

Waverly Historic District

Roughly bounded by Hampton, Heidt, Gervais, and Harden streets
Columbia

The historic core of the Waverly neighborhood was originally an early subdivision of an antebellum community of the same name located on the outskirts of Columbia. By the early 20th century, it had evolved into a community of black artisans, professionals, and social reformers, many of whom made significant contributions to the social and political advancement of African Americans in Columbia and statewide.

Black families first began settling in the Waverly neighborhood in the late 19th century, their numbers growing rapidly in subsequent years. By 1903 black residents outnumbered white residents in Waverly by nearly two to one. By the 1920s Waverly had evolved into Columbia's most prominent black community. The neighborhood's importance in black history is reflected by the homes of its residents and by the concentration of institutions that served the black community at a time when racial discrimination denied them access to services available in the white community. The black residents of Waverly created a nearly self-sufficient community of black-owned business, hospitals, churches, and schools that served black residents in Waverly and in the state.

Two institutions that initially drew African Americans to Waverly were Benedict College and Allen University (see also Allen University and Benedict College Historic District). The former was founded in 1870 by the Baptist Home Mission Society, and the latter in 1881 by the African Methodist Episcopal Church. The pattern in which major black urban communities grew up around black colleges and universities was a common one in the South. The gradually growing presence of a large group of black urban professionals in Waverly was directly related to the concentration of schools, churches, and other public institutions that served the black community.

Hospitals and other health care facilities serving the black community were significant in the development of Waverly. Among these were the Benedict Hospital and the Waverly Fraternal Hospital and Nurses Training School. The presence of these institutions accounts for the unusually high number of black doctors and nurses who worked at or trained in Waverly.

Churches, such as the Woodrow Presbyterian Church, and black retail businesses served the community as well, forming the core of the self-supporting network created by the community's members. Waverly's development illustrates important patterns in the shift from biracial coexistence to the strict racial segregation common to early 20th-century urban centers.
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