

**2022
APRIL
FOV NEWSLETTER**



Happy Spring Friends of Oberlin Village! Read on to learn about recent events, resident history, and more! Enjoy!

Oberlin Cemetery Clean-Up



FOV's Oberlin Cemetery Clean-up Day had a huge turn out on April 9 with 103 volunteers! Special thanks to Tom Howard from Regency Centers, Nathan Cenis from Bartlett Trees, the Pastors of Hayes Barton & Wilson Temple UMC, the Raleigh Service Day team from NCSU, the Raleigh Charter Key Club and all our other friends from the community. Family plots were lovingly pruned and cleared by small groups of families including one descendant family. Thanks to everyone for sharing in Oberlin Village history and helping out! Our next clean up will be July 16.

Sign Up Now! The Inaugural Oberlin Village Heritage 5K Run/Walk!

June 18th will be a special morning. Participants in the Inaugural Oberlin Village Heritage 5K Run and Walk will be enjoying a fun family event at Raleigh's Dix Park and engaging with FOV volunteers about the past, present and future of Oberlin Village at an Informational Museum along with:

- Preservation NC
- The Latta House Foundation
- City of Raleigh
- The Village Library

5K participants are encouraged to register now at <https://oberlinvillageheritage5k.itsyourrace.com/>

More **volunteers** are needed to support the race. Positions are described and you can sign up at [Oberlin Village Heritage 5K VOLUNTEERS in Raleigh, NC - Details, Registration, and Results | ITS YOUR RACE](#)

More **volunteers** are needed for the FOV Informational Museum. We need people for 1-2 hour shifts to meet and greet and share our many resources, or help set up and take down. If available to help out FOV please email Sandy at Friendsofberlin@gmail.com. If you have already offered to volunteer, Sandy will be reaching out soon to schedule shifts.

We hope to see many of you on what promises to be a wonderful morning!

Event proceeds will support the Friends of Oberlin Village in raising public awareness and preserving Oberlin's rich history, contributions, and achievements.

- Follow us on social media. Facebook: Oberlin Village Heritage 5K Run/Walk and Instagram: OberlinVillage5K

Oberlin Village Stories



Pictured above: Letitia Nedab, Jeannette Harris, and Mary Haywood

Remembering the Fields Sisters

(This is a reprint of a 2013 story by Ann Sides from the University Park Homeowners Association newsletter. Jennette Harris passed in 2019, and Letitia Nedab passed last month. We thought this would be a nice way to remember these lovely ladies of Oberlin Village.)

When Letitia and Jeannette Fields were little girls, they skipped through meadows of trees and wildflowers where the Cameron Village shopping center now stands. Letitia remembers Bedford Avenue surfaced with hard clay and stones. Jeannette recalls a sawmill east of Oberlin road, and a stand of Christmas trees where apartments and shops exist now. Most of all, however, the octogenarian sisters remember the vibrant community spirit of Oberlin Village, a historic African-American settlement where children were brought up to value hard work, education, and family relationships.

The home in which Letitia Fields Nedab and Jeannette Fields Harris grew up still stands, at 802 Oberlin Road. From the wide, shady veranda of this attractive, 19th Century house, Letitia and Jeannette went on to careers as teachers and administrators in the Washington D.C., public schools, but never forgot their roots in Raleigh.

“Oberlin Village was founded by freed slaves just after the Civil War,” Jeannette explains. “Our forefathers had a great concern for education, and we had a

school here in Oberlin Village in 1869, seven years before the first public school opened in Raleigh.”

The residents, Letitia adds, opted to name their community and its main street “Oberlin,” because the Ohio college welcomed former slaves, and one of the village founders, James E. Harris, was a graduate. On a large tract of land on Parker Street, Rev. M.L. Latta established an orphanage and vocational school called “Latta University” in 1892. Dr. James E. Shepard, an Oberlin Village native and relative of the Fields sisters’ mother, founded North Carolina Central University in 1909.

In the 30’s and 40’s when the Fields sisters were growing up, Oberlin Village was a thickly-settled, self-contained, African-American community. The 12 block area comprised approximately 1,000 people in 175 homes, plus stores, workshops, churches, and a cemetery. However, westward growth of Raleigh and its commerce, particularly the Cameron Village shopping center, began to eat into the boundaries of the Oberlin community in the 1950’s. Desegregation brought more housing choices for blacks. Young people went off to college, and didn’t return to Oberlin Village, Letitia says, “not realizing its value.”

Oberlin Village is now a subdivision at the northeast corner of the University Park Homeowner’s Association boundaries, and has a diverse population of students, renters, and homeowners. Descendants of the freedmen who settled the area still remain in the neighborhood, but their numbers are dwindling.

The Fields sisters, after successful careers as educators, returned to Raleigh and joined community efforts to preserve Oberlin Village’s history and character. The neighborhood’s fight against a megadevelopment derisively called “Coker Towers” at Oberlin and Wade succeeded, but Letitia frets that the current building, Oberlin Court, encroaches the cemetery where her ancestors are buried. The sisters also point to efforts to preserve the cemetery and the Latta school property as examples of community activism; an alliance between the original families and newer arrivals.

“The newcomers, fortunately, have gotten into the nostalgia mode,” Jeannette says, “and want to keep it as a walking neighborhood. I’d like them to experience the same warm feeling we experienced, growing up here.”

Board of Directors Strategic Planning Session

The Friends of Oberlin Village Board of Directors held a Strategic Planning meeting on April 9, with a focus on goals and priorities for the next two years. They also held their official April BOD meeting, which included the election of FOV Officers. Board Members and their positions are as follows: Sabrina Goode, Executive Director; Michelle McLean, Board Chair; Chris Mincey, Vice-Chair; Karen Throckmorton, Secretary; Ted Carter, Jr., Treasurer; Kendall Harris, Member; Hank Debnam, Member. Member terms are listed on the [FOV website](#).

Authenticated Research Welcome

The Friends of Oberlin Village historical data is based on the research by Dr. M. Ruth Little titled, **Rooted in Freedom: Raleigh, North Carolina’s Freedmen’s Village of Oberlin, an Antebellum Free Black Enclave** published in the

October 2020 *North Carolina Historical Review*. This document can be viewed on the Friends of Oberlin Village website at FriendsOfOberlinVillage.org. Since 1924, the *North Carolina Historical Review* has been a definitive source for the study and understanding of North Carolina History. Recognizing that research is always evolving, FOV supports ongoing research about Oberlin Village and invites individuals to share their authenticated knowledge and research via an email to friendsofoberlin@gmail.com.

Upcoming Events:

- 4/16 Oberlin Village Walking Tour 10am
- 4/25 Virtual FOV Meeting 6pm
- 6/18 OV Heritage 5K Run/Walk 7-11am

If interested in attending any of our Upcoming Events, email friendsofoberlin@gmail.com for more details.

Friends of Oberlin Village greatly appreciates your financial support. If interested in making a donation, please click on the link below.



Our Contact Information

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