



1965 photo courtesy of Onondaga Historical Association

ONE OF THE LANDMARKS of the old 15th Ward was Schor's market at 604 Harrison St. The store was torn down when the southbound Harrison exit ramp from Interstate 81 was built.

15TH WARD FILM IS 'ABOUT THE PEOPLE'

The Ebony Market, Croton Elementary School, Dunbar Center, The Glass Bottom and the Open Door Lounges, Ben's Kitchen, the Brady Center and Washington Irving School. . .

How the memories flowed, according to Courtney Rile, a young filmmaker, who was responsible for catching them on video. All of those places, most of them long gone from Syracuse's 15th Ward neighborhood, are part of a documentary to be debuted in a "red-carpet premiere" Sunday at Syracuse Stage's Storch Theater.

The documentary is "Syracuse's 15th Ward and Beyond" and it's Courtney's work. She graduated from Syracuse University in 2004 and has her own company, "Daylight Blue Media." She told me Monday that collecting the 15th Ward stories from folks who lived there was so much fun — and so important — that she gladly donated some of her time to the project.

"When I got a chance to do this, I jumped at it," Courtney explained.

The film, which runs about an hour and a-half, consists mainly of interviews recorded by Courtney last October during a bus trip through the old turf of "The Ward," a neighborhood east of downtown that once was home to Syracuse's African-American community and Jewish population. A lot of the 15th Ward was wiped out by urban renewal and the construction of Interstate 81, through the edge of downtown.

Just now, some 50 years later, the community is trying to decide the fate of the interstate. Shall we tear it down? Shall we replace it with a ground-level highway? Interestingly, residents of "The Ward" had no say about the roadway when it was put up.

"They tore down our old neighborhood," former county legislator Clarence "Junie" Dunham says.

"They destroyed the ward," according to Billy Moore.

Both men grew up in "The Bricks," the public housing project known formally as "Pioneer Homes," and dating to the 1930s. This was New York's state's first federal housing complex.

The 15th Ward was a political district that stretched from Erie Boulevard south to Brighton Avenue.

Courtney says she found The Ward also is a potent memory for about 25 senior citizens who took the bus trip last fall. She taped their memories, "really amazing stories" which ranged from recollections of Pioneer

Homes, the Dunbar Center and the former Central Technical High School.

Riders included Mannie Breland, a former resident and basketball star who went on to become Central's principal, as well as Marjorie Carter, Syracuse's first black teacher, and Marjory Wilkins, a Syracusan who contributed her own pictures of the Black History Preservation Team created by Syracuse University's South Side Initiative.

Courtney said her documentary is sprinkled with Wilkins' photographs, as well as pictures from the Onondaga Historical Association, another preservation team partner, and other sources, including the Black History collection at Beauchamp Branch library. All of her footage is to be included in an online Black History site which is in the works.

"This is a part of Syracuse's history that's not well-documented," Courtney explained. "It's about the people."

Help wanted

Gary Shirley of 909 Hudson St. (863-9286) is working on a research project about origins of the Valley Little League, which was started 58 years ago. He'd like to hear from relatives of Byron Todd, Cornelius Killo-ran, Robert Lester, H. T. Harrington, David Blandford and Larry Layton.

Dick Case writes Tuesday, Thursday and Sunday. Contact him at 470-2254 or dcase@syracuse.com.

