



About 1932, left to right: Hugh Wallace, Graham Mitchell, Charles Greene, Alonzo Banks, and James Banks. All, except Alonzo Banks, were members of the Boys Patrol.
Courtesy of James Banks.



Photo by Steven Cummings

Remembering the Early Years by James G. Banks

I was born on August 8, 1920, at 3 p.m., in my parents' bedroom at 2710 Stanton Road, S.E. Our house was built on land purchased by my father from the **Freedmen's Bureau**.

Our house was built on a little less than an acre of land. Next door my **paternal grandfather**, an escaped slave, also built a house.

From my earliest days, I recall that everyone in my house, mother, father, and three brothers, were constantly busy. Water had to be drawn from a nearby street pump, chickens had to be fed, eggs were collected from the hen house, and wood and coal were brought in as the seasons required.

My brothers and I, like my parents before us, attended Birney Elementary School on Nichols Avenue (now Martin Luther King Jr. Avenue). In the absence of junior high schools, we attended Birney School through the eighth grade. From Birney, we all went to high school.

During our few free hours, we played marbles, baseball, or pitched horse shoes. There was very little time in any day when there was nothing to do.

In the areas where blacks were concentrated, there were small grocery stores, a few operated by white owners and many by black owners. There were also two black physicians, one dentist, several hucksters (who sold fresh fruit and vegetables) and several pharmacists.

For most black residents of the Anacostia area, church and schools were the primary community institutions. Though there were a few exceptions, most residents were members of churches. Within walking distance (10 blocks) of our home there were five churches—one Methodist, one Catholic, one Holiness, and two Baptist. Church programs typically included Sunday and week night prayer services. Without question, families and community combined with church and school. Both protected the residents and supported their achievements.

Anacostia was a close-knit community. Even to this day, I remember the names of most families who lived on Stanton, Morris, Douglass and Pomeroy roads—from fifty years ago.

Most of the residents of Anacostia were migrants from the **Deep South**. Although many parents were not educated, a number of their children finished high school and some finished college. Among those residents of my age, there were some who became physicians, lawyers, school teachers, and even a professional baseball and football player.

A Community Resident

Here are some sample questions to use when questioning your community resident.

- What is your name, please?
- Do you mind telling me how old you are, or when did you first come to this community?
- Did the streets and community look the way they do now?
What are the changes?
- What were the main points of interest or landmarks in the area?
- Where did you go to shop?
- Where did you go for fun?
- How far did you travel to school, or work?
- With whom did you live when you first lived here? Who lived around you in other buildings?
- Do you know who had been living here longest when you came? Where did they live or work?
- Who was the most interesting person you knew in the community and why was he or she interesting?
- Describe the racial or ethnic groups that lived, and lives, here. How have different groups moved in or out of the community over the years?
- Which events have taken place while you lived in the community?
- Was there anything unusual about this community, that makes it different from other places to live?

Other questions that I will ask are:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

