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The House by the Side of the Road: A History of the Andrew P. Stewart Center

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THE HOUSE BY THE SIDE OF THE ROAD
A HISTORY OF THE ANDREW P. STEWART CENTER

by

MEGAN MCDONALD

Under the Direction of Marni Davis, PhD

ABSTRACT

The Andrew P. Stewart Center was founded by a group of Southern Baptist women in 1916 as the “Andrew Stewart Day Nursery.” Members of the Baptist Women’s Missionary Union, these women sought to alleviate the impoverished conditions facing children and families living in the English Avenue community of Atlanta. The organization survived ten decades of dramatic social change, and currently operates in the Pittsburgh neighborhood. This thesis chronicles the Stewart Center’s evolution over the course of the past century, reflecting on larger patterns of Atlanta’s history while also highlighting the unique responses of an organization largely led by female, Southern Baptist missionaries and volunteers. Racial transitions feature prominently in the Center’s evolution: neighborhood white flight and school desegregation played a pivotal role in the organization’s geographic location and interpretation of purpose.

INDEX WORDS: American South, Atlanta, Southern Baptist Convention, Women’s Missionary Union, White Flight, School desegregation, Gentrification, English Avenue—Atlanta, Reynoldstown—Atlanta, Pittsburgh—Atlanta

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MEGAN MCDONALD

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of
Master of Arts
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Georgia State University
2018

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May 2018

DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to the memory of Dr. Clifford Kuhn.

I am very grateful to have known and studied under Dr. Kuhn at Georgia State University during the final years of his life. His approval and enthusiasm for this project gave me much needed confidence as an early graduate student and his continued investment in my progress meant a great deal. Even after his death, Dr. Kuhn's encyclopedic knowledge of Atlanta directly informed my work as I consulted his books, oral histories, and radio programs.

Dr. Kuhn was dedicated to making history meaningful and accessible to everyone, and he believed in the value of all voices and all stories. It is my hope that this thesis and my future work in the field of history will reflect these same qualities.

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life: as a child living in Reynoldstown and again as an adult WMU member. I so very much appreciated her willingness to share her memories and research, and for her consistent support.

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Young Hughley shared his early memories of the Stewart Center in the late 1960s from his perspective as a young adult waiting at the bus stop across the street. He also pointed me in the direction of several long-time residents of Reynoldstown and introduced me to the tremendous role that the Reynoldstown Civic Improvement League and Reynoldstown Revitalization Corporation played in neighborhood life.

The archivists and librarians at the Kenan Research Center at Atlanta History Center, the Georgia Baptist Convention archives, and the Southern Baptist Historical Library and Archives were incredibly helpful in finding materials for this project. Laura Drummond's timely work on the English Avenue school national register nomination was immensely helpful, and her high standards for the documentation and research of historic structures gave me a model to aspire to.

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1 INTRODUCTION

Let me live in a house by the side of the road
And be a friend to man.
-Sam Walter Foss



Figure 1 Undated photograph of the Andrew Stewart Day Nursery, 219 Bellwood Avenue. First opened March 17, 1917. Courtesy of the Andrew P. Stewart Center.

On March 15, 1917, a group of women opened a small house in a crowded industrial district of northwest Atlanta known as Bellwood. Originally named the Andrew Stewart Day Nursery, the house was a place where white, working-class mothers could bring their small children to be cared for while they worked long hours in nearby mills and factories. The nursery was founded by members of a Baptist organization known as the Women's Missionary Union (WMU). Wealthy and well-connected, the WMU women poured their time, energy, and resources into the work, hoping that they could improve the quality of life experienced by these children and their families.

The day nursery was named in honor of Andrew Perry Stewart, a prominent figure in Atlanta's business and political life. Andrew and his wife Frances were members of First Baptist Church of Atlanta, where Andrew was superintendent of the Sunday school and Frances was an active member of the WMU. The Stewarts were well known for their generosity and often supported charitable causes on behalf of children. It was therefore fitting when Andrew Stewart died in October of 1916, that members of the WMU asked Frances Stewart to support their new day nursery as a memorial to her husband. She gladly accepted and responded by saying that: "Mr. Stewart had told her to give--and to give generously--just as he had given and to commemorate his name in an Institution whose one purpose was to help every child that came within its doors; to give the child an opportunity to make the beginning of life on equal footing with its more fortunate brothers."¹

When the doors of the Andrew Stewart Day Nursery opened in 1917, the organization began a journey that would be marked by its ability to adapt to internal and external change. From the outset, WMU members and the Center's missionary directors worked to evaluate and adjust the Center's programming to better meet the needs of their neighbors, while also responding to the immense social and cultural changes of the twentieth century. This attitude of programmatic flexibility would allow the Center to stretch and grow to meet the needs of their neighbors for over a century. In the decades to come, the Stewart Center was at its best when its leaders listened closely to the expressed needs of the surrounding community and adjusted programming accordingly. At its worst, leaders resisted change and responded with fear.

Because the Stewart Center was a predominantly Southern Baptist organization, its leaders viewed their work in light of the biblical mandate to "love thy neighbor." While WMU

¹ "History of the Andrew and Frances Stewart Good Will Center," made available to author by the Andrew P. Stewart Center, Atlanta, Georgia, 3.

leadership and missionary directors held varying theological perspectives over time, each sought to interpret what it meant to love one's neighbor in the context of the needs of the community.

While some leaders of the organization would focus their efforts on the individual primarily through evangelism and relationship building, others would seek to intervene in the environmental and systemic issues that faced local families, in addition to building relationships.

At several moments in time, the organization's leadership had to confront their beliefs about just who their "neighbor" was and what "love" looked like in the form of programming. The Stewart Center was founded in a segregated city and spent its first five decades as a segregated institution. The organization's early responses to racial transition in Atlanta are reflective of larger patterns regarding Southern race relations in the twentieth century. However, the Stewart Center ultimately diverged from mainstream patterns, welcomed their new black neighbors, and remained in the community despite the widespread flight of local whites.

The WMU and the missionaries that operated the Center were diligent record keepers and left behind detailed records of programmatic and organizational changes. Upon close examination, these records reveal much more than the history of a small, Baptist institution. When considered in the context of their time and place that they occurred, suddenly a much bigger story emerges, one that chronicles the sweeping social changes that dramatically altered the landscape of Atlanta, the South, and the United States. Through the organization's experiences in three Atlanta communities, the Stewart Center offers a revealing perspective of community change.

During the course of the Stewart Center's 100+ year lifetime, it has operated in three working-class Atlanta neighborhoods: English Avenue, Reynoldstown, and Pittsburgh. To the



Figure 2 Map of Atlanta, showing the three neighborhoods in which the Stewart Center has operated: English Avenue (1917-1949), Reynoldstown (1950-2015), Pittsburgh (2015-present)

present-day observer, these communities may appear to have little in common. Hidden in the shadow of Mercedes-Benz stadium, the English Avenue community has faced decades of poverty and neglect, with residents battling crime, blight, and real estate speculation.

Meanwhile, across town, the streets of Reynoldstown are filled with the sounds of construction, as developers crowd small lots with high-priced homes, hoping to cash-in on the neighborhood's proximity to the BeltLine. Pittsburgh finds itself somewhere in between, both geographically and developmentally: still recovering from widespread real estate fraud, the neighborhood's prime location near downtown and along the BeltLine lead many to anticipate an impending revival.

Despite 21st century differences, English Avenue, Reynoldstown, and Pittsburgh share striking similarities in their early development. All three communities were initially located outside of the city limits, where land was cheaper and more plentiful than downtown lots. Reynoldstown was annexed to Atlanta in 1909, with English Avenue and Pittsburgh joining the city the following year. Each neighborhood was initially home to working class residents who had migrated to the city looking for work. All three had such large populations of children in the early 20th century that they were included in a 1922 bond issue for the construction or expansion of a local elementary school. Each was impacted by nearby highway construction in the 1940s and 1950s. All three neighborhoods entered a period of decline in the 1970s, leading to increased crime. In the 21st century, English Avenue, Reynoldstown, and Pittsburgh have all been impacted by real-estate speculation and gentrification, as Atlanta enjoys a revival of in-town living.

The Stewart Center encountered these neighborhoods in distinctly different time periods. It first opened in English Avenue in 1917, where it operated until 1949. Arriving at the tail end of the Progressive Era, the Stewart Center founders were imbued with the optimism of the period's reformers as they entered a neighborhood struggling to cope with the consequences of rapid industrialization. During the organization's 32 years in the community, the Stewart Center supported families through two World Wars and the Great Depression. As one of the city's most impoverished white neighborhoods during the early twentieth century, much of the Center's programming in English Avenue was focused on meeting physical and material needs of local families, in addition to evangelism. Moving to Reynoldstown in early 1950, the Stewart Center entered the community during a period of post-war prosperity and all time low unemployment levels. Physical and material needs of local families were considerably less acute than those

faced in previous decades in English Avenue. As a result, the majority of programming shifted to focus on education and spiritual training in the form of bible studies, Vacation Bible School, and children's clubs, although the day nursery continued to provide a much-needed service to working families. The Stewart Center's tenure in this community was marked by the challenges of white resistance to integration and white flight. In 1968, the Center's missionary directors made a significant decision to stay in the community and welcome their black neighbors, despite widespread white abandonment. In the decades that followed, the leadership of the Stewart Center worked to support their neighbors through economic depression, high unemployment levels, and a dramatic rise in crime. After years of disinvestment, gentrification ultimately displaced most of the under-resourced families served by the Stewart Center, and in 2015 the organization moved to the Pittsburgh neighborhood. Today, the Center's programming continues to evolve in a new neighborhood, where it operates a greatly expanded after school program and a new affordable housing initiative to support local families.

The following pages chronicle the evolution of the Andrew P. Stewart Center over the past century. The organization has charted a unique path in its development and has survived when so many institutions like it have not. However, the Stewart Center was not a unique organization at the time of its founding, nor was it particularly well known outside of Baptist circles. The Stewart Center's goals were not socially or politically radical and its leaders were guilty of perpetuating many of the same stereotypes and racial prejudices of greater southern society. Yet the organization displayed a remarkable capacity for change and an ability to learn from the mistakes of the past. In the process, thousands of lives were impacted by its influence.

2 ENGLISH AVENUE

I remember so well the afternoon you took us up to the old nursery on Bankhead Avenue where we were examined and vaccinated so that we could enter into the ‘nursery.’ I was too young to comprehend the tragedy that had come into our lives, (but I know now how much it must have meant to you to have had such a place to leave your children while you worked twelve hours a day.) How wonderful it must have been for you to know that your children were being well cared for...¹

-Elizabeth Crews to her mother, Essie

In this excerpt from a letter to her mother, Elizabeth Crews shares her earliest recollections of the Andrew Stewart Day Nursery. First attending as a toddler in the late 1920’s, the tragedy that had befallen her family was the death of her father. Her mother, Essie, worked twelve-hour shifts as an inspector in the Exposition Cotton Mills, providing the sole income for her young family. The family rented a small house in a northwest Atlanta community known as Bellwood, where they lived within walking distance of both the Andrew Stewart Nursery and the Exposition Cotton Mills. In a few years, Elizabeth would be old enough to attend the local elementary school with her siblings, but even then, she would still attend the nursery in the hours before and after school, participating in its many clubs and activities while her mother worked.²

Elizabeth Crews was one child amidst hundreds in her overcrowded, working-class neighborhood, one of many whose basic needs could not be met on the low wages earned at the Exposition Cotton Mills and other nearby industries. However, Elizabeth lived in an era of great reform and social change, an era that produced reformers and organizations that sought to improve the environmental conditions of working-class communities and enhance the quality of life for their residents. The Andrew P. Stewart Center was established by a group of compassionate Baptist women as a response to the rapid industrialization that had taken place in

¹ “50th Anniversary Historical Sketches: Essie and Elizabeth Crews,” made available to author by the Andrew P. Stewart Center, Atlanta, Georgia.

² Atlanta City Directory, 1933 (Atlanta: Atlanta City Directory Company, 1933.)

Atlanta, leading to overcrowding, unsanitary conditions, poverty, and a host of other conditions in working class neighborhoods. These women hoped to support working mothers like Essie Crews by providing a day nursery where their children would be well-cared for while she they were away.

The Women's Missionary Union and the Founding of the Stewart Center



Figure 3 First Baptist Church of Atlanta WMU. Frances Stewart and other founders of the Andrew Stewart Nursery are pictured. Courtesy of the Kenan Research Center at the Atlanta History Center.

The Women's Missionary Union (WMU) was an organization of Southern Baptist women founded to support Baptist missionary efforts at home and abroad through fundraising and education. Prior to the establishment of the WMU in 1888, local Women's Missionary Societies were established across the south and many Southern Baptist Women hoped to coordinate their efforts through a central organization. They were met with resistance and

opposition from male leaders in the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC). Amidst a conservative culture protective of gender norms, Southern Baptist men feared that women would be inspired to leave the home and preach. They also worried that the WMU would afford Baptist women a level of economic control that would compete with other church activities. (Long considered to be the SBC's most successful fundraisers, WMU were enormously successful in securing support for the various causes and organizations they supported.) Ultimately, Southern Baptist women created the WMU as an auxiliary to the SBC. This allowed the WMU to be self-governing and self-supporting, while also quelling male fears that the women were establishing an organization independent of the SBC.³ Most Southern Baptist churches had a WMU group comprised of women in their congregation, and these groups cooperated with those of other churches across the city in local "Associations."

The collective WMU groups of the Atlanta Association worked together on a variety of local projects. Since most WMU members did not work outside of the home, they were able to dedicate vast amounts of time and energy to WMU projects, frequently tapping into their financial resources and social networks to further their causes.⁴ Atlanta WMU members rallied to support the Georgia Baptist Hospital and the Georgia Baptist Children's Home and worked together on these projects for decades. By the time the Andrew Stewart Day Nursery was founded, a well-established, cooperative network from over 50 Baptist churches in Atlanta already existed to support the effort.⁵

³ T. Laine Scales, *All That Fits a Woman: Training Southern Baptist Women for Charity and Mission, 1907-1926*, (Macon: Mercer University Press, 2000) 34-45.

⁴ Mrs. George. Westmoreland, *Through the Years with the W.M.U. A History of Atlanta Baptist Woman's Missionary Union*.

⁵ Mrs. C.L. Dean, "Work Being Done at Settlement Home in Atlanta," *The Atlanta Constitution*, February 2, 1916, D6

The movement to establish a day nursery in English Avenue was begun by two WMU members: Ela Key of Second Ponce de Leon Baptist Church and Roberta Little of First Baptist Church. During the summer of 1916, the two women volunteered at the Kate Pendleton Dawson Nursery in southwest Atlanta every Thursday afternoon. Located near the Atlanta Woolen Mills and founded in 1911 by women of the West End Baptist Church, the Dawson Nursery was a novel form of ministry for middle-class women who had spent very little time in direct, regular contact with impoverished communities. WMU members spent hours volunteering at the nursery, developing relationships with the children of mill workers. Initially called the Stewart Avenue Settlement, the Dawson nursery was a Southern Baptist adaptation of the Settlement Movement.⁶

Although the settlement house was a new organizational form for the women of the WMU, the settlement movement had been gaining momentum in the United States for several decades. Originating in industrial areas of England, the settlement movement began as an experimental effort to alleviate the conditions and problems caused by rapid industrialization.⁷ The central feature of the movement was the presence of a settlement house that was purchased or rented in a densely populated urban area. These houses were inhabited by middle and upper middle-class “residents” who were outsiders to the community, most of whom were college educated and unmarried. While programs varied between settlements, they shared a common method: by living in the community with their neighbors and establishing relationships with them, settlement workers sought to break down class barriers.⁸ In addition, by living among the

⁶ Originally founded as the “Stewart Avenue Settlement” I have chosen to use its later name “Dawson” in order to avoid confusion with the later Andrew P. Stewart Center.

⁷ Jane Addams, *Twenty-Years at Hull House*. 1910. (Reprint, New York: The MacMillan Company, 1968), 125-127.

⁸ Mina Carson, *Settlement Folk*. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1990), 8.

poor, settlement workers hoped to develop genuine, reciprocal relationships with their neighbors and formulate practical solutions to the problems of poverty.

Many settlement programs were directed toward children. In addition to clubs, camps, kindergartens and health clinics, settlements constructed neighborhood playgrounds for children as a safe alternative to playing in the streets and alleys of their congested communities. Similarly, settlement workers founded nurseries and kindergartens for children who were too young for school and might not have adequate care or supervision while their parents worked. As children were often the most trusting element of the population, they often displayed the most enthusiasm and excitement for settlement house workers and their programs.⁹ As parents and extended families established trusting relationships with settlement workers, programs for adults became more popular. Night schools and health clinics were common programs and settlement houses often served as meeting spaces for local groups.

Many religious groups were inspired to establish settlements, including Southern Baptists. However, it is important to note that despite similarities in programming, Southern Baptist settlements only partially reflected the settlement movement. While social reform was the primary goal of Northern, non-denominational settlements, Southern Baptist settlement workers largely focused their energies on changing the individual through evangelism and social services.¹⁰ This was true of the Dawson Nursery and the Andrew Stewart Day Nursery, where WMU members sought to address the challenges that faced local children, but generally did not address the external factors that placed their families in poverty. Bible stories and prayers were infused into almost every program, and religious conversions were meticulously recorded and celebrated. While pitifully low wages at the mills and nearby factories impacted nearly every

⁹ Carson, *Settlement Folk*, 62.

¹⁰ Scales, *All That Fits a Woman*, 183-4.

aspect of a family's life including their ability to pay for child care, visit a doctor, afford decent housing, or feed and clothe their children, the WMU never used their positions of privilege to publicly advocate for better wages or support workers during labor strikes. Instead, the WMU generally focused their efforts on ameliorating the effects of poverty by providing free or low-cost services and programs. In a move that recognized this difference and sought to create a more uniquely Southern Baptist identity, most Southern Baptist settlements were renamed "Good Will Centers" after 1914.¹¹ The Andrew Stewart Day Nursery, whose programs were closely aligned with that of Southern Baptist settlements, was renamed a Good Will Center in 1921.¹²

Whether or not they were operated by a religious institution, settlement programs required a high degree of flexibility on the part of their workers. Since all settlement programs were voluntary, neighborhood interest (or lack thereof) was often reflected in neighborhood attendance. Settlement workers continually adapted and changed programming based on the interests and needs of their neighbors and relevant neighborhood conditions. As reformers succeeded in achieving their reforms, they sometimes rendered their programs obsolete. For example, when reformers involved with the Kindergarten movement (many of whom were settlement workers) successfully lobbied for mandatory public kindergartens, settlements no longer needed to provide them and re-focused their energies and resources elsewhere. This flexibility and constant reassessment of methods and programs was a key component of the settlement method and ideology.¹³ It would certainly play a role in the Andrew Stewart Day Nursery's programmatic changes in subsequent decades.

¹¹ For similar reasons Southern, Methodist women changed the names of their settlement houses to "Wesley House" in 1906.

¹² Scales, *All That Fits a Woman*, 204; APSC Board minutes, 10/10/1921, 1920-1922 Board Notebook, Georgia Baptist Convention Archives.

¹³ Carson, *Settlement Folk*, 133.

While settlement houses in northern cities were typically situated in immigrant neighborhoods, in southern cities where European immigrants numbered far fewer than in the north, settlement houses were most commonly located near mill communities among American born, rural migrants. A number of factors pertaining to life in a mill community drew the attention of settlement workers including overcrowding, poor sanitation, and child labor. As was common throughout the urban and industrial south, Atlanta textile workers were often stigmatized by the city's middle and upper class, who viewed them as a "particularly downtrodden group among the white working class."¹⁴ Mill workers, misunderstood and belittled by outsiders, were described in such terms as: "inherently ignorant, helpless, suspicious, shiftless, wretched, degenerate, and out of control."¹⁵ These perspectives linked the causes of poverty to the individual characteristics of mill workers, rather than examining the systemic causes of their plight.¹⁶ While outsiders differed in their beliefs regarding the causes of poverty in mill communities, many were moved to take action.

As a direct result of their experiences at the Dawson nursery, WMU members Ela Key and Roberta Little decided to found a second Baptist nursery in the city of Atlanta. After consulting several prominent figures in Atlanta's charitable circles, including James Logan of the Associated Charities and Nellie Peters Black of the Kindergarten Association, they decided to investigate the English Avenue community.¹⁷

¹⁴ Clifford Kuhn, *Contesting the New South Order: the 1914-1915 Strike at Atlanta's Fulton Mills*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001), 18.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 53.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ "History of the Andrew and Frances Stewart Good Will Center," made available to author by the Andrew P. Stewart Center, Atlanta, Georgia.

English Avenue (Bellwood)

Prior to the Civil War, English Avenue (then known as Bellwood) was a sparsely populated, rural settlement located about a half-mile outside of the Atlanta city limits.¹⁸ In the postbellum decades, the population of the community grew as local industries clustered along Marietta Street and the Western and Atlantic railroad. In particular, Bellwood experienced rapid development following the International Cotton Exposition of 1881, which was held at Oglethorpe Park in the northern part of the community. The brainchild of Atlanta businessmen intent on promoting Atlanta and the southern textile industry, the Exposition showcased Atlanta's progress since the Civil War and promoted its reputation as a place for business. After an immensely successful exposition that drew hundreds of thousands of people to Atlanta and boosted the confidence of local businessmen, the park and Exposition buildings were purchased from the city by a group of 29 investors. Four months later on April 5, 1882, they were reopened as the Exposition Cotton Mills Company.¹⁹



Figure 4 Grounds of the International Cotton Exposition, Oglethorpe Park. Courtesy of the Kenan Research Center at the Atlanta History Center.

¹⁸ "Large Sale of Valuable Lots in Bellwood Settlement" *The Atlanta Daily Sun*, January 5, 1869.

¹⁹ Exposition Cotton Mills Company, *The Exposition Cotton Mills Company, seventieth anniversary, 1882-1952*. Atlanta, 1952.

The Marietta Street artery and the Western and Atlantic Railroad, which formed the eastern border of the Bellwood community, was the site of many factories and industries. Combined with the newly established Exposition Mills, the presence of so many jobs in the area drew large numbers of people to Bellwood seeking work, generally migrants from rural areas of the Georgia Piedmont. As local industry flourished, large lots of land in Bellwood were subdivided and sold. Much of the community was developed as a white-working class neighborhood in 1891 by James W. English Jr., the son of Atlanta mayor Captain James W. English Sr. Named for the developer and his father, English Avenue runs north-south through the heart of the neighborhood.

While English Avenue was a predominantly white, working-class neighborhood, the community was also home to African American residents. Unofficial patterns of segregation within the neighborhood designated specific streets for whites and blacks. Attempts to legally codify residential segregation repeatedly failed: between 1913 and 1931, Atlanta officials sought to enforce segregation through zoning and ordinances, only to have them declared unconstitutional by the United States Supreme Court. However, racial designations were not quickly forgotten by city officials, who remained cognizant of areas that had been designated as appropriate for black use.²⁰ Unable to maintain segregation legally, city officials and Atlanta residents frequently created and maintained informal boundaries in communication with black realtors, as was the case in English Avenue. In one instance, a “special committee” that included councilmen, aldermen, and the pastor of Western Heights Baptist Church proposed a plan to restrict a series of streets for whites only, “approved by leading negro real estate dealers.”²¹ In

²⁰ Wiese, *Places of Their Own*, 55.

²¹ “Schools of Fifth in Merger Fight,” *The Atlanta Constitution*, July 8, 1927, 16.

the plan, streets designated for blacks were interspersed throughout the white areas, and in one case, blacks and whites occupied opposite sides of the same street.

In 1894, the Exposition Cotton Mills Company expanded the mill to include an additional 16,000 spindles, doubling the size of the mill and its workforce.²² This expansion, coupled with the continued growth of local industry drew additional workers to the area. At that time, the community was located outside of the city limits on the rural outskirts of Atlanta. As the population (and potential tax base) of the area grew, Atlanta's political leaders began to talk of annexing the community. Bellwood officially joined the Fifth Ward of Atlanta in 1910.²³ Upon annexation, Bellwood saw gradual improvements including paved roads, electricity, streetcar service, and the construction of a new school. Despite these physical improvements, the community was becoming increasingly overcrowded. Not all who sought employment found it, and those who did often received pitifully low wages. The neighborhood soon acquired a reputation as a particularly impoverished section of the city where frequent instances of violence inspired the nickname: "The Bloody Fifth Ward."²⁴ As former Atlanta police officer M.Y. "Pete" Rutherford reflected:

I reckon the white neighborhood, the poorest white neighborhood I imagine would have been what they called the old fifth ward. Used to call it the old bloody fifth... That was back out English Avenue and back over yonder... There was some, a few colored's out there, but mostly that territory was white people there. There was some mean ones out in the bloody fifth. They'd kill you out there.²⁵

When members of the Women's Missionary Union (WMU) began investigating the neighborhood in 1916, men and women living in Bellwood were employed in a variety of

²² "Whirring Spindles," *The Atlanta Constitution*, December 23, 1894, 19.

²³ Department of Budget and Planning. Annexation Map of Atlanta
<http://digitalcollections.library.gsu.edu/cdm/ref/collection/atlmaps/id/155>

²⁴ Interview with Frank Hicks by Cliff Kuhn, 29 January 1979, Atlanta History Center.

²⁵ Interview with M.Y. "Pete" Rutherford by Cliff Kuhn, 9 March 1979, Atlanta History Center.

working-class occupations. Exposition Mill employees generally lived in company-owned housing immediately surrounding the mill, although some millworkers elected to live outside the mill village and settled among non-mill workers. Those not employed by the mill found jobs within walking distance of their homes or took the streetcar to work. Many of Bellwood's white, male residents worked as carpenters, street car drivers, watchmen, railroad workers, painters, chauffeurs, and machinists. In the era of Jim Crow, African Americans living in segregated areas of Bellwood had limited employment opportunities. As reflected in the 1916 city directory, African American men living in Bellwood were almost exclusively employed as laborers, commonly in the sanitation department. African American women were listed as laundresses or cooks. White women also contributed to household incomes, finding work as seamstresses, stenographers, milliners, or telephone operators. Typically young and single, women found employment in local factories making cigars, brushes, boxes, and wrapping candy.²⁶ One of Bellwood's young working women was a 14-year-old named Mary Phagan, who lived on Lindsay Street and rode the streetcar to her job at the National Pencil Factory.²⁷ Her murder in 1913 was sensationalized in the newspapers and aroused the passions of working-class citizens throughout the city, ultimately leading to the mob lynching of factory superintendent, Leo Frank. Phagan's age at the time of her death was indicative of the fact that many children and adolescents joined the work force at an early age in Bellwood.²⁸

Although many of the neighborhood's children worked in order to contribute to their families' income, many were too young, even by early 20th century standards. Due to the community's swelling population, the local elementary school underwent rapid growth and

²⁶ Atlanta City Directory, 1916 (Atlanta: Atlanta City Directory Company, 1916.)

²⁷ Atlanta City Directory, 1913 (Atlanta: Atlanta City Directory Company, 1913.)

²⁸ Nancy MacLean, "The Leo Frank Case Reconsidered: Gender and Sexual Politics in the Making of Reactionary Populism," *The Journal of American History*, Vol. 78, No. 3 (December 1991), 917-948.

struggled to provide enough space for students. The overcrowding of the school and the impoverished conditions experienced by many of its students were key factors that drew the attention of the Women’s Missionary Union to the community.

The English Avenue School



Figure 5 The original Western Heights School was four room schoolhouse located on the corner of Pelham Street and Paines Avenue. It was completed in 1906. Report of the Fulton County School Board, 1908.

In 1906, a brand new, timber-framed school was opened on the corner of Pelham Street and Paines Avenue.²⁹ Alternately referred to as the “West Side School” or “Western Heights School,” the Fulton County School Board declared that the four-room school house was severely overcrowded within a year of its construction. Between 1907 and 1909, the number of children

²⁹ “Dedicate School Tonight,” *The Atlanta Constitution*, November 9, 1905, 10.

attending the school nearly doubled, from 215 to 425 students. Daily double-sessions were instituted, in which students only attended school for half of the school day.³⁰ The Fulton County School board was well aware of the need to relieve overcrowded conditions at the Western Heights School and even proposed an addition of four classrooms to the school house. However, these plans were delayed and ultimately abandoned once it became clear that the community was to be annexed and the school absorbed into the Atlanta Public Schools system.³¹

Shortly after annexation, the Atlanta school board approved the use of funding for a new school building in the Bellwood community and construction began in 1910.³² The brick, three-story structure was constructed at the corner of Pelham Street and English Avenue. The old timber-frame Western Heights School, located only a block away, sat in view of the new school and remained available for use as an annex in later instances of overcrowding.



Figure 6 1911 photo of children playing in front of the newly completed Western Heights School. "Constitution's Page Devoted to Children of Public Schools," The Atlanta Constitution, October 29, 1911, A6.

³⁰ Fulton County Schools Report, 1907 and 1908, Box 3 Folder 1, Kingsbery family papers, Kenan Research Center, Atlanta History Center. Fulton County Schools Report, 1909, Box 3, Folder 2, Kingsbery family papers, Kenan Research Center, Atlanta History Center.

³¹ Fulton County Schools Report, 1909, Box 3, Folder 2, Kingsbery family papers, Kenan Research Center, Atlanta History Center.

³² "Architects Appointed for School Buildings," *The Atlanta Constitution*, July 29, 1910, 2.

While the new school building provided some relief from the cramped quarters of the four-room schoolhouse, it was only a matter of time before the community outgrew the available space. By 1913, Bellwood's new school building was bursting at the seams. After receiving heavy public criticism for the conditions, Atlanta Mayor James G. Woodward pledged to construct additional classrooms for the three-year-old school. In describing the nature of the overcrowding at the Western Heights School, Woodward pointed to the pervasive practice of child labor in Bellwood: "I found that the lower grades of the school are and have been crowded for some time. This is due to a peculiar condition of the district. Out there the children who attend the school come largely from the mill districts. They attend school until they reach the fourth grade, and then quit to go to work for their parents."³³

Georgia's progressive reformers and politicians had campaigned for child labor reform for years, to no avail. At the time of Woodward's assessment, children as young as ten were permitted to work for twelve hours a day, or a total of sixty-six hours a week.³⁴ Reformers achieved some success in 1912, when a bill passed that would gradually raise the age that children could work in the mills to fourteen.³⁵ A comprehensive school attendance law would not be passed until 1916, at which point children between the ages of eight and fourteen were required to attend school for a minimum of four consecutive months of the year.³⁶ With the enactment of stricter child labor laws and compulsory attendance, the overcrowding in the Western Heights school would only become more acute.

³³ "Annex to English Avenue School is Favored by Mayor," *The Atlanta Constitution*, October 17, 1913, 1.

³⁴ "State's Child Labor Law and Needed Amendments," *The Atlanta Constitution*, April 21, 1907, 11.

³⁵ "Child Labor Bill Passed by House," *The Atlanta Constitution*, July 17, 1912, 5.

³⁶ Jamil S. Zainaldin, and John C. Inscoe, "Progressive Era," *New Georgia Encyclopedia*, 2015. <https://www.georgiaencyclopedia.org/articles/history-archaeology/progressive-era>.

A new annex to the school was completed in 1917. By this point, the school was generally referred to as the English Avenue School, although it would later be renamed “Kingsbery Elementary School” in honor of its principal, Miss Lula Kingsbery. Beginning her tenure in the community in 1909, Kingsbery initially worked as a fourth-grade teacher in the old four-room schoolhouse.³⁷ The following year she became the school’s principal, a position she would hold for 37 years. Kingsbery faced many challenges amidst the chronic overcrowding of her school and the impoverished conditions of the community. Health and hygiene posed a particularly serious problem. In her attendance ledger, Kingsbery scrawled the word “smallpox” next to the names of several absent fourth-grade students.³⁸ Evelyn Witherspoon, a young teacher under Principal Kingsbery, recalled with dread the occasions in which she had to send children home to be treated for lice, “I had my life threatened once because I happened to be the one who handed the note to the child.”³⁹ Poor nutrition was also a significant concern. Since the school did not have a cafeteria, children were required to bring their own lunch. Witherspoon recalled that many children ate only soda crackers because they could be purchased for five cents from the local store.⁴⁰

Aware of the nutritional deficits many of her students experienced, Principal Kingsbery worked with the Atlanta Junior League to institute one of the first free-lunch programs in the city.⁴¹ She also actively worked with the school’s Parent Teacher Association to present educational programs that addressed the particular issues facing community members, including health and hygiene programs. Evelyn Witherspoon recalled that the first time she ever heard the

³⁷ Lula Kingsbery Attendance Ledger, 1909-1910, Box 3; Folder 4, Kingsbery family papers, Kenan Research Center, Atlanta History Center.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Interview with Evelyn Witherspoon by Cliff Kuhn, 13 March 1979, Atlanta History Center.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Kathryn Grayburn, “Her Memory Lane Glows with Color” *The Atlanta Constitution*, October 18, 1964, 18E.

word “syphilis” was at an English Avenue School PTA meeting, and that venereal disease was rampant in the community. Part of the problem stemmed from prostitution: “I heard of a great many of the teenage girls that were going into prostitution, and they would sell for a quarter. They would walk up and down Marietta Street.”⁴² Prostitution was a pervasive problem in mill communities, as women sought to supplement poor wages with additional income.⁴³ Although getting parents to attend the meetings often posed a challenge, English Avenue School PTA meetings served as an early source of health education for the Bellwood residents and sought to ameliorate the issues that plagued their students and families.

Known as “Miss Lee” while a teacher at the English Avenue School, Evelyn Witherspoon taught under Principal Kingsbery from 1918-1923. Her recollections of the community were reflective of her middle-class upbringing and her perspective as an outsider. Frequently referring to the community as a “slum” in her recollections, Witherspoon was particularly frustrated by the poor hygiene and inadequate clothing of many of her students. She recalled several attempts to help her students that backfired. In one instance, Witherspoon took a student who was “terribly deprived” to Davidson’s clothing store in downtown Atlanta and bought him a new outfit. When he came to school the next week with his new shirt covered in black soot, he simply explained: “I had to bring in the coal.”⁴⁴ On another occasion, Witherspoon was so moved by the plight of one particular family that she considered adopting one of the children. The child’s mother had married when she was fourteen years old and eventually bore 20 children. Witherspoon recalled:

She made their little clothes out of flour sacks. They were running barefooted in December when there was sleet on the ground. Beautiful little children. I had two of them in my room. Later they moved out to live in a tent pitched in a pasture on

⁴² Interview with Evelyn Witherspoon by Cliff Kuhn, 13 March 1979, Atlanta History Center.

⁴³ Kuhn, *Contesting the New South Order*, 52.

⁴⁴ Interview with Evelyn Witherspoon by Cliff Kuhn, 13 March 1979, Atlanta History Center.

Bankhead [Bellwood Avenue], just below Ashby St. That's how rural that area was at that time. Just beyond Ashby on Bankhead, a great big pasture and they lived in that tent. Every time it rained they had to go to bed to get out of the water.⁴⁵

Having heard similar accounts of the poverty, overcrowding, and health conditions present in Bellwood, the Women's Missionary Union decided to act. Informed that there were more children per block in Bellwood than in any other area of the city, they decided that the community would greatly benefit from a day nursery.⁴⁶

The Opening of the Andrew Stewart Day Nursery

While the management of the Exposition Cotton Mills did not want any outside interference in the community, the WMU received critical support from Principal Lula Kingsbery and proceeded with their plan to open a day nursery in Bellwood. After several trips to the neighborhood in search of adequate facilities, the location committee rented a three-room cottage at 219 Bellwood Avenue.⁴⁷ With the help of a city missionary working with the First Baptist Church, WMU members visited Bellwood and notified local families that they would be opening a low-cost day nursery in the coming months. Once renovations to the small cottage were completed in the early spring, the nursery was ready to open.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ "History of the Andrew and Frances Stewart Good Will Center," 2.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

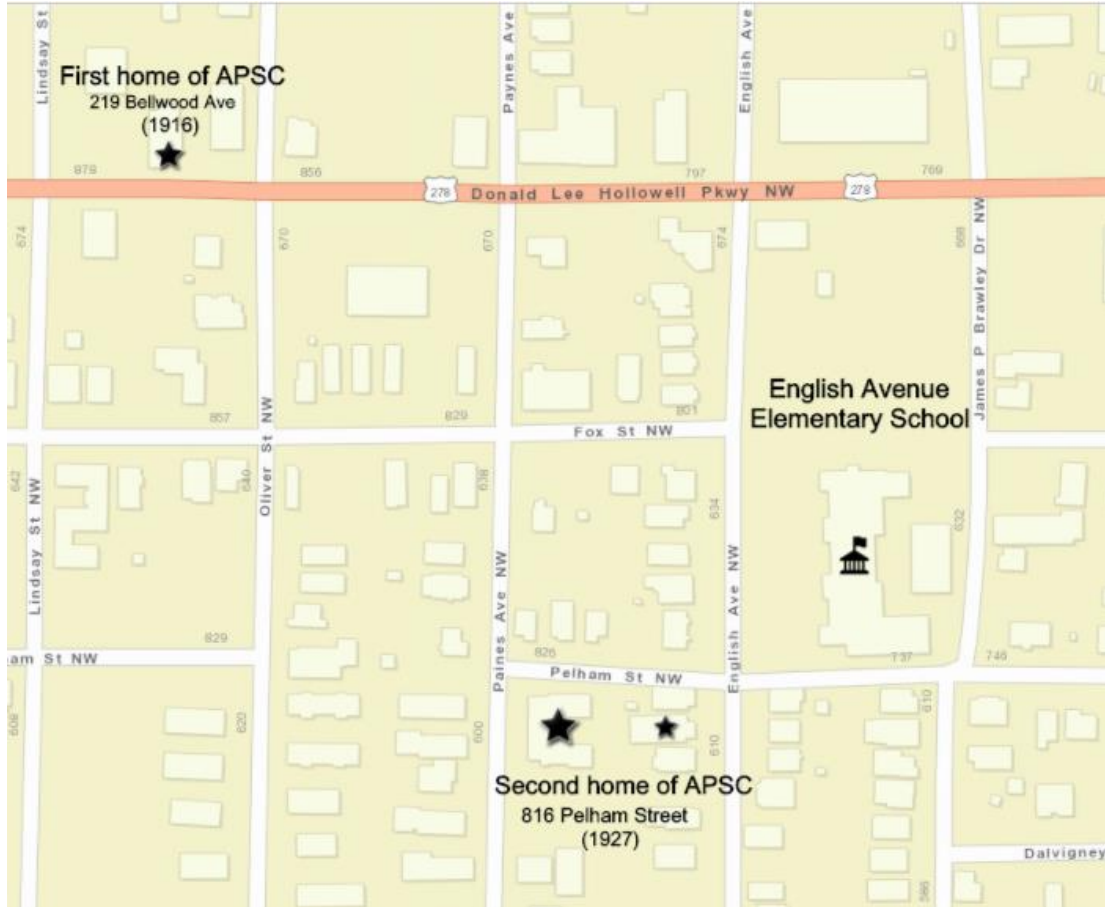


Figure 7 Clockwise from top left: First location of Andrew P. Stewart Center (APSC) in English Avenue, 219 Bellwood Avenue. English Avenue Elementary School (originally Western Heights School, and later Kingsbery Elementary). Second Location of APSC, 816 Pelham Street.

The day nursery opened for the first time early in the morning on March 15, 1917.

Frances Stewart, Ela Key, and Roberta Little were present. As the six o'clock hour neared, seven children and their mothers approached the steps of the cottage.⁴⁸ While the mothers were away at work, their children would be bathed and fed, and play under the watchful eye of the nursery matron. At the end of the work day, the mothers would return to the nursery and walk home together with their children. One wonders what they must have felt that day as they said goodbye to their young children, leaving them in the care of strangers. The WMU women who

⁴⁸ "History of the Andrew and Frances Stewart Good Will Center," 3.

greeted them at the cottage were undoubtedly welcoming and providing a much-needed service to the mothers, but the fact remained that they were outsiders to the community. Their wealth and social status differed markedly from that of the working-class mothers living in Bellwood. Despite their apparent differences, the women and neighborhood mothers shared common ground in their belief that children need to be mothered and cared for, even if their mother must work outside of the home.⁴⁹



Figure 8 Undated photo of a child taking a bath at the Stewart Center. Courtesy of the Andrew P. Stewart Center.

As the days passed and trust developed between the children's mothers and the nursery workers, word of the new day nursery spread among Bellwood residents. Within a few short months, the number of children staying at the day nursery increased from seven to thirty. Soon, the WMU women opened a kindergarten, which enrolled an additional thirty-five children. Older children began coming to the nursery after school, remaining there until their parents returned from work. The small cottage was soon bursting at the seams. As one WMU member later described, the Center became so popular that the small building was quickly overcrowded:

⁴⁹ Georgina Hickey, *Hope and Danger in the New South City*. (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2005), 86-7.

“The good will center was magnetic. It drew them and drew them until it became embarrassing.”⁵⁰

Little Tots of the Andrew Stewart Nursery



A few of the sixty-five children being cared for at 219 Bellwood avenue. The children shown are some of the kindergarten class.

Figure 9 A group of children at the Andrew Stewart Nursery on Bellwood Avenue. “Little Tots of the Andrew Stewart Nursery,” The Atlanta Constitution, June 16, 1918, 10.

Staffing the Center

As the Stewart Center began to draw increasing numbers of children, it became clear to WMU members that trained leadership was necessary to lead and grow the young organization’s efforts. Up until 1924, the Center’s daily programs were operated by a series of local, live-in matrons, with a great deal of guidance and volunteer support from the WMU. Kindergarten teachers were hired based on the recommendation of local Normal Schools. Doctors volunteered their time for health clinics, and Emory University students led clubs for boys and girls. However, the WMU hoped to hire a committed director that had specific training in social work and Christian education to coordinate all of its programs. In 1924, the WMU decided to hire a

⁵⁰ Mrs. T.L. Lewis, “New Home for Good Will Center Donated by Mrs. A.P. Stewart,” *The Atlanta Constitution*, July 15, 1923, D5.

graduate of the WMU Training School in Louisville, Kentucky to direct the operations of the Center.⁵¹



Figure 10 Baptist WMU Training School, Louisville, KY. In author's possession.

Founded in 1907, the WMU Training School was established in Louisville, Kentucky in order “to train women for efficient service in foreign, home, and city missions and as church and Sunday School workers.”⁵² While most male Southern Baptist missionaries attended seminary or had some theological training prior to entering the mission field, this had not been the case for female missionaries before the twentieth century. A movement among Southern Baptists to educate aspiring female missionaries resulted in the WMU Training School, which was funded almost entirely by donations from WMU organizations throughout the South. Women who attended the training school could choose between a two-year Bachelor of Missionary Training or a three-year Master of Missionary Training, both of which involved theological coursework alongside male students at the Southern Baptist Seminary as well as field work at local sites. WMU Training school students also took classes focused on “Personal Service” which was a

⁵¹ "History of the Andrew and Frances Stewart Good Will Center," 7.

⁵² T. Laine Scales, *All That Fits a Woman*. (Macon: Mercer University Press, 2000), 1.

term used by the school and the WMU to describe evangelistic mission work that employed methods of social work.⁵³

Just as work in a settlement afforded women new professional opportunities and alternatives to marriage and motherhood, so too did mission work. Amidst a Southern Baptist culture that generally limited women's roles to that of wife and mother, the possibility of serving as a missionary offered an exciting alternative for women. Many Southern Baptist women grew up reading and hearing stories about the efforts and adventures of foreign missionaries and set their sights on participating in similar work at an early age. For Southern Baptist women in the first half of the twentieth century, the WMU Training School was the primary avenue toward missionary service.

A significant characteristic of the WMU Training School body was its nearly homogenous socio-economic status. Most women who attended the WMU Training School came from poor families and lived in rural areas of the South. This was representative of the denomination at large: while most Southern Baptist leaders, including WMU leadership, were wealthy elites, the majority of Southern Baptists in the United States came from modest means. In order to meet the financial needs of Training School students, WMU members throughout the region raised funds to provide scholarships. Costs at the Training School were kept to a bare minimum by assigning household duties to students, and churches and mission organizations donated food to the school regularly.⁵⁴

⁵³ Scales, *All That Fits a Woman*, 102, 116, 123.

⁵⁴ Scales, *All That Fits a Woman*, 84-92, 67.

The Center's first director to graduate from the WMU Training School was Allie Arendall. As described by a WMU member: "The Baptist women were wise in their choice of Miss Arendall [sic], who has a strong appeal for little children, and sympathy for the working woman..."⁵⁵

Arendall's ability to develop relationships with mothers as well as children was likely aided by the fact that she shared a similar economic background with residents of Bellwood. In contrast to most settlement houses, in which residents largely hailed from middle or upper-class families, most Baptist Good Will Centers were operated by missionaries of similar, if not identical, economic status. In this way, mission workers may have been more approachable to community residents than members of the WMU.



Figure 11 Allie Lee Arendall, the Stewart Center's first Missionary-Director and graduate of the WMU Training School. Courtesy of the Andrew P. Stewart Center.

Growth of Programming at the Stewart Center

WMU members realized that many families in Bellwood received inadequate medical care. They responded by enlisting the services of doctors to examine the children on a regular basis, at no cost to their families. When children were diagnosed with medical conditions that required further treatment, such as hookworm or dental problems, one of the WMU members personally took them to Georgia Baptist Hospital for treatment.

⁵⁵ "Miss Arendall Describes Life At Good-Will Center," *The Atlanta Constitution*, June 2, 1929, page C8.

During the 1920s and 1930s a series of well-baby clinics were held throughout the city of Atlanta. The Stewart Center hosted one in English Avenue on a regular basis. Elizabeth Lundy, who became the Center's director in 1935, described the clinic's early operations:

The Well Baby Clinic was one of the first in the city. This was something new to the community to bring well babies to the doctor once a month for a check up. It was not easy to get them there at first. The doctors and dentist donated their time and services. One of the doctors, Dr. James Hackney, later became Director of the City Health Department... Each month there were two baby clinics, one pre-natal clinic and one clinic just for immunizations. In the spring of each year when typhoid and booster shots were given the crowd in the waiting room overflowed into the yard.⁵⁶



Figure 12 Dr. Dixon Fowler, volunteer doctor at the Stewart Day Nursery. Courtesy of the Andrew P. Stewart Center

Another program offered at the Stewart Center was a mothers' club, in which WMU members taught home-making skills such as cooking and sewing. The club also provided an opportunity for socialization and featured educational lectures.⁵⁷ Even though the WMU women may have believed that the rightful place for a woman was at home as a wife and mother, the fact that their first move was to establish a day nursery indicated an implicit understanding that this

⁵⁶ Elizabeth Lundy, Appendix to "History of Stewart Good Will Center," made available to author by the Andrew P. Stewart Center, Atlanta, Georgia.

⁵⁷ APSC Board minutes, 3/14/1921, 1920-1922 Board Notebook, Georgia Baptist Convention Archives.

was simply not an option for many women, including those who were divorced, widowed, deserted, or had never been married.⁵⁸



Figure 13 Boys Club, in front of the Stewart Center on Bellwood Avenue/Bankhead Highway, 1924. Courtesy of the Andrew P. Stewart Center

Clubs for boys and girls mirroring those held at many Baptist churches (such as “Sunbeams,” “Blue Birds,” “Royal Ambassadors,” and “Girls Auxiliary”) were formed and began meeting regularly during the school year. Many of these clubs taught children about mission work, in addition to providing fun activities and outings. An annual Vacation Bible School (VBS) was initiated in the 1920s and lasted for several weeks each summer. VBS was held in partnership with the Western Heights Baptist Church and drew hundreds of children each summer. Volunteers from Atlanta Baptist churches traveled to the community to help lead activities (many of whom were WMU members). Children memorized bible verses, sang songs, made crafts, and presented plays. Summer VBS always culminated with a special closing ceremony, held either at Western Heights Baptist Church or in the Kingsbery Elementary auditorium. The summer bible school drew children from every corner of the neighborhood,

⁵⁸ Hickey, *Hope and Danger in the New South City*, 86-7.

some of whom had no affiliation with the Stewart Center or the church itself. In 1925, one of the earliest years of VBS, 110 children attended.⁵⁹ By 1942, 230 children and 30 volunteers participated in the annual event.⁶⁰



*Figure 14 Caption reads: "D.V.B.S (Daily Vacation Bible School) 1926."
Courtesy of the Andrew P. Stewart Center.*

In addition to providing activities for children, the Stewart Center also became a source of relief when local families hit hard times. On numerous occasions, the Center put forth rent money for families who had run low. WMU members secured donations of coal from local suppliers (8 tons from Campbell Coal Company in 1922) which they distributed to families when they could not afford it. They collected food and clothing donations, and turned a storage room in the basement of the nursery into a fitting room for shoes. The sick were attended to through home visits and trays of food. WMU members and staff maintained contact with local industries, helping to secure employment for parents and neighbors: in 1922 alone, the Center secured work

⁵⁹ "Vacation School Holds Exercises," *The Atlanta Constitution*, July 19, 1925, A2.

⁶⁰ "Vacation Bible School to Close," *The Atlanta Constitution*, July 3, 1942, 9.

for 118 individuals.⁶¹ The Center also had one of the only telephones in the neighborhood, which residents could use in cases of emergency: 700 phone calls made on behalf of community members were reported in 1925.⁶²

Hoping to help young people escape the financial circumstances of their childhood, WMU members secured scholarship funds for a number of young people in order to advance their education. A 1923 report cites that a “friend of the Goodwill Center” provided the tuition for a student to attend the Mary P. Willingham Industrial School, a finishing school operated and financed by the WMU in Blue Ridge, Georgia.⁶³ The same year, the WMU secured scholarships for two boys to attend Bleckley Memorial Institute (a Baptist boarding school) in Clayton, Georgia. Elizabeth Crews reflected that the Good Will Center helped her receive a scholarship to Greenleaf School of Business.

Many of the Center’s programs included evangelistic efforts, and the early missionary directors meticulously tracked the conversions of children and community members. While they hoped that children and families would attend church upon conversion, they did not emphasize the Baptist denomination over others. As a WMU member stated in a 1923 newspaper article: “The service of the center is undenominational. Although it is sponsored by Baptist women, Methodist students at Emory co-operate, and assistance has been received at times from members of all denominations. The question of church affiliation does not enter into the work of the institution at all.”⁶⁴ Parents were undoubtedly aware of the Center’s evangelistic aims, and responded with varying degrees of enthusiasm. Many families expressed appreciation for the biblical training that their children received and the consolation and hope that religious faith

⁶¹ 1922 Report. Made available to author by the Andrew P. Stewart Center.

⁶² 1925 Report. Made available to author by the Andrew P. Stewart Center.

⁶³ Gordon Sawyer, *Northeast Georgia: A History*, (Charleston, SC: Arcadia Publishing,) 2001.

⁶⁴ “Stewart Good Will Center Will Have Larger Quarters,” *The Atlanta Constitution*, April 22, 1923, page E6.

could offer them. WMU members and the Center's directors saw their efforts in the community as a form of love, and sought to establish a supportive community for children and families alike. A mother named Mrs. Powell reflected on the way that the Center met her family's need for love and compassion, in addition to material assistance: "I continue to be grateful... the workers there at the Goodwill Center [helped] to calm my anxiety when I seemed almost at the end of a very lonely road, and at a time when my children and I needed care and love as well as material things."⁶⁵

Pelham Street

As early as 1921, WMU members began exploring their options to accommodate the ever-increasing number of programs and participants. A 1923 report stated:

We have entirely outgrown our present quarters, and begin to hope the near future will somehow help us to realize our need for a new and larger plant, where we may do better work and reach more of the needy and helpless than we have done in the past. But for the constant kindness and gifts of our dear Mrs. Stewart, we would not know where to turn when things wear out and repairs are needed.⁶⁶

The women decided to look for a new property within the community that would be large enough to include a playground. They soon discovered that the Atlanta Board of Education was preparing to sell the old Western Heights School property on Pelham Street. Located a block away from the English Avenue school, the old four-room school house had been used as an annex after the construction of English Avenue Elementary. After two additions to the English

⁶⁵ Janice Singleton, "History of Stewart Good Will Center, 1950-1966" made available to author by the Andrew P. Stewart Center, Atlanta, Georgia.

⁶⁶ Mrs. Porter King, 1923 report, made available to author by the Andrew P. Stewart Center.

Avenue School in 1917 and 1922, the Atlanta Board of Education decided that the old Western Heights school house was no longer needed.⁶⁷



Figure 15 Newspaper article showing original Stewart Center and English Avenue School Annex. Atlanta Constitution, April 26, 1923, page 6.

Members of the WMU contacted several city councilmen and members of the Board of Education, asking them to consider donating the property to the WMU for the nursery. Initially they were refused, but the women were persistent. They consulted the president of the Board of Education and school superintendent Willis A. Sutton. They spoke at a Board of Education meeting, emphasizing the crowded conditions of English Avenue and the need for more play space for local children. After months of effort, the women successfully convinced the Board of Education to give them the lot, valued at \$2000, for a nominal fee of \$100. Upon securing the property, the women also purchased a narrow lot that connected the property to English Avenue.⁶⁸

For several years, the nursery continued its crowded operations on Bellwood Avenue. The annex was considered unfit for use, and a new building would need to be constructed. Despite the pressing need for more space, the WMU was unable to raise funds for a new building because of their commitment to an ongoing fundraising effort taking place in the Southern Baptist Convention known as the 75 Million Campaign. The 75

⁶⁷ "History of the Andrew and Frances Stewart Good Will Center," 6; "Stewart Good Will Center Will Have Larger Quarters," The Atlanta Constitution, April 22, 1923, E6.

⁶⁸ "History of the Andrew and Frances Stewart Good Will Center," 6.

Million Campaign was a five-year effort to which the WMU, nationally, had committed to raise \$15 million dollars. The Andrew Stewart nursery's board of trustees had been asked to postpone any fundraising for a new building until the campaign had ended. As the WMU anxiously waited to begin fundraising, and as the Stewart Center's programs continued to develop under Allie Arendall's leadership, Frances Stewart became increasingly ill. Sensing that she would not likely recover, the WMU felt that a gesture of gratitude was necessary to convey their appreciation for all that Frances Stewart had done for the Stewart Center. To honor her work, they re-named the organization "The Andrew and Frances Stewart Good Will Center." Frances Stewart passed away on September 9, 1924. In a final act of generosity, she bequeathed \$10,000 to the organization to be used toward the construction of a new building.⁶⁹

Upon completion of the 75 Million Campaign, the WMU quickly obtained architectural plans for the new Center and raised additional funds for its construction. Unlike the small cottage on Bellwood Avenue, the Pelham Street building was designed with the Center's many programs in mind. In addition to larger nursery space, the new building had clinic rooms (one of which included a dental chair), apartments for Arendall and other workers, and a large playground. As construction neared completion, the WMU acquired all of the necessary furnishings and supplies.



Figure 16 Undated photograph of the Pelham Street Center. Courtesy of the Andrew P. Stewart Center

⁶⁹ Equivalent to approximately \$144,000 in 2018



Figure 17 Side view of the Pelham Street location. This building was much larger than the Bellwood Avenue house, and designed specifically with the programs of the Stewart Center in mind. Courtesy of the Andrew P. Stewart Center.

The new Andrew and Frances Stewart Good Will Center opened on October 12, 1927 in the heart of the English Avenue community. Sitting on a hill overlooking the community, English Avenue Elementary School was visible less than a block away. Following the move to Pelham Street, Allie Arendall continued her work in the community for seven years. When she resigned in 1934, a new director was hired from the WMU Training School as Arendall's replacement.

Elizabeth Lundy began her work in the community in January of 1935. She was joined shortly afterward by her friend and WMU Training School classmate, Myrtle Salters. Salters, awaiting a foreign mission appointment to China, expected her stay to be temporary. However, when health issues prevented her from obtaining the necessary medical clearances, she stayed at the Stewart Center as Lundy's assistant director. Both women were born into working class families from the rural South. Salters grew up on a farm near Johnston, South Carolina. When she expressed a desire to attend college, her father mortgaged the farm's most valuable assets, his mules, in order to help pay her tuition. To cover the rest of her expenses, Salters sewed

dresses for her classmates and served as the campus “bell ringer,” alerting all students of changing class times. Lundy’s father owned a small grocery store, and was therefore slightly better off than local farmers. However, he died while Lundy was a teenager, and her mother passed away shortly afterward.

Both women were well equipped to work with the Stewart Center’s children thanks to undergraduate degrees in education and studies in social work and evangelism at the WMU Training School. Their coursework, however, had prepared them for mission work in a segregated context. In the coming decades when African Americans began to press for equality and segregation began to lose its grip on the south, Elizabeth Lundy and Myrtle Salters would be forced to grapple with their beliefs regarding segregation, particularly in light of their role as missionaries. As directors of the Stewart Center, they would also be responsible (alongside the WMU) for formulating programmatic responses to Atlanta’s changing racial climate. Their first encounter with racial transition took place in English Avenue in the late 1940s.

Segregation and the Stewart Center

The Stewart Center grew by leaps and bounds in the first several years of its existence, providing much needed services and enjoyable activities for many in the English Avenue community. However, not all were welcome at the Stewart Center: for the first fifty years of its existence, the Andrew P. Stewart Center was for “whites only.” As the Center was founded in a Southern city during the height of Jim Crow segregation, this fact is unsurprising. Although English Avenue was a predominately white, working class neighborhood when the Stewart Center began working in the community in 1916, African Americans had always lived in their midst, on adjacent streets and in nearby communities to the south and west of English Avenue.

In the 1940s, local and national forces converged to bring an influx of African American residents to the community. When the United States entered World War II, Atlanta experienced an influx in population as people moved to the city looking for jobs in wartime industries. When the war ended, thousands more flocked to the city as soldiers returned to Atlanta in search of jobs and eager to buy homes and start their families. These factors, combined with a lack of new residential construction during the war, led to serious housing pressures that disproportionately impacted African Americans. As one author described it, housing pressures “combined to choke the city’s black neighborhoods, where tiny frame houses stood so closely side by side their roofs looked like a single tar-paper canopy.”⁷⁰ Many of the early African American pioneers into formerly white neighborhoods did so on Atlanta’s west side. As English Avenue was located on the outskirts of several large African American communities, (it’s southern and western borders: Simpson and Ashby Streets, had long been considered racial lines), it was one of the earliest sites of racial transition in Atlanta.

Exacerbating the housing shortage was an onslaught of urban renewal projects taking place in the city, including highway construction and slum clearances that demolished entire neighborhoods and uprooted thousands of black Atlantans. Atlanta officials sought to replace the cleared housing and alleviate the housing shortage by constructing public housing units. According to historian Andrew Wiese, these public housing projects “represented a marked improvement over most of the housing stock available to blacks; however, since federal regulations tied new construction to the demolition of ‘slums,’ public projects did nothing to ease the shortage.”⁷¹ In English Avenue, Herndon Homes was constructed in the eastern portion of the neighborhood, adjacent to the African American Gray Street School. Formerly the site of

⁷⁰ Frederick Allen, *Atlanta Rising: The Invention of an International City 1946-1996*. (Atlanta: Longstreet Press) 7.

⁷¹ Wiese, *Places of Their Own*, 176.

several residential streets, the homes were demolished and the streets erased as a slum clearance project. A second housing project, Eagan Homes, opened in nearby Vine City the same year. Despite the addition of thousands of public housing units in Atlanta, the shortage continued.



Figure 18 Children stand in front of a home on Western Avenue, located in the English Avenue community. Formerly an all-white street, these houses were demolished amidst "slum clearance" and replaced with the Alonzo Herndon Homes. Circa 1940. Kenan Research Center at the Atlanta History Center.

Prior to the post-war housing crisis, the conditions in many African American neighborhoods were substandard due to city negligence and overcrowding that resulted from segregation. While African Americans constituted a third of the city's population, they occupied only one-fifth of its land area, most living in six aging neighborhoods that splayed outward from the central business district.⁷² Within these neighborhoods, African Americans lived in dilapidated bungalows and shotgun houses constructed closely together along unpaved streets. A 1947 survey observed that 72 percent of black-occupied dwellings were substandard. Despite this fact, vacancy rate in black neighborhoods was microscopic.⁷³ With such limited housing

⁷² Wiese, *Places of Their Own*, 174.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 175.

options under segregation and new housing construction not yet keeping up with demand, many African Americans, armed with hard-earned savings had little choice but to “pioneer”⁷⁴ into the fringes of white neighborhoods.

As African Americans desperately searched for decent homes during the post-war housing crisis, some found that homeowners on the fringes of white neighborhoods were willing to sell to them (albeit, frequently at inflated prices). Despite the potential violence to be faced by angry white neighbors, many African Americans took the risk. While homes in white neighborhoods were often already fifty or more years old, they usually had a significant advantage over working-class black neighborhoods in the way of basic improvements like paved roads, street lighting, and sewers.⁷⁵ In addition, homes in these neighborhoods typically had much larger lot sizes than those in most working-class African American neighborhoods, which were frequently land-locked by segregated residential patterns and therefore built homes close together.

Atlanta’s white residents frequently used threats or acts of violence to frighten African Americans from encroaching upon formerly “white” areas. In English Avenue, a segregationist organization known as the Columbians actively worked to “defend” the area from racial transition. Founded in 1946, the Columbians targeted their recruitment efforts among the working class, including workers at the Exposition Cotton Mills. Members of the Columbians patrolled transitional neighborhoods with pistols, threatening or physically beating any African American who had the misfortune to encounter them. Afterwards, members of the Columbians were often given medals from the organization for their acts of violence in defense of white

⁷⁴ Pioneer is Wiese’s term

⁷⁵ Ronald Bayor, *Race and the Shaping of Twentieth-Century Atlanta*. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press), 134.

neighborhoods. Columbian leader Homer Loomis specifically described the “threat” they sought to ward off in English Avenue: “Here on Ashby Street, the Negroes are driving a wedge toward Bankhead Avenue. And here on Chestnut they’re getting another wedge started...Objective of the enemy here is to cut off this Western Heights section---and make it an ‘island’ of whites surrounded by Negroes. Then they want to keep moving on in.” While the efforts of the Columbians were short lived, after a plot to bomb city hall, police headquarters, and other facilities was uncovered, the organization’s charter was revoked in 1946 and many of its leaders were jailed, violence and intimidation would continue to be employed by whites elsewhere in their attempts to ward off potential black residents.⁷⁶

Educational Inequality in English Avenue

Educational inequality between the races was readily apparent in English Avenue. While Atlanta school officials had worked diligently to meet the educational needs of the city’s white children, schools for African American children were not given equal attention or resources. In English Avenue, many African American children passed the English Avenue school on their long walk to the Gray Street School, where they attended overcrowded, double sessions for half of a school day.

In September 1948, a group of approximately sixty African Americans attended an Atlanta Board of Education meeting to protest the city’s unequal system of public education. Presenting a petition that criticized the Board’s “policy of denying to Negro school children educational facilities and services equal to those offered to white public school children in

⁷⁶ Kevin Kruse, *White Flight: Atlanta and the Making of Modern Conservatism*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press) 2005, 46-47.

Atlanta”⁷⁷ the group pressed for the expansion and improvement of schools for African American children. The 1948 petition did not call for the integration of schools, instead calling for the fulfillment of educational equality promised under Plessy vs. Ferguson, the law of “separate but equal.” The 1948 petitioners pointed out the huge disparities that existed between white and black schools and highlighted the plight of their children who sought to gain an education in overcrowded, under-resourced schools across the city.

Most white schools had eliminated double sessions by 1917, but black schools were forced to continue double, sometimes triple sessions with much higher teacher-pupil ratios.⁷⁸ The inferior physical conditions of many black schools were well documented. The 1921-1922 Strayer-Engelhardt survey of Atlanta Public Schools reported that 66 percent of the black schools were considered unsafe for use and lacked adequate playgrounds, classroom space, and equipment. Most black schools also did not have auditoriums or lunchrooms. The survey pointed out that “no plan for the adequate housing of colored children has ever existed in Atlanta.”⁷⁹ While some improvement in school facilities took place in subsequent decades, black schools were still in no way equal to white schools. Vast differences in per-pupil expenditures existed between white and black schools and the spending gap continued to widen. By the 1947-48 school year, twice as much money was being spent on the education of white children than on black children. In that year, “the average white school child received his education in a school having facilities representing an investment of \$383.87 per pupil.’ For blacks the investment was \$153.42 per pupil. The disparity in this case would increase by 1948-49.”⁸⁰

⁷⁷ “Negroes Petition Board for Equal School Facilities,” *The Atlanta Constitution*, September 15, 1948, page 21.

⁷⁸ Bayor, *Race and the Shaping of Twentieth-Century Atlanta*, 217, 209.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 205.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 216.

Included in the 1948 petition to the Atlanta Board of Education was a request that two white schools be converted to schools for African American children. One of the two schools requested for transfer was the English Avenue School (which by this time had been renamed Kingsbery Elementary). When brought to a vote before the Atlanta Board of Education two years later, sponsors of the resolution explained that “Negroes practically surround the school”⁸¹ and indicated that many African Americans had moved to the area after being displaced by highway construction. Both Kingsbery Elementary and the Stewart Center began to see a drop in white enrollment during the 1940s. The Stewart Center’s Vacation Bible School had an enrollment of 230 children in 1943. Two years later, in 1945 VBS enrollment dropped to 186, and to 158 in 1946.⁸² Between June 1948 and June 1950, the Kingsbery School’s white student enrollment had decreased by 353 students. The massive school, which had undergone numerous additions and renovations in order to accommodate the chronically overcrowded community, now couldn’t fill its classrooms. By 1950, Kingsbery had fallen to a ratio of one classroom for every thirteen students.⁸³

Meanwhile, the growing number of African American children living in the neighborhood attended the overcrowded Gray Street School, located nearly a mile away. In 1948, the school ran all double sessions for its 837 students, in a building with faulty plumbing and broken windows. Many students had to cross a span of twenty-two railroad tracks in order to get to the Gray Street School, presenting a serious safety hazard.⁸⁴ Faced with these facts and

⁸¹ “Board of Education Turns White School Over to Negroes,” *Atlanta Daily World*, June 15, 1950, page 4.

⁸² “Vacation Bible School to Close,” *The Atlanta Constitution*, July 3, 1942, 9; 1945 and 1946 reports, made available to author by the Andrew P. Stewart Center.

⁸³ “Board of Education Turns White School Over to Negroes,” *Atlanta Daily World*, June 15, 1950, page 4.

⁸⁴ C. Lamar Weaver, “School Facilities Inadequate” *Atlanta Daily World*, September 12, 1948, 1; C. Lamar Weaver, “Hazards and Neglect Handicap to Students,” *Atlanta Daily World*, September 26, 1948, 1.

the clear demographic shift taking place in the area, the school board made plans to convert Kingsbery Elementary to a school for African American children.



Figure 19 Gray Street School students cross hazardous railroad tracks on their way to school in English Avenue. "Hazards and Neglect Handicap to Schools" Atlanta Daily World, September 26, 1948, page 1.

White members of the community "bitterly protested the conversion of the school to Negro use."⁸⁵ More than 400 white residents held a meeting to organize their efforts against the school conversion. They drafted a petition that stated: "We the parents and property owners of the Northwest section of the City of Atlanta demand that we be privileged to keep Kingsbery School because of the need of white children in this area."⁸⁶ Despite opposition from white residents, the Board of Education maintained its position that "the school could better serve the community as an elementary school for Negro students."⁸⁷ The name of the school was reverted back to English Avenue Elementary School and opened to African American students on September 1, 1950.

⁸⁵ "Board of Education Stand Pat on Kingsbery Decision," *Atlanta Daily World*, July 12, 1950, page 4.

⁸⁶ "School Shift to Negro Use Stirs Whites," *The Atlanta Constitution*, July 7, 1950, page 2.

⁸⁷ "Board of Education Stand Pat on Kingsbery Decision," *Atlanta Daily World*, July 12, 1950, page 4.



Figure 20 Second grade students at Kingsbery Elementary School, March 1949. Four months after this picture was taken, the school board voted to change the racial designation of the school, effective September 1950. Courtesy of Ellie Gibson Petty.

The timing of the Kingsbery School's conversion can certainly be attributed to rapid demographic change in the area, but it is also indicative of significant economic and political gains made by the African American community. Black incomes nearly tripled during the 1940s. Although their per capita income in 1949 still remained less than half that of whites, many African Americans had prospered from the industrial war boom or military service and were eager to buy homes and land.⁸⁸ Politically, African Americans had been barred from meaningful political participation by the all-white primary for decades. Its elimination by the Supreme Court in 1946 gave African Americans leverage in Atlanta politics. African Americans had long dealt with substandard housing and few city services such as paved streets, sewers, or streetlights, but without the power to influence elected officials with their vote, city leaders turned a deaf ear.

⁸⁸ Wiese, *Places of Their Own*, 168, 174.

With the elimination of the white primary and successful voter registration drives, the African American population of Atlanta now exerted a formidable political force, making up a quarter of the local electorate. They immediately began to use their influence to secure improved services for their communities. The call for the transfer of Kingsbery Elementary School to the black community was only a small piece of a much larger effort to remedy the city's unjust educational system.⁸⁹

White bitterness and frustration would remain for several years following the loss of Kingsbery. In December of 1960, nine years after its conversion, a bomb exploded near the Pelham Street entrance of the school. Believed by many to be racially motivated, the school had been the site of a prayer meeting, followed by an anti-segregation march the previous afternoon.⁹⁰ The explosion broke windows, ruined the auditorium and two classrooms, and sent chunks of pavement onto the roofs of nearby homes. The culprits were never identified.⁹¹

White Flight in English Avenue

Upon the rezoning of the English Avenue School, whites abandoned the community in droves. As white residents of English Avenue deserted the neighborhood, the community's churches also left in search of whiter pastures. English Avenue Methodist Church, Western Heights Baptist Church, Fox Street Methodist Church and several other white churches quickly sold their buildings to African American congregations and relocated.⁹² The decision the white churches made to relocate was motivated by several factors, including a desire to prevent the

⁸⁹ Wiese, *Places of Their Own*, 183.

⁹⁰ Laura Drummond, *National Register of Historic Places Nomination: English Avenue Elementary School, Atlanta, Georgia*. Historic Preservation Division, Georgia Department of Natural Resources. 2018.

⁹¹ "No New Leads in School Bombing," *Atlanta Daily World*, December 14, 1960, page 1.

⁹² "Board of Education Turns White School Over to Negroes," *Atlanta Daily World*, June 15, 1950, page 4.

dramatic decline in white membership that they assumed would follow neighborhood racial transition. It was also a financial move, as a church's financial well-being was directly tied to its membership. The willingness of these churches to abandon the communities they served amidst racial transition exposes the fact that "even the practice of evangelism was stunted in many white churches by a racist social imagination that limited cross-racial interaction—including communication of their beloved gospel of "good news." When churches abandoned their communities as African Americans moved into the neighborhood, evangelism took a back-seat to fear, self-preservation, and racism. "To use the language of the old hymn, many ties bound white Atlanta congregations that found themselves in the midst of neighborhood racial transition—Christian love, yes, but also white racial identity. Neighborhood racial transition presented congregations with an opportunity to examine and reconsider those ties."⁹³ Amidst one of the earliest racial transitions in the city, the churches of English Avenue did not waste much time examining their convictions and quickly chose their ties to whiteness over Christian love.

As a Christian organization that held evangelism as one of its primary goals, the Stewart Center was also presented with the opportunity to examine its ties to Christian love and white racial identity. The organization appears to have remained slightly longer than the community's churches: while the Western Heights and Fox Street churches transitioned out of the neighborhood, they used the Stewart Center's chapel-recreation building for their meetings and worship services. The Center did not remain long afterward. As described several years later by a WMU member: "Owing to city growth and community changes, the Atlanta Baptist W.M.U.

⁹³ Preston Hogue. "The Tie that Binds: White Church Response to Neighborhood Racial Change in Atlanta, 1960-1985." Atlanta Studies.

Association felt the need to relocate the Good Will Center.”⁹⁴ Beyond this brief statement, nothing else was recorded about how the WMU and Stewart Center directors perceived the “community changes” that took place in English Avenue, nothing to shed light on the decision-making process that led to the Center’s relocation. It is unclear how the Center’s directors, Elizabeth Lundy and Myrtle Salters felt about the move, but they assisted the WMU members in their search for a new community to continue their work. Clearly, the Stewart Center’s ties to white racial identity superseded its ties to evangelism during the racial transition of English Avenue.

Upon identifying a suitable property in southeast Atlanta, the WMU sold the buildings in English Avenue in 1949. The chapel-recreation building, only six years old, was sold to “St. James Negro Baptist Church” and the main building was sold to be used as “a negro apartment house.”⁹⁵ After thirty-three long, meaningful years in the English Avenue Community, the Stewart Center left in the blink of an eye.



Figure 21 St. James Baptist Church, English Avenue. Originally built as the Chapel-Recreation building for the Stewart Center, the building is still owned by the African American church that purchased it in 1949. Photo by author.

⁹⁴ Long, “History of Andrew and Frances Stewart Good Will Center, 1916-1952,” 4.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 5.

While white residents of English Avenue viewed the conversion of Kingsbery Elementary as an unjust loss and fled the neighborhood in fear of plummeting property values and race-mixing, it represented a small victory for the African American community. The conversion of Kingsbery was certainly a political victory for African American leaders, but more significantly it was a victory for the neighborhood's black children. Now able to attend English Avenue Elementary, children received a full day's instruction in a larger school, much closer to their homes. However, greater change would be required in order to ensure quality education for all of Atlanta's African American children. For the thousands of black students attending double sessions in overcrowded, substandard schools across the city, piece-meal measures would no longer suffice. Atlanta's African Americans would use their powerful voting bloc to bar bond referendums that discriminated against them, and would continue to demand better schools for their children. The results of their efforts, coupled with white fears of school integration following *Brown v. Board of Education*, would accelerate school improvements for African American children in the coming decade. In its new home in Reynoldstown, the Andrew Stewart Good Will Center would find itself at the center of these changes once again.

3 Reynoldstown: 1950-1974

“I didn’t feel like I belonged anywhere. But yet, when I came to the Center, all that disappeared, even if it was just for a few hours or a day.”¹

Sheila Ann (Ashley) Schmidt



*Figure 22 153 Stovall Street, 1955.
Courtesy of the Andrew P. Stewart Center*

In late 1949, the WMU purchased a building on the corner of Stovall Street and Mauldin Street in southeast Atlanta. The property was shaded by a number of large old oak trees and surrounded by a spacious yard. Built in the 1920s, the building had formerly been home to a grocery store, with the upstairs serving as a residence for the owners. A streetcar line passed along the southern wall of the building. Located in a neighborhood now known as Reynoldstown, in the 1950s local residents understood the neighborhood to be comprised of two distinct white and black communities with different names.²

¹ Interview with Sheila Ann Schmidt by Megan McDonald, 21 November 2014, in author’s possession.

² When the City of Atlanta established the Neighborhood Planning Unit (NPU) system in 1974, the entire community (bounded by Pearl Street, I-20, Moreland Avenue, and the CSX rail line) came to be known as Reynoldstown, replacing colloquial, race-based definitions of the community.

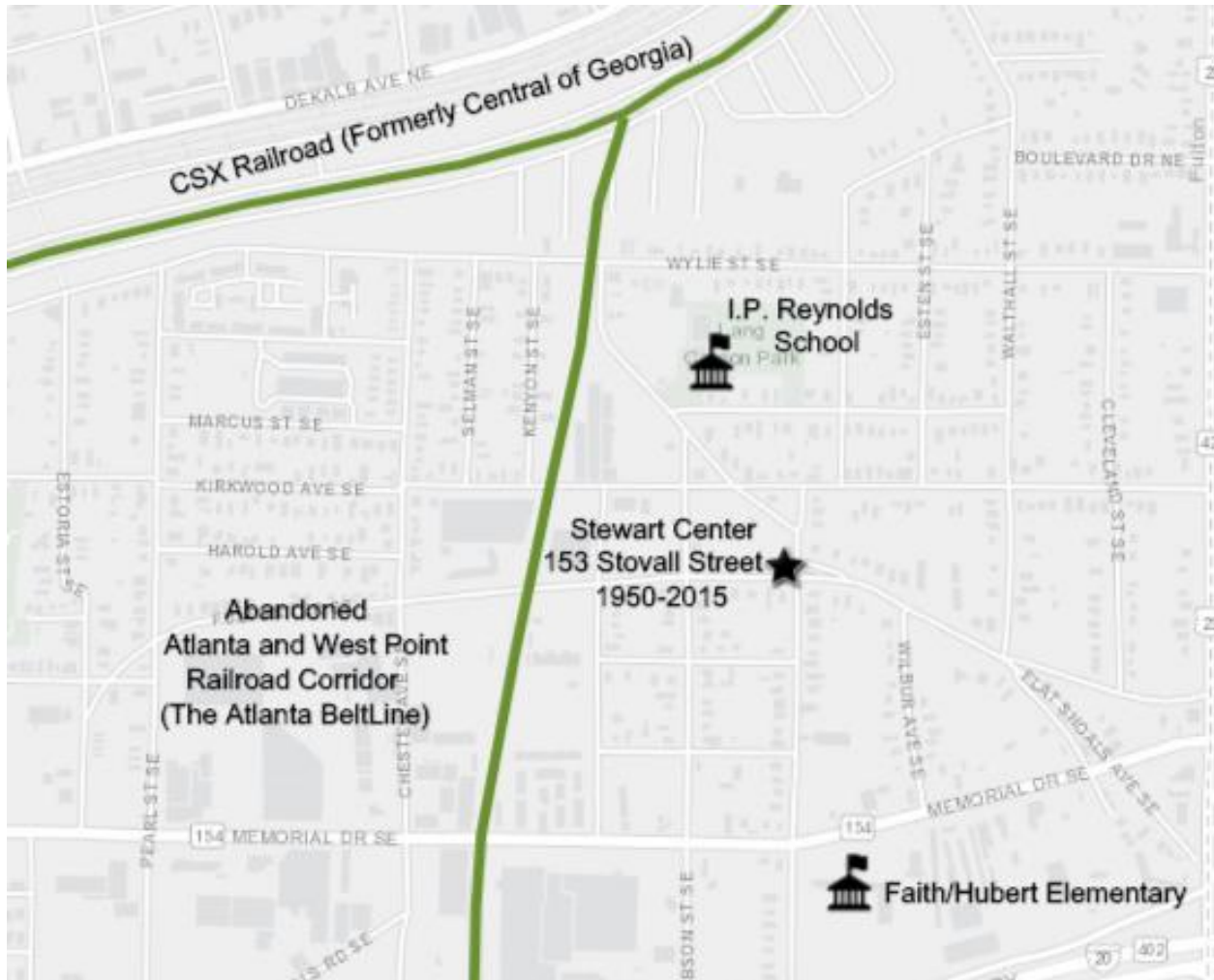


Figure 23 Location of the Andrew P. Stewart Center in Reynoldstown, 1950-2015.

The Stewart Center’s new location on Stovall Street was surrounded by a white, working class community generally referred to as “east Atlanta” by its residents.³ Located immediately east of the Cabbagetown mill community, residents of the community worked in a number of local industries. A small sample of white people who grew up in the community during the 1950s shared that their parents worked at the Fulton Bag and Cotton Mill, the A&P Bakery, a venetian blind factory, Rich’s department store, and Sears. Several white families also owned small businesses, including a small grocery store and a furniture store. The neighborhood was

³ Whether this was simply a geographical descriptor or meant to associate residents with the nearby East Atlanta neighborhood is unclear.

located within walking distance of Fair Street (later Memorial Drive) where employment opportunities were available in a number of industries including the Pittsburgh Plate and Class company, Atlanta Dairies, and a motorcycle parts warehouse.

A half-mile northwest of the Stewart Center along the railroad corridor was a long-standing African American community known as Reynoldstown. Predating the white “east Atlanta” community by several decades, Reynoldstown was settled by freed slaves following the Civil War, who moved to the area to work for the railroad.⁴ Thought to be named for a former slave named Madison Reynolds, Reynoldstown began as a small settlement along the Central of Georgia, and extended southward after a trolley route connected Wylie Street to Fair Street (later Memorial Drive). A small black commercial district developed along Wylie Street.⁵ Despite the close proximity of these white and black communities, under segregation they worked in separate industries and their children attended separate schools.

White children attended Faith Elementary School on Memorial Drive, which had originally been founded as a private school in 1893 by local resident, John Faith.⁶ Children living in the community generally shared similar economic circumstances. As one woman who attended both Faith School and the Stewart Center recalled: “We didn’t have much money but we didn’t know we were poor...Most of the kids at Faith were from millworkers families. There was a few kids whose families had a little bit of money, maybe owned a gas station or something, but for the most part it was millworkers. And we all had about the same as far as clothes and houses.”⁷

⁴ Steven H. Moffson, *National Register of Historic Places Nomination: Reynoldstown Historic District, Atlanta, Georgia*. Historic Preservation Division, Georgia Department of Natural Resources. 2003.

⁵ Moffson, *National Register of Historic Places Nomination: Reynoldstown Historic District, Atlanta, Georgia*.

⁶ John F. Faith Elementary School, *History of Faith Elementary School, 1893-1937*. (Atlanta, 1937).

⁷ Interview with Frances Fortner Anderson by Megan McDonald, 18 November 2014, in author’s possession.



Figure 24 Original 1893 Faith School on Flat Shoals Ave. From "History of Faith Elementary School, 1893-1937." Atlanta, GA. 1937.

Programming in Reynoldstown

The "Baptist Stewart Good Will Center" officially opened its doors to the Reynoldstown community on July 10, 1950 after several months of renovations. Many of the programs from English Avenue carried over to Reynoldstown. The day nursery was the first program to open in the community, continuing the organization's initial purpose of supporting working parents. Attendance records from the Center's first months in Reynoldstown indicate that six children who had stayed in the nursery in English Avenue continued to attend in the new location, having either moved to the community or traveling across town to get there.⁸ Nursery children arrived at the Center at 7:30 am for breakfast and a devotion, and then walked up the hill to school at Faith Elementary. After school let out, they returned to the Center until their parents came home from work. Vacation Bible School continued in Reynoldstown, now operating in partnership with East Side Baptist Church, also located on Stovall Street.

⁸ "Report for July and August 1950." Made available to author by the Andrew P. Stewart Center, Atlanta, Georgia.

While many of the Center's original programs carried over to Reynoldstown, there were also some changes. According to a WMU member, the day nursery was discontinued in 1963 due to "stricter requirements of the city regarding personnel."⁹ A second change was the elimination of health and dental clinics and the discontinuation of well-baby clinics. Space might certainly have been an issue: the Reynoldstown building was much smaller than the one in English Avenue, and lacked the specialized medical facilities that had been incorporated into the design of the Pelham Street Center.



Figure 25 Children play in the swimming pool, circa 1950. Courtesy of the Andrew P. Stewart Center.

While the Stovall Street building was smaller than the one on Pelham Street, the property was particularly conducive to the Center's many recreational activities. A large playground was equipped with modern equipment, "flexer-racers," and a concrete-block pool. A woodshop was constructed on the rear of the Stovall Street building, from which Myrtle Salters led a variety of craft and woodworking projects. A chapel/recreation building was constructed in 1951 that was

⁹ Long, "History of Andrew and Frances Stewart Good Will Center, 1916-1952," 7.

used for basketball, shuffleboard, Christmas Pageants, and WMU meetings. The Center's baseball team had plenty of space to practice, and metal cages were hung over the gym windows to protect them from stray baseballs. Boys and Girls clubs remained immensely popular.

Programming at the Stewart Center in the 1950s was much less focused on the physical and material needs of neighborhood children. During the city and nation's post-war economic boom, the white working-class families of Reynoldstown during this era benefitted from all time low unemployment levels in the city and a thriving economy. Programming in Reynoldstown therefore took on a greater emphasis on education. The Center opened a lending library to local children and started a literacy class for adults. Lundy and Salters frequently emphasized their pride in students who graduated high school and attended college:

Much credit is due those who continue in school until graduation and particularly to the ones who find it possible to attend college. On the other hand, it is a disappointment to see those who fail to measure up to expectations and become 'drop-outs.' This often leads to early marriages or the pathway to troubles, and assuming of adult responsibilities before they reach adult-hood. As a result, there is unrest, insecurity and often time broken homes.¹⁰



Figure 26 A group of boys stand in front of the chapel-recreation building at the Stewart Center, early 1950s. Courtesy of the Andrew P. Stewart Center.

¹⁰ Singleton, "History of Stewart Good Will Center, 1950-1966," 12.



Figure 27 Adult Literacy Class at the Stewart Good Will Center. Circa 1966. Courtesy of the Southern Baptist Historical Library and Archives.

While neighborhood families generally did not struggle to feed their families, Lundy and Salters knew that some programs that the Center offered (like music lessons or trips to summer camp) would have been unaffordable for many. Working together with the WMU, Salters and Lundy frequently fundraised for such expenses.

Many who attended the Stewart Center during the 1950s have described the way the Stewart Center provided for their emotional development and needs for community. For example, Sheila Schmidt recalled the many occasions in which Miss Lundy and Miss Salters offered a listening ear while she dealt with abandonment by her mother and adoption by her grandparents.¹¹ Frances Anderson summed up a sentiment echoed by many, that the Center “gave me a sense of belonging somewhere.”¹²

¹¹ Interview with Sheila Ann Schmidt by Megan McDonald, 21 November 2014, in author’s possession.

¹² Interview with Frances Fortner Anderson by Megan McDonald, 18 November 2014, in author’s possession.

With 15 years of experience in English Avenue under their belts, Myrtle Salters and Elizabeth Lundy had crafted a well-established set of programs that were appealing to children. Lundy, remembered by many who went to the Center to be prim and proper and immaculately dressed, typically led programs for girls. Meanwhile Salters, who was “good with a saw,” loved to go fishing, and was known for her quick wit, generally worked with the boys.¹³ Salters and Lundy maintained contacts with Georgia Tech students and men’s bible study groups to assist in leading programs for boys. They took children to summer camp at Ridgecrest every year. They established a close working relationship with the local Baptist church: East Side Baptist, with whom they operated a Vacation Bible School each summer.



Figure 28 Myrtle Salters, Courtesy of the Andrew P. Stewart Center



Figure 29 Elizabeth Lundy, Courtesy of the Andrew P. Stewart Center

In many ways, the Stewart Center’s first decade in Reynoldstown seemed to be a return to the earlier, idyllic decades in English Avenue before questions of race erupted in the community around them. However, despite the apparent calm in Reynoldstown during the 1950s

¹³ Ibid.

and early 1960s, fear and conflict over school integration were rapidly spreading across the city and the South. The decade after leaving English Avenue served only as a brief intermission in the Stewart Center's struggle to understand the role of race in its programming. The Stewart Center's experiences in Reynoldstown provide a first-hand account of how one community was impacted by the long, drawn-out battle to integrate the Atlanta Public School system.

White Flight in Reynoldstown

As was the case with Kingsbery Elementary in English Avenue, Faith Elementary School was a segregated school for the community's white children. When the Center moved to Reynoldstown in 1950, the school was not yet facing the racial pressures that had led to Kingsbery's conversion. However, by the early 1950s Atlanta's African American community had reached the conclusion that their children would never receive an equal education to that of their white peers under segregation. Atlanta educator Benjamin Mays estimated that the cost of bringing African American schools up to the standard of white schools would require as much as \$100 million or more, and surmised that: "the Atlanta Board will hardly spend more money on Negro schools than it spends on white schools in order to equalize the Negro schools." As a result, in the same year that the Stewart Center moved to Reynoldstown, a suit was filed in US district court to end segregation in Atlanta's public schools.¹⁴

The Atlanta desegregation suit, coupled with the impending *Brown versus Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas* ruling, instilled widespread fear among white southerners and moved Georgia lawmakers to action. Realizing that blatant inequality in the schools threatened the survival of segregation, Georgia Governor Herman Talmadge embarked on "the greatest

¹⁴ Bayor, *Race and the Shaping of Twentieth-Century Atlanta*, 218

spending binge in state history,”¹⁵ initiating a tremendous, state-wide school construction campaign known as the Minimum Foundation Program for Education (MFPE). Funded by a three percent sales tax, the campaign sought to preserve segregation by proving that the state could successfully establish schools on a separate but equal basis. Between 1952-1962, after decades of neglect and broken promises, the state of Georgia constructed approximately 500 new schools for African American children, replacing and consolidating nearly 3,000 inadequate facilities. These schools were not built in racially transitional areas. Instead, new schools were built within the black community in an attempt to direct blacks away from white schools. Under MFPE, hundreds of schools were also constructed for white children, although the international style design rendered them architecturally indistinguishable from those constructed for African American children. Other southern states enacted similar programs, and thousands of such schools were constructed across the south, sometimes referred to as “equalization schools” or “Supreme Court schools.”¹⁶ At the height of the MFPE campaign, local black leaders of Reynoldstown petitioned the Atlanta Board of Education to build an elementary school in the northern part of the neighborhood for African American children, who were not permitted to attend the all-white Faith Elementary. The Board acquiesced, and in 1958, the Isaiah P. Reynolds School opened to the neighborhood’s African American children.¹⁷

In 1961, nine black students integrated four public high schools in Atlanta without any of the violence or fanfare that took place in Little Rock, New Orleans, or elsewhere. Praised across the nation, Atlanta’s school integration appeared to be an overwhelming success to outsiders. As

¹⁵ Allen, *Atlanta Rising*, 46.

¹⁶ Steven Moffson. “Equalization Schools in Georgia’s African-American Communities, 1951-1970.” Historic Preservation Division, Georgia Department of Natural Resources. 2010; Bayor, *Race and the Shaping of Twentieth-Century Atlanta*, 219.

¹⁷ PEQ and MXD Collaborative, *Reynoldstown: 2000 and Beyond. A Neighborhood Master Plan*. (Atlanta: n.p., 2000), 22.

described by historian Alton Hornsby: “For the next several days, Atlantans were patting themselves on the back as the future of their town looked very good, indeed.”¹⁸ However, it quickly became obvious to Atlanta’s African American community that the integration of the schools was superficial, doing almost nothing to remedy the gross inequalities that existed between white and black schools. The city’s integration plan called for desegregation of one grade per year, beginning with the twelfth grade in fall 1960. The plan required black students to apply for transfer to a white school, initially involving psychological and intelligence testing, among other criteria that was not required of white transfer students. While these tests were ultimately dropped, black students were still forced to apply for transfer to white schools, even if it was the closest school to their home.¹⁹ An Atlanta NAACP official commenting on the process said: “We’ve got a saying around here that it’s easier to go to Yale than to transfer from one public school to another in Atlanta.”²⁰

In 1963, after two years of token integration, Atlanta was ranked next to last among southern cities in the total number of students desegregated. Black schools remained overcrowded despite acknowledgement by the school superintendent that overcrowding had a negative impact on a student’s education. Afraid of white backlash, school officials refused to transfer sufficient numbers of blacks from overcrowded schools to underutilized white schools. While school officials delayed and avoided widespread integration, they continued to build new classrooms and facilities, even though integration would have cost the city far less.²¹

¹⁸ Alton Hornsby, Jr. “Black Public Education in Atlanta, Georgia, 1954-1973: From Segregation to Segregation,” *The Journal of Negro History*, Vol. 76 #1 (1991), pp 21-47.

¹⁹ Bayor, *Race and the Shaping of Twentieth-Century Atlanta*, 223, 224, 228.

²⁰ Hornsby. “Black Public Education in Atlanta, Georgia, 1954-1973: From Segregation to Segregation,” 29.

²¹ Bayor, *Race and the Shaping of Twentieth-Century Atlanta*, 229, 226

Murphy High School was one of the four original schools to be integrated, located only a mile and a half from the Stewart Center. As most children living in Reynoldstown attended Roosevelt High school in Grant Park (a white neighborhood), early integration efforts at the high school level do not appear to have had a direct impact on neighborhood children. However, the school district had begun employing various stalling tactics to prevent integration that would directly affect Faith Elementary School. On occasions when an underutilized white school was located in an area of racial transition, school officials converted the school to use by black students, rather than integrating the lower grades (which were not yet required under the integration plan). School officials changed the racial designation of twenty-seven formerly white elementary schools between 1961 and 1971, including Faith Elementary School.²² On February 16, 1964, the newly named Charles DuBois (“C.D.”) Hubert School held its dedication services, now a school designated for African American children.²³

The Stewart Center Responds to Racial Transition

In 1964, the WMU members and directors of the Stewart Center found themselves in an identical position to that which they had experienced in English Avenue fifteen years earlier. They were faced with a choice: they could resist desegregation like so many of the institutions surrounding them, or they could forge a different path by remaining in the community and opening their doors to African American children. A WMU member framed the dilemma as a new challenge:

By the year 1966 changing conditions again brought pressures not only in this community but in the entire metropolitan Atlanta. The Atlanta BWMU Executive Board and the two missionary-directors have proved themselves to be sensitive to the needs of a changing community. The solution seemed to lie, not in moving the location but in

²² Kruse, *White Flight*, 166.

²³ “Hubert School Dedication is Next Sunday,” *Atlanta Daily World*, February 11, 1964, page 6.

initiating plans and methods to face the new challenge brought about by the changing community.²⁴

Despite the conversion of the local school and rapid white flight of local families, the leadership of the Stewart Center decided to stay put. Myrtle Salters and Elizabeth Lundy, now in their mid-fifties, found themselves in uncharted territory. That these two white women decided to continue living and working in the quickly transitioning community is somewhat surprising, especially considering the Center's rapid exit from English Avenue. However, reflections of several children who attended the Stewart Center indicate that they learned a fairly progressive view of race from the Southern Baptist missionaries who operated it, long before racial transition took place in Reynoldstown. In reflecting on her experiences at the Center in the 1920s and 1930s, Elizabeth Crews describes how learning about missionaries at the Center imparted a particular perspective on race:

I remember reading about the man who was on the boat going to Africa to become a Missionary to the Africans. He told of his deep feeling of frustration and inner struggle when a colored man accidentally brushed up against him. How he instinctively drew away and how he had to reconcile his soul to the fact that in the sight of God the color of man does not matter, but only the condition of the souls of man.²⁵

Elizabeth Lundy and Myrtle Salters were devout Southern Baptist missionaries who felt that their purpose at the Stewart Center, above all else, was to care for the souls of their neighbors through Christian evangelism. These women believed that all people were equal in the eyes of God, and therefore felt that African Americans needed to hear about the love of God just as much white people. Linda Reynolds attended the Stewart Center during the 1950s and described how spending so much time with Miss Lundy and Miss Salters impacted the children: “Even before all the changes had gone on in our country, I think being around Miss Lundy and

²⁴ Singleton, “History of the Stewart Baptist Center, 1967-1971,” 1.

²⁵ “50th Anniversary Historical Sketches: Essie and Elizabeth Crews,” made available to author by the Andrew P. Stewart Center, Atlanta, Georgia.

Miss Salters helped us be more accepting. Because they had a missionary mind, and if you have a missionary mind, you don't draw borders."²⁶ The two women taught the white children who attended the Center that segregation was inherently wrong through anecdotal stories and the experiences of missionaries. Ford Chance echoed this sentiment and recalled that as a child at the Center in the 1950s: "This was the first place that I really heard that [segregation] was wrong."²⁷ Despite what neighborhood children had been taught regarding segregation in their homes and schools, through Elizabeth Lundy and Myrtle Salters they learned to view race through the perspective of Christian love and evangelism.

A second impetus that likely contributed to the Stewart Center's dramatically different response to neighborhood racial change was the public stance that several prominent Baptist pastors made regarding integration several years earlier. In November of 1957, eighty Atlanta ministers signed a statement that later became known as the "Ministers' Manifesto" and was published in both the *Atlanta Journal* and the *Atlanta Constitution*. Written in the wake of the Little Rock integration crisis, the document challenged massive resistance to desegregation and called for moderation, communication between the races, and obedience to the law. Among the signers was Rev. Roy O. McClain, the pastor of First Baptist Church of Atlanta. First Baptist was not only the largest Baptist church in the city but was the church that Elizabeth Lundy and Myrtle Salters had attended since coming to Atlanta in 1935. Rev. McClain's highly visible public stance regarding an appropriate response to desegregation likely affirmed Lundy and Salter's conviction to remain in Reynoldstown despite the racial transition. The pastors of several other Baptist churches that supported the Stewart Center were represented in the

²⁶ Interview with Linda Barnes Reynolds by Megan McDonald, 22 September, 2017, in author's possession.

²⁷ Interview with Ford Chance by Megan McDonald, 5 November 2014, in author's possession.

Ministers' Manifesto as well, and likely garnered both ire and admiration amongst their congregations.²⁸

For fifteen years, local black children living in Reynoldstown had watched white children play at the Stewart Center from across the street where they waited at the bus stop. Separated by skin color and a chain link fence, they watched the white children play baseball, climb the playground equipment, and swing around the merry-go-round. Beginning in 1966, Miss Lundy and Miss Salters began welcoming African American children to the Center's programs for the first time.



Figure 30 Michael Manuel (bottom left) attending the Stewart Center boys club, 1966. Courtesy of the Andrew P. Stewart Center.

Michael Manuel was the first African American resident of Reynoldstown to attend, and participated in the boys' club for several years. In the coming years, increasing numbers of African American children began attending the Stewart Center's programs. As described in a 1968 report "This month we began meeting with some of the Negroes on Friday afternoons. They have seemed so happy to come and have entered into the things planned for them. The boys who come are in 7th, 8th, & 9th grades and some of the white boys in those grades meet with

²⁸ Edward A. Hatfield, "Ministers' Manifesto," New Georgia Encyclopedia, 2015.

them.”²⁹ Lundy and Salters also welcomed African American adults to the adult women’s bible study and as volunteers.³⁰



Figure 31 October 1972, courtesy of the Andrew P. Stewart Center.

The directors made a concerted effort to be involved with the local schools, I.P. Reynolds and C.D. Hubert, both of which were now designated for black children.³¹ They enlisted the help of several WMU members to volunteer at the schools as tutors each week.³² In a statement thanking WMU members for their volunteer service at the Stewart Center and at the local schools, Lundy and Salters revealed how white flight and suburbanization had also impacted

²⁹ Elizabeth Lundy and Myrtle Salters, September 1968 report, made available to author by the Andrew P. Stewart Center.

³⁰ Elizabeth Lundy and Myrtle Salters, Quarterly Report: November 1971-January 1972, made available to author by the Andrew P. Stewart Center.

³¹ White children that remained in the community now traveled by bus to schools outside the community, including Grant Park School. (Quarterly report: February-April 1969)

³² Elizabeth Lundy and Myrtle Salters, Quarterly Report: November 1971-January 1972, September-October 1972, made available to author by the Andrew P. Stewart Center.

WMU members: “We salute each and all of the volunteers-some coming as far as 25 miles or more away (50 miles round trip) once a week.”³³

While Miss Lundy and Miss Salter’s decision to remain in the neighborhood certainly impacted the African American children who could now participate in the Center’s programs, it also had an impact on the white children who had attended in previous decades and maintained contact with the Center. Linda Reynolds married and moved to Florida after graduating high school, but kept in touch with friends and family in the community as the racial transition took place.

I thought about Miss Lundy and Miss Salters when things began to change in the community so much. I thought about them and I thought “well, they’ll quit now because they’re older and they were brought up in a different time so they’ll probably quit and just retire”... I mean, because I remember hearing so many of the people that age in the [East Side Baptist] church and around say ‘well we’re just going to sell and move.’ And even the church moved. And I thought well they’ll retire now, they won’t stay on. But they were there and I thought “now that is a commitment”... I was really proud of them, deep down inside. Because that lets me know that it doesn’t matter. They were able to look past the color and still deliver God’s word. And that means a lot because as a Christian you can’t be picky. You can’t say “well I only want to talk to this group over here.”³⁴

While the Center’s decision to integrate its programs was a dramatic break with the past, very little in the way of programming changed. Until their retirement in 1974, Myrtle and Elizabeth continued to lead the same activities and share the same message with the neighborhood’s children, the primary difference being that all children were invited, regardless of skin color. Girls and boys clubs continued, with attendance quickly becoming almost entirely black as white families left the community. When Myrtle and Elizabeth retired, eight years after initially welcoming black children to the Stewart Center, only four white families were still in

³³ Elizabeth Lundy and Myrtle Salters, Quarterly Report: September-October 1972, made available to author by the Andrew P. Stewart Center.

³⁴ Interview with Linda Barnes Reynolds by Megan McDonald, 22 September, 2017, in author’s possession.

attendance. While in past years white children who attended the Stewart Center had the opportunity to attend summer camp at Ridgecrest, black children were not initially allowed to attend. Instead, Miss Lundy and Miss Salters began a relationship with Camp John Hope in Fort Valley, Georgia, which had been founded in the 1930's specifically for African American children. Black children also attended "Inner City Camp" at the Atlanta Baptist Assembly.³⁵

While the number of white residents of the community dwindled quickly, Elizabeth and Myrtle spoke positively of the relationships they saw building between white and black participants of the Center's programs. "We've seen, recently, neighbors who were strangers before become friends. We've seen hatred turn into love, especially in connection with our transition period working here, when our white people began moving out and blacks moving in."³⁶



Figure 32 Four members of the Women's Bible Study Class. Courtesy of the Andrew P. Stewart Center

³⁵ Elizabeth Lundy and Myrtle Salters, Quarterly Report: May-August 1974, made available to author by the Andrew P. Stewart Center.

³⁶ Elizabeth Lundy and Myrtle Salters, interviewer unknown, July 17, 1974, Home Mission Board Oral History Collection, Southern Baptist Historical Library and Archives, Nashville, Tennessee.

Of all the Center's programs, the adult women's bible study class appears to have adapted particularly well to integration. Evenly split between black and white members, Lundy and Salters were thrilled by the friendships they saw forming between the ladies as they sang, made crafts, and prayed together at bible study each week. Many of the members continued to attend for years after Elizabeth and Myrtle retired, including a white woman named Lillian Taylor, who went to the ladies' bible study until the week of her death in 1985, at age 94.³⁷ Reflecting on this particular group during their final months at the Stewart Center in 1974, Elizabeth Lundy and Myrtle Salters relayed a story about inviting the women's bible class to attend a quarterly meeting of the WMU. Although typically these were business meetings in which Lundy and Salters reported on the Stewart Center's activities, at this particularly meeting they invited the bible study members to attend and share a song with the WMU members:

Elizabeth Lundy: "we asked them as a group (they love to sing) 'Would you like to come and sing for the ladies at their quarterly meeting?' And they came and sang as a group. Several years ago, this could not have taken place."

Myrtle Salters: "It was also an eye opener to those [WMU members] who attended our quarterly meeting because many of them had been in churches where there had been the white flight because of the race. And many of them that day sat and listened and I don't think there was a dry eye in the audience, because it really touched them and it proved to them that God is no respecter of persons. I don't think anybody knows that there were blacks and whites together because it was just such a wonderful fellowship..."³⁸

While certainly a beautiful memory for Elizabeth and Myrtle to hold as they ended their thirty-nine-year tenure at the Stewart Center, race relations in Reynoldstown and the city of Atlanta would not be resolved so simply. There appear to have been local consequences for the Stewart Center's decision to integrate. While records do not specify why, after 20 years of cooperation, the Stewart Center held its last Vacation Bible School at East Side Baptist Church

³⁷ Lora Hall, April-June 1985 quarterly report, Georgia Baptist Convention Archives.

³⁸ Elizabeth Lundy and Myrtle Salters, interviewer unknown, July 17, 1974, Home Mission Board Oral History Collection, Southern Baptist Historical Library and Archives, Nashville, Tennessee.

in the summer of 1969.³⁹ The following summer, three “Special Weeks” described as “Similar to Bible School” were held at the Stewart Center, instead.⁴⁰ The decision was likely motivated racially motivated, as the church sold its property and relocated to Lithonia a few years later during the height of the neighborhood’s racial transition.⁴¹

Significantly, not all Baptist Good Will Centers survived the racial transitions of the era. The Kate Pendleton Dawson Good Will Center, the original Baptist Day Nursery upon which the Stewart Center had been modeled, closed its doors in 1973 while experiencing similar racial demographic changes in Inman Park.⁴² The racial transition of the community surrounding the Dawson Center, coupled with the WMU’s newly emerging financial difficulties, led the women to sell the properties and give its furnishings and supplies to the Stewart Center.⁴³



Figure 33 Miss Lundy and Miss Salters (wearing dresses made by Salters) pose for a picture with Ford Chance and Don Watkins at their 1974 retirement celebration. Both men attended the Stewart Center as children in Reynoldstown. Courtesy of Ford Chance.

³⁹ Elizabeth Lundy and Myrtle Salters, Quarterly Report: May-August 1969, made available to author by the Andrew P. Stewart Center.

⁴⁰ Elizabeth Lundy and Myrtle Salters, Quarterly Report: May-July 1970, made available to author by the Andrew P. Stewart Center.

⁴¹ “Our Church History,” East Side Baptist Church, accessed March 2018, <http://www.myeastside.net/history>.

⁴² The Dawson Nursery was originally located near the Atlanta Woolen Mills, but relocated to Inman Park several decades later.

⁴³ Minutes, Sixty-Fifth Meeting of Baptist Woman’s Missionary Union, October 1973.

The Stewart Center's ability to survive the racial turbulence of integration and white flight in Reynoldstown is due in large part to the actions of Elizabeth Lundy and Myrtle Salters. Having learned from the lessons of the past, these women not only helped to make the Andrew P. Stewart Center a more welcoming place by welcoming their black neighbors, but also influenced generations of white children, many of whom maintained contact with the women as adults.

4 Reynoldstown: 1974-2015



Figure 34 Children outside at the Stewart Center, early 1970s. Courtesy of the Andrew P. Stewart Center.

The decision to stay in Reynoldstown despite the racial re-designation of the Faith School and widespread white flight drew the Stewart Center's leadership into uncharted territory. Because the Stewart Center continued to operate in the Reynoldstown community after white abandonment, it offers a particularly revealing lens through which to view the long-term consequences of white flight and the Atlanta Public School system's resistance to integration. In addition, the organization's programmatic changes in the 1970s and 1980s are reflective of how the economic downturn impacted many inner-city communities, which had become largely economically homogenous upon the widespread suburbanization of both whites and blacks.

Elizabeth Lundy and Myrtle Salters retired in 1974 after 39 years of service to the Stewart Center (24 of which had been in Reynoldstown). The two women were followed by a

string of young, Southern Baptist directors with varying educational backgrounds and perspectives on mission work. The collective experiences of these leaders between 1974 and 1987 reflects the rapidly changing economic and social conditions taking place in Reynoldstown and in the city of Atlanta during this period. Following the immense change that took place in Reynoldstown in the late 1960s and early 1970s, the Stewart Center entered a period of continued evolution and programmatic refinement in the neighborhood's new context.

While the Stewart Center had hosted volunteers, visitors, and summer missionaries in past decades, its role as a site of social contact became increasingly important in the decades following white flight and suburbanization. Atlanta had become racially polarized in the wake of white flight, and the Stewart Center provided a rare opportunity for outsiders to examine their prejudices in light of their religious beliefs. WMU members who volunteered at the Center generally traveled to the Stewart Center from their new homes and churches in white, suburban areas. Summer missionaries who worked at the Center for several months at a time were typically white, middle class students from outside of Atlanta. Traveling basketball teams brought Stewart Center children into white churches all across the city. In this way, the Center served as a point of social and economic education for white outsiders by providing an opportunity to build relationships with the children and families of Reynoldstown.

Resegregation in Reynoldstown, Economic Downturn of the 1970s

In 1971, a WMU member described the continued transition taking place of the Reynoldstown community: "The area covered by Stewart Center is ever changing. At present it is a unique combination of residence and industry, the poor and those with moderate income, home owners and renters, black and white, the very religious people and those with no religion."

¹ The neighborhood's racial diversity would not last long. As white flight continued, the city and the school system became predominantly black. Whites comprised 63 percent of Atlanta's population in 1950, dropping to 48 percent in 1970 and to 30 percent in 1980.² Reynoldstown followed this population trend.

The Atlanta Public Schools, too, underwent a dramatic racial transition. While the APS system was 70% white and 30% black during the 1951-52 school year, within ten years the student population had shifted to 55% white and 45% black in the 1961-62 school year. By 1972-73, the APS school system was 77% black and only 23% white.³ In 1972, eleven years after the token integration of Atlanta Public schools, 106 of 153 Atlanta schools were still "totally or virtually totally segregated." In that year, school officials were ordered by the U.S. Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals to desegregate in "the fullest cooperation with the spirit as well as the letter of this order."⁴ The order came too late. White flight had so dramatically altered the demographics of the city that not even controversial solutions such as widespread busing could remedy the resegregation that had occurred. As Lonnie King aptly stated: "There were no white kids to bus... You'd be busing children from an 87 percent black school to another 87 percent black school."⁵

While white flight was certainly a predominant factor in the migration of white families from the urban core to the suburban periphery, some of the demographic changes that took place in Reynoldstown can be attributed to a general trend of suburbanization in the United States.

One woman, who attended the Stewart Center during the 1950s, purchased a home in

¹ Singleton, "History of the Stewart Baptist Center, 1967-1971," 1.

² Drummond, *National Register of Historic Places Nomination: English Avenue Elementary School*.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Bayor, *Race and the Shaping of Twentieth Century Atlanta*, 245.

⁵ Ibid., 247

Reynoldstown shortly after getting married. When she and her husband decided to move to a larger home in the Forest Park suburb of Atlanta in 1966, she described Reynoldstown as “still a good neighborhood--we didn’t have any problems” and explained that Forest Park was “THE place to move” at the time.⁶ Many residents who relocated from the city of Atlanta to the suburbs during this period would express their decision in similar terms. Suburban homes were new and neighborhoods frequently boasted good schools and shopping malls. This trend was not limited to white city dwellers: many middle-class African American families also migrated to the suburbs. In Reynoldstown, as in other predominantly black neighborhoods, many upwardly mobile blacks moved to suburban areas located to the south and west of Atlanta. Seeking bigger, newer homes with safer streets, the exodus of middle-class African Americans ensured that neighborhoods like Reynoldstown became economically homogenous, largely inhabited by working class blacks who were most vulnerable to economic downturns.⁷

During the 1970s, the Reynoldstown community was impacted by a nationwide economic recession. Overall unemployment rates in Atlanta rose to 9.5 percent (from a record low of one percent), but the unemployment rate was significantly higher among African Americans, reaching into the double digits. Persistent disparities in wealth existed between the races: while whites only comprised 40 percent of Atlanta’s population, they held 95 percent of the city’s wealth.⁸ Locally, Reynoldstown was impacted by the closure of the Fulton Bag and Cotton Mills, which ceased operation in 1978.⁹ Unemployment created new needs among the Reynoldstown community that could not be met with only children’s clubs and bible studies.

⁶ Interview with Frances Fortner Anderson by Megan McDonald, 18 November 2014, in author’s possession.

⁷ Wiese, *Places of Their Own*, 166-7.

⁸ Frederick Allen. *Atlanta Rising*. (Atlanta, Longstreet Press) 188, 205.

⁹ Christine de Catanzaro, “History of the Fulton Bag and Cotton Mills,” accessed February 2018, http://www.library.gatech.edu/fulton_bag/history.html.

Programming in the 1970s and 1980s



Figure 35 Novella and Jackie McClung leading an activity at the Stewart Center. Courtesy of the Andrew P. Stewart Center.

Jackie and Novella McClung were hired by the WMU upon the retirement of Elizabeth Lundy and Myrtle Salters. While Lundy and Salters had spent most of their adult life in the Jim Crow south, the McClungs (who were in their early 30s) had come of age in an entirely different era. Their youth, coupled with seminary training that had embraced a more progressive view of race, shaped their relationships both with the children of Reynoldstown and the churches that supported the Center. When Jackie and Novella McClung arrived in Reynoldstown in 1974, they immediately noticed that the Center had no programming for local teenagers. As basketball was a favorite past-time among neighborhood youth, they quickly started a team at the Center, which competed in several church leagues. The program included a bible study before each practice and was incredibly popular, drawing teenage boys to the Center in droves. Jackie and Novella observed a dramatic improvement in many of the players' self-esteem, and used the team to emphasize the importance of discipline and teamwork. The team traveled to Atlanta area Baptist

churches for league games, wearing uniforms made by WMU members from two local churches.¹⁰

Unfortunately, the McClungs were forced to combat prejudice and discrimination towards Stewart Center players on several occasions. Basketball games were often held in white churches, in white neighborhoods. Some churches made it clear that they didn't want the African American youth on their property, allowing them to enter the gym but no other part of the building. At a particularly memorable game, the pastor of a church was so rude and disruptive toward the Stewart Center team that the referee forced him to leave the game. In each of these scenarios, Jackie and Novella were careful to explain to the youth that the prejudiced actions were wrong. In helping the youth formulate a response to racism at basketball games, Jackie said: "play fair, but go ahead and beat them." The McClungs felt that the basketball league provided a learning opportunity for the churches they visited: "taking kids to those churches changed the churches, made them more accepting."¹¹

In addition to the basketball program, Jackie and Novella continued to operate clubs for younger children, taking many to camp during the summer months. A senior citizen group met every Thursday morning, led by local pastors. Many children stopped by the Center on their way to school to say hello to "Mr. and Mrs. Mac," and to pick up pop tarts for breakfast. The Center maintained a positive relationship with the local elementary schools, particularly I.P. Reynolds. The school did not have a gymnasium, so in inclement weather students were driven to the Stewart Center gym for their PE classes. The McClungs also continued to recruit volunteers to tutor students at both I.P. Reynolds and Hubert schools each week.¹²

¹⁰ Singleton, "History of Stewart Good Will Center, 1971-1976," 10.

¹¹ Interview with Jackie and Novella McClung by Megan McDonald, 11 October 2012, 30 July 2014.

¹² Jackie and Novella McClung, Quarterly Report: April-July 1975, made available to author by the Andrew P. Stewart Center.

For several decades following white flight in Reynoldstown, a skewed racial dynamic existed between the Center's largely white volunteer base and the neighborhood's nearly all-black population, and the directors were keenly aware of it. In 1976, a third-grade boy asked Novella McClung: "Mrs. Mac, what are all those white people doing here?" when a WMU group came to help with a project.¹³ The McClungs made a concerted effort to recruit student workers from Morehouse and the Interdenominational Theological Seminary (ITC) and also hired local residents to work at the Center, part-time.



Figure 36 Reggie Robbins began working at the Stewart Center as a field work student at the Interdenominational Theological Center (ITC). He and his wife later served as interim directors between the McClungs and Martha Creel. Photo courtesy of Martha Creel.

When continued economic decline and unemployment began to take its toll on neighborhood residents in the 1970s, the McClungs witnessed an increase in local drug activity and prostitution. Jackie testified in court on at least one occasion regarding neighborhood drug activity. Reggie Robbins, an ITC student who worked at the Center with the McClungs and served as an interim director after they left in 1980, recalled that Reynoldstown had its "rough

¹³ Jackie and Novella McClung, Quarterly report July-October 1975, made available to author by the Andrew P. Stewart Center.

edges” and that a lot of drug activity took place in the northeastern section of the neighborhood. Despite the economic recession and increased incidences of criminal activity, the directors during this period remember Reynoldstown as a pleasant place where people took care of their homes and their property. Many of the Center’s neighbors were senior adults who were proud of their homes and worked hard to maintain them.¹⁴

The incidence of local crime continued to rise when Martha Creel was hired as the Center’s new director in 1980. In 1981, Creel requested WMU members to pray for “the strength needed by our teens to resist the easy drug availability in our area.”¹⁵ More significantly, Creel’s tenure was marked by a dramatic rise in homicides in the city. In 1979, Atlanta had seen a record 231 homicides, a 61% increase from 1978.¹⁶ In a disturbing new development, a string of child murder cases began to fill the headlines of Atlanta’s newspapers.

Referred to as the “missing and murdered children case,” over 28 children and adolescents were murdered between 1979 and 1981, all of whom were African American. Victims represented the city’s most vulnerable: poor, African American children, many of whom lived in public housing. These cases instilled fear into the minds of many. Atlanta’s City Council imposed a curfew on children under the age of 16, and many parents were increasingly protective of their children and wary of strangers.¹⁷ Some in the African American community believed that the murders were a widespread conspiracy targeting blacks, led by the KKK. Entering the community during this crisis presented a challenge for Creel, and she initially faced skepticism and distrust from some parents. While likely tied to the unsolved disappearances of

¹⁴ Interview with Lora Hall Laminack by Megan McDonald, 5 September 2013; Interview with Reggie Robbins by Megan McDonald, 2 July 2014.

¹⁵ Martha Creel, July-September 1981 quarterly report, Georgia Baptist Convention Archives.

¹⁶ Allen, *Atlanta Rising*, 208.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 210.

young children, other factors directly related to the Stewart Center likely played a role in complicating the relationship between directors and the community.

Since the organization's inception, the WMU and the Stewart Center's directors were outsiders to the community, both in English Avenue and Reynoldstown. WMU members, who traveled to the Center from other parts of the city, differed markedly from local families in their class background. The early directors were also outsiders: they were from rural areas of the south, had a higher level of educational attainment than most residents of English Avenue and Reynoldstown, and they were also set apart by their identification as missionaries. However, the directors were more easily accepted by both communities largely as a result of their shared socio-economic background and the fact that they lived in the community, in an upstairs apartment on both Pelham and Stovall Streets. As residents of the communities themselves, these directors were a consistent presence and more deeply ingrained in neighborhood life, which fostered trust. Jackie and Novella McClung (1974-1980) and interim directors Reggie and Anna Robbins (1980), were the last directors of the Stewart Center to live in the facility. For various reasons, the directors that followed in the 1980s and 1990s did not live in the upstairs apartment.

The fact that Martha Creel and all subsequent directors of the Stewart Center drove to Reynoldstown from other areas of the city was a significant departure from the past. To many, the Center's directors were no longer viewed as neighbors, but rather as outside service providers. Coupled with the skewed racial dynamic of white, well-educated missionaries and WMU volunteers leading the majority of the Center's programming, it is understandable why some residents (particularly new residents) of the majority black neighborhood might view the organization with suspicion. However, many of the neighborhood's long-standing senior residents (especially those who participated in the women's bible study) maintained a positive

relationship with the Center, despite staff turnover. While the Stewart Center's relationship with the community certainly changed as a result of these factors, it maintained a reputation as a "safe haven" for neighborhood youth, a quality that would become increasingly important as the immediate neighborhood saw increased gang and drug activity.



Figure 37 Martha Creel with her daughter and longtime resident of Reynoldstown, Mrs. Taylor. Courtesy of Martha Creel.

While Creel continued many of the programs instituted by Jackie and Novella McClung, she also sought to combat the consequences of rising unemployment in the community. She introduced a job training program in hopes of helping young to middle aged adults find work, led by young professionals from a local church.¹⁸ As a result of economic hardship, she also began to receive increased requests for food from neighbors. In the fall of 1981 she notified the WMU:

In the last few weeks, we have averaged a call for food every other day and some days I get two calls. The need for this ministry increases more and more as unemployment rises and federal programs are cut back. Please bring as much food and as often as you can during the

¹⁹ Martha Creel, 1980-1981 evaluation. Georgia Baptist Convention Archives.

fall and winter months so that we can continue to help people around us whose families do not have enough to eat.¹⁹



Figure 38 IP Reynolds students and Reynoldstown residents gather in front of IP Reynolds Elementary School. Atlanta Journal Constitution, March 5, 1982.

The Atlanta Public School System underwent tremendous change in the decades following integration and white flight. Despite protests from residents, I.P. Reynolds Elementary School closed in 1982, one of ten Atlanta elementary schools closed that year. A focal point and gathering space in the heart of the neighborhood, the closing of I.P. Reynolds represented a community-wide loss. I.P. Reynolds students were shifted to C.D. Hubert (formerly Faith Elementary) the following school term. Prior to the 1982 school closures, the district had already shuttered 42 schools since 1970.²⁰ The dramatic population decline resulting from white flight and suburbanization had removed significant numbers of students and tax dollars from the city of Atlanta, leading to under-population of city schools and subsequent financial problems.

²⁰ Martha Creel, July-September 1981 quarterly report, Georgia Baptist Convention Archives.

²¹ "Budget Woes May Close 10 Atlanta Elementary Schools," *The Atlanta Constitution*, January 9, 1982, 1B.

The closure and consolidation of schools as a cost cutting measure would be repeated in the following decades with a continued decline in student enrollment.

In the coming decades, the Atlanta Public Schools would earn a reputation among suburbanites as a dysfunctional, underperforming system. However, the troubles faced by the Atlanta Public School system were directly tied to the widespread abandonment of the city by both whites and middle- and upper-class blacks in previous decades. The evacuation of large numbers of school age children in the span of a decade left APS with an overabundance of facilities, and not enough children to fill them. The removal of tax dollars crippled the schools. Yet residents of Atlanta suburbs rarely pointed to these factors as the source of the APS system's troubles. As aptly stated by scholar Kevin Kruse:

Through either ignorance or apathy, suburbanites possessed a convenient, collective amnesia about the nation's troubling history of residential apartheid, school segregation, and economic discrimination. Refusing to recognize past patterns that had led to both the rise of suburbia and the decline of inner cities, they came to see their isolation as natural and innocuous. In the end, the ultimate success of white flight was the way in which it led whites away from responsibility for the problems they had done much to create.²¹

The WMU in Transition

Many WMU members still volunteered at the Center on a regular basis during the 1970s and 1980s, driving into Reynoldstown from Decatur, Buckhead, and suburban areas of the city. Each of the directors during this period expressed a deep respect and abiding gratitude for the WMU members, whose fundraising and volunteer efforts kept the Center open despite the era's economic challenges. However, the directors were also aware of changes taking place in the WMU and the mixed perspectives WMU members held regarding the Center's work. As Martha Creel recalled:

²² Kruse, *White Flight*, 258.

As in any group, there were women who loved everyone and volunteered with the kids. They cared about the programs and loved the kids individually. Then you had people who were really supportive and loved those quarterly meetings to see and hear about what we were doing. They were proud to see that their support financially kept us going. Then you had women who thought of us as almost doing foreign mission work because it was so out of their comfort zone. They supported a ministry and were proud of that, but really had no real interest of having a relationship with anyone in the neighborhood. The leadership at that time were in the 3rd group...²²

The leadership of the WMU, whom Martha recalled to be disconnected from the day to day operations of the Center's programs at this time, also seemed to shy away from conversations regarding race. Just as Myrtle Salters and Elizabeth Lundy had brought residents of the community to WMU quarterly meetings in the past, Martha planned to bring a gifted local orator to recite a speech by Martin Luther King Jr. After seeking permission from the WMU, she later received a phone call from a WMU member who said: "we just can't have this."²³

Whatever their level of involvement with the Stewart Center's activities or their particular views on race, the WMU felt that the Center's work was important enough to continue the work of keeping it open, despite increasing challenges. During the latter half of the 20th century, as women entered the workforce in increasing numbers, the WMU experienced a steady decline in new membership. As the chief source of fundraising and volunteers at this time, declining numbers of WMU members were directly tied to the Center's day to day operations and its financial viability. Feeling that it was important to encourage the WMU in their efforts at the Stewart Center, Martha Creel often thought to herself: "what does the WMU need to hear to keep the place going?"

Lora "L'Nola" Hall was hired in 1982 after Martha Creel resigned to raise her family. With a background in Elementary Education, L'Nola had particularly fond recollections of

²³ Martha Creel, personal correspondence, January 2017.

²⁴ Ibid.

working with the youngest children at the Center. She recalled that most kids went by nicknames, including a little girl known as “That-a-way” who didn’t learn her real name until second grade, and a boy who preferred to be called by his full name: “Louis Darnell Haygood Junior.” In the summer months, L’Nola took children on trips all across the city in the Center’s greenish blue van: “I can’t tell you how many times I hiked up Stone mountain and Kennesaw Mountain.” After working in the community for several months, L’Nola began to notice a number of young mothers living in the community. She started a young mothers program, about which she reflected: “it just happened as I got to know them.”²⁴ The Center continued to distribute food to neighbors out of the Center’s small pantry, which was stocked with canned goods collected by WMU members and Georgia State University students. In early 1984, L’Nola notified the WMU that the food supply had run low, having served an all-time high of 74 families.²⁵

When L’Nola Hall submitted her resignation in 1987, WMU members were worried about the organization’s finances and unsure how long it would take them to find a new director. They decided to rent the Stewart Center property to an organization that wanted to open a women’s shelter, providing a source of income. For several months, the Center no longer operated programs for children and the future of the organization was uncertain. Alice White interviewed for the position and was hired as the Center’s new director in late 1987. Despite their excitement at finding a new director, the WMU was still concerned about finances and feared for their long-term ability to sustain the organization. They therefore proceeded with caution, hiring Alice on a part-time basis. For the first six months of her employment, Alice was only permitted to open the Center for programming two days a week. As White recalled: “The

²⁵ Interview with Lora Hall Laminack by Megan McDonald, 5 September 2013.

²⁶ Lora Hall, January-March 1984 quarterly report, Georgia Baptist Convention Archives.

WMU was really at a quandary because their funds were shrinking and with their aging population...their offerings were dwindling, so their support of the Baptist Center was really at a low point.”²⁶

With only two days a week to work with, Alice held bible clubs for children on Tuesday and Thursday afternoons, quickly reinstated the Senior adult ladies’ bible study, and opened the gym for basketball once a week. After six months at the Center, Alice requested that she be allowed to open for programming an additional day each week. Not long afterward, encouraged by the rebirth of programming at the Center, the WMU asked Alice if she would like to begin working full-time. Within a few months, the women’s shelter found a new location and the Stewart Center had full access to the property, once again.²⁷

Reynoldstown in the 1990s-2000s

While Reynoldstown’s greatest population losses took place between 1960 and 1980, the neighborhood population further declined between 1980 and 1990, dropping from 2,616 to 2,152 residents. The decrease in population led to higher vacancy rates in the neighborhood, which contributed to crime. As stated in the neighborhood’s 1999 master plan: “The presence of a large number of vacant properties, particularly those with vacant structures, increase the potential for crime and other activities that are counter-productive to a safe neighborhood. Vacant properties also reduce the visual appearance of the neighborhood and serve as a visual indicator of distressed economic conditions faced by a neighborhood.”²⁸

²⁷ Interview with Alice White by Megan McDonald, 27 June 2015, in author’s possession.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ PEQ and MXD Collaborative, *Reynoldstown: 2000 and Beyond. A Neighborhood Master Plan*. (Atlanta: n.p., 2000), 22.

The neighborhood maintained a black majority, at 90% black and 10% white in 1990. Most residents rented their homes, with 66% of homes occupied by renters and only 34% occupied by owners. High unemployment rates continued in the neighborhood, up to 11.4% in 1990 from 6.4% a decade earlier. The majority of residents worked in low-paying retail and service-sector jobs, contributing to low incomes in the community. Affordable housing was an issue of concern in Reynoldstown, particularly among the elderly. 19% of households were paying over thirty percent of their income toward rent in 1990.²⁹

Beginning in the 1990s, the city of Atlanta began to see a small increase in population, after several decades of decline. Revitalization efforts began in several in-town neighborhoods, resulting in early gentrification and displacement. As early as 1999, residents of Reynoldstown expressed concern over the gentrification taking place in the community. The neighborhood's close proximity to downtown made it an ideal location for people searching for shorter work commutes. Significantly, revitalization efforts initiated from within the community had enhanced the quality of life for residents and made the neighborhood more desirable to outsiders.³⁰ In the late 1990s, several of the long-vacant industries and warehouses along Memorial Drive were already being converted to loft apartments and private developers and land speculators began to purchase and renovate homes. Residents were seeing marked improvements in the neighborhood's housing stock and saw many new residents moving to the community. Many began to fear being uprooted by the rising costs of housing associated with gentrification.³¹

³⁰ PEQ and MXD Collaborative, *Reynoldstown: 2000 and Beyond. A Neighborhood Master Plan*, 7-12.

³¹ Largely responsible for local revitalization was Reynoldstown Revitalization Corporation (RRC) was founded in 1989 and led by Young Hughley.

³² PEQ and MXD Collaborative, *Reynoldstown: 2000 and Beyond. A Neighborhood Master Plan*, 12-24.

Despite neighborhood revitalization and gentrification in much of the city, these improvements did not necessarily benefit Atlanta's schools. Troubles within the Atlanta Public School system had also continued during the 1990s and early 2000s. By 2002, the public schools had virtually resegregated, with an almost entirely black population. "Of the city's 93 schools, 54 had just 1 or 2 white students enrolled, while another 21 had no white students at all."³² Budget cuts and school closures also continued to impact Reynoldstown. In 2002, C.D. Hubert Elementary was selected for closure as a result of declining attendance. Atlanta Public Schools that had fewer than 450 students were not eligible for state funding under the Governor's Education Program, and Hubert had approximately 250. Students living in Reynoldstown were redistricted for Cook Elementary School the following year.³³ Located next to the Capitol Homes project on Memorial Drive, children now took the bus to a school 1.5 miles outside the Reynoldstown community.

Programming in the 1990s and 2000s

Criminal activity continued in the community during the 1990s, and neighborhood children were well aware of it. Alice White remembered that drugs were sold across the street from the Center and that children frequently talked about drug raids that had taken place in their homes or nearby, referring to SWAT teams as the "red dog." She recalled that several children lived in homes known for drug activity, and were constantly in fear of drug raids and violence. On a few occasions, children suddenly vanished from the community, oftentimes removed from the home by the Georgia Division for Family and Children Services (DFCS). Prostitution was

³³ Kruse, *White Flight*, 239.

³⁴ APSC Board minutes, 4/22/2002, 1/3/2000, made available to author by the Andrew P. Stewart Center, Atlanta, Georgia.

rampant along Flat Shoals Avenue, which passed in front of the Stewart Center.³⁴ As White recalled: “There was a see-saw situation going on as far as criminal activity. If the police had control of the drug situation, prostitution was up. And it seemed when prostitution went down, the drugs [went up]...It took me a few years to get my mind wrapped around that.”³⁵

While White expressed that there were no easy answers to the crime and drug activity taking place in Reynoldstown, as a conservative Southern Baptist missionary she felt that: “Christ was the answer... I know that Christ can make a difference. Christ can change the drug addict’s life.” With this perspective guiding her actions and programming at the Stewart Center, Alice focused her efforts on evangelism. For example, when the Center held its first annual “Fall Festival” in 1988, White planned for volunteers to hand out “Marked New Testaments, outlining how to become a Christian.”³⁶

Most volunteers were white WMU members by the 1990s, reflective of the still-segregated nature of many churches. Seeing a need for more positive black role models for the children, director Alice White reached out to Rev. Dr. Emmanuel McCall at Christian Fellowship Church. Rev. Dr. McCall was the first African American to serve in a leadership position with the Southern Baptist North American Missionary Board, and White asked him if any members of his church would consider volunteering to lead a week of summer camp. Regarding the children at the Stewart Center, White told McCall that “all they are seeing is white faces.”

In addition to evangelistic efforts, White also started an after-school homework help program in 1992 and worked to proactively meet the educational needs of neighborhood

³⁵ PEQ and MXD Collaborative, *Reynoldstown: 2000 and Beyond. A Neighborhood Master Plan*, appendix, November 9, 1999 notes.

³⁶ Interview with Alice White by Megan McDonald, 27 June 2015, in author’s possession.

³⁷ Alice White, October 1988 newsletter, Georgia Baptist Convention Archives.

children.³⁷ The after school program was catered toward a distinct need in the community: high school drop-out rates were incredibly high in Reynoldstown. While drop-out rates had declined since 1980 (55% of residents over the age of 25 had not completed high school in 1990, in contrast to 79% in 1980), they still remained high. Only 4% of residents had a bachelor's degree in 1990.³⁸ Educational programming was also incorporated into summer camp activities.

Upon the closure of C.D. Hubert Elementary, the Stewart Center experienced a decline in children attending programs, as many children found other after school programs or moved from the community.³⁹ However, board minutes from the period contain several references to declining numbers prior to the school closure. In 2001, the director's report explained that: "We have had a few problems in attendance in our afterschool program. We have competition for our children from a tutoring program at school and the Boys and Girls Club."⁴⁰ When asked why summer Vacation Bible School was limited to only 35 children, White explained that "we focus on a one to one relationships with 35 children for six hours a day for seven weeks as opposed to a larger number for a shorter period."⁴¹ Space limitations imposed by the building were also cited as a reason for limited numbers, and White believed that numbers would increase significantly with a larger building. By 2002, despite the small numbers attending Vacation Bible School, it was noted that many of the children were coming from outside the community to attend.⁴²

Based on the declining number of children participating in the Stewart Center's programs during this period, several trends are apparent. First, by the early 2000s, the Stewart Center's

³⁸ APSC Board minutes, 2/26/2001, made available to author by the Andrew P. Stewart Center, Atlanta, Georgia.

³⁹ PEQ and MXD Collaborative, *Reynoldstown: 2000 and Beyond. A Neighborhood Master Plan*, 8.

⁴⁰ APSC Board minutes, 4/28/2003, made available to author by the Andrew P. Stewart Center, Atlanta, Georgia.

⁴¹ APSC Board minutes, 2/26/2001, made available to author by the Andrew P. Stewart Center, Atlanta, Georgia.

⁴² APSC Board minutes, 8/25/2003, made available to author by the Andrew P. Stewart Center, Atlanta, Georgia.

⁴³ APSC Board minutes, 2/25/2002, 8/26/2002, made available to author by the Andrew P. Stewart Center, Atlanta, Georgia.

primary programs for children were an after school program and Vacation Bible School, both of which faced competition from similar programs offered by local schools and community Centers. Second, that the leadership of the Center during this period emphasized smaller numbers to focus on relationship building and evangelism. Third, the early indications of a population shift were becoming apparent, as fewer children were living in the community than in previous decades, and gentrification had begun a slow displacement of low income families.



Figure 39 A WMU member makes a snack with children at the Stewart Center, early 2000s. Courtesy of the Andrew P. Stewart Center

A significant change in the Stewart Center's organizational structure took place in 1995. With the average age of WMU members continuing to rise and fewer new members joining, all involved were concerned for the future of the organization. The WMU owned and operated the Stewart Center, and was the organization's primary means of financial support. Additional concerns about the age and condition of the Stovall Street building led to a desire to pursue foundation and grant money in order to build a new Center. The combined impact of these factors led the organization's leadership to pursue non-profit status. Upon becoming an independent nonprofit organization in 1995, the Stewart Center was no longer the property of the

Atlanta WMU. Although WMU members continued to support the Center through financial support, volunteer efforts, and service on the newly formed Board of Directors, the organization now sought to expand its network of support beyond the Baptist world.



Figure 40 The Stewart Center, as it appeared in the 1990s. The building's increasingly dilapidated state led Alice White and WMU members to pursue nonprofit 501(C)3 status in 1995. The sign reads: "Stewart Baptist Center, Baptist Woman's Missionary Union, Auxiliary to Atlanta Baptist Association."

Upon earning 501(C)3 status, a steering committee was quickly formed to initiate a capital campaign for a new building. The board purchased the old Faith family home on Flat Shoals in 1999 for \$145,000, with plans to build and relocate the Center there.⁴³ Despite the historic value of the house in relationship to the neighborhood's development, it was deemed too deteriorated for future use, having been home to "vagrants" and illicit drug activity for years.⁴⁴

⁴⁴ APSC Steering Committee minutes, 9/9/1999, made available to author by the Andrew P. Stewart Center, Atlanta, Georgia.

⁴⁵ APSC Steering Committee minutes, 12/8/99, made available to author by the Andrew P. Stewart Center, Atlanta, Georgia.

Overrun with rodents, the committee could not secure a permit to tear down the house until a pest control company assured the City of Atlanta that rats would not escape into the neighborhood upon demolition.⁴⁵ The steering committee hired an architectural firm to draw up plans for the new facility, which included: “a gymnasium, classrooms, offices, a clinic, storage, a workshop for minor repairs, and a computer lab. The plan will meet the demands for children’s daycare, athletic teams and educational purposes, a neighborhood meeting place for children and adults, and expanded food and clothing distribution.”⁴⁶ To finance the project, the committee initiated a capital campaign known as “The Cause for Hope” to raise \$3.1 million dollars. The WMU was one of the earliest groups to contribute to the campaign, pledging \$50,000.⁴⁷

Brittany Mackey was hired as the director of the Stewart Center in 2004. As the first director to be hired since the Center became an independent nonprofit, she was also the first director in nearly 80 years who was not a Southern Baptist missionary. In 1991, the Southern Baptist Convention had split between its moderate and conservative factions, resulting in the formation of the moderate Cooperative Baptist Fellowship (CBF). Mackey was the first of several non-missionary directors to be affiliated with a CBF church. A former elementary school teacher interested in community development and urban poverty, Mackey was particularly concerned with the environmental and systemic issues that kept neighborhood children in poverty. Mackey hoped that the Stewart Center would make an intentional difference in the lives of families, and be a presence that made change in the community.⁴⁸

⁴⁶ APSC Steering Committee minutes, 2/23/2000, made available to author by the Andrew P. Stewart Center, Atlanta, Georgia.

⁴⁷ Campaign document, steering committee notes, 1998

⁴⁸ APSC Steering Committee Minutes, 11/13/1998, made available to author by the Andrew P. Stewart Center, Atlanta, Georgia.

⁴⁹ Interview with Brittany Mackey by Megan McDonald, 20 June 2014.

Mackey's tenure was marked by rapid gentrification, as the city continued to receive an influx of white residents and the BeltLine project emerged in the city's newspapers between 2003 and 2005. Alice White had been aware of gentrification taking place in her later years at the Stewart Center and was baffled regarding a course of action: "I don't know what to do with this. If this is what's going happen, I don't know what we're going do."⁴⁹ When the old gas station across the street from the Center was opened as a dog park/coffee shop, Mackey knew that the Center's time in Reynoldstown was limited.⁵⁰

While Reynoldstown experienced an economic boom during the early 2000s, the financial crisis and economic recession temporarily slowed down gentrification in the community. The ambitious "Cause for Hope" project to build a new, larger Stewart Center came to a screeching halt in 2007, when a fundraising consultant hired by the Board determined that the organization didn't have the fundraising capacity to raise 3.1 million dollars. By this point, tens of thousands of dollars had already been spent on architectural drawings and fundraising consultants. The failed project alienated several funders and left board members feeling disappointed and directionless.⁵¹

A second financial blow nearly closed the Center for good. In the summer of 2009, the Stewart Center embarked on an ambitious, expensive project to implement a nationally recognized program in the summer camp. Partnering with the Children's Defense Fund, the Stewart Center hosted a "Freedom School" which focused on curbing summer learning loss and closing achievement gaps.⁵² The effort was spearheaded by new director, Karol Vellines, with Brittany Mackey now working as program director. Those who witnessed the Freedom School

⁵⁰ Interview with Alice White by Megan McDonald, 27 June 2015, in author's possession.

⁵¹ Interview with Brittany Mackey by Megan McDonald, 20 June 2014.

⁵² Ibid., Interview with Maxine Chesser by Megan McDonald, 18 February 2014.

⁵³ "Programs," Children's Defense Fund, accessed April 2018, www.childrensdefense.org.

saw it as a serious enhancement to the Center's programs. Mackey reflected that it even drew the interest of Reynoldstown's newer residents: "It was probably the highlight of my time at the Center. It provoked a lot of excitement in the community, and for the first time, newer Reynoldstown residents were just a little bit invested in the Center." However, a \$20,000 grant that was expected to cover the cost of the program never materialized, and the organization had no choice but to pull the money from savings.

The Stewart Center's Board of Directors found themselves in a precarious financial position. In a heartbreaking decision, they decided to suspend services immediately following the conclusion of summer camp. Members of Dunwoody Baptist Church provided funding for children to attend the local Boys and Girls Club, and board members continued to care for the building and maintain its finances. While board members were careful to state that this was a temporary decision, many wondered if the Center had closed its doors for the last time. For several months, the Stewart Center sat empty, its playground vacant.

The Stewart Center in the 2010s

Just as Alice White's timely appearance twenty-two years earlier had reinvigorated the organization when the WMU feared that all had been lost, a candidate for director emerged in 2009 as the board scrambled to keep the organization alive. Clayton Davis was a graduate of McAfee School of Theology, and was passionate about community development and urban ministry. The Stewart Center board hired him on a part-time basis in December 2009. For the next five months, Davis worked to regain the support of churches and funders, hosted a number of volunteer groups to paint and repair the building, and visited the principals and teachers at local schools. Most importantly, Davis reconnected with families that had attended the Center

prior to the suspension of services, notifying them that the Center would re-open for summer camp in June of 2010. That first summer, over 40 children signed up for camp and the after school program resumed operation that fall, primarily serving Cook Elementary School students.⁵³

For the next five years, the Stewart Center experienced a period of rebirth and growth. Attendance steadily increased in both the after school program and Summer camps. A new middle and high school Youth program included academic programming and community service, culminating in an end-of-year travel trip. The Stewart Center's finances also began to improve. While many Baptist churches continued to support the Center, increased grant writing and the inception of an annual golf tournament increased the Center's operating budget exponentially.



Figure 41 End-of-Year Youth trip to the Grand Canyon, 2017. Courtesy of the Andrew P. Stewart Center.

⁵⁴ Interview with Clayton Davis by Megan McDonald, 3 October 2014, in author's possession.

Atlanta Public Schools Redistricting

In 2011, the Atlanta Public Schools introduced a controversial redistricting plan of the entire APS system. Intended to save the district about \$6.5 million dollars, the plan called for closing and consolidating a number of schools.⁵⁴ At the time that the plan was proposed in 2011, Atlanta Public Schools had a student population of 47,000 students (not including charter schools), who were attending schools in buildings which could accommodate up to 60,000 students. With an excess of 13,000 seats, the district identified this as an area in which budget expenditures could be reduced. Ultimately, ten schools were closed.⁵⁵

Directly impacting the Stewart Center was the decision to close Ed S. Cook Elementary School, where most children at the Stewart Center attended. This was the third elementary school serving Reynoldstown to be closed, following I.P. Reynolds in 1982 and C.D. Hubert in 2002.⁵⁶ The closing of Cook Elementary scattered students between Parkside Elementary (Grant Park), Whitefoord Elementary (Edgewood), and Toomer Elementary (Kirkwood). While Whitefoord was redistricted to include Reynoldstown, the Stewart Center also picked up students who had been moved to Parkside and Toomer. In addition, the mother of a student who attended summer camp asked Davis if he would consider picking up students who attended Gideons Elementary School in the Pittsburgh neighborhood of Atlanta, to which he agreed.

When the Stewart Center began picking up children from Gideons Elementary School, staff members were struck by the contrasting conditions of the Pittsburgh and Reynoldstown communities. The streets of Pittsburgh were filled with blighted and vacant houses, while new

⁵⁵ “What you need to know about Atlanta Superintendent Erroll Davis,” *The Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, June 30, 2014. <https://www.ajc.com/news/what-you-need-know-about-atlanta-superintendent-erroll-davis/Jtu7txzJ5fXNBJCQKNfbFN/>

⁵⁶ Superintendent’s Final Redistricting and Closure Recommendations. Posted March 31, 2012. <https://www.atlantapublicschools.us/cms/lib/GA01000924/Centricity/Domain/45/FinalRecPub0331v.6.pdf>

⁵⁷ Whitefoord Elementary would constitute the fourth, closing in 2017. Children living in Reynoldstown were reassigned to Burgess-Peterson Academy, beginning in Fall 2017.

construction filled every available lot in Reynoldstown. Most children who attended Gideons Elementary lived in the surrounding community, and could be seen walking around the neighborhood after school hours. Whereas in Reynoldstown, no school operated in the neighborhood and children were bused to schools outside the community. Fewer and fewer low-income families lived in Reynoldstown, replaced by affluent transplants who generally sent their children to private schools or charter schools. Faced with this glaring contrast, the leadership of the Stewart Center began a slow, painstaking deliberation process regarding its future in Reynoldstown. Gentrification reached critical-mass as the effects of the recession had lost their grip, and a portion of the Beltline’s “East Side Trail” was completed nearby. Affordable housing in the community had all but disappeared, and only a handful of few senior citizens who owned their homes remained from earlier decades. In 2015, the leadership of the Stewart Center decided to cease operations in Reynoldstown. Unlike the Stewart Center’s move to Reynoldstown 65 years earlier, the move did not represent a rapid “flight” from the community but rather was the culmination of a slow, thoughtful process that took place over the span of several years.

At the conclusion of summer camp in 2015, the Stewart Center closed the Stovall Street building in Reynoldstown for the last time. The organization now redirected all of its energies and resources on children and families living in Pittsburgh. The Stovall Street property and Flat Shoals property (upon which the Board had hoped to construct a new building a decade earlier) were sold. Reflective of the dramatic gentrification that had taken place in the neighborhood, the Stovall Street buildings were demolished and replaced with fourteen “urban row homes” priced at over \$500,000 each.⁵⁷

⁵⁸ “Reynoldstown Row,” Thrive Homes, accessed March 2018, <http://www.buildwiththrive.com/CommunityDetails.aspx?ID=12>.



Figure 42 Figure 43 Mauldin Street View of Stewart Center buildings, driveway, and playground, 2013. Author photograph.



Figure 43 Mauldin Street view of former Stewart Center property, post demolition, 2016. Author photograph.



Figure 44 "Reynoldstown Row" development, on the former site of the Stewart Center, 2018. Author photograph.

5 Pittsburgh

The Stewart Center's initial involvement with the Pittsburgh community was gradual, with programs developing and increasing in size as the organization came to better understand the community's needs. Educational support had emerged as a critical need in the community early on in the Stewart Center's involvement. In October 2009, the city's newspapers revealed a system-wide cheating scandal in the Atlanta Public Schools (APS). "Statistically unlikely" gains in test scores in at least twelve Atlanta elementary schools and a high incidence of erasures on the Criterion-Referenced Competency Tests (CRCT) indicated that teachers throughout the APS system had corrected students' incorrect answers in order to yield higher test scores.¹ Gideons Elementary School had been highlighted in news reports as the poster child of the Atlanta Public Cheating Scandal. 88% of classrooms at Gideons had been flagged for test erasures, and the criminal investigation revealed that the school principal ran a "coordinated school-wide cheating scheme."² While the scandal wrought severe consequences for the district, the primary victims of the scandal were the students themselves, whose misrepresented educational achievement meant that many children had been passed from grade to grade, regardless of whether or not they had met state standards. With this in mind, the Stewart Center's first involvement in Pittsburgh was in the form of academic and reading support. Beginning in the fall of 2011, staff members transported six children from Gideons Elementary School to Reynoldstown each day to participate in the after school program.

¹ "Are Drastic Swings in CRCT Scores valid?" *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, October 19, 2009. <https://www.myajc.com/news/local/are-drastic-swings-crct-scores-valid/1uNxbbiLUZjvYQx6gMkyN/>; "A System-Wide Scandal," *The Atlanta Journal-Constitution*. February 18, 2013. <https://www.ajc.com/news/cheating-our-children/aps-investigation-map/>

² "A System-Wide Scandal," *The Atlanta Journal-Constitution*. February 18, 2013. <https://www.ajc.com/news/cheating-our-children/aps-investigation-map/>

As the Stewart Center got to know families through the after school program, they soon learned from local families and school officials that few affordable summer camps were available to neighborhood children. In 2012, the organization decided to host a two-week pilot summer camp in the community to gauge community interest. In addition to typical summer camps activities such as crafts, sports, and trips to the swimming pool, the Stewart Center camp also included daily bible stories and an educational curriculum designed to prevent learning loss during the summer months. The camp quickly filled the small church where it was held, with additional children lining up across the street to watch the activities. Based on the overwhelming participation and interest of neighborhood families, the Stewart Center expanded the size and length of the Pittsburgh summer camp in each of the following summers, while simultaneously operating in Reynoldstown. Beginning in 2013, summer camp was held at Gideons Elementary School with the cooperation and support of the principal.



Figure 45 Children attending the Stewart Center's first summer camp in Pittsburgh, June 2012. Courtesy of the Andrew P. Stewart Center.

For the first four years of the Stewart Center's involvement in Pittsburgh, the after school program and summer camp were its primary programs, mirroring those in Reynoldstown.

However, as the Stewart Center became more involved in Pittsburgh, it became clear that neighborhood residents had unique needs that had not been encountered in Reynoldstown. As Clayton Davis and other Stewart Center staff members got to know children and their parents, housing emerged as a serious concern held by local families. In order to understand the factors that led to Pittsburgh's housing crisis, an examination of the neighborhood's development is instructive.

Pittsburgh's Early Development

Pittsburgh's early history and development were similar to that of Reynoldstown. A predominantly African American neighborhood since its inception, the community emerged in southwest Atlanta along the East Tennessee, Virginia, and Georgia Railroad (later the Southern Railway Company). The railroad and nearby maintenance shops provided employment for many African Americans who moved to the city looking for work after the Civil War. A small business district grew up along McDaniel Street and the neighborhood was serviced by three streetcar lines, providing easy access to downtown Atlanta.³ Initially developed on the outskirts of the Atlanta city limits (as was true of both English Avenue and Reynoldstown) Pittsburgh grew exponentially in the early twentieth century and was annexed in 1910. The neighborhood earned its name as a result of the smoky rail yard, which reminded residents of the steel mills of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.⁴

³ GSU MHP Program, *National Register of Historic Places Nomination: Pittsburgh Historic District, Atlanta, Georgia*. Historic Preservation Division, Georgia Department of Natural Resources. 2006.

⁴ Franklin Garrett, *Atlanta and Environs: A Chronicle of its People and Events, Volume 2*, (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1969) 65.

The pride and joy of the Pittsburgh community was its schools. The first was Pittsburgh Grammar School, was founded in 1904 by the Ariel Bowen A.M.E. Church.⁵ Students initially met in the church, but in 1909 community members raised the funds to construct a new school house at the corner of Mary and Ira Streets.⁶ In 1922, a new brick school building was constructed at the corner of West Avenue and Fletcher Street, on land donated by Clark College (Clark Atlanta University) and named Crogman Elementary. The Crogman School served the neighborhood's children until it was closed in a round of Atlanta Public Schools budget cuts in 1979.⁷ A second school was constructed in Pittsburgh at the height of the neighborhood's population growth and during the state's Minimum Foundation Program for Education spending binge. Charles L. Gideons Elementary school was completed in the western portion of the community on Welch Street in 1959. Upon the closure of Crogman in 1979, Gideons became the sole elementary school serving the neighborhood.



*Figure 46 Pittsburgh Grammar School, 1909.
Report of the Suburban and Rural Schools, Fulton
County, Georgia.*

⁵ As of 2017, the Stewart Center houses its offices in the former parsonage of Ariel Bowen A.M.E. Church.

⁶ GSU MHP Program, *National Register of Historic Places Nomination: Pittsburgh Historic District*

⁷ Ibid.

Unlike English Avenue and Reynoldstown, Pittsburgh did not experience large-scale white flight in the mid-twentieth century. With the exception of the neighborhood's western border, Stewart Avenue (now Metropolitan Parkway) the community had been predominately occupied by African Americans. In 1930, for example, 91% of Pittsburgh residents were African Americans. While the bulk of the neighborhood did not experience white flight, Pittsburgh was impacted by highway construction and urban renewal projects in the area. With a loss of over 600 housing units between 1950 and 1960 and highway construction taking place directly along the neighborhood's eastern border, many middle-class residents relocated to more favorable areas in previously white-only neighborhoods and newly developed suburban communities. Highway construction resulted in the demolition of at least 30 houses and several commercial buildings in the southeastern portion of the neighborhood, where the University Avenue exit of 75/85 was built.⁸

Population trends in Pittsburgh mirrored those in Reynoldstown during the latter half of the twentieth century. Reaching a peak population of 9,780 residents in 1960, the population declined to 7,276 in 1970, 4,324 in 1980, and 3,567 in 1990. The neighborhood's thriving small businesses also declined after 1960, when the spending power of residents decreased. With the combined impact of middle-class residents relocating, rising unemployment rates in the city, and the decline of the railroads, Pittsburgh became a predominantly low-income community. New housing construction after 1960 reflected this trend, as small, concrete block duplexes and single-family housing were built by various urban renewal projects to accommodate low income families. As was true in Reynoldstown, poverty bred crime, particularly related to drugs and prostitution.⁹

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid.

While the City of Atlanta showed a small increase in population (3%) during the 1990s, reversing the decline of previous decades, much of this growth was fueled by increases in the white population in gentrifying neighborhoods. Pittsburgh did not experience this growth, instead continuing to experience population losses during the 1990s. Unemployment rates remained high in Pittsburgh: almost 41 percent of working aged men were neither working nor actively seeking work, and an estimated two out of three households had incomes of less than \$25,000.¹⁰ The Pittsburgh Community Redevelopment Plan, completed in 2001, determined that Pittsburgh had significantly higher vacancy rates than the broader geographic region, which encouraged unlawful activities and impacted the overall feel of the neighborhood. In addition, a significant proportion of properties were considered to be deteriorated or dilapidated, requiring extensive repairs.¹¹

21st Century Challenges in Pittsburgh

One of the neighborhood's greatest assets is the existing single-family residential character of the community. This quality, considered alongside the neighborhood's close proximity to downtown Atlanta, easy access to both I-20 and I-75, and the location of the BeltLine along its southern border have made Pittsburgh a target among real-estate speculators. The neighborhood gained widespread popularity among investors when news of the impending BeltLine project filled the city's newspapers between 2003 and 2005: the BeltLine and a huge concrete parcel, ripe for redevelopment, comprise Pittsburgh's southern border.

¹⁰ Urban Collage Inc., Huntley & Associates, Altamira Design and Common Sense, CHJP and Assoc., *Pittsburgh Community Redevelopment Plan, Final Report*, (Atlanta: n.p., 2001).

¹¹ Ibid.

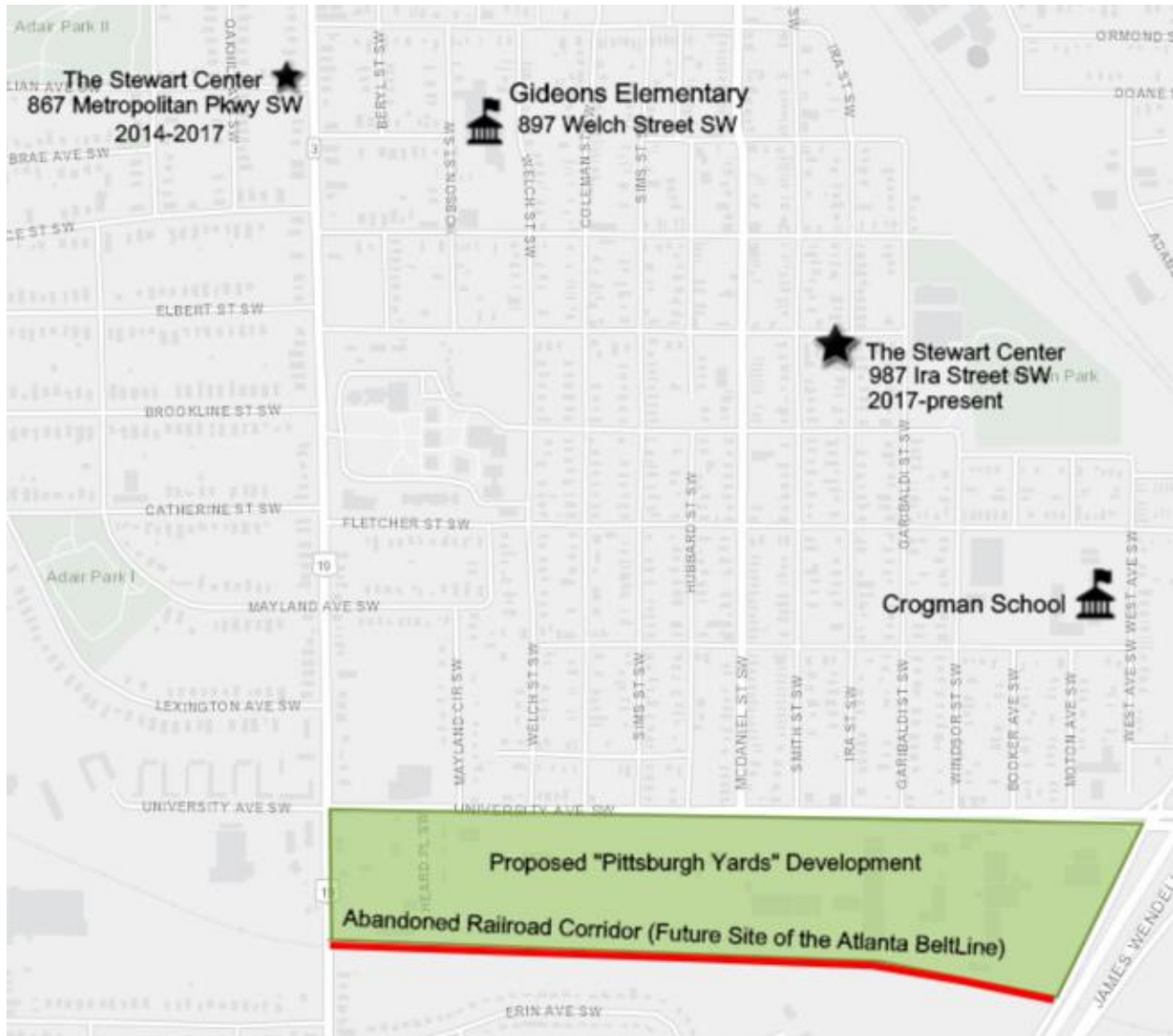


Figure 47 Map of Pittsburgh showing locations of the Andrew P. Stewart Center and local schools. The BeltLine and a large concrete parcel make up the neighborhood's southern border.

Through analysis of home sales between 2000 and 2006, researcher Dan Immergluck found that initial media coverage of the BeltLine induced substantial speculation and gentrification in lower-income, southside neighborhoods located within a quarter mile of the Beltline. While paving of the southern portion of the Beltline would not likely begin for over a decade, the mere possibility of profiting from the immensely popular BeltLine led to a “bidding-

up of residential property values” in southside neighborhoods—including Pittsburgh.¹² Homes in Pittsburgh appreciated as much as 30 percent within a two-to three-year period, a rate significantly higher than similar properties located a mile from the BeltLine. While at first glance the appreciation of property values may appear to be a good thing, as Immergluck succinctly states:

While some—especially those who own property and can afford higher taxes—may welcome higher property values, others—including some lower-income owners—may not, particularly if they desire to remain in the area and will have difficulty affording higher taxes. Lower-income renters, whose new leases are likely to reflect higher tax assessments and higher property values, will almost certainly experience some pressure towards displacement.¹³

Considering the impoverished status of most residents of Pittsburgh, rapid appreciation in property values would very likely lead to their displacement. In addition, despite the rapid sale and rehabilitation of some homes in Pittsburgh during the BeltLine bonanza—most remained vacant, contributing to further blight and crime in the community. While investors hoped to cash in on their investments in the future, they contributed to further neighborhood decline in the present. Author Mark Pendergrast described this predicament through an interaction between Pittsburgh Community Improvement Association (PCIA) president, Pierre Gaither, and one such investor:

Ironically, BeltLine publicity was partly responsible for the glut of empty homes. Investors were just sitting on them, hoping for development and rising prices. When [Pierre] Gaither tracked down a California woman who had bought a shabby vacant house in Pittsburgh sight unseen, she told him, “I’m waiting for the BeltLine to come through.” He said, “Ma’am, this is a twenty-five-year project. Can you cut your grass until then?”¹⁴

¹² Dan Immergluck, “Large Redevelopment Initiatives, Housing Values and Gentrification: The Case of the Atlanta Beltline,” *Urban Studies Journal* Vol. 46 #8 (July 2009), 1725.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 1743.

¹⁴ Mark Pendergrast, *City on the Verge: Atlanta and the Fight for America’s Urban Future*, (Basic Books), 201.

While Pittsburgh already had higher vacancy rates than most other Atlanta neighborhoods during the 1990s and early 2000s, the condition would worsen after the market collapsed and the ensuing foreclosure crisis revealed widespread mortgage fraud. While impacting many towns and cities across the United States, Pittsburgh had been particularly hard hit. By the time the Stewart Center began its involvement with the community, vacant houses comprised as much as 45% of Pittsburgh's housing stock.¹⁵

Rising vacancy rates contributed to a further increase in crime, as empty houses became sites of illicit activities. Due to high levels of crime in the neighborhood, Pittsburgh was federally designated as a "Weed and Seed" community in 2007 through the U.S. Department of Justice alongside Mechanicsville, English Avenue, and Vine City. Through this program, the city of Atlanta received seven, two-year grants in order to "weed out violent crime, gang activity, and drug use and trafficking in target areas, and then seed the target area by restoring the neighborhood through social and economic revitalization."¹⁶ Although the program had generally been deemed successful in reducing crime rates in Atlanta's Weed and Seed communities, it had done little to promote its second purpose: social and economic development. When the federal program ended in 2011 and Atlanta's grant dollars expired in 2012, the city received widespread criticism for mismanagement of funds. An audit found that most of the grant money had gone toward staff and ancillary service instead of community job training.¹⁷

¹⁵ "Unsafe Streets Stifle Housing Rebound in Southwest Atlanta," *The Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, October 29, 2012.

¹⁶ US Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs. https://www.ojjdp.gov/pubs/gun_violence/sect08-e.html

¹⁷ "Federal Audit Slams Atlanta's use of Grant Dollars," *The Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, September 23, 2013. <https://www.myajc.com/news/local/federal-audit-slams-atlanta-use-grant-dollars/Xih5FbBNi4LPzYRNCHZASJ/>

The Stewart Center Evolves in Pittsburgh

It was clear to the leadership of the Stewart that many of the challenges faced by residents of Pittsburgh had been created or aggravated by outsiders: investors purchased homes that lie vacant, lenders committed real estate fraud, local government failed to use funds for local job training, and school officials cheated local children out of an education. Because Pittsburgh residents had been negatively impacted by outsiders time and time again, it was clear to the Stewart Center's leadership that any intervention into the community would need to be a concentrated, long-term effort pursued in partnership with existing residents. In the newsletter that announced the Stewart Center's 'new strategic direction' and intention to relocate all operations to the Pittsburgh community, Clayton Davis stated the organization's objectives and commitment to neighborhood residents:

Over the next 15 years the Stewart Center will direct all of its resources in partnership with Pittsburgh residents to bring about community transformation. Through expanded programs, strategic initiatives, and deliberate partnerships the Center will adopt an asset based community development model focused on education, wellness, housing, and economic development...Our endeavors are not envisioned nor implemented to perpetuate a set of programs, an ideology or even the organization. We exist for the love of our neighbors.¹⁸

In an effort to become more involved with the community and better understand neighborhood conditions, summer staff who worked at the Pittsburgh camp lived in rented homes in Pittsburgh beginning in 2013. Other staff members moved to the community the following year. Beginning in the fall of 2014, the Stewart Center opened an after school program within the community, rather than transporting students to Reynoldstown.¹⁹ Stewart Avenue United Methodist Church allowed the Stewart Center to rent their building for this

¹⁸ Clayton Davis, "New Strategic Direction," June 22, 2015 newsletter, the Andrew P. Stewart Center.

¹⁹ During the 2014-2015 school year, the Stewart Center operated simultaneous after school programs in Pittsburgh and Reynoldstown.

purpose. This location was not viewed as a long-term solution, as the church was located on the outskirts of the community and across a major thoroughfare (Metropolitan Parkway, formerly Stewart Avenue.)

In 2015, when all programming and resources were shifted to Pittsburgh, the Stovall Street property in Reynoldstown was sold. The influx in funds obtained from the sale of the Reynoldstown buildings presented the Stewart Center with a unique opportunity. Because the Center rented space for offices, after school programming, and summer camp, it did not have an immediate need to purchase property for programming in the neighborhood. This left a great deal of funding available for other uses. In light of this opportunity, the Stewart Center once again molded its programming to meet the needs of the community. Because vacancy rates and lack of safe, affordable housing were the most pressing issues facing children and their families, the Stewart Center created a subsidiary, known as Pittsburgh Community Housing LLC, with the stated objective to “intervene in Pittsburgh’s housing crisis by providing suitable housing options for families connected to the Stewart Center.”²⁰

The Stewart Center was not the first organization to intervene in Pittsburgh housing crisis. The Pittsburgh Community Improvement Association (PCIA) and the Annie E. Casey Foundation had worked to alleviate vacancy in Pittsburgh by purchasing and renovating homes in the community. However, the cost to purchase these homes (ranging between \$80,000 and \$95,000) were out range for most Pittsburgh residents. Perhaps intended to lure “urban pioneers” to the community, the homes were scattered across the neighborhood, often surrounded by blighted housing owned by absentee owners. As described by author Mark Pendergrast: “[F]ew urban pioneers would buy a nice house surrounded by abandoned homes

²⁰ “Housing,” The Andrew P. Stewart Center, accessed March 2018, <https://stewartcenter.org/housing/>.

and crack dens.”²¹ In response to this fact, the Stewart Center planned to lease the homes to local families, with the option for residents to enter a lease-to-own agreement.



Figure 48 Two houses purchased by the Stewart Center's Pittsburgh Community Housing Program, prior to rehabilitation. 552 and 554 Rockwell Street.

In May of 2015, the Stewart Center purchased three houses in the community, hiring contractors to rehabilitate the formerly vacant properties. The Stewart Center remodeled the homes with the intention of renting them to families who had children participating in the Center's programs. Three families moved into the houses in 2016. Four additional properties were acquired and rehabilitated in 2017 and 2018, and quickly filled by local families.

²¹ Pendergrast, *City on the Verge*, 201.



Figure 49 Map showing location of 8 homes purchased and rehabilitated by PCH. All of the homes are leased to local families, who have the option to enter a lease-to-own agreement if they would like to pursue homeownership

The Stewart Center also sought to meet other critical needs in Pittsburgh. The neighborhood was considered a “food desert,” a term used by the USDA to refer to communities that are not located near a grocery store or other source of fresh fruits and vegetables.²² While corner stores, gas stations, and fast food restaurants are within walking distance to Pittsburgh

²² “Documentation,” USDA Economic Research Service, accessed March 2018, <https://www.ers.usda.gov/data-products/food-access-research-atlas/documentation/>

residents, within these entities food options are limited and fresh meat, fruits, and vegetables are often expensive and of poor quality. For low-income families with unreliable transportation, traveling to the grocery store can present a serious challenge. Grocery store chains are often unwilling to open stores in low-income neighborhoods like Pittsburgh, because the community is deemed unable to support a store.²³ To offer residents better access to nutritious food, the Stewart Center initiated a “wellness cooperative” that seeks to provide healthy food in a manner that also promotes dignity and builds community. Large quantities of food are ordered from the Atlanta Community Food Bank and members sort, pack, and distribute it together at monthly meetings at the Stewart Center. Members are encouraged to take ownership of the co-op, leading monthly meetings and determining what foods are ordered. Meetings typically feature educational programming such as cooking classes or presentations by health practitioners. A key component of the wellness cooperative is the community building nature of the meetings, in which members share prayer requests with one another and lead devotionals.

In 2016, Atlanta Public Schools Superintendent Meria Carstarphen announced that five under-performing schools would be turned over to charter schools, in a last-ditch effort to prevent the schools from coming under state control. Due to poor academic performance, Gideons Elementary was selected alongside four other schools to undergo the charter school experiment, beginning in the fall of 2017.²⁴ Atlanta-based Kindezi School, a charter school that emphasized small student-to-teacher ratios, was to operate Gideons Elementary and the Stewart Center was selected to be the school’s official after school program provider. This decision had several implications for the Stewart Center. First, the after school program would move from

²³ “Starving for Nutrition,” *The Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, <http://investigations.myajc.com/fooddeserts/>

²⁴ “APS Proposes School Closures, Charter School Management,” *The Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, January 28, 2016.

Stewart Avenue United Methodist Church on the outskirts of the community, to Gideons Elementary School in the heart of Pittsburgh. Second, the program would quadruple in size, serving nearly 150 students each day. While the undertaking would be an expensive one (the Stewart Center was responsible for all costs associated with the after school program, including the expanded staff) it lent a great deal of credibility to the organization, and highlighted its long history of providing academic support to Atlanta's children. No longer in need of after school programming space, the Stewart Center entered a rental agreement with Ariel Bowen United Methodist Church on Ira Street, renting the former parsonage for offices. With the Stewart Center's after school programming taking place at Gideons Elementary School, its offices housed on Ira Street, and eight homes housing local families through the PCH initiative, the Stewart Center was now immersed in the life of the community.

Looking to the Future

As of April 2018, the Andrew P. Stewart Center owned eight homes in Pittsburgh, providing quality, affordable housing for local families. A flourishing and greatly expanded after school program was completing its first year in partnership with the Kindezi School. Plans for the 7th annual summer camp in Pittsburgh were well underway. While the organization was making great strides in the community as it earned the trust of its neighbors, further challenges lie on the horizon.

With the memory of gentrification and displacement in Reynoldstown fresh on their minds, the leadership of the Stewart Center was keenly aware of the potential for displacement of community members as progress on the Atlanta BeltLine drew closer to Pittsburgh. In March 2018, plans for a large commercial development along the Pittsburgh section of the BeltLine

were announced. The “Pittsburgh Yards” project would be developed on a portion of the huge, 31-acre concrete parcel sandwiched between University Avenue and the BeltLine, owned by the Annie E. Casey Foundation. Early press regarding Pittsburgh Yards highlighted the Casey Foundation’s intention to hire local residents for at least half of the entry- and mid-level jobs created by the project.²⁵ However, in light of the decline of affordable housing in other BeltLine neighborhoods (including Reynoldstown) and the negative impact of real estate speculation in Pittsburgh over the past decade, neighborhood residents have ample reason to view the project with suspicion. Unhindered by the widespread vacancy rates and level of blight faced by Pittsburgh, neighborhoods surrounding Pittsburgh have already begun the process of gentrification, including Adair Park, Capitol View Manor, and Peoplestown.

In 2018, the Andrew P. Stewart Center finds itself working to intervene in the systemic issues that face Pittsburgh residents, primarily in the form of housing and education. Armed with the memory of gentrification in Reynoldstown, the organization hopes to work alongside its neighbors in Pittsburgh to create a healthy, viable community for those who live there. The challenges to this goal are significant. Outside real estate speculators with no investment in the life of the community continue to hoard vacant, blighted properties and thereby place their desire for financial gain above the safety and concerns of local residents. The potential for gentrification caused by the Pittsburgh Yards development and the presence of a well-respected charter school are serious concerns for those who cannot afford rising rents or taxes. Certainly, the Stewart Center cannot prevent gentrification, displacement, or real estate speculation in Pittsburgh. Yet by making an intervention into Pittsburgh’s housing market, the Stewart Center hopes to allow local families, many of whom have patiently endured the neighborhood’s

²⁵ J. Scott Trubey, “Project Set to Rise Along Future Southern Atlanta Beltline Trail,” *The Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, March 12, 2018.

challenges for decades, to stay in the community as it revitalizes and benefit from its improvement.

Conclusion

From its beginnings in a little house on Bellwood Avenue to its present-day incarnation in Pittsburgh, the Stewart Center has made a dramatic evolution over the past century. Virtually every aspect of the organization has changed in some way, including geographic location, theological underpinnings, and programmatic function, to name a few. Yet there are constants in its history, too. While no longer owned by the WMU, the Stewart Center still receives financial and volunteer support from the organization, and the current director of the WMU Atlanta Metro Baptist Association, Esther Grissom, serves on its board of directors. Although the Stewart Center has expanded its network of support to include secular organizations and non-Baptist churches, the Center still maintains its relationship with dozens of Atlanta area Baptist congregations. The majority of the Stewart Center's operating hours are still spent working with children, though the organization recognizes and seeks to address the role that systemic issues such as food and housing contribute to their well-being. Most importantly, the Stewart Center still grapples with what it means to "love thy neighbor" on a day-to-day basis, seeking to know and understand what "love" is to residents of Pittsburgh.

6 Epilogue: April 16, 2018

Between 2011 and 2014, I worked as the Stewart Center's program director in Reynoldstown. During that period, the organization was still recovering from the temporary suspension of services in 2009. While attendance was growing and the Stewart Center was making significant progress financially, the organization faced a number of external challenges. Within my first year, the results of the Atlanta Public Schools cheating scandal investigation were revealed, Cook Elementary School was slated to close, and the Beltline's East Side trail was paved less than a mile from the Stewart Center. As I looked around the playground in those early days, I felt incredibly frustrated by the systemic issues that trapped our children and their families in poverty. While I tried to focus my energies on what I could control (providing the best quality programming possible) I often wondered if our work would really matter in the long run. I found reassurance in a surprising place. During my first year at the Stewart center, I was visited by three adults who had attended the Stewart Center as children. These encounters forever altered my perspective of the organization and led me on a journey to understand organization's long and beautiful history in Atlanta.

On the first occasion, a middle-aged man driving a utility truck pulled over by the driveway, climbed down from the vehicle and walked inside the fence with a huge grin on his face. When I greeted him, he immediately told me that he had come to the Stewart Center as a little boy and couldn't believe it was still there. On a second occasion, a woman walked slowly through the same gate, staring up at the building. Thinking she was lost, I asked if I could be of assistance. Barely glancing at me as she looked from the building to the playground, she asked "Is Miss Alice here?" I told her that Miss Alice had retired some time ago and now lived in Savannah. The woman, whose name I never learned, looked at me and said: "this was our safe place when I

was a kid” and left as quickly as she came. I was somewhat more prepared for my third encounter when a father called to let me know he would be picking up his daughter for the first time that afternoon. At the end of the phone call, he paused for a moment and then asked me if we still had the old basketball court out back. He went on to tell me that he had spent most of his childhood days playing basketball at the Stewart Center and recalled his sadness when the married couple who ran the Center (Jackie and Novella McClung) moved to Arizona. I invited him to take a tour when he arrived later that afternoon. Generally unimpressed by the main building, when we entered the gym, a huge smile spread across his face. He walked into the gym ahead of me and stood near the center of the court. After a few moments, he slowly turned to face me and said simply: “I can’t stop smiling.”

These encounters left a profound impression upon me. While I was glad to know that the Stewart Center had a lasting influence on many who came to its programs, I was also struck by the particular nature of its influence. It was clear to me that the Stewart Center had meant different things to each of these individuals. Their experiences at the Stewart Center were directly shaped by the context of the time and place in which they encountered it and their individual circumstances. Upon meeting these individuals, I wanted to know more. My boss, Clayton Davis, directed me to a metal cabinet full of ledgers and photo albums and handed me a little yellow folder of histories written by WMU members over the years.

With the yellow folder in hand, my research began in earnest. I learned that the Stewart Center had originally been located in the English Avenue community and moved to Reynoldstown in 1950 because of ambiguous “community changes” that I surmised were race related. Armed with the addresses of the Center’s first two locations, I drove to English Avenue one spring morning in 2012. It was soon apparent that the original cottage on Bellwood Avenue

had been demolished some time ago, so I turned down English Avenue and headed towards Pelham Street. As I neared my destination, the sight of a massive, abandoned school literally took my breath away. The three-story building filled an entire city block and was surrounded by ancient oak trees. The roof had begun to collapse, spilling sunlight into long-empty classrooms. When I got out of the car and approached the building, my eyes were drawn to a wise old owl perched above the main entrance, keeping watch over the empty schoolyard. While it would be several years before I researched the school's history, it was clear to me that it had once played a dominant role in the community.



*Figure 50 English Avenue Elementary School, 2018.
Author photograph.*

I then walked one block west to the intersection of English Avenue and Pelham Street. From the corner, I viewed a red and white wood-frame church and a stone house with blue trim. At the time, I correctly identified the church as the Stewart Center's former chapel-recreation building, but misidentified the stone house as the main building. I later realized that a huge, abandoned lot located directly behind these structures was the actual site of the Stewart Center. No trace of the building or playground remained, having been replaced with a U-shaped series of

cinderblock apartments. The lot was strewn with trash and tires and the property was obscured by overgrown vegetation. Windows of the buildings were boarded shut, but the doors hung ajar. As I stood on the sidewalk, I tried to see past the property's abandoned state, envisioning an earlier time when it was crawling with children.



Figure 52 Corner of Pelham Street and Paines Avenue in English Avenue. Former site of the Andrew P. Stewart Center, 1928-1949.

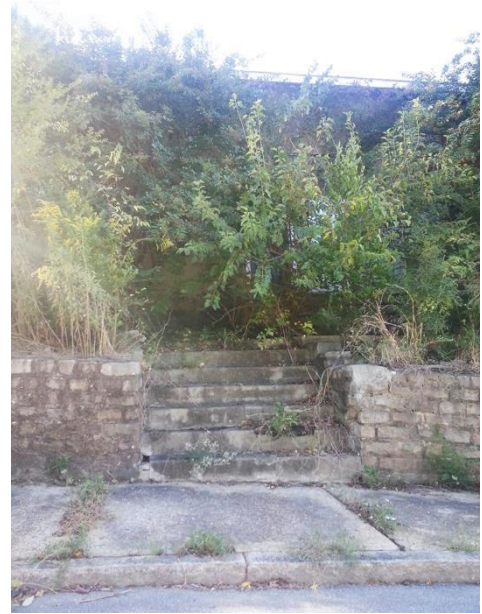


Figure 51 Steps that once led to the Andrew P. Stewart Center on Pelham Street, 2012. Author photograph

I made a second pilgrimage that day, shortly after leaving English Avenue. I had recently learned that Andrew Perry Stewart and his wife Frances were buried in Westview cemetery and felt compelled to visit their final resting place. Despite the fact that the cemetery office was closed and I had absolutely no idea where the Stewarts were buried, I entered the stone gates and wound my way through the property. I pulled off to the side of the road and wandered through several rows of Atlanta's most recognizable names. After pausing at the grave of Coca-Cola's Robert Woodruff, I started up a small hill and soon found what I was looking for.



Figure 53 Grave of Andrew and Frances Stewart, Westview Cemetery, 2012. Author photograph.

There, just a few feet from the sidewalk, were the graves of Andrew and Frances Stewart. As I stood in the grass, I remember wishing that I had brought flowers. Up until this moment, they had been an abstraction in my mind: I read, spoke, and typed their name daily, yet knew almost nothing about them. As I drove home that afternoon, my head was filled with questions.

One day while looking at some photo albums at the Stewart Center, I opened a book and was taken aback by the sight of white children smiling back at me. At the time, no white children attended the Stewart Center and most children I encountered in the schools were African American. All three of my adult visitors had also been African Americans. By this point, I had read quite a bit about Atlanta's history of white flight and begun to understand the role that it had played in the Stewart Center's relocation to Reynoldstown. It eventually dawned on me that many of the white children in the photographs were still living. The photo albums had been

captioned with the full names of each child, the diligent work of Elizabeth Lundy and Myrtle Salters.



*Figure 54 Linda Reynolds, Frances Fortner, and Barbara Ramsdell, who attended the Stewart Center in the 1950s, on a visit to the Andrew P. Stewart Center, November 2014.
Courtesy of Barbara Ramsdell.*

I wrote letters and made phone calls, sent Facebook messages and emails. I reached a turning point when I met Ford Chance, who coordinated Roosevelt High School class reunions and had grown up at the Stewart Center in Reynoldstown during the 1950s. Ford connected me to dozens of men and women who went to the Stewart Center with him. Most had not strayed far from Atlanta and lived within an hour of the city. Many shared with me that they drove through the neighborhood whenever they were nearby, checking in on their childhood homes from the comfort of their vehicles. Several agreed to visit me at the Center and allowed me to interview them. I heard so many stories about Miss Lundy and Miss Salters that I sometimes felt as if I had known them, personally.

Within a short period of time I had amassed a great deal of information about the Stewart Center, and began to feel a weight of responsibility to preserve it in some way. While the memories and recollections of individuals captured distinct moments in time, the moments had

not yet been pieced together into a cohesive story. In addition, after meeting so many people associated with the Stewart Center, I hoped to bring those of different generations together. As the organization's 100th birthday loomed on the horizon, the opportunity to accomplish both goals emerged. On March 19th, 2017, a group of men and women travelled across state and county lines to attend the Stewart Center's 100-year celebration.

Much of the planning for the 100-year celebration took place after I left my position at the Stewart Center to attend graduate school. I felt that in order to adequately understand and interpret the organization's history I needed further training in the field of public history, and left shortly before the Center began its transition to Pittsburgh. As much of my time was directed toward school work, I kept up with the Center's progress from a distance. Upon learning that the Stovall Street building had been sold in 2016, I drove by the building to see it one last time before it was demolished for townhomes. Surprised by the sight of my second-floor office, now missing a roof and two of its walls, I stood on the sidewalk for a very long time.

The physical condition of this building had been the bane of my existence since I started working at the Stewart Center in 2011. Many mornings before getting out of the car I looked upon its faded blue paint with disdain, wondering when we could work a fresh paint job into the budget. (Which we did eventually get, thanks to an enthusiastic youth group.) While I continued to dream of a nicer facility for the children who attended our programs, over time I began to look at the physical building in a different light. The building had come to symbolize decades of unglamorous, unrewarding, often mundane work that had been carried out at the Stewart Center in order to love and support generations of neighbors. While the building may have been a faded, raggedy, blue eyesore to some, there was beauty in its worn-ness.

Luckily, I wasn't the only one who saw the Blue Center this way. Whenever I met adults who attended the Stewart Center as children, I watched closely for their reactions when they stepped onto the playground or into the building. I wish I had adequate language to describe the way in which their eyes twinkled, jaws dropped, and facial features relaxed when they crossed the threshold. That blue building in Reynoldstown encompassed a host of meanings and memories for those who knew it well: it was a place where needs were met, relationships were built, and lessons were learned. It was a place of safety and belonging, and a place where people of dramatically different backgrounds encountered one another. While that particular building no longer stands, those qualities have carried over to programming in Pittsburgh, where the Stewart Center continues to grow and evolve among a new generation of children and their families. The physical memory of the Stewart Center has disappeared from the landscape of both English Avenue and Reynoldstown, but it is my hope that this history has in some way captured the tremendous, everyday human efforts that took place there.

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