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*Anacostia Community Museum Archives*

## **Birney School Life Newsletter, November 1950**

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tobacco and he sold much of what is now Barry Farm to the government for a site for St. Elizabeth's which was sold in lots of one acre each. The land needed to be cleared, roads constructed and two-room homes were planned and built. The price of the land ranged from \$200 to \$300 an acre. No mortgaging was allowed until the tracts were completely paid for and all work was done in the late evening by hand. Due to the fact that this land was given with no provision for streets and roads, the government was averse to making improvement such as paving roads, sewage, lighting and public transportation facilities. The very nature of governmental policies, therefore, tended to isolate these people from their neighbors in the greater Washington area.

Water separates Anacostia proper, so that one of the earliest means of travel was by ferry. In 1795 the Eastern Branch Ferry was built to provide more rapid and regular transportation for this region. Later bridges connected Anacostia with Washington proper. Between 1795 and 1797 charters were granted for the building of toll bridges across the eastern branch. These two structures were commonly referred to as the upper and lower bridges. Both were destroyed by the American forces on August 4, 1814. The Navy Yard Bridge which spans the Anacostia River was built in 1818; the John Phillip Sousa and the Benning Bridge were built next and the newest one, the South Capital Bridge was complete in 1950. All of these structures provide the residents of Anacostia with a quick means of transportation to the downtown shopping centers.

Many of the older Anacostia residents remember when streets were unpaved, being mere trails or cowpaths; when electric cars spanned the Navy Yard Bridge; when Minnesota Avenue became one of the main thoroughfares and when the Suitland Parkway Road helped to ease traffic congestion in this area.

With the opening of Minnesota Avenue, transportation by bus and automobile became even quicker for residents. The old electric trolley cars have been replaced by modern busses which extend along a route much farther than the electric cars.

Many of the streets of Anacostia were named for former Presidents. The first plot of this area included the names of such streets as Harrison, which replaced a part of Good Hope Road, and then Jackson, Washington and Jefferson. Streets running from Good Hope Road were Taylor, Adams, Pierce, Fillmore and Monroe.<sup>4</sup> On June 15, 1908 the District Commissioners ruled that these names be given to another section of the city. The only government owned road led directly to the Asylum. It was originally known as Asylum Road and the changed to Monroe Street. Monroe Street became Nichols Avenue in honor of Dr. Charles Nichols who was the first surgeon of St. Elizabeth's Hospital. Fourteenth and W Streets is famous as being the site of Cedar Hill, the home of Frederick Douglass.

A great many abolitionists were know to Anacostia and have left their stamp on many street names. Howard Road was named for General Oliver Otis Howard; Douglass Road was named for Frederick Douglass<sup>5</sup>; Sumner Road was named for Charles Sumner; Sheridan Road was named in honor of Secretary of the Treasury Stanton who served during Abraham Lincoln's administration. Pomeroy and Elvans Road were named for Senators who were if office during the time when this area was laid out for Negroes. Since many of these streets were unpaved and without sidewalks until comparatively recently, Anacostia



owes much of its modern improvements in transportation, street development and home building to its various citizens associations. Within the past two decades home building has progressed to a great degree and we find many and varied types of which one can be proud. The Barry Farm Project itself serves over four-thousand individuals. Other housing developments are under way and when erected the age-old problem of school overcrowding will present itself again. A new elementary school will then be necessary. The problem of more adequate transportation will again face the residents.

Younger residents of Anacostia have not fully realized what a great heritage has been handed down to them by older Anacostians.

One can only hope that young Anacostians will meet the challenge of this heritage and do everything possible to keep the community as outstanding in the future as the older residents have done in the past.

Compiled By  
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[[line]]

3. Document 3 - Dr. George C. Havenner-"The Old and New Anacostia"  
-Washington Post-January, 1926.
4. Document 4 - John C. Proctor-"Along The Eastern Branch"  
-Washington Post-July, 1947.
5. Document 5 -"Columbian Historical Society Records"-Vol. 17, 1899.

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