

East End Bluefield

AFRICAN AMERICAN HISTORIC SITES

Walking Tour

7



Park Central High School
102 Park Street

Park Central High School was built in 1949 and opened to its first class in September of the same year. Set upon half a city block in the North Side neighborhood of Bluefield, Park Central served African American students in 10th, 11th, and 12th grades. The two-story, red brick building was constructed in the International style. It contains thirteen classrooms, a cafeteria able to accommodate 300 students, a library, and various administrative offices. In 1957, a massive, vaulted auditorium and gym was added to the east elevation of the building. In 1968, the Mercer County School Board voted to close Park Central High School and students were transferred to Bluefield High located across the railyard in the city's downtown. The class of 1969 was the last to graduate at the school. The school was sold in 1985 to the Greater Mount Zion Pentecostal Church, who are the current owners. A vestibule entry was added to the south elevation, but the building retains the layout and exterior finishing present when it was built. Alumni of Park Central High are among the Church Elders and the building is lovingly maintained.

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Hardy Street Recreation Center (demolished)
Hardy Street between Fairfax Street and Floyd Street

The Hardy Street Recreation Center opened in June of 1952. It was a two-story concrete block building located on a flat lot on Hardy Street. A basketball court, baseball diamond, wading pool, and playground were also located on the site. Programming included dance classes, sports, crafting, and holiday parties. The center was also used for receptions, birthday parties, civic club meetings, and other community events. Although at first a product of the "separate but equal" era in Bluefield, the Hardy Street Recreation Center was a beloved community gathering space with activities for children and teenagers. It operated throughout the 1990s but fell into disrepair in the 2000s. After several attempts to renovate the building, it was demolished by the City of Bluefield. The site remains as the Hardy Street Park with playground equipment and lawns.

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Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity House
300 Sussex Street

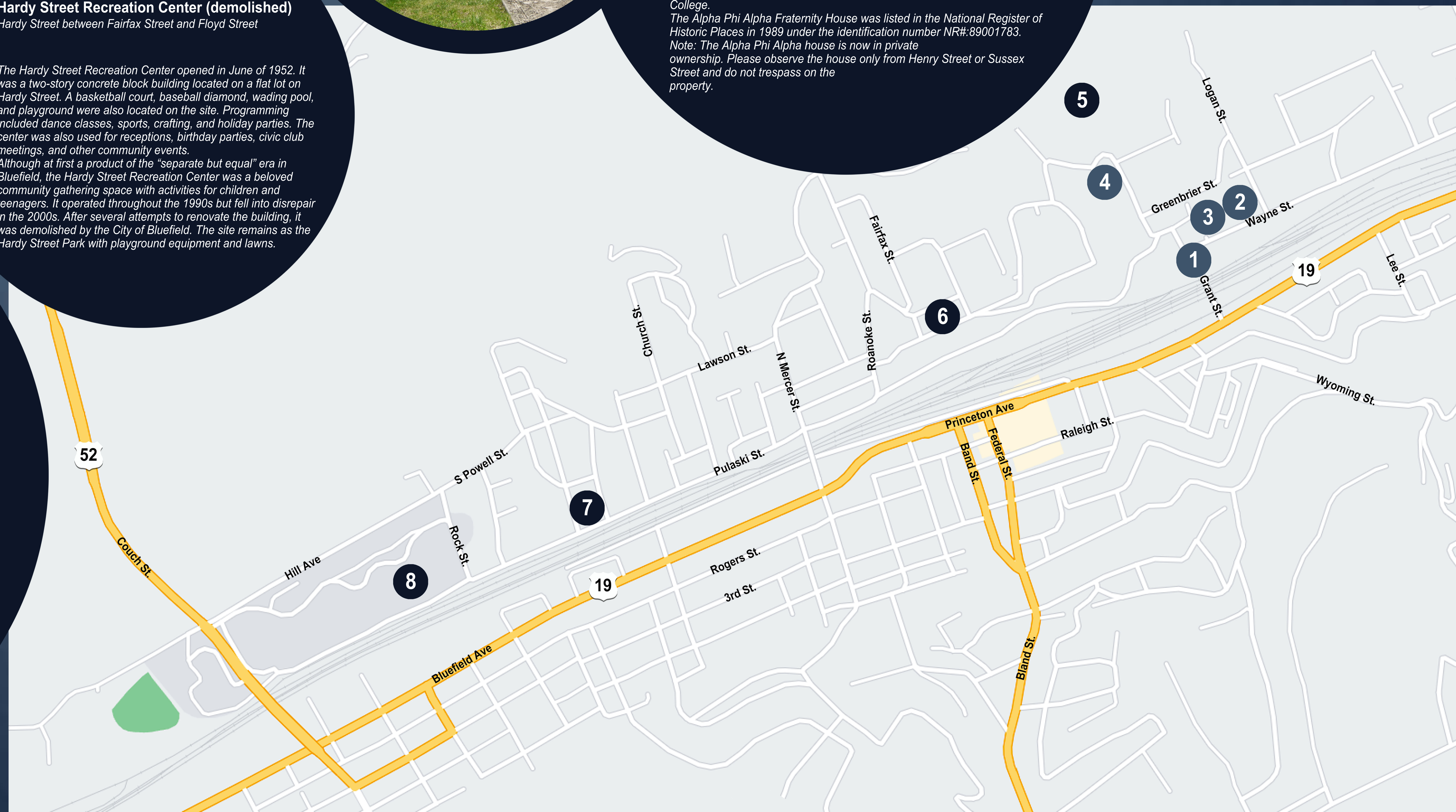
The Alpha Phi Alpha House was built in 1907 by M. H. Pettigo for Charles Hancock, an early industrialist in Bluefield. Hancock owned the Bluefield Hardware Store, which supplied wholesale hardware to mines. The house is an American Four-Square plan in the Neoclassical Revival style. Built with imported and local building materials, it is among the most prominent in the East End neighborhood. The house sits on a hill overlooking the Norfolk & Western Railyard and downtown Bluefield beyond. Concrete steps lead up the terraced yard to the wrap-around front porch. The first floor of the house contains an entrance hall, great room, study, living room, dining room, and kitchen, while the upper floors contain six bedrooms. In 1962, the Hancock House was purchased by Bluefield State College chapter of the Alpha Phi Alpha fraternity. Following the purchase and dedication in 1963, the house was used as a residence for undergraduate Alpha Phi Alpha fraternity brothers and as a hall for balls, parties, musical performances and other university and community events. In 1966, Duke Ellington gave a private concert at the house following a performance at Bluefield State College. The Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity House was listed in the National Register of Historic Places in 1989 under the identification number NR#:89001783. Note: The Alpha Phi Alpha house is now in private ownership. Please observe the house only from Henry Street or Sussex Street and do not trespass on the property.

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Bluefield State College
219 Rock Street

Industrialization in southern West Virginia brought an influx of African American families to the region in the 1890s. To attract and retain the workforce needed in the mining and railroad industries, state politicians courted these families with promises of improved education opportunities. Originally called the Bluefield Colored Institute, Bluefield State College was founded in 1895 and the first classes were held in 1897. As the college grew in size, influence, and capacity, the name was changed in 1929 to Bluefield Institute and in 1931 to Bluefield State Teachers College. In the mid-20th century, Bluefield State was the cultural and intellectual center of the Black community in southern West Virginia. Noted intellectuals such as the poet Langston Hughes came to lecture, and musical stars such as Duke Ellington, Fats Waller, and Dizzy Gillespie performed at the college auditorium. Up until the 1960s, the college was led by African American presidents, first Professor Hamilton Hatter, then Robert Page Sims, who led the college from 1906 to 1936. Sims led the expansion of the campus and initiated new programs of study, more than doubling enrollment over his tenure. Henry Lake Dickason became president upon Sims's retirement in 1936 and led the school through continued expansion over 16 years. It was during this period that several buildings designed by Alex Mahood, notable West Virginia architect, were erected on campus. The last Black president of the college was Leroy Allen, who led the school between 1958 to 1965. Following desegregation in the 1960s, Wendell Hardaway, who was white, was appointed president. The school shifted away from its roots as a historically Black college and began enrolling commuter students from the southern West Virginia region, leading to an increasingly white student body. Hardaway closed the college's dormitories in 1968 following a bombing at the physical education building. Closure of the dormitories disrupted the education and community of the mostly Black residential students, effectively bringing the historical era of the college to a close. In the 21st century, Bluefield State College serves a diverse student body and reopened renovated and newly built dormitories in 2021.



For an expanded mobile version of the tour, please scan the QR code with your phone camera.