



Karen Schmidt, Bloomington Ward 6 alderman and mayor pro tem, represented the City of Bloomington at the dedication.

Bloomington marker commemorates era of racial segregation

On September 20, the McLean County Museum of History, in partnership with the City of Bloomington, the Bloomington-Normal NAACP, and Not In Our Town Bloomington-Normal, dedicated an ISHS marker memorializing a dark chapter in Twin Cities history—the racial segregation of public beaches at Bloomington’s west side Miller Park.



In 1908, the Miller Park board established separate and grossly unequal beaches and bathing facilities. White swimmers had exclusive use of the park’s lake and its larger beach and cleaner waters, while “colored” residents were restricted to the park’s smaller lagoon. This disgraceful arrangement continued into the early 1950s. “As President George W. Bush said at the dedication of the National Museum of African-American History and Culture, ‘A great nation does not hide its history. It faces its flaws and corrects them,’” noted Mark Wyman, an Illinois State University



Rev. Dr. Brigitte A. Black, pastor, Wayman A.M.E. Church, Bloomington (left), and Rhoda Walker, lead the crowd in the hymn, “We’ve Come This Far by Faith.”

history professor who played a leading role bringing this story to the community’s attention.

For much of the first half of the twentieth century, African Americans in Bloomington-Normal faced discrimination in public accommodations, such as local hotels, restaurants, and theaters. They also encountered nearly insurmountable barriers when it came to accessing middle class jobs and housing. “By dedicating this historical marker we are helping uncover a community secret,” added Dr. Wyman. “That secret is this: Bloomington and Normal were held in the grip of racial segregation for the first half of the twentieth century and beyond.”

The dedication ceremony included formal remarks by Quincy Cummings, president of the local chapter of the NAACP, and a benediction by Rev. Dr. Brigitte A. Black, pastor of Wayman A.M.E. Church, the oldest African-American church in the area.



Speakers at the dedication ceremony included Quincy Cummings, president of the Bloomington-Normal NAACP.