



The Rich History of Newtown



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NEWTOWN'S HISTORICAL MARKERS



The History of Newtown Graphic Organizer

Early Life:

Overtown was settled in:

Newtown was established in:

Community Attributes (Adjectives):

Two facts that I found interesting:

1. _____

2. _____

Who was Lewis Colson and what was he famous for?

How would you feel if you lived in Newtown during the times of segregation?

Directions: Using the Newtown map on page 1 as a guide, write 1 or 2 interesting facts about each of the historical markers you visited on your field trip today.

1. EARLY SETTLEMENT – Overtown (now the Rosemary District) became Sarasota’s first African American community in 1884. By the 1920’s the community grew into a thriving residential and business district prompting anxiety amongst city leaders and residents. Overtown residents were encouraged to to move north to Newtown with most relocating by the 1970’s.

2. MAKING A LIVING - When the Civil War ended in 1865, many freed people migrated to Sarasota, Manatee and Hillsborough Counties from north Florida, Georgia, Alabama and the Carolinas in search of a better life. Job opportunities increased with the arrival of the railroad in 1903 and Florida’s 1920’s land boom. African American labor built Sarasota’s infrastructure.

3. ACTIVISTS & ELECTED OFFICIALS - *“Without activists, there would be no African American elected officials.”* - Edward E. James II

4. THE WRIGHT BUSH HOUSE - Wright Bush was born in Georgia in 1863. He moved to Sarasota and built a home on Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Way (then 33rd Street) in 1920. Bush was a businessman involved in building Sarasota’s early roads, homes, schools and churches.

5. BUSTLING BUSINESS DISTRICT (Part 1) – “*Make a way, find a way*” was the mantra of Newtown residents who worked long hours, exerting their bodies to exhaustion to provide for their families.



6. NEWTOWN REDEVELOPMENT - Newtown’s revitalization and redevelopment requires more than streetscapes and beautification. The physical solutions must be combined with social and economic changes in order for the community to survive. The Newtown Community Redevelopment Plan was adopted in 2008 to eliminate “*blight and slum conditions.*” A “*blueprint for revitalization,*” based upon priorities outlined by Newtown residents, was developed and is in the implementation stages.



7. SEGREGATION, DESEGREGATION & INTEGRATION - Florida was a hotbed of racist activity during the Reconstruction Era (1865-77) after the Civil War. Race relations deteriorated as African Americans were run out of town, punished more severely for crimes, assaulted without reason, denied voting rights and stripped of their land.



8. CHURCH ARCHITECTURE - Places of worship have always been an important aspect of life in Newtown and one of the best locations to gauge the heartbeat of the community.



9. BUSTLING BUSINESS DISTRICT (Part 2) - A thriving business district is the heartbeat of a community. Shops along 33rd Street, the main thoroughfare in Newtown (now Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Way) helped residents survive the degrading effects of segregation by providing the necessities when Sarasota shops were off-limits.

10. HISTORICAL ARCHITECTURE - Most of the historic buildings in Newtown can be described as “vernacular” architecture. Generally, vernacular buildings are constructed based on the traditions and experiences of local craftspersons whose work meets the community’s needs using locally sourced materials.

11. MILITARY SERVICE - Enlisting in the United States military and swearing to protect the rights of all Americans is a high calling that requires sacrifice. Newtown has a long history of residents who have served their country.

12. EDUCATION - Education was a cherished possession of free African Americans denied the privilege of reading and writing by slave owners. Newtown residents lead the fight for equal education for all.

13. MEDICAL HISTORY - For almost a third of Newtown's 100 year history from 1914-2014, the African American community supplied most of their own medical care - using cobwebs, cotton balls, turpentine and castor oil as internal and external cure-alls. Churches provided spiritual healing.

14. ORGANIZATIONS - After the Civil War ended slavery in the south, segregationist policies and Jim Crow laws still prevented access to healthcare, education and social services for African Americans.

15. AFRICAN AMERICAN CHURCHES - The Newtown and Overtown communities were built on strong religious foundations.

What are your thoughts about the historical markers and the people you have learned about today? Have you learned anything new? What additional questions do you have? Is there anything else you would like us to know about you? Tell us what you think!

Little Willie Mae and Colored Water



Little 5 year-old Willie Mae looked up at the water fountain. Florida was hot in the summer, and she was very thirsty. Her brown-skinned father lifted Willie Mae’s tiny body up to take a drink and told her she could

drink from the colored-only drinking fountain. Willie Mae looked at the sign and back at her father then pursed her lips in anticipation. She wondered, *“Would the colored water come out like a rainbow? What about the white water? Did it pour out like white sheets of paper?”*

As she grew older, Willie Mae began to understand the injustices around her. Willie Mae asked her father if he was angry with people of other races because of the unfair treatment they had experienced. Her father turned to her and said, *“God made one race, the human race, and we have to love everybody.”*

**Willie Mae Scott
Sarasota, Florida**

This is a true story based on the words of Willie Mae Scott, a long time Newtown resident and member of The Bethlehem Baptist Church. The 83-year-old Grandma (as she likes to be called) has 13 grown children and resides in Newtown Estates in Sarasota, Florida.

As a five-year-old child, Willie Mae was intrigued by the segregated water fountains. How do you think you would feel if you had been in her shoes that day? Do you think your feelings and opinions will change, as you grow older?

Directions: Please use complete sentences to answer the questions below.

- 1. How** do you think your feelings would change if you were Willie Mae at age 5 versus at age 10?

- 2. Why** would you possibly think differently at age 10 compared to age 5?

- 3. Why** is it important to treat people with kindness and respect?

- 4. Who** has been a positive influence in your life? Please write specific examples and explain why.

“The Problem We All Live With”

by Norman Rockwell (1964)



Let's put on our investigator hats and take a closer look at this painting.

1. Does the little girl look happy or sad?



2. Why are the adults walking in front of and behind her?

3. Does her posture look relaxed or ridged?

The United States Supreme Court case, *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954), was a landmark decision which declared state laws establishing separate public schools for black and white students to be unconstitutional. It was a turning point in the American Civil Rights movement. **Ruby Nell Bridges** was the first African American child to desegregate the all-white William Frantz Elementary School in Louisiana during the New Orleans school desegregation crisis in 1960. When Ruby went to school, people protested and she had to be escorted into the school by police officers. Once Ruby started her new school, many white parents took their children out of the school. All of the teachers refused to teach Ruby. Only one person, Barbara Henry from Massachusetts, agreed to teach Ruby and for over a year, Miss Henry taught Ruby alone, “*as if she were teaching a whole class.*”

Directions: Draw an emoji in each box below that best describes the feelings for each question.



How do you think Ruby felt at her new school?	How would you have felt if you had been in Ruby’s shoes?

1. What is the same about Ruby on her first day of school and you on your first day of school?
2. What is different about Ruby on her first day of school and you on your first day of school?
3. How can you welcome new students to your school?

Did you know that Sarasota County schools remained segregated until the 1960s?



In 1961, a small number of African American students were allowed to attend all-white *Nokomis Elementary School*, but they were taught in classrooms separated by race.

In 1962, *Bay Haven School of Basics Plus* was the first **integrated** school in Sarasota County.

By 1971, all Sarasota County schools were integrated.

Directions: Create a historical marker to be read 100 years from today. How would the historical marker describe your community? How would it describe the racism, discrimination and other problems in your community? How would it describe what you, your friends and your neighbors are doing to make your community better?