

Lloyd Washington

President Durkeeville Historical Society

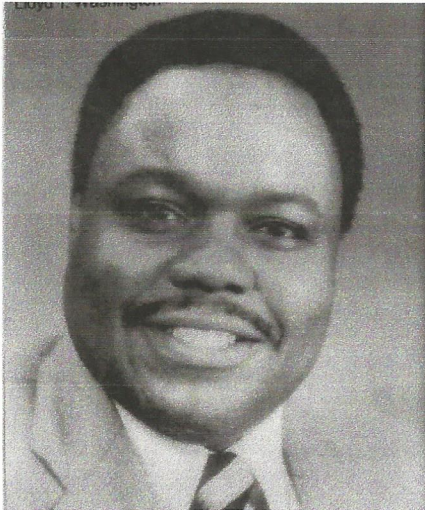
Jacksonville, Florida

February 4, 2022

Hearing Title: The Subcommittee on Constitution, Civil Rights, and Civil Liberties

Hearing on H.R. 301

Lloyd Washington Bio



Mr. Lloyd Washington

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Mr. Lloyd Washington was born and raised in Jacksonville and has a great love for the history of Afro-Americans in Jacksonville. He has served on the board of directors of Jacksonville Housing Partnership, the Weed and Seed Program, and Northwest Jacksonville Community Development Council.

He has served as Community President of the Grand Park Community Association for 16 years. He has been a member of the Durkeeville Historical Society for 15 years and has served as president since 2011. He has champion the recognition and development of the “Lift Ev’ry Voice and Sing Park”, the birth site of James Weldon and John Rosamond Johnson. His commitment is to preserve and protect Afro-American history in the Jacksonville area.



To: The Subcommittee on Constitution, Civil Rights and Civil Liberties

RE: Written Testimony for February 4, 2022 Hearing on H.R. 301

To the Chair and Members of the Committee,

The song Lift Ev'ry Voice and Sing has been performed by many popular singers; such as Marian Anderson one of the most celebrated singers of her era. It is still sung today by singers of our time, such as Beyonce and Alicia Keyes. Here in Jacksonville, Reverend James Henry & Summerville Baptist church sing the song every second Sunday. During February the Jacksonville youth Choir will perform the song. Lavilla School of the Arts performed the song during their European tour. It continues to be performed in schools, faith communities and civic gatherings in Jacksonville. The hymn brings hope and solidarity in Duval County as the song's importance crosses different races, creeds and cultures. Whether at a city-wide celebration of Dr. King or at a prayer vigil in the town square, the very act of people singing "Lift Ev'ry Voice and Sing" embodies the hope, justice and freedom that is the core of our Democracy. I support making this hymn our national hymn.

Lloyd Washington, President

Durkeeville Historical Society

2013

Designation Application and Report

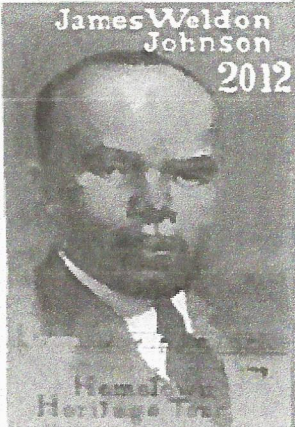
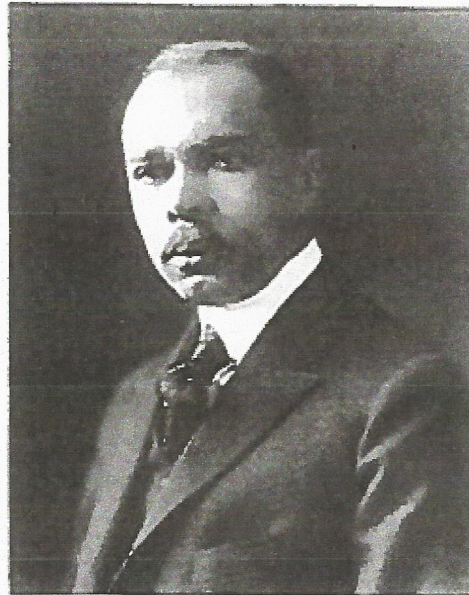
Planning and Development Department

Of the City of Jacksonville regarding

PROPOSED DESIGNATION OF LS-13-01

The James Weldon Johnson and John Rosamond Johnson Birth Site

Lift every voice and
sing
Till earth and heaven
ring
Ring with the
harmonies of Liberty;
let our rejoicing rise,
high as the list'ning
skies, let it resound
loud as the rolling sea
sing a song full of
faith that the dark
past has taught us....



Submitted by Lisa Ransom
Prepared in accordance with Chapter 307, City of Jacksonville Ordinance Code
July 26, 2013

**REPORT OF THE PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT DEPARTMENT
APPLICATION FOR DESIGNATION
AS A CITY OF JACKSONVILLE LANDMARK**

LS-13-01

**James Weldon Johnson and
J. Rosamond Johnson Birth Site @ the
Northwest corner of Lee and Houston Streets**

GENERAL LOCATION: Lot 6, Block 1-C, LAVILLA Division C, as recorded in Deed Book W. Page 566 and 567 Jacksonville of the Former Public Records, Duval County Florida Containing 10,428 Square feet or 0.24 acres more or less

RE# 074829 0000

Prepared in accordance with the JACKSONVILLE ORDINANCE CODE, SECTION 307.104, the Jacksonville Planning and Development Department hereby forwards to the Jacksonville Historic Preservation Commission, its "Findings, Conclusions and Recommendations" on the Landmark Designation, LS-13-01, sponsored by Mayor Alvin Brown.

FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS

- (A) At the request of Mayor Alvin Brown, the Jacksonville Planning and Development Department began preparing a designation application for the property located at the northwest corner of Lee and Houston streets

- (B) Consistent with the JACKSONVILLE ORDINANCE CODE, SECTION 307.104(d), the Planning and Development Department determined that the application for designation of the property at the northwest corner of Lee and Houston Street as a Landmark was complete. As required, the Planning and Development Department had signs posted in front of the property being considered for designation, as well as sent notices by U.S. Mail to each owner of real property within three hundred and fifty (350) feet of the proposed site. There were 7 notices sent. Notice of the public hearing on the designation of the property at the northwest corner of Lee and Houston Streets, the birth site of James Weldon Johnson and J. Rosamond Johnson, as a Landmark was

published in the *Financial News and Daily Report*. Proof of publication will be attached to this report.

(C) If designated, any work, including ground disturbing activities that impacts the property identified as Lot 6, Block 1-C, LaVilla Division C, as recorded in Deed Book W, Page 566 and 567 Jacksonville of the former Public Records, Duval County Florida, will require a Certificate of Appropriateness from the Planning and Development Department. Some work, such as new construction and building relocation will required the COA application to be reviewed and approved by the Jacksonville Historic Preservation Commission. Routine repairs and maintenance, alterations, and new construction not seen from the public right-of-way and other projects consistent with the Secretary's Standards can be pre-approved by the Jacksonville Planning and Development Department. However, the following activities will require a review by the Jacksonville Historic Preservation Commission.

1. New construction and additions.
2. Relocation of historic buildings.
3. Other work that the Planning and Development Department has determined to be in conflict or in potential conflict with the *Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation*

(D) At the close of the public hearing, the Jacksonville Historic Preservation Commission shall determine, whether based upon the evidence, the James Weldon Johnson and J. Rosamond Johnson Birth Site located at the northwest corner of Lee and Houston, meets the criteria for designation. In reviewing the application, the Planning and Development Department has found the application to meet three of the seven criteria.

The three criteria include the following;

- A. ***Its value as a significant reminder of the cultural, historical, architectural, or archaeological heritage of the City, state or nation.***

The site is located in the LaVilla neighborhood of the downtown area of the city. The LaVilla area was first documented after the transfer of Florida back to Spain in 1784, when the Spanish government continued the liberal land grant policy initiated during the British Period (1763-1783). In 1801, John Jones received a Spanish land grant of 350 acres defined as a triangular tract-stretching north from the mouth of McCoy's Creek. This same parcel was re-ceded to Isaac Hendricks by the governor of Spanish East Florida in 1804, and confirmed by the land commissioners in 1819. By the time the

property was deeded as a gift to Catherine Hendricks, the wife of Isaac Hendricks, the parcel has been expanded to 500 acres bounded by McCoy's Creek to the south, the Taylor Grant to the east, and public lands to the north and west. In 1831, the tract came under the ownership of Rebecca Jones, later the wife of Calvin Reed, who divided the property into two separate tracts. After a series of owners, both tracts came under the ownership of Reverend James McDonald, the pastor of the Baptist Church in Jacksonville.

After acquiring the property in 1842, McDonald sold 150 acres in 1851 to Reverend Joseph S. Baker, who later in that same year acquired the remaining 350 acres. Reverend Baker had succeeded Reverend McDonald as pastor of the Baptist Church. According to early Jacksonville historian, T. Frederick Davis, J. McRobert Baker, the son of Reverend Baker, remodeled the existing farmhouse constructed by Reverend McDonald, and named the new plantation, LaVilla. He later built a school on the property called the LaVilla Institute that continued until the Civil War. Founded in 1838 by Reverend McDonald, the Baptist Church moved to LaVilla, and built a brick church along present day Myrtle Avenue between West Adams Street and West Duval Street.

During the Civil War, Jacksonville was occupied four times by Union forces. Much of the military action near Jacksonville occurred in the west part of LaVilla that was connected to the interior of the state by the Old Plank Road and the railroad. The Baptist Church, which was eventually destroyed, was used by the Federal troops for pickets and outposts. Following the war, the west part of LaVilla continued to be occupied by Federal troops, many who were freedmen that stayed in the area after being mustered out of military service.

After the Civil War, Reverend Baker sold his LaVilla tract to Francis F. L'Engle and other white owners who subdivided and incorporated the Town of LaVilla in 1869. A member of one Jacksonville's prominent families that included the L' Engles and the Daniels, Francis F. L'Engle, who had been purchasing property in LaVilla since before the Civil War, leased for ninety-nine years $\frac{1}{4}$ acre plots to forty-one freedmen in 1866.

Immediately following the Civil War, many freedmen were attracted to urban areas such as Jacksonville because of potential jobs and housing, as well as the protection and welfare services provided by the Freedmen's Bureau. The LaVilla area specifically attracted union veterans from the three black regiments that had been stationed in Jacksonville during and immediately after the war. By 1870, the population of LaVilla had swelled to 1,078 with over seventy-seven percent being African American. Since the majority of these new LaVilla residents were originally from Florida, they began developing a social network based on kinship, previous friendships, shared military service, and worship. These African American residents were primarily employed in unskilled day labor at the docks, sawmill and railroads or did domestic work. However, within a few years, several black owned businesses and professions were established in the neighborhood.

Being a majority population, African American males were to play a significant role in the political life of LaVilla. The first elected government for the Town of LaVilla in 1871 included Frances L'Engle as mayor, and four whites as council members. However, African American males were elected as Town Marshall, Tax Collector, Tax Assessor, as well as five serving as Aldermen. Based on surviving records for the Town of LaVilla (1869 – 1887), two African Americans, Mitchell P. Chappelle (1874-1876) and Alfred Grant (1876-1877) were elected mayor. During this same period, six African American males served as Town Clerk, two as Tax Assessor, three as Tax Collector, one as Town Treasurer, four as Town Marshall, and thirty-six as Councilman. Other African Americans were appointed to perform municipal duties such as police officer, lighting street lamps, and trash removal.

According to James Weldon Johnson's autobiography *Along This Way*, Johnson states that "long after the close of the Reconstruction period, Jacksonville was known far and wide as a good town for Negroes; several members of the city council were Negroes; one or two justices of the peace were Negroes. When a paid fire department was established, one station was manned by Negroes; ...the city government was reorganized and Joseph E. Lee, a Negro and a very able man and astute politician, was made Judge of the Municipal Court. He also observed that there were many stalls in the local city market that was owned by Negroes and that they also were land stewards for the Clyde Steamship Company; and there was no such thing as a white-owned barber shop."

In an 1886 report produced by the Jacksonville Board of Trade, LaVilla was the largest suburb with a population of 3,228 compared to Jacksonville's population of 11,545. By 1886, 814 buildings had been constructed in LaVilla, with 93% being residential structures. In addition, the community reportedly had six churches, two public and three private schools, three livery stables, two public halls, and one cemetery (old Baptist Church Cemetery). Two early churches founded in LaVilla included St. Paul's AME Church and Shiloh Baptist Church (1871). Several freedmen in LaVilla formed the Trustees of the Florida Institute with the stated purpose of increasing educational opportunities for African Americans. With the support of the Freedmen's Bureau, the Trustees established the Stanton Normal School named in honor of General Edwin M. Stanton, Secretary of War under President Lincoln. Opening in 1869, the Stanton Normal School was located on the block in LaVilla bound by West Ashley Street, West Beaver Street, Clay Street and North Broad Street. The 1.5-acre block, which was purchased from Florida Governor Ossian B. Hart, the son of Jacksonville's founder, Isaiah D. Hart, has been the site of four separate school buildings with the current one being constructed in 1917.

With the development of the railroad, the old Union Terminal and finally, the Jacksonville Terminal, the commercial and warehouse district along East and West Bay Street in Downtown Jacksonville began to expand west towards LaVilla. Eventually much of the south part of LaVilla was occupied by large warehouses, wholesale and retail establishments, boarding houses and small hotels, as well as the notorious "red light district" along Houston Street. As a result by the 1880's, LaVilla had established

an unsavory reputation for gambling, drunkenness, prostitution, and political corruption. With the end of political reconstruction and the return of political control back to the Democratic Party, the state legislature in 1887 approved the annexation of LaVilla, along with Riverside, Brooklyn, Springfield, East Jacksonville, Oakland, and the Town of Fairfield, as part of the City of Jacksonville. Although the stated purpose was to broaden the tax base and provide additional city services to the growing suburbs, annexation diluted African American political power, significantly reducing their involvement in local politics until the Civil Rights movement of the 1960's.

LaVilla also attracted many of Jacksonville's early Jewish families, particularly during the flood of Eastern European immigration in the 1880's and 90's. The first Jewish migration during the middle of the nineteenth century brought Jews of German descent. Followers of a Reformist faith, these Jewish citizens became successful business owners and were so highly regarded in the Jacksonville community that one of their members, Morris A. Dzialynski, was elected mayor in 1881. The second migration during the 1880's and 90's brought Russian and Romanian immigrants who had stronger ties to the Orthodox Judaism of their homelands. Establishing their homes and businesses in LaVilla, these immigrants formed an Orthodox Temple named B'nai Israel in 1901. In 1908, construction of a new Orthodox synagogue was started at the northwest corner of West Duval Street and North Jefferson Street. With the growth of the Jewish community in LaVilla, a Young Men's Hebrew Association was established in 1910, and opened its own facility at 712 West Duval Street across from the Congregation B'nai Israel in 1914. Now serving as the Maceo Elks Club, the YMHA building originally housed numerous recreational, social, cultural and educational activities and programs for Jacksonville's Jewish community. With the shift in Jewish settlement from LaVilla to the more popular suburbs of Springfield and Riverside, both the Congregation B'nai Israel and the YMHA had relocated by 1932 to the new Jacksonville Jewish Center at 205 West Third Street in Springfield.

Although starting at the Cleveland Fiber Factory at West Beaver Street and Davis Street, most of LaVilla was spared by the Great Fire of May 3, 1901 that destroyed Downtown Jacksonville. For over a century, the northern part of LaVilla has been the commercial and social center of Jacksonville's African American community. Significant African American institutions first developed in LaVilla included Old Stanton High School (521 West Ashley Street); the Masonic Temple (Most Worshipful Union Grand Lodge at 410 Broad Street); Old Brewster Hospital (915 West Monroe Street), and the Clara White Mission (611 - 615 West Ashley Street). Numerous commercial enterprises such as stores, restaurants, hotels, theaters and funeral homes, serving the African American community were established along West Ashley, North Broad, North Jefferson and North Davis Streets. The area around the intersection of West Ashley and North Jefferson Street also was a hub for African American entertainment for many years. Many great early jazz performers played and stayed in LaVilla during the 1920's, 30's and 40's, including Louis Armstrong, Cab Calloway, Duke Ellington, Ray Charles and Billie Holliday.

It should also be noted that Genovar's Hall, located at 638-644 West Ashley Street (LM-95-22) was a significant commercial building within the LaVilla area. Owned by Harry Finkelstein, Genovar's Hall during the 1920's and 1930's began to be associated with a significant period in the history of the LaVilla area. During this period, LaVilla became the primary commercial and entertainment district for Jacksonville's African American community. In response to state sanctioned segregation, numerous commercial enterprises such as stores, restaurants, hotels, theaters and funeral homes, serving the African American community, were established along West Ashley, North Broad, North Jefferson and Davis Streets.

By 1918, Genovar's Hall was completely occupied by black owned businesses including barbers, cleaners, shoe repair, filling station, restaurants, taverns, as well as furnished rooms. 1931, Jack D. Wynn opened the Wynn Hotel on the second and third floors with the Lenape Tavern being located on the first floor. According to oral tradition, the Wynn Hotel, which operated under that name until 1941, was a popular lodging spot for some of these early jazz performers playing in LaVilla and the surrounding area. Reportedly, Louis Armstrong, who played at the Knights of Pythias Hall at 733 West Ashley Street, would prefer the Wynn Hotel over more "upscale establishments" since it was located closer to the street action generated by such nearby entertainment amenities as the Hollywood Music Store, The Top Hat, Manuel's and the Bronx.

In addition, the January 1942 monthly magazine of the NAACP, "The Crisis", highlighted Jacksonville's African American community and featured many of the famous establishments that were well-known throughout LaVilla and the county at large. The article states that the earliest forms of commerce in Jacksonville were largely retail merchandising. Later businesses formed included investment and insurance companies and banks. The Afro-American Life Insurance Company was founded in 1901 by Abraham Lincoln Lewis and seven business associates. Over the 40 years in business, the company expanded to include a savings department, pension bureau as well as an investment department. By 1937, the company held over one million dollars in assets and was responsible for the creation of American Beach in Nassau County, Florida.

With the end of state sponsored segregation, many African American residents and businesses left the LaVilla area to seek opportunities in other parts of the city. As a result the economic and social vitality of LaVilla declined resulting in marginal businesses or empty commercial buildings and a predominance of low-income rental units. Continued lack of investment fostered significant deterioration of LaVilla's building fabric resulting in numerous demolitions. Except for several landmark structures, as well as a cluster of older commercial buildings along North Broad Street, most of the area is vacant undeveloped land.

3. *It is identified with a person or persons who significantly contributed to the development of the City, state, or nation.*

The subject property is the birth site for two highly regarded, nationally and internationally known natives of Jacksonville, James Weldon Johnson and his brother John Rosamond Johnson. For the purposes of this report, James Weldon Johnson's accomplishments will be identified first and then those of J. Rosamond Johnson will be described afterward.

James Weldon Johnson 1871-1938

James Weldon Johnson was born on June 17, 1871 in Jacksonville, Florida. A true Renaissance man, Johnson was a lawyer, educator, songwriter, poet, foreign diplomat, novelist, and civil-rights leader. Much of Johnson's childhood and young adult life in Jacksonville is told in his own words in his autobiography, Along This Way. Johnson graduated from Atlanta University in 1894. He returned to Jacksonville and became principal of Stanton Grade School. At that time, the state of Florida did not have a high school for Negro children. While he was principal, Johnson improved the educational standards of the school until Stanton became a high school. Subjects like algebra, English composition, physical geography, bookkeeping, geometry, English literature, elementary physics, history and Spanish were included. In 1897, while serving as the principal, Johnson became the first African American in Duval County to pass the bar exam through open examination in court in Florida.

In early 1900, he and his brother Rosamond, an accomplished musician, collaborated and wrote "Lift Every Voice and Sing," an anthem commemorating Abraham Lincoln's birthday. The song was originally written to be sung by 500 Negro school children. According to his autobiography, James Weldon and J. Rosamond wrote "Lift Every Voice and Sing" at the Johnson family home in LaVilla. James Weldon recounts the story with emotion as each stanza was created. Eventually, the song was taught to the school children for the Lincoln celebration. However, the children and churches kept singing the song until the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People adopted it. Known today as the Negro National Anthem, "Lift Every Voice and Sing" is an uplifting song that is sung with reverence as it commemorates the civil rights struggles of the past. Today, the song is sung nationwide in churches and at special ceremonial occasions in African-American institutions.

The Great Fire of 1901, burned 146 city blocks, destroyed more than 2,368 buildings, and left almost 10,000 residents homeless in Jacksonville. Stanton was lost despite the efforts of James Weldon Johnson and others. Immediately following the fire, the

Duval County School Board replaced the burnt facility with a wooden "temporary building". Johnson described it as being "huge, crude, three-story hideous structure that looked more like a granary than like a schoolhouse". According to Johnson, the school board contemplated doing away with Stanton as a central school. Stanton was sited in one of the best locations in the city and the school and facilities encompassed one city block. In addition, the School Board planned to sell the land that Stanton stood on and to break the larger school into several "more accessible" smaller schools. As noted in his autobiography, Johnson stated that "these plans meant the destruction of a traditional and important element in the life of Jacksonville Negro citizens and the sweeping away of one of its main centers of pride and affection. Furthermore, they probably meant the end of a Negro high school."

Despite the school board's plans, the high school and the site remained intact. James Weldon Johnson wrote that he reminded the school board that the Stanton property had been deeded to "a board of trustees made up of white and colored men as a site for a Negro school by Governor Hart, a Reconstruction governor of Florida. This deed, furthermore, stated that, if the property ceased to be used for the purpose of a Negro school, it would revert to the heirs of the Hart estate. Although saved at this juncture, eventually, the third building became unsafe and was condemned". Ultimately, the school board built the structure that currently stands.

In 1915, there was a \$1 million bond issued in Duval County for the construction and improvement of school buildings. As a part of the proposal, the school board planned to eliminate the Stanton School and replace it with smaller schools in different locations. In response, the trustees along with prominent members of the Black community responded with a petition to the school board on February 23, 1915. The petition requested that an equitable portion of the bond money provide a new Stanton that would be adequate for the county's African American population in its original location. When the school board refused, the trustees responded by filing an injunction in Circuit Court. The parties settled out-of-court. In September 1915, the school board agreed to construct another Stanton High School on the same site. The new building was opened for classes in the fall of 1917.

The victory that began with James Weldon Johnson has endured for all of Jacksonville's children. The school continues to hold classes for some of Jacksonville's youngest students. The present building represents the culmination of nearly 150 years of Black education at its present location. In addition, the building that James Weldon Johnson fought to have constructed was listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1983. In June 2013, the Jacksonville City Council adopted an ordinance designating the Edwin M. Stanton High School as a historic landmark. The historic Stanton building continues to be a source of pride for the community. The institution

that began in 1869, by funding from the Freedman's Bureau for the education of former slave children, was bolstered and fought for by James Weldon Johnson. The legacy of this great institution endures for future generations.

James Weldon Johnson produced an independent newspaper, *The Daily American*, in 1895. He also was the first African American to pass the Florida Bar through an oral exam before a state judge. Johnson was multi-talented and a prolific writer. By 1902, Johnson was making seasonal trips to New York City to join his brother and Bob Cole in the production of several musical pieces. After marrying New York native, Grace Nail, in 1910, Johnson went on to publish his book, The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man in 1912. In addition to being a contributing editor to the *New York Age*, Johnson was appointed field secretary of the NAACP in 1916, and later served as an Executive Secretary. During the 1920's and 30's, he was responsible for several publications, such as God's Trombones (1927), re-print of The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man (previously printed anonymously), editor of The Book of Negro Poetry (1922 & 1931), and his autobiography, Along This Way (1933).

In 1906, he was appointed by President Teddy Roosevelt as U.S. Consul to Venezuela and later served in the same position in Nicaragua.

James W. Johnson began his work with the NAACP in December 1916 as field secretary. Johnson's first task as field secretary was to organize the Association efforts in the South. In three years there were 310 branches of the Association, 131 of them were in the South. Johnson became the first African American Executive Secretary of the NAACP. Johnson is also credited with organizing the historic Silent March of 1917 to protest the national crime of lynching.

During his life, James Weldon Johnson has received numerous honorary degrees and awards including Master of Arts degree from Atlanta University (1904); doctor of literature from Talladega College and Howard University; the Spingarn Medal as "author, diplomat and public servant"; and the Harmon Award for God's Trombones. In addition to receiving a Rosenwald fellowship for writing, Johnson was appointed in 1931 as the Adam K. Spence Professor of Creative Literature and Writing at Fisk University, as well as the visiting professor of creative literature at New York University. James Weldon Johnson died on June 26, 1938 in an automobile accident near Wiscasset, Maine, and is buried in Greenwood Cemetery in Brooklyn, New York.

In conclusion, James Weldon Johnson life and legacy demonstrated that he was a strong advocate for civil rights for all Americans, but especially for African Americans at a crucial time in American history. Many of Johnson's accomplishments occurred despite the rise of the Ku Klux Klan (1866-1870), Jim Crow, the dismantling of Reconstruction era politics and the horrific, shameful season when the lynching of African Americans was commonplace in this country. Johnson was a leader through his personal actions and his powerful writings.

James Weldon Johnson's Activities and Accomplishments

- 1894: Graduated from Atlanta University
- 1895: Published the Daily American, the first Negro daily ever published
- 1894-97: Made Stanton Grade School into a high school
- 1897: First black admitted to Florida bar in an oral exam before a judge
- 1899: Wrote "Lift Every Voice and Sing" with his brother, Rosamond
- 1906: Appointed US consul, Puerto Cabello, Venezuela
- 1909: Appointed US consul, Corinto, Nicaragua
- 1920: Appointed executive secretary of NAACP and served 10 years in this position
- 1921: Wrote first novel: "The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man"
- 1922: Collected poems of black poets in "The Book of American Negro Poetry."
- 1925: Compiled, edited "The Book of Negro Spirituals" with his brother
- 1927: With brother Rosamond, published "God's Trombones", a collection of folk sermons
- 1930: Became professor at Fisk University
- 1930: Published Black Manhattan
- 1933: Wrote autobiography, "Along This Way"

James Weldon Johnson's Awards

- 1925: Awarded the Spingarn Medal which is awarded annually for "the highest or noblest achievement by an American Negro"
- 1929: Received the Julius Rosenwald Fund Grant, 1929.
- 1933: Awarded the W. E. B. Du Bois Prize for Negro Literature, 1933, named after first incumbent of Spence Chair of Creative Literature at Fisk University.
- N/A Rewarded with honorary doctorates from Talladega College and Howard University.
- 1988: The United States Postal Service issued a 22 cent postage stamp in his honor
- 1990: The James Weldon Johnson Middle School in Jacksonville is named in his honor.
- 2000: Inducted into the Florida Artist's Hall of Fame

John Rosamond Johnson 1873 - 1954

John Rosamond Johnson was one of the more important figures in black music in the first part of the 20th century, usually in partnership with Bob Cole or with his brother James Weldon Johnson. While some feel that his memory lives in the shadow of his famous older brother, John Rosamond enjoyed a varied career as a pianist, songwriter, producer, soldier, singer, and actor. Professionally, he was known as J. Rosamond Johnson.

J. Rosamond Johnson was born in Jacksonville, Florida, on August 11, 1873. His mother was his first music teacher and he began playing the piano at age four. Johnson received his music degree from the New England Conservatory of Music in Boston. By the end of the 19th century, Johnson served as the musical director for the Florida Baptist Academy. Johnson moved to New York City in 1900 and plunged into his life as a musician, actor and composer. After contributing a song to Williams and Walker's *Sons of Ham* (1900), Johnson and his brother teamed up with Robert Cole with whom he began creating a vaudeville act and writing songs. In 1901 the brothers signed a contract with Joseph W. Stern and Company guaranteeing them monthly payments against future royalties, the first such contract between African American song writers and a Tin Pan Alley publisher. Their first popular hit was "My Castle on the Nile" (1901), and this was followed by popular songs such as "The Maiden with the Dreamy Eyes," "The Old Flag Never Touched the Ground," "Didn't He Ramble," and the amusing ragtime song "Under the Bamboo Tree," the melody of which is a syncopated inversion of the spiritual "Nobody Knows the Trouble I've Seen." The brothers teamed with Bob Cole to write a suite of six songs, "The Evolution of Ragtime" (1903). For seven years, the pair toured as "Cole and Johnson," and wrote and published more than 200 songs. *Under the Bamboo Tree* was highly successful. The song sold more than 400,000 copies, making it one of the nation's most popular tunes at the time.

Besides crafting a sophisticated vaudeville style, Cole and Johnson produced two musicals, *The Shoo-Fly Regiment* (1907) and *The Red Moon* (1909). While these

shows were successful, they lost money and Cole and Johnson returned to vaudeville performance. This partnership lasted until Cole's death in 1911.

A passion for musical comedy soon drew Johnson into show business. By age 23, he was touring as a vocalist with the company of *Oriental America*, thought to be the first all-black show on Broadway that was not a burlesque house act. While in New York, Johnson met numerous celebrities of the day in the music field, most notably Oscar Hammerstein, who would ultimately help shape his career. His brother James Weldon Johnson joined his brother and Robert Cole during the summers off from Stanton.

Johnson's compositions skills were the strongpoints of his musicals and vaudeville performances. Shortly after Cole's death, Johnson performed as a pianist in "A Concert of Negro Music" the great Carnegie Hall concert of May 2, 1912. When World War I broke out, Johnson received a commission as a 2nd Lieutenant in the 15th Regiment. After the war, he toured with his own groups, and even sang and played the part of a lawyer in the original production of *Porgy and Bess* in 1935. J. Rosamond Johnson died in New York City on November 11, 1954. In 2006, John Rosamond Johnson was inducted into the Florida Artists Hall of Fame.

G. Its suitability for preservation or restoration.

In utilizing this criterion, it has been the practice of the Planning and Development Department to evaluate proposed landmarks based on evidence of significant exterior alterations that have negatively impacted character-defining features, as well as represent alterations difficult, costly, or impossible to reverse. Further, the degree and nature of any exterior deterioration, as well as the evidence of long term and potentially on-going neglect are also a factor in evaluating potential landmarks for their suitability for preservation or restoration.

Based on a site visit by a representative of the Planning and Development Department, the James Weldon and J. Rosamond Johnson birth site is currently an undeveloped city-owned parcel. However, if approved, the accomplishments of the Johnson brothers could be commemorated by the designation of their birth site. It should be noted that the two brothers have been acknowledged by the state of Florida and at higher learning institutions throughout the nation. Both brothers have been awarded and honored for their contributions in various disciplines including the arts, politics, literature and music. Once designated, the site could be set aside for development as

a public monument/public space honoring the brother's contributions to art, music, civil rights and education for the citizens of Jacksonville, and for the nation.

RECOMMENDATION

Based on the findings of this report, the Planning and Development Department recommends that the Jacksonville Historic Preservation Commission **APPROVE** the designation of Lot 6, Block 1-C, LAVILLA Division C, the northwest corner of Lee Street and Houston Street, **(LS-13-01)** as a City of Jacksonville Landmark site.



OFFICE OF MAYOR ALVIN BROWN

ST. JAMES BUILDING
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JACKSONVILLE, FLORIDA 32202

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www.coj.net

May 20, 2013

Angela Schifanella
Chairman
Jacksonville Historic Preservation Commission
3rd Floor – Ed Ball Building
214 North Hogan Street
Jacksonville, Florida 32202

Dear Ms. Schifanella:

Please accept this letter as my application for the landmark site designation of the James Weldon Johnson birth site at the northwest corner of Lee Street and Houston Street in LaVilla pursuant to Section 307.104 (a), Ord.Code. It was at this site on June 17, 1871 that Jacksonville's most famous native son was born, James Weldon Johnson. A true renaissance man, James Weldon Johnson was a successful educator, journalist, lawyer, author, songwriter, and diplomat. Honored both nationally and internationally, his achievements are truly legendary. It was also on this site in 1899 that James Weldon Johnson collaborated with his brother John Rosamond Johnson, to produce the famous piece, *Lift Every Voice and Sing*, now recognized as the Negro National Anthem.

As Mayor, I am truly honored to sponsor this landmark site designation to ensure that the location of his residence (originally Block 1c, Lot 6, Division C -*LaVilla*) be preserved and eventually become an Historic Landmark honoring this great American. I also want to thank you and other members of the Commission for your valuable service in the preservation of Jacksonville's significant and irreplaceable historic resources. Your kind consideration of my request is greatly appreciated.

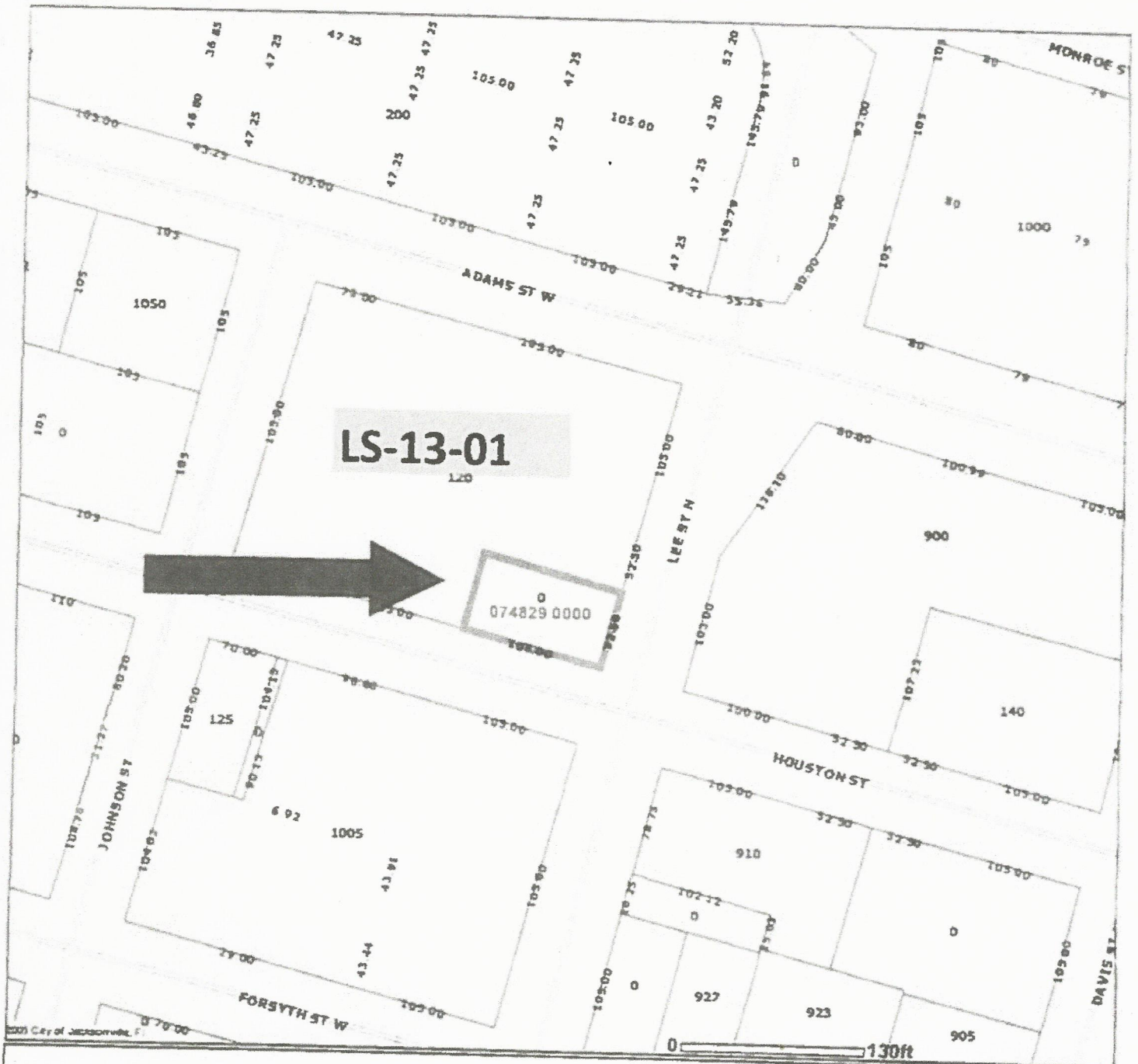
Sincerely,

Alvin Brown
Mayor

Designation Application for LS-13-01

James Weldon Johnson & J. Rosamond Johnson Birth Site
Northwest corner of Lee and Houston

LOCATION MAP



Lift Ev'ry Voice and Sing Park



Brian R. Owens 2021