

THE DEPOT

COMING OF CHANGE

The first train arrived in Matthews in December 1874 forever bringing change to the community. The train took people to Charlotte for shopping, provided an opportunity to get cotton to larger markets, gave some men a good job, and changed the town's name from Fullwood to Matthews, in honor of Edward Matthews, a company Director. The depot, once located close to Trade Street, was moved to its current location in 2001.



The depot was built in the 1880s and at its height served five passenger and eight freight trains daily. The last passenger train was in 1958, and in 1966 freight service stopped.

Courtesy: Southeast News



George Shelton was Station Master and telegraph operator from 1909 to 1947. He was beloved by the children in the town as he was known to frequently give them a nickel or a stick of gum.

Courtesy: Southeast News

Background Photo: Ben Brooksbank / Ex-Midland 4-4-0 at Royston Locomotive Depot / CC BY-SA 2.0

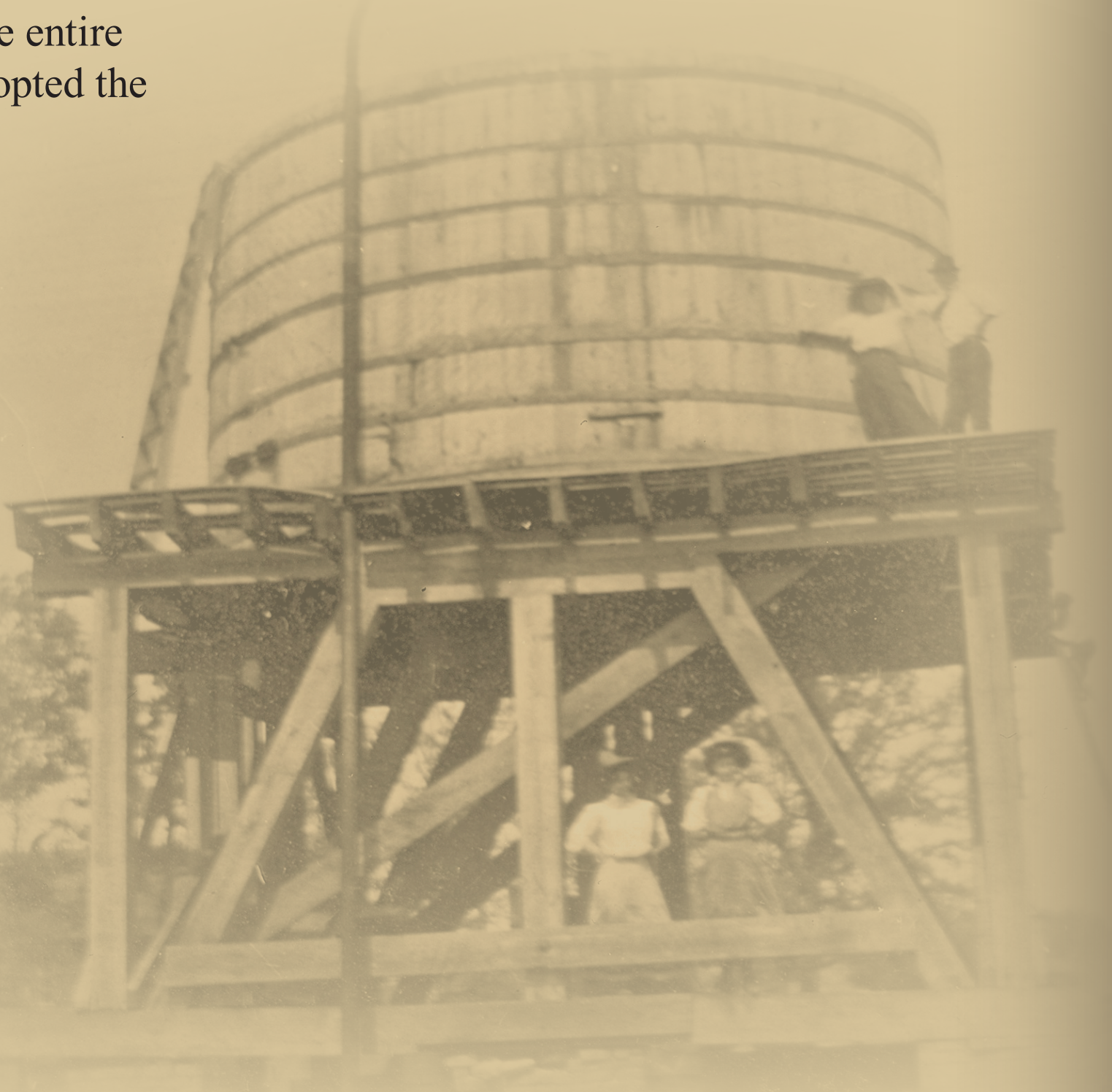
WELCOME TO CRESTDALE

TANK TOWN BECOMES CRESTDALE

In 1857, Dr. J. S. Gribble bought 143 acres in the Morning Star area of Mecklenburg County to live on and farm. In 1874, the Carolina Central Railroad was built on his property just east of Matthews. The water tank that replenished trains with water for steam power was located here, giving the name Tank Town to the area. In 1878, Gribble started selling pieces of his property to black and white citizens, including two Black churches. Over time the area developed into an African American community. In 1963, the school system changed the name of the school in Tank Town from Matthews Colored School to Crestdale.

Before long, the entire community adopted the new name.

Steam engines needed water to produce steam to power the trains. The tank just outside Matthews was located near a creek. The Carolina Central Railroad hired a couple to keep water pumped into the tank. Sometimes Mr. Shelton, station master, had to run from the station to the tank to make sure it had enough water for the next train.



Background Photo: Courtesy Southeast News

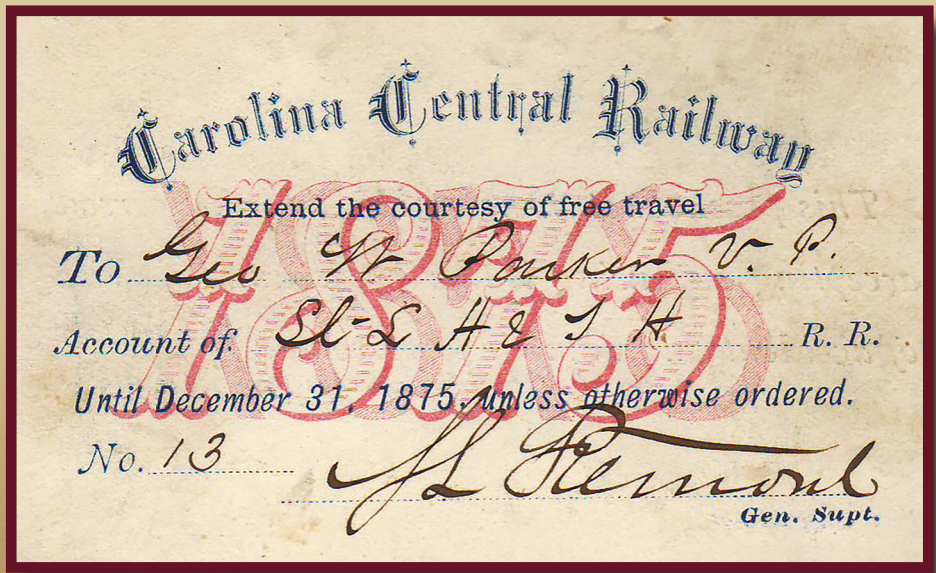


Historical information and interpretation provided by:
Matthews Heritage Museum
232 N. Trade Street, NC 28105
www.matthewsheritagemuseum.org

THE RAILROAD

GETTING TO MATTHEWS BY RAIL

The Carolina Central Railroad linked the Wilmington area to Charlotte, then west to Rutherfordton, one of the earliest towns and the most important commercial and political center in western North Carolina. Christopher Bechtler, Sr., established a coin-producing operation there that is recognized as the most successful private mint in United States history. The rail line also linked with rail lines to the south and north, making travel so much easier.



Carolina Central Railway Boarding Pass, 1875.

Courtesy: North Carolina Historic Sites

WORKING ON THE RAILROAD

Tank Town residents who worked for the train included Sam Boyd, James Clay, Will Jackson, Raymond Alexander and Charlie Roland. Some of them lived in “section houses” provided by the railroad. Most of the men did track work. In 1940, they made \$600 a year. The train transported freight as well as people, including Dr. Massey’s bed when he moved from Florida to town.



Courtesy: State Archives of North Carolina



This steam engine was used on the Carolina Central Railway. SAL Number 416 was Carolina Central Number 26. Steam engines needed to stop for water approximately every 100 miles.

Courtesy: <https://carolana.com/NC/Transportation/railroads/nc.rr.carolina.Central.html>



Dr. H. V. Massey moved to Matthews in 1879. His house is the Matthews Heritage Museum.



Courtesy: Dr. H. V. Massey Collection, Matthews Heritage Museum

In March 1879, Dr. H. V. Massey shipped his mattress and bedstead by rail from Waldo, Florida, where he had been living, to Matthews Station.

The train made stops in Monroe, Indian Trail, Matthews, Roberts and Charlotte.

Background Photo: Carolina Central Railway Company Records, 1873-1883.

MATTHEWS CHAPEL

FOUNDING MATTHEWS CHAPEL PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

After the Civil War, former slaves in the area started the Murkland Presbyterian Church on Old Providence Road. Folks from the Tank Town area attended, even though it was over 6 miles to get there. By 1878, land was purchased to build a Presbyterian Church in Tank Town. It flourished until the 1960s. In 1969, with the congregation shrinking, it merged back with Murkland Presbyterian to form Matthews-Murkland Presbyterian Church.



Rev. J. H. Gamble was the minister for the church for 37 years, serving until 1967. Gamble also served as the principal for the Matthews Colored School and was known to be a strict disciplinarian.

Courtesy: Catawba Story, 1886-1930 by Rev. D. G. Burke



Early Tank Town residents attended Murkland Presbyterian Church, on Old Providence Road before the Matthews Chapel Presbyterian was built

Courtesy: Eleanora Stitt



The second sanctuary of Matthews Chapel was built in 1952. The bell from the first church was placed beside the new structure.

Courtesy: Barbara Taylor, Matthews Heritage Museum

COMMUNITY CENTER DREAM BECOMES REALITY

In 1986 renovations were made to the Matthews Chapel Presbyterian Church to serve as the Crestdale Community Center providing space for the 4-H during weekdays and other community activities such as instruction on sewing and canning. A grant of \$6,000 was given by the Foundation of the Carolinas. The project was backed by the Crestdale Community Association, started by Sam & Viola Boyd and other Crestdale residents. Teresa McDow spearheaded the project.



Teresa McDow, from left, and Lola Lawrence talk with Howard Kympton about plans for a community center in Crestdale.

Courtesy: Charlotte Observer, Mary Schulte, photographer

Waiting on replacement image.

Background Photo: Facebook

LIFE IN TANK TOWN



A SHARING COMMUNITY

The first known African American residents in the Tank Town area, beginning in 1880, include William Wed(d)ington, Harvey Downs, Epp Grier and Henry Gaddy. Shirley Stitt Haley recalls that her family with 11 children were poor but there was always food to eat, and her mother was an excellent cook. Neighbors shared with each other. Her mother would send her to get milk from Jessie and Sanders Bell, who had several cows. Shirley had to cross the creek near Mt.

Moriah Church and pass a bull on the way. The bull often tried to charge her until one day she defended herself, whacking the bull with a stick. She had no further problems.



Janette Logan Stitt (left), mother of 11 children, including Shirley Stitt Haley (right), was a dietician at McClintock Middle School.

Courtesy: Shirley Stitt Haley Collection



Courtesy: Aaron Whitfield Photography



Charles Burke on stilts.

Courtesy: Denise Burke Collection

CHILDREN'S GAMES

Children who lived on the school side of the railroad would gather on the school grounds to play kickball, or other games. Those living along Charles Street would gather on Kenneth Alexander's father's land. Addie McNeal Dixon remembers playing "jack stones" (like Jack's but with stones) or Hide and Seek. A pair of stilts offered hours of entertainment.



Backyard Garden



Wild Blackberries



Sassafras Roots



Creasy Greens

LOCAL FOOD

Residents tended gardens growing corn, okra, tomatoes, and greens. They harvested edible plants such as wild blackberries and plums, persimmons, and creasy greens. They gathered sassafras roots to make tea. Some raised turkeys and chickens and an occasional pig, keeping them in a pen on property owned by Manley Clyburn. With no running water, they walked to a nearby well to pump water for cooking and washing. Pumps were located near Mt. Moriah, near Manley Clyburn's house on Tank Town Road, and at the Matthews Colored School.

Background Photo: <https://goodinthehead.com/>

EDUCATION IN TANK TOWN

SEPARATE BUT NOT EQUAL

Jimmy Clay gave his house located at Charles Street and what is now George Clay Lane to be used as the first school. It was used from around 1900 to 1924. Before then, children had to walk over three miles to Hoods Crossing to go to school. The new school educated students to the seventh grade. The house was built in the popular “shotgun” style.



Jimmy Clay House used as the first school in Tank Town.
Courtesy: Greater Matthews Habitat for Humanity Brochure, c. 1989

WHAT IS A SHOTGUN HOUSE?

A shotgun house is a narrow rectangular residence, usually no more than 12 feet wide, with rooms arranged one behind the other and doors at each end of the house, so you could shoot a bullet through the house. It was the most popular style of house in the Southern United States from the end of the American Civil War (1861–65) through the 1920s.



A pot-bellied stove warmed the school. Those who sat closest were warm. There was no electricity in the building.
Courtesy: Library of Congress, Lewis Hine Collection



Children attending school would have used a slate and chalk to write their assignments.
Courtesy: Matthews Heritage Museum



Children would drink water from a bucket and dipper, filled from the pump behind the school.
Courtesy: Pinterest



There was an outhouse for the boys and one for the girls.
Courtesy: Toilography

Background Photo: Swannanoa Valley Museum

THE BOYDS

THE FIRST TWO GENERATIONS

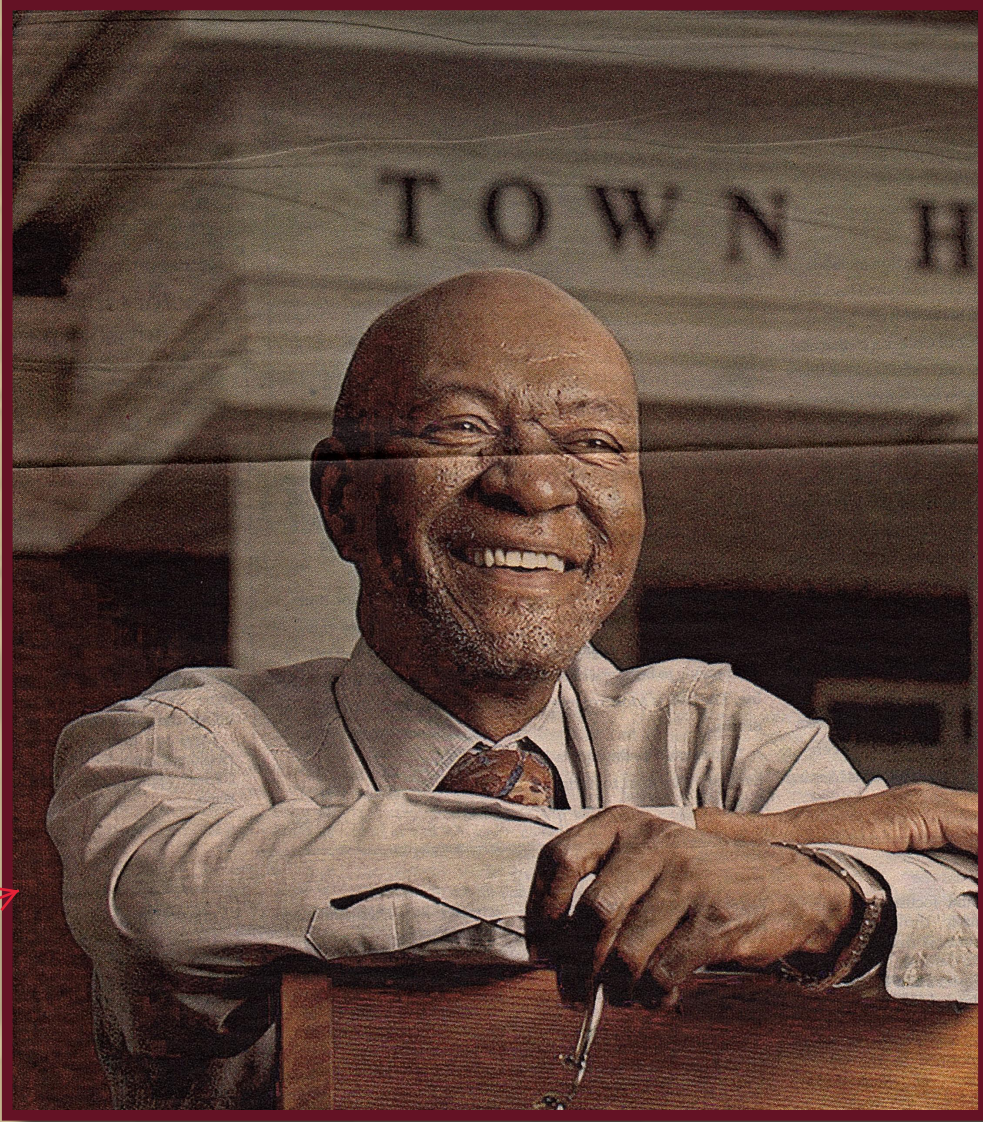
Sam Boyd, the son of Rev. Henry Calvin Boyd, who started Mount Moriah Missionary Baptist Church, grew up in Tank Town one of eight children. He and his wife Viola first lived in a “section house” along Charles Street that was provided by the railroad.

Sam and Viola built their Crestdale Drive home in 1944, purchasing the land from George Shelton. Sam was unofficially known as the “Mayor of Crestdale” for the many ways he helped the community. He represented the community on the Matthews School Board, helped to get Crestdale incorporated into Matthews, and began the Crestdale Community Association. In the 1960s, Sam and his wife paid for the first water line to be brought into Crestdale, so they could have running water.



Sam and Viola Boyd had a family of five children. He worked for the Seaboard Air Line Railroad for 40 years, and she was a beautician for 30 years, having received her training from Madam C. J. Walker's Beauty School.
Courtesy: Harvey Boyd Collection

CONTINUING THE LEGACY



Courtesy: Southeast News

Harvey Boyd, the youngest child of Viola and Sam, attended the Matthews Colored School. He was interested in becoming an artist and attended West Charlotte High School that had a strong art curriculum, hitchhiking daily to school across town.

Boyd worked for The Charlotte Observer, one of the first blacks on the staff working in the graphics department. He went to Howard University and worked for the Washington Post, putting himself through college.

After graduation from Howard University, he worked for many years in Detroit as a commercial artist, and later in Saudi Arabia. When he retired, he returned home to Crestdale. Following in his father's footsteps, Harvey is involved with the Crestdale community and has recently reactivated the Crestdale Community Association.

Sam worked at the cotton gin behind Renfrow's store. He “buckled ties” to hold the bales of cotton together. He could buckle 40 or 50 bales a day.



Courtesy: Farm Flavor



When 19, Harvey entered a contest to design a seal for Mecklenburg County. His design won! It is still used by Mecklenburg County.

Courtesy: Mecklenburg County, NC

Background Photo: Barbara Taylor, Matthews Heritage Museum

MOUNT MORIAH

MOUNT MORIAH MISSIONARY BAPTIST CHURCH: CENTER OF THE COMMUNITY

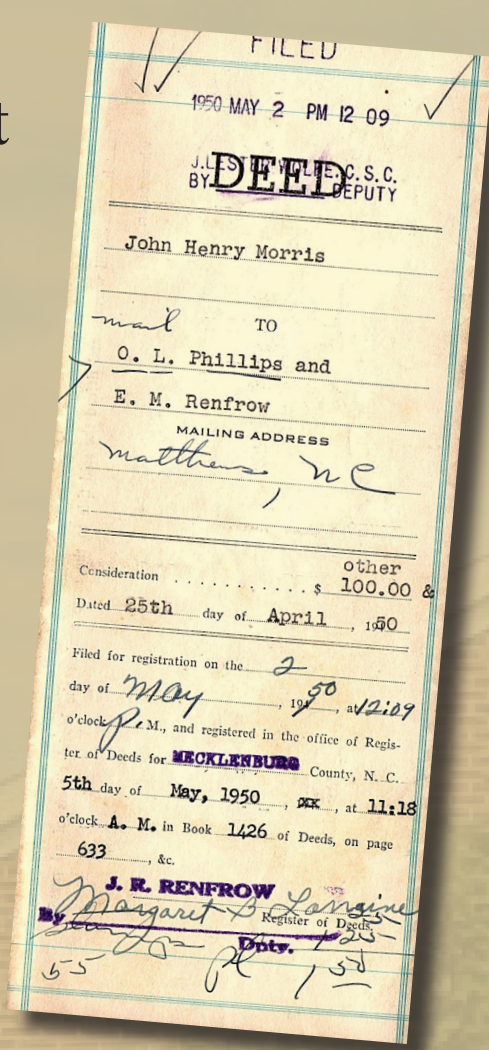
In 1879, three men representing the church purchased a “half lot of land” from Dr. J. S. Gribble. The church was organized by Rev. Henry Calvin Boyd. Boyd was born around 1845 in South Carolina and was most likely a slave. By the age of 34 he was establishing his church in Tank Town. The congregation met under an arbor, until a building was erected the following year. Boyd was minister until 1915 or approximately 35 years.



The first sanctuary served the congregation until 1952. It was near Matthews Chapel Road, near an existing creek, where people were baptized.
Courtesy: Mount Moriah Missionary Baptist Church

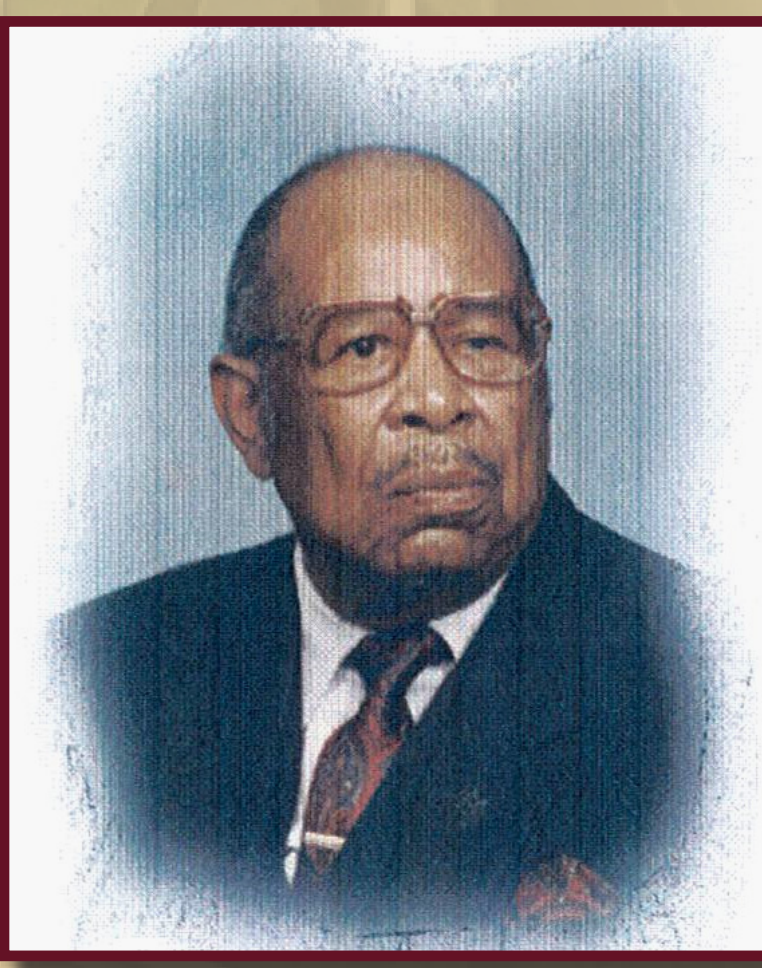


Built as a wood-sided structure, the second sanctuary was later clad in brick. It was dedicated in 1954 while Rev. J. C. Robinson was pastor.
Courtesy: Southeast News

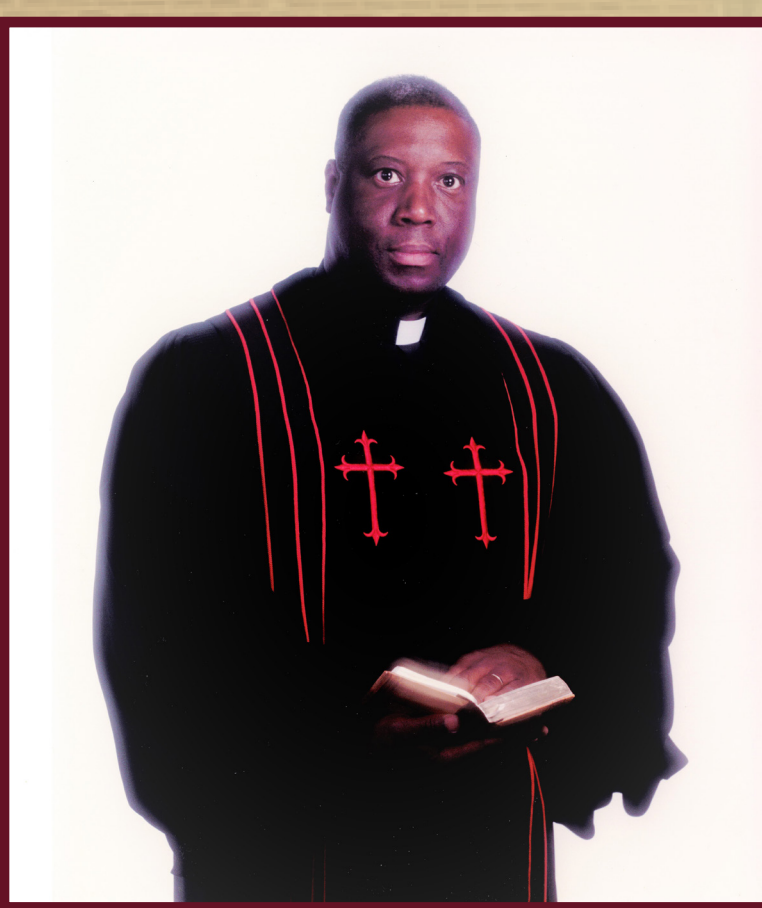


In 1950, O.L. Phillips and E. M. Renfrow (white) purchased land from John Henry Morris (Black) for \$100 and sold it to Mt. Moriah for \$10 to build a new sanctuary.

Courtesy: Mecklenburg County Register of Deeds



In 1945, Reverend J.C. Robinson became pastor and served for 49 years until 1994.
Courtesy: Mount Moriah Missionary Baptist Church



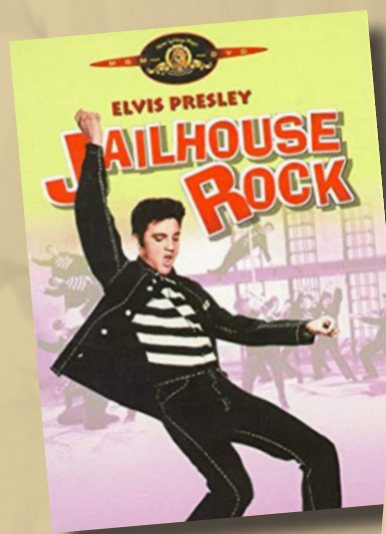
Rev. Larry Whitley became pastor in 1997 and built the modern sanctuary in 2010. In 2019, the church celebrated its 140th anniversary.
Courtesy: Mount Moriah Missionary Baptist Church

Current Sanctuary for Mt. Moriah. The campus includes four buildings.
Background Photo: Barbara Taylor, Matthews Heritage Museum

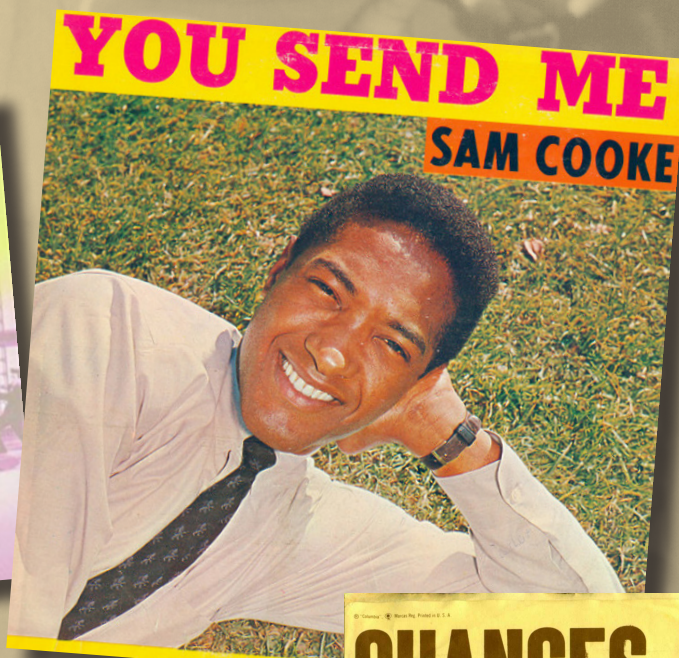
THE BLOSSOM INN

FRIDAY NIGHTS AT THE BLOSSOM INN

The Blossom Inn was one of two juke joints in Tank Town, where people went to socialize, dance, and have a good time. A “juke joint” is the vernacular term for an informal establishment featuring music, dancing, gambling, and drinking, primarily operated by African Americans in the southeastern United States. The term “juke” is believed to derive from the Gullah word joog or jug, meaning rowdy or disorderly. The Blossom Inn was operated by James Mangum, who lived next door and whose house still stands.

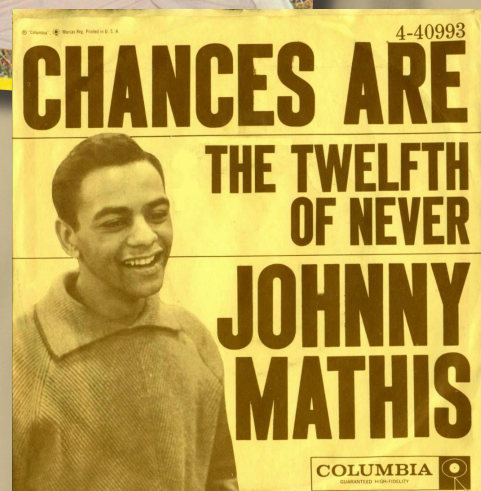


Courtesy: www.Quora.com



Courtesy: discogs.com

Some of the songs of the time include Sam Cooke's “You Send Me,” Elvis Presley's “Jailhouse Rock” and “Chances Are” by Johnny Mathis. This was the age of Rock & Roll!



Courtesy: Pinterest



This 1946 Seeburg “Trashcan” Jukebox was the same as the one in the Blossom Inn that operated from the mid-1950s to the late 1980s. It was filled with the popular songs of the day, on 45's, the name for the speed at which the record played (45 RPM).

Courtesy: Pinterest



Background Photo: Michael Ochs Archives / Stringer

A NEW SCHOOL FOR TANK TOWN

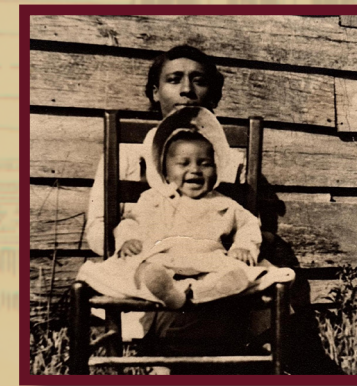
A COMMUNITY EFFORT

Children attended the shotgun school thru the early 1920s, but the building was in bad repair. In 1924, Ablow W. Stewart donated over three acres of her land, and both black and white communities worked with the Rosenwald Foundation to raise \$6,100 to build a 4-room schoolhouse for Tank Town students and other blacks in the area. From its founding until 1962, the school was called Matthews Colored School. In 1963, it was renamed Crestdale, and the community took its new name from the school. The building was used until 1966. It burned in 1975.



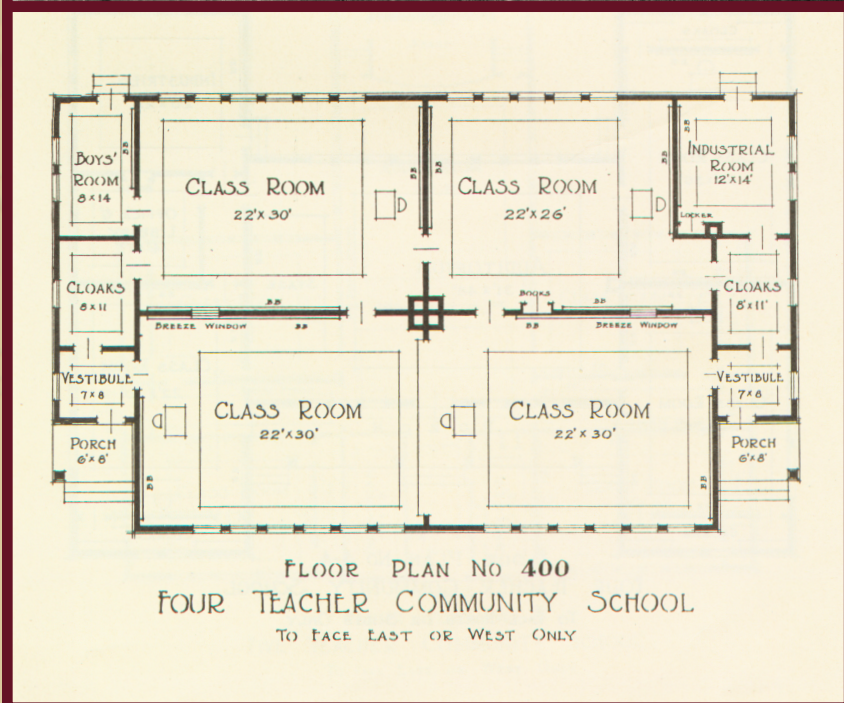
Built in 1924, the school had no bathrooms or electricity. The school took advantage of natural sunlight through its large windows.

Courtesy: Fisk University, Rosenwald Collection



Ablow Stewart, largest landowner in Tank Town, gave 3 acres of land to build a school for the neighborhood children.

Courtesy: Walter Stewart Collection



Courtesy: HistorySouth.org



Julius Rosenwald, an executive with Sears, Roebuck, and Company donated millions of dollars, for the education of African Americans. His foundation helped build more than 800 schools for African Americans in North Carolina alone. Both white and Black communities were expected to financially support the school, with the foundation giving about one third.

Courtesy: www.history.com

UNITED HOUSE OF PRAYER

ANOTHER HOUSE OF WORSHIP IN TANK TOWN

A third house of worship was established in Tank Town in 1928, fifty years after the beginning of the community. The United House of Prayer for all People, an evangelical Christian group started by Bishop Charles Manuel “Sweet Daddy” Grace in Massachusetts in 1919, started its fourth church in Tank Town, two years after one opened in Charlotte. The church used the Jimmy Clay shot-gun house to hold its services.

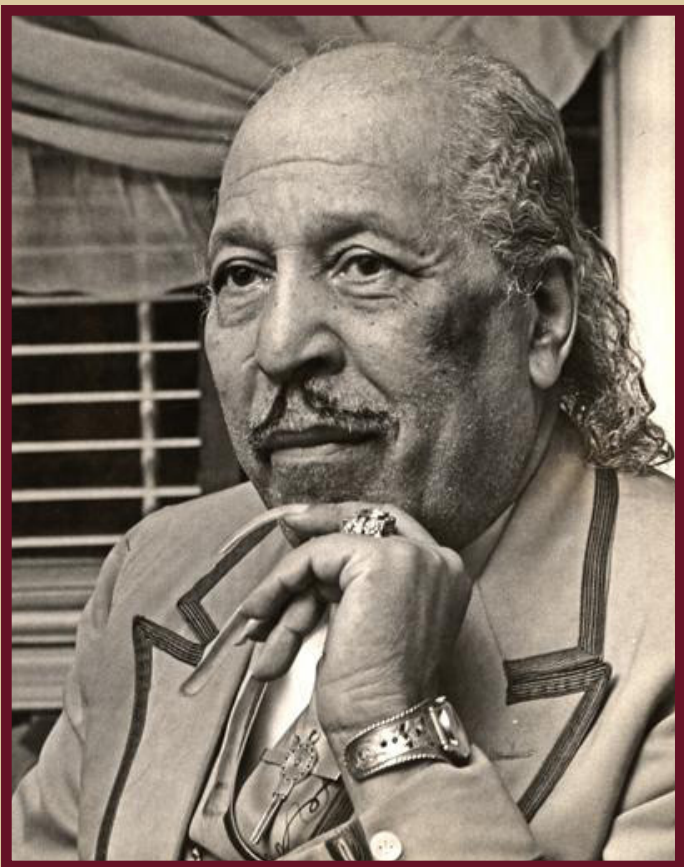
Several members of the House of Prayer including Green Lea Stewart, were trustees for the church and helped to purchase land on Linden Street for its second sanctuary. Walter Stewart, Green Lea’s son, remembers attending a service where congregants would walk in a circle throwing money into a bucket. It continued until the last person contributed.



The second sanctuary of the House of Prayer in Crestdale.
Courtesy: Paula Lester

DADDY GRACE: A COLORFUL FIGURE

Grace was an early prototype of what is now understood in western culture as the “celebrity preacher”. Active during the early and mid-20th century, Grace used attention-getting devices such as wearing loudly colored suits with bold, different colored piping and shiny buttons. People flocked uptown to his parades. As “Daddy Grace”, the bishop and leader of his church, he was known and respected by his followers as a faith healer and miracle worker.



Courtesy: The Virginian-Pilot



The church had a strong emphasis on music called “Shout”, a lively religious music played primarily by brass instruments.
Courtesy: Daniel Coston for NPR

The current House of Prayer in Crestdale was built in 2005. It is on the land where the Matthews Colored school was located.

Background Photo: Barbara Taylor, Matthews Heritage Museum

A FRATERNITY OF MEN

A COMMUNITY EFFORT

The Star of St. Matthews Lodge #566, a Black Masonic Lodge, received its charter in 1925 from the Grand Lodge of North Carolina, Prince Hall Affiliation. Christopher Columbus “Budd” Potts was the first Worthy Master, or president, of the lodge and served over 30 years.

On October 20, 1928, trustees of the lodge including Potts, Crawford Neptune Patterson, William M. B. Reid, Daniel Marshall Maxwell, and Ranson Lake purchased an acre of land on what is now Morris Road in Tank Town from the Charlotte Mecklenburg County Board of Education for \$500.00.

Members of Star of St. Matthews Lodge #566 came from a variety of backgrounds including farm laborers, a blacksmith and brick mason and several ministers.



Members of the Ezell Commandery #9, circa 1978 – 1979. Second from left in front row is past Worshipful Master Henry Massey. Second from right in the same row is Charles Sharpe, also a past Worshipful Master.

Courtesy of Henry Massey and Charlotte-Mecklenburg Historic Landmarks Commission

THE FIRST WORTHY MASTER

Budd Potts was well known throughout the community as he ran the only black business in downtown Matthews, selling fresh fish that he got shipped in by train. His store was located on the Charles Street side of the building now occupied by Weaver, Bennett and Bland. It was directly across from the Depot.



Pott's building was located across from the depot before the depot was moved. He got fresh fish from Wilmington.

Courtesy: Dawa

THE MASONRY MISSION

Charity and service work in the community was especially important in the function of Freemasonry. Several members of Star of St. Matthews Lodge #566 undertook such efforts as mentoring local youth from Piedmont Middle School in Charlotte. The masonry mission is a brotherhood that is low key, focused on self-improvement, enrichment of community through positivity—setting an example for the youth.

NEW FOREST

FROM FIELDS TO FORESTS

As you wander through the trees on this section of the trail, note that this area supported agricultural operations during the 1860 to 1950 period, sometimes growing large fields of cotton as a cash crop. By then there were very few forests intact. Even trees around creeks were logged.

Can you find these trees?

As the growth of cotton waned, and fields fell fallow, trees began to grow, signaling the regeneration of a forest. A mix of shortleaf pine and hardwoods such as sweetgum and yellow poplar then infiltrated.



Short leaf pines are often the first to grow in an open field.

Courtesy: SC Native Plant Society



Leaves and balls of the Sweet Gum Tree.

Courtesy: Etsy



1938 aerial photo of Tank Town with contemporary map overlay.

Courtesy: State Archives of North Carolina, Raleigh, NC