



Southern Life NORTHERN CITY

..... THE HISTORY OF

ALBANY'S



COMMUNITY

 New York State
Museum

RAPP ROAD HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION





"Hanging Bridge" in Shubuta, Mississippi. Several hangings took place off of this bridge in the first half of the 20th century.

GREAT MIGRATION

and Life in Shubuta, Mississippi



ABOVE: Cotton hoers work from 6 a.m. to 7 p.m. for \$1, near Clarksdale, Mississippi, c. 1930.

LEFT: School Interior, Mileston, Mississippi, c. 1930.

PHOTOGRAPHS COURTESY OF MISSISSIPPI DEPARTMENT OF ARCHIVES AND HISTORY



RIGHT: Migrants heading North, c. 1940. African Americans packed everything they owned and headed north for the hope of a better life. PHOTOGRAPH COURTESY OF THE LIBRARY OF CONGRESS

THE GREAT MIGRATION was the movement of seven million African Americans out of the southern United States between 1910 and 1970 to industrial centers in the North, Midwest, and West. Migrants moved hoping to find higher paying wages, decent housing, less discrimination, and improved education for their children. In short, migrants wanted an overall better life than what the South offered. Many African Americans looked to Albany, New York for this new and better life.

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

When migrants arrived in Albany most were only allowed to live in the South End and Arbor Hill. It was difficult for African Americans to find and rent decent housing. The poorest people in Albany lived in the South End during the first half of the 20th century, which by default consisted of the newest immigrants and African American migrants. This area was also home to many bars, gambling houses, and prostitution. Albany was not perfect, but it was a better alternative to living in the South where discrimination could become violent.



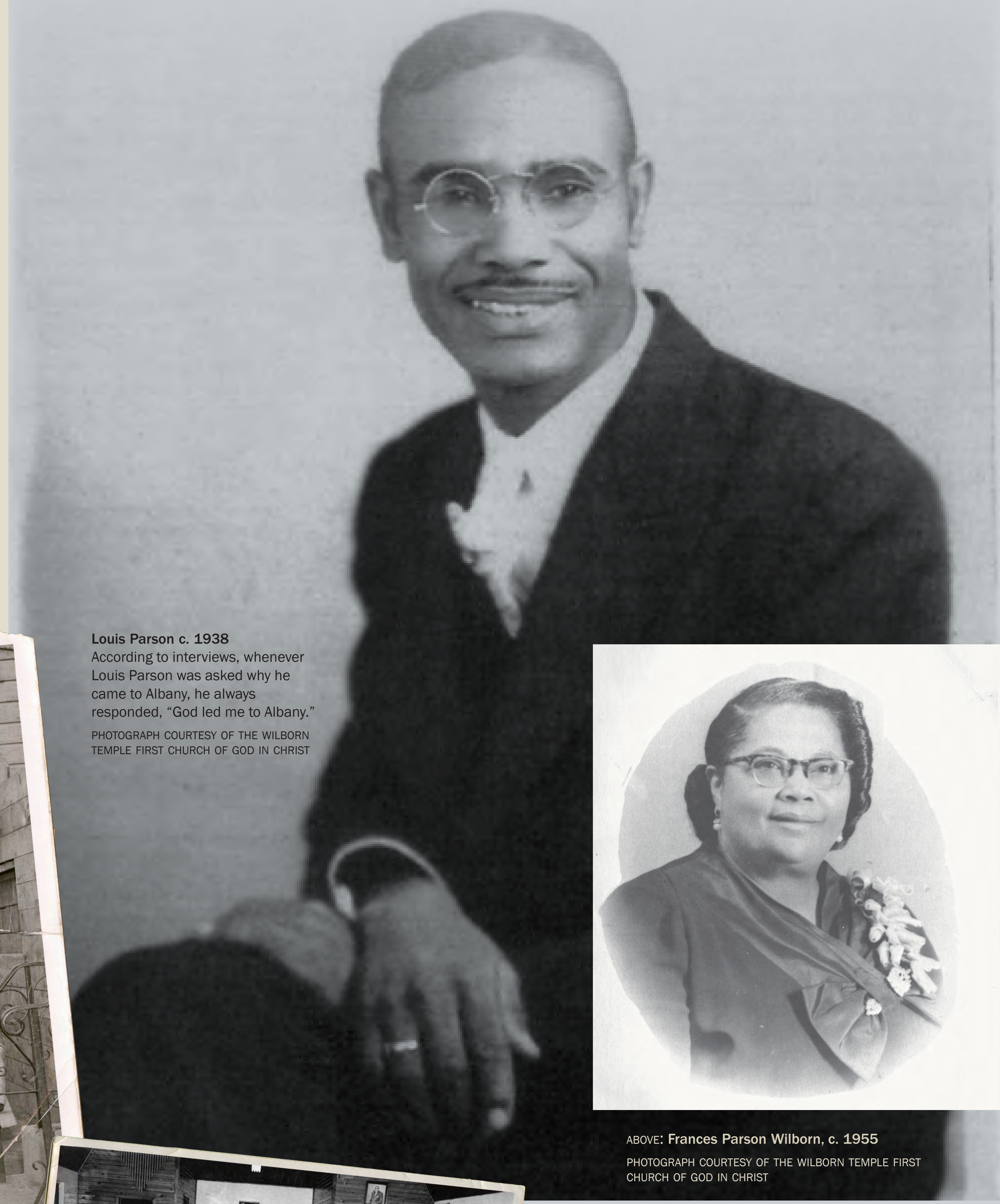
RIGHT: Dongan Avenue at Bleeker Street, c. 1945. Many of the migrants that came with Parson settled on Dongan Avenue in Albany's South End. PHOTOGRAPH COURTESY OF ALBANY INSTITUTE OF HISTORY & ART

ALBANY'S SOUTH END

and Louis Parson

Many of the migrants that made Albany home came from South Carolina, North Carolina, and Virginia as most railroad lines ran in a north-south direction. However, a large group of migrants came from Shubuta, Mississippi because of one man's vision.

Louis Parson (1902-1940) was a part-time preacher and laborer in the logging industry in Shubuta. He received a large cash settlement since he was injured while working. Parson purchased an automobile and moved north in 1927 with his wife, Frances. With only the North as a destination, the couple decided upon Albany because they met a small group of women holding prayer meetings in the South End of Albany. The Parsons joined the women and established the First Church of God in Christ located at 40 Franklin Street in Albany's South End.



Louis Parson c. 1938
According to interviews, whenever Louis Parson was asked why he came to Albany, he always responded, "God led me to Albany."
PHOTOGRAPH COURTESY OF THE WILBORN TEMPLE FIRST CHURCH OF GOD IN CHRIST



ABOVE: Frances Parson Wilborn, c. 1955
PHOTOGRAPH COURTESY OF THE WILBORN TEMPLE FIRST CHURCH OF GOD IN CHRIST



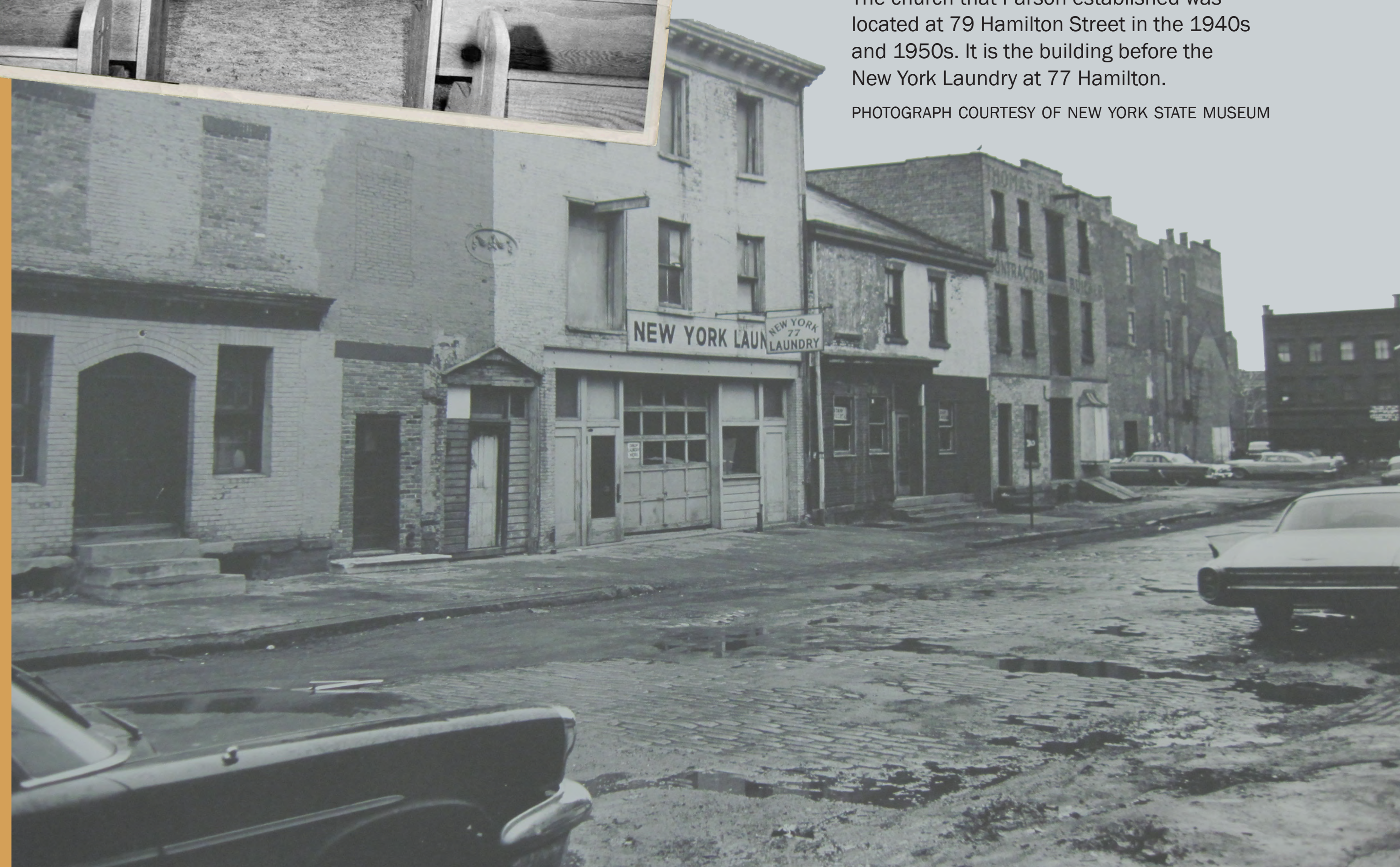
ABOVE: Group of families that moved to Albany as the result of John "Jack" Johnson's trips to Mississippi, c. 1950. John Johnson (back row) established St. John's Church of God in Christ at 7 Dongan Avenue in 1952.
PHOTOGRAPH COURTESY OF ADRIENNE JOHNSON

After the church was established, Parson drove to Shubuta and the surrounding area to recruit members for his Albany congregation. He recruited family, friends, and

congregation members from the South because he felt the North offered a better life for them. Parson made several trips back and forth between Albany and the Shubuta area. Most of the people he brought to Albany settled in the South End and became members of his congregation. A fellow congregant named John "Jack" Johnson followed in Parson's footsteps and purchased a bus to transport migrants out of Mississippi. Between 1937 and 1957, Johnson was responsible for "rescuing" more than one hundred blacks from the South and driving them to Albany.



LEFT: Wilborn Temple First Church of God in Christ's Senior Choir, c. 1950. Photograph taken inside of 79 Hamilton Street.
PHOTOGRAPHY COURTESY OF WILBORN TEMPLE FIRST CHURCH OF GOD IN CHRIST



BELOW: Hamilton Street between South Pearl and Green Street, Albany, c. 1965. The church that Parson established was located at 79 Hamilton Street in the 1940s and 1950s. It is the building before the New York Laundry at 77 Hamilton.
PHOTOGRAPH COURTESY OF NEW YORK STATE MUSEUM



ABOVE: The Woodard kids from Rapp Road. Clockwise: Oceana (Burkhalter), Walter, Pauline (Walker), Emma (Dickson), unidentified, Rita Hughes, Paul, Ann (Stanfield) center, c. 1950.

PHOTOGRAPH COURTESY OF ANN STANFIELD



ABOVE: Large garden fields on Rapp Road, c. 1989.

PHOTOGRAPH COURTESY OF ALBANY INSTITUTE OF HISTORY & ART

RIGHT: Labor Johnson building his house at 39 Rapp Road, c. 1944.

PHOTOGRAPH COURTESY OF ADRIENNE JOHNSON



BUILDING a Community

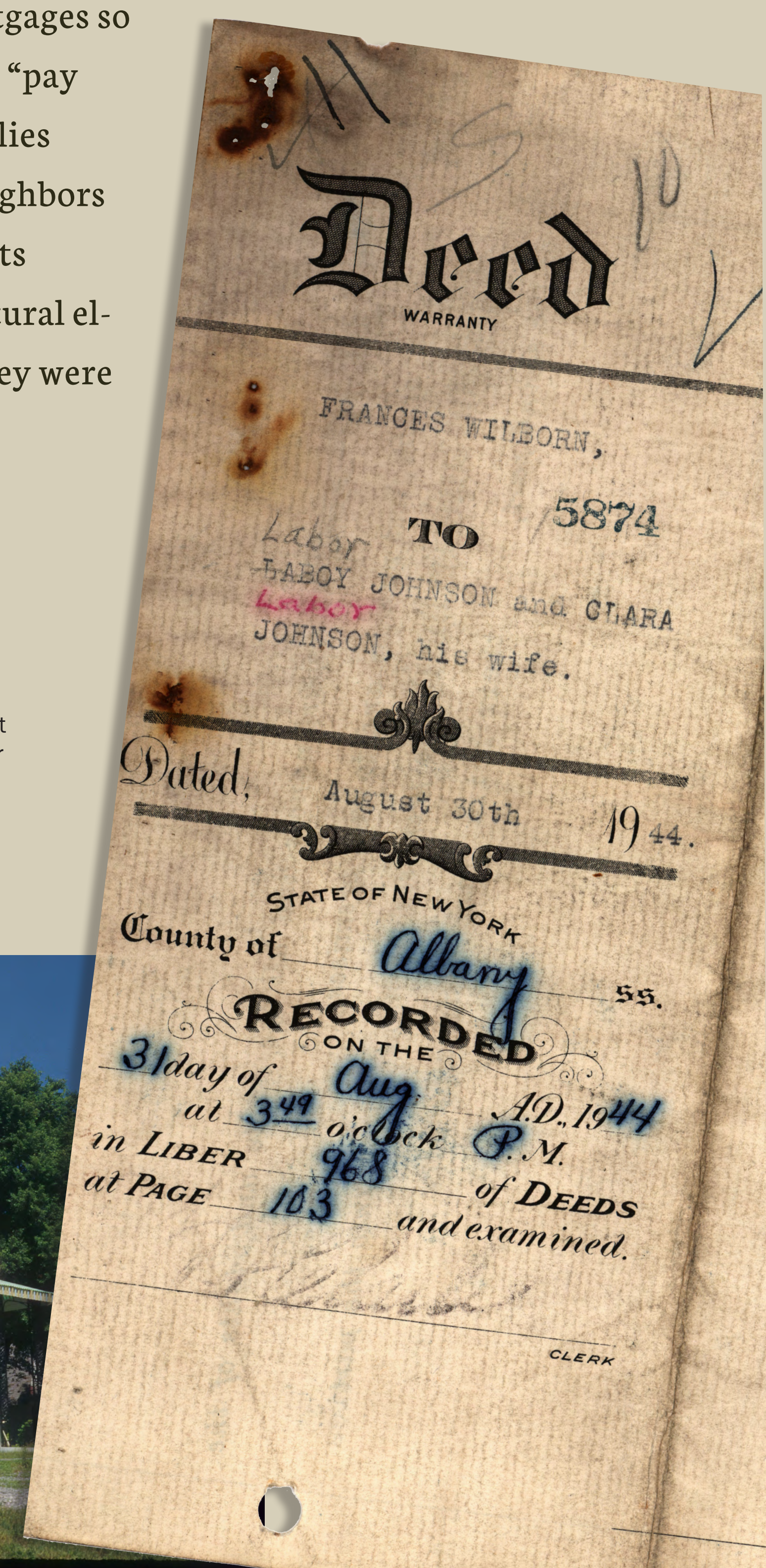
Some of the folks that Parson brought north were unhappy living in the South End of Albany. Most were deeply religious, used to a rural life, and did not like city living. Parson set out to remedy the situation. In May 1930 Parson and fellow church member, William Toliver, purchased 28-acres of land from Charles Smith in the western extension of the city of Albany in an area known as the Pine Bush. The acreage that the men purchased was rural and surrounded by only a few farms. Parson's plan was to sell plots of land to members of his church so they could get away from city life.

Louis Parson passed away in 1940, but his wife, Frances, continued to sell the land on Rapp Road. Twenty-three church families bought tracts of land from the Parsons. The road that traversed this area was named Rapp Road after the Rapp family that had lived and farmed the area for decades.

Before families could move to Rapp Road, the land had to be cleared and houses built. During this era it was uncommon for blacks to be awarded mortgages so each family had to build their house on a "pay as you go system." As a result, most families built their own home with the help of neighbors and family members. Rapp Road residents built their homes with the same architectural elements used in their southern homes. They were also able to grow fields of vegetables, raise animals, and embrace a rural life in the city of Albany.

RIGHT: Deed to land on 39 Rapp Road where the Johnson's built their home. Frances (Parson) Wilborn is selling the land to Labor and Clara Johnson.

PHOTOGRAPH COURTESY OF ADRIENNE JOHNSON



LEFT: (L-R) Oceana Woodard, Bertha (baby), and Naomi McCann on Rapp Road, August 1955.

PHOTOGRAPH COURTESY OF ANN STANFIELD

RIGHT: 39 Rapp Road, home of Labor and Clara Johnson from Shubuta who came to Albany with Parson on his fourth trip to Albany in 1933. Photograph c. 1989.

PHOTOGRAPH COURTESY OF ALBANY INSTITUTE OF HISTORY & ART



LIFE ON RAPP ROAD and Preservation

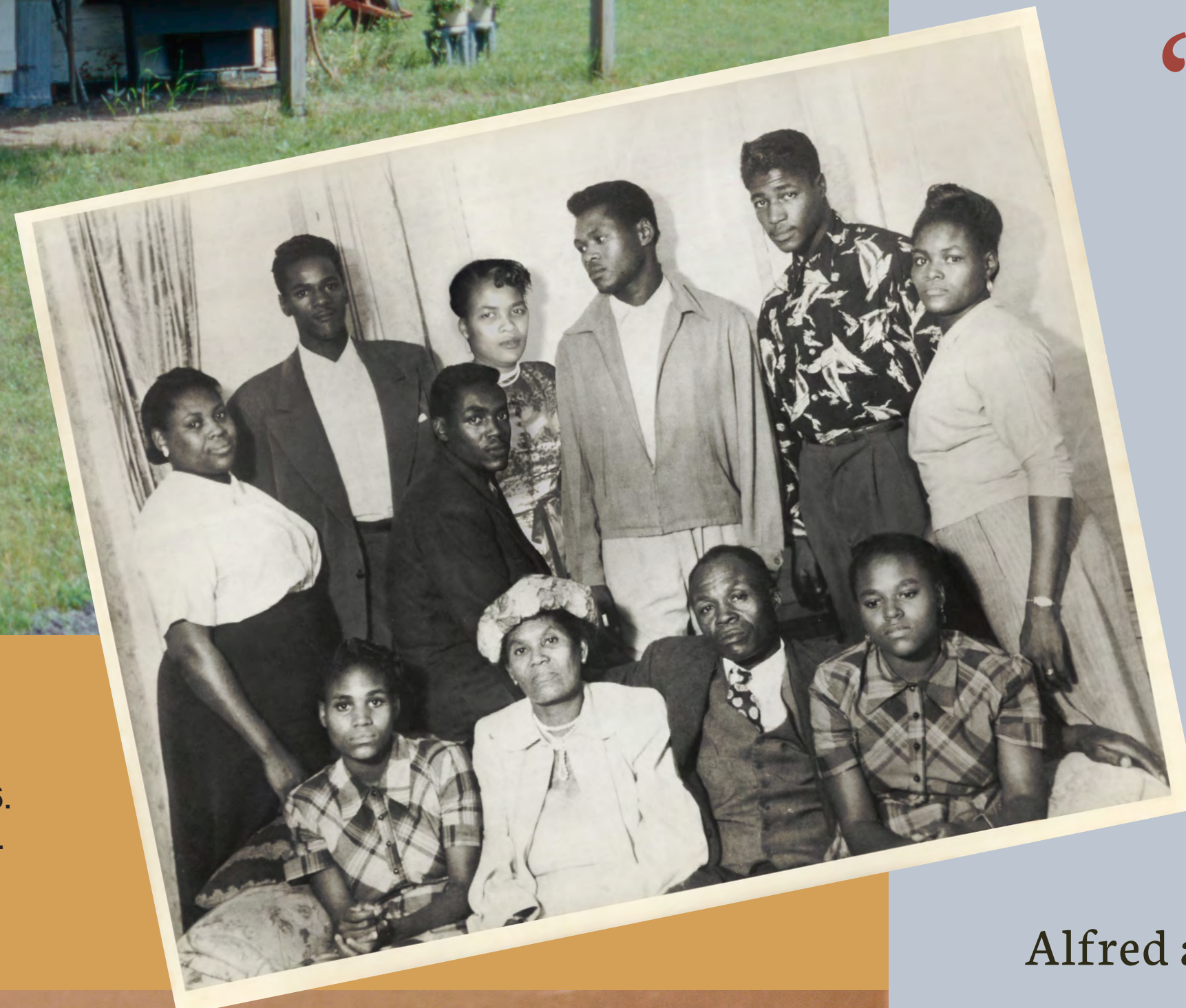


ABOVE: This smoke house was built by Dan McCann at 38 Rapp Road to roast pig for the annual family reunions.

PHOTOGRAPH COURTESY OF ALBANY INSTITUTE OF HISTORY & ART

RIGHT: The Franklin Family, c. 1955. Samuel and Luella Franklin migrated to Albany from Chicora, Mississippi in 1936. They bought land on Rapp Road in 1941.

PHOTOGRAPH COURTESY OF RHONDA NORMA



The Rapp Road families recreated their southern life in the Pine Bush. The residents on Rapp Road all worshiped in the same church, moved to Albany from the same part of the country, had similar upbringings, and settled on Rapp Road around the same time. As a result, the community was close. Long-time resident, Emma Dickson recalled:

“Everyone out on Rapp Road did everything together. You took care of each other’s children. They went to church together, they had prayer meetings together. Whatever had to be done, you got together and did it.”

As this strong sense of community developed, families felt the need to celebrate. Looking to their southern experiences, they decided to hold a yearly reunion for family and friends. The Rapp Road reunion began in 1957 by

Alfred and Leola McCann Woodard, Daniel McCann, and Willie McCann when one of their relatives from Mississippi was visiting Albany. As the tradition continued to grow, Daniel McCann built a small smoke house on his property at 38 Rapp Road specifically for roasting pig at family reunion. The reunion continues today.

While the community remained un-changed for decades, the area surrounding Rapp Road developed. Washington Avenue Extension was built in 1971 which opened the area to commercial and residential development. By the late 1990s more than half of the original settlers still lived on Rapp Road and younger generations began moving back to the community to live. In recent years the community has diminished as the first generation settlers have passed away, but currently there are second, third, and fourth generations living on Rapp Road.



(L-R) Girlie Ferguson, Emma Dickson, and Lucy Johnson, 2002. Girlie Ferguson and Emma Dickson on a research trip to Mississippi. Both Ferguson and Dickson helped document and collect Rapp Road’s history over the years.



ABOVE: Sammie and Henrietta Fantroy, c. 1950 Mr. Fantroy was from Alabama and Mrs. Fantroy was from South Carolina. The couple moved to Albany in 1943 and attended the First Church of God in Christ. They purchased property on Rapp Road in 1946.

PHOTOGRAPH COURTESY OF MAXINE FANTROY



LEFT: Annual Rapp Road Reunion, c. 1990

PHOTOGRAPH COURTESY OF EMMA DICKSON

In 2003 the Rapp Road Community was placed on the New York State and National Historic Registers.