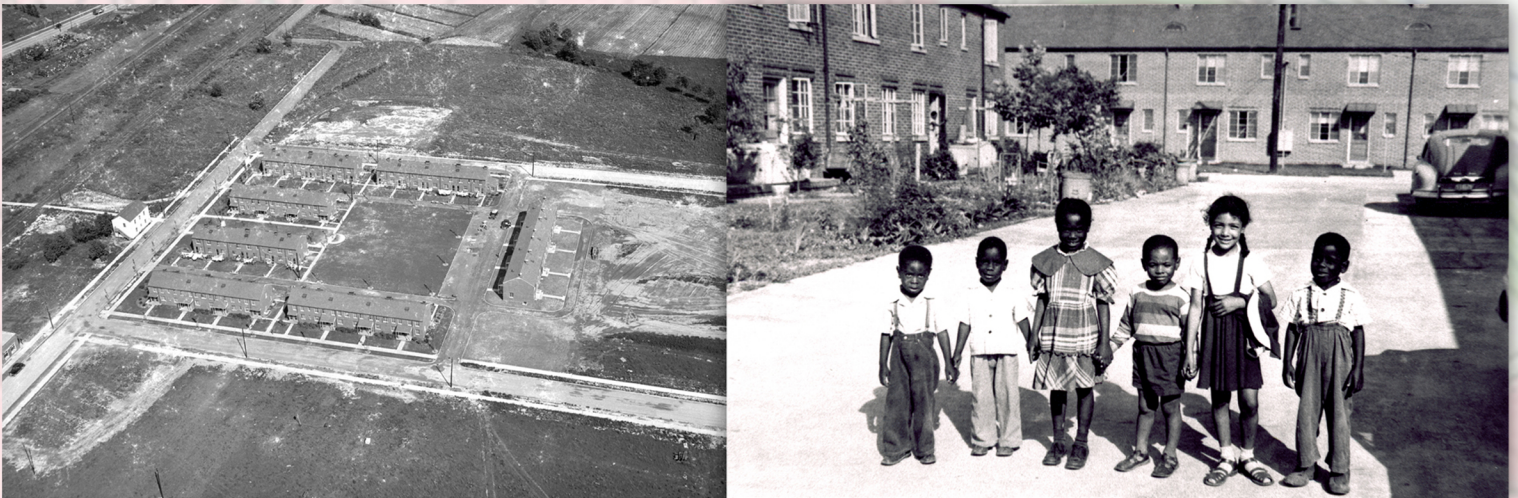


RIVERVIEW COMMUNITY

Before Riverview was established, the core of Kingsport's Black community was located along Sullivan, Dale, Oak, Maple, & East Walnut (now East Sevier Avenue). During the nineteen-thirties, a coalition of Black ministers pressured the Kingsport city government to expand housing opportunities for the overcrowded Black community. Unbeknownst to most, the Board of Mayor & Aldermen had already selected a location to construct what would become Riverview. Built in the early nineteen forties, Riverview has been Kingsport's central Black neighborhood for over half a century.

Riverview has housed hundreds of residents at any given time, as well as such institutions as Douglass School (now V.O. Dobbins, Sr. Complex), the Riverview Pool (now the Splash Pad), Central Baptist Church & Mt. Zion Holiness Church. Prominent figures like Richard Watterson, Cora Cox, & V.O. Dobbins, among countless others, have not only lived in the neighborhood, but have learned, worked, played, & made a life there. Riverview has been the source of prestigious sites, sounds, & characters and its importance to the development of Kingsport cannot be overstated. Riverview is physically isolated from the rest of Kingsport with only two access routes in & out of the neighborhood (& only one prior to 1961). Pollution from the surrounding traffic, industrial area, chemical company, train tracks, & under-maintained sewage system plagued residents time & again over the latter half of the twentieth century. Lack of open housing enforcement & hazardous conditions in and around the neighborhood remained issues of contention with the residents.

Nevertheless, the conditions that surrounded Riverview yielded impressive moments within the Black community.



In 1939, The United States Housing Authority received an application from Kingsport, Tennessee requesting loans to construct public housing in order to abate the city's "slums." The impoverished area in question, "...consist[s] of cheap board houses, without plumbing facilities & generally without water connection. These shacks were erected by private real estate operators & rents are abnormally high in proportion to facilities furnished." The U.S.H.A. granted Kingsport the money needed to construct two apartment complexes: The Riverview Apartments (for Black residents) & the Robert E. Lee Apartments (for white residents). Riverview was boxed in by railroad tracks to the northeast, the Holston River to the southwest, a privately-owned industrial area to the northwest, & the busy Wilcox Drive thoroughfare to the southwest. Riverview's only entrance at Lincoln Street (now M.L.K. Jr. drive) was furthermore accented by a junkyard, which in 1951, H.M. Sneed's asked – in a letter to the editor – to be concealed by, "...neat fence [that] would hide its unattractiveness." The resident-author included this postscript, "Why not take a sight-seeing tour?"



Despite the environment, Riverview residents were busy building their new neighborhood up during the forties and fifties. In November 1941, Central Baptist Church began services in their new Riverview church building, & that same year the Riverview Day Nursery opened. In 1951, Douglass School moved to Riverview from its former location near Bristol Blvd & Walnut Street. In 1953, the Riverview Swimming Pool Committee began fundraising to build a public pool in the neighborhood. On August 4, 1954, the Riverview Swimming Pool opened to the public.



Riverview Swimming Pool, 1962



In addition to the swimming pool, school, churches, & the Mason & Elks Lodges, Riverview also hosted a thriving business district. Emmitt Collins' grocery store, Paul Taylor's grocery-liquor store, Reverend C.E. Edge's store "The Hut" & barbershop & Robinson's Mortuary all called the neighborhood home. The most popular business, by far, was the Dairy Mart, ran by Jason & Nora Mae Taylor, with a local claim on the footlong hotdog.

In September 1961, the Board of Mayor & Aldermen agreed to expand Riverview after acquiring a twelve-lot subdivision from the Tennessee Eastman Company in order to ease overcrowding. During rainy weather, the neighborhood was prone to flooding & Douglass students were forced to cross over the railroad tracks in order to get to school – the underpass would flood making it difficult, if not impossible, to walk through. In March 1966, George and Betty Reinbold moved into Number 42, Riverview Apartments. While they became the technical integrators of the previously all-Black neighborhood, residents of Riverview were mostly barred from living beyond the Riverview community.



NEW FRIENDS — Young neighborhood visitor comes calling on Riverview's first white couple, Mr. and Mrs. George Reinbold.

How Riverview Got 'Integration'

Kingsport Times-News
March 31, 1966



Riverview Flooding, 1968



Riverview Flooding, 2012

Kilns



In March 1969, the Kingsport Times ran a series of stories written by staff writer Mary Kiss titled "The View From the Other Side" which focused upon Black, middle-class life in Kingsport. Open housing was the focus of these articles. The first story of the four-part series centered around Riverview's more affluent residents who could not move out of the area due to rampant housing discrimination across Kingsport. Interviewees detailed their experiences searching for housing, only to have various landlords & real estate agents either lie about availability, or outright deny housing on the basis of race. Kiss' other stories asked white readers to empathize with their Black neighbors, & to think of Black Power as Black pride.

A federal law enforcing open housing was scheduled to begin in 1970. Later that same year, a group named the Pledge Committee began circulating the "Good Neighbor Pledge" in support of open housing in Kingsport. Per the oath, signees, "...pledge[d] to be a good neighbor to any person who moves into my neighborhood, & to accept my neighbor's choice to sell or rent his home to a person of any race, religion, or national origin."

The rumblings of urban renewal were beginning to ripple through Kingsport yet again. Unlike the forties, however, nearly the entirety of Kingsport was slated for some sort of improvement. The Eric Hill Associates' "Neighborhood Analyses," described Riverview as, "situated 'in an inappropriate location for residential purposes,' surrounded by industrial areas..." However, "Riverview was found to have been 'constructed and maintained in an attractive manner,' with only two structures in need of major repair." Urban renewal was a long process that took Kingsport into the early seventies. The Board of Mayor & Alderman formally adopted a resolution for urban renewal in June 1972, but open housing was not formally adopted until 1974

Richard Watterson's importance in this matter went beyond his voting power alone. At the same meeting during which open housing was approved, the Board of Mayor & Aldermen motioned to further recreational opportunities for Riverview residents; they scheduled to open the Riverview recreation center on October 1, 1973 – in addition to repairing the former Douglass gym to house the recreation center.



Richard Watterson, Kingsport Times, May 2, 1975

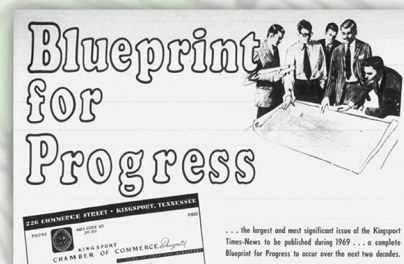
In the summer of 1979, the Riverview pool closed down. The quarter-of-a-century old pool suffered from leaks – costing its operating permit, as well as \$75,000-\$150,000 in potential repairs according to the Parks & Recreation Department. Leaders such as J.B. Gaines, V.O. Dobbins, and Rev. C.E. Edge headed the fight to save the neighborhood's watering hole. In May 1979, a group of Riverview residents presented a 300-name petition to the city council demanding their pool be repaired. Additionally, they found an ally in City Manager William Cook, who supported reconstructing the pool. By the end of June, the Board of Mayor & Aldermen passed their 1979-'80 budget, including the necessary funds to renovate the Riverview pool. On August 14, 1979, the Riverview Pool re-opened for business

Over the course of the nineteen eighties, Riverview's name regularly appeared in the Times News in association with drug sales, use, & violent crimes. The first generation after desegregation would find itself in the midst of the national the War on Drugs, signaling for many a decline in quality of life in the community. In 1985, Kingsport Housing Authority executive director Marge Sherwin proposed an increase in police patrols & street lighting, closing non-emergency-use alleys adjacent to the Riverview apartments, & the appointment of a task force with officers to surveil Lincoln Street. Ultimately, things came to a head with the shooting death of four-year-old Jalisa Ferguson on June 25, 1994.

That tragedy sparked the mobilization of Riverview residents to increase their work to address neighborhood issues. A neighborhood watch was established, community clean-ups began in earnest & the maintainance of positive programming outlets for youth expanded. The Riverview Apartments were demolished in 2006 and replaced with Hope VI Project homes. From the work of organizations such as "Douglas Alumni Association", "New Vision Youth" "Catch the Vision", "Weed and Seed", & many others, Riverview has managed to maintain the traditions of holding public officials accountable, while simultaneously doing the long-term work of community preservation and development.

'Neighbor' Pledge Tops 1,000 Mark

Kingsport Times, April 2, 1969



Kingsport Times, January 22, 1969