

# Greensboro Heritage Community Application



## Contact Information

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Neighborhood/Community Warnersville Community Coalition / Warnersville Historical & Beautification Society

## Neighborhood/Community Basic Information

My neighborhood (check all that apply):

\*Please provide documentation exhibiting one or more of these qualifications

is a registered 501(c)3

is registered with the Greensboro Neighborhood Congress

has elected officers and holds regular meetings with recorded meeting minutes

has the signatures and addresses of 5 community representatives interested in recognition as a Heritage Community

is filing the application in conjunction with the City of Greensboro

## Application Documentation

Please attach documentation exhibiting each of the below requirements:

Statement of Significance (150 words or less) summarizing the importance of the community.

Current Map of the general area of the Community to be recognized

Historical maps of the community.

Documented evidence that the community contributed significantly to the social, cultural, political, or economic life of Greensboro over a sustained period. *Documentation are items such as newspaper or magazine articles, books, photographs, archaeological surveys, scholarly articles, or oral histories gathered and archived from residents and/or their descendants.*

Narrative description of the community's activities and contributions (no more than 3 pages).

Additional documentation of the community's contributions to events of regional or national significance is also welcome, but not required.

**Statement of Significance (175 words)**

*Warnersville is a special place, even today it is a special place. History is not about what somebody thinks or feels. It is about what actually happened... We do different things not only to remind the community of its history, but also to celebrate our heritage.*

James Griffin

There is a tremendous sense of pride among most people who have grown up or lived in the Warnersville neighborhood, pride in a place rooted in local African American history that began after the Civil War.

Warnersville remains a culturally and historically significant place with a strong sense of community that still exists today, 150 years after it was founded by Quaker Yardley Warner, in large part because of its rich and unique history. This is especially relevant because so much of the physical landscape and its original homes, churches, schools and other buildings that created the fabric of the community were destroyed by Redevelopment during the 1970s.

## Narrative Description

The community of Warnersville is culturally and historically significant to Greensboro for several reasons.

Started by Pennsylvania Quaker Yardley Warner immediately following the Civil War, it was the first planned African American community in the area. It began as a small area of land outside the city limits purchased in 1865-66 by Warner, who came to North Carolina to create a community for recently freed blacks. He built a school and sold lots so these individuals could learn to read and own land to improve their lives.

### *The Early History: Yardley Warner and Harmon Unthank*

Pennsylvanian Yardley Warner (1815 – 1885) came to North Carolina in the late 1860s with a cause in mind and funds to make it happen. Money contributed by fellow Quakers went to build schools for African Americans, and in Greensboro, provided the roots for a community where people of color could live, work and worship.

Warner purchased 35 ½ acres of land for \$2,260 in an area south of town. He oversaw the land's division into plots, each with enough for gardens and small livestock. Defying convention, he chose to use a lot for himself and built a house, a decision that brought criticism from white residents. Warnersville received its start because of Yardley Warner and Philadelphia Quakers; it flourished because of the many generations of families who created a community.

Yardley Warner devoted his life to organizing schools and improving the lives of African Americans across the South. In 1876, he founded the Warner Institute in Jonesboro, Tennessee to train African American teachers.

A great deal of what we know about Warnersville during the early years comes from the letters of Henry Stanley Newman, an English Friend, or Quaker, who visited America between 1888 and 1890. His encounters with people and impressions of the places he visited, including Warnersville, were published in *The Monthly Review*.

Harmon Unthank (1827 – 1894), born into slavery in Guilford County, became one of Warnersville's first landowners. He bought the first of several lots in 1871 and soon emerged as a community leader, overseeing lot sales after Yardley Warner left Greensboro. The father of eight, Unthank built a large home at 163 West McCulloch St. where he lived with his second wife, Maria, and their children.

Unthank, a skilled carpenter, worked full-time at the Greensboro Spoke & Handle Works; he also had his own businesses, including making wooden coffins and repairing stoves. Nicknamed "The Boss," the man regarded as the community's unofficial mayor became involved in local and state politics as a member of the newly-founded Republican Party. Unthank served as a member of the county school board, was a delegate to a state freedmen's convention and became the first African American bank director in North Carolina.

In 1867 Warner transferred all the acreage he purchased to “The Association of Philadelphia and Its Vicinity for the Relief of Colored Freeman.” This land was subdivided into acre plots and sold for \$25 to \$400. Between 1868 and 1888, St. John’s Lodge No. 12, an African American Masonic Lodge, and about two dozen people purchased plots.

### ***Growth and Development during the Twentieth Century***

During the late 19<sup>th</sup> and throughout the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the population of Warnersville grew and expanded as did the neighborhood’s boundaries. The establishment of African American churches such as St. Matthews (founded in 1864), New Zion Baptist Church (founded in 1897) and schools such as Ashe Street School, also known as the Graded School Number 2 for Colored Children (1898-1922), Jacksonville School (c.1909-1954) and J.C. Price School (1922 – 1983) strengthened the bonds of this community. At the same time, many black-owned businesses ranging from barber shops and corner markets, to funeral parlors and the first African American physician began to develop in the neighborhood.

### **J. C. Price School**

J.C. Price School was named to honor AME Zion minister, educator and orator Joseph Charles Price (1854 – 1893), a renowned advocate of legal, civil and educational rights for African Americans and founder of Livingstone College in Salisbury. From its beginnings in 1922 until 1971, Price served as a center of education and community for African American students and their families, and for much of that time, it offered grades 1 – 9.

Lorcy R. Henderson served as the first principal, succeeded by Mr. Peeler, who oversaw building expansions and launched the school system’s first student-run radio station. Peeler emphasized what has been called the J. C. Price Spirit, “a unity – of togetherness – among the community, the students, the faculty and even certain administrators,” a spirit nourished under the leadership of Dr. Melvin C. Swann, who followed Peeler as principal from 1969 to 1971.

When Greensboro Public Schools came under federal desegregation orders in 1971, Price became a magnet elementary until it closed in the early 1980s. The buildings were used by Guilford Technical Community College, then bought by Greensboro College, which had plans for an athletic complex that brought strong criticism from neighborhood advocates. Supporters tried many approaches to save Price, without success. The complex was then purchased by the Salvation Army. The main school building was demolished in 2014, with several pieces saved, including ones on exhibit, in hopes they may be displayed in a Boys and Girls Club planned for the property.

### **Redevelopment and Its impact on Warnersville**

*We really fought redevelopment. Because our history was being torn down.* Delcie Washington Gladney

During the 1950s and 1960s, the U. S. government funded projects across the nation to tear down neighborhoods and commercial districts and replace them with new buildings. If a city’s officials labeled an

area as blighted or substandard, it could be designated for purchase, demolition and redevelopment. Neighborhood property owners had little power in the decision-making process.

In Greensboro and Warnersville in particular, redevelopment changed not only buildings but the physical landscape and social fabric of the community. Some residents in affected neighborhoods felt there were benefits, but for many, redevelopment was never wanted or welcomed.

Linda Waddell, a resident of the community, remembers:

*“when they came through with the urban renewal, I felt like... parts of our history, a part of us being black people, were taken away from us because, quote-unquote, the white people thought it was for the good of us to come through and knock down our humble beginning, our surroundings. They thought they were giving us something.”*

Warnersville, the largest designated neighborhood at 338 acres, was planned as a three-phase project. The Warnersville redevelopment projects demolished nearly all of the neighborhood’s existing housing units, forcing hundreds of families to move. It also shut down most of its businesses, especially those on Ashe St. Changes in street configurations caused several churches to move to new locations and rebuild. While affected families and business owners received payments for the loss of personal property, few felt the compensation was fair or adequate

### **Ashe Street Business District**

The Ashe Street Business District was permanently removed by redevelopment, and the lack of stores created a hole in the fabric of the community that remains today. Zoning guidelines and street redesigns made it nearly impossible for businesses to stay within the neighborhood. Those affected received money for moving expenses and property loss and some received government-funded displacement payments. Yet for many, the money never matched their sacrifice

Redevelopment affected the lives of nearly every Warnersville family. Hampton Homes, 275 subsidized income apartments, were completed by the Greensboro Housing Authority in 1968, on land where small bungalows and homes had been. Some families moved there. Others moved to Morningside Homes, another public housing community, other Greensboro neighborhoods, or even left Greensboro.

Churches were affected, too. Several churches re-built or relocated, providing a source of strength and a sense of stability.

### **The Future**

And despite all these challenges and obstacles, for many who grew up or lived in Warnersville a sense of community has remained. Organizations such as the *Warnersville Historical and Beautification Society* and the *Warnersville Community Coalition*, and the recent collaboration between the Warnersville community (including David Jones Elementary School, the Warnersville Recreation Center and several local Churches) and the Greensboro Historical Museum is testament to the strength of this community’s spirit, as well as the cultural significance of its history and its relevance in the larger context of Greensboro History.

## Agreement and Signature

By submitting this application, I affirm that the facts set forth in it are true and complete. I understand that applications will be reviewed for completeness and merit by the Heritage Community Review Committee and then by the Greensboro Historic Preservation Commission (HPC) where public comment is heard. The HPC makes a recommendation to the Greensboro City Council. The City Council hears public comment and formally authorizes recognition. Recognition as a Heritage Community places no restrictions on property and is not a form of zoning regulation. The contents of the application become public information.

Additional signatures are welcome and may be attached to the application. The Greensboro Heritage Community

## Recognition Program

Name (printed) James T. Griffin  
Signature/Date *James T. Griffin*  
Address 1306 Dilworth Street 01/17/2015

Name (printed) Gertrude G. Pennix  
Signature/Date *Gertrude G. Pennix* 1/6/17/15  
Address 808 Logan St.

Name (printed) Harold L. Seegar  
Signature/Date *Harold L. Seegar* 6-17-15  
Address 4907 Shady Pine Dr. G'boro 27455

Name (printed) Shalane W. Griffin  
Signature/Date *Shalane W. Griffin* 6-17-15  
Address 2504 Wilkes Drive G'boro 27406

Name (printed) JEANNETTE STURDIVANT  
Signature/Date *Jeanette Sturdivant* 6/17/15  
Address 3103 Twin Brooks Drive 27407

*Jon B. Zachman*  
Jon B. Zachman  
Curator, Greensboro Historical Museum