III. African Americans in Camden: The Recent Past
The buildings of Boylan-Haven-Mather Academy were not easy to tear down. Local residents recall that when wrecking crews began their work in the fall of 1993, they found the buildings to be sturdier than anyone had imagined. To Camdenites who cherished fond memories of the school, the buildings’ seeming resistance to destruction belied previous statements by owners and city officials that the facilities were dangerous and beyond repair.\textsuperscript{345} When the plaster and brick finally fell to bulldozers, a powerful symbol of black Camden was gone. The demolition of Mather was evidence of a national trend: as opportunities opened for blacks to participate more fully in white society in the wake of the civil rights movement, many of the social and economic institutions that had nurtured and sustained the black community during the era of segregation experienced a decline.

In Camden and across the South, the decades since the end of Jim Crow have meant both gains and losses for African Americans. Following passage of the Voting Rights Act of 1965, black South Carolinians returned to the formal political process in large numbers. Between 1958 and 1970, the number of registered black voters in the state nearly quadrupled to 220,000. In 1970, voters in Charleston and Richland Counties elected three African Americans to the General Assembly, the first to serve since the 1890s.\textsuperscript{346} Four years later, there were thirteen African Americans in the legislature. In Camden and Kershaw County, black candidates began running for local offices during the 1970s. African Americans won seats on the county council in 1980 and 1984 and on the school board in 1988.\textsuperscript{347} Today, one African American serves on Camden’s five-member city council, and city agencies employ African Americans, although not in top positions.\textsuperscript{348} The local branch of the NAACP remains active, and the Black Caucus, an organization of black community leaders, seeks to increase black representation in local government.\textsuperscript{349}

After the end of segregation, blacks in Camden increasingly held jobs at one of the area’s major employers, mostly in manufacturing, health care, and education.\textsuperscript{350} During the 1990s, DuPont’s May Plant, now known as INVISTA, cut jobs drastically. The plant hired its first black site manager, Cornelius M. Jamison, in 2002.\textsuperscript{351} Camden’s horse industry, while not as central to the area’s economic life as it was in the 1930s, continued to employ large numbers of African Americans, albeit in the least visible roles. While African Americans shared in the area’s relative prosperity, they continued to lag behind whites in education and economics. At the turn of the twenty-first century, Kershaw County blacks were as likely as whites to graduate from high school, but almost half as likely to have college degrees. Blacks’ per capita income was approximately half that of whites, and black unemployment was twice as high. More than a quarter of the county’s African Americans lived below the poverty line, compared with 8.6 per

\textsuperscript{346} Edgar, \textit{South Carolina}, 541-2.
\textsuperscript{347} “Kershaw County Results for All Black Candidates,” South Carolina Political Collections, University of South Carolina.
\textsuperscript{349} Interview with Rev. Otis Scott, 7 February 2006.
\textsuperscript{351} \textit{May Times} 52, no. 1 (January- September 2002) Vertical File, Camden Archives and Museum, Camden, SC.
cent of whites. Paradoxically, the end of Jim Crow also saw a decline in black entrepreneurship. Today, a casual visitor walking on Broad and Rutledge Streets would never know that it had been the heart of Camden’s thriving black business district. Virtually the only survivors are barbershops, beauty salons, and funeral homes—services that remain largely segregated by race throughout the South.

As one of the first federal agencies to overturn policies of segregation, the military has implemented quota systems and affirmative action programs to ensure more opportunities for African-American soldiers since the Vietnam War. In Camden, veterans’ groups remained largely segregated. Founded in 1950, the Sanders-Stoney American Legion Post gave African-American veterans and their spouses a place to meet and share common experiences, to create a social network that aided the Camden veteran population, and to remember the legacy of African-American soldiers. In 1988, the group opened its own building. Another local institution that remained segregated after the demise of Jim Crow was the church. Camden’s Ministerial Alliance is a multiracial, multi-denominational group of pastors, who work together to promote cooperation among local churches. The group sponsors such events as an interracial Thanksgiving service. Despite these attempts, Sunday morning remains the most segregated hour in Camden and across the country. As African Americans have gained access to more opportunities in white society in the decades since the civil rights movement, some Camdenites have seen a decline in the church’s once-central role in the black community.

The desegregation of the schools in Kershaw County meant better funding and facilities for Camden’s black students, but the closing of previously all-black schools represented the dissolution of institutions that had been centers of the African-American community. Jackson Colored High School and Jackson Colored Grammar School, descendants of one of the Freedmen’s Bureau schools from the early days of Reconstruction, were the first to feel the effects of desegregation. When the school district consolidated, the teachers and student bodies of both Jackson schools were dispersed and the buildings left empty. Jackson Colored Grammar school was used for a secondary learning center until 1981, when the district tore it down to make way for the new Jackson Elementary school. The private Boylin-Haven-Mather Academy fared no better after desegregation. As public schools improved and transportation became available, Mather lost its competitive edge. From its heyday of some 300 students in the 1950s, the school’s population declined to 57 in 1980. In 1983, the Women’s Division of the United Methodist Church decided to close Mather’s doors. In the early 1990s, a group of community activists joined with such organizations as the Kershaw County United Way, the Ministerial Alliance, and the Kershaw County Historical Society in an effort to rehabilitate the

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353 Interview with Charles and Gladys Wood, 14 February 2006.
354 Edgar, South Carolina, 569.
355 Alt and Alt, Black Soldiers, 120 – 121.
357 Interview with Rev. Otis Scott, 7 February 2006.
Mather campus. Among the possibilities they investigated were turning the property into a federal Job Corps site or a centralized county services facility. Former students blamed the city and the owner for the buildings’ demolition in September 1993, but noted that the black community did not unite quickly enough to save them.\footnote{Michelle R. Davis, “Camden’s Mather Academy Being Demolished,” The State, Columbia, 1 October 1993; Interview with Dr. Daisy Alexander, 7 February 2006; and Interview with Frankie Hull, 8 February 2006.} Today, all that remains of the educational oasis are the front gates bearing the institute’s name.\footnote{Cahn, “Boylan-Haven-Mather Academy.”}

The loss of significant structures in recent decades has inspired black and white Camden residents to seek to protect evidence of the city’s African-American heritage. In 1988, the Jackson Schools Alumni erected a large monument near the site of the original Jackson School building on the corner of Dekalb and Campbell Streets.\footnote{Martha Bruce, “Jackson Monument Dedication Set.”} Today, efforts are underway to create a monument park on the former Mather property, including pictures of the school, a roster of graduates, and seating.\footnote{Cahn, “Boylan-Haven-Mather Academy.”} The park is part of an initiative of the Kershaw County Clean Community Commission (KCCCC) to beautify Campbell Street and promote it as one of the city’s heritage tourism attractions. The project focuses on the one-mile stretch of Campbell Street from Meeting Street to DeKalb Street and will highlight the Mather and Jackson monuments as well as Cedars Cemetery.