

VINEGAR HILL

AT THE SOUTHEAST CORNER OF RIDGE STREET AND WEST MAIN STREET IS THE CREST OF A SMALL HILL, APPROXIMATELY 500 FEET IN ELEVATION. "VINEGAR HILL" FIRST APPEARS ON THE 1877 O. W. GRAY & SON MAP OF CHARLOTTESVILLE, ALONG WEST MAIN STREET JUST EAST OF RIDGE STREET - WHAT IS TODAY THE WEST END OF THE DOWNTOWN MALL. OVER THE YEARS, VINEGAR HILL BECAME THE AREA BOUNDED ROUGHLY BY PRESTON AVENUE, WEST MAIN STREET, AND 4TH STREET NW. BUSINESSES LINED THE HIGHER RIDGE ALONG WEST MAIN. HOUSES AND CHURCHES FILLED THE DOWNHILL SLOPE TO THE NORTH.

EARLY 1800s

IRISH IMMIGRANTS LIVING IN THIS SPARSELY SETTLED VICINITY MAY BE THE ORIGIN OF THE IRISH "VINEGAR HILL" PLACE NAME.

1835

CHARLOTTESVILLE ANNEXED VINEGAR HILL (ALSO KNOWN AS RANDOM ROW).

1860s - 1960s

FOLLOWING EMANCIPATION, AFRICAN-AMERICAN FAMILIES MOVED TO VINEGAR HILL AND OPENED BUSINESSES TO SERVE THE GROWING POPULATION, AND BECAME ACTIVE PARTICIPANTS IN LOCAL POLITICS. JOHN WEST, ONE OF CHARLOTTESVILLE'S WEALTHIEST RESIDENTS, WAS ONE OF THE FIRST AFRICAN AMERICANS TO PURCHASE PROPERTY IN VINEGAR HILL IN 1870.

1902

IN THE LATE 19TH AND EARLY 20TH CENTURIES, VIRGINIA ENACTED ITS CONSTITUTION OF 1901-2, WHICH INSTITUTED MEASURES SUCH AS POLL TAXES, LITERACY TESTS, AND PROPERTY REQUIREMENTS IN AN EFFORT TO SUPPRESS BLACK PEOPLE FROM VOTING.

1910s - 1960s

VINEGAR HILL THRIVED AS THE ECONOMIC, EDUCATIONAL, CULTURAL, AND SOCIAL CENTER OF CHARLOTTESVILLE'S AFRICAN-AMERICAN COMMUNITY.

1940s

ELECTED OFFICIALS BEGAN DISCUSSION OF EXTENDING RIDGE STREET NORTH ACROSS WEST MAIN STREET, CONTRIBUTING TO THE DECLINE OF BUILDINGS IN THE VINEGAR HILL NEIGHBORHOOD AS ROAD CONSTRUCTION WOULD REQUIRE DEMOLITION TO OCCUR.

1949

THE AMERICAN HOUSING ACT OF 1949 PASSED, LEGALIZING "SLUM CLEARANCE" PROJECTS AND URBAN RENEWAL.

1960

WITH THE JIM CROW POLL TAX STILL IN PLACE AS A BARRIER TO AFRICAN AMERICAN VOTER REGISTRATIONS, THE VOTERS ELIGIBLE TO DETERMINE THE FATE OF THE NEIGHBORHOOD WERE OVERWHELMINGLY WHITE. ALTHOUGH THE ISSUE OF VINEGAR HILL'S POTENTIAL DESTRUCTION AND REDEVELOPMENT WERE CONTENTIOUS, CHARLOTTESVILLE'S VOTERS NARROWLY APPROVED A REFERENDUM THAT ENABLED THE DEMOLITION OF THE VINEGAR HILL NEIGHBORHOOD AND COMMERCIAL BUSINESS DISTRICT IN ORDER TO PROMOTE THEIR REDEVELOPMENT THROUGH THE DISPLACEMENT OF ITS RESIDENTS AND BUSINESSES.

1964

DEMOLITION OF THE VINEGAR HILL NEIGHBORHOOD BEGAN.

1965

FEDERAL PASSAGE OF THE VOTING RIGHTS ACT OF 1965 AIMED TO OVERCOME JIM CROW ERA LEGAL BARRIERS AT THE STATE AND LOCAL LEVELS THAT UNFAIRLY AND INTENTIONALLY HINDERED AFRICAN AMERICANS FROM EXERCISING THEIR RIGHT TO VOTE AS GUARANTEED UNDER THE 15TH AMENDMENT TO THE U.S. CONSTITUTION.

1960s - 1980s

REDEVELOPMENT OF VINEGAR HILL HAPPENED SLOWLY AND MANY LARGE PARCELS REMAINED VACANT FOR DECADES.

2011

IN AN ACT CHAMPIONED BY CITY COUNCILOR AND VICE MAYOR HOLLY EDWARDS, CITY COUNCIL APPROVED A RESOLUTION APOLOGIZING FOR THE RAZING OF VINEGAR HILL.

2011-2012

THE 2009 CHARLOTTESVILLE CITY DIALOGUE ON RACE SOCIAL/CULTURAL WORKING GROUP AND THE JEFFERSON SCHOOL FOUNDATION COORDINATED A PROCESS THAT SELECTED NATIONALLY KNOWN SCULPTOR MELVIN EDWARDS TO DESIGN A MONUMENT TO VINEGAR HILL. CITY COUNCIL CONTRIBUTED \$18,000 TO THE ARTIST SELECTION PROCESS, BUT THE PROJECT HAS YET TO BE REALIZED BECAUSE OF A LACK OF FUNDING.

2016

THROUGH A RESOLUTION, CITY COUNCIL UNANIMOUSLY DEDICATED THE RIGHT OF WAY AT THE WESTERN END OF THE PEDESTRIAN MALL AS VINEGAR HILL PARK. THIS RESOLUTION ALSO APPROVED A PLAN FOR NEW INTERPRETIVE AND WAYFINDING SIGNS IN THE PARK. COUNCIL DEDICATED FUNDING FOR WAYFINDING SIGNS, AND THE CITY HISTORIC RESOURCES COMMITTEE DEDICATED FUNDING FOR THE FOUR INTERPRETIVE SIGNS INCLUDED IN THE DESIGN.

2019

CONSTRUCTION HAS BEGUN TO REPLACE THE FORMER ICE SKATING FACILITY (MAIN STREET ARENA) WITH THE TECHNOLOGY-FOCUSED CENTER OF DEVELOPING ENTREPRENEURS (CODE) BUILDING.

WHAT'S NEXT?

FOLLOWING CONSTRUCTION OF THE CODE BUILDING, THE MALL WILL BE RETURNED TO ITS PRE-CONSTRUCTION CONDITION AND INTERPRETIVE SIGNS AND MARKERS INSTALLED.

PHOTO OF VINEGAR HILL, CIRCA 1960; K. EDWARD LAY, ALSO PUBLISHED IN THE ARCHITECTURE OF JEFFERSON COUNTRY: CHARLOTTESVILLE AND ALBEMARLE COUNTY, VIRGINIA. 2000.



THE CONTENTS OF THIS TEMPORARY INSTALLATION WERE PREPARED AND FUNDED BY THE CITY OF CHARLOTTESVILLE HISTORIC RESOURCES COMMITTEE. FOR MORE INFORMATION OR TO PROVIDE COMMENTS, VISIT CHARLOTTESVILLE.ORG/HISTORICRESOURCES