

NOMINATION OF HISTORIC BUILDING, STRUCTURE, SITE, OR OBJECT
PHILADELPHIA REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
PHILADELPHIA HISTORICAL COMMISSION

SUBMIT ALL ATTACHED MATERIALS ON PAPER AND IN ELECTRONIC FORM (CD, EMAIL, FLASH DRIVE)
ELECTRONIC FILES MUST BE WORD OR WORD COMPATIBLE

1. ADDRESS OF HISTORIC RESOURCE *(must comply with an Office of Property Assessment address)*

Street address: 1102 Master St

Postal code: 19122

2. NAME OF HISTORIC RESOURCE

Historic Name: Sister Rosetta Tharpe House

Current/Common Name: _____

3. TYPE OF HISTORIC RESOURCE

Building

Structure

Site

Object

4. PROPERTY INFORMATION

Condition: excellent good fair poor ruins

Occupancy: occupied vacant under construction unknown

Current use: Residential

5. BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

Please attach a narrative description and site/plot plan of the resource's boundaries.

6. DESCRIPTION

Please attach a narrative description and photographs of the resource's physical appearance, site, setting, and surroundings.

7. SIGNIFICANCE

Please attach a narrative Statement of Significance citing the Criteria for Designation the resource satisfies.

Period of Significance (from year to year): from 1962 to 1973

Date(s) of construction and/or alteration: 1962

Architect, engineer, and/or designer: Hassinger and Schwam

Builder, contractor, and/or artisan: Denny Development Corporation

Original owner: Rosetta Tharpe and Russell Morrison

Other significant persons: _____

CRITERIA FOR DESIGNATION:

The historic resource satisfies the following criteria for designation (check all that apply):

- (a) Has significant character, interest or value as part of the development, heritage or cultural characteristics of the City, Commonwealth or Nation or is associated with the life of a person significant in the past; or,
- (b) Is associated with an event of importance to the history of the City, Commonwealth or Nation; or,
- (c) Reflects the environment in an era characterized by a distinctive architectural style; or,
- (d) Embodies distinguishing characteristics of an architectural style or engineering specimen; or,
- (e) Is the work of a designer, architect, landscape architect or designer, or engineer whose work has significantly influenced the historical, architectural, economic, social, or cultural development of the City, Commonwealth or Nation; or,
- (f) Contains elements of design, detail, materials or craftsmanship which represent a significant innovation; or,
- (g) Is part of or related to a square, park or other distinctive area which should be preserved according to an historic, cultural or architectural motif; or,
- (h) Owing to its unique location or singular physical characteristic, represents an established and familiar visual feature of the neighborhood, community or City; or,
- (i) Has yielded, or may be likely to yield, information important in pre-history or history; or
- (j) Exemplifies the cultural, political, economic, social or historical heritage of the community.

8. MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

Please attach a bibliography.

9. NOMINATOR

Organization Philadelphia Historical Commission Date May 11, 2022

Name with Title Jon Farnham, Executive Director Email Jon.farnham@phila.gov

Street Address 1515 Arch Street, 13th Floor Telephone 215-686-7660

City, State, and Postal Code Philadelphia, PA 19119

Nominator is is not the property owner.

PHC USE ONLY

Date of Receipt: May 11, 2022

Correct-Complete Incorrect-Incomplete Date: May 11, 2022

Date of Notice Issuance: May 12, 2022

Property Owner at Time of Notice:

Name: Mildred G. McCollum

Address: 1102 Master Street

City: Philadelphia State: PA Postal Code: 19122

Date(s) Reviewed by the Committee on Historic Designation: June 15, 2022

Date(s) Reviewed by the Historical Commission: July 8, 2022

Date of Final Action: July 8, 2022

Designated Rejected

5. BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

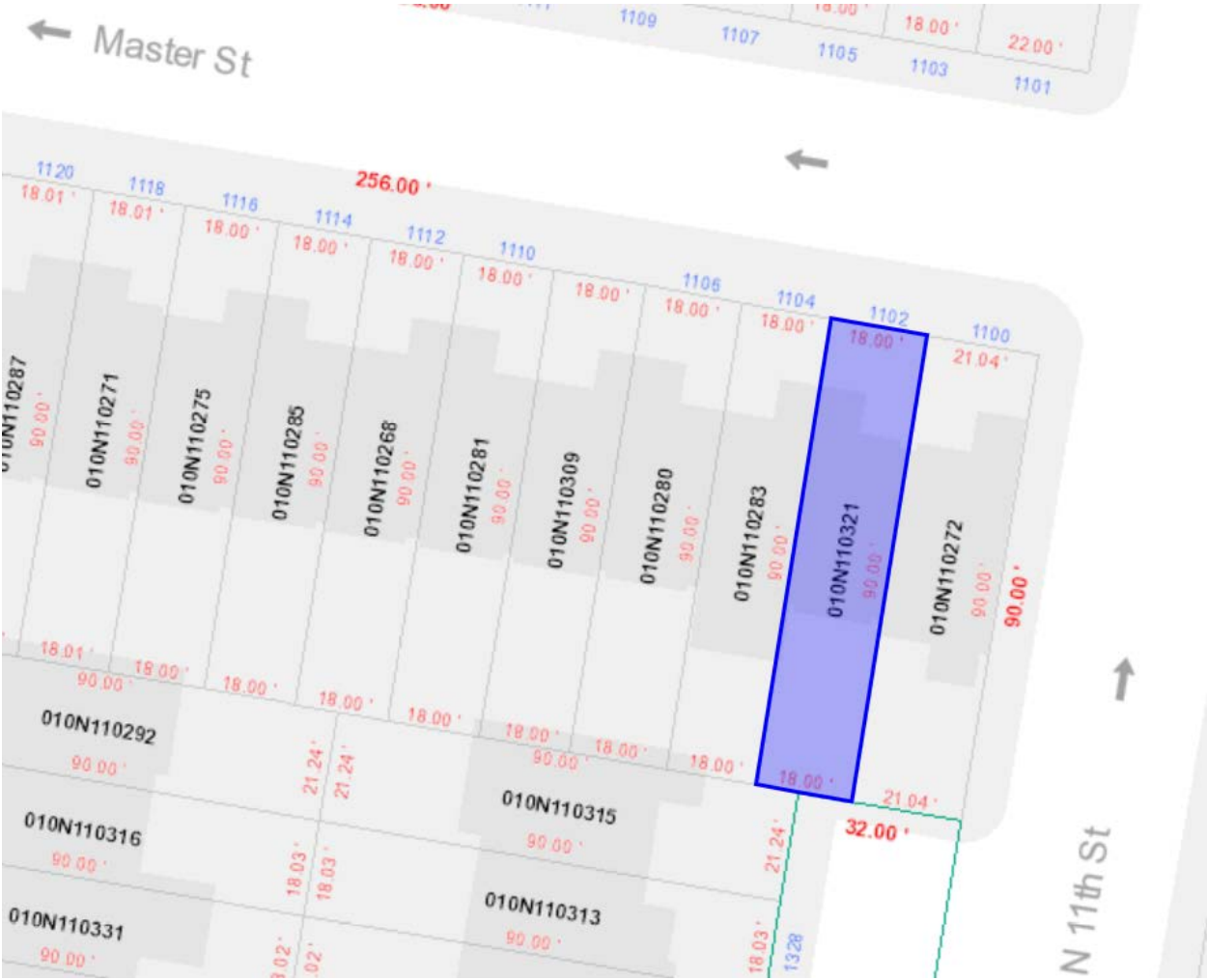


Figure 1: The parcel at 1102 Master Street. Source: CityAtlas.

ALL THAT CERTAIN lot or piece of ground with the buildings and improvements thereon erected SITUATE in the 20th Ward of the City of Philadelphia described according to a Plan of Lots made for Denny Development Corp. by William Spencer Erwin, Civil Engineering and Surveying, Fairless Hills, Pa. dated January 10, 1961 to wit: Beginning at a point on the Southerly side of Master Street (50 feet wide) measured North 78 degrees 39 minutes 00 seconds West along the said Southerly side of Master Street the distance of 21.04 feet from the Westerly side of 11th Street (50 feet wide) CONTAINING in front or breadth North 78 degrees 39 minutes 00 seconds West along the said Southerly side of Master Street 18.00 feet and extending of that width in the length or depth South 11 degrees 21 minutes 00 seconds West between parallel lines at right angles to the said Master Street 90.0 feet. The rear line thereof partly extending along the widened portion of 11th Street (82 feet wide). The Easterly line thereof passing through a driveway and passing through a party wall both between these premises and the premises adjoining on the East and the Westerly line thereof passing through a walkway and passing through a party wall both between these premises and the premises adjoining on the West.

BEING lot 68 on the said plan.

BEING part of the same premises which the Redevelopment Authority of the City of Philadelphia by deed bearing the date of the fourteenth of September A.D. 1959, and recorded at Philadelphia in Deed Book CAB 1163, page 566, granted and conveyed unto Denny Development Corporation, a Pennsylvania Corporation, in fee.

Parcel: 010-N11-0321

OPA Account: 141461700

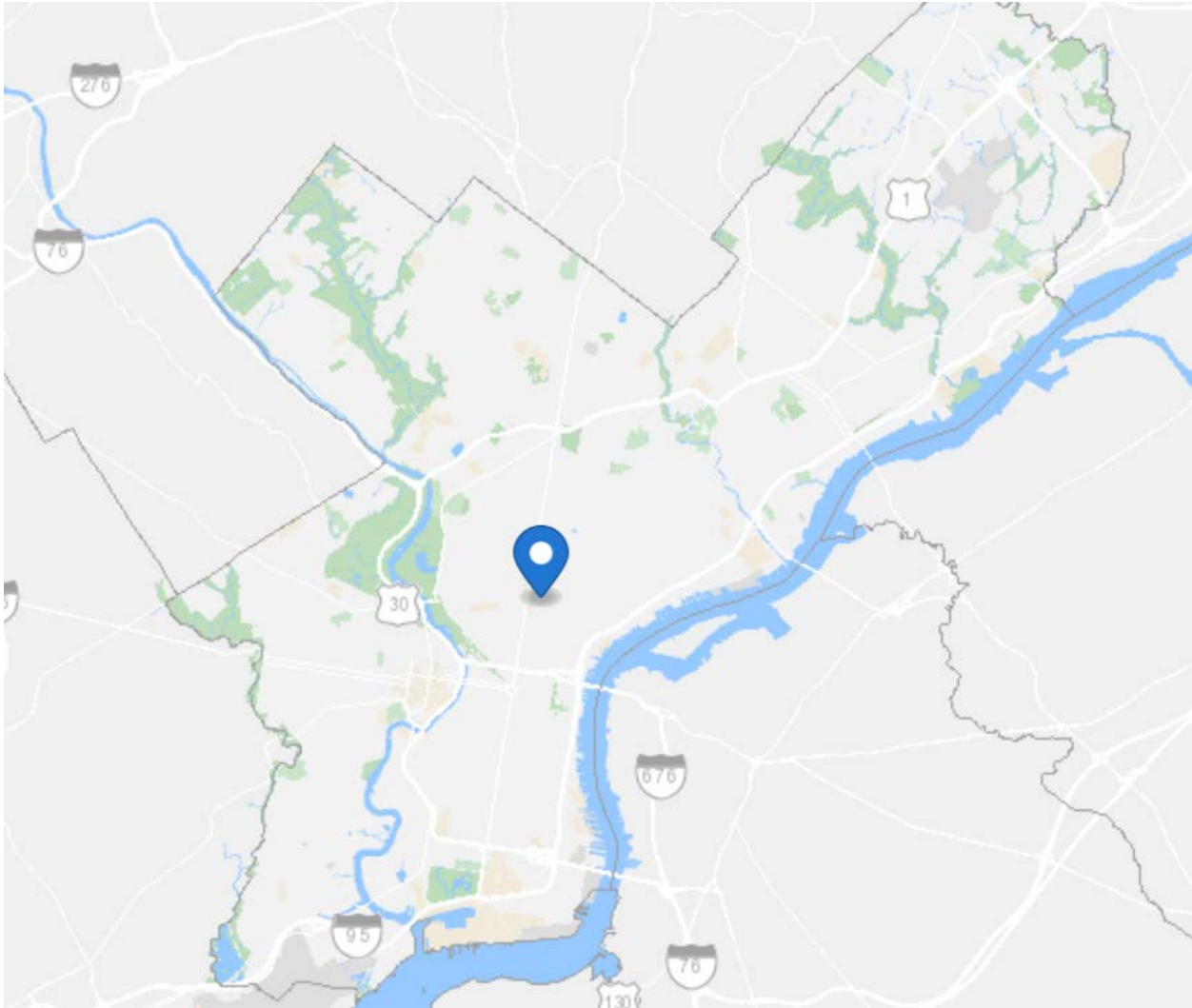


Figure 2. Location of 1102 Master Street in the City of Philadelphia. Source: CityAtlas.

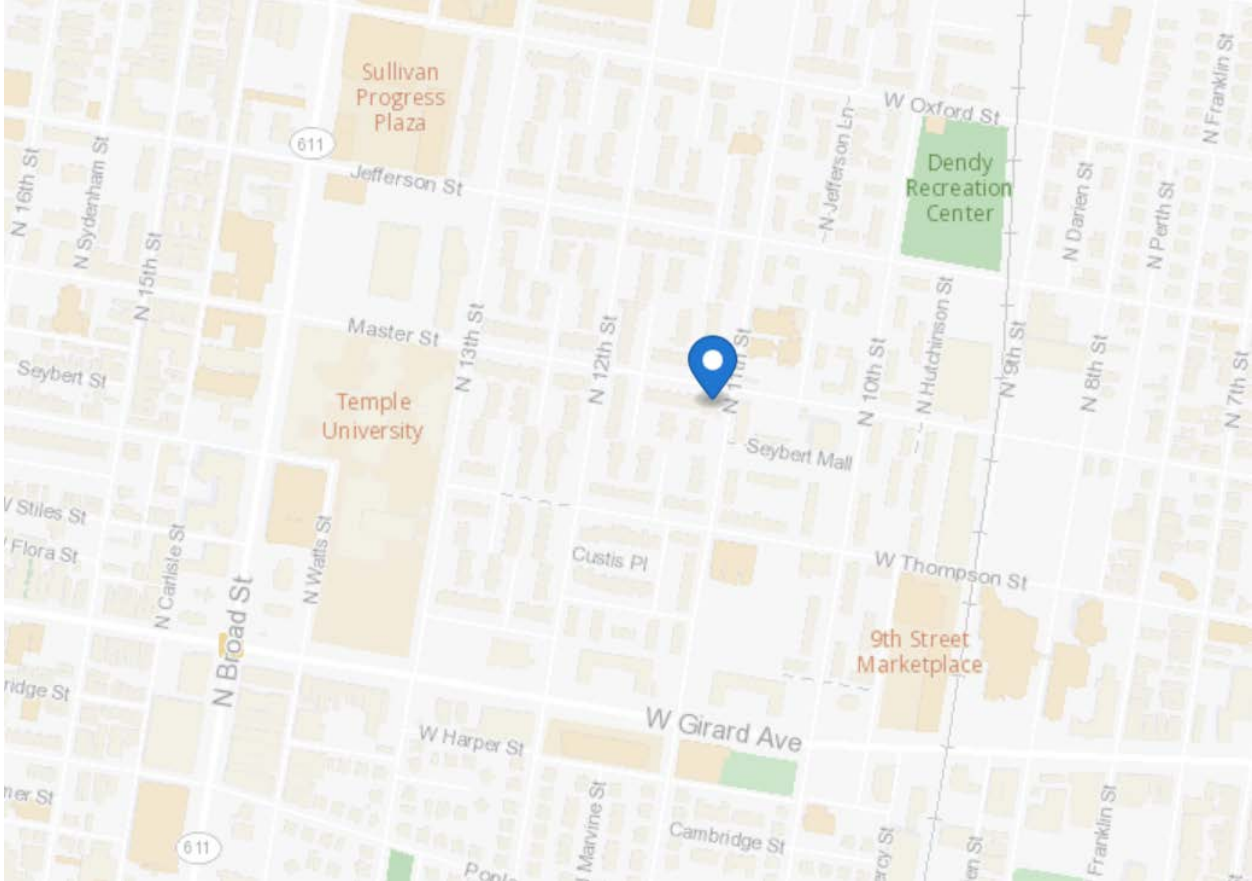


Figure 3 Location of 1102 Master Street in the Yorktown neighborhood of North Philadelphia. Source: CityAtlas.

6. PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION



Figure 4. View of front façade at 1102 Master Street, July 16, 2019. Source: Cyclomedia.



Figure 5. View looking southwest toward the south side of the 1100-block of Master Street, July 16, 2019. Source: Cyclomedia.



Figure 6. View looking northwest at the rear facades of 1100-block of Master Street, May 2, 2020. Source: Cyclomedia.

The property at 1102 Master Street is a 1,620 sf rectangular plot of land, 18 feet wide and 90 feet deep. A three-story, brick rowhouse stands on the property (Figure 4). The rowhouse is one of 14 in the row (Figure 5). A Pennsylvania State Historical and Museum Commission marker

acknowledging Sister Rosetta Tharpe stands at the curb. The front façade of the rowhouse is set back about 33 feet from the curb line on Master Street. The open area at the front includes a concrete driveway and walk with steps and a lawn with a short brick retaining wall on two sides. The front façade includes a single-car garage door at the ground level, a raised porch and entranceway with canopy between the ground and second floors, and paired double-hung windows at the second and third floors. The rowhouse has a flat roof with a pent roof at the cornice line.

At the rear, the rowhouse is three stories tall and clad in painted, scored concrete at the first floor and red brick (Figure 6). Sliding glass doors open onto the rear yard at the first floor. The upper floors are fenestrated with paired double-hung windows. A rear lawn runs about 30 feet from the rear façade to the rear property line.

7. STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The property at 1102 Master Street, the residence of Sister Rosetta Tharpe from 1962 to 1973, is historically significant and should be listed individually on the Philadelphia Register of Historic Places. The property satisfies Criterion for Designation A, as delineated in Section 14-1004(1) of the Philadelphia Code, because it "is associated with the life of a person significant in the past," Sister Rosetta Tharpe. Known as the "Godmother of Rock 'n Roll" and the "Original Soul Sister," gospel singer, instrumentalist, and songwriter Sister Rosetta Tharpe, who became a recording and performing star in the late 1930s, was famous for singing spiritual songs in a raucous rhythm-and-blues musical style, and for playing the electric guitar in a loud, distorted, groundbreaking way that set the stage for the emergence of rock and roll in the early 1950s. She was one of gospel music's first superstars, the first gospel performer to record for a major record label, and an early crossover from gospel to secular music. Sister Rosetta Tharpe significantly influenced later popular music, especially rock and roll, as acknowledged by Bob Dylan, Little Richard, Elvis Presley, and Johnny Cash. Her guitar playing technique had a profound influence on the development of British blues in the 1960s. In particular, Sister Rosetta Tharpe's guitar playing on a European tour with blues legend Muddy Waters in 1964, specifically a performance in Manchester, United Kingdom on May 7, 1964, has been cited as especially influential by prominent British guitarists Eric Clapton, Jeff Beck, and Keith Richards. Sister Rosetta Tharpe was a key figure in the development of the type of music that became the dominant musical form and means of popular cultural expression in English speaking and other countries in the 1950s and 60s and that musical form continues to dominate popular culture today.¹

¹ This biography of Sister Rosetta Tharpe is based on William K. McNeil and Terry Buckalew, "'Sister Rosetta' Tharpe (1915-1973)," Nancy A. Williams and Jeannie M. Whyne, eds., *Arkansas Biography: A Collection of Notable Lives* (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 2000).



Figure 7. Autographed photograph inscribed "May God Bless You Always, Sister Rosetta Tharpe Morrison," c. 1962. Courtesy of Schubertiade Music and Arts.

BACKGROUND ON THE PROPERTY AT 1102 MASTER STREET

The Sister Rosetta Tharpe House is located at 1102 Master Street in the Yorktown neighborhood in North Philadelphia. Yorktown, which is located between Girard Avenue and Cecil B. Moore Avenue, Broad Street and N. 11th Street, was redeveloped between 1959 and 1969 as a middle-income Black community. It was the Philadelphia's first urban renewal project to be completed by a private developer and incorporated planning principles for residential neighborhoods that were considered innovative at the time.

In 1948, the City of Philadelphia certified the Southwest Temple area in North Philadelphia as a redevelopment area with the goal of eliminating perceived "blight." The Southwest Temple area was bounded by Columbia Avenue, now Cecil B. Moore Avenue, the Reading Railroad line near 9th Street, now a SEPTA line, Girard Avenue, and N. Broad Street, encompassing about 25 city blocks. The plans for the redevelopment of the Southwest Temple area, including Yorktown, evolved over a period of around 12 years beginning in 1949. At the time planning for the area began, the Philadelphia City Planning Commission noted that the area was "fully occupied before World War II," that the area was more than 90% "non-white" in population, and that it was primarily residential, although "every block ... presents a mixed land use pattern." The total area was estimated to have over 17,000 inhabitants. The first plan for Southwest Temple, published in 1950, was based on Modernist planning principles: the reorganization of the dense, complex urban fabric into a "rational" system of high-rise housing units organized in super blocks, some new lower rise housing rows, and the relocation of commercial development to the edges of the area along Girard Avenue, Cecil B. Moore Avenue, and N. Broad Street. Beginning in 1954, the City cleared some portions of the Southwest Temple to the east of what became Yorktown and constructed two-story, low-rise, state-subsidized rental housing.

In 1957, the Redevelopment Authority (RDA) presented a proposal to Philadelphia City Council for the relocation of residents and redevelopment in the area that would become Yorktown. The proposal called for the acquisition of 23 acres of land for residential as well as "semi-public and commercial uses." The proposal stated that "in residential areas, only "single family dwelling structures limited to 35 feet in height," with "maximum building coverage" of "50 per cent of the lot area," would be allowed. Further, each lot was to have a minimum of 1440 square feet and 16-foot width, a front yard of at least eight feet in depth with a rear yard minimum of nine feet. "All dwellings" were to "have off-street parking provided at a ratio of not less than one parking space for each dwelling unit." The proposal also stipulated that "no rear alleys" were to "be permitted." The RDA's proposal was ultimately approved by City Council in February 1958, and a year later it resulted in a City Ordinance that established the basis for the development of Yorktown as it is known today.

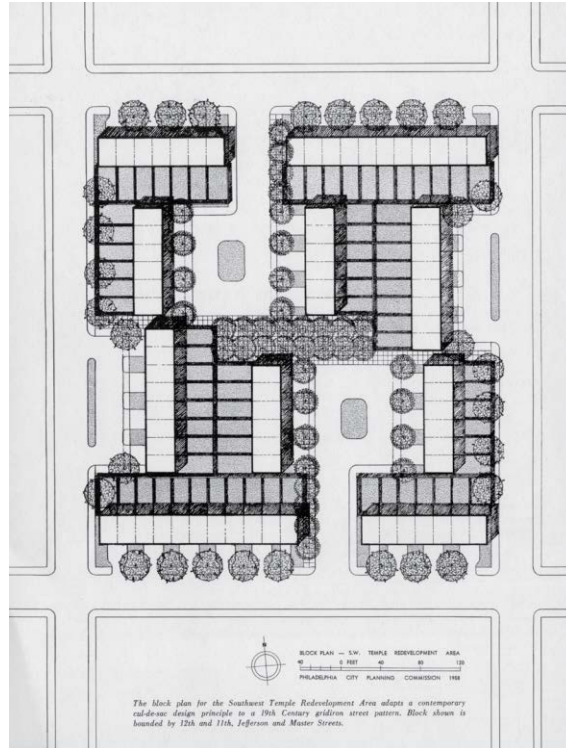


Figure 8. Plan of the block bounded by N. 11th and 12th, Jefferson and Master Streets, part of the Southwest Temple Redevelopment Area, Project A, Unit No. 10, from the Philadelphia City Planning Commission's 1958 Annual Report.

The implementation of the Yorktown redevelopment began in May 1959, when the RDA signed an agreement with the Denny Development Corporation. The agreement included a draft plan for the project drawn by Philadelphia architects Hassinger and Schwam that illustrated the overall layout of units in the blocks that were to be developed and included a more developed plan for the block bordered by 11th, 12th, Master, and Jefferson streets, the first to be constructed (Figure 8). The plan for the block incorporated the cul-de-sac and front garage features previously employed by Denny at a development in Northeast Philadelphia. In September 1959, the RDA deeded the block bounded by 11th, 12th, Master, and Thompson streets to the Denny Development Corporation. The start of the project was marked by groundbreaking ceremonies attended by Philadelphia Mayor Richardson Dilworth, who wielded a ceremonial shovel to turn the “first spade of earth.” Newspaper coverage of the event records several important facts relating to the project, the most important of which was that the Denny development was to have its own identity and name, Yorktown, to distinguish it from previous subsidized housing construction.

Construction proceeded at a steady pace. By May 1961, the 70 houses in this first block were sufficiently complete for grand opening festivities. The new houses were offered for sale at \$11,990 with Federal Housing Administration-insured financing. The construction materials in this new urban/suburban development were promoted as modern and “maintenance-free.” Similarly, the developer noted that “the garden level design has full-length sliding doors leading from the ground-level recreation area to a rear patio and garden,” and that a “stone wall, 5 feet high and 18 inches thick provides privacy and keeps young children from wandering into adjacent streets or plazas.” The interior features included, at ground level, “a powder room and a utility room separated from the garage by a sliding bamboo curtain door”; on the first floor, a “living room, dining room and a kitchen with a disposer, eye-level oven and a counter-top range”; on the second floor, “bedrooms and a ceramic tile bath that may be any one of six color

combinations” and “room-width closets in each bedroom.” Press accounts contemporary with the first wave of construction never mention that this was growing as a largely Black neighborhood, but slightly later articles reveal that Yorktown properties were being purchased virtually exclusively by middle-class Black families, in no small part because of the efforts of the Reverend William Gray Jr. of Bright Hope Baptist Church, which was located at 12th and Oxford Streets, a building that would be demolished to make way for the Yorktown development. In 1963, Bright Hope Baptist Church completed a new building at 1601 N. 12th Street on land provided by the RDA. In 1963, Rev. Gray worked with Norman Denny, who by then had founded and was president of Lincoln National Bank, to create a mortgage program that made it easier for middle-income Blacks to purchase homes in Yorktown with limited down payments. Yorktown was thus a neighborhood of professionals and relatively well-to-do Black Philadelphians from its inception. By March 1963, all of the area that was the subject of the initial redevelopment agreement was either fully developed or in construction.²

The Sister Rosetta Tharpe House at 1102 Master Street is located in the first section of Yorktown to be redeveloped by the Denny Development Corporation. On March 29, 1962, Sister Rosetta Tharpe and her husband Russell Morrison purchased the property at 1102 Master Street from the Denny Development Corporation for \$13,450 (Figure 9).³ The house in Yorktown was Sister Rosetta Tharpe’s primary residence until her death in 1973.

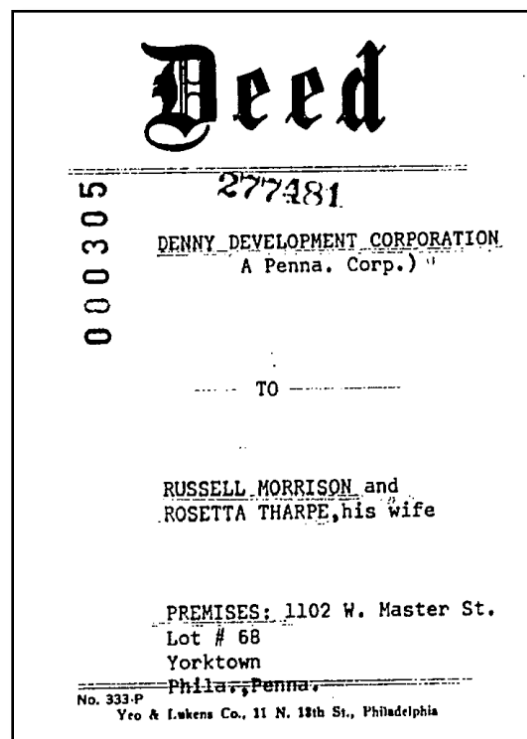


Figure 9. Cover of the deed transferring 1102 Master Street from Denny Development Corporation to Rosetta Tharpe and Russell Morrison, March 29, 1962, Deed CAB-1865-567.

² This short history of the development of Yorktown is taken from Preservation Alliance for Greater Philadelphia, *Yorktown: An Historical Philadelphia Neighborhood*, 2014, <https://www.preservationalliance.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/09/Yorktown.pdf>, which was based on Emily T. Cooperman, ARCH Preservation Consulting, *Nomination of the Yorktown Historic District to the National Register of Historic Places*, June 26, 2012.

³ See Philadelphia Department of Records, Deed CAB-1865-567.

SISTER ROSETTA THARPE

Sister Rosetta Tharpe was born in Cotton Plant, Woodruff County, Arkansas on March 20, 1915 to Katie Bell Nubin Atkins, an evangelist, singer, and mandolin player associated with the Church of God in Christ (COGIC), and Willis Atkins.⁴ Cotton Plant is about halfway between Memphis and Little Rock. The 1910 US Census for Cotton Plant includes an entry for Willis and Katie Adkinson with two children, William and Emily, presumably Rosetta's older siblings.⁵ Rosetta was known by the first names Rosa, Rosie Etta, and Rosabell, and used both her father's last name and her mother's maiden name, Nubin.⁶ She began performing at age four, singing religious songs in a gospel style. Later, she learned to play the guitar.

Rosetta and her mother were members of the growing Holiness movement, the COGIC, a branch of the Pentecostal church that formed in 1897 in Lexington, Mississippi and included 100 congregations in Mississippi, Tennessee, and Arkansas by 1906. Pentecostal services are known for their lively, exuberant expressions of praise and worship with musical accompaniment, including congregational chanting and singing of hymns in the gospel style. In COGIC churches, the choir is an integral part of the worship experience. In the early twentieth century, "sanctified" women connected with the COGIC denomination began travelling around the country, preaching and singing in the streets as a form of evangelism. By age six, Rosetta appeared regularly with her mother, performing a mix of gospel and secular music styles that would eventually make her famous. As a youth, she could sing and keep on pitch and hold a melody. While her singing was exceptional, she became known for her guitar playing. She played individual tones, melodies, and riffs, instead of merely strumming chords, in a style that was influenced by her mother's mandolin playing. This talent was remarkable because, at the time, few Black women played guitar. Billed as the "singing and guitar-playing miracle," Rosetta was an attraction at her mother's church services. Eventually, Rosetta and her mother joined a travelling evangelistic troupe that performed at churches throughout the South. Through travelling troupes and recordings, the COGIC style eventually made its way to an audience beyond the church. In the 1920s, blind pianist Arizona Dranes was one of the first gospel artists to bring the musical styles of COGIC to the public in performances and her records for the groundbreaking Okeh label. Later, in the 1930s and 1940s, Sister Rosetta Tharpe would bring the COGIC sound to a broader American public.⁷

In the mid-1920s, Rosetta and her mother settled in Chicago, Illinois, where they performed and worshipped at the Roberts Temple COGIC on South State Street.⁸ They also travelled around the country, performing at church conventions. In 1934, at age 19, "Rosie Etta Belle Nuben" married Thomas J. Thorpe, a COGIC preacher, who accompanied her and her mother on their

⁴ A 1948 article in a Camden, Arkansas newspaper claimed Sister Rosetta Tharpe and her father as residents; "Camden is the home of Sister Rosetta. Her father was the late Willis Atkins an old pioneer of Camden." See "Famous Negro Singer Here," *Camden News*, October 1, 1948, p. 2. Camden is about 150 miles southwest of Cotton Plant, Arkansas. It appears that Willis Atkins had lived in Camden. Later in life, Sister Rosetta Tharpe connected with her father's relatives in Camden, but was never a resident of the town.

⁵ Thirteenth Census of the United States: 1910, Cotton Plant, Woodruff County, Arkansas, Sheet 34.

⁶ This nomination will refer to Sister Rosetta Tharpe simply as Rosetta during the period of her life before taking the name Tharpe in the 1930s, owing to the fluid use of several last names.

⁷ Hannah Wakefield, "Religious Music: Beginnings to World War II," in Omari L. Dyson, Judson L. Jeffries Ph.D., Kevin L. Brooks, eds., *African American Culture: An Encyclopedia of People, Traditions, and Customs* (Santa Barbara, California: Greenwood, an imprint of ABC-CLIO, LLC, 2020), p. 772-778. See also Jerma A. Jackson, *Singing in My Soul: Black Gospel Music in a Secular Age* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004).

⁸ The church, which was renamed the Roberts Temple in 1953 after its founder, Bishop William Roberts, was established in 1916 and became famous as the site of Emmitt Till's 1955 funeral, an event that was a catalyst for the Civil Rights Movement.

tours. In 1936 and 1937, Rosetta and her mother became popular in South Florida, performing at the Miami Temple COCIG. The performances were broadcast on the radio on Sunday evening. The marriage to Thorpe lasted only a few years, but Rosetta decided to adopt a version of her husband's surname as her stage name, Sister Rosetta Tharpe. Although she married again, she used Tharpe professionally for the rest of her life. In 1938, she left her husband and moved with her mother to New York City.

In 1938, Sister Rosetta Tharpe's career was catapulted forward by several big events. Her performances with Cab Calloway at Harlem's Cotton Club in October 1938 brought her to fame. On October 12, 1938, *New York Daily News* critic Danton Walker opined in the language of the day that "the new Cotton Club revue is the usual mélange of dynamic dancing, colorful costumes and scintillating syncopation... In an all-star colored cast, the hit of the show is a newcomer named Sister Tharpe, a Holy Roller from Harlem."⁹ On October 31, 1938, at age 23, Sister Rosetta Tharpe recorded her first records, four songs for Decca Records, backed by Lucky Millinder and His Orchestra (Figure 10). The songs, "Rock Me," "That's All," "My Man and I," and "The Lonesome Road," were instant hits, called "swing spirituals," establishing Tharpe as an overnight sensation and one of the first commercially successful gospel recording artists.¹⁰ These releases started a trend for Tharpe, who recorded both traditional numbers for her gospel fan base and up-tempo tunes for her growing secular audience. In November 1938, Sister Rosetta Tharpe, billed as "The Holy Roller Singer," performed at the Paramount Theater in New York with Count Basie and others (Figure 11). That same year, she published a book of music titled *Eighteen Original Negro Spirituals*.¹¹ The popularity of her records and live performances led music impresario John Hammond to include Sister Rosetta Tharpe in his music extravaganza, "From Spirituals to Swing," held in Carnegie Hall in New York City on December 23, 1938. The show featured an all-Black cast and was intended to educate a primarily white audience on the history of African American music. The extravaganza was dedicated to Bessie Smith, the Empress of the Blues, who had died one year earlier, featured many of the most prominent musicians of the day, and was divided into four sections, "Spirituals and Holy Roller Hymns," which included Sister Rosetta Tharpe, "Blues," "Boogie-Woogie," and "Swing," which culminated with Count Basie and His Orchestra. The concert was hailed not only as a musical milestone but also as a social milestone. It "was a cultural event with a social mission: to transform attitudes about race by displaying exemplars of black musical achievement to an urban white audience. In particular, Hammond hoped that by booking an array of top-notch African American acts, many of them newcomers to New York, and showcasing them at a high-culture venue typically unwelcoming of black artists, he could use music as a medium of social change."¹²

⁹ Danton Walker, "Broadway," *New York Daily News*, October 12, 1938, p. 206.

¹⁰ Danton Walker, "Broadway," *New York Daily News*, February 22, 1939, p. 40.

¹¹ Sister Rosetta Tharpe, *Eighteen Original Negro Spirituals: For Voice and Piano* (New York: Mills Music Co., 1938).

¹² Gayle Wald, "From Spirituals to Swing: Sister Rosetta Tharpe and Gospel Crossover," *American Quarterly*, Vol. 55, No. 3 (September 2003), pp. 387-416.



Figure 10: Sister Rosetta Tharpe, “Rock Me,” Decca Records, 1938.



Figure 11. Advertisement for Count Basie and His Orchestra with Sister Tharpe at the Paramount Theater on November 30, 1938, *New York Daily News*, November 29, 1938, p. 470.

In April 1939, *New York Daily News* Broadway critic Danton Walker declared that “singing Sister Rosetta Tharpe who deserted the Holy Rollers of Harlem for a Broadway career, is the greatest discovery in colored talent in the past decade.”¹³ A few months later, in July 1939, a headline in the *New York Age* announced that “New Star Adorns the Apollo Stage for Next Week.” The article under the headline explained that:

Sister Rosetta Tharpe, blues singer, hymn singer and guitar playing star of Broadway’s famed Cotton Club makes her first personal appearance on the stage of the popular

¹³ Danton Walker, “Broadway,” *New York Daily News*, April 5, 1939, p. 672.

125th Street Apollo Theatre next week. Sister Tharpe has sung in churches all over the country since infancy but was discovered only last year by a scout searching for talent for the Cotton Club. She sings hymns, the blues and spirituals as well as play the guitar and is sure to set the Apollo rocking like it has done never before.¹⁴



Figure 12. Sister Rosetta Tharpe, publicity photograph used for her July 1939 performances at the Apollo Theatre, New York City.

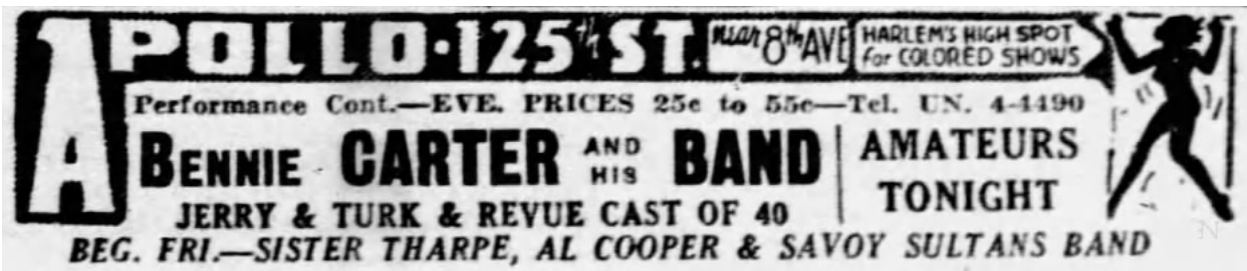


Figure 13. Advertisement for Sister Rosetta Tharpe at the Apollo Theater, July 1939, *New York Daily News*, July 12, 1939, p. 612.

¹⁴ "New Star Adorns the Apollo Stage for Next Week," *New York Age*, July 15, 1939, p. 7.

In the August 28, 1939 issue of *Life* magazine, the most popular magazine in the United States at the time, an article titled “Singer Swings Same Songs in Church and Night Club” portrayed Sister Rosetta Tharpe as a unique performer who deftly straddled the sacred and secular worlds.¹⁵ *Life* photographed Sister Rosetta Tharpe socializing with the most popular jazz musicians of the day including Duke Ellington and Cab Calloway (Figure 15). In less than a year, Sister Rosetta Tharpe had become a star. When the *Cotton Club Parade of 1939* opened in October 1938, she was not mentioned in the advertisements for the nightclub show, but three months later, in January 1939, she was receiving top billing with some of the biggest stars of the day including Cab Calloway, W.C. Handy, and the Nicholas Brothers, the acrobatic dancing duo from Philadelphia. Entertainment critic Danton Walker said of her July 1939 Apollo Theater show:

A year ago I picked out an unknown singer in the Cotton Club revue, which starred Bill Robinson and Cab Calloway, and hailed her as ‘the greatest discovery in colored talent in the past ten years.’ After that Singing Sister Tharpe, a 21-year-old Holy Roller from Harlem, found her name up in lights and her services much in demand from the recording studios. And last nite a huge audience shouted, stamped and whistled its enthusiasm for her swing spirituals.¹⁶

The figure shows two newspaper advertisements for "The Cotton Club Parade of 1939".

The left advertisement is a large, detailed poster. At the top, it says "The Cotton Club Parade of 1939". Below that, the names of the stars are listed: CAB CALLOWAY, NICHOLAS BROS., BERRY BROS., MAE JOHNSON, and W. C. HANDY. Under W. C. HANDY, it says "Composer of 'St. Louis Blues'", "50 SEPIAN STARS", and "50 DUSKY SOUTHERN BELLES". It also states "3 SHOWS NIGHTLY, 7-12-2". At the bottom, it says "Book, Lyrics & Music by BENNY DAVIS & J. FRED COOTS" and "COTTON CLUB B'WAY at 48th ST • Circle 7-1000". There is a small box at the bottom right of the poster that says "NEVER A LOCATION OR COVER CHARGE WINDUP AFTER 10 DINNER \$1.50 SAT-SUN-HOL \$2".

The right advertisement is a vertical strip. At the top, it says "STILL IN FRONT 3rd SMASH MONTH!" and "The COTTON CLUB PARADE". Below that is a cartoon character holding a flag. The names of the stars are listed: Cab CALLOWAY, NICHOLAS Bros., BERRY BROS., MAE JOHNSON, W. C. HANDY, and SISTER THARPE. It also says "100 SEPIAN STARS" and "3 SHOWS NIGHTLY: 7:30-12-2". The prices are listed as "Full Course \$1.50 6 TO 9:30 DINNER 1 9:30". At the bottom, it says "SAT-SUN-HOL \$2 WINDUP AFTER 10 NO COVER EVER" and "COTTON CLUB".

Figure 14. Newspaper advertisements for “The Cotton Club Parade of 1939,” *New York Daily News*, October 13, 1938, and January 5, 1939. In October 1938, Sister Rosetta Tharpe was an unknown, but she had become a star by January 1939.

¹⁵ “Singer Swings Same Songs in Church and Night Club,” *Life*, August 28, 1939, p. 37.

¹⁶ Danton Walker, “Broadway,” *New York Daily News*, July 18, 1939, p. 437.



Figure 15. A photo shoot staged in New York City by *Life* magazine in August 1939. Sister Rosetta Tharpe, on the left, poses with Duke Ellington playing Rosetta's guitar, Cab Calloway at the piano, singer Ivie Anderson, on the right, and others.



Figure 16. Sister Rosetta Tharpe singing at the Café Society Downtown in New York City, 1940.



Figure 17. Lucky Milliner and His Orchestra and Rosetta Tharpe, “Shout, Sister, Shout!,” Decca Records, 1941.

Throughout the World War II years, Sister Rosetta Tharpe played the clubs and theaters of New York City like the Apollo, Strand, Fox, and Zanzibar, first with Lucky Millinder, with whom she was under contract, and then Cab Calloway and others. Sister Rosetta Tharpe recorded “Trouble in Mind,” “Shout, Sister, Shout,” “That’s All,” “I Want a Tall Skinny Papa,” and “Rock Me,” all with Lucky Millinder and His Orchestra in 1941 and 1942 (Figure 17). “Tall Skiny Papa” featured risqué lyrics, which troubled some fans of her sacred music. Writing in *Billboard* magazine in 1942, music critic Maurie Orodenker, who was born and raised in Philadelphia, described Sister Rosetta Tharpe’s vocals on “Rock Me” as “rock-and-roll spiritual singing.” Orodenker is considered the first to use of the phrase “rock and roll” to describe a style of music, and he continued to use the term regularly in reviews over the next few years, several years before it was popularized by Alan Freed and others (Figure 18).¹⁷

¹⁷ Maurie Orodenker, “On the Record,” *Billboard*, May 30, 1942, p. 25.

LUCKY MILLINDER (Decca 18353)

Savoy—FT; VC. Rock Me—FT; V. .

The Savoy Ballroom up New York's Harlem way has already been endeared in jive-land with the *Stompin'* opus of an earlier year. The A side is now another using that jitterbug palace as a well of inspiration. This one, by maestros Lucky and Bill Doggett, is the average run of riff tune in fast-jump tempo. Band bears down heavy for the opening and closing choruses. Filling in is the singing of Trevor Bacon and a chorus split between a hot trumpet and piano tinkles. Band takes to the background for the platter-mate, and it's Sister Rosetta Tharpe for the rock-and-roll spiritual singing. Guitar introduces the spiritual and Miss Tharpe's vocal preachments fill the side. It's the second turn on wax for *Rock Me*, Miss Tharpe having cut it before for the label while still a single.

Figure 18. Maurie Orodener, "On the Record," *Billboard*, May 30, 1942, p. 25.



Figure 19. Sister Rosetta Tharpe with the Lucky Millinder Orchestra, about 1943.

By 1944, Sister Rosetta Tharpe's popularity had grown so great that she was only one of two Black gospel acts, the other was the Dixie Hummingbirds, to record "V-Discs" for U.S. troops overseas (Figure 20). From 1944 to 1951, Sister Rosetta Tharpe's main accompanist was Samuel "Sammy" Blythe Price, a boogie-woogie pianist from Texas. Price and his trio served as the in-house band for Decca Records and backed Sister Rosetta Tharpe on many recordings including "Strange Things Happening Every Day," which was recorded in 1944 and became a hit in 1945. "Strange Things," which showcased her virtuosity as a guitarist and her witty lyrics

and delivery, was the first gospel record to cross over and become a hit on the “race records” chart, the term then used for what later became the R&B chart. “Strange Things” reached #2 on the *Billboard* “race” chart in April 1945 and is considered by music critics and historians to be the first true rock and roll record.¹⁸ In June 1943, Sister Rosetta Tharpe and Foch P. Allen, an entertainment manager, talent scout, publicist, and promoter, were married. They obtained a marriage license in St. Louis.¹⁹ The marriage did not last long, ending in divorce in Nevada in 1947. In 1950, Allen married Audrey Vanterpool, a Broadway dancer.



Figure 20. Sister Tharpe with Lucky Milliner and his Orchestra, “Rock Me” and “That’s All,” V Disc, 1944.

For the entirety of her career, Sister Rosetta Tharpe toured relentlessly, performing across the country, and later across Europe, in both sacred and secular spaces, in venues large and small. She typically performed with others, usually preachers and other gospel performers, often sharing the stage with other COGIC congregants. For example, on June 11, 1946, she performed at Mason Temple in Memphis, Tennessee, sharing the bill with Elder Utah Smith and the Southern Wonders. The Reverend Utah Smith was a pastor from New Orleans who played the electric guitar in a loud, distorted, blues-oriented style much like Sister Rosetta. Famous for his song “I Want Two Wings,” the eccentric COGIC preacher performed with large angel wings strapped to his back as he whipped crowds into frenzies. Although known for musical experimentation and excellence, Memphis undoubtedly witnessed an unprecedented show on June 11, 1946, when Sister Rosetta and Elder Utah rocked the house playing holy songs on their guitars.

¹⁸ Dan DeLuca, “Rocker for the Ages,” *Inquirer*, February 22, 2007, pp. D1, D4.

¹⁹ “Marriage Licenses,” *St. Louis Globe-Democrat*, June 4, 1943, p. 20.



Figure 21: Advertisement in the Memphis Press-Scimitar for a concert by Sister Rosetta Tharpe and Elder Utah Smith, Memphis, June 11, 1946.

In 1946, Sister Rosetta Tharpe saw Marie Knight perform at a Mahalia Jackson concert at the Golden Gate Ballroom in Harlem. Sister Rosetta Tharpe recognized a special talent in Knight and introduced her to executives at Decca Records, who paired them as a duo for recordings. Knight and Sister Rosetta released several call-and-response gospel songs for Decca that broke through to the rhythm and blues charts, an almost unheard-of feat. “Precious Memories,” “Up Above My Head,” “Didn’t It Rain,” and “Beams of Heaven” established the duo as one of the top gospel acts of the era (Figure 22). To promote their recordings, they toured the gospel circuit for several years. Though dismissed by both artists as gossip, many people speculated that the two singers maintained a romantic and sexual relationship.²⁰

²⁰ William Grimes, “Marie Knight, Rich-Voiced Gospel Singer, Dies at 89,” *New York Times*, September 2, 2009.



Figure 22. Sister Rosetta Tharpe and Marie Knight in the mid 1940s.

Knight was not the only talent who Sister Rosetta helped break into show business. In 1947, while playing a show at the Macon City Auditorium, Sister Rosetta Tharpe heard a 15-year-old Richard Wayne Penniman sing in an opening act. Impressed by his talent, she invited the teen to sing with her during the concert and even paid him for it afterwards. It was Penniman's first time performing for an audience outside of church and it inspired him to continue pursuing his passion for music. Penniman matured into a world-renowned rock 'n roll musician known as Little Richard.

In 1948, Sister Rosetta Tharpe purchased a house in Richmond, Virginia, where she, her mother, who had lived with her from Arkansas to Chicago to New York, and Marie Knight could live when they were not on the road performing. The house, which cost \$7,500, was located at 2306 Barton Avenue in Barton Heights, a middle-class African American neighborhood north of

downtown Richmond.²¹ A 1950 Richmond city directory listed the signer as “Tharpe Rosetta musician h2306 Barton av.”

In 1949, to commemorate her first anniversary of being a homeowner, Tharpe put on a concert at what is now the Altria Theater in Richmond, Virginia. Supporting her for that concert were the Twilight Singers, who Rosetta adopted as her background singers for future concerts, renaming them The Rosettes. That same year, 1949, Tharpe and her mother, Katie Bell Nubin, formed a successful duo, releasing a record with “Ninety-Nine And A Half Won't Do” and “Daniel In The Lion's Den” (Figure 23). Of the record, one music critique noted: “That’s a damn good trick – putting religion to rhythm.”²² While appearing at the Apollo Theatre in Harlem, the mother and daughter performed “Spirituals in the Modern Manner.” Even though Tharpe had returned to the church's fold, she could not resist a jab at the conservatism of some fellow church members. Just before beginning one song Tharpe observed to the audience, “God is as likely to be found at the Apollo as anywhere else; he doesn't stay at church all the time.” On New Year's Day 1950, Sister Rosetta Tharpe made her first national television appearance, on the Chesterfield Supper Club with Perry Como, where she sang “White Christmas” in a horse-drawn wagon. In the summer of 1950, she and her mother toured the country with supporting acts (Figure 24).



Figure 23. Sister Rosetta Tharpe and Her Mother (Katie Bell Nubin) with Sam Price Trio, “Ninety-Nine And A Half Won't Do” and “Daniel In The Lion's Den,” Decca Records, 1949.

²¹ Gayle F. Wald, *Shout, Sister, Shout!: The Untold Story of Rock-and-Roll Trailblazer Sister Rosetta Tharpe*. Boston: Beacon Press, 2007.

²² Lloyd Lacy, “Platter Patter: Decca Produces Mellow Blues,” *Santa Fe New Mexican*, September 18, 1949, p. 5.



Figure 24. Advertisement for Sister Rosetta Tharpe performing in Kansas City, July 14, 1950, in the Kansas City Times, July 14, 1950, p. 32.

By the end of 1950, Sister Rosetta Tharpe and Marie Knight had disconnected their careers and gone their separate ways. On July 3, 1951, 25,000 people bought tickets to witness Sister Rosetta Tharpe's wedding to her business manager Russell Morrison, her third marriage, in a ceremony held at Washington DC's Griffith Stadium.²³ The promotional event included the wedding, fireworks, and a concert. Decca captured audio recordings of the entire three-hour event for release as an album.²⁴ The 1953 Richmond, Virginia city directory listed the singer, no longer single, as "Russell (Rosetta T) h2306 Barton av."

Throughout the 1950s, Sister Rosetta Tharpe continued to perform and record. After she lost her recording contract with Decca, she signed with Mercury Records in 1956. That year, Sister Rosetta Tharpe recorded an album with the gospel quartet The Harmonizing Four and studio jazz musicians from New York City titled *Gospel Train*. Critics highly regarded the album, which represented a change in style and presaged her influence on blues and blues rock guitarists of the 1960s. A contemporary review in *Billboard* magazine quotes the Methodist minister John Wesley, who asked, "Why should the devil have all the good tunes?" The reviewer responds that "Sister Tharpe shows that he hasn't, and she does this with her well-known rocking rhythm and zest. ... A choir accompanies the sister. When they all feel the spirit on them it adds up to a whale of a performance."²⁵

²³ "Sister Rosetta to Be Welcomed Home as Bride," *Richmond News-Leader*, June 29, 1951, p. 19.

²⁴ Dixie Gilliland, "Wedding and Gospel Should Make Year's Most Unusual Recording," *Hutchinson News*, July 22, 1951, p. 5.

²⁵ "Reviews and Ratings of New Popular Albums," *Billboard*, December 15, 1956, p. 39.

The following year, Sister Rosetta Tharpe's Richmond home and belongings were seized and auctioned off on April 25, 1957 to cover an unpaid mortgage debt (Figure 25). Sister Rosetta Tharpe and her husband Russell Morrison left Richmond, making their way to Philadelphia.

TRUSTEES Auction Sale of Residence, 2306 Barton Avenue, Richmond, Virginia. Default having been made in the debt secured by Deed of Trust from Sister Rosetta Tharpe, unmarried, dated March 29, 1951 and recorded in the Clerk's Office of the Richmond Chancery Court in Deed Book 523-B, page 484 and being required so to do by the noteholder, the undersigned Trustee will offer the above property for sale at public auction on the premises, for cash, on Thursday, April 25, 1957 at 4:30 P. M. Bidders deposit \$500.00.
JOHN C. WILLIAMS,
Trustee 25M

Figure 25. Advertisement for auction on April 25, 1957, *Richmond Times-Dispatch*, April 22, 1957, p. 20.

Jazzshows present— **America's**
Sensational Gospel Singing Favourite
Sister ROSETTA THARPE
and
CHRIS BARBER'S JAZZ BAND
CIVIC HALL, TUESDAY,
WOLVERHAMPTON Nov. 26th at 7-30 p.m.
Reserved Seats. 6/6, 8/-, 5/6, 5/-, 4/- from Box Office, Civic Hall.

Figure 26. Advertisement for a concert during Sister Rosetta Tharpe's tour of the United Kingdom in 1957, *Walsall Observer and South Staffordshire Chronicle*, November 15, 1957, p. 13.

Later in 1957, Sister Rosetta Tharpe toured Europe for the first time, performing for one month in the United Kingdom with British trombonist and jazz band leader Chris Barber (Figure 26 and Figure 27). At a press conference upon her arrival in London for the tour, Sister Rosetta Tharpe explained that "I am not a female Billy Graham. I have sung in the streets, in night-clubs, in theatres and in churches, and I always sing the same songs. Religion is a duty. I combine entertainment with being a missionary. Any money I earn from the stage I keep. Any money I earn in church goes to the church."²⁶ Over the next few years, Sister Rosetta Tharpe would tour extensively in Europe, in the United Kingdom, France, Germany, Spain, and Scandinavia.

²⁶ "Gospel Singer Arrives," *Daily Telegraph and Morning Post* (London), November 22, 1957, p. 11. See also "Sister Rosetta in Here to 'Rock' Hymns," *Evening Standard* (London), November 21, 1957, p. 3.



Figure 27. Sister Rosetta Tharp with Chris Barber in Cardiff, Wales, 1957.

In the late 1950s, Sister Rosetta Tharpe lived a transient lifestyle, spending most of her time on the road performing. As early as 1959, she began to refer to Philadelphia as her hometown. In an interview with a Minneapolis reporter in January 1959, while performing at the city's Key Club, she explained that her present home base was Philadelphia. She also informed the reporter that she likes to go fishing on her days off and is always in the company of her husband Russell Morrison and their dog Chubby, a cocker-poodle mixture. She also noted that she was giving up the title "Sister." She explained that "it sounds so religious. People think I'm Catholic – and I love Catholics – but I don't happen to be one."²⁷ Other publications of the time also noted that Sister Rosetta Tharpe was now residing in Philadelphia, but no permanent address for her has been found for the years 1959 to 1961.²⁸ One article published in June 1960 noted that she and her husband were in Philadelphia, where they "rested with friends ... following a strenuous year of triumphant concerts in more than a half-dozen European countries."²⁹

On March 29, 1962, Sister Rosetta Tharpe and her husband Russell Morrison purchased the property at 1102 Master Street from the Denny Development Corporation for \$13,450.³⁰ The house in Yorktown was Rosetta Tharpe's primary residence until her death in 1973. While living on Master Street, Sister Rosetta Tharpe worshipped at the nearby Bright Hope Baptist Church, where she regularly sang for Sunday services.

Sister Rosetta Tharpe recorded two albums for Verve Records in the early 1960s, *Sister on Tour* (1961) and *The Gospel Truth* (1962). In April and May 1964, Sister Rosetta Tharpe toured

²⁷ Stephanie Brown, " 'Sister' Wants to Be Known as Just Plain Rosetta Tharpe," *Minneapolis Star*, January 5, 1959, p. 23.

²⁸ The following articles referred to Rosetta Tharpe as a resident of Philadelphia. "Gospel Singers to Appear at Mt. Vernon Center," *Daily Item* (Port Chester, New York), March 3, 1960, p. 7. "Concert Planned at Johnson City," *Bristol Virginia-Tennessean*, July 25, 1962, p. 5.

²⁹ "Sister Tharpe Rests Before Tour," *Pittsburgh Courier*, June 25, 1960, p. 24.

³⁰ See Philadelphia Department of Records, Deed CAB-1865-567.

Europe as part of The American Folk Blues and Gospel Caravan, alongside Muddy Waters and Otis Spann, Ransom Knowling and Little Willie Smith, Reverend Gary Davis, Cousin Joe, Sonny Terry and Brownie McGhee. She was introduced on stage and accompanied on piano by Cousin Joe Pleasant. Granada Television recorded a concert in the rain at the disused railway station at Wilbraham Road, Manchester, in May 1964. At that show, the musicians performed on one platform while the audience was seated on the opposite platform. Sister Rosetta Tharpe's performance of "Didn't It Rain" on the wet railway platform stole the show and has since become to be known as one of the great performances of her career (Figure 28). Also in 1964, Sister Rosetta Tharpe appeared at the Newport Jazz Festival with Count Basie, with whom she has performed early in her career.



Figure 28. Sister Rosetta Tharpe performing with The American Folk Blues and Gospel Caravan, Manchester, England, May 1964.



PHILHARMONIC HALL
HOPE STREET, LIVERPOOL
FRIDAY 1st OF MAY AT
8 P.M. ONLY
ROBERTS AND IRELAND LTD.
 (in association with Harold Davison)
PRESENT
THE AMERICAN FOLK BLUES
AND GOSPEL CARAVAN
WITH
SONNY TERRY, BROWNIE MCGHEE,
MUDDY WATERS, SISTER ROSETTA
THARPE
 Also
 Missisipi John Hurt, Rev. Gary Davis,
 Cousin Joe Pleasant, Otis Span.
Tickets: 20/-, 15/6, 12/6, 10/-, 7/6.
Box 12 6 each (Box 75/- 6 seats)
From: Rushworths Cranes,
Philharmonic Box Office.
Postal Applications to: Philharmonic
Box Office, Hope Street, Liverpool.
Enclosing P.O. and s.a.e
Box Office now open

Figure 29. Advertisement for The American Folk Blues and Gospel Caravan in Liverpool, England, in the Liverpool Echo, April 7, 1964, p. 9.

In 1965, Sister Rosetta Tharpe made a gospel record with Little Richard, who she had assisted as he was breaking into show business (Figure 31). She also appeared on television on the show *TV Gospel Time* (Figure 30). In 1967, Sister Rosetta Tharpe appeared at the Newport Folk Festival with her mother Katie Bell Nubin, with whom she had been singing for nearly 50 years, since she was a child. Sister Rosetta Tharpe toured extensively in 1967, visiting England, France, Germany, Spain, the Netherlands, Denmark, and other Scandinavian countries.

The following year, in 1968, Katie Bell Nubin, Sister Rosetta's constant companion throughout her life, died. That year, Sister Rosetta Tharpe made two records on the Savoy label, *Precious Memories* and *Singing in My Soul*, the former earning her a Grammy nomination for Best Soul Gospel Performance.



Figure 30. Sister Rosetta Tharpe on TV Gospel Time, about 1965.



Figure 31. Little Richard with Sister Rosetta Tharpe, "Really Movin' Gospel," Guest Star Records, 1965.

Sister Rosetta Tharpe suffered a stroke in Geneva, Switzerland in December 1970 while on tour with the American Folk, Blues and Gospel Festival. After a hospitalization in Geneva, she was compelled to leave the tour and return to the United States, where she recovered at Temple University Hospital. Her health continued to deteriorate and one of her legs was amputated owing to complications from diabetes in 1971.

Despite her ailments, she continued to perform. In the summer of 1972, Sister Rosetta Tharpe performed at Soul at the Center, a historic “festival of Black theater, dance, poetry, and music” at Lincoln Center in New York City (Figure 32).³¹

On October 9, 1973, the eve of a scheduled recording session, Sister Rosetta Tharpe died from another stroke, suffered while at home in Philadelphia. Her funeral was held close to her home at 1102 Master Street, at Bright Hope Baptist Church on N. 12th Street Street. Marie Knight, her former partner, did her makeup and selected her clothing for burial. At the service, she sang “Peace in the Valley” and gospel great Marion Williams sang “Precious Lord.” Sister Rosetta Tharpe was buried without a marker at Northwood Cemetery in Philadelphia’s West Oak Lane neighborhood.³² In 2008, fans raised money and installed a marker at the grave (Figure 33).³³

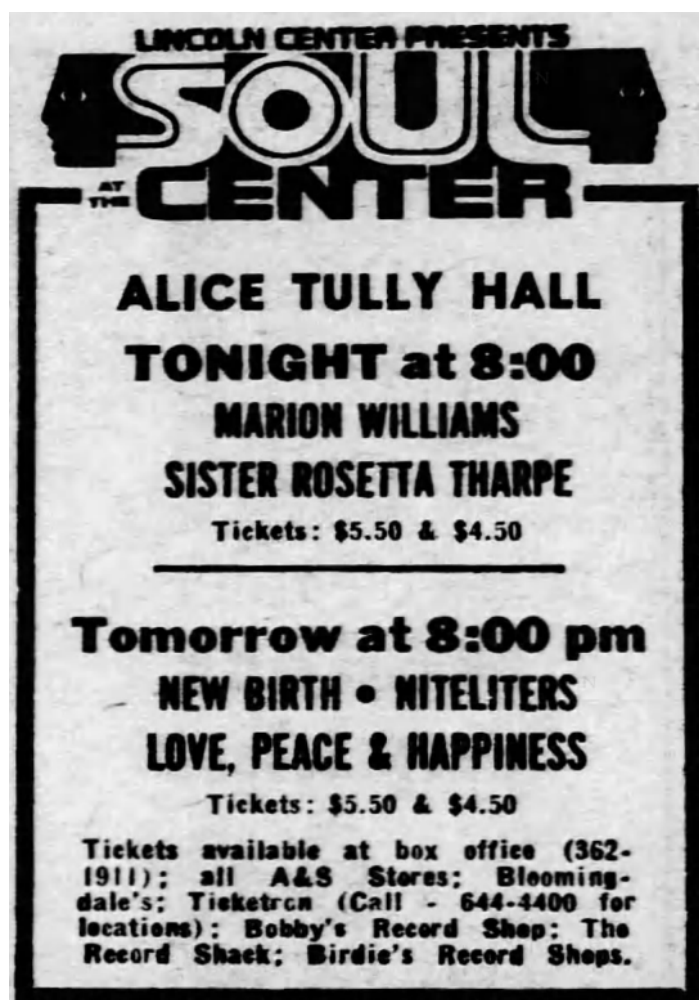


Figure 32. Advertisement for Lincoln Center Presents Soul at the Center, Daily News, July 26, 1972, p. 218.

³¹ Patricia O’Haire, “Soul at Center a Treat,” *New York Daily News*, July 25, 1972, p. 226.

³² “Sister Rosetta Tharpe, 56, Renowned Gospel Singer,” *Inquirer*, October 11, 1973, p. 40.

³³ Joel Rose, “Sister Rosetta Tharpe: Etched in Stone at Last,” *NPR*, March 20, 2009, <https://www.npr.org/2009/03/20/102167126/sister-rosetta-tharpe-etched-in-stone-at-last>; Yoni Kroll, “Grave Images: A musical trip around Philadelphia’s historic cemeteries,” *XPN Music News*, July 31, 2020, <https://xpn.org/2020/07/31/philadelphia-music-graves/>



Figure 33. Sister Rosetta Tharpe's gravesite in Northwood Cemetery, West Oak Lane, Philadelphia.

CONCLUSION

At the time of her death in 1973, Sister Rosetta Tharpe, who had been a huge star in the 1940s, had slipped from the public's awareness in the United States. In the intervening years, numerous musicians have acknowledged her influence on the creation of rock and roll music and the American public has rightfully returned her to a place of prominence. In 1992, when Johnny Cash was inducted into the Rock & Roll Hall of Fame, he referenced Sister Rosetta Tharpe when speaking about rock's early influences on him. He remembered buying records as a kid: "It was at the Home of the Blues record shop where I bought my first recording of Sister Rosetta Tharpe singing those great gospel songs," he told Rock & Roll Hall of Fame crowd. "Some of the earlier songs I wrote were influenced by people like Sister Rosetta Tharpe."³⁴ His daughter Rosanne Cash later stated in an interview with Larry King that Sister Rosetta Tharpe was her father's favorite singer.

Chuck Berry once said his entire career was "one long Sister Rosetta Tharpe impersonation." All you need to hear is the guitar introduction to Sister Rosetta's 1947 hit "The Lord Followed Me" to recognize Chuck Berry's musical debt to her. Little Richard called her his greatest influence. Elvis Presley, Carl Perkins, and Jerry Lee Lewis were also all inspired by Sister Rosetta Tharpe. So was Little Walter, whose 1955 No.1 R&B hit, "My Babe," owed everything to one of her biggest hits, "This Train." Sister Rosetta Tharpe's tours of the United Kingdom in the

³⁴ Marissa Lorusso, "How One of Music's Biggest Stars Almost Disappeared, And How Her Legacy Was Saved," *NPR Music*, September 27, 2019, <https://www.npr.org/2019/09/27/759601364/how-one-of-musics-biggest-stars-almost-disappeared-and-how-her-legacy-was-saved>

late 1950s and early 1960s inspired the young Keith Richards, Eric Clapton, and others to create the British blues scene that led to the mid-60s British Invasion.³⁵ Other musicians, including Aretha Franklin and Isaac Hayes, have identified her singing, guitar playing, and showmanship as an important influence on them. Tina Turner credits Sister Rosetta Tharpe, along with Mahalia Jackson, as early musical influences.

In the last 20 years or so, Sister Rosetta Tharpe has finally received the recognition for her influence on American music and cultural that she failed to receive at her death in 1973. The United States Postal Service issued a 32-cent commemorative stamp to honor Sister Rosetta Tharpe on July 15, 1998 (Figure 34). In 2003, the album *Shout, Sister Shout: A Tribute to Sister Rosetta Tharpe* was released, with versions of Sister Rosetta Tharpe's songs performed by prominent female artists including Maria Muldaur, Odetta, and Marcia Ball. In 2005, Librarian of Congress James H. Billington selected Sister Rosetta Tharpe's 1944 recording of "Down by the Riverside" for inclusion in the National Recording Registry, which celebrates the richness and variety of the nation's audio legacy and underscores the responsibility to assure the long-term preservation of that legacy for future generations. Gayle Wald published her definitive biography of Sister Rosetta Tharpe, titled *Shout, Sister, Shout!: The Untold Story of Rock-and-Roll Trailblazer Sister Rosetta Tharpe*, in 2007. That same year, Sister Rosetta Tharpe was inducted into the Blues Hall of Fame. In 2008, Pennsylvania Governor Edward G. Rendell declared that January 11 would be known as "Sister Rosetta Tharpe Day" in Pennsylvania. On October 24, 2011, a Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission historical marker plaque was unveiled outside of Sister Rosetta Tharpe's Philadelphia home at 1102 Master Street. In 2011, the British Broadcasting Corporation aired a one-hour documentary entitled *Sister Rosetta Tharpe: The Godmother of Rock & Roll*, written and directed by British filmmaker Mick Csaky. In 2013, the documentary was shown in the United States as part of the PBS series *American Masters*. Sister Rosetta Tharpe was inducted into the Arkansas Black Hall of Fame in 2012 and the Arkansas Entertainers Hall of Fame in 2013. On September 12, 2016, the musical play *Marie and Rosetta*, based on the relationship between Sister Rosetta Tharpe and Marie Knight, opened at the Atlantic Theater Company in New York City. In 2017, the State of Arkansas designated Highway 17 from Cotton Plant to Brinkley as the Sister Rosetta Tharpe Memorial Highway. In July 2017, *Shout, Sister, Shout!*, a musical conceived and directed by Randy Johnson and based on Sister Rosetta Tharpe's life as documented in Gayle Wald's biography, had its world premiere at the Pasadena Playhouse in California. On December 13, 2017, Sister Rosetta Tharpe was elected to the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame as an Early Influence. On April 14, 2018, Brittany Howard of Alabama Shakes performed "That's All" and "Strange Things Happen Every Day," two of Sister Rosetta Tharpe's hits, at Tharpe's stirring induction into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame in Cleveland, Ohio.³⁶ Howard has said, "As far as I'm concerned, Sister Rosetta Tharpe was who created rock and roll as we know it."³⁷

³⁵ Stu Hackel, "Sister Rosetta Tharpe: The Godmother Of Rock'N'Roll: A pioneer who influenced everyone from Chuck Berry to Keith Richards, Sister Rosetta Tharpe played rock'n'roll way before anyone else," *Udiscovermusic*, March 20, 2022, <https://www.udiscovermusic.com/stories/sister-rosetta-tharpe-rocknroll-pioneer/>

³⁶ Elias Leight and Kory Grow, "Brittany Howard Performs Stirring Sister Rosetta Tharpe Tribute at Rock and Roll Hall of Fame," *Rolling Stone*, April 15, 2018, <https://www.rollingstone.com/music/music-news/brittany-howard-performs-stirring-sister-rosetta-tharpe-tribute-at-rock-and-roll-hall-of-fame-629486/>

³⁷ Richard Bienstock, "Brittany Howard: 'Sister Rosetta Tharpe created rock and roll as we know it,'" *Guitar World*, March 1, 2021, <https://www.guitarworld.com/news/brittany-howard-sister-rosetta-tharpe-created-rock-and-roll-as-we-know-it>

In summary, the property at 1102 Master Street merits listing on the Philadelphia Register of Historic Places, satisfying Criterion for Designation A, owing to its association with Sister Rosetta Tharpe.



Figure 34. United State Postal Service commemorative stamp of Sister Rosetta Tharpe, 1998.

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