finally, the Blacks who came to Atlantic City found employment as a hotel worker had less social stigma than domestic work. Working as a general servant was synonymous with social inferiority. Unlike other occupations, the individual was hired, not their labor. The use of the word "servant" was a mark of social degradation.

In Atlantic City, Blacks were not *servants* but, rather, *employees* in a hotel and recreation economy that relied upon them heavily for its success. Based upon data available from the late 19th to early 20th centuries, historian Herbert J. Foster concluded that at the turn of that century the weekly wages of hotel workers in Atlantic City compared favorably with other cities and may have been the highest paid at the time. The resort's reliance upon Black workers evolved swiftly following the boom period ignited by Samuel Richards' second railroad. Between 1854 and 1870 Atlantic City's Black population did not exceed 200. But after the narrow gauge railroad in 1877, tourists flocked to town and the hotel industry flourished. Hotel owners recruited Black workers from Delaware, Maryland, and Virginia for the summer season. Working for hotels and boardinghouses, these workers were provided food, lodging, and wages far better than anything they could earn at home. Beginning in the 1880s, Blacks came to Atlantic City primarily for the summer months and then returned to their homes. As the resort grew in popularity and the number of hotels operating year-round increased, Blacks found work beyond the summer months, and many made the resort their permanent home.

Atlantic City became the most "Black" city in the North. By 1905 the Black population was nearly 9,000. By 1915 it was greater than 11,000, comprising more than one-fourth of the permanent residents. During summer, the Black population swelled to nearly 40 percent. Of those Northern cities having more than 10,000 Black residents, Atlantic City was without any serious rival in terms of percentage of total population. These numbers are critical in terms of understanding the status of Atlantic City's Black experience in American history.

Following the Civil War, between 75 and 90 percent of all African-Americans who traveled North gravitated to cities, with most living in larger cities such as New York, Philadelphia, and Chicago. Those who settled in smaller cities and towns found a bitter isolation. Without sufficient population of their own to establish

a separate community life, many Blacks had no life but work. This was especially true of the smaller communities in New Jersey where there had been support for the Confederate cause. New Jersey's reaction to Lincoln's election in 1860 included talk of secession. When war broke out, former Governor Rodman Price and other Democrats openly stated that the state should join the South. Local sentiment didn't change during the War. In addition to being the only Northern state where Lincoln failed to gain a majority, New Jersey selected pro-Southern Democrat James Wall to serve in the U.S. Senate in 1863. The same year, Democratic Governor Joel Parker denounced Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation as an improper trespass on state's rights and the New Jersey legislature adopted legislation banning Negroes from the state. Finally, the Legislature elected in 1864 rejected the ratification of the 13th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, which ended slavery.

For many years following the Civil War, in the towns and cities throughout New Jersey, there was a deep division between Blacks and Whites. The vast majority of the African-American population was relegated to blighted areas, which were located "across the tracks," "over the creek," "by the dump," or "back of the hill." Nearly all were employed at unskilled labor and domestic work.

U.S. census statistics show that by the beginning of the 20th century the overwhelming majority of Blacks in Atlantic City were "domestic and personal service workers." But the recreational orientation of Atlantic City's economy makes those numbers misleading. The variety and pay of domestic service positions and, consequently, the social structure of the Black community differed greatly from other Northern cities, both large and small. Hotel/recreation work in Atlantic City paid more than domestic service in other cities, not only because of higher wages, but also because Black hotel workers came in contact with tourists and earned tips. Additionally, most employees were provided with regular daily meals in the hotels. Equally important, there was a hierarchy of positions within the hotel and recreation industry. As a result, the Atlantic City tourist economy provided Black workers with the ability to move from one type of job to another. Such mobility in the workplace was unavailable to Blacks in other cities. The result of this phenomenon was development of a Black social structure in Atlantic City far more complex than other Northern cities. By virtue of their higher income,

property ownership, and greater responsibility attached to their hotel positions, a substantial portion of Atlantic City's Black residents were, by comparison to other Blacks nationally, part of the middle and upper classes.

The social structure among African-American workers in Atlantic City roughly broke down along the following lines: *Upper*—hotel-keepers, boardinghouse keepers (and owners), headwaiters, stewards, cooks, head bellmen, and rollingchair managers; *Middle*—waiters, waitresses, chambermaids, elevator operators, lifeguards, actors, musicians, entertainers, and performers; *Lower*—bellmen, busboys, porters, dishwashers, kitchen helpers, and rollingchair pushers. Intelligence, experience, and personal initiative counted for much in the hotel and recreation industry. Unlike many other cities where Blacks were simply servants, those in Atlantic City had a realistic chance for advancement in the tourist economy.

But the mobility available in the workplace did not translate into social mobility. As Blacks grew in numbers, the racial attitude of Atlantic City's Whites hardened. While White racism has been a strong force throughout American history, historians have noted that at the close of the 19th century race relations began to develop more formal patterns.

History rarely marches in a straight line. Succeeding generations have a way of retrenching as they reject portions of social changes made earlier. Time and again, positive social advancements are made only to be followed by negative reactions. Weariness of the federal government's role in the South and political expediency prompted Presidents Rutherford B. Hayes and James Garfield to preside passively over the dismantling of efforts to bring about interracial democracy. Northern Republicans, Hayes' and Garfield's attitudes reflected the views of their constituents.

As part of a bargain to hold on to the White House following the disputed Hayes-Tilden election, in which he was actually the loser in the popular vote, President Hayes withdrew the last federal troops from the South and "home rule" was restored. Hayes and the Republicans wanted tranquility and promoted an alliance of "men of property," both North and South. In expressing his views in letters to friends, Hayes stated, "As to the South, the let-alone policy seems now to be the true course." In another letter he advised, "Time, time is the great cure-all." Hayes' successor, James Garfield, was no more

eager to confront the South. Shortly after being sworn into office in 1881, he wrote to a friend, "Time is the only cure for the South's difficulties. In what shape it will come, if it comes at all, is not clear."

Upon the federal government's withdrawal from the South, the forces of White Supremacy were unleashed. Following the fall of Reconstruction governments in the South, "Jim Crow" laws became popular throughout the Old Confederacy. The 1890s saw a wave of segregation laws adopted by southern state legislatures. These laws were a constant reminder to Blacks that they were unfit to associate with Whites on any terms that implied equality. Jim Crow laws hastened the migration of Blacks to the North. Although Northern Whites did not institute a legal system of segregation and disfranchisement, they did develop subtle but identifiable discriminatory patterns of employment and housing. This discrimination led to racial polarization and the growth of Black ghettos in most Northern cities. Blacks were forced out of White neighborhoods into segregated areas by so-called neighborhood improvement associations, boycotts, high rents, anonymous acts of violence and intimidation, and, finally, with the help of lawyers and real estate brokers who devised restrictive covenants in housing.

As Blacks thronged to Atlantic City in ever-growing numbers in search of jobs, little thought was given to their housing. Until they could save money and make a place for themselves, newcomers were huddled like cattle at the rear of luxurious hotels on dirt floors in windowless shacks with little or no ventilation and with accesses that formed a labyrinth of alleys. They were forced to live in worn-out abandoned homesteads and poorly constructed houses without baths or modern lighting, most of which were neither sanitary nor waterproof. The worst living conditions were found among the families of the fishing boat helpers. They lived in houseboats hauled up on the marshy islands near the bay, most of which were so low it was impossible to stand upright and so cramped that parents and children had to sleep together in a single bed.

The results of such living conditions were painfully dramatic. The Black infant mortality rate was double that of White children, and the death rate among Blacks from tuberculosis was more than four times that of Whites. The numbers of persons, especially during the summer months, overwhelmed the supply of housing affordable to Blacks. Few Blacks could afford their own homes. In 1905, the percentage of

Black households with their own homes was less than two percent. Decent housing available for rent to Blacks was so expensive that households were forced to double-up. Many of Atlantic City's Black tenants dealt with high rents by taking in boarders with "privilege of the kitchen" during the summer season. As the Black population swelled, the percentage of households that took in boarders increased from 14.4 percent in 1880 to 57.3 percent in 1915. As the number of Blacks grew, racial discrimination created a chronic condition of crowded, substandard housing.

The growth in the size of the Black workforce became a major concern to the local White establishment. Many readings from the time, which express White attitudes, have an unreal quality. It was almost as if White society wished Blacks would disappear at the end of the workday. Blacks were acceptable as hotel workers, but their presence on the Boardwalk and other public places was unwelcome. The thought of mingling with them socially was intolerable.

The irony of it all was cruel to Blacks. They earned a respectable wage, could vote, and own property. They performed the most personal of services and were entrusted with important responsibilities, but they were barred from restaurants, amusement piers, and booths; were denied shopping privileges by most stores; were admitted to hotels only as workers; were segregated in clinics and hospitals; and could only bathe in one section of the beach, but even then had to wait until after dark. An article appearing in the *Philadelphia Inquirer* in 1893 expressed the revulsion felt by Whites:

> What are we going to do with our colored people? That is the question. Atlantic City has never before seemed so overrun with the dark skinned race as this season … both the Boardwalk and Atlantic Avenue fairly swarm with them during bathing hours like the fruit in a huckleberry pudding … Of the hundreds of hotels and boardinghouses … it is improbable that not a dozen could be found in which White help is employed. And when to the thousands of waiters and cooks and porters are added the nurse girls, the chambermaids, the barbers and boot blacks and hack drivers and other colored gentry in every walk of life, it will be easily realized what an evil it is that hangs over Atlantic City.

The "evil" hanging over the resort was a necessity. Take away all the Black waiters, cooks, porters, and chambermaids complained of by the *Inquirer* and there would have been no one to wait on the reporter who wrote the article.

Without Black workers, Atlantic City would have been a very different place. Absent the cheap labor provided by Blacks, a tourist economy could never have developed and Jonathan Pitney's beach *village* would have remained just that. Between the Civil War and World War I, America's economy was exploding with job opportunities for Whites, both skilled and unskilled. Atlantic City couldn't compete for White workers in the economy of the late 19th century. The nearest population center large enough to generate the required numbers of unskilled workers was Philadelphia. The expansion of that city's industrial economy sucked up every able-bodied person and at wages greater than hotels could afford. There was no chance for Atlantic City's hotels to attract the numbers of White workers needed for such menial work.

The resort had no choice but to pursue Black workers. What none of the White hoteliers could foresee as they began recruiting Blacks was the extent to which their operations would come to rely upon them. Nor could the operators envision what a large presence they would have in the city. And, finally, the last thing business owners gave any thought to was how it would all play out in terms of social integration.

During the early years, Blacks were integrated throughout the city. However, as their numbers increased they were forced out of White neighborhoods and into a ghetto known as the "Northside," an area that was literally the other side of the railroad tracks that ran through that section of town. The Northside was bounded by Absecon Boulevard to the north, Connecticut Avenue to the east, Atlantic Avenue to the south, and Arkansas Avenue to the west. Between 1880 and 1915, the pattern of residence made a radical shift. In 1880, more than 70 percent of the Black households had White neighbors, by 1915 only 20 percent. In a single generation the population had diverged, with Blacks to the Northside and Whites to the Southside and other areas. By 1915, Blacks only went to the Southside to work, to walk on the Boardwalk, and to bathe on their restricted section of the beach.

The Northside became a city within a city. As Blacks encountered racial prejudice, they reached inward to construct a social and institutional life of their own. While White racism had created the physical ghetto, it was civic-minded upper- and middle-class Blacks who led their community to create an institutional ghetto in order to provide services that the White community had denied Blacks. The first major institution established by Blacks in Atlantic City was the church.

According to historian and prominent turn-of-the-20th-century African-American leader, W. E. B. Du Bois, "The Negro Church is the only social institution of the Negroes which started in the African forest and survived slavery." In support of his conclusion, Du Bois argued that the transplanted African priest, "early became an important figure on the plantation and found his function as the interpreter of the supernatural, the comforter of the sorrowing, and as the one who expressed, rudely, but picturesquely, the longing and disappointment and resentment of the stolen people." Black historians, such as Du Bois, have noted that the first established Black churches had only "a veneer of Christianity." Over the years, Blacks found in evangelical sects, such as Baptist and Methodist, a set of beliefs and an opportunity for emotional expression relevant to their everyday experiences in slavery. From the beginning of the importation of slaves, Blacks received Christian Baptism. Initially, there was strong resistance to baptizing slaves. The opposition subsided when laws made it clear that slaves did not become free through the acceptance of the Christian faith. As long as they continued to be property of Whites, Blacks were free to develop their own religions, taking from White churches those practices and tenets that they found relevant to their condition.

African-American historians have characterized their church in slavery as the "invisible institution." The chaos brought about by the Civil War caused a major disruption in that institution. Despite emancipation, the African-American's world had been turned upside down. The social disorganization throughout the South was enormous. The dismantling of Reconstruction caused further deterioration for Blacks. Out of this turmoil the "invisible institution" became visible. It began this process by affiliating with existing independent Negro churches in the North; initially, the most prevalent were the Baptist and Methodist Negro organizations. These denominations, and others, grew rapidly and the church became the glue of Black

society. The church was the only effective agency for helping Blacks to cope with racial prejudice. Its growth was a product of necessity. Throughout its development, between the Civil War and World War I, the church was shaped by not only the Biblical teachings of White denominations but, more importantly, by the cultural forces and collective experiences of their isolated social world, both as slaves and freed people.

Through no choice of their own, Blacks who decided to make Atlantic City their home became socially isolated. Out of necessity, these new residents clung to their churches, which became the center of social life in the Black community. It was here that Blacks could freely express themselves through worship and attain status and recognition by participation in the hierarchy and social organizations of their churches. It was common during the off-season for Blacks to combine both religion and recreation on Sundays. Families and friends frequently met at church and brought picnic lunches or uncooked meals with them. After the religious services, they walked to the beach, gathering firewood along the way. There, they camped out for the remainder of the day, eating meals prepared over an open fire and spending the afternoon talking, singing, and playing games.

African-American scholars who have studied the development of their churches in Northern cities have argued that there was a relationship between Black social classes and church affiliation. The upper class usually formed the majority of the relatively small Episcopal, Presbyterian, and Congregational churches; the middle class primarily comprised the more numerous Baptist and Methodist churches; and the lower class gravitated toward the small and numerous Holiness and Spiritualist churches.

The first traditional Black church in Atlantic City was the Bethel African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Church founded in 1875. In 1884, it was renamed St. James AME Church. The next traditional Black church came a year later in 1876. That year, Price Memorial African Methodist Episcopal Zion was founded by a group of locals headed by Clinton Edwards, Dr. George Fletcher, and Cora Flipping. Clinton Edwards was the first Black born in Atlantic City. Dr. Fletcher was the city's first Black physician. Cora Flipping and her son, John, founded one of the first funeral homes in Atlantic City. These people were not only leaders of a new church, but also leaders in their community. Their stature attracted many members. St.

James and Price Memorial are only two examples. To this day, both churches remain a vital force in Atlantic City's Black community.

In the two generations between 1880 and 1930, many church organizations took root in the Black community. By 1930, Atlantic City had a total of 15 traditional Black church organizations. In addition, there were numerous storefront churches that served the needs of migrant Blacks newly out of the South.

The migration of Southern Blacks to the urban North was traumatic for many of them. Stripped of the practices and social structures they had created in order to cope with their lowly status in Southern society, many felt lost in a strange land. Without the customs of the invisible church, these new migrants found it difficult to adjust to the tumult of urban life. The loss of the customary religious practices, which had been their only refuge during slavery, produced an ever-present crisis in the life of the average Black migrant. In order for the visible Black church to play the role needed by its followers, it had to be transformed.

The transformation of the African-American church began with secularization. Black churches began to lose their other-worldliness and focused their energy on the conditions of their congregants in this world. Churches became increasingly interested in the affairs of the community as they impacted upon their members. Another transformation that occurred in Black religious behavior was the emergence of Holiness and Spiritualist churches. Originally formed as personality cults, their leaders had a message directed to the post-slavery experience. In Atlantic City most such churches had their inception in storefronts, side-by-side with row houses and businesses. These storefront churches were usually located in the poorer neighborhoods and served the lower class, especially the newly arrived migrants from the South. As was the case in other Northern cities, storefront churches flourished because they adopted the rural church experience to city life by providing the face-to-face association of a small church. Their existence was due partly to the poverty of their members and the fact that congregants could participate more freely in services during prayers by "shouting."

The inability of the more traditional denominations to serve the needs of Black migrants stimulated the growth of storefront churches. These churches made it possible for Blacks to worship in a manner in which many had practiced in the South. Their religious

rites were highly emotional, creating a personal form of worship in which all the members of the congregation became involved. Their pastors preached about a very real heaven and hell. Their church services appealed to those Blacks searching for relief from the insecurities of this world through salvation in the next.

The first Spiritualist church in Atlantic City was founded in 1911 by Levi and Franklin Allen. From that church, 10 other churches sprang up almost immediately. While the sermons of their ministers were other-worldly, these tiny sects never lost sight of the hardships their members had to overcome in this world. The Spiritualist church provided material as well as spiritual assistance to help Southern migrants deal with urban life. A fundamental teaching of Spiritualist doctrine was to serve the community by raising funds to help feed and clothe the poor. Like the Spiritualist churches, the Holiness churches of Atlantic City also found support among the lower class, who were as much devoted to the community as to God. A cornerstone of their church doctrine was never to permit a member to be without the bare necessities of food, shelter, and clothing.

Over time, Atlantic City's Black churches became a social safety net for their members in need. But Sunday was only one day in the week. To build what was required to deal with White racism, namely, a city within a city, Blacks needed more than their church.

Confronted by discrimination and forced segregation, Black leaders began to establish social agencies in the Northside at the turn of the 20th century. The first social agency established by Blacks was a home for the elderly. The Old Folks Home and Sanitarium opened its doors shortly around 1900. Its purpose was to provide convalescent care for Blacks in need, regardless of religion, 65 years or older. The home was run by a Board of Managers consisting of 15 persons who investigated and approved all admissions and established charges depending upon need. The home, which was located at 416 N. Indiana Avenue, was managed well and on July 14, 1922, the Board of Managers had a formal ceremony at the Price Memorial Church, where the mortgage was burned in celebration.

Local Blacks were denied access to the city's Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA). Prominent businessman George Walls organized a group that conceived a plan for the Northside YMCA. Walls was a successful bathhouse operator and a dynamic leader of the Northside who spearheaded numerous causes and lent

a helping hand to many Blacks. The "Northside Y" was only one of his accomplishments.

The Northside YMCA operated out of a small cottage on North New York Avenue for more than 30 years. In 1930 it moved to a new building on Arctic Avenue, which contained a gymnasium, recreation room, showers, and dormitory accommodations. Funded entirely through private donations, the Northside YMCA was constructed at a cost of approximately $250,000. The Arctic Avenue branch of the YMCA, as it came to be known, was directed by C. M. Cain. In 1930, a staff of seven secretaries carried on a general character-building YMCA program, with a membership of more than 250 young men. The Arctic Avenue YMCA became the headquarters for many Black community organizations and clubs. Among them were the Northside Board of Trade, the Northside Business and Professional Woman's Club, the Lincoln University Alumni Associates, the Young Men's Progressive Club, the Great Building and Loan Association, the Lion's Social Club, two of the four Black Boy Scout Troops, and the Woman's Home Missionary Society.

In 1916 the Northside Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA) was founded by Maggie Ridley, an active civil leader who was co-owner of the popular Ridley Hotel and one of the founding members of the Jethro Memorial Presbyterian Church. The Northside YWCA operated an employment bureau and provided counseling services to young women. Its facilities were too small for recreational programs so young women used the gymnasium facilities at the Arctic Avenue branch of the YMCA.

As the permanent Black population increased, numerous social societies were established. These groups were often "secret societies," akin to the Masonic Order. These secret societies were one of the vehicles used by Blacks to cope with their minority status. As early as the Revolutionary period, free Blacks found it desirable to join together for social and cultural improvement, economic self-help, and mutual relief. They did this through secret societies. These societies provided their members with one of the few opportunities they had for group expression and cooperation outside of the church. By 1900, Atlantic City had more than a dozen secret societies, among which were the Prince Hall Masons, the Independent Order of Good Samaritans, the Grand United Order of True Reformers, and the Elks. Societies such as the Masons and Elks

emphasized moral and social uplift of their race through the conduct of individual members and provided charity to the less fortunate. The Good Samaritans and True Reformers took the lead in providing insurance and business loans for their members. All these societies met at Mason's Hall at North Michigan and Arctic avenues.

Meeting places like the Mason's Hall and the Northside YMCA were critical to a Black social structure. But informal opportunities were also needed. Denied access to the hotels, restaurants, and recreational facilities of the Southside, enterprising Blacks created their own places of amusement. The first known amusement house where Blacks could gather to drink and socialize was established by M. E. Coats in 1879. Another early café and dance hall was Fitzgerald's Auditorium on North Kentucky Avenue. Built in 1890, Fitzgerald's grew in popularity, becoming a bar, restaurant, nightclub, and gambling room. During the Depression, Fitzgerald's was renamed "Club Harlem" and became one of the most chic and talked about nightclubs in the Northeast, frequented by stylish Blacks and Whites. In 1919, the "Waltz Dream," a large recreation center and dance hall at North Ohio Avenue, was established by a Mrs. Thomas, a White woman from Philadelphia. There were weekly wrestling and boxing tournaments, as well as basketball games, to sold-out crowds. The Waltz Dream was the site of many Black charity events and when dances were held at the hall, popular Black orchestras played to capacity crowds of more than 2,000, young and old alike.

In time, the Northside became a self-contained, vibrant community with a wide range of successful Black-owned businesses. The main street of the Black community was Kentucky Avenue. In addition to night spots like Club Harlem, the Northside had its own retail stores, boardinghouses, restaurants, funeral homes, and theaters, which provided a rich life serving most of the Blacks' needs. As for the fire safety needs of the densely populated Northside, there was an all-Black fire company. Engine Company #9 with two platoons and Truck Company #6 with two platoons had their own segregated firehouse at Indiana and Grant avenues. Engine Company #9 earned a national reputation for excellence throughout the country. It played a major role in fighting all the city's fires and held the city record for efficiency six years in a row.

Blacks had developed their own city in response to the racism of Atlantic City's White population. However, there remained two areas

where Blacks were unable to build their own institutions and continued to be the victims of racial prejudice: education and healthcare.

There was no discrimination in the school system during the early years of the resort. As long as their numbers remained small, Blacks posed no threat. But as the White community hardened its stance on integrated neighborhoods, so too did it shrink from integrated schools as the number of Black pupils grew.

Prior to 1900, the resort had a single school system with Black and White children being educated together, entirely by White teachers. In 1881, community leader George Walls organized a Literary Society and used it as a vehicle to push for improved education for Black children. Walls presented the local school board with a resolution of his group demanding the hiring of a Black teacher. The board responded by adopting a resolution of its own supporting the idea, but waited 15 years until 1896 before finally yielding and actually hiring a Black teacher.

The lengthy gap in time between the resolution and hiring was in large part a product of the controversy in the Black community caused by Walls' proposal. Walls wanted Black teachers for Black children. He was, in effect, promoting an early Black nationalistic policy of separation of the races, which many Black leaders rejected. Those Blacks favoring integration believed that if the cost of securing Black teachers was the loss of integration, then the price was too high. Walls had his opponents. M. E. Coats, owner of a popular Northside amusement house, and C. Williams, secretary of the Price Memorial AME Zion Church Literary Society, were bitterly opposed to Walls' idea. They feared that Walls' proposal would do more harm than good.

As the controversy raged, Coats and Williams organized a mass meeting of all Blacks. According to historian Herbert J. Foster, Walls might have been physically attacked but for several articles in support of Walls, which appeared in the *Atlantic City Review*. One such article stated:

> This young man is right. The child is at a disadvantage with a white teacher because she does not know his history and environment. She does not have the patience and understanding. When a boy's mother leaves home at six o'clock in the morning, her child is not out of bed, at school time he jumps up, rushes to school without his face

> washed or his hair combed, a white teacher does not take that boy aside and make him wash his face, she just goes on with the lesson, ignoring that boy, because she does not know that he is not able to get attention from home. If Negro children have Negro teachers, they will have an inspiration, they will have members of their own race, for ideals and not white ideals that are so diligently instructed about in the schools.

Over time, Walls' proposal gained acceptance and the school board hired Hattie Merritt. Merritt was born in Jersey City and was a graduate of Jersey City Teachers Training School. She was assigned to teach an integrated class at the Indiana Avenue School. Things didn't go well.

Miss Merritt found teaching in an integrated system more than she had bargained for. Her problem wasn't the children but rather the parents. The White parents made her job impossible by coming to school and standing outside the classroom, glaring and taunting her as she tried to teach. Many of these parents demanded that the school board remove their children from her class. Merritt complained to Walls and he in turn complained to the school board. The end result of the controversy came in 1900 when the board decided on a policy of separate education for Black children and the employment of additional Black teachers to instruct them.

With the school board's decision made, Black children were moved out of the city school system and into the basement of the Shiloh Baptist Church. This didn't work out, and the following year the Black students were moved into the Indiana Avenue School, one of the older school buildings, which was converted to an all Black school. As the resort's population grew, the building wasn't large enough to handle the number of school-age Blacks. The next move was to divide the New Jersey Avenue School; half for Whites and half for Blacks. There was a door for "White" and a door for "Colored," and separate play yards to keep the children from mingling.

By 1901, W. M. Pollard, Superintendent of Atlantic City School, claimed proudly that separate classes for Black children was a good thing. In his annual report he stated:

> The employment of colored teachers for separate colored classes has worked very successfully in our city. We

> employ ten colored teachers. These teachers occupy rooms in the same building where white children attend. The separation is continued as far as the seventh grade, after that the colored pupils attend the same grades with the white children. This plan has been in many respects beneficial for the race.

It's difficult to determine who was vindicated by the results—Walls or his critics. But the outcome was segregation for as long as it could be maintained.

Unfortunately, there was no one like Walls to lead the charge on healthcare for the Black community. Health services for Blacks were as segregated and meager as Whites could make them. Blacks were not permitted in White doctors' offices and routine medical services were dispensed out of a separate Blacks-only clinic in a back room in city hall until 1899. In that year, the first public hospital was opened, but it would only treat Blacks in wards separate from Whites. While the hospital hired Blacks for cooking and cleaning, there were none to care for patients. As late as 1931, nearly 100 Blacks were employed as orderlies, cooks, janitors, waiters, and maids, but not one was employed as a nurse or doctor. The few local Black physicians there were could not see their patients in the hospital, and qualified applicants for training as nurses were turned away by the hospital's administration, forced to go to other cities for their education. The message was clear: African-Americans were servants and that was all they could ever hope to be in Atlantic City.

While upper- and middle-class Blacks of the Northside prospered, the seasonal employment, squalid housing, and poor health services for a majority of Blacks took their toll on the quality of life. Without proper food, clothing, shelter, or medical care, many Black babies didn't make it through the winter months. A large percentage of their parents contracted tuberculosis at a rate more than four times that of Whites.

A city that could host millions of tourists refused to provide facilities for combating tuberculosis among its Black population. To openly admit to such a problem would have been bad publicity for the tourist economy, and Atlantic City would have none of that.