

Vinegar Hill

“Vinegar Hill” one of the city’s first neighborhoods was boarded loosely by Preston Ave., West Main St., and Fourth Street. It was established by Irish families in the early 1800s and incorporated into Charlottesville in 1835.

First called the “Random Row,” the origin of the name “Vinegar Hill” remains obscure. Ruled by the O’Tooles, the O’Traceys and the O’Donovans, the local tradition has it that National League pitcher Charlie Ferguson- a four time 20 game winner in the mid 1880s- was born and raised here.

African Americans first moved onto the “Hill” after the Civil War. From the 1920s to the early 1960s it was the city’s principle black business district and the vibrant center of the community’s social life.

In the 1960s, noting “Vinegar Hill’s” large number of substandard homes, the voters of Charlottesville decided to redevelop the 20 acre neighborhood. Sadly, because of a poll tax, many of the residents were denied a say in their own future. By March 1965, one church, 30 businesses, and 158 families—140 of which were black—had been relocated. Today, “Vinegar Hill” is just a memory.



Figure 1: Vinegar Hill marker on the Water Street Entrance to the Downtown Mall