

Remembering



LEFT: William Glenn stops by the former site of Gladstein's, now a trendy restaurant, to remember his father working there when the area was known as the Black Wall Street.

RIGHT: Susan, known as the angel lady, enjoys lifting the spirits of those who walk along Parish Street, former home to Durham's Black Wall Street (Staff photos by Norman Gossett, Jr.)

BLACK WALL STREET

By Norman Gossett, Jr.
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At the corner of Parrish and Mangum streets lies a historical marker commemorating Black Wall Street. On an adjacent vacant lot, modernistic sculptures engraved with inspirational phrases attest to the area's history.

The remaining buildings on Parrish Street are not all that impressive. Perhaps Black Wall Street is just another metaphor for something that was and is no more.

William Glenn, an Appalachian State University alumnus who is now retired, said his father worked for one of Black Wall Street's founders, Jed Gladstein, from the 1940s until the business folded.

"Gladstein hired him because he was a hard worker and because he was black

— whites couldn't communicate with blacks and it made selling hard," Glenn said.

"Gladstein's [store] was over behind Clements Funeral Home on Orange Street. Everybody on Parrish Street had to go by there to get to the post office," he continued. "He always kept his inventory up.

"My dad used to talk about how busy it got in the fall when school started," he explained.

"In good years in the late summer, when the tobacco money was flowing, people paid for things with cash. Retailers didn't have to run accounts. Now days, the money is gone. The street is broke."

Returning to Parrish Street, Glenn pointed to the

upstairs windows where workers were gutting the old buildings in preparation for remodeling.

"Somebody is spending a lot of money on all this work," Glenn said.

"Black Wall Street was just people trying to survive. Didn't any color matter except green."

— William Glenn

and personal merchandise, a bank with money to lend, insurance on the borrower and the collateral and — if the deal went south — a mortuary.

A placard on the front of the Mechanics and Farmers building indicates North Carolina Mutual Life

Insurance Co. used to be housed in the building next door. And standing beside the bank placard was a head, completely covered with a hat full of shiny, little angel pins.

"My name is Susan. People call me the angel lady. I do angel therapy by changing the atmosphere and changing stress levels," she said.

The lady, who seemed genuinely concerned about other people's suffering, said she believes she can help reduce people's stress levels.

It was an interesting predicament that presented itself. Here on Parrish Street trying to find Black Wall Street with the help of Susan, the angel lady.

"Black Wall Street was just people trying to survive. Didn't any color matter except green," said Glenn. "People took care of each other."