

The African American Experience in Greenbelt



African Americans working in front of Greenbelt's Center School, circa 1937. Greenbelt Museum

The Resettlement Administration's earliest plans for the land that would become Greenbelt included an area called the Rossville Rural Development, which was to be lived on and farmed by African American families. However, in the climate of strict segregation in Prince George's County and the state of Maryland, these controversial plans were quickly dropped. Additionally, although Greenbelt was a relief project built by both African American and white workers, because of segregation, only white families would be accepted to move into the experimental town. There were two other New Deal communities in the mid-Atlantic region built for African American families, Langston Terrace in Washington, D.C. and Aberdeen Gardens near Newport News, Virginia; but Greenbelt, Maryland would remain an all-white community for several decades.

Inevitably, at the Greenbelt Museum, when staff and docents explain Greenbelt's segregated history, the next question from visitors is, "When did Greenbelt become integrated in terms of race?". We know

that there was a Citizens for Fair Housing group active here beginning in 1963, but to the best of our knowledge so far, African American families did not begin moving into Greenbelt until the late 1960s. In researching this exhibition, we have realized that we have many, many more questions than answers.

As a lasting legacy of the 75th Anniversary of the City of Greenbelt, and in an effort to answer some of the many questions we have about segregation and integration here, the Greenbelt Museum will establish an ongoing Archive of the African American Experience in Greenbelt. We need your help to make it successful. If you would like to share information, photographs, memories, or oral histories, please contact the Museum by calling 301-507-6582 or sending an email to museum@greenbeltmd.gov.

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