

"Advocating Equity for All Since 1992"



**CommUNITY Diversity Group
of La Grange**

A Self- Guided Walking Tour



30 Years of Diversity Days

African Americans in Early La Grange

As part of Diversity Days of La Grange, come learn about La Grange's rich African American history through a self-guided tour. Use your smart phone to scan the above QR code and access the African Americans in Early La Grange Walking Tour. A Google map of the walking tour sites with directions is also available via the guide.

Tag **#DiversityDaysofLG** to show your support!

Sponsored by the CommUNITY Diversity Group of LaGrange.

www.communitydiversity.org

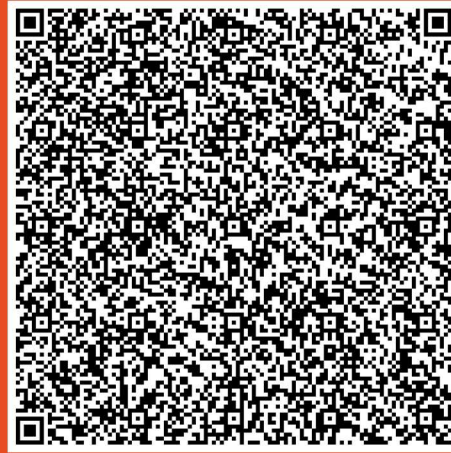
Tour Map and Locations

A Google map of the below listed historical sites with walking directions can be accessed via the below QR code. Please feel free to adjust the Google map to your preferred mode of transportation (i.e. driving, biking).

PART 1



PART 2



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D- 205 Washington: The Romanski Family Home

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F- 248 Sawyer- McClinton's Market | 249 Sawyer- McClinton's Market

G- 240 Sawyer: The Bernard Sims Family | Sims Cleaning Business

H- 100 Sawyer: Family Home of Mr. & Mrs. Winslow and Cynthia Brown

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OUTSIDE THE EASTSIDE: ADDITIONAL SITES TO EXPLORE

M- Shawmut Field (Gordon Park, La Grange) ("M") - Baseball Diamond at 'Ogden and the Viaduct'

N: St. Francis Xavier Catholic Church (124 N. Spring, La Grange)

O: Graue Mill & Museum (3800 York Rd., Oak Brook)

**Please note that the term "colored" school was referenced by Mrs. Minnie Carr and others in numerous publications.*



5 Sawyer Avenue ("A"): Bessie's Beauty Shop

Mrs. Bessie Wade Peyton was *kind-hearted and business oriented.* She moved to La Grange in 1946 and opened Wade Beauty Shop in 1949 in the business building at 108 Hayes, along with other businesses that occupied it as well.

****See 108 Hayes for Additional Site Information****

TIMELINE:

1949-1963	Bessie Wade first owned Wade Beauty Shop in the business building on 108 Hayes (now 104 Hayes).
1959-1963	Bessie and Charles Peyton built 5 Sawyer as a residential and commercial building for local businesses with construction completed in 1963.
1963 - Present	Bessie's Beauty Shop was opened in 1963. African American women primarily worked as maids at this time and typically did not have their own stylists. Bessie recognized this need and opened a salon to cater specifically to African American women.
1963 - 1991	Town and Country Dress Shop was a very well-known and respected dress shop that catered to all women -- women of color and white women -- from La Grange, Chicago, Batavia, Glen Ellyn, and Wheaton.
1993 - 1995	After Bessie passed away in 1987, Bessie's daughter Renee sold the business to an African American dress shop owner. It was important to rent the space to and support African American businesses and their owners.
1995-2002	Charlie's Corner Candy Shop - Charles Davis was one of two shop proprietors from 2000-2002.
2002 - 2006	Connie's Corner Candy Shop - Connie Hurd was the store's proprietor.
2006-2007	Another Candy Shop (name unknown)

Acknowledgement: Thank you to Olivia Renee Peyton-Hodges, daughter of Bessie Peyton and current proprietor of Bessie's Beauty Shop, for generously providing the information on this site location.



26 Washington Avenue (B"): Second Baptist Church

TIMELINE:

1896- 1914	<p>The Second Baptist Church of La Grange was organized as the First Baptist Church of Hinsdale. Members initially worshipped in the Hinsdale Village Hall (having only to pay the electric bill). Unable to find a more permanent, affordable location in Hinsdale, the church moved to La Grange and changed its name to the Second Baptist Church of La Grange.</p> <p>After holding services at Union Hall on Hillgrove (near Brainard) for some years, the church's 40 members dedicated 322 Franklin as their new home.</p>
1947	<p>The church secured the building at 26 Washington Avenue that is now its current site.</p>
1960	<p>The new church building there was completed and dedicated.</p>
1978	<p>A food pantry for the entire community opened and serves approximately 225 families (500-600 individuals) per month.</p>

Acknowledgement: Thank you to Deacon William Branch of the Second Baptist Church of La Grange for generously providing information on this site location.



200 Washington Avenue ("C"): The Eastside Community Center (The La Grange Community Center)

In the 1930's, the current location of the Community Center was once a baseball field and the playlot for the community. The Play School was where young children went to nursery school and local churches were where the community held social gatherings and club/organization meetings.

During the 1930 s/1940 s, the Eastside Community Center was sponsored by the Community Nurse and Services Association. In the 1950 s 'The Center' was part of the Red Feather Agency that received funds from the Community Chest and provided health and scouting programs to the community.

In the early 1940 s, the Emmanuel Episcopal Church donated their 17-year-old barrack-style annex building to the Community Nurse and Service Association who then donated and moved the building to the Eastside. The property was owned then and now by the Village of La Grange. The building was physically moved to where the basketball courts are currently located on Washington and Lincoln.

The Playlot as a Baseball Field: Where the current building is now was home plate, right field was the alley, and a 'home run' was knocking over the Center building,' according to residents who remember playing on that field!

1964- The current Community Center building was built for \$85,000.

For more information on this site, see site location H" regarding Mrs. Cynthia Brown.

OF HISTORICAL INTEREST...

The First Recreation Center was at 88 S. La Grange Rd. It was later moved and called the La Grange Community Center at 8 S. La Grange Road. These facilities appeared to be 'for Whites,' based on terminology used in publications. Black residents used the facilities on the Eastside, as is referenced in this tour.

Acknowledgement: Information for this site location credited to News From the Eastside/The LaGrange Citizen.



205 Washington Avenue ("D"): The Romanski Family Home

The Frisby's were one of the early families in La Grange.

In the mid to late 1920s, Nancy Frisby married Odee Romanski in Mississippi in 1912 and moved to La Grange to be close to Nancy's family.

In 1928, Nancy's father, William Frisby, along with his two sons-in-law, Odee Romanski and Thomas Minnis, all purchased the property and home that was later moved to 205 Washington that same year. The house was originally on the street behind the La Grange Police Station (one street south of Burlington and west of La Grange Road, likely Calendar Court) and had been built sometime between 1880-1920. The structure standing today at 205 Washington Avenue is the same home the Romanski Family had moved.

The 3-story house moved down the hill and across the tracks, placed on timbers the length of the building made specifically for the size of the house. It was likely pulled by horses, and mules dug out the basement/foundation. The house sat on wheels until the foundation was ready. Houses in the early 1900s were built structurally sound and would just need to be placed on a new foundation - probably cinder blocks. Then hooked up to electric, plumbing, and connected to the basement.

There was an apple tree in front of the house, and Mrs. Vivian Romanski would make the best apple pies with apples from that tree. Anybody who asked could take them to cook with or can them.

Southern hospitality was sharing what you had- living accommodations and food. If you had a slice of bread you shared it. Love thy neighbor, take care of thy neighbor." ~ Mr. Ken Romanski

OF HISTORIC INTEREST...

An article describing how houses were moved in the early 1900s: <https://www.shiawasseehistory.com/house.html>

In the early 1900s, some of the other notable African Americans of Early LaGrange were the Sims, Mallory, Williams, Barbee, and Anderson families.

Acknowledgement: Thank you to the Romanski Family for generously sharing information on their family's history for this site location.



Cossitt Avenue and Washington Avenue ("E"): Former Site of "The Play School for Colored Children" *

**Please note that the term "colored" school was referenced by Mrs. Minnie Carr and others in numerous publications.*

The "Play School for Colored Children" existed in La Grange at this site in the 1930s. It is unclear which corner the original building was located.

The "Play School for Colored Children" was where African American children from the Eastside of La Grange attended nursery school. The children played in a *recreation yard* across the street. Ms. Virginia Earl was Head Teacher of the school from 1938-1942 and Ms. Cora Dryden was the Leader of the Play School from the 1930's to 1942.

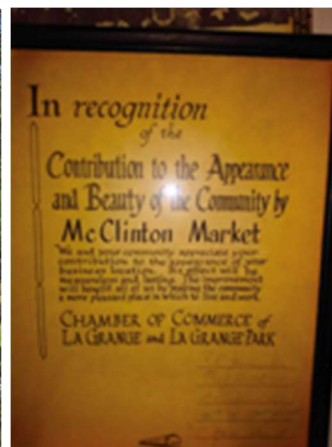
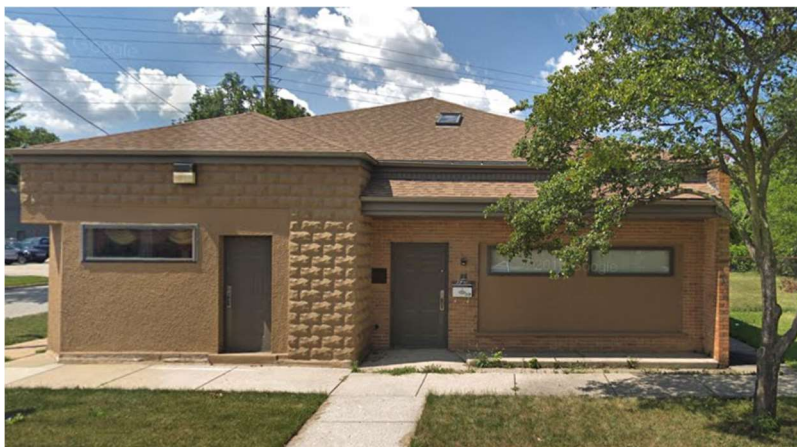
Previously, the nursery school was held at the A.M.E. Mission Church. The Play School program was sponsored by the La Grange Community Nurse and Services Association.

In early 1940's, a building was donated by the Emmanuel Episcopal church and physically moved to the empty play lot on Washington and Lincoln. The Eastside Community Center became the central spot for community gatherings and events, including most activities for very young children in the 1940 s and 1950 s.

OF HISTORIC INTEREST...

The Works Projects Administration (WPA) had to lay off many workers in the early 1940 s. Unfortunately, this caused a great deal of tumult, job reassignments and program restructuring on the Eastside. The WPA was a federal program that *employed skilled and unskilled workers...in public works projects that included, creating parks, building roads, bridges, schools and other public structures*", according to www.loc.gov.

Acknowledgement: Information provided by News From The Eastside / The La Grange Citizen for this site location.



248 Sawyer Avenue ("F"): McClinton's Market

H&B Grill | Tyson Pool Hall / House of Gadore / St. James Community Church

248 Sawyer: McClinton's Market at 248 Sawyer was owned by Mrs. Bernice and Mr. Roosevelt McClinton.

Mr. Roosevelt McClinton served on the Board of the YMCA, was actively involved in the NAACP, and served as Director of the Eastside Community Center for several years in the 1950s.

As Mr. McClinton worked at General Motors during the day, his wife Bernice ran the Store and Restaurant from 8am until closing. Mrs. Bernice McClinton was a strong woman and equally the backbone of the family, who, along with her husband Roosevelt, worked long hours.

In the early 1960's, the McClintons purchased the building from the original owner, the Harkey family from Brookfield that owned Harkey's Grocery Store. It had an apartment in the back where the McClinton family lived.

While living there, they added a brick addition which they opened as a sit-down and carryout restaurant. The family served soul food and American diner food. Patrons were known to come from local businesses, General Motors, local residents and the surrounding suburbs.

In the mid-late 1960's, the McClintons relocated across the street from the McClinton's Market at 249 Sawyer. After their move, they rented out 248 Sawyer to various businesses and organizations, such as H & B Grill – BBQ Restaurant owned by the Beasely Family, another BBQ restaurant owned by Mrs. Elnora Malloy, and Tyson Pool Hall.

In the mid 1960's, House of Gadore rented the space to teach Black history to Eastside residents. The organization was started by Ms. Esther Ray Poole who was the daughter of respected residents, Uberta and KC Poole.

On July 5, 1970, the St. James Community Church (Pastor Anthony Richardson) rented the brick addition side of the building for Worship Service. In 1976, the Church purchased the entire building.

Acknowledgement: Thank you to the McClinton Family, Mrs. Ethel Beasely, and Pastor Anthony Richardson for generously sharing their history and photos for this site location.



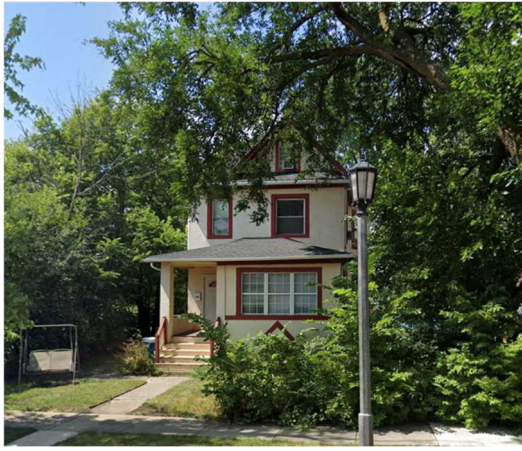
249 Sawyer Avenue (F''): McClinton s Market / Johnny's Record Shop

In 1966, Roosevelt and Bernice McClinton purchase property across from their grocery store at 248 Sawyer and build a new Grocery store, McClinton's Market with living quarters above.

In the late 1960's, Johnny s Record Shop (see bottom photo) and a barber shop were businesses that rented the adjacent space to this building (facing Cossitt Ave.).

In the early 1970 s, the store was closed, and the building was converted to apartments.

Acknowledgement: Thank you to the McClinton Family for generously sharing their family history and photos for this site location.



240 Sawyer Avenue ("G"): The Bernard Sims Family | Sims Cleaning Business

In 1903, Mr. Bernard Sims, Sr. was the first Black person born to one of the only Black families in La Grange at that time.

He went on to attend St. Francis Xavier grade school and graduated from Lyons Township High School (LTHS) in 1921.*

In 2006, LTHS inducted Mr. Sims into its Hall of Fame, citing his exemplary athleticism, his success as a businessman, and his civic activism and leadership.

His Lyons Township High School Hall of Fame biography is included below.

Mr. Sims, a LaGrange resident for all of his life, exemplifies a life of perseverance, service, leadership, and achievement in the community. Sims was born to the first African American family in LaGrange in 1903. He attended St. Francis grammar school and then Lyons Township High School in 1921. At LT, he was an outstanding athlete; he ran hurdles in track, played football, and was one of the pitchers in baseball. After graduating in 1925, his career started as a runner for the Chicago Stock Exchange until 1929 when the market crashed. Determined not to fall into poverty following the crash, Mr. Sims founded a carwash and housecleaning business that steadily grew and provided jobs for local residents during the Depression. He later received a real estate license and worked for years as a broker in town. He took a commanding role as a civil rights activist in the area by taking leadership roles in many different areas and thus became known as "The Mayor." Sims was a member of the Knights of Columbus, Toastmasters, and served as president of the LaGrange Chapter of the NAACP in the late 1960's. When serving as president, he encouraged the chapter to fight for a fair housing ordinance in LaGrange, which was passed in the early 1970's. He participated in a sit-in at the lunch counter of a LaGrange drugstore after blacks were denied service. He also encouraged other LaGrange residents to expect equal treatment in businesses throughout the village. Sims served as La Grange's first black Republican precinct captain. He also volunteered at St. Francis Xavier Catholic Church and the Southwest Suburban Center on Aging in La Grange. Sims passed away at the age of 97."

An obituary from the Chicago Tribune after his death at age 97 on June 3, 2001 can be found here:

<https://www.chicagotribune.com/news/ct-xpm-2001-06-15-0106150365-story.html>

Mr. Sims worked as a notary public, real estate broker, and built a successful car washing and cleaning business in La Grange.

His grandchildren, Bernadine Sims and Carolyn Gothard, describe their grandfather as *a well-respected member of the community.*"

Mr. Sims was an organizer and equal rights advocate who was known as "The Mayor of the East Side" due to his tireless work for equal opportunities for Blacks in La Grange.

*Although the LTHS Hall of Fame write-up for Mr. Sims indicates he graduated from high school in 1925, the information provided by the family and the Tribune is that he graduated in 1921.

Acknowledgement: Thank you to The Sims Family for generously sharing information on their family history for this site location. Additional information courtesy of The Chicago Tribune and Lyons Township High School. Photo of Bernard Sims, Sr. credited to Lyons Township High School.



100 Sawyer Avenue ("H"): Family Home of Mr. & Mrs. Winslow and Cynthia Brown

This property was a vacant lot in the 1940 s.

In the early 1950 s, La Grange resident Mr. Winslow Brown had the current house built.

Mrs. Cynthia Brown was a community activist who fought to hold government officials accountable and to create changes needed for her community. One resident fondly remembers Mrs. Brown as *well-educated and a wonderful lady. The nicest neighbor you d ever want to have. A community-first type of person, making the neighborhood the best it can be.*"

Below is a list of some of her notable accomplishments.

Early 1960 s: Recreation programs for Eastside children were scarce. Children often played under the bridge, nicknamed "The Hole."

1964: Mrs. Cynthia Brown, as President of the La Grange Chapter NAACP, headed 35 pickets at the official opening of the new Eastside Community Center building that was erected at 200 Washington (current facility). The Village said the new center was for the youth of La Grange. However, as quoted in a 1978 Suburban Tribune article, "Cynthia Brown said the \$85,000 center was a standing memorial to segregation, purposely located in the center of the Negro ghetto" to perpetuate racial separation." Mrs. Brown requested that the Village Board create an interracial youth program by hiring a recreation consultant.

Cynthia Brown Community Leadership Roles:

President of LaGrange area NAACP, League of Women Voters, Teacher in Chicago Public Schools, La Grange Village Trustee

1971: Winslow and Cynthia Brown s son, Owen, was a star athlete on the Class of 1971 Lyons Township High School (LTHS) basketball team which won state championship. LTHS currently offers students the Owen Arthur Brown Scholarship."

OF HISTORICAL INTEREST...

Other Protests in the 1960 s led by The LaGrange NAACP:

Sit-in at a La Grange Drugstore Lunch Counter

Boycott: La Grange area Black residents withdrew their money out of local banks due to discrimination and denial of loans.

March of 1968: 500 La Grange residents flooded La Grange Village Hall in opposition to the 11/27/67 ordinance, proposed by the La Grange NAACP, that licensed real estate dealers and prohibited them from discriminating in the sale or rental of property in the village. Police led speakers to the front of the meeting for public comments. The ordinance was approved in April 1968.

1969- Protest Line at The La Grange Theater for discrimination against black patrons."

Acknowledgement: Thank you to Cheryl Chapman from the African American Write Night on February 16, 1993, and other local residents for information regarding Mr. and Mrs. Brown. Information was also obtained from the Suburban Tribune.



34 Sawyer Avenue ("I"): The Mallory Family Home

From the 1950s until 1963, the original Mallory family home was located at 632 N. Catherine, LaGrange Park.

At the time, realtors were offering Black residents a flat rate for their homes in an effort to move Black residents out of the area.

Mr. William Mallory was interviewed by "Suburban Life" on November 15, 1978 and was quoted by the reporter as saying:

Why should I sell the house and then go into debt to buy a new one? Dad said we were going to stay put and we did." Then, in 1963 after Mallory's parents died, he sold the home at 632 N. Catherine Avenue. Mr. Mallory said he decided to move to "Where a black community with an open mind was forming - La Grange."

In 1963, Mr. William Mallory built the home we see today at 34 Sawyer with son, Curtis.

OF HISTORIC INTEREST...

In the late 1950s through 1961, when houses, garages, attics were filled with families that moved to La Grange for good paying jobs in Electro-Motive and other companies, it was reportedly too noisy and crowded with loitering becoming an issue.

Consequently, in 1961 the Village of La Grange adopted a new building occupancy code that reduced the Black residents living in La Grange by half.

Acknowledgement: Information for this site location credited to Suburban Life.



100 Hayes Avenue ("J"): A Residence of Minnie Carr 1944-1949

100 Hayes, 10 Sawyer, 100 Sawyer are all homes on the Eastside that housed many residents, sometimes all at the same time, throughout the early years. Families lived in certain homes that had many floors with one family per floor, even finding room in garages, attics and basements too - 'any spare corner was filled!'

Residents recall that people would come to La Grange from the South with the clothes on their backs seeking work at Electromotive, International Harvester and other companies and factories in the area.

Minnie C. Carr was one of many community members who played an integral part in the early care and activities for children of La Grange's Eastside in the mid-1900's. Mrs. Carr taught music, crafts and Bible Class to children and in 1942 became Director of the Eastside Community Center. She also wrote a society column called *News From the Eastside* in *The La Grange Citizen*.

In 1940, Minnie Carr started the Doll Buggy and Wagon Parades where children would decorate their doll buggies, wagons and bikes and march through the village to the delight of the community. She created and reported in great detail on these events that were the first ever of their kind for annual neighborhood children's parades in La Grange.

Acknowledgement: Information provided by *News From The Eastside / The La Grange Citizen* and various residents for this site location.



**108 Hayes Avenue (Currently 104 Hayes Avenue) ("K"):
The Eastside Grill | Wade Beauty Shop | Golden Barber Shop |
Holmes and Jones Grocery Store**

In 1949, the building was built by Rev. Morgan Davis and managed by Morgan Eastland.

In 1951, the businesses in the building held a special event to celebrate their second anniversary. They had a parade through the Eastside with attractions and treats in each place for anyone who attended.

Acknowledgement: Information for this site location credited to News From the Eastside/The LaGrange Citizen.



320 East Calendar Avenue ("L"): Davis Memorial A.M.E. Church

In 1894, church services were first held in the home of Mr. and Mrs. Thomas Nelson from Hinsdale with Reverend Brown as minister.

The church moved to La Grange in 1896 and met at Union Hall on Hillgrove and Brainard Avenues where the name became Cornerstone Chapel African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Church.

In 1916, lots were purchased at 320 and 322 Calendar Avenue and the church building (320 Calendar- current structure) was completed at the cost of \$5,500. It was renamed Centennial as the first cornerstone was laid. It was the 100th year of the incorporation of the African Methodist Episcopal Church (A.M.E.).

In 1929, Rev. William H. Jenkins was pastor, and a parsonage was built in the 322 Calendar lot.

Reverend Morgan Davis was the dynamic pastor of this historic church from 1934 until his death in 1950. Rev. Davis was highly respected by the entire Village of La Grange. Upon his passing, it was renamed Davis Memorial A.M.E. Church in his memory.

Acknowledgement: Information for this site location credited to *A History of Davis Memorial African Methodist Episcopal Church, La Grange, IL* from the Founder's Day celebration.

OUTSIDE THE EASTSIDE: ADDITIONAL SITES TO EXPLORE



Shawmut Field (Gordon Park, La Grange) ("M") - Baseball Diamond at Ogden and the Viaduct

La Grange Baseball- The La Grange Colored Giants*- A Black boys league that played other teams in the Chicagoland area.

1930's 'La Grange Colored Giants' played:

- The Dixie Moore Blues- 'a colored team from Harvey'*
- Wilson's Team of West Side Chicago
- The Colored Monarchs of Chicago*
- Congress Park Eagles
- Argo
- Maywood
- Lemont
- Berwyn
- Hinsdale

**Please note that the term "colored" is how the team was referenced by Mrs. Minnie Carr and others in numerous publications.*

OF HISTORIC INTEREST... The National Men's Baseball League became integrated in 1948.

La Grange Softball- The La Grange Bombers- A Black girls league that would play other teams in the Chicagoland area. The La Grange players held a fundraiser that helped pay for their first uniform, which was a brown and yellow sweater.

1930's 'La Grange Bombers' played:

- Brookfield
- Argo
- Wheaton
- Westmont
- Orchard Grove

Acknowledgement: Information provided by News From The Eastside / The La Grange Citizen for this site location.



St. Francis Xavier Catholic Church ("N"): Church & School

St. Francis Xavier Catholic Church and School, located on Spring Avenue in La Grange, has been an integrated school and place of worship at least since 1899, when the Congregation of the Sisters of St. Joseph arrived in La Grange and began teaching. Mr. Bernie Sims, Sr., and his family attended the St. Francis Xavier Church and School.

The Sisters also ran two boarding schools (located at 1515 W. Ogden) for area boys and girls, including many families from the Chicago area, who boarded during the week and went home on weekends, as well as Nazareth Academy located near the Sisters' house on Ogden.

Acknowledgement: *Thank you to Sister Marlene Schemmel for generously providing information for this site location from the Congregation of the Sisters of St. Joseph's historical records.*



Graue Mill & Museum, 3800 York Road, Oak Brook, IL 60523 ("O"): Underground Railroad Site

In the 1800's, Wheaton, Glen Ellyn, Glendale Heights, Wayne Center, Warrenville, West Chicago, Lombard, Naperville, Downers Grove, Hinsdale, Lyons and Oak Brook had "stations" on the Underground Railroad. DuPage County was situated in such a way that "passengers" coming from the south, southwest, and western parts of the state passed through the area. Graue Mill was once an active Underground Railroad site and served as an important part of the journey to freedom for many enslaved African Americans.

Wheaton College, the Filer House (Glen Ellyn), the Peck House (Lombard), and the Blodgett Home (Downers Grove) are examples of the few remaining structures in DuPage County which provided havens for enslaved persons seeking their freedom.

Graue Mill and Museum in Oak Brook is one of the remaining "stations." Visit their website to learn more about this important site: <http://www.grauemill.org/underground.htm>

Source: <http://www.grauemill.org/underground.htm>

Special Thanks!

Thank you for dedicating your time to learn more about the extraordinary lives of the African American residents of early La Grange featured in this tour and the collective impact their lives made on La Grange.

If you have additional information you would like to share with CDG for this ongoing project, please contact us at communitydiversity.org.

With sincere gratitude, the Community Diversity Group of La Grange would like to thank and acknowledge the following La Grange families and friends highlighted in this tour for sharing and entrusting their family's history and stories with us all:

Mrs. Ethel Beasely and Family,

Ms. Joan Davis and The Davis Family,

Davis Memorial AME Church,

Mr. Larry Fields and the Thomas/Fields Families,

Ms. Regina McClinton and The McClinton Family,

Ms. Olivia Renee Peyton-Hodges and Family,

Pastor Anthony Richardson,

Ms. Sherry Robinson and Family,

Mr. Ken Romanski and The Romanski Family,

The Second Baptist Church and Deacon William Branch,

The Sims Family - Ms. Bernadine Sims and Ms. Carolyn Gothard,

The Sisters of St. Joseph, La Grange Park