

Tampa's Jackson Rooming House: Music to a Preservationist's Ears

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Outside the Jackson Rooming House

Though there's no clear record for when exactly it was built, Tampa's [Jackson Rooming House](#) started off as a typical single-family home in the 1890s. It wasn't until between 1901 and 1905 that it received its addition and became the one of the city's few rooming houses that catered to African-Americans during the era of segregation.

Located adjacent to the [Ybor City Historic District](#), and just blocks from Tampa's Union Station, the rooming house of Moses and Sarah Jackson catered to common folk and celebrities alike as they traveled along the Gulf Coast of Florida. Entertainers and musicians like Ella Fitzgerald, Cab Calloway, James Brown, Ray Charles, and Count Basie have all called this hallowed haven home, at least for a few nights.



But since the rooming business ceased in 1989, the house has fallen on hard times, suffering from a dilapidated roof and disintegrating interior -- no doubt exacerbated by Tampa's humid climate. And though Willie Robinson Jr. -- grandson of Moses and Sarah Jackson -- has done his best to maintain the property, by 2010, code violations on the building began to add up.

Before the house -- now the last freestanding, privately owned residence in downtown Tampa -- could be condemned, Robinson formed a 501(c) nonprofit organization that would work to save the property and manage its restoration. With the help of Bracken Engineering, a plan was devised to shore and stabilize the house, as well as add a new roof.



Though the house was listed on the National Register in 2007, its restoration has proven easier said than done. Several would-be collaborators on the project, including local radio DJ Bubba the Love Sponge, have backed away, citing an abbreviated timeline.

Thankfully, the city of Tampa has continued to work with Robinson and Bracken Engineering, pushing the deadline for completion of work from its original October 2010 mark to June 1 of this year. In February, the NAACP got involved, assuming a project management role. More recently, fundraising efforts have been put in place and bids for the necessary stabilization work have been solicited.



Moving forward, Robinson, Bracken Engineering, and the NAACP are looking forward to returning the home to its appearance during the '30s and '40s when the house played host to some of America's most famous musicians.

"This is one of the few buildings that really represents the segregation era here in Tampa," says Matthew Depin, a project manager with Bracken Engineering. "So it's an important piece of black history that needs to be preserved."

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