

# Glendale documentary a study in black and white

## African-American history project encounters snags along the way

BY CARRIE WHITAKER | [CWHITAKER@ENQUIRER.COM](mailto:CWHITAKER@ENQUIRER.COM)

It's the only way she can explain it: Glendale was half and half.

And if you were a black child growing up in the village in the 1950s and '60s, there was a half where you just didn't fit.

That doesn't mean Frances Carcile Thacker remembers a painful childhood. That's just the way things were.

Thacker's story will be just one of many collected by fellow resident Paul Breidenbach as he pieces together a documentary about African-American history in Glendale, a community more often recognized for its affluent white residents and its historic buildings.

### • Video: [Completing Glendale's history](#)



[Clyde Cooper looks over family photos in his home. His family was on its way to Detroit in the 1930s when his mother decided to stay in Glendale. He was 9 years old when they moved there.](#)

The village now is about 14 percent black, about 5 percentage points less than the population mix in the early 1900s.

The film has been a work in progress for the last four years. Officials had hoped to finish it for the city's sesquicentennial in 2005, but the project has hit a number of snags, including lack of funding and the loss of one of its key producers, Breidenbach said.

But a new committee has been formed and members will edit down more than 40 hours of interviews.

"Some would ask, 'Why bring all of this back up, it's unpleasant, it's painful,' " Breidenbach said. "The main thing for me is that we don't worry so much about it being painful. ... You don't learn from it by ignoring it or finding some way of not knowing it."

Thacker was born in the house she and husband, Thomas, live in on Washington Avenue. It once housed her mother's beauty salon. They lived in one of two black neighborhoods. The other was west of the railroad tracks across from village square.

She remembers walking to Eckstein School, just down the street from her house. For decades it was the school for black children, while the white children went to elementary school at Glendale School. This ended in the 1950s after the NAACP sued the schools for discrimination and got black students admitted to Glendale School.

There was no segregated high school in Glendale. All students who attended school went to Glendale High School on Congress Avenue.

Many black families had come to Glendale from the South, Clyde Cooper said.

In the 1930s, Cooper's mother left him and his three siblings with their grandpa in Knoxville, Tenn., with her sights set on Detroit, but on the way there she stopped at a family member's house in Glendale and stayed.

"That's the way it worked. One person would be adventurous and leave, write back, sometimes send money," Cooper said. "Then other members of the family would come join them. It seems to be a pattern, people from certain states went to certain states."



Frances Thacker's mother ran a beauty salon in the home where she still lives.

In Greater Cincinnati, there were jobs outside of farming and working for white families, the two likely options in the South, he said. Men who came to Glendale could get factory jobs or become porters for General Electric, Procter & Gamble and others.

Cooper moved to Glendale when he was 9. He graduated from Glendale High School in 1949, where his class of 12 students included two other black students. After nearly two years in the Army, he got a job cleaning floors at General Electric.

"I'd see white kids I graduated school with and they'd stop me and say, 'Why aren't you doing something else?' " Cooper said. "I'd say, 'Cause they won't let me do anything else.' "



Glendale resident Frances Thacker collects pieces of art depicting the lives of African-Americans. This piece was her mother's.

Cooper said he chose his battles. While stationed in Germany, his all-black Army unit continually got high praise, but one unit would be asked to stay behind when all the others went into town. The man in charge said Cooper's unit would stay behind.

"In the military, you only speak when you are spoken to. He was speaking to me," Cooper said. "I said, 'There's no incentive for being the best if you are going to be punished for it.' That night we went into town."

Born more than two decades after Cooper, Thacker, too, can identify with discrimination. In high school she tried to get co-op jobs, but was upset when another student got the job.

She has broken through some glass ceilings in her life. She volunteers with various groups and her husband was Glendale fire chief and still works for the Fire Department as a volunteer. All of their kids have at least a bachelor's degree.

Today, she works for Princeton City Schools' transportation department, driving students to school.

When the documentary is complete, she hopes all students see it.

The world isn't all that different today than it was then, she said. "You still have to prove yourself."