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"The most well utilized building. . . in the United States:"

CITRUS PARK COLORED SCHOOL

Geoffrey Mohlman

Born during the height of Jim Crow, inadequately funded, and ignored by the school system, Citrus Park 13 Colored School persevered through the sheer determination and love of its African American founders. Situated in northwest Hillsborough County, the school's historical roots extend back to the beginning of the 20th Century. Originally housed in a Methodist church located on Mr. Tony Lewis’ -- a locally prominent African American -- property at 9201 Gunn Highway, the church and community organized and supervised the school. A few years later the church was struck by lightning and burned to the ground. By 1921, Mrs. Barbara Allen -- an influential African American property holder in Citrus Park -- donated land to the Hillsborough County School Board for the purpose of erecting a school. In 1924, Rev. Charlie Walker went to the Hillsborough County School Board requesting help in establishing a new school. The school board eventually donated materials, and local citizens, through sweat and labor, constructed Citrus Park Colored School in 1926 on the land donated by Mrs. Allen.²

Miss Leona Allen, daughter of Barbara Allen, taught the first class. Teaching grades one through five, Miss Allen had 13 children during her first year. After serving one term, Miss Allen was replaced by Early Ernestine Ballard. Following in the footsteps of Miss Ballard, Eunice Roundtree, Edith Allen Footman, Ruby Clark Smith, Vernease Hadley, and Corene Prince-Hardy all taught at the one room school house. Finally, in 1934, Mrs. Eliza Davis began teaching and remained at Citrus Park until the school was shut down in 1948.³

Originally all wood, the one room school house was painted red, had four windows, one door, and raised off the ground on wood foundation piers. Shortly after the school opened, Mr. Tony Lewis, Mr. Dave Allen, Rev. Charlie Walker and others expanded the building, through materials donated by the Black community, adding on to the back and reconstructing the front porch. Additionally, they supplanted the wood piers with concrete block and replaced the wood floor of the building with concrete (Figure 1). The school remained this way with no more than 30 students at any one time until its closure. On October 13, 1949, the school and the property were officially deeded to Harry Lewis, James Walker, Barbara Robinson, Mable Walker, and Florence Bruce in trust of Mount Pleasant African Methodist Episcopal Church.⁴ Henceforth, the school building has served the Mt. Pleasant AME Church.

Unlike the original parochial school, the Hillsborough County School Board operated the Citrus Park Colored School. However, Mt. Pleasant AME held services on Sunday in the school building until the 1950s. Because of the multiple uses of the building, it is impossible to separate the school and the church's history. Many of the people involved in building the school and keeping it operating were members of Mt. Pleasant AME. Last names including Allen, Walker, and Lewis grace the corner stone of the church erected in the 1950s on the same property, next to the school building. Along
Survey map of T27R17 S and E – Citrus Park area surveyed in April 1846 and approved February 8, 1847.
with Mt. Pleasant AME, a Baptist church also used the school building on Sundays. Mt. Pleasant worshiped in the church two Sundays of the month, while the Baptist worshiped in the church during the other two Sundays.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Citrus Park is located in the northwest corner of Hillsborough County, six miles south of the Pasco County line. Citrus farmers and/or cattle raisers have lived in the Citrus Park area from the mid-19th century, including such family names as Gant, Lynn, McCarty, Mobley, Moody, and Spivey. William L. Mobley, along with his family and slaves, moved from North Carolina to the Florida Gulf Coast in 1860. Fearing the possible escape of his slaves, Mobley resettled in the Citrus Park area shortly thereafter. Pioneer families like Mobley were sparsely settled in northeast Hillsborough County throughout the 1880s.5

Enough White families lived in the area to establish Gant School on July 14, 1893. N.M. Moody served as supervisor. The following year F.H. Lynn became supervisor. Key Stone Park School was another early school in existence by 1883. While located in another community, Key Stone Park School may have drawn upon children in the Citrus Park area before the creation of Gant School. Citrus Park received another school in 1911 at 7700 South Gunn Highway, located west of the present day Ehrlich Road/Gunn Highway interchange. A few years later, Key Stone Park School was closed and many of the students were transferred to the Citrus Park School (not to be confused with the Citrus Park Colored School). The school became a focal point for the White community, where local residents joined the PTA, held dinners and bake sales, and learned how to can vegetables.7

Sawmills and turpentine stills dominated northwest Hillsborough County and southwest Pasco County shortly after the turn of the century. Gulf Pine Lumber Company bought 50,000 acres in 1907 only to sell it two years later to bowling Lumber Company. Dowling and the Lyon Lumber Company erected sawmills, both in Pasco County near Odessa, employing several hundred men to cut trees and operate the mills. To ensure access to trees, the mills constructed narrow-gauge rail lines throughout the region. Not only supplying jobs to recent immigrants and pioneer families, the sawmills also provided lumber for the new homes, schools, and business being erected. The lumber industry prospered until the 1920s by which time they had over-exploited the area’s forest resources. In 1925, both mills burned to the ground, foreshadowing the bust of the Florida land boom and the Great Depression.8
Figure 2: 1913 Plat of Citrus Park – Plat Book 1, page 13-1, Clerk of the Circuit Court of Hillsborough County, Tampa, Fl
Trains, sawmills, and turpentine opened up the Citrus Park region for investment. However, not until the birth of the 20th century did businesses move into the territory. C.E. Thomas, D.P. Robertson, and F. Ben Davis -- all Chicago, Illinois, residents -- incorporated the North Tampa Land Company on September 9, 1911, with its main office in Tampa. The company platted Citrus Park on September 30, 1913, with the Tampa & Gulf Coast Railroad (T&GC) running through the heart of the plat (Figure 2). The area surrounding the new plat consisted of lakes, railroad tracks, a lone store that doubled as a rail stop, turpentine stills, and lumber yards. Charles H. Brown, a T&GC Railroad official, George Broadhurst, and E.T. Young, filed for incorporation of the Citrus Park Mercantile Company on July 12, 1916. Two years later residents could buy supplies at the Citrus Park Mercantile Company’s general store and purchase their groceries at M. Bruton’s store. By 1925, the same year that Franz Kafka’s The Trial and F. Scott Fitzgerald’s The Great Gatsby were published, Citrus Park had at least one telephone and several businesses. E.B. Gould, E.A. Mack, E.J. Spivey, and Citrus Park Mercantile Company each operated general stores. James I. Mobley served as the community’s notary, and E.J. Spivey, the postmaster, also sold real estate and operated as a live stock breeder.9

Despite this growth, Citrus Park was still predominately rural when Mrs. Inez Richardson moved to the region in 1923:

"When we came out here . . . it was really in the wild then. It was really wild. Lakes and streams and ponds, wild animals, cats and dogs, and everything, alligators, turtles, whooping cranes, frogs. Anything you wanted, it was out here, and it was just a beautiful place to live."10

Citrus Park’s 617 residents in 1930 consisted of 363 males and 254 females. The majority of Citrus Park’s 488 Whites were U.S. born, with only 49 foreign born. Compared to other rural sections of the county, Citrus Park had a large African American population, consisting of 129 individuals. This may in part be explained by the fact that nearly 75% of the timber industry’s workers were Black. Additionally, William Mobley donated a sizeable amount of property just north of Citrus Park to his emancipated slaves shortly after the Civil War. With the death of the timber industry and the onslaught of the Great Depression, northwest Hillsborough County’s population dwindled as people looked elsewhere for greener pastures. Many of the businesses patronized by Citrus Park’s population fell upon hard times during the 1930s and closed their doors forever. Citrus Park weathered the economic drought and began to prosper in the 1950s with the addition of churches, businesses, boy and girl scout troops, and little league teams. Since World War II, the area has increasingly become a bedroom community to Tampa. Today’s Citrus Park is undergoing an intense transformation as suburbanites from Tampa move farther north in Hillsborough County, building gated communities and shopping centers, expanding roads, and constructing schools. Yet, the area is still rural in many sections.11

HISTORY OF CITRUS PARK COLORED SCHOOL

Despite only existing as a county school for approximately 20 years, it is impossible to speak of Citrus Park’s African American community without discussing Citrus Park Colored School. According to Lillie Mae Nix Madison, "History in this [Citrus Park] community to us, takes us back to three important factors and they are: The Home, Church, and School."12 Mrs. Mable Walker,
a former student and substitute teacher at Citrus Park Colored School who later went on to be Supervisor of Hillsborough County Schools, echoed Ms. Madison’s statement by saying "the school and the church was all that we had" in Citrus Park. The school’s genesis began around the turn of the century in a church building that no longer exists. Located on a parcel of property behind the present Mt. Pleasant AME Church, the church was situated in the middle of a cemetery on what was at that time Tony Lewis’ property at 9201 Gunn Highway. Mr. Lewis was a former slave from Mt. Dora, Florida, who moved to Citrus Park in the 19th Century and became a large property owner and successful farmer. The church was an impressive building according to Amanda James, the oldest member of Mt. Pleasant AME Church in 1996 who also attended Citrus Park Colored School:

"It was a big white church with a big bell, steeple and a bell up on it. And it burnt down one night. It was a Methodist church. Everybody, the Baptist and the Methodists all went there."15

Later in the interview, Mrs. James went on to say:

"It was a big wooden church. It was built different [from the present day Mt. Pleasant AME Church]. A big nice church. It had a steeple on it and a big bell sitting up on top of it. And they used to ring that bell. You could hear it everywhere. And they say it was time for service and you'd see the folk just getting out, getting ready, getting to church."16

In this building, the church operated a school for the few Black children from Citrus Park and surrounding communities. As with many African American schools during the early 20th Century, this one was realized without any assistance from local or state government. Due to Jim Crow laws, Florida’s 1885 constitution, and the 1897 Plessy v. Ferguson Supreme Court ruling, African American children were not allowed to attend White only schools. Education discrimination did not stop here though. Racist ideology even went so far as to separating school books that African American children used so the text books would not be "forced upon white children at a succeeding term of school."18 Thus, according to J. Irving E. Scott, author of The Education of Black People in Florida, the school on Mr. Lewis' property was typical of Black Florida schools where, "in most cases, black children were housed in church buildings, lodge halls or buildings vacated by white children."19

According to Mrs. Mable Walker, Miss Barbara Hamilton, who later became Mrs. Barbara Allen, taught the local Black children at the church. Not a native of the area, Miss Hamilton moved from Seffner, Florida, to Citrus Park at the request of the church. After her arrival, Miss Hamilton met and married Rollie Allen -- an influential property owner who was one of several children born in Citrus Park to a servant slave named Sevilla and her owner, an Anglo-American architect -- and began raising a family.20 Mrs. Allen was described as a prosperous farmer in a circa.1909 Tampa Bay Land brochure:

"Barbary [sic] Allen, colored, has a two-acre orange grove in the southwest quarter of the northwest quarter of Section 26, from which she receives an average of $350 per annum. She also sells about $100 worth of garden truck every year. On her farm she raises an average of 200 bushels of sweet potatoes to the acre and receives 75 cents per bushel for them. She also sells about 75 gallons of syrup made from sugarcane, and 100
Figure 3: Plat of Township 27 South, Range 17 East in the Atlas of Hillsborough County, Florida (Tampa, FL: Dixie Survey and Atlas Company, 1916), 37

(Courtesy USF Special Collections.)
bushels of corn, all grown on her little place."\(^{21}\)

Not only did her move to Citrus Park forever change Mrs. Allen’s life, but her move also had a tremendous impact upon African American residents of Citrus Park. Because of her tireless efforts and contributions for the betterment of local citizens’ daily lives, Mrs. Allen became the matriarch of the Black community, respected and praised by every person who met her. According to Mrs. Inez Richardson, who moved to Citrus Park in 1923 and grew up knowing Barbara Allen, Mrs. Allen was, "a leader in her community... but very soft, very kind, very gentle, and when Barbara said ‘no,’ she meant no. It's like I said, she was a leader in her community."\(^{22}\) Mr. Allen passed away by 1921, and consequently, Mrs. Allen, by herself, raised her five daughters and one son, operated a farm and a small store, donated land for community use, and opened her home to orphaned children.\(^{23}\) Mrs. Allen’s legacy serves as a role model to present and future generations of Hillsborough County.

Even disastrous events brought out the best in Mrs. Allen and Citrus Park’s other African American residents. One fateful evening in the early 20th Century the church building was struck by lightening and burned to the ground:

"One night we were eating supper and we looked out there and there was the biggest fire going. My grandpa and them -- you know we didn’t have water then, water around then like they do now -- there was

(Figure 1) The Citrus Park Colored School as it appeared in 1996.

(Photograph courtesy of the author.)
nothing they could do but just look at it burn down. It was a nice white church."[24]

In spite of this tragic setback, the Black community was undaunted. For a while classes were taught on the back porch of Mr. Lewis’ house. However, the few families with children in the area left; consequently, the classes were stopped. As early as 1920, Citrus Park’s African American population petitioned the school board for a school. The board, however, tabled the petition for further discussion. Less than a year later, on August 9, 1921, Mrs. Allen, administratrix of her husband’s, Rollie Allen, estate, sold to the Hillsborough County School Board for the sum of one dollar (for all tense and purposes she gave the land to the school board) one acre of land in the Southeast Corner of the Northwest Quarter of the Southwest Quarter of Section Twenty-six (26), Township Twenty-seven (27) South, Range Seventeen (17) East (Figure 3). African Americans donating land for the construction of a school was not an unusual event. In the early 1930s, William Glover bestowed ten acres of land to the Hillsborough County School Board for a school to be built in Bealsville. Despite the donation of land by Mrs. Allen, a school had not been established by late December 1923, the arrival date of Rev. Charlie Walker and his family to Citrus Park.[25]

Participating in the Florida Boom and becoming part of the flood of immigrants, both Black and White, to the west coast of Florida, Rev. Walker moved his family from Fort Valley, Georgia, to Port Tampa in April 1923. Hearing of the good business opportunities in the area from his mother, Rev. Walker went to work in a hotel in Clearwater, Florida. Deciding that hotel work was not for him, Rev. Walker relocated to Port Tampa, going into business for himself clearing land all across the state. While working along Gunn Highway and Cosine Road in 1923, Rev. Walker brought his family out for a visit. They liked the area so much that they moved to Citrus Park later that year. Several years later, during the 1930s, the Walker family acquired ten acres of land in the area, and eventually Rev. Walker purchased an additional 70 acres.

Rev. Walker, having five children of his own upon moving to Citrus Park, went to the Superintendent of Public Schools and the Hillsborough County School Board one Monday morning for the purpose of requesting a school for Citrus Park’s African American children. Yet, not until Wednesday was Rev. Walker granted a meeting. School officials told Rev. Walker that they kept him waiting for three days to see if he was serious in his intent to obtain a school.

They agreed to supply the materials for the school, but he would have to find a teacher. They then directed him to Blanche Armwood, the Supervisor of Black Schools, for help in obtaining a teacher. This effort produced no results; thus, Rev. Walker renewed his determination and searched until a teacher was found.[26]

Mrs. Amanda James remembered the school board contributed materials to build the school, but the Black residents had to donate the labor and expertise to complete the construction:

"Mr. Tony Lewis and Mr. Dave Allen [and Rev. Walker and others] . . . they all got together and built that school. The county give them the stuff if they would build it. And they give them that stuff and they put that school up . . . They all helped and built that."[27]
Approximately 15 feet by 20 feet, the entire structure was made of wood and painted red (Figure 3). Miss Leona Allen, daughter of Mrs. Barbara Allen, in 1925 became the school’s first teacher, instructing thirteen children, several of whom came from the Allen, Lewis, and Walker families. In subsequent years, the number of children taught never exceeded 30 students. Only having four windows and a front door, the children and teacher made due with what little they had. Like other rural schools of that time period, the children utilized an outhouse, obtained water from an outdoor pump, and the school consisted of one room in which several different grades were taught by Miss Allen.28 Mrs. Muriel Manning, a former student at Citrus Park Colored School, described the condition of the school and school supplies in the early years:

"Here, we had, it was difficult. We came back and we had regular school then, and we had books, some of them were old. I can remember one year we went back to school and they had clean[ed] up the [White] school down at Citrus Park, and this big box was sitting on the porch of our little school that you saw out there. And in this box was a whole lot of old books, parts of books, and crayons, and pieces of chalk, and just a whole lot of just really junk. But we were happy to get it. I can remember we had a chalk board with, that stand behind the pulpit, because the school was used for church, it was used for the AME church."29

What the Citrus Park Colored School did not have in supplies it made up for in the quality of its teachers. Miss Allen was not a typical Black teacher of the 1920s. According to D.E. Williams, State Agent for Negro Schools between 1927 and 1962, "ninety per cent of the teachers had no college training (many had not finished high school)."30 While home from attending Spelman College in Atlanta, Georgia, Miss Allen taught at the school from the summer of 1925 straight through to December 24, 1925, apparently teaching while the school was being built. She returned to Atlanta to finish her education.31

Typically during this era most African American women were relegated to bottom rungs of the economic ladder, constituting a significant portion of the state’s agricultural, domestic, and personal service labor force. Teaching, however, was one of the few professions opened to Black women during the first half of the 20th century. Between 1930 and 1950 the number of Black teachers grew in Florida from 539 to 3,796. Reflective of other jobs in the state African American women faced the double discrimination of color and gender when it came to pay. In 1930, the average Florida Black female teacher made $61.60 a month in comparison to her White male counterpart who earned a monthly salary of $169.20. White men were followed by White women who averaged $115.80 a month and Black men who made $84.20 monthly.32 The unequal distribution of pay did not stop here. The lowest paid educators were those that taught in one-teacher schools. During the 1928-29 school year, 523 of Florida’s 866 Black schools were of the one-teacher type. According to the Biennial Report of the Superintendent of Public Instruction of the State of Florida for the Two Years Ending June 30, 1930:

"The lowest salaries are paid in schools of this [one-teacher types] where the term is shortest, work is hardest, and the poorest buildings, furniture, and teaching equipment are provided. Needles to say, the poorest trained teachers are employed in these schools. The average annual salary paid Negro teachers in one- and two-teacher schools in 1928-29 was $182."33
J.H. Brinson, State Supervisor of Negro Education, stated in 1924 that poor pay accounted for the lack of Black teachers and the inadequate training of those that did teach. Throughout the 1920s and the 1930s, the lack of funding, inadequate training of teachers, and poor facilities would plague most one-teacher African American schools. Despite the dismal pay, the typical African American teacher fared better than her female counterpart in 1939 who picked strawberries in Plant City for an average of $7 to $9 a week or the typical Tampa domestic servant earning $8.50 a week in the 1920s.34

By the 1932-33 school year, 25 Black schools existed in Hillsborough County, 11 of which were of the one-teacher type, four were of the two-teacher type, three were of the three-teacher type, and seven were of the five or more teacher type. Of the 120 African American teachers employed by the county, the average teacher received $462 a year in comparison to Hillsborough’s 929 White teachers who averaged $816.64 annually. Twenty-five teachers were college educated, 35 had graduated from normal schools, and 55 had high school diplomas. These educators taught 5,542 students, averaging 46 students per teacher. Hillsborough owned 16 of the 25 school buildings with the remaining nine county schools operated in Black owned churches. Nine of the buildings had no water and four had no lavatories.35

Following Miss Allen’s departure in 1925, the school closed its door while Rev. Walker scoured the country side, roaming from Lakeland to St. Petersburg before securing Miss Early Ernestine Ballard as a teacher on
January 14, 1926. Miss Ballard received her high school diploma in Macon, Georgia, and moved to Florida to live with her uncle and aunt. According to Mrs. Richardson, one of her former students, Miss Ballard not only taught the standard educational requirements of the day, she also instilled upon the students the importance of patriotism and the value of community. As with her predecessor, Miss Ballard did not stay long, only until June 1926 -- she went to college to continue her education -- and was followed by Eunice Roundtree, Edith Allen Footman, Ruby Clark Smith, Vernease Hadley, and Corene Prince-Hardy. In 1934, Mrs. Eliza Davis, for $63.00 a month, began teaching at the school and remained until the school closed in 1948.36 Mrs. Davis, in an interview with Rosemary Brown, a reporter for the *Tampa Times*, stated that she stayed at the school for so long because “she fit right into the picture” and she and the students “latched onto each other.”37

Shortly after the school was constructed, local residents expanded the building. To accomplish this, the community donated both materials and labor. Mr. Tony Lewis, Mr. Dave Allen, Rev. Charlie Walker, and other members of Citrus Park’s African American community returned to the school and added additional square footage onto the back of the structure, rebuilt the porch on the front of the school, replaced the wood piers with concrete block, and ripped out the wooden floor and replaced it with concrete. The school grew in size from 15 feet by 20 feet to 15 feet by 30 feet. Additionally, another outhouse was built so that the boys could use one and the girls could use the other.38

Because of the rural setting and the distance from any other Black schools, Citrus Park Colored School’s student body came from beyond the borders of Citrus Park. Without school buses, every child was left to walk to school. While children from the Walker, Allen, and Lewis families lived within three miles of the school, other children came from Brown’s Turpentine Still approximately six miles away. The remaining children’s homes were scattered across the countryside.39

The Lewis, the Allens, and the Cruses were among the first Black settlers in the Citrus Park area, arriving in the 19th Century. Other founding families include the Walkers, the Petersons, and the James, homesteading in the 1920s and 1930s. Between these families, they possessed over 150 acres of land, and controlled a significant part of three lakes.40 Thus, from its conception, several prominent members of Citrus Park’s African American community were involved in the Citrus Park Colored School.

Not only were these families dedicated to the success of the school, but also the church. Instead of building a new church after the first one burned down, Mt. Pleasant AME utilized the school building on weekends. Consequently, the school building served multiple purposes for the Black community. Members of the Walker, Lewis, Allen, Footman, and the Robinson families all worshiped under the roof of the school. But the congregation of the AME church was not alone. During a revival meeting, some members of the congregation expressed a desire to form a Baptist church. In September 1932, the First Baptist of Keystone organized and held services in the school. African American churches were more prevalent than schools in Northwest Hillsborough County during this period; consequently, the congregations consisted of more local residents than the school’s student population. Not large enough to accommodate two services at the same time,
Mt. Pleasant worshiped in the building during the first and third Sundays of the month, and the Baptists utilized the building on the second and fourth Sundays. Despite being two different denominations, many of the same people attended both services. When a fifth Sunday occurred during the month, both congregations worshiped together and held a picnic afterwards. This arrangement between the school and the two churches lasted through the 1940s when the Baptists built their own church on land donated by Rev. Walker. Mrs. Manning demonstrated the importance of the churches to the community when she stated:

"When we arrived there [in 1923] they had an AME church established . . . but we were Baptist, and daddy [Rev. Walker] wanted us there... We went to the AME church, and so AME had services on first and third Sundays, we used their ritual and then on the second and fourth Sundays the Baptist people. And then on the fifth Sunday we all got together and had something. Sometimes a cookout or a picnic on the ground, bring a covered dish and we’d all eat there together. But the relationship between the two churches was really excellent and the whole community because we all, everybody supported it. And it was somewhere for us to go. It was a way to learn about each other and all the children learned [about] each other. We got along just great."

Religion also played an important role in the school. While the age-old adage of reading, writing, and arithmetic applies to Citrus Park Colored School, it only covers part of the students’ school day. Mr. Mordecai Walker, a former student who started Citrus Park Colored School in 1930, described an average day when he said, "I remember we had to line up by the flagpole every morning, and march in ...we would line up by the flagpole, say the pledge, come inside and have devotion." Later in the interview, Mr. Walker said:

"The typical day, in fact there was no typical day, it was every day. The only time we didn’t stop and say the pledge if it had been raining mighty hard. I would say if it wasn’t raining, we come there and play out there. And what ever time it was, I think it was maybe eight o’clock . . . she’d come to the door and ring the bell. We would line up at the flag pole. Girls in one line, boys in the other line. We would say the pledge, and we’d come in.

"Then the fifth or sixth grade sometime would be in charge of devotion, and you would sing a song . . . and then we would have prayer. And then the students had to learn a bible verse. Different ones would say a bible verse. Devotion last about fifteen minutes.

"After that, we had a primer, that in my first year we had . . . before first grade was primer. You call it kindergarten, but the first grade was primer . . . we had first grade arithmetic . . . second grade. Everybody had arithmetic until, through sixth grade. For a while we had seventh grade. And then we’d come back and you’d have spelling. You’d have so many words you’d spell. Okay, then reading. Same thing, starting back at primer, first grade read, second grade read, third grade read.

"Then we’d have a little recess. That was about ten o’clock in the morning. You’d go outside. If you’d have a little snack you’d eat it. We’d used to pull the bud out of palmetto. Those pine cones had kernels in there. You could eat them . . . We had about fifteen minutes of play."
"Then we'd come back and then we have geography. They called it geography. Then we go all the way through geography. Then science.

"Then we had big recess we called it. We'd have an hour off . . . Well I know it was half an hour at least. But we'd have what we call "big recess." And then, a few of the kids would go home for lunch. We had to bring ours. It was too far for us to go. We'd stay about a mile and a half or two miles from the school.

And then in the afternoon we had, we call it drawing or art."44

Mrs. Amanda James lauded the time she spent at the school as a student:

"It was beautiful. We had . . . a good teacher. She was nice to us. And we played ball all out there . . . And we had a pump. We didn't have no electric pump you know . . . and that's the way we pumped our water. And we had plenty of games that we played and everything. All us went to school played that. We played ball and play hipscotch, or whatever you call it, and everything. But we enjoyed ourselves. There wasn't no fighting. They didn't fight and carry on. They were stricter on us than the people is now. And we had to behave ourselves and mind the teacher 'cause the teacher would give us a good spanking and when we got home we got another good spanking. And so we behaved ourselves at school, and it was very nice. We enjoyed it. We enjoyed every bit of it."45

Beyond book work and play, the students completed chores around the school. During winter some of the older male students collected fire wood for the school's wood burning potbelly stove. The State Agent of Negro Schools encouraged students performing chores as a way of instilling values of cleanliness, beauty, and self improvement.46 Throughout the year, before leaving at the end of the day, the children cleaned the school:

"So in the afternoon, about the last fifteen minutes, you could volunteer or she assign somebody to sweep the floor, go out and beat the erasers, you know clean them out, and wash the boards, and we'd clean up and go home."47

Once the school day was over, the students' work were not done. Many children went home to accomplish chores and other tasks. Once completed, dinner was served and then homework was done. Variations existed on this scenario with some children playing a while before accomplishing their tasks or some working outside the home, but diligent work was asked of all, both at home and in the school. When asked about activities after school, Mr. Mordecai Walker commented:

"Well that kind of varied. We had a few kids that didn't have to . . . they went home. I used to work for my family, we were kinda . . . we had a big family. We were on the poor side . . . We worked out quite a bit after school. I used to pull down trees for five cent an hour, or five cent a tree, make 15 or 20 cent an afternoon. And my older brothers ...well all of us had little jobs we went too. My older brothers and sister, they started, after going to school they started working regular. . . My sister started cooking when she was thirteen and she would go to school and do all of it."48

Mrs. Amanda James remembered working on the family farm after school:

"We had time to play, but our parents had them big fields, and we had plenty corn, peas, and okra, and everything planted.
When we go home we could play a little bit, but we had to work. We had work, because they had plenty of chickens, hogs, and a cow, and they had to be tended. But we enjoyed it.49

Through the various activities the students participated in, the school embodied the values of the community. Having the children say prayer and reciting bible verses at the beginning of every day instilled a sense of the importance of religion, thus reaffirming the link between the school during the week and the churches) on the weekend. Likewise, the concept of hard work was well established during the school day and activities afterwards. Having children accomplish chores around the school taught them the value of work, cleanliness, and respect for property. Once the students reached the end of the school day, most went to work either at home or at a job. Even after these tasks were accomplished their work was not completed. During the evening, the children finished their homework assignments.50 The value of hard work is most readily seen in the accomplishments of the schools graduates. Because the majority of students prospered in later life, Mrs. Thelma Allen was only able to comment on a few of the success stories when she stated:

"The children would have to study, they’d have to study. They have to get those lessons [done], don’t care what else they have to do. They did pretty well too . . . The parents that could help their children go off to college somewhere, really finished their education and pick up whatever profession they thought they could handle. They did it, and they did quite well, because quite a few of the Black children from this community did good. Quite a few... My son [Raleigh Allen, Jr. (III)] is a veterinarian, and he finished from Tallahassee Black school and he finished from Tuskegee Institute. Then the government sent him to another school too . . . The Allens and the Lewises and the Walkers, the Walker’s children did well. They went off to college. One of them [Herbert Walker] finished from Tampa College [i.e., University of Tampa]. The other one [Mordecai Walker] finished in agriculture . . . Curbs Walker Wilson finished [from F A.M.U. ]. She took her home ec[economics] . . . Different ones did different things, and I think that speaks well for the parents and for them. They had a hard time at it. It wasn’t made easy. None of it was easy.”51

Not every day was all hard work and no play. The church and school put on plays, gospel quartets, cook outs, and parties for the children and parents of Citrus Park. So much activity occurred because of the two churches and school, Mr. Mordecai Walker stated "it was the most well utilized building . . . in the United States."52 He went on to comment about the various activities that took place at the school:

"The teachers, especially after we got Mrs. Davis, she would have . . . PTA meetings, but we would have little plays and box suppers -- you know where you bring your money and buy a box. Who ever owned that box would sit down and eat with them."53

Nearly everyone interviewed for this article discussed school plays, revealing their importance to the community. Mr. Mordecai Walker reflected, "We had some good plays out there on Friday evenings."54 Mrs. Mable Walker elaborated by saying:

"They would have plays and things like that at night . . . they invite the parents to come at the end of the school year, or something like that. Little entertainment things like that to let them . . . see what the children had been doing."55
Rosemary Brown, in an interview with Mrs. Muriel Manning, wrote, "Mrs. Manning has fond memories of barbecues and fish fries celebrating the last day of the school." Mrs. Manning further revealed, "The whole community turned out for the school closings; they were beautiful."56

Beyond recreational activities, the building served as a community center for Citrus Park’s African American population: Home Demonstration agents held classes in the building, 4-H club had meetings there, and the entire community received immunization shots at the school in 1934. A few years later, as with her generous contribution of land for the school, Mrs. Barbara Allen donated property for the county to build a meeting place for the 4-H club and the Home Demonstration classes.57 Much of the public, educational, and spiritual life of the Black community centered around the school. Without it, many of the events would have been difficult, if not impossible, to conduct.

Just as the community rallied together to build the school in the 1920s, the local residents also joined together to transport children to Tampa once they graduated from Citrus Park Colored School. Because the school only went through the seventh grade and no junior or senior high schools existed for Black children in the area, older students had to attend Booker T. Washington Junior and Senior High School in Tampa. Children who went on with their education had to stay with relatives or friends of the family who lived in Tampa because the county did not provide busing. This prevented those students who had no family or friends in the city or transportation from attending high school. As the federal government organized the Securities and Exchange Commission to gain some control over the stock market in 1934, Hillsborough County began subsidizing local residents to use their private automobiles to transport the children.58 Rev. Walker was the first among many who took up the call to drive:

"Now my dad [Rev. Walker], see, for a while there was no transportation at all... See there were five of them old enough to go to school in Tampa. Well, Mrs. Walker and . . . she had an aunt living in Tampa, she stayed with them. So my dad had an old Model A Ford, and then the . . . the four of us started riding."59

Purchasing a bus with his own money from a White bus driver in the Citrus Park area, the school board subsidized Rev. Walker $5.00 a month to cover oil and gas expenses. Eventually, the old bus gave out and Rev. Walker bought yet another vehicle. Obtaining a Model A bread truck, Rev. Walker cut the Model A’s top off and welded the back of the bus onto the truck. No one can remember why, but the bus was painted black. Henceforth, it became known as "The Black Mariah" to local African Americans. The community extensively utilized the bus much like they did the Citrus Park Colored School building. Because the bus was privately owned, it was used on weekends to transport shoppers back and forth to Tampa and Tarpon Springs, sometimes making several trips a day. During the Florida State Fair, the bus was packed to the gills, ferrying people to and from the fairgrounds.60

Other members of the community also drove their vehicles, ensuring that Citrus Park students continued their education. The school board, between 1937 and 1947, subsidized Edith Footman, Clyde Allen, Odell Allen, Mable Walker, and Dave Allen, Jr. to drive students to Tampa.61 This was not an easy task, for each one drove to Tampa five days a week at least once if not
twice a day. Consequently, residents of Citrus Park petitioned the school board to rectify the situation in August 1946. The board responded to the Trustees of Citrus Park (these were not the same people as the parents, but a group in charge of overseeing educational matters in different sections of the county) by saying "that it had no vehicle for [the] purpose," but it would pay $2.50 per student a month if another driver could be found.62

The community utilized Mr. Dave Allen, Jr.'s station wagon to transport eight or nine students to Tampa during the 1946/47 school year. However, the automobile was "worn out" after a years toil, and the parents were forced, once again, in August 1947, to petition the school board for adequate transportation. A week later, the board informed Rev. Walker that they would provide transportation to twelve high school students from Citrus Park (an increase of four from the previous year). This bus only furnished service to Tampa. Children who attended Citrus Park Colored School during its last year of operation still walked to school.63

Despite the importance of the school to the local community, this was not enough to keep the school board from shutting it down. Occurring at the same time as the school bus petition and foreshadowing events to come, Citrus Park Colored School received a grim evaluation in a school building survey conducted in 1946 for the Hillsborough Board of Public Instruction. By September of 1946, the school housed grades one through seven, with a total of twelve students. The building was still heated by a "small wood stove," the children still used the outhouses, and the school never had electricity.64 In fact, not until 1942 did a resident in the Citrus Park area even receive electricity, and he was a military officer stationed at MacDill. Sadly, the school reflected conditions at other Black schools scattered across the county.65 The evaluator concluded the Citrus Park Colored School section by stating:

"There are only twelve children at this school and although the building is poor, it seems unwise to provide a new building for so small a number of children. This is an isolated school. Therefore, it is recommended that it be retained as a probable elementary center but that it be replaced or abandoned within ten years. If the school is abandoned, the children should be transported to Tampa."66

It would only take the school board two years to achieve the recommended closing.

In an attempt to improve the education of its citizens and in the process to attract businesses, southern states began passing legislation to improve their public school systems following World War II. Coupled with this, southern states implemented this legislation to delay integration of racially segregated schools. Through the improvement of African American schools, these states hoped that their compliance with Plessy v. Ferguson's "separate but equal" mandate would stave off court rulings for integration. Florida and Hillsborough County participated in this trend, consolidating rural schools by shutting down several schools in order to bus the children to one central location. In 1947, the state legislature passed the Minimum Foundation Program. The program established general standards for all schools to meet, attempting to provide a minimum level of education to all of Florida's children, whether they were rich, poor, rural, urban, Black or White. This program was a double-edged sword for rural communities, especially for African Americans. As funding became available to
construct new schools, older -- and in many instances inadequate -schools were closed. However, despite being inadequate in materials and funding, the schools that were closed were significant community institutions. Hillsborough County shut down Citrus Park Colored School as part of this process in 1949.67

As early as April 15, 1948, Mrs. Barbara Allen began requesting the return of the property she donated to the school board in 1921. At that time, the board was unsure if it would close down the school. However, on November 4, 1948, the board considered Mrs. Allen's appeal, and on June 9, 1949, the board stated that the Citrus Park Colored School had been abandoned. The students and Mrs. Davis were moved to a school in Sulphur Springs where Mrs. Leona Allen Houston and Mrs. Mable Walker taught in 1947. Yet, not all small schools suffered the same fate as Citrus Park Colored School. The Glover School in Bealsville, Florida, was one school that children were bussed too; consequently, it experienced a growth in student population and construction in the 1940s.68

Not to waste any time, the board appraised the Citrus Park Colored School property in July 1949, and agreed to sell it to the trustees of Mt. Pleasant AME church for $400. On October 13, 1949, Harry Lewis, James Walker, Barbara Robinson ' Mable Walker, and Florence Bruce signed the deed on behalf of the church. Members of Mt. Pleasant continued to worship in the building until a new church was erected on the same property in the 1950s (Figure 4). Since the school's closing the building functioned as a fellowship hall where dinners were served and other activities occurred. Desiring to preserve and celebrate the school, alumni made requests of Hillsborough County's Historic Resources Review Board in 1996 to designate the building as a historic landmark of Hillsborough County. Staff members investigated the history of the school house and recommended to the Board of County Commissioners that the building be nominated as a landmark. On August 27, 1996, the County Commissioners unanimously voted for the designation.69 Despite the closure of Citrus Park Colored School, the school still lives in the memories of the former students, "Good memories of 'The Schoolhouse' will linger in our hearts because we all loved and cherished it so much."70

ENDNOTES

1 The research for this paper was conducted as part of the author's duties while employed at the Historic Tampa/Hillsborough County Preservation Board. The Historic Resources Review Board provided funding for the research which resulted in a Hillsborough County Landmark designation for the Citrus Park Colored School. I would like to give recognition and thanks to the graduates of Citrus Park Colored School and community members who opened up their homes and their memories to me. They include Thelma Allen, Colleen Gambrell, Shady Hunter, Amanda James, Beatrice Johnson, Muriel Manning, Janice Myers, Inez Richardson, Mable Walker, Mordecai Walker, Curtis Wilson. Special thanks also goes to Teresa Maio, Historic Preservation Planner for Hillsborough County's Planning & Growth Management Department, for all the work with research, edits, and help in learning the historic preservation process.

2 Rosemary Brown "Reunion Revives the Memories of Citrus Park Colored School," The Tampa Times July 24, 1982, 113; Hillsborough County Clerk of the Circuit Court (1921), Deed Book 335, page 362; Amanda James, Interview by Teresa Maio and Geoffrey Mohnman, July 9, 1996:Tape 1, Side A, #278; Inez Richardson, "History of Citrus Park Colored Negro Elementary School," (manuscript on file Citrus Park Colored School file, Hillsborough
Brown, "Reunion Revives the Memories of Citrus Park Colored School," 1B, 3B; Amanda James, Tape 1, Side A, #079,091.

Brown, "Reunion Revives the Memories of Citrus Park Colored School." 1B,3B; Hillsborough County Clerk of the Circuit Court (1949), Deed Book 1542, page 599-600; Hillsborough County School Board Minutes, book 17, page 36,120,178,384; Amanda James, Tape 1, Side B, #229; Mable Walker, Beatrice Johnson, and Janice Myers, interview, by Teresa Maio and Geoffrey Mohlman, June 27, 1996, Tape 1, Side A, #403; Mordecai Walker, Tape 1, Side B, #157.


Binder, History of Keystone, Odessa, and Citrus Park, 26-30; When History was in the Making: The Neighborhood Origins of Public Schools in Hillsborough County, 1871-1900 (Tampa, Fl: Hillsborough County Schools, 1975), 5,21.

Binder, History of Keystone, Odessa, and Citrus Park, 14-16.


Inez Richardson and Shady Hunter, interview by Teresa Maio and Geoffrey Mohlman, August 13, 1996, Tape 1, Side A, #104.


Mable Walker, Beatrice Johnson, and Janice Myers, Tape 1, Side A, #502.

Amanda James, Tape 1, Side B, #038; Keystone Park Colony, Hillsborough County, Florida (Tampa, Fl: Tampa Bay Land Company, circa 1909), 17; Muriel Manning, Janice Myers, Mordecai Walker, and Curtis Wilson, personal communication, September 9, 1996; Inez Richardson, "History of Citrus Park Colored Negro Elementary School, 1983, 1, Citrus Park Colored school file, Hillsborough County's Planning & Growth Management Department.

Amanda James, Tape 1, Side B, #252.

Ibid., #278.


Scott, The Education of Black People in Florida, 1.

Muriel Manning and Curtis Wilson, interview by Teresa Maio and Geoffrey Mohlman, August 14, 1996, Tape 1, Side A, #278; Janice Myers, personal communication September 8, 1996; Inez Richardson and Shady Hunter, Tape 1, Side B, #290; Mable Walker, Beatrice Johnson, and Janice Myers, Tape 1, Side A, #041,137.

Keystone Park Colony, Hillsborough County, Florida, 17.

Inez Richardson and Shady Hunter, Tape 1, Side B, #245.
23 Colleen Gambrell, telephone interview by Teresa Maio, August 16, 1996; Muriel Manning and Curtis Wilson, Tape 1, Side A, #400; Inez Richardson and Shady Hunter, Tape 1, Side B, #260.

24 Amanda James, Tape 1, Side B, #288.

25 Hillsborough County Clerk of the Circuit Court (1921), Deed Book 335, page 362; Hillsborough County Historic Resources Review Board, *The Glover School Designation Report* (Tampa, FL: Hillsborough County Historic Resources Review Board, 1994), 4; Hillsborough County School Board, Minute Book 6, page 144; Amanda James, Tape 1, Side A, #551, Tape 1, Side B, #266. Richardson, "History of Citrus Park Colored Negro Elementary School," 1; Inez Richardson and Shady Hunter, Tape 1, Side A, #100; Mordecai Walker, Tape 1, Side A, #129.


27 Amanda James, Tape 1, Side A, #278.

28 Brown, "Reunion Revives the Memories of Citrus Park Colored School," 113; Amanda James, Tape 1, Side A, #79, 97, 364; Richardson, 1; Muriel Manning and Curtis Wilson, Tape 1, Side A, #117; Inez Richardson and Shady Hunter, Tape 1, Side A, #116, 399; Mable Walker, Beatrice Johnson, and Janice Myers, Tape 1, Side A, #289; Mordecai Walker, Tape 1, Side A, #500; D.E. Williams *A Brief Review of the Growth and Improvement of Education for Negroes in Florida, 1927-1962* (Atlanta, GA: Southern Education Foundation, Inc., 1963), 15. According to the Hillsborough County School Board, Minute Book 8, page 294, the school board permitted the establishment of the school and appointed Ernestine Ballard as its first teacher on January 14, 1926. This conflicts with the memories of former students who insisted the first teacher was Leona Allen. It could be that Miss Allen taught while the school was being constructed, or even prior to its construction, and was paid not by the school board, but by the parents.

29 Muriel Manning and Curtis Wilson, Tape 1, Side A, #233.


31 Brown, "Reunion Revives the Memories of Citrus Park Colored School," 113; Richardson, "History of Citrus Park Colored Negro Elementary School," 1; Muriel Manning, Janice Myers, Mordecai Walker, Curtis Wilson, personal communication, September 9, 1996.

32 Jones, "No Longer Denied," 253-255.


35 Notice that the total number of teachers that were college, normal, and high school graduates equaled 115, leaving five teachers unaccounted for. *Biennial Report of the Superintendent of Public Instruction of the State of Florida for the Two Years Ending June 30, 1934* (Tallahassee, FL: Capital City Publishing Company, 1934), 164, 188-189.

36 Brown, "Reunion Revives the Memories of Citrus Park Colored School," 313; Hillsborough County School Board, Minute Book 8, 294, Book 9, page 236-237, Book 12, page 331; Amanda James, Tape 1, Side A, #093; Muriel Manning and Curtis Wilson, Tape 1, Side A, #160, 169; Richardson, "History of Citrus Park Colored Negro Elementary School," 1; Inez Richardson and Shady Hunter, Tape 1, Side A, #226.

37 Brown, "Reunion Revives the Memories of Citrus Park Colored School," 3B.

38 Ibid., 113; Florida State Department of Education and Division of Field Studies, College of Education, University of Florida, "School Building Survey,
Hillsborough County, Florida” (Manuscript on file Tampa-Hillsborough County Public Library, 1946), 154; Inez Richardson and Shady Hunter, Tape 1, Side A. #399; Mable Walker, Beatrice Johnson, and Janice Myers, Tape 1, Side A. #238,262; Mordecai Walker, Tape 1, Side B. #157.

39 Inez Richardson and Shady Hunter, Tape 1, Side A. #471; Mable Walker, Beatrice Johnson, and Janice Myers, Tape 1, Side A. #495; Mordecai Walker, Tape 1, Side B. #276.


41 Thelma Allen and Janice Myers, interview by Teresa Maio and Geoffrey Mohlman, June 27, 1996, Tape 1, Side A, #316,457; Brown, “Reunion Revives the Memories of Citrus Park Colored School,” 313; Colleen Gambrell, telephone interview, August 16, 1996; Janice Myers, personal communication, September 8, 1996; Inez Richardson and Shady Hunter, Tape 1, Side A, #267,535, Tape 1, Side B, #447,473; Mordecai Walker, Tape 1, Side A, #234.

42 Muriel Manning and Curtis Wilson, Tape 1, Side A. #243.

43 Mordecai Walker, Tape 1, Side A, #229.

44 Ibid., #369.

45 Amanda James, Tape 1, Side A, #294.

46 *Biennial Report of the Superintendent of Public Instruction of the State of Florida for the Two Years Ending June 30, 1936* (Tallahassee, Fl, 1936), 190-194; Brown, “Reunion Revives the Memories of Citrus Park Colored School,” 313; Mordecai Walker, Tape 1, Side B. #224.

47 Mordecai Walker, Tape 1, Side B. #249.

48 Ibid., Tape 1, Side A. #412.

49 Amanda James, Tape 1, Side A, #490.

50 Ibid., #427, #498.

51 Thelma Allen and Janice Myers, Tape 1, Side A, #380.

52 Mordecai Walker, Tape 1, Side A, #246.

53 Ibid., Tape 1, Side B, #257.

54 Ibid., Tape 1, Side A, #320.

55 Mable Walker, Beatrice Johnson, and Janice Myers, Tape 1, Side A, #527.

56 Brown, “Reunion Revives the Memories of Citrus Park Colored School,” 3B.

57 Thelma Allen and Janice Myers, Tape 1, Side B, #334; Muriel Manning and Curtis Wilson, Tape 1, Side A, #430; Inez Richardson and Shady Hunter, Tape 2, Side A, #340; Mable Walker, Beatrice Johnson, and Janice Myers, Tape 1, Side A, #541, Tape 1, Side B, #038; Mordecai Walker, Tape 2, Side A, #175.

58 Thelma Allen and Janice Myers, Tape 1, Side A, #514; Brown, “Reunion Revives the Memories of Citrus Park Colored School,” 313; Hillsborough County School Board, Minute Book 12, page 189; Amanda James, Tape 1, Side A, #098; Mordecai Walker, Tape 1, Side A, #519. During the 1920s and early 1930s, Booker T. Washington Junior and Senior High School was the only school that the older students attended. By the 1930s Citrus Park students attended Middleton High School, and by the 1940s students from Citrus Park also enrolled in Don Thompson Vocational School.

59 Mordecai Walker, Tape 1, Side A, #520.

60 Brown, “Reunion Revives the Memories of Citrus Park Colored School,” 313; Hillsborough County School Board, Minute Book 12, page 189; Muriel Manning, Janice Myers, Mordecai Walker, Curtis Wilson, personal communication, September 9, 1996.

61 Muriel Manning, Janice Myers, Mordecai Walker, Curtis Wilson, personal communication, September 9, 1996.

62 Hillsborough County School Board, Minute Book 16, page 28.

63 Ibid., 28,317,324; Mordecai Walker, Tape 1, Side B, #105; Mordecai Walker, personal communication, September 9, 1996.

64 Florida State Department of Education and Division of Field Studies, College of Education,


68 Thelma Allen and Janice Myers, Tape 1, Side A, #170,491; Hillsborough County Historic Resources Review Board, *The Glover School Designation Report*, 4; Hillsborough County School Board Minute Book 16, page 237, Minute Book 17, page 15,178,279; Amanda James, Tape 1, Side A, #113; "Negro Schools to be Cut in Consolidation," *Tampa Tribune* August 9, 1946; Mable Walker, Beatrice Johnson, and Janice Myers, Tape 1, Side B, #052,131. Mrs. Leona Allen Houston was the first teacher at Citrus Park Colored School. By 1947, she had married, thus the addition of Houston to her name, and was teaching at Sulphur Springs.

69 Tom Brennan, "Colored School named county landmark," *Tampa Tribune* August 28, 1996, 1-Northwest; Hillsborough County School Board, Minute Book 17, page 303, 309, 316, 341; Hillsborough County Clerk of the Circuit Court (1949), Deed Book 1542, page 599-600; Amanda James, Tape 1, Side A, #131,162; Mable Walker, Beatrice Johnson, and Janice Myers, Tape 1, Side B, #149.