

A Brief History of the Site

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As downtown Spartanburg entered a period of unprecedented growth during the 1890s and early 1900s, open lands throughout the mile and a half radius that defined the city limits were rapidly developed for commercial and residential use. One



such area was a sloping hillside to the northeast of the city, known most often as “Gas Bottom” because it marked a topographically low point near an early natural gas plant. Many of the city’s most impoverished families lived in this area, with the steep terrain and proximity to the unpleasant odors of the gas works making it undesirable to those who could afford it. An 1891 illustration of the city shows residences along the northern ends of Oakland Avenue and Dean Street but scant few houses in the

vast area between them. Twenty years later, a 1903 city directory shows that around 20 residences line new streets in this area, nearly all occupied by African-Americans. The biggest growth occurs in the 1910s, when several new streets subdivide the area and the number of residences jumps to around 80, not including those directly facing Oakland and Dean. Over the next several decades, a dozen or so additional residences are built. The area is almost exclusively residential although a few household businesses are listed in various city directories, including corner groceries, a beauty



salon, and a few midwives. Photographs of the area reveal that many of the small homes were not well built and had degraded rapidly by the 1950s. This area becomes the focus of Spartanburg's first Urban Renewal site with remodeling, house moving, and demolition occurring during 1960 and 1961. Most of the area remained vacant through the rest of the 1960s, but a need for a new Northside recreation center to replacing the 1930s-era T. K. Gregg Center off of Evins Street made this spacious site an attractive option for the city. In 1974, the Brotherhood Recreation Center opened, featuring a large gymnasium, art classrooms, conference rooms, ball fields, playgrounds, and a large outdoor pool. In addition to community center programming, limited medical and daycare services were offered. It was a beloved amenity and a source of pride for a community that had felt sidelined for decades. In the early 1980s, its name was changed to honor Dr. T. K. Gregg and the earlier recreation center he had begun. With the promise of a new TK Gregg recreation facility (shown below) soon to be under construction on Howard Street in the Northside, the aging facility was closed in 2012.

