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.”

In 2016, First Lady Michelle Obama proclaimed Orange Mound as a Preserve America Historic Neighborhood. This designation from the President’s Advisory Council on Historic Preservation gives the neighborhood new opportunities for historic preservation and economic development through heritage tourism.
Melrose High School is famous for its achievements in academics, athletics and music, and has graduated many significant alumni. The story of Orange Mound and the history of Melrose High School are inseparable.

That history reaches back more than 125 years. In 1890, 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, it became a city school and relocated to a new 11-classroom building supported by the Julius Rosenwald Fund.

In 1937-39 a new Art Deco-styled school, built by President Franklin D. Roosevelt’s New Deal, opened along Park Avenue. It had 79 classrooms, science labs, a shop building, music room, library, and auditorium. The gym is still used as the Orange Mound Community Services Center.

In 1972, Melrose High School opened its present facility. The school’s famous athletes include 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.
Historic African American churches call Orange Mound home. Three early sanctuaries serve as landmarks of faith and community.

Mt. Pisgah CME Church, organized in 1879, is a beautiful Gothic Revival landmark building that was built in 1929 and 1949. The spectacular auditorium-style interior has original hardwood pews, stained glass windows, Gothic arches, and a beautiful center pulpit. In 1959, Mt. Pisgah hosted the NAACP's Tennessee Conference, where leaders crafted strategies for the successful civil rights activism of the 1960s.

Organized in 1879, Mt. Moriah Baptist Church is the neighborhood’s oldest Baptist church. Twin castellated Gothic towers serve as a beacon to the faithful. During the Civil Rights Movement, Mt. Moriah’s Rev. Roy W. Norsworthy was a key Memphis leader. Those opposed to integration in 1958 attempted to bomb the church in retaliation of the congregation allowing the NAACP to use the building for meetings.

Established in 1904, Beulah Baptist Church grew under the long leadership of Rev. A. F. D. Dixon, who arrived in 1918 and directed the construction of the present building in 1927. Rev. Dr. Wesley C. Holmes came in 1955 and served until the next century. Beulah is a “community church,” supporting Orange Mound Day Nursery and used for hosting various Civil Rights meetings.
Fred L. Davis began his insurance agency on Airways Avenue in 1968. He was one of the first African Americans elected to serve Orange Mound as a City Councilman and the first African American to serve as the chairman of the Memphis City Council.

Evelyn Taylor was the city's first African American real estate agent. She was active in working with the City of Memphis to establish the Orange Mound Community Center. She was also president of the Orange Mound Senior Citizens Council.

The WC Handy Theatre on Park Avenue doubled as a movie theatre and a live music venue. Acts such as Count Basie, Sarah Vaughn, and Lionel Hampton, Willie Mitchell and B.B. King played there. Nate Evans ran the theatre’s popular candy shop from the 1940s – 1960s.

The Orange Mound Grill has operated since 1947. Walter and Daisy Young first operated the restaurant at 2401 Park Avenue before moving to 1238 Airways.

Robert Wright owned The Brown Derby, a night club that catered to African Americans and he was the first African American bail bondsman. He was also the founder of the historical Orange Mound Bowl Football Game that was started to support the Orange Mound Day Nursery.

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