

# *A PLACE CALLED POPPLETON*



**Special Edition**  
*December 19, 2023*



**A Place Called Poppleton** is an ongoing cultural documentation project focused on the rich history, folklife, and culture of the Poppleton neighborhood of West Baltimore.

This is a special edition of the A Place Called Poppleton zine (designed by Baltimore-born and Los Angeles-based artist Markele Cullins). We are sharing a walking tour brochure (designed by Baltimore artist Alexis Tyson) and an ArcGIS virtual walking tour designed by Tristan Diaz with research from American Studies students from spring 2021 to fall 2023. We are debuting short films produced by Prof. Bill Shewbridge's Media & Communication Studies students in 2023.

In February 2020, the Eaddy family received a condemnation notice for their home, which had been in the family since 1992. In summer 2020, the Baltimore Traces: Communities in Transition project began documenting Poppleton's long history of failed redevelopment and preserving the sense of place and community created by the Eaddy family and other residents, churches, and local businesses.

In 2021 and 2022, the work of cultural documentation—place-based research and oral history interviews—shifted from documenting the ongoing displacement of residents in Poppleton to organizing for change. Baltimore City has been taking Black people's homes using eminent Wdomain—the power of the state to take private property for public use—since 2004 for a misguided redevelopment project linked to the move of the University of Maryland BioPark into Poppleton and West Baltimore.

We organized to Save Our Block and to fight for equitable development in Baltimore. On July 18, 2022, Mayor Brandon Scott and Housing Commissioner Alice Kennedy announced that the Eaddy family would keep their home and the Sarah Ann Street alley houses would be redeveloped for homeownership by Shelley Halstead of Black Women Build. This win was a new beginning (not an end) in the fight for equitable and community-led development in Poppleton and Baltimore.



**AMST Community in America Students:**

Jordann Allen, Kyle Casamento, Tristan Diaz, Angela Green, Spencer Hanks, Chibuzo Ibezimako, Kristin Kelly, Edward Lee, Juelle Lee, Julia New, Jordan Packett, Dontae Phillips, and Lexi Tyson, with grad assistant, Adrianna Ebron

With this zine, we present stories of residents and some of the community assets in Poppleton: 1) Sarah Ann Street Local Historic District 2) St. Luke's Youth Center 3) the Southwest Sports and Fitness Alliance and the Poppleton Rec Center 4) Excel Academy and 5) Allen A.M.E. Church. For more info, see: <https://baltimoretraces.umbc.edu/poppleton/>

We thank Sonia Eaddy and the Poppleton Now Community Association members for inviting us into their neighborhood. And thanks to Allen A.M.E. Church and Pastor Brenda White (UMBC alumna) for hosting us for this community celebration. A special thanks to all the people we interviewed this semester: Diane Bell, TyJuan Hawkins, Francina and Sterling Walker, Pat Nickerson, Anthony Hudgins II (Executive Director, Southwest Sports and Fitness Alliance, Inc.) and the legacy members of Allen A.M.E. Church—Odell and Gay Jones, Betty Jean Singletary, Shirley Luallen, and Charlene McClain Boykin.

This project is the collective work of UMBC students in AMST & MCS courses during 2023.

For more info or to schedule an oral history interview, please contact Prof. Nicole King, American Studies, UMBC [nking@umbc.edu](mailto:nking@umbc.edu) (202) 345-6250



# TIMELINE





**1910:** Baltimore passed the nation's first residential segregation ordinance  
**1930:** "Slum clearance," Black people's homes are taken for development of public housing  
**1940:** Poe Homes opened as the first public housing complex (298 units) in Baltimore City  
**1958:** The Lexington Terrace public housing high-rise apartments (667 units) opened  
**1960-1975:** The Highway to Nowhere cuts off Poppleton north of Franklin-Mulberry  
**1970s:** Federal Government tears down homes for the Greater Model Park and Recreation Center  
**1975:** Poppleton Urban Renewal Area created + Phoebe Stanton's Poppleton Study  
**1982:** MLK Jr. boulevard expressway opens, cutting Poppleton off from downtown  
**1995:** Poppleton becomes part of Baltimore's Empowerment Zone \$100M federal program  
**2004:** Groundbreaking for the University of Maryland Baltimore (UMB) BioPark—the university crosses the expressway



**2004:** City plans to use eminent domain to clear & redevelop 14 acres in Poppleton  
**2005:** La Cité (Poppleton LLC) is awarded the right to develop the parcel  
**2006:** Land Disposition and Development Agreement is signed by the City of Baltimore and Developer + Memorandum of Understanding for preservation of historic properties  
**2007 :** 2012: La Cité Project stalled // City clears land using eminent domain  
**2012:** City tries to cancel development deal with La Cité  
**2013:** La Cité sues and keeps right to redevelop Poppleton parcels  
**2015:** La Cité is given a \$58M Tax increment financing (TIF), a public financing method that is used as a subsidy for redevelopment infrastructure and other community improvements



**2017:** Groundbreaking for La Cité Center West apartments  
**2018:** Transform Poe - The Housing Authority of Baltimore City plans to demolish and redevelop the City's oldest public housing complex, Poe Homes  
**2019:** Center West apartments open after a delay due to water damage  
**2020:** City seeks condemnation of the Eaddy home for La Cité development  
**2021:** Sarah Ann Street residents are relocated for La Cité development + developer announces Black-owned grocery store Market Gourmet coming to Center West (the store has yet to open)

**2021 (July 11):** Save Our Block rally hosted by residents and Organize Poppleton City  
**2021 (July 13):** Boss Kelly row of homes on the block demolished by Baltimore City  
**2021 (August):** Poppleton residents and Organize Poppleton submit an application to form the Sarah Ann Street Local Historic District  
**2022 (July 18):** Mayor Brandon Scott announced at a press conference on Sarah Ann Street that the Eaddy house would be saved and Sarah Ann Street preserved and rehabbed for homeownership by Shelley Halstead of Black Women Build  
**2023 (February 13):** Plaintiff Angela Banks and Economic Action Maryland file an administrative complaint with HUD (U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development) against Baltimore City, Mayor Brandon Scott, and the City Council for consistent violations of the Fair Housing Act with the Poppleton redevelopment project  
**2023 (April 3):** Mayor's signing ceremony for the Sarah Ann Street Local Historic District  
**2023** The fight for community-led development and preservation continues...





# DISPLACED RESIDENTS



It is still difficult for Cynthia "Diane" Bell to speak about the financial and emotional toll of being forced to leave her rowhouse in the 100 block of N. Carlton St. nearly two decades ago. Bell and her family were forced to move out of the city, and the difficulty in restarting her daycare business led to bankruptcy. All of the rowhouses on her block in the Poppleton neighborhood were taken by the city under eminent domain for a redevelopment which never took place. (Amy Davis / Baltimore Sun)



*“No amount of money can change what happened to me... they took my life*

The public needs to know and remember the story of Diane Bell. Mrs. Bell suffered through the trauma of losing her home in Poppleton by eminent domain—the power of the state to take private property for public use—as part of the 2006 Poppleton redevelopment project.

Bell was a licensed daycare owner. She ran her business on the bottom floors of her home in Poppleton. Being a homeowner and a small business owner, Mrs. Bell was able to live out her dream. Her daycare business was a way for her to connect and support the people in her community. Unfortunately, her dream was short-lived.

In 2007, when the City of Baltimore took Mrs. Bell's home along with the homes of her neighbors and friends through eminent domain, these hard-working city residents felt they were being taken advantage of. The harm and repercussions of losing their homes had a lasting impact on their lives.

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“There's not a day that goes by that I don't think about it,” says Diane Bell.



Image link - credit Diane Bell's granddaughter in front of her home





Diane Bell and her neighbors were not treated with respect nor given options for where to live. Residents felt pressured to buy expensive houses beyond their means. "They had to leave us like they found us," Bell explains. "They found us with a mortgage; they leave us with a mortgage." Worse, some residents never made it through the structural violence of forced displacement.

Mrs. Bell had to sell all her daycare items, close her business, and find a job she despised. This mentally broke Mrs. Bell for a while. She lost everything she had worked so hard for. She fell into a deep depression, almost taking her own life following the trauma of displacement.

The people involved within this relocation scheme in Poppleton must be held accountable for the damages they have caused to hardworking city residents.

The houses that were taken away from Mrs. Bell and her neighbors by eminent domain stood from 2007 up to 2019. For twelve years, the homes stood vacant and untouched. Twelve years that something could have been done.

In 2019, Mrs. Bell's home was demolished. Today, it is a vacant lot.

Where is the justice for Mrs. Diane Bell and her neighbors?





## *Pat Nickerson: Ms. Pat Remembers Her Friend Linda Jihad*



"I was working at Social Security. And this is when I met my good girlfriend, Linda. She was a sweetheart. She would do anything for you," Pat Nickerson explains. In the 1980s both Ms. Pat and her good friend Linda Jihad moved into Poppleton as neighbors.

"She got this letter from the city in 2006. I believe it might have been like summertime. She brought it to work. And she said, 'The City is trying to take my house ... I don't want to leave.' And I said, 'Oh my god, that's terrible.' Ms. Pat said that her friend was doing well with her battle with cancer, but then stress from the relocation caused her health to take a downturn. One Sunday Ms. Pat and Linda had a good conversation.

"I had talked to her that Sunday. And we had a very nice time. We talked about old times we talked about when we met, we talked about our work," Ms. Pat explained. "And we just had an awesome time that day, that Sunday. That Monday, when I came out of my house to go to work. I saw a bunch of police cars all up and down here." Linda Jihad died on March 19, 2007 and Ms. Pat blames the stress and trauma from her displacement from a home she loved for the death of her friend.

"I wanted people to know what the City is doing to innocent people," Ms. Pat explains why she is telling her friend's story. "You work to have things, things for your family, your children. But the City don't see it that way. All they see is monetary [gain] for themselves, and big corporations... but they're displacing people." Ms. Pat concludes, "I know if Linda was here I wouldn't be here telling her story. And I know Linda did not want to leave."





# *The Walkers Fighting to Remain*

Sterling and Francina Walker have deep roots in Poppleton going back generations. Mr. Walker explains, "You know, I love this neighborhood. And I'm still here, I'm not planning on going anywhere."

"My problem with the fact of them tearing the houses down and moving these people out was wrong," Mr. Walker explains. "I've seen people live here, over generations and generations that have family members killed in this neighborhood, not just a son, or nephew, or cousin or father, or mother. And they stayed here. They stayed in this neighborhood." His wife asks, "Where are all the promises?" The Walkers are frustrated because, "All that was taken, and nothing replaced."

The Walkers both feel the past and present residents should matter and have a say in what happens in Poppleton moving forward. "We didn't really have people down City Hall to fight for us," Mr. Walker says, referencing how the Poppleton redevelopment process began.

"That's not right, Just ain't right. And I don't like it. And that's why I go to the meetings," say Mr. Walker. Mrs. Francina Walker is a board member for the Poppleton Now Community Association. They both are fighting for a better future for their neighborhood and city.



# *Lost Businesses of Poppleton ... gone but not forgotten*





## *Sampson's Restaurant*



Sampson's was an iconic Black-owned business located at 944 West Fayette Street in Poppleton. Owner J.A. Duke Martin opened Sampson's restaurant in the 1950s when dining in the city was still primarily segregated. Martin's restaurant became known as the "gateway to West Baltimore." Sampson's had a bakery where customers could watch its famous bread and rolls being made. In addition to those famous rolls, Sampson's was known for home cooking, such as collard greens, chitterlings, and pork chops, and its friendly atmosphere. For generations, Sampson's was a space for both the political elite and everyday Baltimorean, serving as a hub for Black Baltimore's food, arts, and culture. As a result of the redevelopment of the area, Sampson's was condemned by the City of Baltimore in 2006. This historic space for Black Baltimore was demolished in 2007 as part of the Center West redevelopment project.

## *Lenny's House of Naturals*



Formerly located at 1099 W. Fayette Street, Lenny Clay's House of Naturals Barbershop was central to the Poppleton community for over 40 years. Arriving in Baltimore from North Carolina in 1955, Lenny Clay began cutting hair at a young age and was able to turn that skill into a lasting business. For Clay, barbershops are about more than grooming. As in many African-American communities across the country, barbershops serve as gathering locations for conversations about all things concerning Black life, and House of Naturals was no different. On any given day, one could walk into discussions about politics, sports, or gentrification. Patrons would have debates about rap music, impromptu therapy sessions, or just find general gossip. From internationally known celebrities to Poppleton community members, House of Naturals was a second home to all kinds of people. Affectionately called the "unofficial Mayor of Baltimore," Clay's legacy is still felt in Baltimore through the mentorship he provided to barbers like Troy Stanton, who is still cutting hair today and has been able to open a chain of beauty salons and barbershops throughout the city. Lenny Clay's House of Naturals is an important example of the role barbershops and other local businesses serve as cultural institutions and community assets.





## *Katie R. Williams (1928 - 1963) Funeral Home: First Black Woman- Owned Mortuary in Baltimore*

"Katie Williams was one of the most dynamic women of our profession. Her name was in itself a trade mark and she will long be remembered by the community, of which she has been an important part," said Charles R. Law, referring to the death of the well-known funeral director and mortician....

Mrs. Katie Ringgold Williams the first woman mortician in the state of Maryland, died suddenly Sunday at the age of 72, in

(Continued on Page 2)

Katie Ringgold Williams was the first Black woman, and possibly the first woman of any race, in Maryland to obtain her mortuary license, which she received from Johns Hopkins School of Embalming in 1920. Mrs. Williams' licensure is especially significant because most women morticians came into the business through their husbands or fathers, but she was able to enter the field on her own. She worked for almost 40 years on Schroeder Street and lived right across the street from the mortuary at 322 N. Schroeder Street, which is now demolished.

Originally built in the late 19th century, this property was bought by Mrs. Williams in 1928 where she and her husband, Clarence Williams, operated their funeral business together until his death in 1929. She is said to have buried over 10,000 Baltimoreans throughout her career and was well-respected and loved in the city.

After her death in January of 1963, over 1,500 people attended her funeral the following month reflecting her importance and value to the community.



# *PRESENT: A Place Called Poppleton Walking Tour*



**Check out the revised virtual walking tour students created using ArcGIS. This is an archive of Poppleton's rich history and culture.**

**Do you have places we should add to the map?**

Place Stories:

Allen AME Church - 1130 W. Lexington St.  
"Boss" Kelly House - 1106 W. Saratoga St.  
Carter Memorial Church of God in Christ - 13 S. Poppleton St.  
Center West's Avra and Cirro Apartments - 101 & 201 N. Schroeder St.  
Eaddy Family Home - 319 N. Carrollton Ave.  
Edgar Allan Poe Museum / Poe Homes - 203 N. Amity St. / 800 W. Lexington St.  
EXCEL Academy at Francis M. Wood High School - 1001 W. Saratoga St.  
Katie R. Williams Funeral Home - 321 N. Schroeder St.  
Lenny Clay's House of Naturals - 1099 W. Fayette St.  
Lexington Terrace - 800 W. Saratoga St.  
Lord Baltimore Theater - 1110-1116 West Baltimore St.  
Morning Star Baptist Church - 1063 W. Fayette St.  
Poppleton Fire House - 801 W. Baltimore St.  
Poppleton (Greater Model) Rec Center - 1051 W. Saratoga St.  
Sampson's - 942 W. Fayette St.  
Sarah Ann Alley Houses - 1102-1124 Sarah Ann St.  
Silver Moon Diner - 764 W. Baltimore St.  
St. Luke's Episcopal Church (SLYC) - 217 N. Carey St.



# *The Future of the Community*



A project to create signage for the historic community assets of Poppleton is underway and the Poppleton Now Community Association wants feedback from residents and local faith communities on what they would like to see to honor the bright future of the community assets in Poppleton.



## St. Luke's Youth Center (SLYC)



"I feel as though the love that I get there is – I can't get that nowhere else... The amount of love that the adults give to everybody, and the amount of attention, it's like you're never alone. It's always someone there to help you. It's just, it feels like home. I would say it is home actually."

*TyJuan Hawkins, Youth Leader & Board Member*

SLYC is a collaborative of West Baltimore families working together to provide youth with critical resources, life-enriching experiences, and a safety net of support. The SLYC Collaborative was founded by a Franklin Square Elementary Middle School teacher, classroom parent, grandparent volunteer, and school social worker who were all acutely aware of the devastating impact of poverty and trauma on young people's capacity to meet academic and social expectations. SLYC began in 2015 and continues to grow through collaborative efforts of individuals and organizations that provide critical resources, life-enriching experiences, and a safety net of support - building the foundation on which our youth can thrive. SLYC's house is at St. Luke's Episcopal Church Cultural Site.



## The Sarah Ann Alley Houses



The Sarah Ann Alley Houses are an iconic and endangered architectural style of homes built in 1870. The houses were financed by the wealthy Baltimorean merchant Miles White, brother-in-law of Johns Hopkins. The Sarah Ann Alley Houses have provided affordable housing for Black and working-class Baltimoreans for over 150 years.

Some of the earliest homeowners included Black women, such as Catherine Kennedy, who bought her home in 1873, and Luberta Williams in 1905.

Carolyn Shoemaker, Robert Estreet, and other long-time tenants at Sarah Ann Street constructed a park and playground for local kids in 2000.

After Baltimore City acquired the alley houses in 2020 through the use of eminent domain, the people of Poppleton fought to preserve the homes. After years of protest and calls for preservation from the community, Mayor Brandon Scott signed the Sarah Ann Street Local Historic District into legislation in April 2023. Shelley Halstead of Black Women Build Baltimore is renovating the homes for affordable homeownership.





# The Poppleton Rec Center's Rebirth



On June 21, 1976, the Greater Model Community Recreation Center opened in the Poppleton neighborhood to great excitement. The Bee Center was funded by President Lyndon B. Johnson's Model Cities program. The indoor community center had a gymnasium, a kitchen, a lounge area, restrooms, showers, and lockers. It also had several outdoor spaces, outdoor fields, and pool provided numerous activities for people of all ages in safety and supervision and surrounding neighborhoods. The Bee Center offered a continuum of services for residents from day care to senior citizens' programs. By the end and just 20 years later in the late 1990s as the Bee Center closed down due to budgetary constraints and disinvestment in the neighborhood. This closure led to the formation of the Poppleton Community, a non-profit organization dedicated to organizing of residents along with crisis partners, the Southwest Partnership, a non-profit organization dedicated to reorganizing building around the needs for the Bee Center and worked with various organizations such as the Southwest Partnership, Southwest Sports & Fitness Alliance, and the Southwest Youth Center. Anthony Hughes will be overseeing the this community asset, Southwest Sports & Fitness Alliance, as a bright space for community members of all ages, especially local youth.

Fundraising Call: Join Us in Rebuilding Hope  
<https://sportsfitnessalliance.networkforgood.com/projects/196084-everyday-giving>





# THE FUTURE OF DEVELOPMENT?

## *Center\West's next phase?*

After the opening of the Avra and Cirro Apartments, Center\West moved to its second phase of redevelopment, which the developers said would bring a grocery store, a hotel, and more apartments to Poppleton.

Two years after Phase 1B started, Market Fresh Gourmet entered into an agreement with La Cité to bring a full-service grocery to Center\West, but construction has moved slowly. In 2022, Mayor Brandon Scott later revealed that Phase 1B would include an affordable senior living development and support the redevelopment and planned expansion of Poe Homes.

Very little has happened since this announcement. La Cité announced plans for a 176-unit senior building next to the current Center West apartment buildings. Early design plans were presented to the Department of Planning in October 2022. No one in Poppleton was notified about the presentation.



## SCHROEDER STREET VIEW







REAL ESTATE

# Poppleton residents say Baltimore should scrap its deal with La Cité: 'We want that land back'

By Giacomo Bologna

Baltimore Sun • Last Updated: Sep 22, 2023 at 9:57 am



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2 of 10 < >



Yvonne Gunn, a long time homeowner in Poppleton, lives in the 1000 block of West Fayette Street where Jim Griffin, chief development officer of HomeFree-USA, has been fixing up other rowhouses. Her home was last assessed by the state at \$40,000, but the newly renovated rowhouse next door just sold for nearly \$400,000. (Kim Hairston/Baltimore Sun )







*What do you want to see for the future of  
Poppleton?*

*Write it below.*

*We want to hear your voices and ideas.*





*This zine is dedicated to Diane Bell.*

*Contact Poppleton Now Community Association President Sonia Eaddy  
[soniaeaddy@gmail.com](mailto:soniaeaddy@gmail.com) for more information.*