

PHASE 1A ARCHAEOLOGICAL HISTORICAL REPORT

Prepared for City Schools of Decatur

Early Childhood Learning Center Project

Decatur, Georgia

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Introduction

City Schools of Decatur is proposing the development of the Early Childhood Learning Center Project in Decatur, Georgia. As part of responsible planning and due diligence, this Phase 1A Archaeological and historical assessment was conducted to evaluate the potential for cultural resources within the project area prior to construction.

The results of this study will provide City Schools of Decatur with a clear understanding of site conditions, historical grounding, and any archaeological considerations that could impact project planning, permitting, and future ground disturbance. During this Phase 1A assessment, our methodology included the use of deep historical research, Geospatial analysis, and in-person visits to the City of Decatur to obtain records, the DeKalb History Center, and civil servants to produce the following archaeological historical report.

The area scope for this project centers the former location of the Allen Wilson Terrace Apartments, bounded by Herring Street (now West Trinity Place) to the north, Electric Avenue on the west, and Oliver Street (now Commerce Drive) on the east side with Chewning Way and formerly Herring Place (1940) crossing through the middle of this block (City of Decatur 2014; Decatur Housing Authority 1940; Sanborn Map Company 1911). This historic block within the heart of The Beacon Hill Community has experienced subsequent periods of disruption, street name changes, destruction during the Decatur City Urban Renewal Program in the 1960s and then again in the early 2000s.

Based on the destruction that occurred during the 1940s and again in the more recent 2010s, that included the destruction of buildings and dwelling places and the removal of streets, we conclude that there is no significant cultural resources or structures remaining of the historic Beacon Hill community in this block slated for the Beacon Hill Learning Center.

I. A Historical Background on Beacon Hill and Black Decatur

The historic Beacon Hill community of Decatur, Georgia, commonly known as “The Bottom,” emerged after emancipation as the center of Black life in Decatur. Founded by formerly enslaved African Americans in the late nineteenth century, the neighborhood developed into a self-sustaining community of homes, schools, churches, businesses, mutual aid institutions, and civic leadership. Beacon Hill occupied the area bounded roughly by West Trinity Place, Electric Avenue, Water Street, and McDonough Street and represented the social, educational, and commercial heart of Black Decatur for nearly a century.

The south side of Herring Street, today West Trinity Place, formed one of the most important corridors within this landscape. Here stood churches, schools, residences, businesses, and gathering places that shaped generations of Black life in Decatur before urban renewal projects dismantled much of the neighborhood during the mid twentieth century.

The following report chronicles the known history of the south side of Herring Street using Sanborn maps, city directory research, oral histories, archival reports, preservation materials, and community memory.



Figure 1. Image of Beacon Hill Community before 1960s era urban renewal destruction showing children in the foreground and a row of homes that once lined the east side of Electric Avenue. Image courtesy of Herman Mason, Jr. as published in African-American Life in DeKalb County, 1823-1970, Arcadia Publishing 1998.

II. Beacon Hill and the Formation of Black Decatur

After the Civil War ended in 1865, formerly enslaved African Americans began settling in the low-lying section of Decatur that became known as "The Bottom." Over time, this area evolved into Beacon Hill, a thriving Black neighborhood characterized by a dense network of schools, churches, businesses, and residences. This transformation reflects both the creation of a self-sustaining Black community in the aftermath of emancipation and the development of a spatially defined cultural landscape that would shape Black life in Decatur for generations (City of Decatur 2014; Mason 1998).

By 1911, oral histories describe Herring Street as one of the principal roads leading into the heart of Decatur. Resident Fannie Mae Eberhart recalled that the road remained unpaved and muddy, with no sidewalks, yet she still remembered the city as "bustling and clean" (Christensen 1982–1999). Her recollections provide one of the clearest firsthand descriptions of early twentieth-century Black life on Herring Street. Eberhart further explained that Senator Leslie Steele owned many of the homes along the south side of Herring Street, illustrating patterns of landownership and tenancy that shaped the neighborhood's built environment (Christensen 1982–1999). Moving westward from Atlanta Avenue toward McDonough Street, residents encountered key institutions including the Odd Fellows Hall, St. James Presbyterian Church, and the expanding educational

district surrounding Herring Street School, which together formed the core of Beacon Hill's civic geography (Christensen 1982–1999; City of Decatur 2014).

The neighborhood contained a rich network of churches, schools, and businesses that supported Black self-determination during segregation. Antioch A.M.E. Church, established in 1868, became Decatur's first African American church, followed by St. James Presbyterian Church, Thankful Baptist Church, Lilly Hill Baptist Church, Mount Zion Baptist Church, and Thirkield Methodist Church, which collectively formed a dense institutional landscape of spiritual, educational, and civic life (City of Decatur 2014; Mason 1998). These institutions functioned not only as places of worship but also as centers of education, mutual aid, and community organizing.

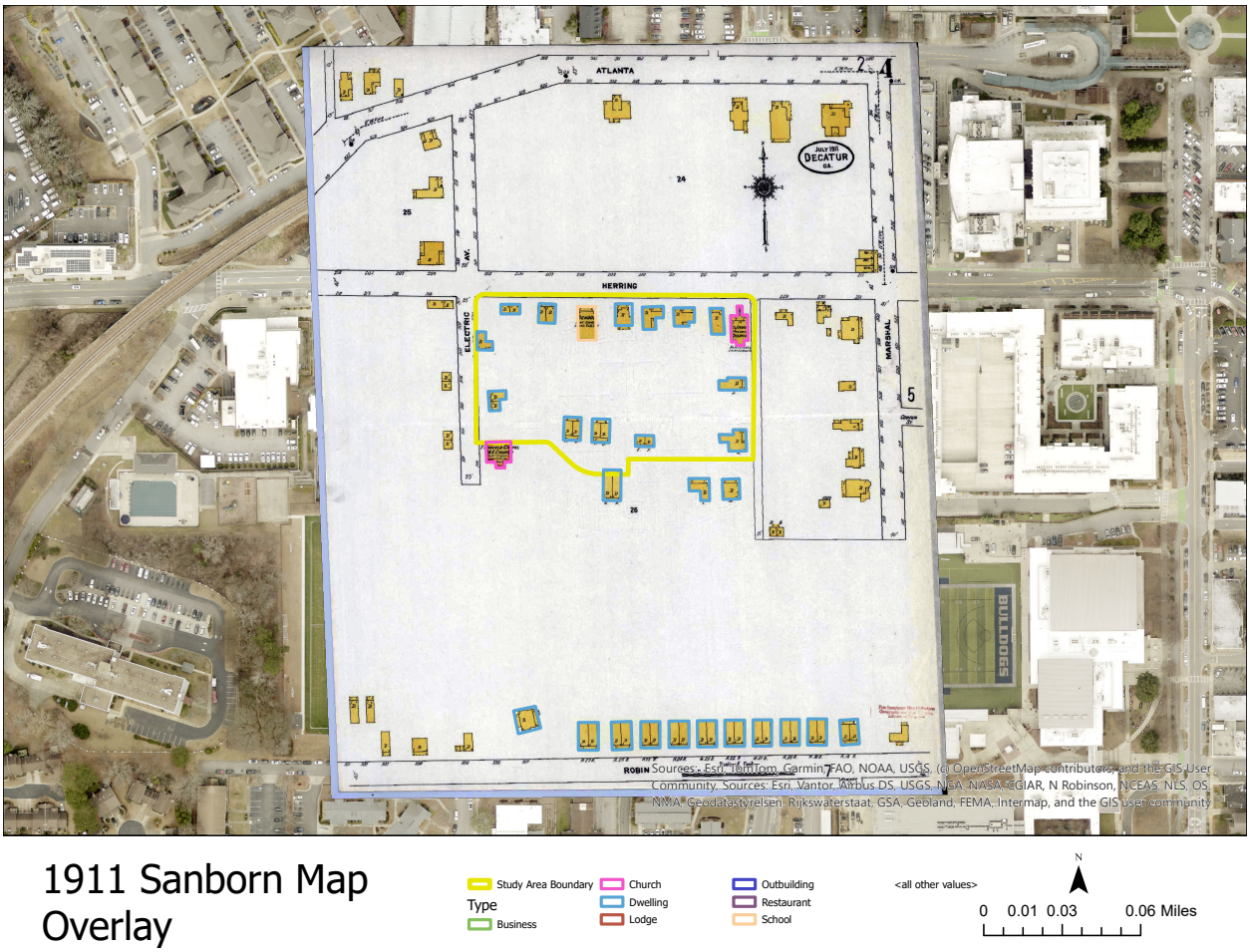


Figure 2. Historical 1911 Sanborn Fire Insurance Map overlaid on top of contemporary aerial image of Beacon Hill Community area. Area of project scope highlighted in yellow. Source Sanborn Fire Insurance Map dated July 1911. Decatur, GA. Map 4. Courtesy of GIS Specialist Dr. Terry Brock.



Figure 3. Image of the Decatur Nursery School located within the Odd Fellows Hall in the Beacon Hill Community, one of the earliest Black schools in Decatur dating back to the early 1900s, located at the intersection of Herring Street and Oliver. Image courtesy of Herman Mason, Jr. as published in African-American Life in DeKalb County, 1823-1970, Arcadia Publishing 1998.

Education was central to Beacon Hill's identity. In 1902, Reverend Allen A. Wilson established Decatur's first school for African American children in a lodge hall, reflecting both the demand for education and the absence of public provision under segregation (Mason 1998; Harris and Taylor 1999). By 1913, enrollment growth led to the construction of the brick Herring Street School, which later expanded into Beacon Elementary and Trinity High School, solidifying the neighborhood as a regional center of Black education (City of Decatur 2014; Harris and Taylor 1999). Oral histories confirm this educational landscape, with Eberhart recalling attendance at a private school held in the basement of St. James Presbyterian Church, where Reverend Allen A. Wilson and his family taught approximately 200 students and families contributed weekly fees to sustain instruction (Christensen 1982–1999).

City directory records and documentary sources further highlight the role of Black educational leadership rooted in Beacon Hill. Sallie Thomas Durham, a formerly enslaved woman who became a successful catering business owner in Decatur, established a multigenerational legacy of leadership and service (Wilson and Davis 2017). Her daughter, Clara Thomas Maxwell Cater Pitts, served as principal of the Herring Street School and later as director of the Carrie Steele Pitts Children's Home, demonstrating the continuity of Black educational leadership across generations (Wilson and Davis 2017). Their story, documented in *5 Generations: From Enslavement to Public Service in Atlanta*, traces the enduring presence of Black families in Decatur from the nineteenth century to the present (Wilson and Davis 2017).

Together, archival records, oral histories, and documentary evidence demonstrate that Beacon Hill functioned as a self-sustaining Black community in which churches, schools, and families worked collectively to create systems of support, education, and opportunity in the face of segregation (City of Decatur 2014; Harris and Taylor 1999; Christensen 1982–1999).

III. “The Bottom” Redefined: Beacon Hill in the 1940s



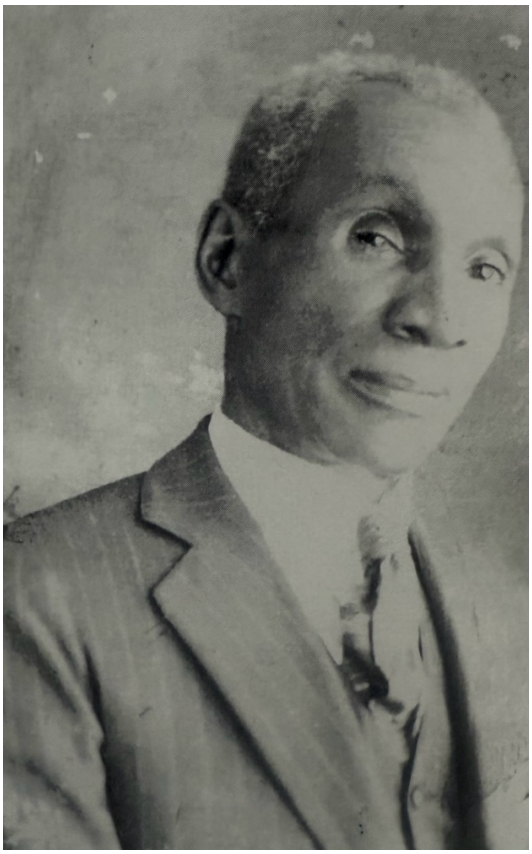


Figure 4. Image of Lena (Oliver) Harper, wife of Samuel Harper and daughter of Henry Oliver, who worked as a laundress, maid, and cook in the Beacon Hill Community and lived at 320 Herring Street. Image courtesy of Herman Mason, Jr. as published in African-American Life in DeKalb County, 1823-1970, Arcadia Publishing 1998.

Figure 5. Image of Samuel Harper, husband of Lena Harper, who worked as a carpenter and the man who designed and built the home he shared with his wife and children at 320 Herring Street before he passed away in 1939. Image courtesy of Herman Mason, Jr. as published in African-American Life in DeKalb County, 1823-1970, Arcadia Publishing 1998.

By the 1940s, the neighborhood, then widely known as Beacon Hill, was anchored by a network of kinship ties, property ownership, and locally rooted institutions concentrated along streets such as Herring Street, Oliver Street, and Atlanta Avenue (Sanborn Map Company 1911; Atlanta City Directory Co. 1929, 1930, 1934, 1935, 1937).

The Harper family at 320 Herring Street illustrates both the lived experience and spatial organization of Beacon Hill, as well as the persistence of Black landownership in the community. Lena (Oliver) Harper (Figure 4) daughter of early landholder Henry Oliver; worked as a laundress, cook, and maid, reflecting her family’s roots in the neighborhood (Mason 1998). Her husband, Samuel Harper (Figure 5), a carpenter, designed and built their home (Figure 6); highlighting the skilled labor and self-sufficiency that shaped the area (Mason 1998). The house itself stands as a material symbol of Black craftsmanship and family stability. This legacy is further evidenced by the 1896 deed granting land ownership to Lena Harper (Figure 8), an African American woman,

underscoring the legal and economic foundations established by Black families in Beacon Hill. (Mason 1998).

By 1940, Beacon Hill remained a densely settled and institutionally vibrant community, as shown in Figure 7, a property line map highlighting residential structures, churches, and schools within the project area (Decatur Housing Authority 1940). Residents such as Walter Burdett, a Works Progress Administration (WPA) janitor living on Herring Street, and Lum Henderson, a laborer and public works employee, reflect the working-class networks that sustained the neighborhood (Atlanta City Directory Co. 1934; United States Census Bureau 1920, 1940). Religious leadership further anchored the community, with figures such as Rev. Robert E. Romans residing and serving congregations along Herring Street (United States Census Bureau 1940).

At the same time, this thriving Black community existed within a broader framework of racial control and exclusion. The 1915 segregation ordinance enacted by the Mayor and General Council of Decatur codified racial divisions block by block, shaping where Black residents could live and reinforcing the spatial boundaries that defined Beacon Hill (Decatur People's History Project 2022). Within this constrained environment, Beacon Hill functioned as both a product of segregation and a site of Black autonomy.

Despite its vitality, white Decatur largely characterized the Beacon Hill community as a blighted slum, and by the 1930s began condemning sections of the neighborhood to make way for public housing developments (City of Decatur 2014). This framing laid the groundwork for subsequent urban renewal policies that targeted the community for clearance. The contradiction between lived reality and external perception is stark: while residents built homes, sustained families, and fostered institutions, city officials and planners advanced narratives of decline that were used to justify displacement.

The renaming of streets further reflects these contested meanings of place and memory. Oliver Street, named for one of the founding Black families, was later renamed Commerce Drive, a change that prompted resistance from residents who viewed it as an erasure of community history. A 1984 newspaper article documents this frustration, including testimony from the daughter of Lena Harper, then 79 years old, who emphasized the importance of preserving these cultural ties to the landscape (*The Atlanta Constitution* 1984).

Together, these records and figures demonstrate that Beacon Hill in the 1940s was not simply a geographic location, but a deeply rooted cultural landscape shaped by Black landownership, labor, kinship, and institutional life. At the same time, the characterization of the community as "blighted" and the early condemnation of its land reveal the structural forces that would ultimately lead to its displacement, making Beacon Hill both a site of Black resilience and a target of urban renewal.

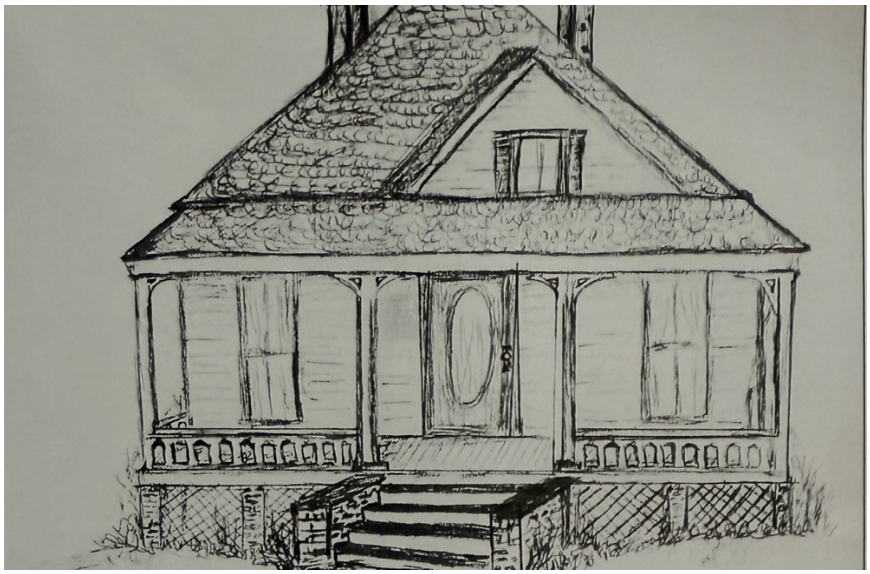


Figure 6. Hand-drawn sketch of the home that Samuel Harper built for his wife Lena Harper, located at 320 Herring Street. Image courtesy of Herman Mason, Jr. as published in African-American Life in DeKalb County, 1823-1970, Arcadia Publishing 1998.

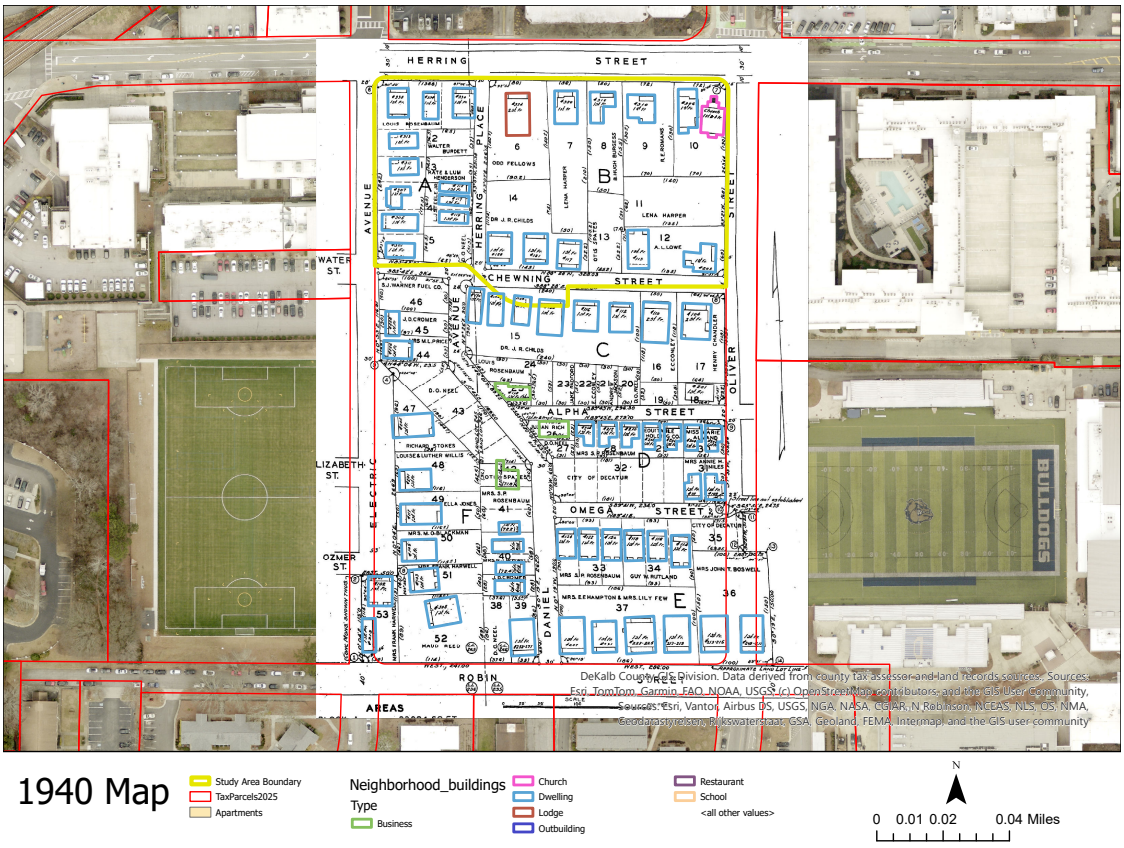
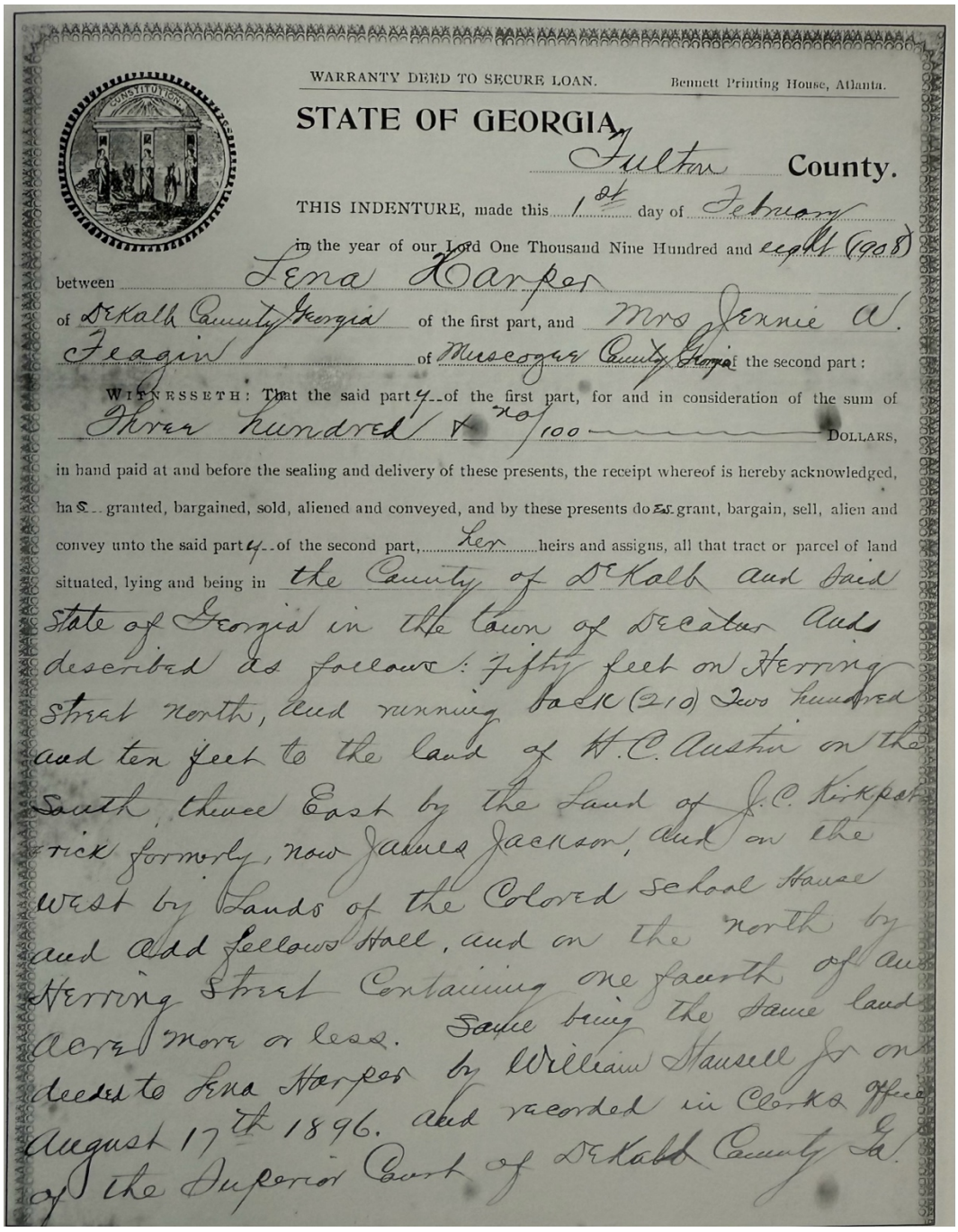


Figure 7. Historical 1940 Property Line Map published by Decatur Housing Project overlaid on top of contemporary aerial image of Beacon Hill Community area. Area of project scope highlighted in yellow. Source Decatur Housing Authority, Decatur, GA. Map dated August 5, 1940. Courtesy of GIS Specialist Dr. Terry Brock.



WARRANTY DEED TO SECURE LOAN. Bennett Printing House, Atlanta.

STATE OF GEORGIA, Fulton County.

THIS INDENTURE, made this 1st day of February in the year of our Lord One Thousand Nine Hundred and eight (1908) between Lena Harper of DeKalb County Georgia of the first part, and Mrs Jennie A. Feagin of Muscogee County Georgia of the second part:

WITNESSETH: That the said party of the first part, for and in consideration of the sum of Three hundred & no/100 DOLLARS, in hand paid at and before the sealing and delivery of these presents, the receipt whereof is hereby acknowledged, has granted, bargained, sold, aliened and conveyed, and by these presents do grant, bargain, sell, alien and convey unto the said party of the second part, Her heirs and assigns, all that tract or parcel of land situated, lying and being in the County of DeKalb and said State of Georgia in the town of Decatur and described as follows: Fifty feet on Herring Street North, and running back (210) Two hundred and ten feet to the land of W.C. Austin on the South, three East by the land of J.C. Kirkpatrick formerly, now James Jackson, and on the West by Lands of the Colored school House and Odd Fellows Hall, and on the north by Herring Street Containing one fourth of an acre more or less. Same being the same land deeded to Lena Harper by William Stansell Jr on August 17th 1896. and recorded in Clerks Office of the Superior Court of DeKalb County Ga.

Figure 8. Deed of land and property ownership issued to Lena Harper dated August 17, 1896 on behalf of the Superior Court of DeKalb County, GA regarding plot of land located at 320 Herring Street. Image courtesy of Herman Mason, Jr. as published in African-American Life in DeKalb County, 1823-1970, Arcadia Publishing 1998.

IV. Street by Street Documentation of Beacon Hill Historic Neighborhood from 1911 –1940

The south side of Herring Street formed the educational, religious, and residential heart of the Beacon Hill community during the first half of the twentieth century. As illustrated in Figure 7, the 1940 property line map reveals a dense landscape of churches, schools, civic buildings, and homes concentrated within a few hundred feet of one another, demonstrating the highly interconnected nature of Black life in Decatur prior to urban renewal (Decatur Housing Authority 1940). Within this compact corridor, education, faith, kinship, and community institutions worked together to sustain Black self-determination despite the constraints of segregation (City of Decatur 2014; Mason 1998).

At 228 Herring Street, St. James Presbyterian Church stood as one of the community's most significant institutions. Organized in 1902, the church appears on the 1911 Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps and in the 1928–1929 Decatur City Directory, reflecting its long-standing presence within Beacon Hill (Sanborn Map Company 1911; Atlanta City Directory Co. 1929). Beyond its religious function, the church served as an educational center where Reverend Allen A. Wilson, his wife, and other family members operated a private school in the church basement before the expansion of the public Herring Street School system (Christensen 1982–1999; Harris and Taylor 1999). Oral history testimony from longtime resident Fannie Mae Eberhart recalls attending this school around 1917 after her family became concerned about overcrowding at the public school housed in the Odd Fellows Hall. Eberhart remembered that families pooled resources to pay the twenty-five-cent weekly tuition and estimated that approximately 200 students attended the church school, underscoring the community's extraordinary commitment to Black education despite limited public investment (Christensen 1982–1999).

Immediately adjacent to the church, 227 Herring Street became the site of the Herring Street School, the educational center of Black Decatur. Originally established in 1902 in a lodge hall and relocated to a purpose-built brick building in 1913, the school expanded steadily from elementary grades through high school instruction as enrollment increased (Harris and Taylor 1999; City of Decatur 2014). Figure 9, an image courtesy of the DeKalb History Center, depicts the Herring Street School on old Herring Street and commemorates it as Decatur's first African American Public School. The photograph provides an invaluable visual record of the institution before its demolition and illustrates its prominence within the Beacon Hill landscape. Under the leadership of educators including Principal Charles M. Clayton, Sarah T. Blackmon, and Albert J. Martin, the school developed scholarship programs, marching bands, football teams, and civic initiatives that made it one of the region's most respected Black educational institutions (City of Decatur 2014; Harris and Taylor 1999).

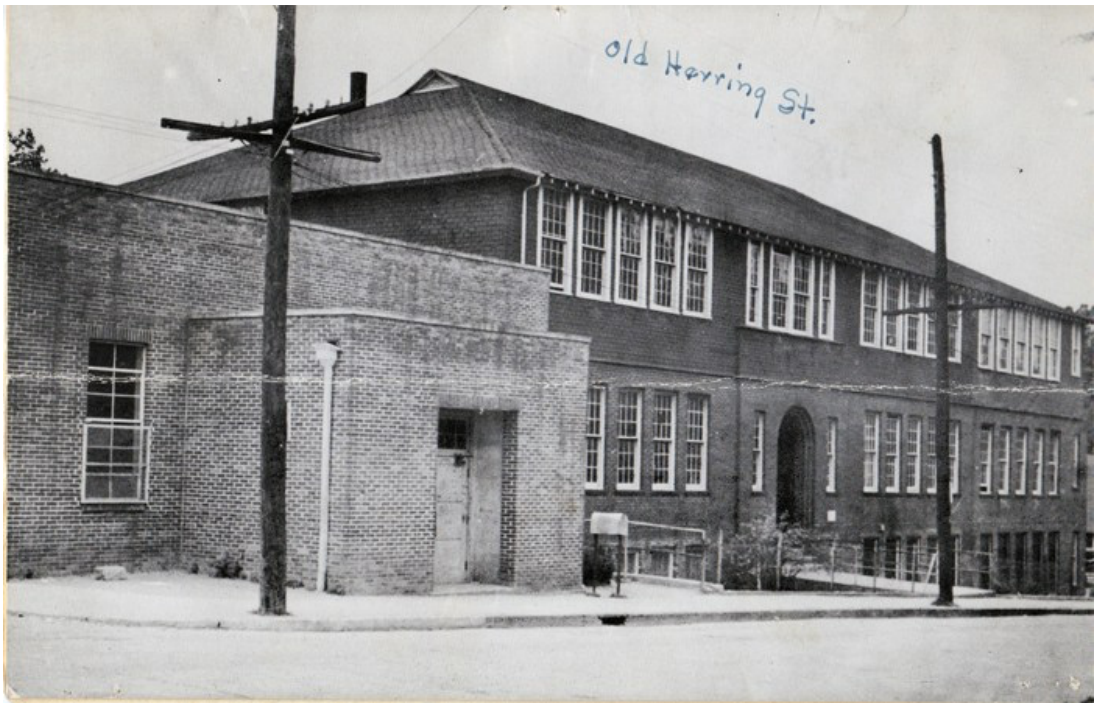


Figure 9. Image of Herring School on old Herring Street from DeKalb History Center. The 1st African American Public School in Decatur. Photo courtesy of DeKalb History Center.

The surrounding addresses along Herring Street further illustrate the residential density that supported this educational district. Research indicates that 226 Herring Street and 224 Herring Street contained wood-frame dwellings occupied by working-class Black families whose livelihoods were tied to domestic service, skilled trades, education, and neighborhood businesses (Sanborn Map Company 1911). 223 Herring Street appears to have functioned as an auxiliary school structure associated with the expanding Herring Street School campus, while 221 and 222 Herring Street consisted of double-occupancy, likely shotgun-style dwellings that housed extended families and renters connected through kinship and labor networks (Sanborn Map Company 1911).

The 1940 census and city directory records reveal the remarkable concentration of educators, clergy, laborers, and civic leaders living along the south side of Herring Street. At 306 Herring Street, Ruth Thompson worked as a teacher for the Works Progress Administration (WPA) School Project. Rev. Robert E. Romans, a Methodist minister, resided at 310 Herring Street, while Homer Sarlington, employed in Works Progress Administration (WPA) road construction, lived at 316 Herring Street. At 320 Herring Street stood the home of Lena (Oliver) Harper, who worked in domestic service and whose family history embodies the long arc of Black settlement and landownership in Beacon Hill. Nearby stood the Odd Fellows Hall at 324 Herring Street, an institution that served as an early educational and civic gathering place before the construction of Herring Street School. The block also included: Maggie Strong at 330A Herring Street, Pearl Broughton at 330B Herring Street, Selma Ivery at 334 Herring Street, and Margaret March and Ernest Stanlaker at 338A Herring Street, with Lillie Belle Benton residing at 338B Herring Street.

Many of these residents worked as domestic servants, yard workers, or laborers, illustrating the occupational diversity and economic realities of Black working-class life in segregated Decatur (Atlanta City Directory Co. 1934; United States Census Bureau 1940).

The Harper residence underscores the Oliver family's lasting role in Beacon Hill's history. Lena Harper, daughter of Henry Oliver, one of Decatur's earliest Black entrepreneurs and landowners, came from a family central to the post-Emancipation community that developed into Beacon Hill (City of Decatur 2014). Her husband, Samuel Harper, a skilled carpenter, designed and built their home at 320 Herring Street around 1896. Figures 4 and 5 show Lena and Samuel Harper, Figure 6 includes a sketch of the house Samuel built, and Figure 8 reproduces the deed confirming Lena Harper's ownership. Together, these records document Black property ownership, craftsmanship, and long-term investment in the neighborhood before the house was demolished in the early 1940s to make way for Allen Wilson Terrace. (Mason 1998).

The north side of Herring Street likewise housed a closely connected community of Black residents, including Watson Pearson, Josephine Hendricks, Maude Austin, Eugene Smith, Thomas Liles, Hattie Showers, Leila Glass, and Pearly Tillman, whose occupations ranged from laundress and cook to garbage collector and Works Progress Administration (WPA) laborer (United States Census Bureau 1940). Collectively, these census records and city directories demonstrate that Herring Street was not simply a collection of addresses, but a vibrant social landscape in which teachers, ministers, laborers, domestic workers, entrepreneurs, and their families lived within walking distance of churches, schools, businesses, and civic organizations that sustained daily life in Beacon Hill.

Just south of Herring Street, Electric Avenue emerged as another critical corridor within the neighborhood. Businesses and institutions such as Clark's Grocery, Cox Funeral Home, Tom Steele's Café, Lilly Hill Baptist Church, Antioch A.M.E. Church, Thirkield Methodist Church, and the Ritz Theatre established Beacon Hill as the commercial, educational, and cultural center of Black Decatur (City of Decatur 2014; Mason 1998). Together, Herring Street and Electric Avenue formed the nucleus of a flourishing African American community whose physical and social infrastructure was later dismantled through urban renewal, even as its historical significance and community memory continue to endure (Rotenstein 2019).

V. Urban Renewal and Destruction of the Community

Homes, schools, churches, and businesses along Herring Street, Electric Avenue, Oliver Street, and Robin Street were systematically demolished during the mid-twentieth century to make way for the Allen Wilson Terrace Homes, Swanton Heights redevelopment, the expansion of Decatur High School, government buildings, parking infrastructure, and emerging commercial corridors (DeKalb History Center 2014; Rotenstein 2019). As illustrated in Figures 7, 10, 11, 12 and 13, this

transformation resulted in the near-total clearance of the historic Beacon Hill landscape, replacing a dense and interconnected Black community with fragmented and redeveloped land uses.



Figure 10 On the corner of Marshall and Herring Street, these and other businesses were completely wiped out during the urban renewal program. Image courtesy of Herman Mason, Jr. as published in African-American Life in DeKalb County, 1823-1970, Arcadia Publishing 1998.

Figure 10 provides a critical visual baseline; this image was taken at the corner of the Marshall and Herring Street showing the destruction of that block. Figure 11 further highlights the destruction capturing an aerial view of the Beacon Hill community in 1960 prior to the implementation of Decatur's urban renewal program for the Swanton Heights redevelopment plan (DeKalb History Center 2014). The image reveals a fully-developed neighborhood landscape with intact residential blocks, street networks, and institutional buildings. In stark contrast, Figure 12 documents the aftermath of this transformation, showing piles of wood beams, metal sheeting, and bricks scattered across the landscape where a row of homes once stood along the east side of Electric Avenue (Mason 1998). Together, these images illustrate the rapid and devastating material impacts of urban renewal on this community.

The irony of preservation politics during this period remains striking. While white civic leaders mobilized to preserve the Swanton House an emblem of elite white heritage, Black homes, churches, and institutions across Beacon Hill were systematically erased under the language and policy framework of "urban renewal" (DeKalb History Center 2014; Rotenstein 2019). This selective preservation underscores the racialized priorities embedded in mid-century planning practices and historic preservation efforts in Decatur.

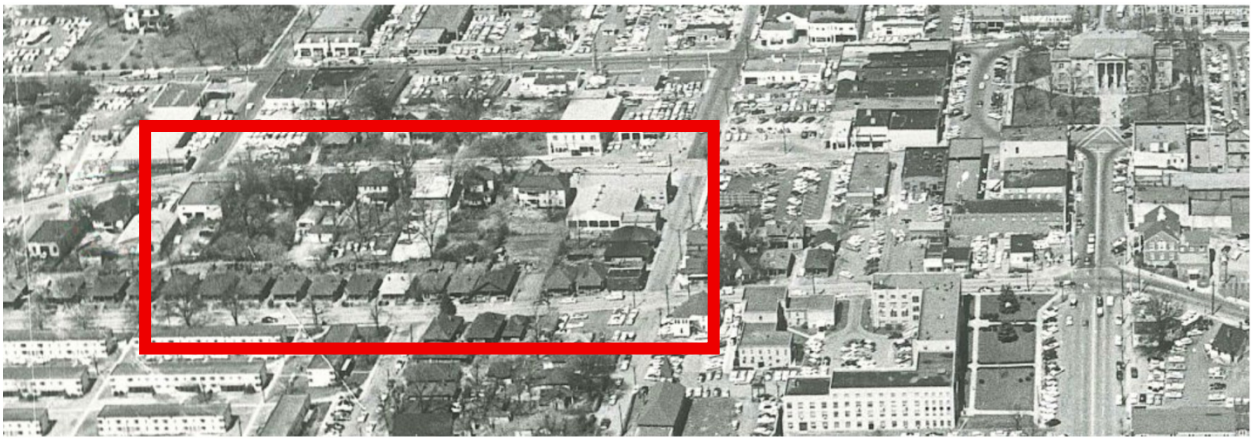


Figure 11. An aerial photo in 1960 before the start of Decatur's Urban Renewal program, which led to the destruction of the historic properties across the Beacon Hill Community. Courtesy of DeKalb History Center.



Figure 12. Image of Beacon Hill Community after 1960s era urban renewal destruction showing piles of wood beams, metal sheeting, and bricks where a row of homes that lined the east side of Electric Avenue was once located. Image courtesy of Herman Mason, Jr. as published in African-American Life in DeKalb County, 1823-1970, Arcadia Publishing 1998.

Cartographic and archival evidence further reinforces this process of erasure. Figure 7 documents a vibrant 1940 landscape, including at least nineteen homes, a church, and a school operating within the Odd Fellows Hall (Decatur Housing Authority 1940). By the 1960s, as shown in Figures 10, 11, and 12, these structures had been removed, streets were altered or eliminated, and the area was distorted and built over (Sanborn Map Company 1911; DeKalb History Center 2014).

This pattern of displacement extended into the twenty-first century. Photographs and city directory notes become a testimony to the second wave of urban renewal destruction with the removal of the Allen Wilson Terrace Apartments. Google Earth imagery shows the apartments present in 2012

(Figure 13) and demolished by 2014 (Figure 14), with the final landscape reflecting complete removal (Figure 14). In 2011, the City of Decatur initiated redevelopment of the Allen Wilson Terrace public housing complex, followed by the demolition of Beacon Elementary and Trinity High School in 2013 (Rotenstein 2019). The city's redevelopment pressures continued as historically significant Black institutional sites were lost; in 2014, a private developer purchased and demolished the former Antioch A.M.E. Church property, originally constructed by one of Decatur's oldest African American congregations after displacement from Beacon Hill in the 1960s, to construct new townhomes (Rotenstein 2019).

Together, these figures and sources document a pattern of repeated displacement and redevelopment spanning from the 1940s through the 2010s, demonstrating how urban renewal and subsequent development initiatives reshaped, and ultimately erased, the physical fabric of the Beacon Hill community.



Figure 13. Map of Beacon Hill Community's Allen Wilson Terrace Apartments in Decatur, Georgia before these multi-family homes were destroyed in 2013. Map Dated 2012. Google Earth Pro 9.3. https://earth.google.com/web/ [Accessed May 15, 2026].



Figure 14. Map of Beacon Hill Community, former location of Allen Wilson Terrace Apartments in Decatur, Georgia after the multi-family residential structures were razed in 2013. Map Dated 2014. Google Earth Pro 9.3. https://earth.google.com/web/ [Accessed May 15, 2026].

VI. Conclusion and Recommendations

In conclusion, the project area encompasses a square block within the historic Beacon Hill community in Decatur, Georgia, bounded by West Trinity Place, Electric Avenue, Chewning Way, and Commerce Drive. Within this area, the south side of Herring Street served as a vital center of Black educational, religious, residential, and civic life. Anchored by St. James Presbyterian Church at 228 Herring Street and extending to the Herring Street School complex and the surrounding homes, this corridor stands as a testament to the resilience, community strength, and self-determination of Beacon Hill residents during the era of segregation. (City of Decatur 2014; Clarke 1996; Mason 1998).

City directories and oral histories illuminate not only the built environment, but also the lived experiences that shaped this community. Residents recalled muddy roads, overcrowded classrooms, and church basements repurposed as schools, alongside memories of neighborhood businesses, football games, and churches that functioned as essential spaces for gathering and mutual support. Together, these accounts highlight the collective efforts of families and community members to preserve educational opportunities and strengthen social networks for Black residents living within a segregated city. (Christensen 1982–1999; Harris and Taylor 1999; Atlanta City Directory Co. 1929, 1930, 1934, 1935, 1937).

Although the physical landscape of Beacon Hill in this square block was erased through mid-twentieth-century urban renewal initiatives, the community's historical memory persists through oral histories, archival photographs, historical maps, and the knowledge preserved by descendant

communities. Streets such as Herring Street, Electric Avenue, and Commerce Drive continue to serve as significant cultural landscapes, reflecting patterns of Black institution-building, community resilience, and enduring struggles over land, displacement, and belonging in Decatur (Rotenstein 2019; Wilson 2026; Decatur People's History Project 2022).

Archival maps and spatial analyses reveal the substantial physical transformation of the project area over time. As illustrated in Figure 7, the 1940 landscape contained at least nineteen residential structures, as well as a historic church and a school (Decatur Housing Authority 1940). Following the implementation of the City of Decatur's urban renewal program during the 1960s, these buildings were systematically removed (DeKalb History Center 2014). All structures within the study block were demolished, and several streets were altered, renamed, or eliminated entirely, resulting in a dramatically reconfigured and largely cleared landscape (Sanborn Map Company 1911).

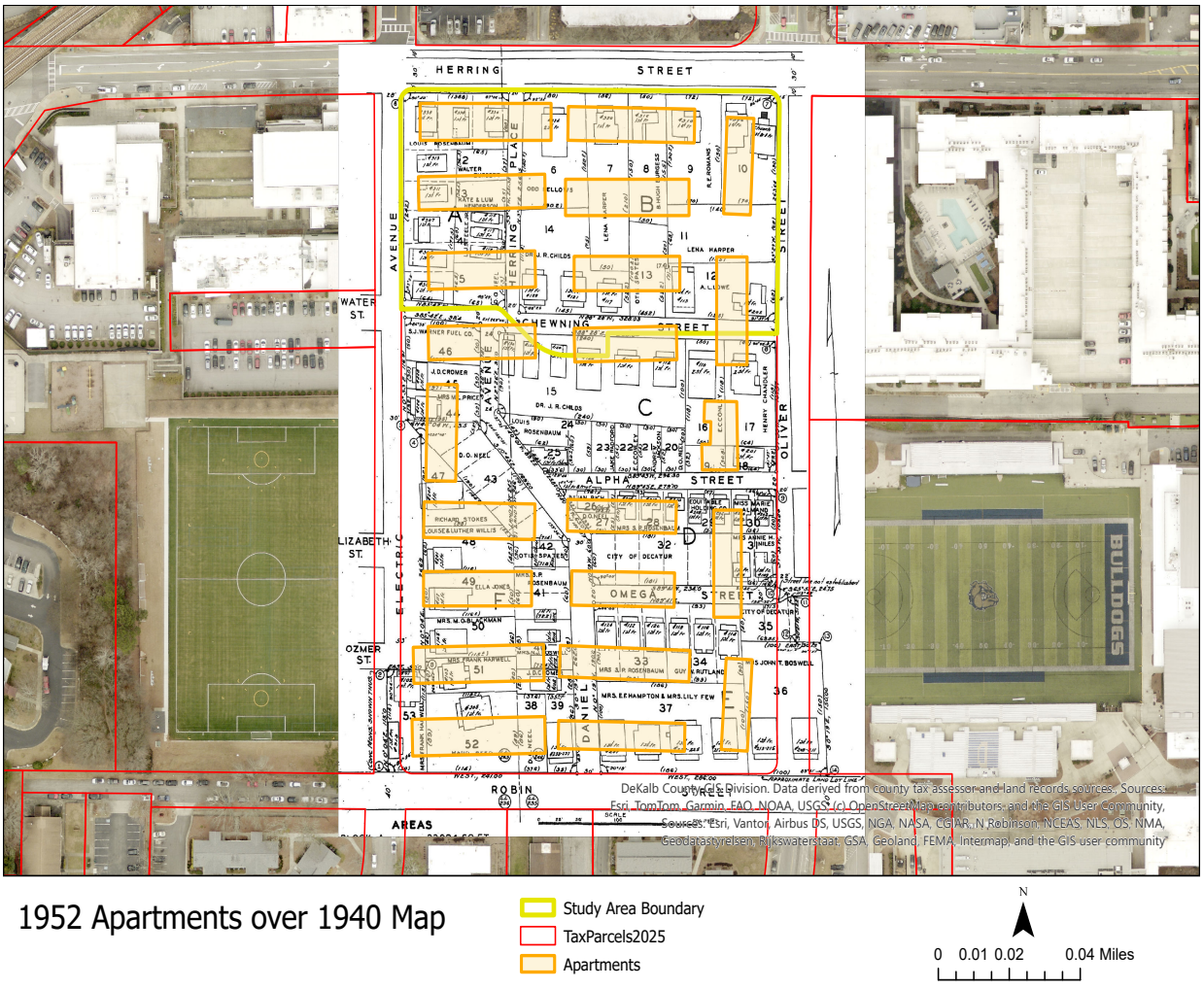


Figure 15. Map of 1952 Allen Wilson Terrace Apartment Building Layout (outlined in orange) overlaid on top of Historical 1940 Property Line Map published by Decatur Housing Project overlaid on top of contemporary aerial image of Beacon Hill Community area as a basemap. Area of project scope highlighted in yellow. Source Decatur Housing Authority, Decatur, GA. Courtesy of GIS Specialist Dr. Terry Brock

A subsequent phase of redevelopment and demolition occurred in the early twenty-first century. Figures 13 through 15 document the removal of the Allen Wilson Terrace Apartments, which were still standing in 2012, but had been demolished by 2014, as evidenced by Google Earth satellite imagery. Taken together, map overlays from 1911, 1940, 1952, the 1960s, and 2013 reveal a recurring pattern of displacement, redevelopment, and erasure that has fundamentally reshaped this historic landscape across more than a century (Sanborn Map Company 1911; Decatur Housing Authority 1940; DeKalb History Center 2014).

In conclusion, mid-twentieth-century urban renewal initiatives and subsequent redevelopment have resulted in the removal of buildings, residences, and portions of the historic street network associated with the historic Beacon Hill community within the newly proposed Early Childhood Learning Center project area. As a result, no extant above-ground historic structures associated with the community remain within the Area of Potential Effects.

Based on the results of this investigation, no further archaeological identification efforts, including a Phase IB archaeological survey, are recommended within the project area. Therefore, from an archaeological perspective and in accordance with the findings presented herein, the proposed undertaking may proceed as planned with no recommendation for monitoring.

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