

Historic Orange Mound

Past, Present, and Future



A Driving Tour of Community Landmarks

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Orange Mound is the oldest historic African American neighborhood in Memphis. Established 125 years ago by E. E. Meacham, Orange Mound began with over 900 small lots, designed for “Shotgun”-style homes, in 1890. But the popularity of the place soon meant that the neighborhood was filled with nice homes of all sorts of early 20th century architectural styles, from Bungalows to Colonial Revival.

Orange Mound, due to the number of homeowners and the presence of so many important schools and churches, has a real community feel. One resident, Juanita Brooks Gilley, remarked that in Orange Mound “there is a certain closeness between the people who have lived there.”

This driving tour of community landmarks features historic schools, churches, and parks. They are the bedrock of Orange Mound in the past, for the present, and onto the future!

1. Orange Mound Community Services Center and Historic Melrose High School 2572 Park Avenue



This modern community center is the heartbeat of Orange Mound, with daily programs and activities. The center uses the mid-20th century gymnasium of historic Melrose High School. The three-story Art Deco-styled school, built by the New Deal, opened in 1939. It had 79 classrooms, science labs, a shop building, music room, library, and auditorium. Grades nine through twelve were added in 1946. Elementary school grades were dropped from the school in 1965 and in 1972, tenth through twelfth grade students moved to modern Melrose High School on Deaderick Avenue.

2. Mt. Pisgah C.M.E. Church 2490 Park Avenue



Mt. Pisgah C.M.E. Church, organized in 1879, worships at a beautiful Gothic Revival landmark building that was built in 1929 and 1949. The congregation in 1975 added a new education wing, a reflection of the local growth in the C.M.E. church once its headquarters were moved from Jackson to Memphis in 1970. The fellowship hall is named in honor of long-time church member and neighborhood activist Carlotta S. Watson. The auditorium-style interior is spectacular, with original hardwood pews, stained glass windows, Gothic arches, and a beautiful center pulpit. On September 25–27, 1959, Mt. Pisgah hosted the NAACP's Tennessee Conference, a show of great confidence at the time. This important meeting crafted strategies for the successful civil rights activism of the 1960s.

3. Mt. Gilliam Baptist Church 1029 Raymond Street



Mt. Gilliam Baptist Church is a mid-20th century Gothic Revival building, with a new cottage-style entrance from the 1980s. Several influential leaders are connected with the history of the church, most notably, Eugene Bates and J.D. Jamerson. Both men were influential in creating a safe haven in the Orange Mound community from the issues that transformed Memphis since the 1940s. Rev. Bates, who died in 1968, led the church for 40 years. Rev. J.D. Jamerson courageously held civil rights meetings in Orange Mound, a fact that the city government recognized in a resolution commending Rev. Jamerson for his 32 years of service to the church and Orange Mound community.

4. Beulah Baptist Church

2407 Douglass Avenue



The commanding red brick and concrete front of Beulah Baptist Church stands tall among the religious landmarks of Orange Mound. Established in 1904, Beulah grew under the long leadership of Rev. A. F. D. Dixon, who arrived in 1918 and who directed the construction of the present building in 1927. The main sanctuary rests on a full basement that serves

Sunday school classes as well as a community center for the neighborhood. Multi-color stained glass panes highlight the interior, while voices from the raised choir seating produces some of the city's most powerful and emotional gospel music every Sunday. Rev. Dr. Wesley C. Holmes came in 1955 and served until the next century. Active in the Civil Rights Movement, Dr. Holmes also served as trustees board chair of LeMoyne-Owen College. Beulah has a reputation as a "community church," for its support for the Orange Mound Day Nursery and for hosting various Civil Rights meetings.

5. Orange Mound Park

Carnes Avenue at Spotswood Avenue



Orange Mound Park was once one of the city's best public parks, segregated for African American use only. It included two tennis courts, a basketball court, a baseball field, plenty of open space, and numerous pavilions and picnic tables. The treasure of the park was the swimming pool. In 1967, however, the city commission turned a deaf ear to

neighborhood protests, and sold a large portion of the park for the expansion of the Mid-South Refrigerated Warehouse Company. A portion of the original Orange Mound Park remains in use today.

6. Hanley Elementary School

680 Hanley Street



Established in 1961, Hanley Elementary was one of two new elementary schools built by the city school board in the wake of the U.S. Supreme Court decisions in *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954, 1955). These new schools were meant to prove to both federal officials and Memphis African Americans that public schools could be "separate but equal." Hanley first served students grade one through four and was then enlarged in 1962 to accept fifth and sixth grade students. Kindergarten came in 1966. Hanley served both the Orange Mound and the nearby Beltline communities. Two years later, however, Memphis began what became a four-year process of school desegregation.

7. Mt. Moriah Baptist Church

2634 Carnes Avenue



Organized in 1879 by Bro. Sabay Frazier, Mt. Moriah Baptist Church is the neighborhood's oldest Baptist church. Between 1921 and 1925 the congregation, under the leadership of Rev. W. T. Morgan, completed a new building on Carnes Street, creating not only a permanent home but also one of the neighborhood's most important architectural landmarks. Twin castellated Gothic towers flanked an arched central entrance while its yellow brick exterior made the building shine as a beacon to the faithful. During

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the Civil Rights Movement, Mt. Moriah's pastor, the Rev. Roy W. Norsworthy, was one the city's most important leaders. Those opposed to integration in 1958 attempted to bomb the church in retaliation of Norsworthy's vocal support for civil and human rights and for the congregation's decision to allow the NAACP to use the church for public meetings.

8. New Era Missionary Baptist Church 797 Laurel Street



New Era Missionary Baptist Church began in 1915 and under Pastor Frank Briscoe, the congregation built its Laurel Street sanctuary in 1925. A new building came in 1952, with Delta Lodge No. 255, A.F. laying cornerstone. The Melrose High School band performed for the occasion as did the New Era Chorus. During the Civil Rights Movement, mass meetings for the Memphis and Shelby County Improvement Association were held at New Era in 1960. The association, chaired by the NAACP leader Benjamin Hooks, fought various forms of segregation. Pastor Briscoe was active in 1963 in blocking a proposed liquor store for Orange Mound, fearing that easy accessibility to alcohol would lead to neighborhood and spiritual decline. Following the death of Pastor Briscoe in 1971 after more than 45 years of service, Rev. Sampson Townsend Sr. became pastor of New Era in 1973. By the end of the decade, Rev. Townsend led the congregation in a renovation and remodeling of the church building. Rev. Townsend Sr. retired in 2005 and was replaced the following year by his son Rev. Sampson Townsend Jr.

9. Greater New Shiloh Missionary Baptist Church 839 Maywood Street

Established in 1888, Greater New Shiloh Missionary Baptist Church began on Willow Road in southeast Shelby County. Early members of the church included the Mitchell family, and Brother Joseph "Joe" Mitchell served as deacon of the church for seventy-two years. Rev. L. L. Carter led the congregation to a new sanctuary in Orange Mound

in 1924. Rev. Carter served until 1937 and eight other ministers followed in the next 23 years. Rev. J. B. Williams became pastor in 1960 and led the congregation to build a new brick sanctuary in



1964 and 20 years later he again led the effort to build a new sanctuary and rename the church as the Greater New Shiloh Missionary Baptist Church. Rev. Williams retired in 1996, followed by Rev. Arthur L. Snow and then Rev. Dr. Fred C. Lofton in 2007. A former board member of LeMoyne-Owen College, Dr. Lofton also has served as president of the Progressive Baptist National Convention.

10. Melrose High School 2870 Deaderick Avenue



Melrose High School is famous for its achievements in academics, athletics, and music, and has graduated many significant alumni. The history of the Golden Wildcats reaches to the beginning of African American secondary education in Memphis. In 1867, state law declared that the Tennessee Board of Education had to provide education for African Americans. In 1888, secondary education was established for African Americans students. Two years later District 18 School, later named Melrose High School in honor of a local philanthropist and humanitarian, opened its doors and in 1894, its first senior class of five girls graduated. In 1918, District 18 School became a city school

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and relocated to a stucco building with eleven classrooms. At the time, the school held first through eighth grade students. In 1937–39 a new school opened on Park Avenue. The gym is still used at the Orange Mound Community Services Center.

In 1972 Melrose High School's current modern-style brick and concrete building opened on Deaderick Avenue. The school continues to prepare and empower its students to become successful and engaged citizens. A partial list of famous athletes who have graduated from Melrose includes NBA basketball star Bingo Smith; University of Memphis basketball star and coach Larry Finch; NFL football veterans Barry Wilburn, Cedric Wilson, Ezell Jones, and Jerome Woods; and Olympians Rochelle Stevens, Shelia Echols, and Kennedy McKinney. The story of Orange Mound and the history of Melrose High School are inseparable. Serving a historically and still predominantly African American neighborhood, Melrose High School stands as a testament to the city's educational history.

11. St. John Missionary Baptist Church 1656 Pendleton Street



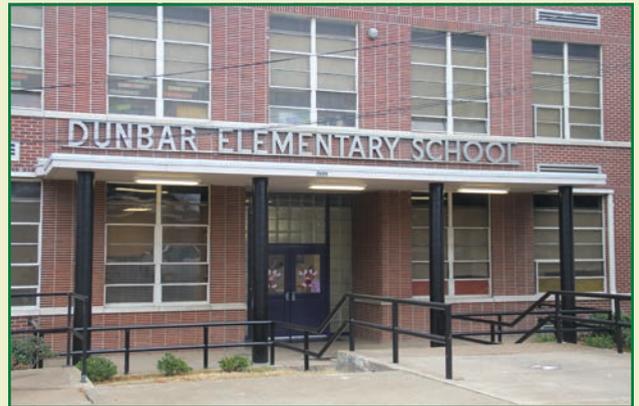
St. John Missionary Baptist Church, first organized in 1924 by Rev. John Markham and Rev. J. W. Smith, has served as a southern anchor of the Orange Mound neighborhood for almost 100 years. The beautiful red brick Colonial Revival-style building was completed at the end of 1944 under the leadership of Rev. W. C. Holmes. Music and community service have always been an important part of St. John's mission. The youth choir, under the leadership of Roland Gardner, became known for its performances of classic Negro spirituals. Community meetings have been commonplace for decades. The church added a new modern-style section to the historic building in 1971 during the ministry of Rev. L. D. McGhee. Amanda Marcum Hughes, daughter of the founder Rev. John Marcum gave land belonging to Edmund Hughes, her father-in-law, for a new parking lot.

12. New Hope Missionary Baptist Church 2731 Enterprise Avenue



This beautiful red brick church hosts one of the neighborhood's oldest congregations, but one that has experienced tremendous growth in the 21st century under the leadership of Rev. Hosie L. Hopkins Jr., a Memphis native and graduate of the University of Memphis.

13. Dunbar Elementary School 2606 Select Avenue



Dunbar School, built in 1958, was part of the city's school board reaction to the U.S. Supreme Court's *Brown v. Board of Education* decisions (1954, 1955) and represented an attempt to prove that "separate but equal" could be a reality. Orange Mound citizens were happy to get a new modernist-styled public school, with up-to-date facilities and technologies, but they continued to push for their full civil rights. Named for famed African American poet Paul Lawrence Dunbar, the school now has served the neighborhood for over 50 years. Susie Bryant, the Civil Rights activist, helped to establish the Dunbar Elementary PTA.

14. Deaderick Family Cemetery

2408 Park Avenue



This family cemetery is all that remains of the deep roots of the Orange Mound community. In 1825, the Deadericks, a prominent Tennessee family, purchased the land that was to become Orange Mound. The Deadericks retained their Shelby County plantation until 1889, when the family sold the land to E. E. Meacham, who intended to create a neighborhood for African American homeowners. Meacham decided to call the new neighborhood Orange Mound, naming it after a large Osage Orange hedge that bordered the Deaderick plantation. While the Deadericks left their land, the cemetery stayed. Family members buried here included John G. Deaderick (died 1831), Eliza E. G. Deaderick (died 1845), David Dunn (died 1837), and Don D. Deaderick (died 1841). John G. Deaderick was one of the early plantation owners in Shelby County and at his death at the age of 40, he already owned 28 slaves. It is not known where the Deaderick slaves are buried.

15. Nat Buring Orange Mound Day Nursery Learning Center

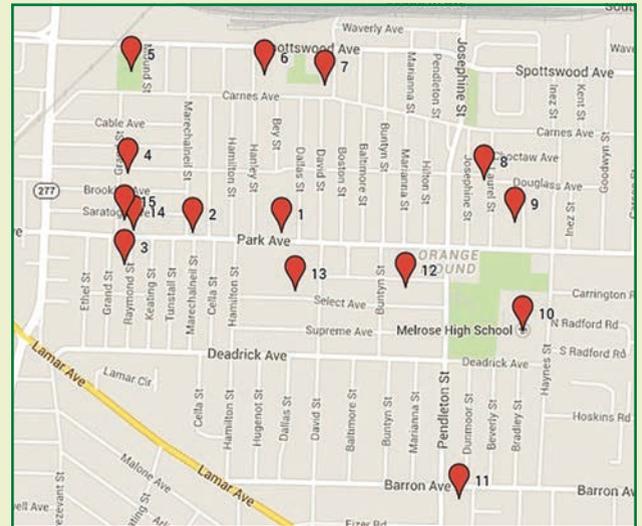
2415 Saratoga Avenue



One of the city's most important, and lasting, social institutions to emerge during the New Deal was the

Orange Mound Day Nursery. In 1941 Shubael T. Beasley, who had studied the needing of working women in Orange Mound, convinced civic groups and local government to support a day nursery so women could take jobs to better support their families and their children could receive pre-school education. It later was the first integrated school nursery in Memphis. In 1971 it received a new modernist-styled school, built with a generous donation from Nat Buring. The center is not currently in operation.

Orange Mound Tour Map



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Map courtesy Google Maps

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