

Seaview Beach and Amusement Park: An African American Gem on Virginia's Chesapeake Bay.

Sherry DiBari
September
2017

This research was funded with a 2017 Research
Grant from the Virginia Beach Historic
Preservation Commission.

Abstract from Seaview Beach and Amusement Park: An African American Gem on Virginia's Chesapeake Bay.

SEA VIEW ATTRACTS NEGRO SOCIETY



AT THE BEACH CLUB Norfolk's social elite holds its formal dances. At right is Dr. Alfred Fentress, leading physician and Sea View's chief organizer.

The Seaview founders were highly educated men and worked as professionals in Norfolk or Portsmouth. Many of them, like the Watts brothers, had side investments as well. Attorney Wilbur O. Watts and his brother, Dr. Irving Watts, were part of a well-known long-time family from Hodges Ferry. The family operated a 500-acre farm employing over 500 seasonal workers. The *Norfolk Journal and Guide* noted that the "Watts Brothers were known for their business ventures." Wilbur and his brothers also operated a truck farm, sold produce from their family business, established and owned a 12-car taxicab service called Safeway Cab,¹⁴⁹ owned open-air markets and had investments in Victory Café, the Inter-City Bus Line and Seaview Beach.¹⁵⁰

In addition to Safeway Cab, Watts's also established a franchise called Watts Motor Bus Company. The *Norfolk Journal and Guide* wrote that

only "two other bus companies in the nation are owned and operated by Negroes."¹⁵¹ His Christmas tree business was reported to be the "largest individual distributor of Christmas trees in the entire South." The annual shipments of 50,000 trees loaded in seven boxcars.¹⁵²

He was also a senior partner in Watts Brothers Real Estate Loans and Investment Association.¹⁵³ In 1954, the brothers announced that they had purchased a 15-acre tract of land on the Nansemond riverfront near Belleville for a housing development.¹⁵⁴

Watts was married to Dr. Helen Mewborn for less than two years. She was a Portsmouth physician and graduate from Howard University's medical school.¹⁵⁵ In 1953, his life took a tragic turn when she was killed in an automobile accident while pregnant with their first child. He died the following year of a heart attack.¹⁵⁶

Irving Watts was a prominent Portsmouth dentist and real estate developer. He was a graduate of Meharry Medical College School of Dentistry and practiced in Petersburg for 10 years before moving his practice to Portsmouth in 1942.¹⁵⁷ The practice was located at the corner of Effingham and County Streets.¹⁵⁸ Watts was a founder of Seaview and active in real estate investments. He was instrumental in the construction of the Nansemond Shores and Drum Creek Farms neighborhoods.¹⁵⁹ Watts died in March of 1968.¹⁶⁰

Many of the Seaview founders were extremely involved in their churches and religious organizations. Several of the men were known throughout Hampton Roads for their humanitarian work.