

DR. OSSIAN SWEET MEMORIAL PARK



DR. OSSIAN SWEET MEMORIAL PARK



LEGACY TREE & QUOTE TREE GRATE



SEATING FOR CONTEMPLATION AND GROUP DISCUSSION



HISTORIC FOUNDATION INTERPRETIVE ELEMENT



ORNAMENTAL FLOWERING TREES



EVERGREEN SCREENING

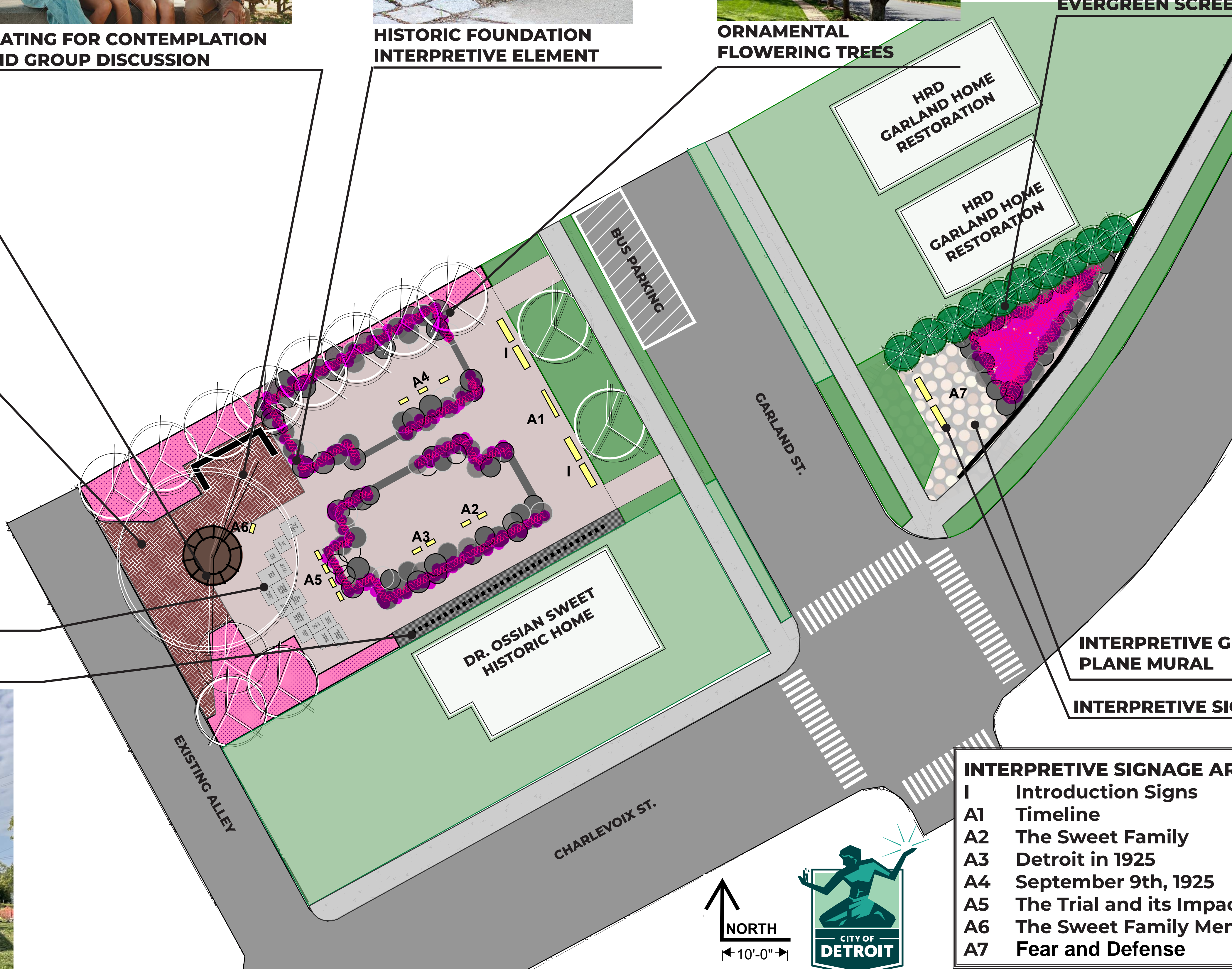


EVENT SUPPORT AREA



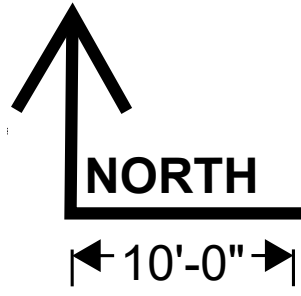
INTERPRETIVE PAVING ELEMENT

QUOTE WALL



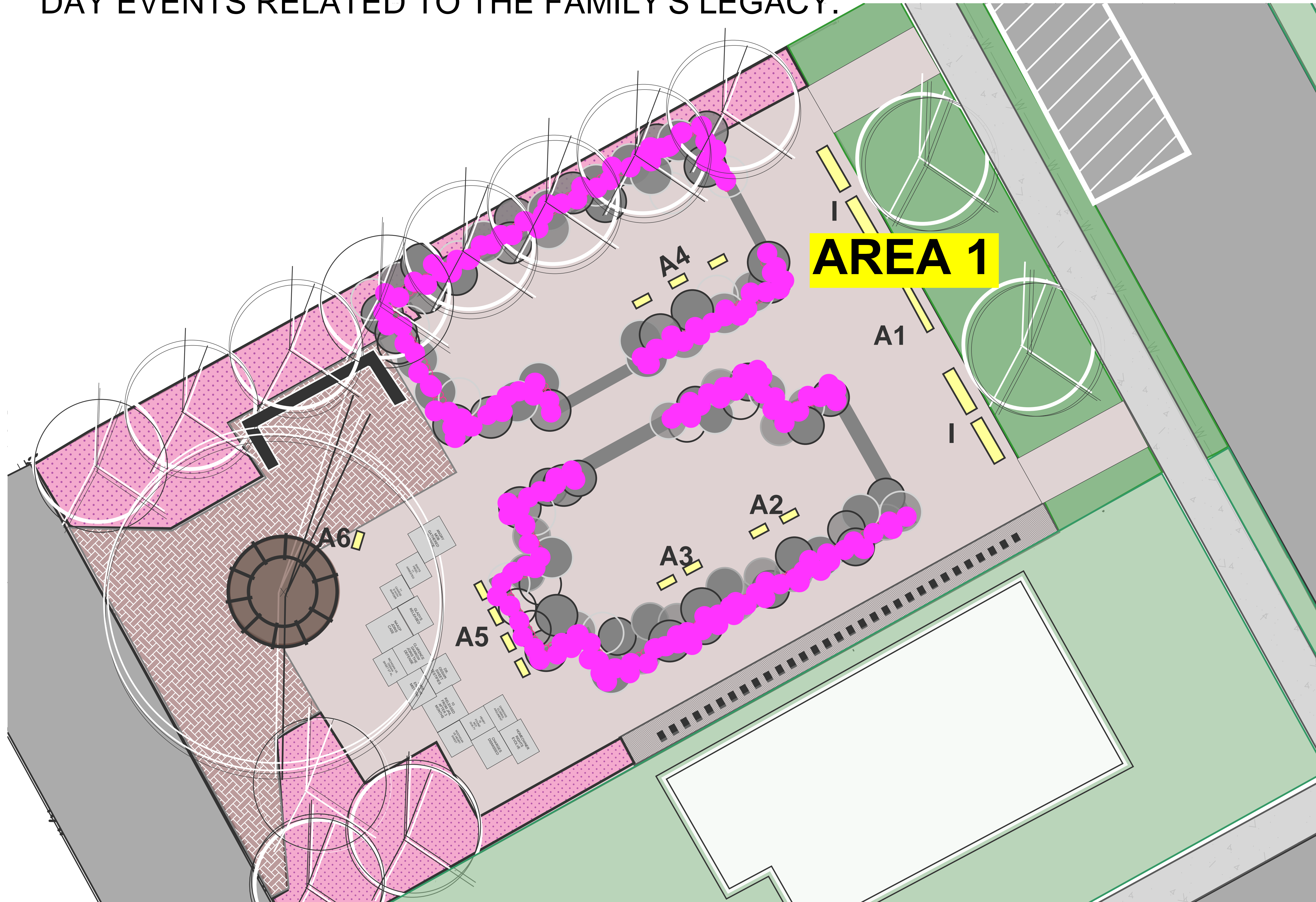
INTERPRETIVE SIGNAGE AREAS

- I Introduction Signs
- A1 Timeline
- A2 The Sweet Family
- A3 Detroit in 1925
- A4 September 9th, 1925
- A5 The Trial and its Impacts
- A6 The Sweet Family Memorial
- A7 Fear and Defense



AREA 1 - TIMELINE + SITE INTRO

TIMELINE - FROM DR. SWEETS BIRTH THROUGH MODERN DAY EVENTS RELATED TO THE FAMILY'S LEGACY.



AREA 1 - TIMELINE

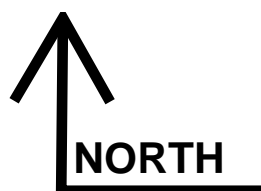
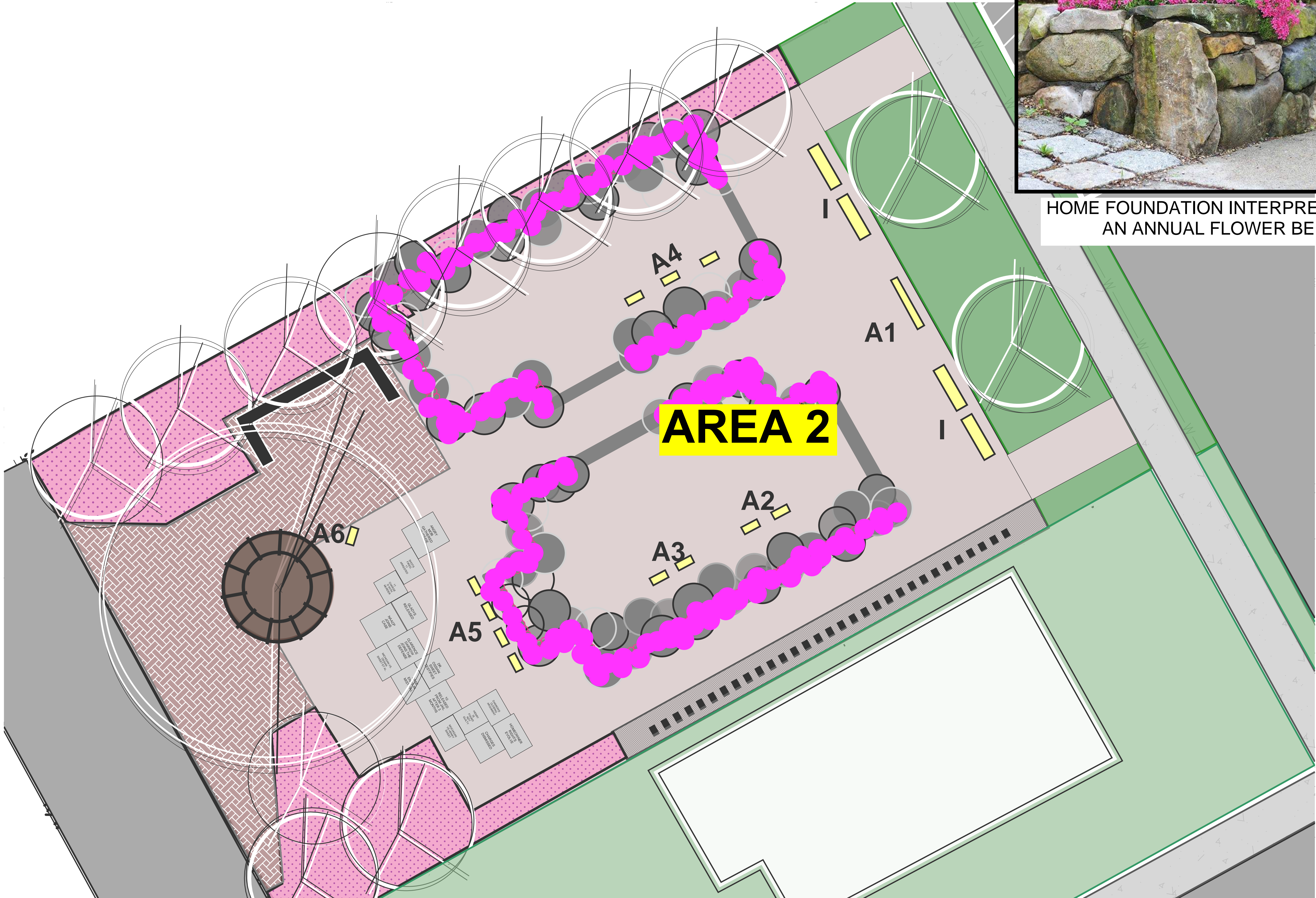


Timeline Mockup Perspective

AREA 2 - THE SWEET FAMILY STORY



HOME FOUNDATION INTERPRETED AS AN ANNUAL FLOWER BED



AREA 2 - THE SWEET FAMILY STORY

SWEET HISTORY PART 1

DR. OSSIAN SWEET

BLACK EXCELLENCE



Ossian's parents emphasized education and his ambition took him far.

When he was 13, he went away to Wilberforce Academy in Ohio, the first school owned and operated by Black educators. Ossian became a charter member of the Black fraternity, Kappa Alpha Psi. To fund his studies, he spent summers working in Detroit, a boomtown at that time.

Ossian decided he wanted to practice medicine. He went to Washington D.C. to study medicine at Howard University, a school founded for African Americans at a time when most universities disqualified or limited Black American enrollment.

Ossian was in D.C. during "the Red Summer of 1919," when white supremacists terrorized cities all across the country. During four days of deadly riots, Ossian witnessed a Black man being brutally beaten.

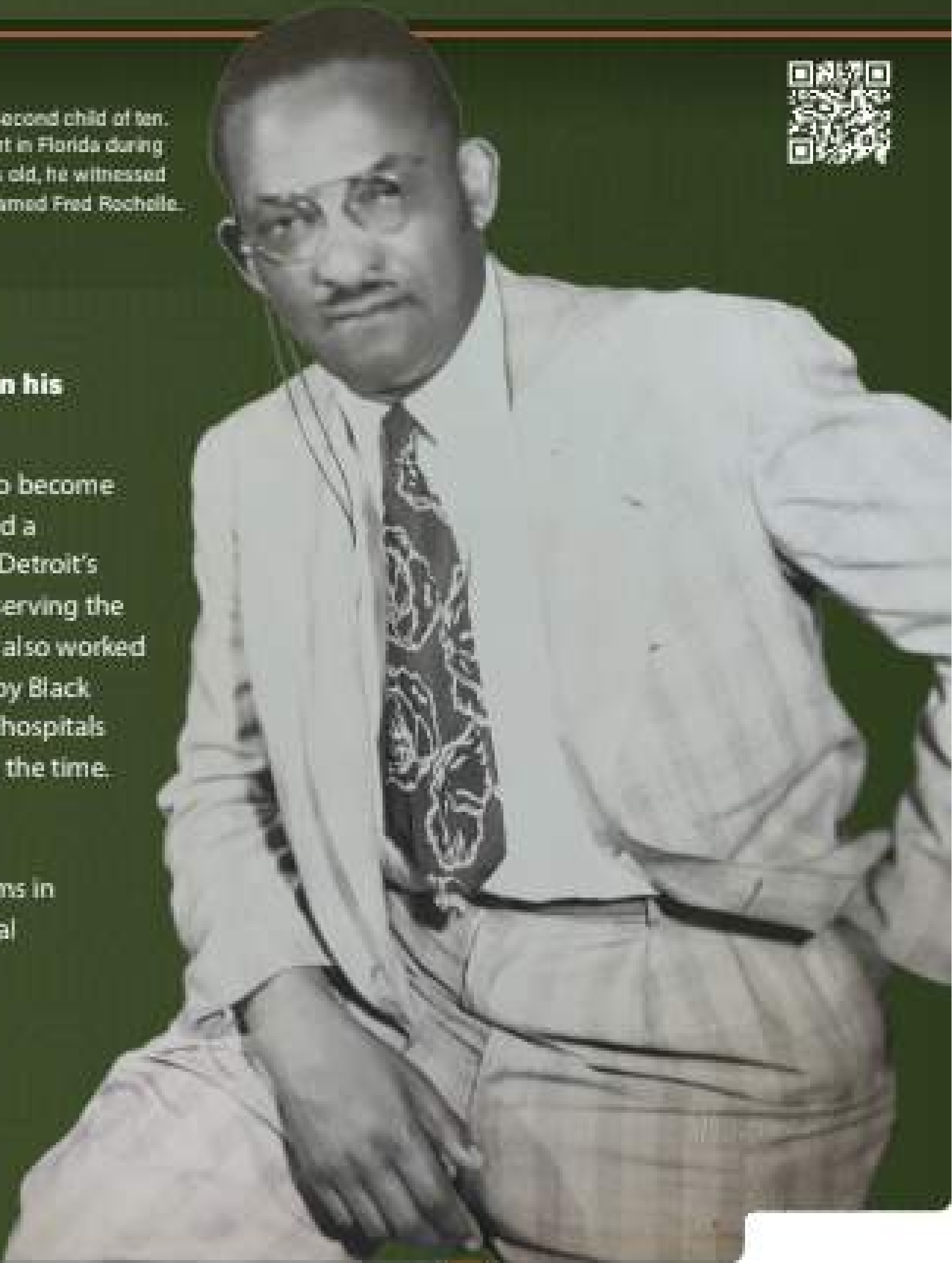


Ossian Sweet was born in Florida in 1895, the second child of ten. Racial violence and discrimination were rampant in Florida during his childhood. When Ossian was just five years old, he witnessed a white mob lynch a Black teenage boy named Fred Rochelle.

Doctor Ossian Sweet began his career in Detroit.

Ossian achieved certification to become a doctor in 1921. He established a successful medical practice in Detroit's Black Bottom neighborhood, serving the growing Black community. He also worked at Dunbar Hospital, operated by Black physicians and one of the few hospitals in Detroit for Black patients at the time.

While Ossian realized his dreams in Detroit, he did not escape racial discrimination or violence.



AREA 2 - THE SWEET FAMILY STORY

SWEET HISTORY PART 2

GLADYS SWEET & THE HOUSE ON GARLAND

PRIDE & JOY

Gladys met Dr. Ossian Sweet while she was studying to become a teacher.

The two dated and soon fell in love. They married in 1922 and spent their first year together traveling in Europe. They returned to Detroit in 1924, with their infant daughter, Marguerite (nicknamed, Iva).

The couple looked for a nice, spacious home for their young family.

This neighborhood was mostly white at the time, but the owners of this house were an interracial couple willing to sell to a Black family. It was not far from Gladys' parents' home and Ossian's office, with an elementary school across the street. The house is a brick bungalow — stylish and well-constructed.

The asking price was high above market value, but the Sweets loved the house and negotiated a deal.



Gladys Atkinson was raised by her mother and step-father in a house on Calne Street, near the western edge of the city, in a peaceful neighborhood of mostly working-class immigrants and one other Black family.



Moving outside Black Bottom was not easy for the young, Black family.

The Sweets knew about the racial violence other Black homeowners in the city were experiencing. They delayed moving that summer in hopes that tensions would ease by autumn. But, instead, their future neighbors organized the "Waterworks Improvement Association," to prevent housing integration. Determined to persevere, the Sweets moved in on September 8, 1925.



A photograph of a rustic stone retaining wall. The wall is constructed from large, irregular, greyish-brown stones. On top of the wall, a dense row of bright pink flowers, possibly azaleas, is in bloom. The wall is situated next to a paved area in the foreground and green foliage in the background.

AREA 3

A1

A2

A3

A4

A5

A6

HOME FOUNDATION INTER
AS AN ANNUAL FLOWER



AREA 3 - DETROIT 1925

DETROIT 1925

A BOOMTOWN WITH PROBLEMS

Detroit was a city of opportunity in the 1920s. The young automotive industry was growing fast and offering good-paying jobs, which, in turn, supported economic growth throughout the city. Some of Detroit's most iconic buildings were built as the population soared.

By 1924, Detroit was the fourth largest city in the United States.

During the "Great Migration," millions of people moved away from the South to escape racist "Jim Crow" policies and to find work in Northern states, like Michigan. Dr. Ossian Sweet moved to Detroit to begin a career in medicine and start a family.



Jobs were plentiful, but racism was pervasive.

White supremacy was on the rise throughout the U.S., taking many forms in Detroit, as elsewhere. The Ku Klux Klan (KKK) terrorized Black residents and white allies and the police did nothing to stop them. The KKK openly endorsed political candidates and engaged in corruption to make sure they won elections. The media stirred fears that people of color were stealing jobs and committing crimes against white people. White residents formed "neighborhood improvement associations" to prevent integration. Housing covenants kept Black Detroiters concentrated in the already crowded Black Bottom neighborhood.



Some wealthier Black families purchased land and homes on the city's outer edges.

White residents reacted with boldly violent tactics. By 1925, Black residents outside Black Bottom were often confronted by angry mobs, bent on driving them from their homes.



AREA 3 - DETROIT IN 1925

HOUSING DISCRIMINATION

RACISM IN THE NEIGHBORHOODS

BLACK FAMILIES FACED MOB VIOLENCE

Fleta & Aldine Mathies

In April 1925, Aldine and Fleta Mathis moved into the lower flat at 5913 Northfield Street, on the city's west side. White crowds gathered and harassed the couple. A brick was thrown through their window. Fleta discharged a firearm from inside her home and she was arrested and charged with "careless use of firearms."

Dr. Alexander Turner and family

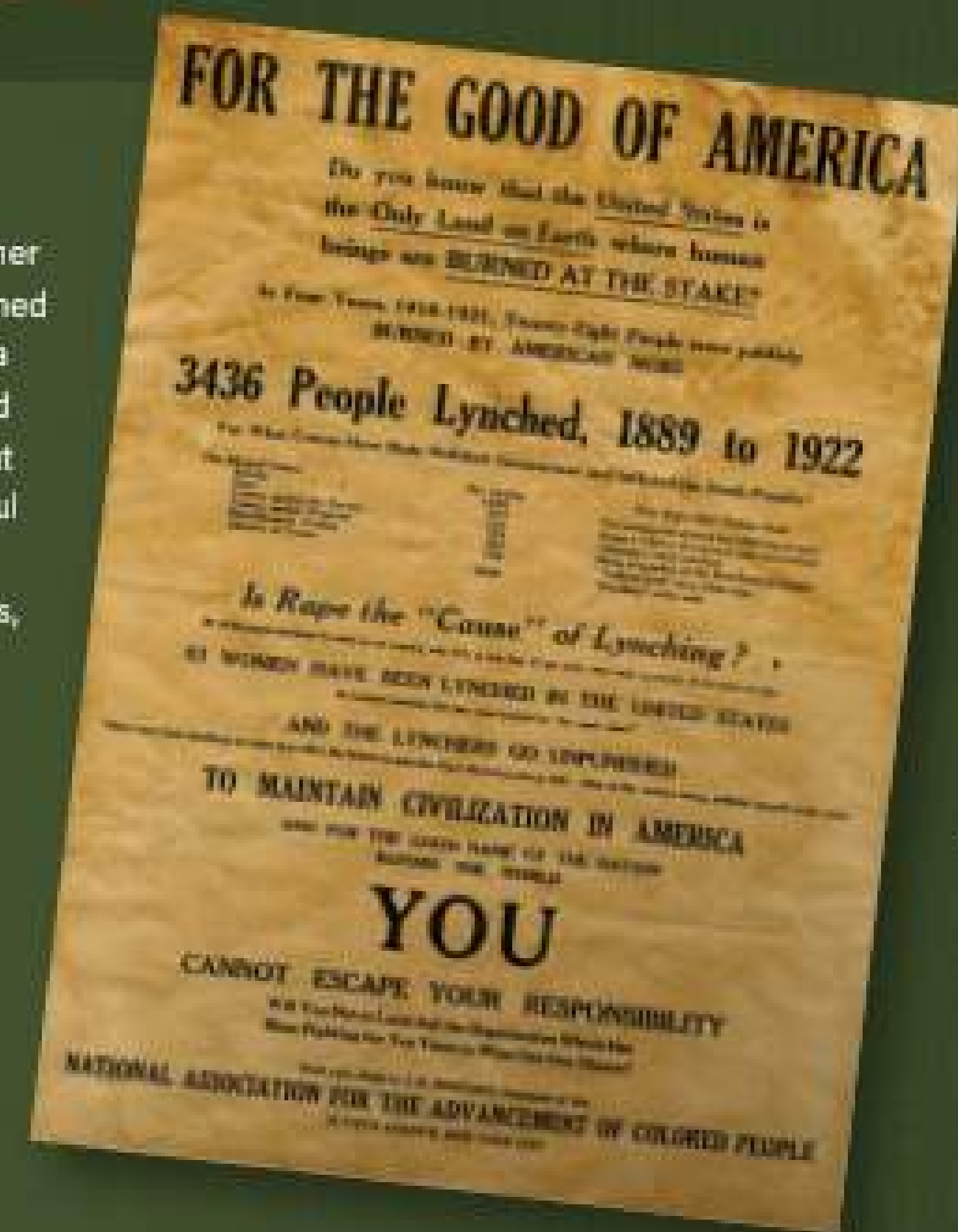
Dr. Turner was a well-respected physician and a colleague of Dr. Ossian Sweet. He owned a chain of pharmacies and was the co-founder and chief of surgery of Dunbar Hospital. Seventy-five percent of his clientele, overall, was white. But none of the prestige mattered when, on June 23, 1925, he moved his family into a home at 4755 Spokane Avenue, a white neighborhood on the city's west side.

Within hours, the house was surrounded by a mob of thousands, throwing stones and garbage. Dr. Turner was held at gunpoint by two men and he was forced to sign the deed over to them. The police escorted the Turner family out of the neighborhood. The family later moved to Ohio.

Vollington & Agnes Bristol

Bristol and his wife Agnes, who together ran a Black Bottom funeral home, owned a house at 7810 American Avenue, in a mostly white neighborhood. They tried renting to white and Black tenants, but found white tenants to be disrespectful of them and the property. However, each time they rented to Black tenants, threats from neighbors would scare them away.

The couple decided to move into the house themselves on July 6, 1925. A mob quickly formed. Stones flew and shots were fired. Nearly 200 police officers were called in. Nineteen white men were arrested.

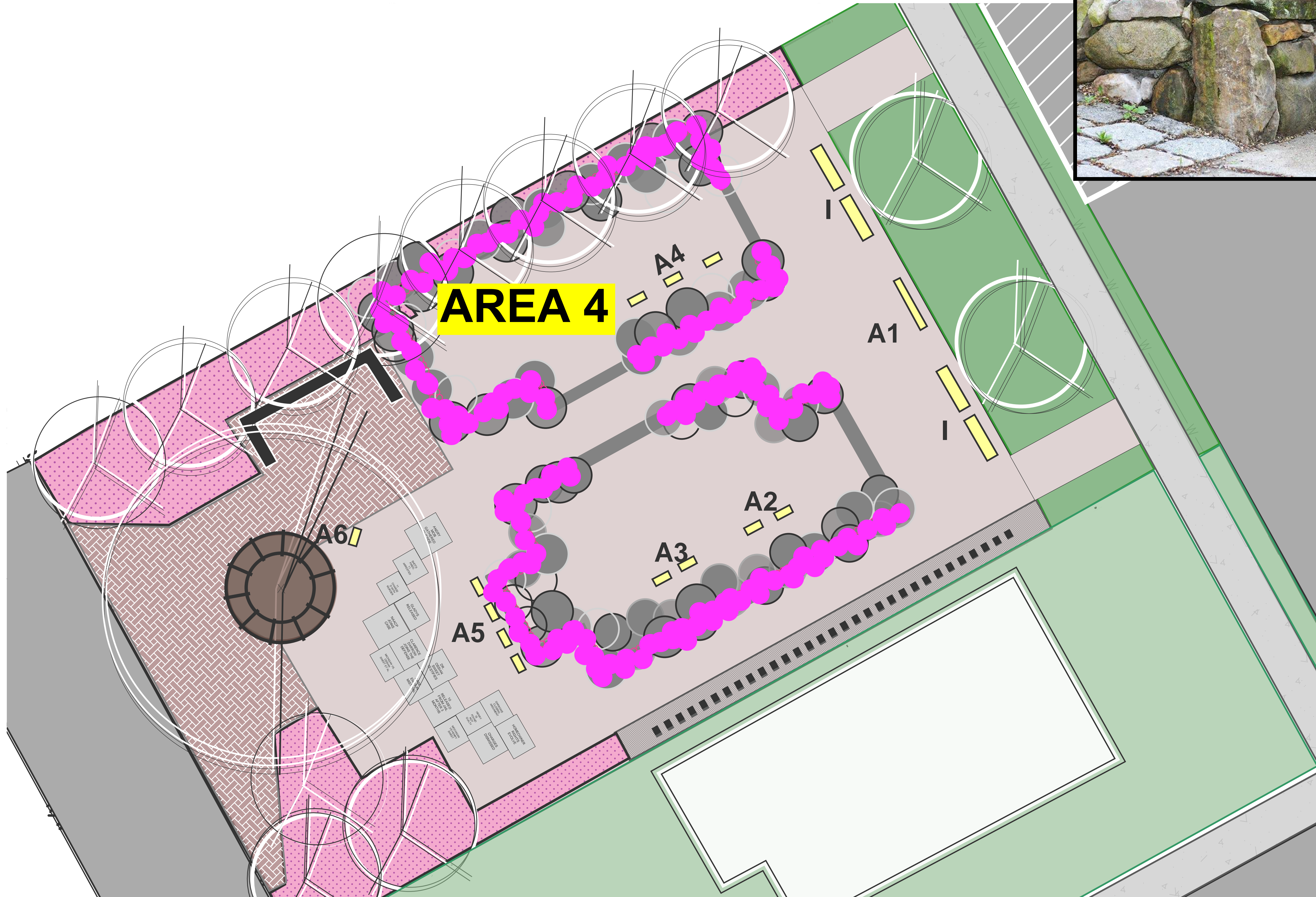


John Fletcher and Family

In July 1925, John Fletcher and his family sat down to a meal in their new home at 9428 Stoepel Avenue, when a white woman outside their dining room window began ranting racial slurs. A mob of 4,000 gathered around the house. People shouted, "Lynch them!" and threw rocks. Two shots rang out from the Fletcher's home. One bullet struck a teenager in the thigh. Police arrested the Fletchers. They moved out the next day.



A photograph of a stone retaining wall. The wall is constructed from large, irregular, greyish-brown stones. On top of the wall, there is a dense row of bright pink flowers. The wall is situated next to a concrete sidewalk in the foreground and a grassy area with some green plants in the background.



AREA 4 - SEPTEMBER 9, 1925

THE MOVE

SEPTEMBER 9, 1925 GREETED BY A VIOLENT MOB



Dr. Ossian H. Sweet's house, located at 2905 Garland at the corner of Charlevoix, 1927

Dr. Ossian and Gladys Sweet, newlyweds and newly parents, purchased the house at 2905 Garland in the summer of 1925, when this was a mostly white neighborhood. They knew people who had faced and suffered violence for crossing the "race line" in other Detroit neighborhoods earlier that year.

So, in hopes that tensions would relax by autumn, they delayed moving in until September 8, 1925.

The first night, hundreds of people gathered on the block, leading to a sleepless, anxiety filled night for the Sweets.

They notified the police to help maintain order, but knew law enforcement alone would not prevent mob violence. They had not yet brought all of their belongings, but they had borrowed guns and ammunition, aware they would need to be ready to defend themselves.

The first morning came without a major incident.

But the second night, a more hostile mob of 800 white people gathered outside the house.

To provide additional support, Ossian asked family, friends and acquaintances to come to the house. The Sweet's infant daughter, Iva, was left with Gladys' parents.

The police were once again stationed around the house to keep the crowd moving. Members of the mob began shouting and throwing stones and bricks at the house.

The eleven people in the house grabbed firearms and positioned themselves throughout the rooms. They peeked through windows and watched as the mob grew in size, volume, and anger.



AREA 4 - SEPTEMBER 9, 1925

SHOTS ARE FIRED

SHOTS ARE FIRED

ONE MAN IS HURT AND ANOTHER MAN DIES

The mob outside the Sweet home grew larger as the sun set on September 9, 1925.

Their shouts and chanting became louder. A rain of stones and trash struck the house, smashing windows. The eleven people inside — there to defend the house — grew more tense and more fearful. They could sense the anger escalating outside. They could not depend on the police to control the crowd.

Shots rang out.

Two white men in the mob were struck by bullets and collapsed. One was hit in the thigh, the other died on the spot.

The police — who had been called to defend the people in the house — forced their way in, and rounded up Ossian, Gladys, and the other nine people inside.

All eleven were arrested and escorted quickly to a paddywagon behind the house.

They were transported to the jail downtown. They would be questioned throughout the night.

Only Henry admitted to firing a weapon. They would all wait a month behind bars for justice.

Meanwhile, as news of the shooting spread, the crowd outside the house continued to grow.

The mob attacked Black people in a car at the intersection of St. Clair and Charlevoix, a block to the east. They stopped another Black couple driving through the neighborhood, smashing the car windows and lunging at the people inside.

Several hundred police officers came to the Sweet house after the shooting, in an attempt to restore order. Still, the mob grew to as many as 5,000 people as the night progressed, and no other arrests were made.



AREA 4 - SEPTEMBER 9, 1925

THE ELEVEN

THE ELEVEN DEFENDERS

Angry white mobs had surrounded and threatened Black homeowners at least four other times in Detroit earlier in 1925. Knowing the risks of moving into a mostly white neighborhood, Dr. Ossian Sweet recruited family, friends, and acquaintances to help the family defend the house.

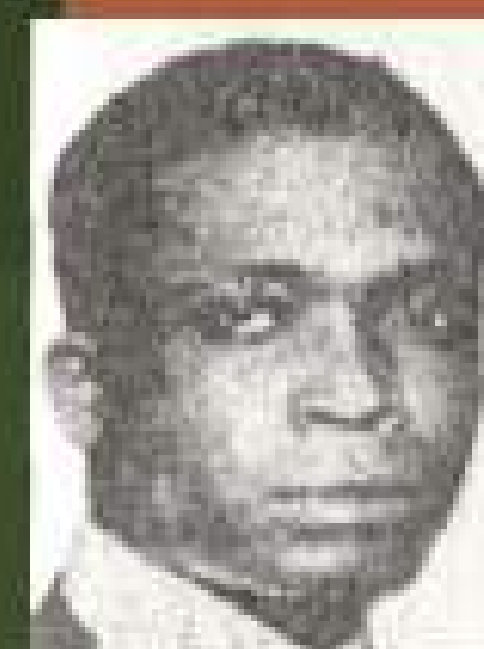
These are the people who were assaulted in the Sweet home on the night of September 9, 1925.



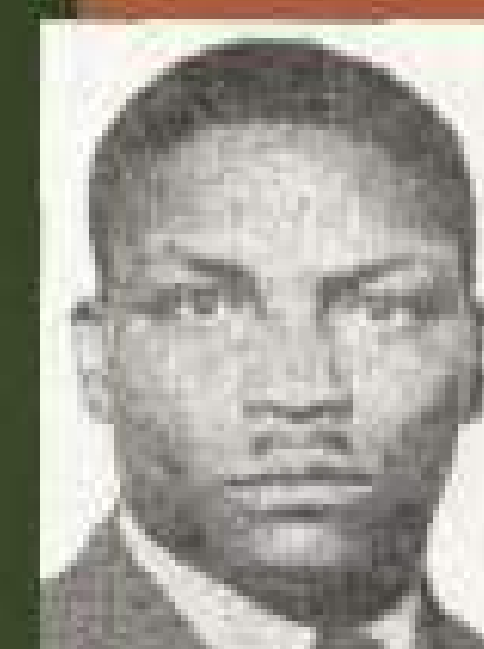
Dr. Ossian Sweet
(1895 - 1960)
Medical doctor, husband,
father, homeowner



Gladys Sweet
(1901-1928)
Wife, mother,
and homeowner



Otis Sweet
(1900-1969)
Dentist, Ossian's brother,
Starting a dental practice
in Detroit



Henry Sweet
(1907-1940)
Wilberforce University
student, Ossian's brother



John Latting
Wilberforce University
student, Henry's roommate



Joe Mack
The Sweet's
hired chauffeur



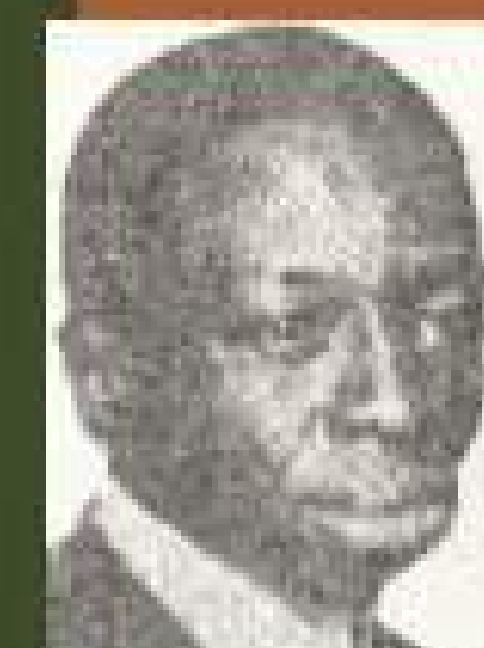
William Davis
Howard University alum,
WWI veteran, Federal
narcotics officer



Norris Murray
A hired handyman



Hewitt Watson
Insurance agent,
Ossian's patient



Charles Washington
Howard University
alum, insurance agent,
Ossian's patient



Leonard Morse
Insurance agent



INTERPRETIVE ELEMENT

QUOTE FENCE

***What happens to a dream
deferred? Along House***

***Does it dry up
like a raisin in the sun?
Or fester like a sore—
And then run?
Does it stink like rotten
meat?
Or crust and sugar over—
like a syrupy sweet?***

***Maybe it just sags
like a heavy load.***

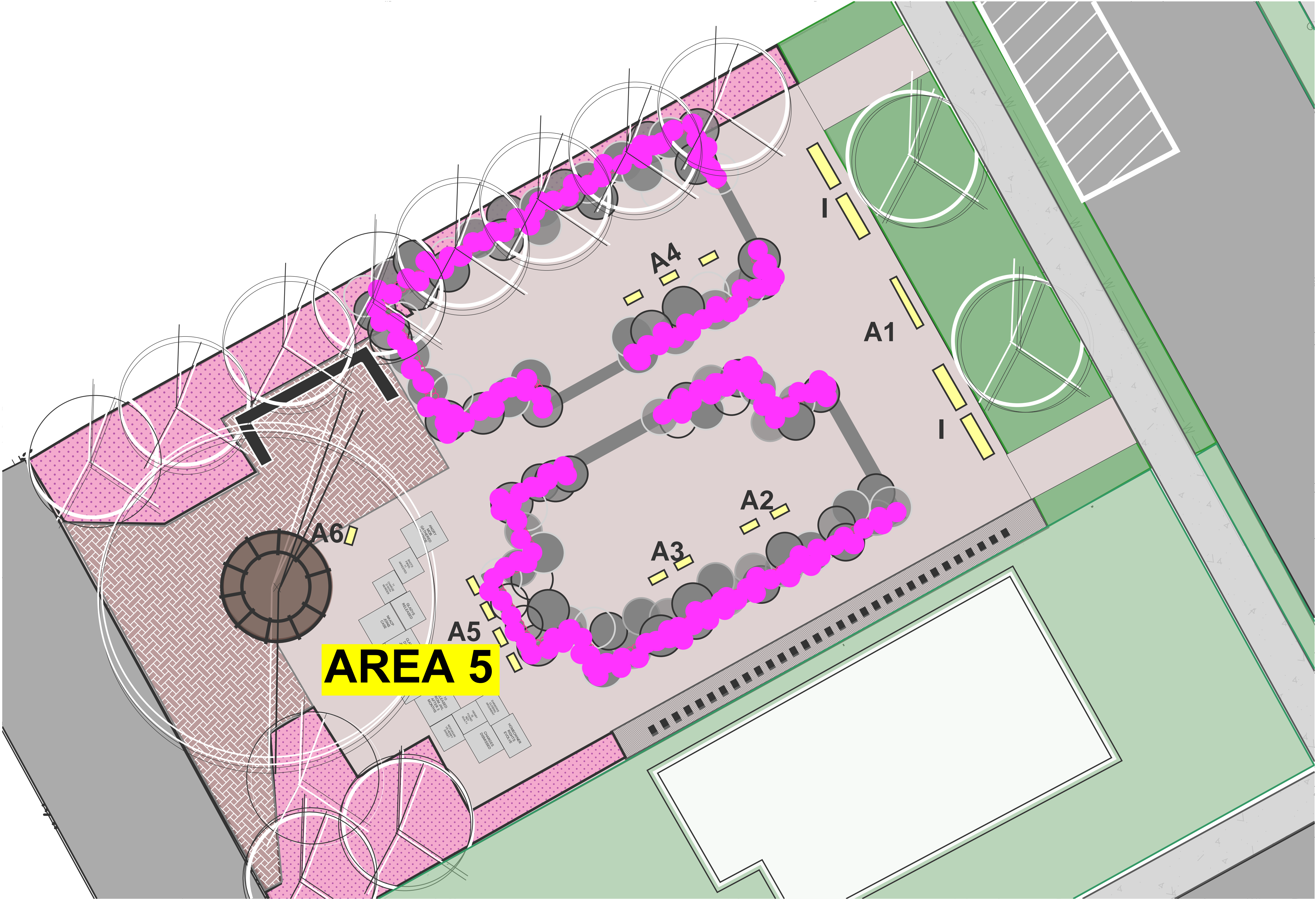
Or does it explode?

***from The Collected Works of
Langston Hughes***



What happens to a dream deferred?

AREA 5 - THE TRIAL AND IT'S IMPACTS



AREA 5 - THE TRIAL AND IT'S IMPACTS

BLACK DEFENSE

BLACK DEFENSE

THE NAACP & ATTORNEY CLARENCE DARROW

The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) offered to help the Sweets in court. Then, as now, the NAACP had a reputation for being a champion of civil rights and justice for African Americans. Since its founding in 1909, NAACP lawyers had fought and won many trials, opposing and defeating segregation and discrimination across the country.

The Sweets gladly accepted the help.

A famous lawyer was brought onto the case.

The NAACP enlisted the services of Attorney Clarence Darrow, known for being an outspoken defender of trade unions. Darrow had recently achieved celebrity status as the defense attorney for a high school teacher who had been charged with the crime of teaching evolution, in a Tennessee case known as the Scopes Trial.

A winning legal strategy was developed.

Darrow, a white man, joined a team that already included several successful black attorneys: Julian Perry, Cecil Rowlette, and Charles Mahoney. They organized a legal strategy for the Sweets and their friends. Meanwhile, the NAACP made sure the trial was being covered by the press, trusting this would be one for the history books.



Henry Sweet and attorneys Julian Perry, Tom Chawkes, and Clarence Darrow.



AREA 5 - THE TRIAL AND IT'S IMPACTS

TWO TRIALS

TWO TRIALS

ONE JUDGE & TWO ALL-WHITE JURIES

The first trial proceeded against all eleven occupants of the house, as a group.

Ossian Sweet took the stand and described the fear he and his family experienced when a violent mob surrounded their new home. He linked the violence to the persecution that, in 1925, Black people had faced in America for over 300 years.

At first, witnesses told the court that the crowd outside the house had been small and friendly. Attorney Darrow intensified questioning until the truth came out: hundreds of people filled the streets outside the Sweet house on the night of September 9, 1925, shouting and throwing rocks and trash.

The jury was unable to agree on a verdict.

Despite the testimony and evidence, this trial ended in a mistrial. The judge ordered a second trial.

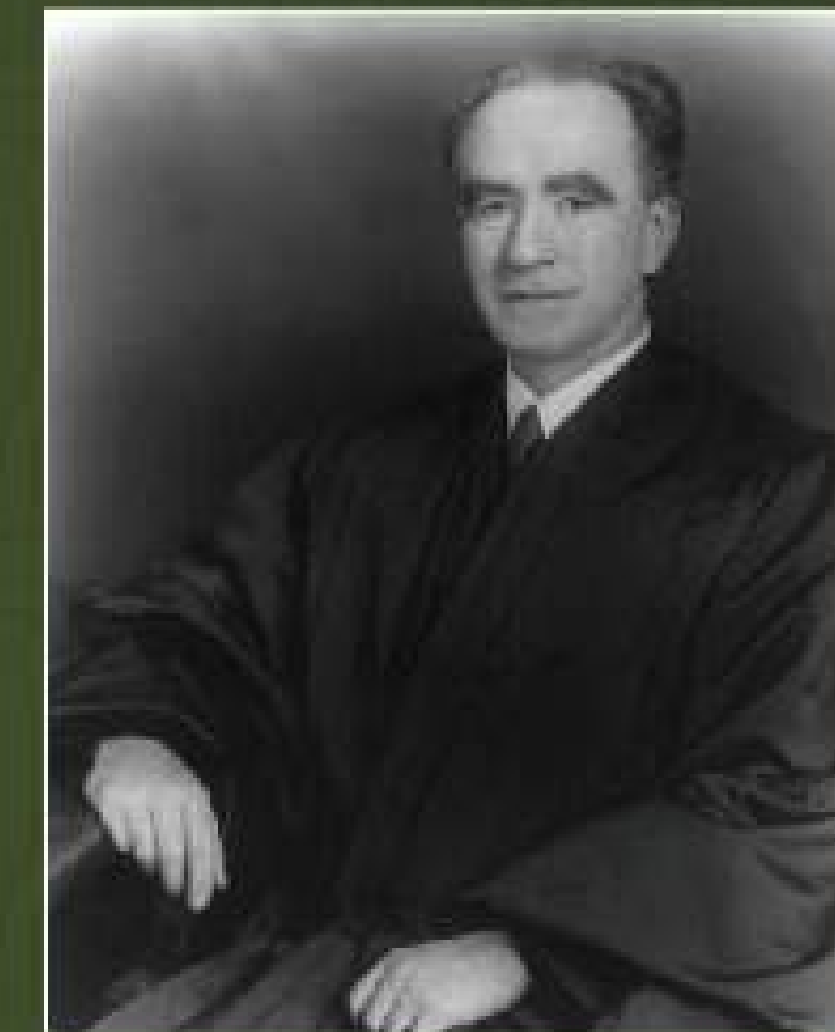
Attorney Darrow requested that the members of the Sweet party face trial separately.

Prosecutors started with Henry Sweet, the only defendant who admitted to firing a gun on September 9. The jury consisted of 12 white men.

Darrow made the case that if a white man were on trial in the same situation, he would never be convicted. He made an eloquent closing statement, appealing to the jury to put prejudice aside.

The jury was persuaded and Henry Sweet was acquitted.

Charges were dropped against the rest of the Sweet family and the other eight people who had bravely helped them defend their house.



Judge Frank Murphy presided over the Sweet trials. He later served as Mayor of Detroit, Governor of Michigan, U.S. Attorney General, and a U.S. Supreme Court justice.



AREA 5 - THE TRIAL AND IT'S IMPACTS

HOMEOWNER RIGHTS

HOUSING JUSTICE vs. HOUSING INJUSTICE

The Sweet trials attracted national attention. The ruling established the right of a homeowner to protect one's home, regardless of race. The outcome was an all-too-rare example of Black Americans prevailing in a justice system stacked against them.

However, the Sweet trials did not solve every issue faced by Black people when it comes to homeownership.

The Federal government created ratings maps of neighborhoods across the country, using race as a factor. These *red-lining maps* affected the value of homes and the availability of loans. People of color suffered for it, and the legacy is ongoing.

In the 1950s, new suburbs attracted white residents away from city centers. Urban property values began to fall. In the 1960s and 70s, cities began undertaking *urban renewal* projects to demolish Black neighborhoods in favor of highways and sports stadiums. Black homeownership suffered nationwide, and the effects linger today.



Decades passed before steps were taken to protect Black homeowners from legal discrimination.

In 1948, the Supreme Court declared that *restrictive covenants* are not legal. Americans were freed from overtly racist mortgages and deeds.

In 1954, the NAACP Legal Defense Fund won the case, *Brown v. Board of Education*, overturning the discriminatory "separate but equal" doctrine and making segregation illegal.

In 1968, Congress passed the *Fair Housing Act*, which protects U.S. citizens from discrimination based on race, religion, national origin, sex, disability, and family status.

Still, these advances are incomplete. Minority homeownership rates still lag behind their white counterparts. People of color continue to face extra hurdles in getting approved for mortgages.



AREA 5 - THE TRIAL AND IT'S IMPACTS

ONGOING IMPACTS

THE RIGHT TO DEFEND ONE'S PROPERTY

Poet Langston Hughes wrote in 1962 that "the Sweet case set a precedent for the law in relation to Negroes. For every citizen it reaffirmed that 'a man's home is his castle.'"

The Sweet Trials broke a wave of attacks on the homes of Black families.

It affirmed every American's right to self defense, regardless of race, and it started to chip away at housing discrimination.

The Sweet Trials were a rallying point for Black people.

It demonstrated the importance of collective action. The NAACP was able to raise over \$70,000 for the Sweet case, more than the organization had ever raised until that time.

Michigan enacted gun control laws in response to the Sweet Trials.

In 1927, a gun control law was passed by the State that — while neutral on its face — was intended to prevent black people from owning handguns. It has been amended many times, but remains at the foundation of Michigan gun control laws.



In 2006, Michigan enacted the Self Defense Act which affirms an individual's right to use deadly force if he or she believes that force is necessary to prevent bodily harm, a sexual assault, or death.

The Sweet Trials are still studied and discussed amongst legal scholars.

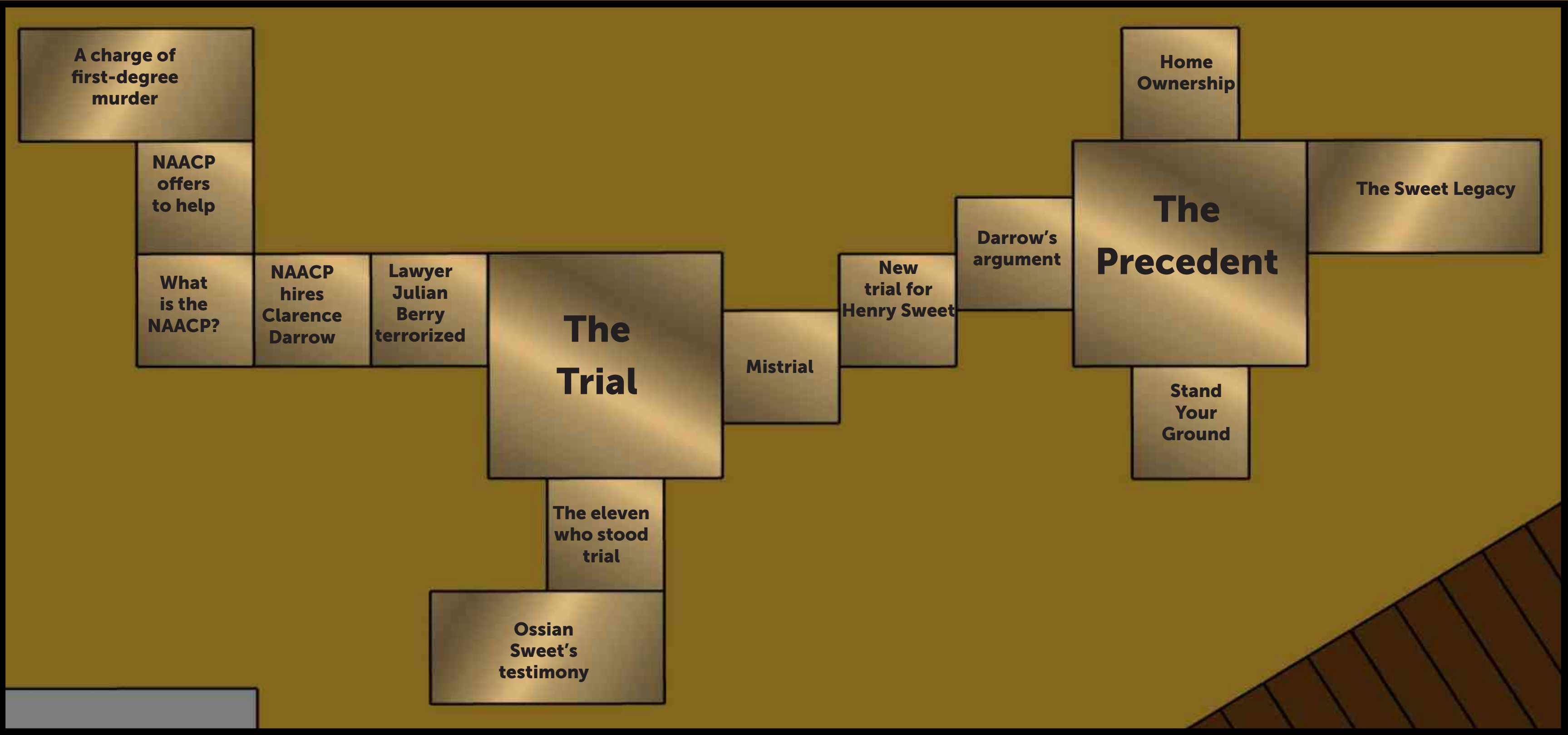
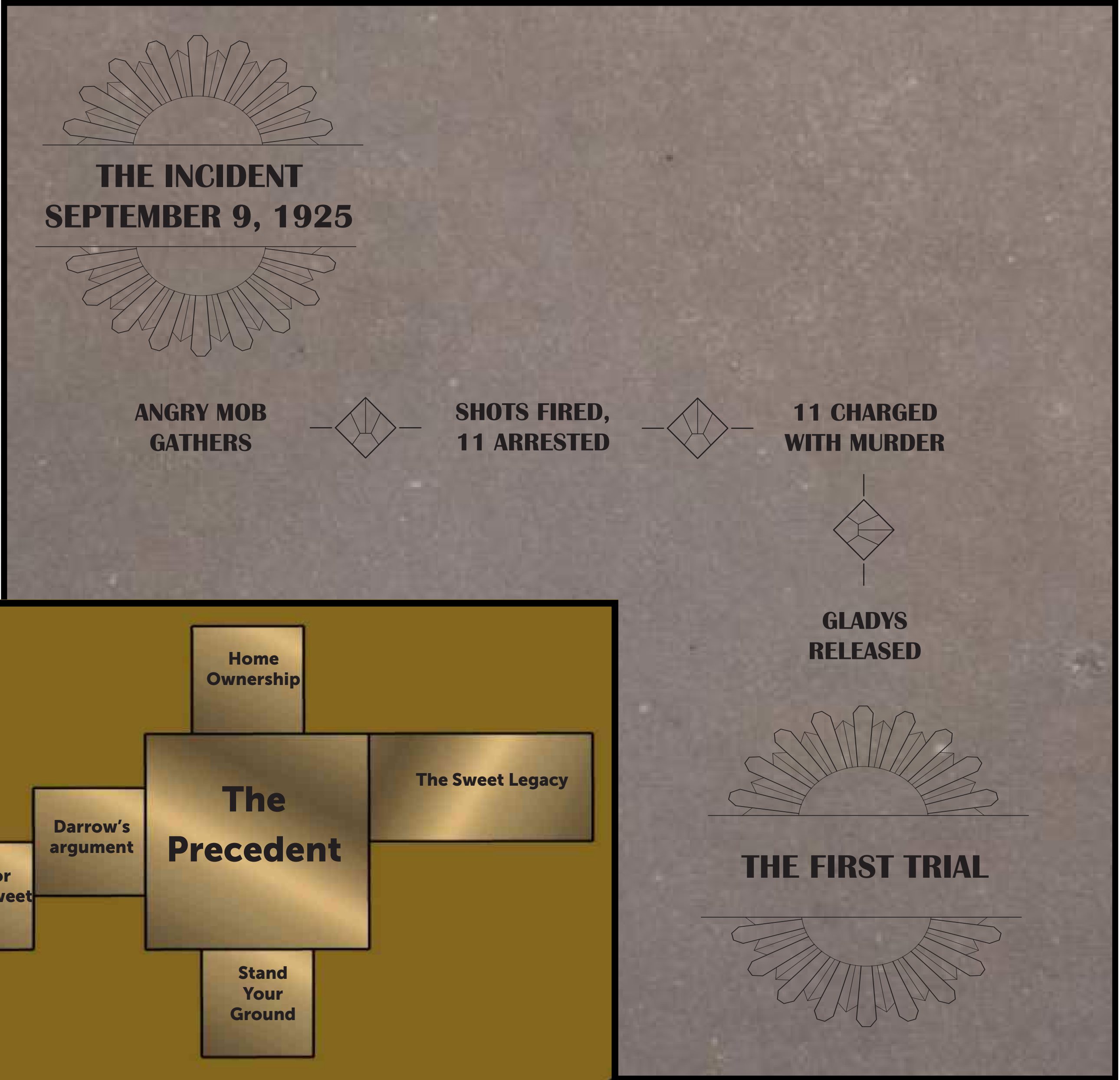
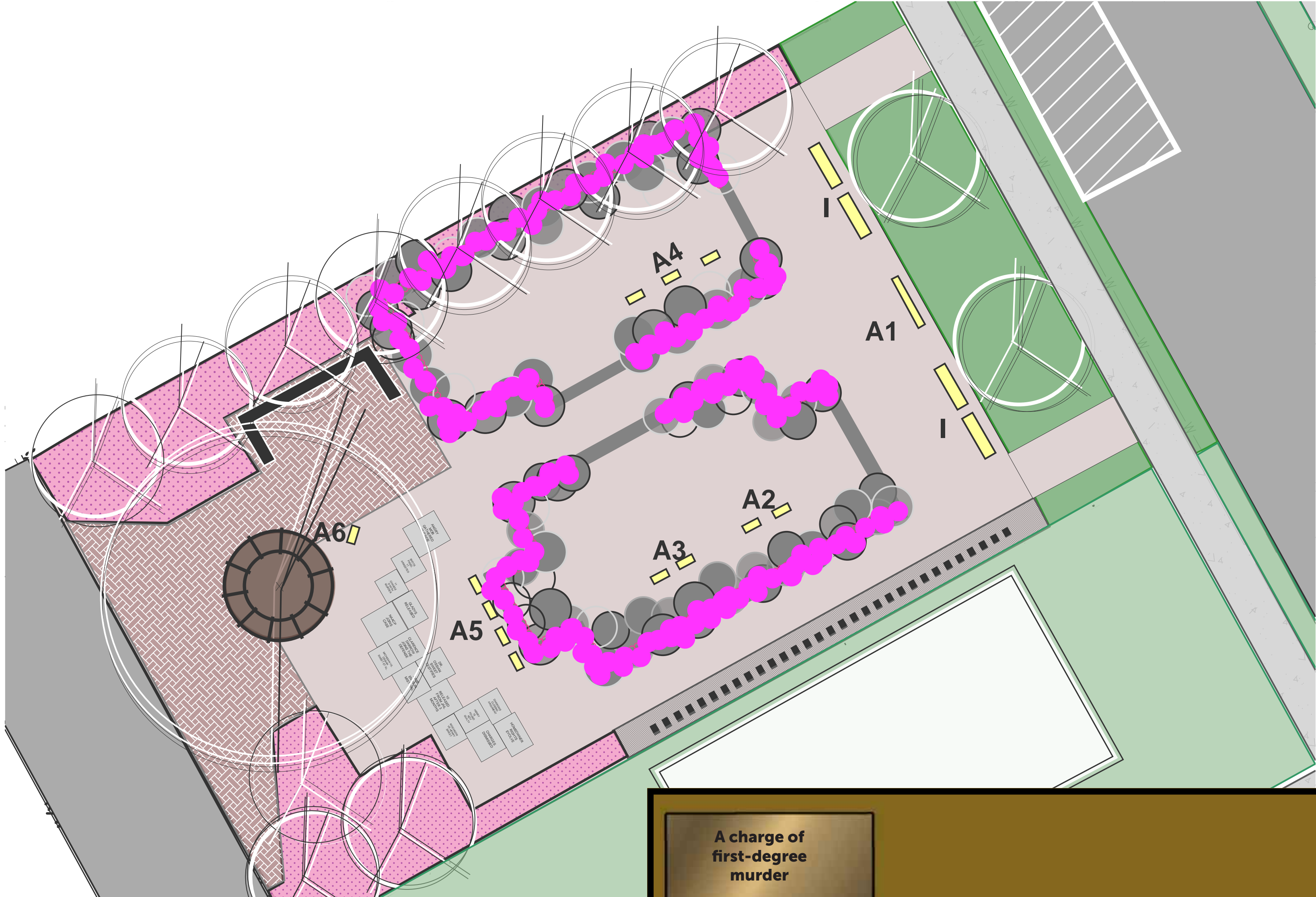
The NAACP published Clarence Darrow's closing arguments from the Sweet Trial, noting its "historical, legal, and humanitarian value."

In 1986, the Sweet trials were memorialized by the Michigan Legal Milestone Program, placing a bronze plaque inside the Frank Murphy Hall of Justice in Detroit. The Sweet house on 2905 Garland Avenue is listed in the National Register of Historic Places.

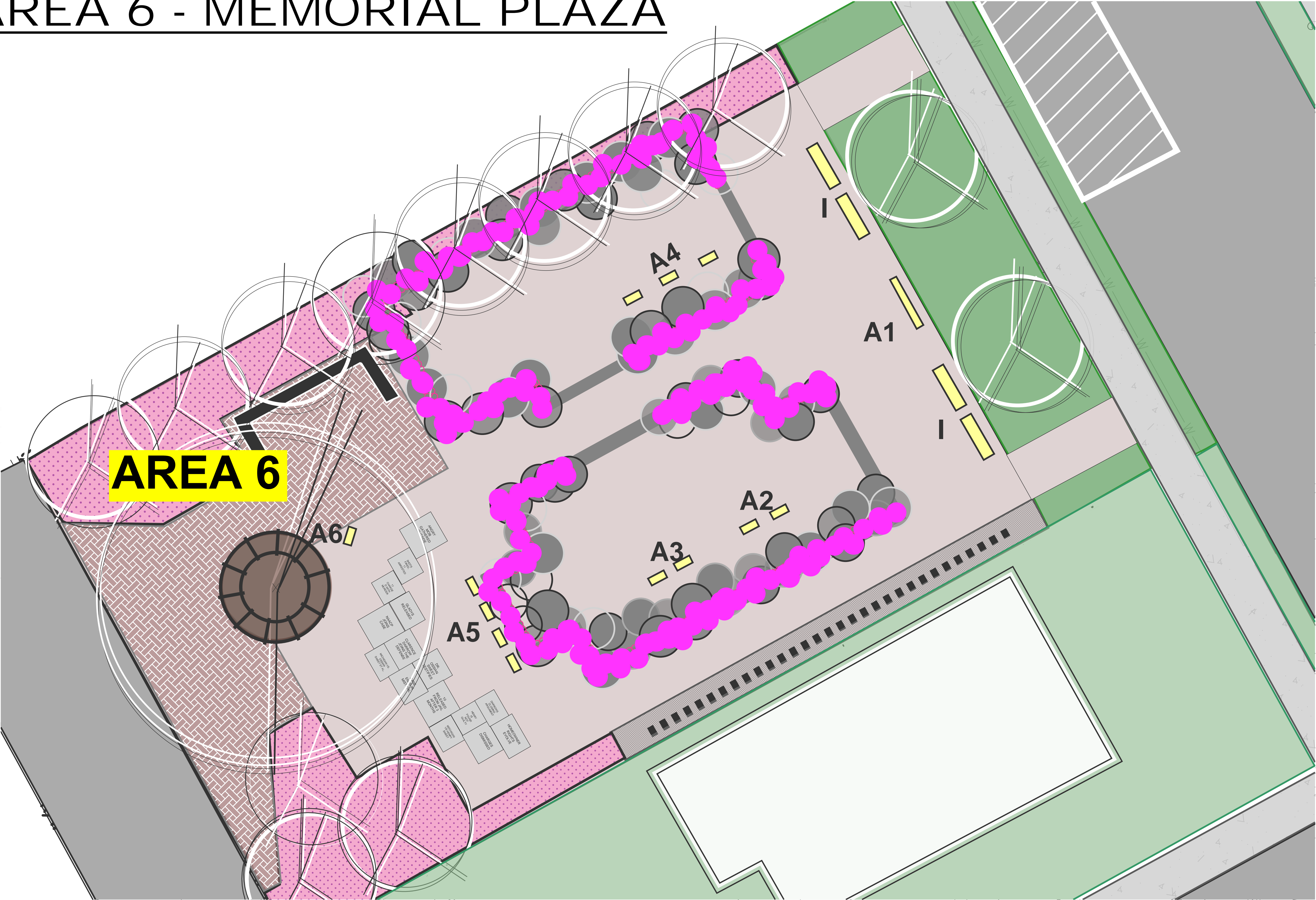


AREA 5 - THE TRIAL AND IT'S IMPACTS

INTERPRETIVE PAVING



AREA 6 - MEMORIAL PLAZA



AREA 6 - SWEET FAMILY MEMORIAL

THE SWEETS AFTER THE TRIALS

THE SWEETS, AFTER THE TRIALS

TRIALS OF OTHER KINDS

The Sweet family wanted a nice house to raise a family. But on September 9, 1925, their second night living here, white mobs surrounded their home. The violence, arrests, and trials that followed affected their lives forever.

The Sweets never returned to their home together.

Gladys and Iva became sick with tuberculosis. Gladys believed she contracted it while in jail. Without Ossian, Gladys and Iva moved to Arizona, hoping to regain their health in a drier climate. But Iva died shortly after her second birthday, in 1926.

In 1928, Gladys returned to Detroit and died soon after. Ossian's brother, Henry died of tuberculosis in 1940.

Ossian paid off the house in 1950, but he faced ongoing personal and financial difficulties. He fell behind on the tax payments. In 1958, he sold the house to family friends William "Herbert" and Ruby "Inez" Baxter. Ossian would sometimes visit.

Ossian Sweet died by suicide in 1960.

The home — still owned by the Baxter family — is now on the National Register of Historic Places.

The Sweets' sacrifice earned us rights we can take for granted today. Discrimination and racism persist, but the Sweet legacy bent the arc of American justice closer to the ideal of equality.



The house at 2905 Garland Avenue is on the National Register of Historic Places.

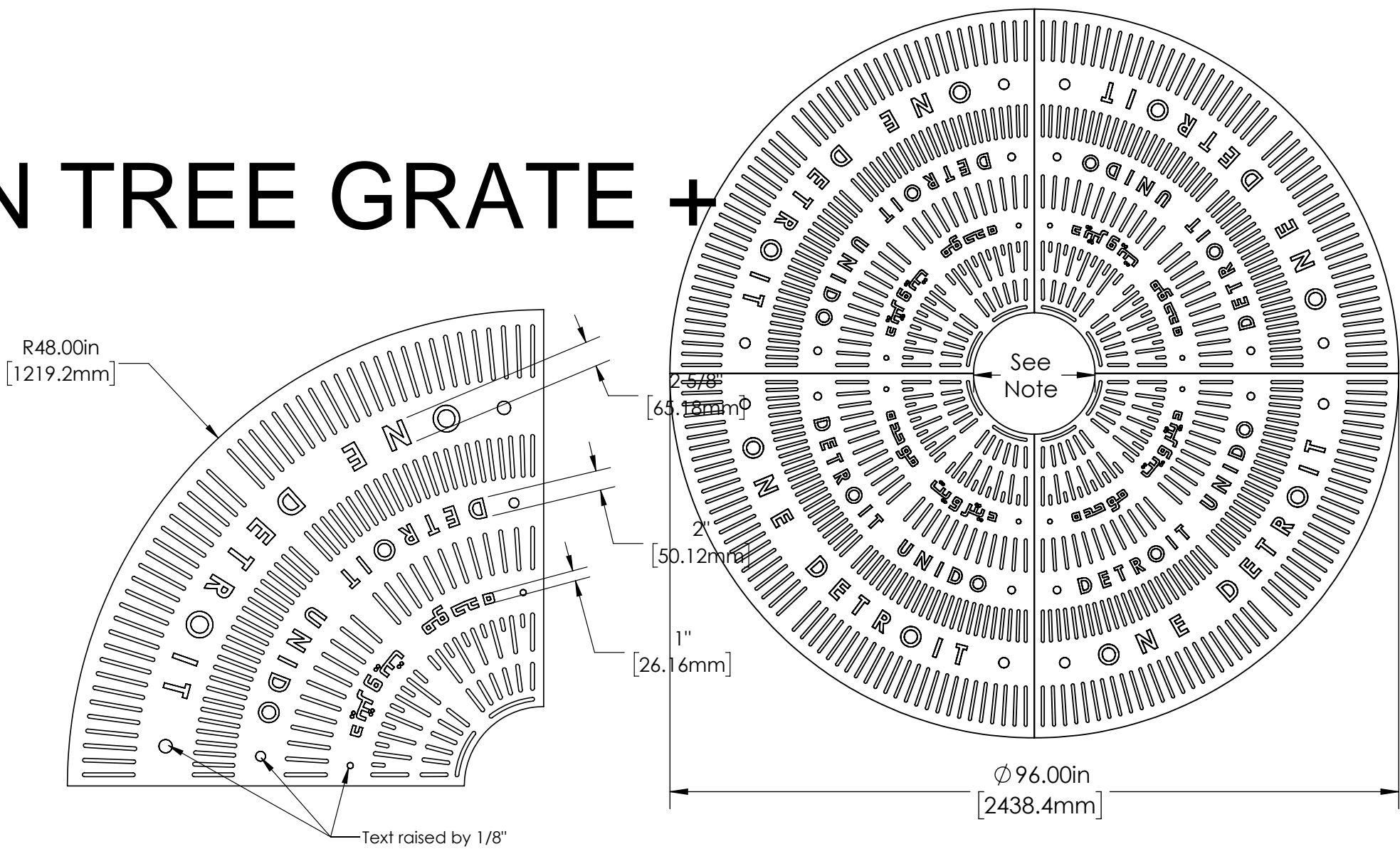


AREA 6 - MEMORIAL PLAZA

MEMORIAL ELM TREE + GLADYS SWEET QUOTE ENGRAVED IN IRON TREE GRATE + BENCH / GATHERING AREA FOR GROUPS

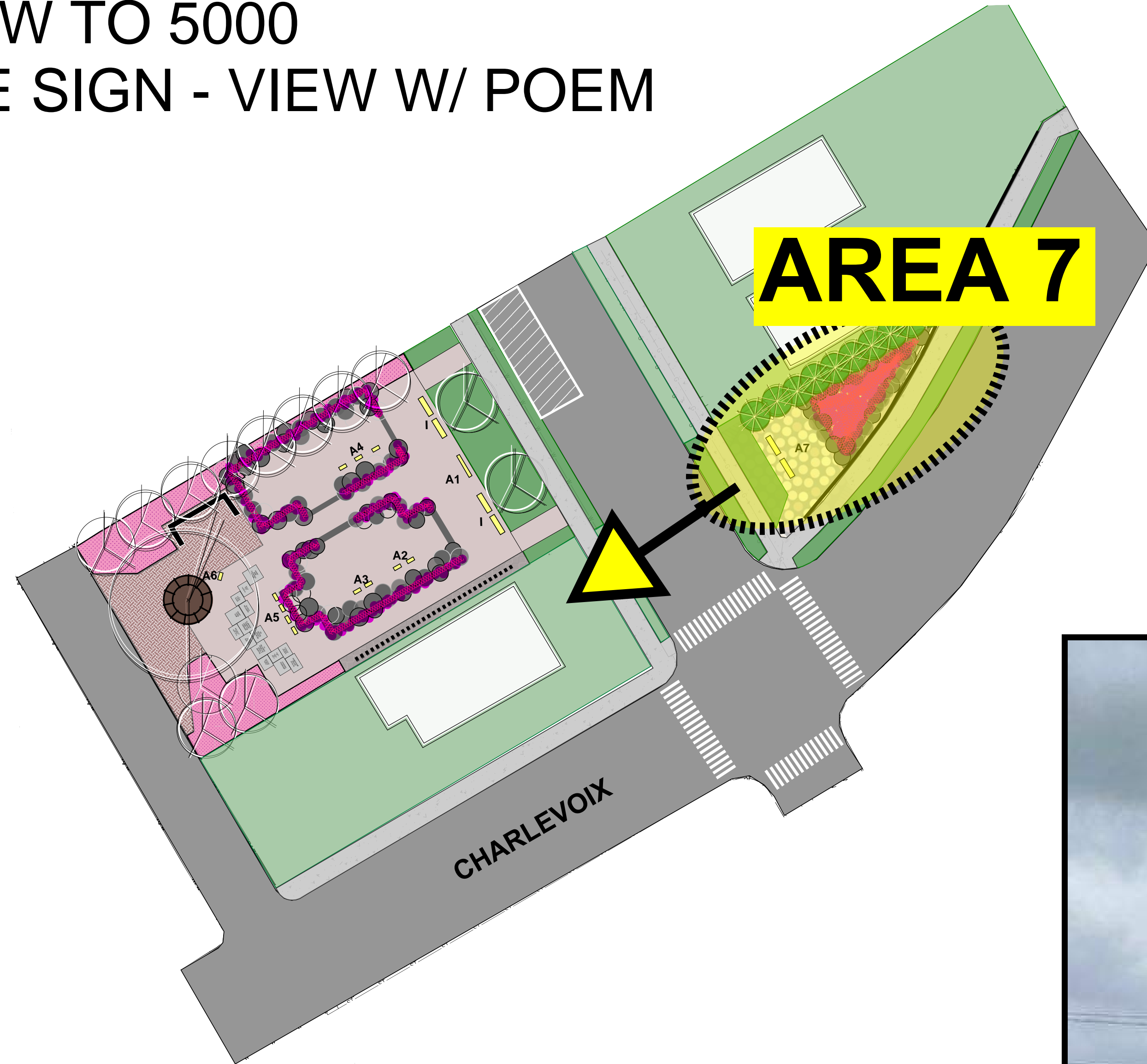
"Though I suffer and am torn loose from my fourteen-month-old baby, I feel it is my duty to the womanhood of the race. If I am freed I shall return and live at my home on Garland Avenue."

– Gladys Sweet
(Arc of Justice, p220)



AREA 7 - FEAR AND DEFENSE

THE MOB GREW TO 5000
INTERPRETIVE SIGN - VIEW W/ POEM

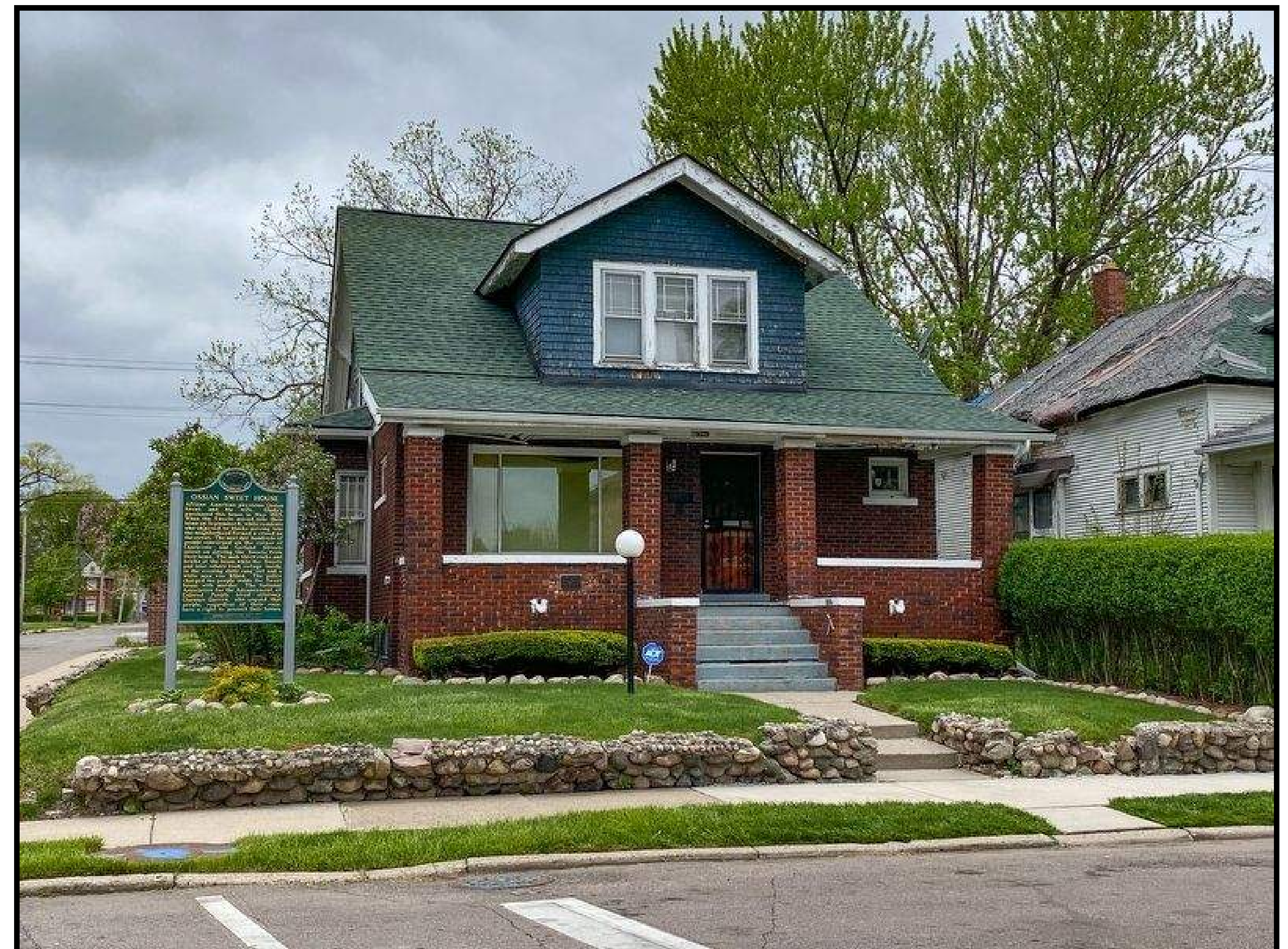


*"When I opened the door, I saw the mob
and I realized I was facing the same mob
that had hounded my people throughout our
entire history. I was filled with a fear that
only one could experience who knows the
history and strivings of my race."*

Dr. Ossian Sweet



HOME FOUNDATION INTERPRETED AS AN ANNUAL FLOWER BED



VIEW FROM INTERPRETIVE SITE

PROJECT MATERIALS BOARD



**GREAT OAK HONORING
DR. SWEET**

ELM

**CUSTOM TREE GRATE
WITH QUOTE**

**INTERPRETIVE
SIGNAGE**

**DECORATIVE COLORED
CONCRETE**

**FLOWERING TREES
HONORING THE 11**

**FOUNDATION WALLS
WITH ANNUALS**

PERMEABLE PAVERS

SITE FURNISHINGS