

Inge's Grocery Store: African-American Business 1890-1979

The oldest part of the building known as Inge's Store at 333 West Main Street was constructed in 1820 and is one of the older buildings remaining on the Three Notch'd Road between downtown Charlottesville and the University. It is an example of the 19th Century buildings which provided commercial space on the street level and living space for the owner above the store. A metal awning projected over the sidewalk and protected the entrance doors for many years.

After graduating from the Hampton Institute, George P. Inge came to Charlottesville to teach in the public school system. In 1891 at age twenty-eight he began a business career as owner-operator of Inge's Grocery. The store provided most of the fresh fish sold in the city, to the University of Virginia Hospital, and to leading hotels and boarding houses. Inge's Store was the center of community and social life in the Vinegar Hill area and was continued by his son, Thomas Inge Sr. until 1979. The Inge family of nine children, among whom there were four teachers, two medical doctors, a college professor, and two businessmen, original lived upstairs.

Mr. George Inge was active in civic, social, educational, and religious affairs. At one time he served as chairman of the local Republican Party. Public hotels refused to accommodate black visitors and private homes had to fill in this void. The Inge family often had famous black guests staying at their home, including Booker T. Washington who was a classmate of Inge at Hampton Institute.



Figure 1: Inge's Store marker on 333 West Main Street.