

Town of Greenburgh
**ASSISTANT
TOWN HISTORIANS**
SURVEY MONKEY COORDINATORS



———— felicia barber + riley wentzler ————

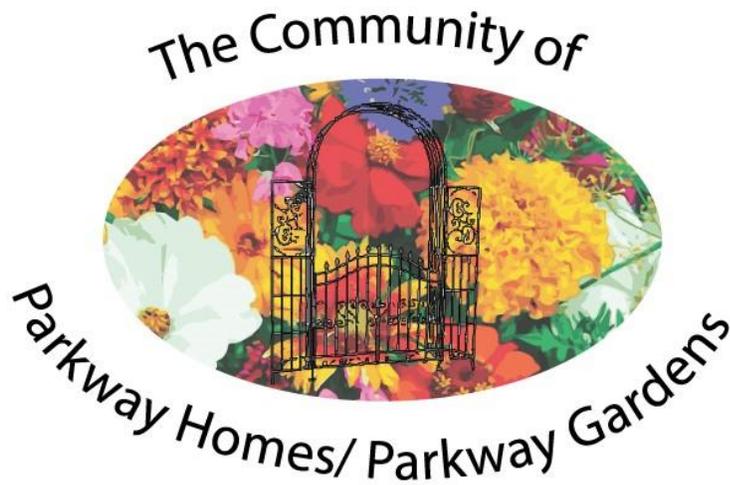
A Note on our Methodology for this article:

What follows is based on a roundtable discussion with long-time Parkway Homes/Parkway Gardens residents. We realize that most accredited historians would not endorse this approach of writing an article based off of anecdotal evidence. We also realize this is a great break with precedent. The authors deeply apologize in advance for a departure from our usual methodology of getting information from: websites, books, and newspapers.

However, to our knowledge, there is no website or book which offers a comprehensive history of the Parkway Homes/Parkway Gardens Community and certainly newspapers don't write full histories of neighborhoods. It is for this reason, that we have taken the unusual approach of writing an article based on personal recollections of residents.

*Formed By Adversity, Held Together
by Faith: The History of the Parkway
Homes/Parkway Gardens Community.*

By: Riley Wentzler & Felicia Barber



Introduction:

Greenburgh is proud to have one of the largest middle class African-American communities in The United States. This community is actually split into two adjacent neighborhoods, Parkway Homes and Parkway Gardens. Since it is Black History Month we, the Assistant Town Historians, wanted to show you, our readers, the history of this great community.

The first homes in both communities were built around 1925, the same year as the completion of The Bronx River Parkway. When it was built it was the first such parkway in the United States. At the time it was built, cars were still relatively new, so in order to experience the new sense of freedom the automobile brought, people were beginning to take long meandering drives through the countryside. The Bronx River Parkway was designed to maximize this scenic view. Therefore, having a home along it, was seen as a privilege. In order to reflect this high privilege, both communities were named after The Bronx River Parkway.

Parkway Homes and Parkway Gardens were co-defined with the geographic boundaries of North Road and Augustine Road. The homes in both of these

communities were small to mid-size. While the houses themselves were beautiful and nicely complemented the picturesque natural landscape, regrettably, there were no parks for youngsters to play in. The community was originally marketed as a blue-collar neighborhood for Italian-American and Irish-American families. The hope was that eventually these families would achieve upward mobility and obtain a standard of middle-class living. The children of this community would attend either schools in the Valhalla School District or Greenburgh School District 8 (what is now Greenburgh Central 7 School District). In the 1930s and 1940s not many African-Americans lived here, however the first two African-American families moved into the community in 1929. Gradually, by the 1950's and 1960's, African-Americans had become the majority home owners in both neighborhoods. The primary catalyst for this move was that they wanted to avoid the widespread discrimination, (much of it codified and sanctioned by law in the form of the Jim Crow Laws) and harsh, cruel, terroristic activities being carried out against African-Americans in the South at that time. Other primary reasons were seeking upward mobility, increased access to blue and white collar job opportunities, cultural similarities and bonding and the desire to create as well as be a part of communities where they felt embraced and welcomed. Another major factor was that, for many people, GI loans allowing for home ownership increased the desire to move. It should also be noted that real estate practices known as "red lining" also contributed to the formation of predominantly African-American communities. So the massive "White Flight" began.

"White Flight" and a Changing Community:

One of the first African-American families to move in was Anna J. Bernard, a licensed lawyer educated at NYU Law School originally from New York City and her husband, Woodruff Robinson, a dentist. They moved into the community in 1929.

Although Mrs. Bernard had passed the bar in 1923 and was therefore licensed to practice law, the laws at that time forbade African-Americans from **actually practicing** law. Therefore, she became a school teacher. In the 1950s and 1960s more African-Americans came. The growing African-American presence was met

with overt as well as covert protest with occasional terroristic activity such as cross burnings by members of the White community. When these protests and terror campaigns failed to deter African-Americans from moving in, most of the white people decided to leave the community. This mass exodus of white people in response to the influx of African-American people is an example of the phenomenon known as “white flight.” After the white flight occurred, very few white people wanted to move to a neighborhood with such a large African-American population. Realtors took advantage of this trend and began marketing these homes directly to African-Americans. The strategy worked. Many African-American and African Caribbean: teachers, doctors, lawyers and some architects moved in alongside working class residents. Several men in both communities were trained and practiced in the skills associated with construction and carpentry allowing for several homes in the area to have been built by the residents themselves.” In addition to the various everyday white-collar professionals the community was also home to all of the following African-American celebrities: Cab Calloway, Hazel Scott, Moms Mabley and Gordon Parks. For their stories click here: <https://greenburghny.com/DocumentCenter/View/6377/Making-Martin-Luther-King-Jrs-Dream-Come-Alive-the-Success-Story-of-the-Parkway-Homes-Parkway-Gardens-Community> .

By the 1980’s, an increasing and unprecedented number of African-Americans throughout America had acquired college degrees. What had started out as more of a blue-collar community in the 1950’s and 60’s had become increasingly white-collar by the late 70’s and into the 80’s as more youth from both neighborhoods acquired advanced educational degrees and as both neighborhoods continued to attract African-Americans from other parts of the country with advanced degrees. One of the first families in this wave, so to speak, was the Beville family who bought their house in 1950. It became a hub of social activity in the community as it sat on the border of both school districts when district lines were drawn so that the children of Parkway Gardens went to Greenburgh School District 7 and the children of Parkway Homes attended the Valhalla School District. However, residents of both neighborhoods remained strong as steel in terms of ensuring that their children grew up valuing cultural identity and expression, religion, family, education, financial stability, home ownership and helping each other. Many families in both neighborhoods managed to send all of the children in their family

to college. Attending college and attaining a degree became the norm in both neighborhoods.

How The Community was held Together:

One of the ways the community got together was through the Carver Garden Club, which was founded by Anna Bernard shortly after she moved in. The Carver Garden Club was very popular and cooperative. Neighbors would often share techniques with each other. The gardening was top-notch, and before to long, the Parkway Homes/Parkway Gardens became “The Place to Go” in Westchester County to see beautiful landscape.

In addition to the Carver Garden Club, the community was also held together by the power of the church. The church has always been the central focus of the African-American community. Historically when African-Americans have moved into or built a significant number of homes in a given area, they have built a church simultaneously. As Peter was the rock upon which the church was built, so the church became the foundation on which the African-American communities were established. The influence of the church was felt: socially, ethically, and, at times, politically. Some prominent churches attended by members the community included: Saint Martha’s Episcopal, Saint Francis’s Episcopal (They later merged into one church called Saint Martha’s- Saint Francis’s Episcopal), and Union Baptist Church, the Seventh Day Adventist Church, Bethel Baptist Church in White Plains and Grace Episcopal Church in White Plains. Saint Martha’s- Saint Francis’s was presided over by the charismatic Jamaican-born priest Father Robinson, who was particularly concerned that young people would either not get involved in the church or walk away from it. So he initiated a program called Young People’s Fellowship (YPF). The program proved highly successful and brought thousands of young people of various religious affiliations together for community involvement. They went on: summer trips to Jones Beach, fall hayrides, winter sleigh rides, and other fun activities which brought children from Parkway Homes and children from Parkway Gardens together despite being separated by school district.

Conclusion:

The Parkway Homes and Parkway Gardens Community is one of the largest middle class African-American communities in The United States. It was formed by adversity and therefore resistant to it. Once formed, it was held together by cultural identity, a sense of belonging, similar values, principles and priorities, pride in home ownership as well as social and neighborly connections. All of these are exemplified by the Carver Garden Club and the power of the church.



Previous Slices of History include:

- 1. Greenburgh's BROTHERLY LOVE, RELIEF AND TRUTH: A History of The Freemasons in Greenburgh (9/12/18)**
<https://www.greenburghny.com/DocumentCenter/View/5658/BROTHERLY-LOVE-RELIEF-AND-TRUTH--in-Greenburgh>
- 2. Greenburgh and The Arts (9/22/18)**
<https://www.greenburghny.com/DocumentCenter/View/5665/Greenburgh-AND-The--ARTS>
- 3. A Final Resting Place for "Man's Best Friend": The Peaceable Kingdom (9/29/18)**
<https://www.greenburghny.com/DocumentCenter/View/5653/A-Final-Resting-Place--for-Mans-Best-Friend>
- 4. Greenburgh's Hall of Heroes: Ferncliff Cemetery Where Memories Live Forever (10/12/18)**
<https://www.greenburghny.com/DocumentCenter/View/5667/Greenburgh-Hall-of-Heroes>

5. **Greenburgh at The Great American Crossroads: Greenburgh's Civil War Story(10/19/18)**
<https://www.greenburghny.com/DocumentCenter/View/5666/Greenburgh-at-The-Great-American-Crossroad>
6. **A Different Kind of Rebel: Greenburgh's Contributions to the Underground Railroad (10/27/18)**
<https://www.greenburghny.com/DocumentCenter/View/5680/A-Different-Kind-of-of-Rebel--Greenburghs-contributions-to-The-Underground-Railroad>
7. **"The Disappearing Railroad Blues" in Greenburgh: The Fate of the Putnam Railroad Line and the old Putnam Trail (11/6/18)**
<https://www.greenburghny.com/DocumentCenter/View/5675/The-Disappearing-Railroad-Blues-in-Greenburgh>
8. **A Thousand Words Which You Never Knew: The Forgotten Story of the Seal of Greenburgh (11/17/18)**
<https://www.greenburghny.com/DocumentCenter/View/5651/A--Thousand-Words-Which-You-Never-Knew-The-Forgotten-Story-of-The-Seal-of-Greenburgh>
9. **How a Flat Tire led to a Happy Escape: The Story of Carvel in Greenburgh (12/11/18)**
<https://www.greenburghny.com/DocumentCenter/View/5670/How-a-Flat-Tire-led-to-a-Happy-Escape>
10. **The Guardians of History: Greenburgh's Historical Societies (1/6/19)**
<https://www.greenburghny.com/DocumentCenter/View/5676/The-Guardians-of--History>
11. **A Small House, an Important Meeting, a Huge Victory: The Story of the Odell House (1/12/2019)**
<https://www.greenburghny.com/DocumentCenter/View/5654/A-Small-House--an-Important-Meeting--A-Huge-Victory>
12. **The Intersection of Banking, Ballet, and School: Greenburgh's Warburg Estate (Updated) (10/22/19)**

<https://greenburghny.com/DocumentCenter/View/6095/The-Intersection-of-Banking--Ballet--and-School-updated>

13. **Lost History: The Tragedy of Malkasten (1/26/19)**
<https://www.greenburghny.com/DocumentCenter/View/5673/Lost-History--The-Tragedy-of-Malkasten>
14. **A Beautiful View for the Perfect Event: The Belvedere Estate (2/9/19)**
<https://www.greenburghny.com/DocumentCenter/View/5652/A-Beautiful-View-for-The-Perfect-Event--Belvedere-Estate>
15. **The Power of Wealth and Humility: A Reflection on Two Highly Influential African Americans (2/18/19)**
<https://www.greenburghny.com/DocumentCenter/View/5679/Wealth-and-Humility>
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<https://www.greenburghny.com/DocumentCenter/View/5668/Greenburgh-under-Hollywood-Lights-Part-I>
17. **Oh, The Places Your Mail has Gone: A History of The Hartsdale Post Office (3/9/2019)**
<https://www.greenburghny.com/DocumentCenter/View/5674/Oh-The-Places-Your-Mail-has-Gone>
18. **From Insurance to Symphonies: The Home of Charles Ives (3/16/19)**
<https://www.greenburghny.com/DocumentCenter/View/5664/From-Insurance-to-Symphonies--The-Home-of-Charles-Ives>
19. **Greenburgh Under the Hollywood Lights: The TV shows and Movies Filmed in Greenburgh Part II (3/29/19)**
<https://www.greenburghny.com/DocumentCenter/View/5669/Greenburgh-Under-the-Hollywood-Lights-The-TV-shows-and-movies-Filmed-in-Greenburgh-Part-II>
20. **From Chasing Rabbits to Setting Records: The Amazing Story of Larry James (4/7/2019)**

<https://www.greenburghny.com/DocumentCenter/View/5661/From-Chasing-Rabbits-to-Setting-Records>

21. From Fixing Cars to building Infrastructure: How Massaro Park Got its name (4/13/2019)
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22. There is no church here, but “the brave men, living and dead, who struggled here, have consecrated” this ground: The Story of The Little White Church Cemetery (4/27/19)
<https://www.greenburghny.com/DocumentCenter/View/5678/There-is-no-church-here-but-the-brave-men-living-and-dead-who-struggled-here-have-consecrated-this-ground>
23. Irvington in Chains and our Process A History of Slavery in Irvington and A look at how Slices of History are made (and our interview with historian Robert Marchant) (5/11/2019)
<https://www.greenburghny.com/DocumentCenter/View/5671/Irvington-in-Chains>
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<https://www.greenburghny.com/DocumentCenter/View/5662/From-Farmland-to-Shopping-District-The-Rise-of-Central-Avenue>
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<https://www.greenburghny.com/DocumentCenter/View/5672/like-a-long-lost-friend>
26. Abandon Ship!!! The Story of United Nuclear Corporation and their Short-lived Elmsford Facility (6/28/19)
<https://www.greenburghny.com/DocumentCenter/View/5656/Abandon-Ship>
27. Beyond Heritage Versus Hate Toward Hope and Reconciliation: The story of Mount Hope Cemetery and its Confederate Monument (7/13/19)

<https://www.greenburghny.com/DocumentCenter/View/5657/Beyond-Heritage-Versus-Hate-Toward-Hope-and-Reconciliation---The-story-of-Mount-Hope-Cemetery-and-its-Confederate-Monument>

28. Hidden History: The Story of Fairview Fairgrounds Part I (7/27/19)
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29. Entertainers for Justice (8/3/2019)
<https://www.greenburghny.com/DocumentCenter/View/5659/Entertainers-for-Justice>

30. A Tale of Two Towns: Greenburgh, NY, and Muncy, PA (8/23/ 2019)
<https://www.greenburghny.com/DocumentCenter/View/5655/A-Tale-of-Two-Towns--Greenburgh-NY-and-Muncy-PA>

31. When Greenburgh Went “East Bound and Down”: Greenburgh During Prohibition (10/6/2019)

<https://greenburghny.com/DocumentCenter/View/5992/When-Greenburgh-Went-East-Bound-and-Down-Greenburgh-During-Prohibition>

32. From Mopping The Floor of One Institution to Managing Three at Once: The Amazing Story of Former Westchester County Commissioner of Public Welfare Ruth Taylor (12/12/19)
<https://greenburghny.com/DocumentCenter/View/6272/From-Mopping-The-Floor-of--One-Institution-to-Managing-Three-at-Once>

33. Greenburgh Gets its “Sun Daze on” Under the Watchful Eyes of the Boys in Blue (1/9/2020)
<https://greenburghny.com/DocumentCenter/View/6366/Greenburgh-Gets--its-Sun-Daze-on-Under-the-Watchful-Eyes-of-the-Boys-in-Blue>

34. Making Martin Luther King Jr's Dream Come Alive the Success Story of the Parkway Homes/ Parkway Gardens Community: (1/18/2020)

<https://greenburghny.com/DocumentCenter/View/6377/Making-Martin-Luther-King-Jrs-Dream-Come-Alive-the-Success-Story-of-the-Parkway-Homes-Parkway-Gardens-Community>

About the Authors:

We are both Assistant Town Historians at Greenburgh Town Hall and we are engaged to be married and are currently looking for permanent employment.

Riley Wentzler:

I was born and raised in a small rural town in central Pennsylvania. In high school, I took every honors course available including four years of Spanish. I received A's in all of them. I graduated third in my class of 146 students. This brought me to Edinboro University of Pennsylvania. Once there, I continued my trend of academic excellence. I graduated summa cum laude in Political Science with a minor in Spanish and a Master's in Communication Studies, with a G.P.A of 3.94. It was also there that I met my lovely fiancée, Felicia Barber. My Master's in Communication has promoted public speaking, teamwork, and customer service. My Political Science degree has developed my research skills using computer-based tools and provided me with experience using the Microsoft Office products. My minor in Spanish has facilitated my bilingual capabilities. During my internship at Greenburgh, I created the petition for the State Roads project using website tools. My diverse education and areas of interest have provided me with a wide range of skills. I look forward to finding a career opportunity in business or government. **To suggest a topic for next week's article, you can contact me at assistanthistorian@greenburghny.com, or to help me find employment, you can contact me at rjwentzler413@gmail.com**

Felicia Barber:

I was born in New York City and raised in Hartsdale, New York. I graduated from Ardsley High School. I recently earned a Bachelor of Fine Arts degree in Graphic Design at Edinboro University of Pennsylvania. It was here that I met my fiancé, Riley Wentzler. As a result of my academic excellence, I won a scholarship every year. I learned and applied many graphic design skills to projects during my summer internships and at school. I am proficient in using Adobe graphic design applications including Photoshop, Illustrator and InDesign. For my Identity/branding course at Edinboro, I created logos to appear on the tee-shirts of Physical Education majors. For a veteran's upcoming event, I used a typeface to focus the reader to the soldier in the poster. For the State Roads Legislative Campaign project, I created the embedded graphic-photo that accompanied the petition I am looking for a job to utilize my skills as a Graphic Designer in an agency, print shop, company or government **To suggest a topic for next week's article, you can contact me at assistanthistorian@greenburghny.com. To learn more about my artwork or to help me find employment you can contact me at feliciadbarber@gmail.com.**

Two Interviews with the authors:

<https://riverjournalonline.com/around-town/a-love-of-history-and-each-other/13708/>

<https://wchs880.radio.com/articles/news/stories-main-street-couple-cerebral-palsy-brings-manytalents-town-greenburgh>