



Southern Life, Northern City: The History of Albany's Rapp Road Community (Excelsior Editions)

Jennifer A. Lemak

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The inspirational story of an African American community that migrated from the Deep South to Albany, New York, in the 1930s.

Southern Life, Northern City is the inspirational story of an African American community in Albany that has fought doggedly for generations to preserve its legacy and way of life. In the 1920s and 1930s rural African American families living in Shubuta, Mississippi, began relocating to Albany, New York. These former sharecroppers initially settled in Albany's South End, but quickly became unhappy with the vice and overcrowding of city life. A leading member of this community, Reverend Louis W. Parson, courageously led the effort to purchase land on the city's western edge. The newly relocated residents enthusiastically recreated their rural southern life in the north—building homes, planting crops, hunting, and raising families. Fifty years later, their settlement found itself threatened by sprawl, commercial development, and corporate greed. Joining forces with public historians and preservationists, the residents triumphed, with the Rapp Road community being named a New York State and a National Historic District.

Jennifer A. Lemak is Senior Historian and Curator of African American History at the New York State Museum.

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