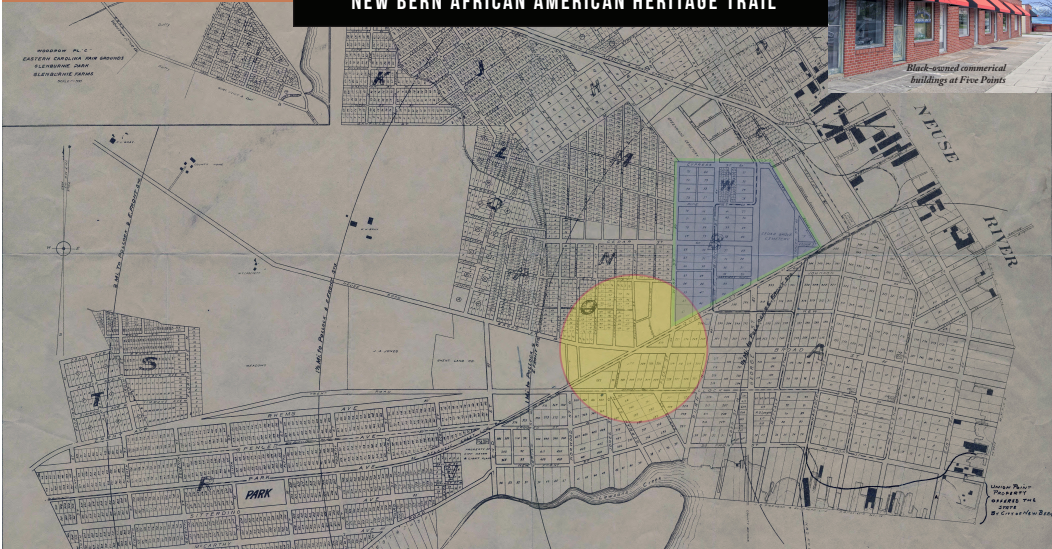


Five Points

NEW BERN AFRICAN AMERICAN HERITAGE TRAIL

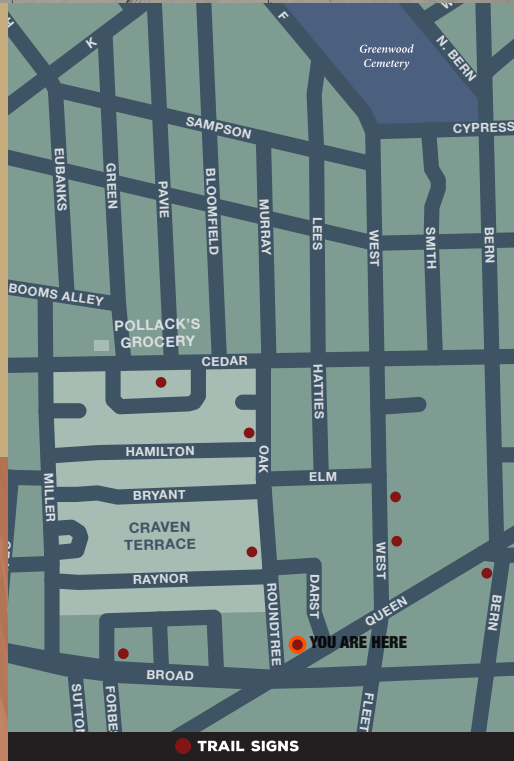


Black-owned commercial buildings at Five Points

Black Disfranchisement

At the turn of the twentieth century, state-mandated disfranchisement laws severely limited the voting rights of African Americans. At the same time, Black communities across North Carolina created new and alternative avenues of economic opportunity and civic engagement. Though barred from political office, Black leaders in New Bern worked to ensure, though not always successfully, that their lives were meaningful and fulfilling and that their children and their community were insulated from the racism and segregation associated with the Jim Crow South. At the forefront were Black-owned and operated institutions, such as schools and businesses that catered to predominantly Black customers.

Making ends meet was still difficult. The Great Fire of 1922, which destroyed much of the Dryborough neighborhood, followed by the Great Depression, forced businesses at Five Points to close. Between 1930 and 1940, population growth was stagnant in the African American community, and by the outbreak of World War II, the majority of New Bern's citizens, for the first time since before the Civil War, were White. With the neighborhood blighted and jobs hard to find, some Black families relocated to northern cities.



Golden Age at Five Points

After World War II, Five Points was reborn as the crossroads district and bustled once more as a vibrant commercial center. In addition to the opening of national chains, such as the Ben Franklin Store and the A&P grocery, there were locally owned Black businesses that catered primarily to African American customers. The Palace Theater, located on Queen Street, did not restrict Black audiences to the balcony as did White theaters in downtown New Bern. The Midway Soda Shop and Dowdy's Café seated and served Black patrons. The West End Barber Shop, Barker's Seafood and Produce, Dr. Hill's Five Points Drug Store, the Rainbow Grill, Robinson's Rib House, Moore's Barbecue, and White and Mumford Shoe Repair were all an important part of Five Points' mid-century African American experience.



In the early 1950s, Broad Street was widened to four lanes to accommodate the increase in New Bern's automobile traffic. The expansion eliminated storefront parking. Businesses such as Pollock's Grocery moved to new locations closer to Craven Terrace. Hampered by the overall decline of the African American population, by the 1970s Five Points struggled to remain the center of New Bern's Black business community.

Images: Library of Congress, National Archives, State Archives of North Carolina, North Carolina Department of Natural and Cultural Resources