Sudduth was born in Covington, Kentucky on August 8, 1888, the second child of Charles and Mattie Sudduth.
"We Must Not Fail!!!"*:
Horace Sudduth; Queen City Entrepreneur

Stephen Middleton

"During the past thirty years or so," writes John Hope Franklin, "there has been a veritable explosion of the field of Afro-American History." Although African American history has exploded since the publication of pioneering works by William Wells Brown, George Washington Williams, and Carter G. Woodson, "the father of Black History," scholars have been fascinated mainly with national topics and persons who were well-known among the movers and shakers of their generation. More is known about African Americans who were prominent as national leaders — Ida B. Wells-Barnett, Booker T. Washington, and W.E.B. DuBois, but studies about blacks and their leadership in state and local communities remain relatively scant.

In Cincinnati, for example, until the publication of Franklin's recent biography, nothing had been written about George Washington Williams. In 1879 Williams became the first black man elected to the Ohio legislature and one of the first northern blacks to be elected to a political office. But if scholars have neglected to write about local black politicians and men of letters (Williams was both), less prominent black Cincinnatians have been almost forgotten. There have been no scholarly studies on Cincinnatian Peter Clark, who worked tirelessly as an abolitionist, editor, and educator to improve life for black people, and in 1845 helped organize the Cincinnati Colored Orphan Asylum.3

Wendell Phillips Dabney, an Oberlin-educated journalist and founder of the Union, Cincinnati's first black-owned newspaper, has also escaped scholarly investigation. Nor have scholars analyzed the political career of Theodore Berry, the first black elected mayor in the Queen City.4 Most of these leaders, whose combined careers spanned more than a century, did not recognize their importance to American history. They rarely left papers and were even less noticed by the larger culture. Possibly scholars have been discouraged because so few records are available. Franklin admits that in preparing his biography of Williams, he "stalked" him for over forty years.5 Cincinnati entrepreneur, Horace Sudduth (1888-1957), poses a similar challenge.

I first heard about Sudduth in the fall of 1985. At the House of Style barbershop on University Avenue, two blocks north of the University of Cincinnati, middle-aged men bragged about the Manse, a hotel allegedly founded by an African American. I paid little attention at first, thinking that this was only "barbershop gossip." On subsequent visits, House of Style patrons inevitably drifted to Black History, and to Sudduth and the Manse. Their discussions were intense. Jacob Elder, the proprietor, frequently talked until sweat dripped from his brow. He proclaimed Sudduth's significance in Cincinnati history.6

This oral history intrigued me, and I launched an investigation, not fully convinced about the legacy of Horace Sudduth. I soon discovered that his contemporaries remembered him fondly, and his name is listed in the card catalogue at the Cincinnati Historical Society. These sources enabled me to create his biographical sketch.

Sudduth made constructive contributions in Cincinnati and the nation before the Civil Rights Revolution. Born in poverty to mulatto parents during the late nineteenth century, and a prisoner of a system that limited his potential,
he succeeded against the odds. Undeterred by segregation, Sudduth, a tireless worker and risk taker, was willing to sacrifice his life for his dreams: the belief that history and the forces of the universe will produce fruits for a committed person. Emboldened by civil rights litigation of the NAACP during the early twentieth century, he anticipated the collapse of segregation and urged black businessmen to expand to nontraditional markets.

It is important to commemorate his achievements. An unsung entrepreneur, Sudduth not only survived as a realtor in Cincinnati, but also became the city's first black hotel-builder and restaurateur. He served as president of the prestigious National Negro Business League (NNBL), where he inaugurated an agenda that survived for decades after his death. Until this study, Horace Sudduth has been a "lost man" in American history.

Horace Sudduth’s life began in Covington, Kentucky, on August 8, 1888, the second child of Charles and Mattie Sudduth. Charles eked out a living as a general laborer, and Mattie worked as a domestic. Barely literate themselves, they stressed the importance of education to their children. From them Horace learned to be diligent, especially in matters vital to his economic welfare. Their instructions took root. When Charles suffered a crippling paralysis in 1896, Horace, age nine, took on a part-time job to supplement the family income. He might have withdrawn from school but for the values imparted by his parents. These were difficult years for young Horace, who suffered because of limited opportunities available to blacks and the blight of poverty.

Sudduth attended the William Grant High School in Covington, named for state Representative William Grant, who had deeded property in 1880 to the Covington Board of Education to fulfill a promise he had made to African Americans. Kentucky, a border state during the Civil War, usually marched ahead of states in the deep South on racial matters. Blacks there were enfranchised after the war, and in 1875 Grant promised to build a “colored school,” if black voters helped him win the election. He kept his promise, and the segregated school survived until the onset of integration in 1965. Horace was a dedicated pupil and his high school education was all the formal training he received. But he obtained the skills and confidence needed to pursue a career in business.

Horace did not remain in Covington, where opportunities for blacks were limited. After graduating from Lincoln-Grant about 1906, he obtained employment with the Pullman Company, one of the largest companies to employ blacks. There Horace mingled with college-educated blacks who often could not find work elsewhere. Pullman porters served railroad travelers, and Horace, obviously adaptable, tolerated the servant’s role for a few years. As a porter he traveled widely, ultimately as far west as Oklahoma. There he realized that in this formerly unorganized Indian Territory, blacks had greater opportunities than they did in other areas and states. Moreover, in Oklahoma, a freshly minted state, Horace envisioned a boom in the real estate industry.

Although he was not aware of it then, streams of African Americans had migrated to Oklahoma since the late 1870’s, motivated by the collapse of Reconstruction. Southern blacks had lived through an era of political involvement in the South. They had been elected to Congress, state legislatures, and to a few judicial posts. But Reconstruction ended in 1877 when President Hayes withdrew troops from the South. A “reign of terror” followed and large numbers of blacks hurriedly migrated to escape the wrath of the white South. Anti-lynching crusader Ida B. Wells-Barnett had urged blacks in Tennessee to migrate to Oklahoma to escape racial violence in Memphis. She anticipated greater security and opportunity for blacks among Native Americans. Oklahoma retained this appeal for black nationalists, who wanted to form an independent black state there well into the twentieth century. So Sudduth, “a man with native business sense, instinctively envisioned greater opportunities for himself in Oklahoma.” The real estate industry intrigued him. Consequently, he resigned from the Pullman Company in 1908 to launch a career in real estate.

Horace soon faced difficult choices, especially because of matters of the heart. He had strong ties to
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Covington — his high school sweetheart and fiancée — Melvina Jones. Horace returned to Covington about 1909, planning to marry Melvina and return to Oklahoma. But Melvina, an independent woman, did not want to move so far away from home. Although supportive of Horace, she obviously lacked his adventurous spirit. Horace could not leave behind the woman he loved so he cancelled his plans and married Melvina. Sensing that there might be more opportunities in Cincinnati than Covington, they moved across the Ohio River to the Queen City. Apparently, Sudduth never regretted his decision, especially after the birth of their children, Horvina, named in honor of her father Horace; and Melace, named in honor of her mother Melvina. They were proud parents who found creative names for their children.

Sudduth’s fascination with real estate continued in Cincinnati. He had already saved enough money during his brief stay in Oklahoma to start a family. Next, he opened the Creative Realty Company office in 1910. Located downtown on West Fifth Street, Sudduth launched a full-service enterprise. He sold residential property and offered investment counseling. This twenty-two-year-old businessman launched his career on a high school education obtained in a segregated school. Very probably the first black full-service realtor in Cincinnati, Sudduth quickly won the confidence of black property owners. He emphasized service, not profits. He advised his staff that financial success would come if they matched a buyer with the right property. He also advised his clients that purchasing a home should be seen as an investment: “You do not buy a home like you buy a hat.” In the Union, a black-owned newspaper founded by Wendell P. Dabney, Sudduth consistently placed his favorite ad, “Sudduth still sells.” He was most proud of the Wheatley Flat Building, a twenty-two room complex on Lincoln Avenue, sold to the Progressive Benefit Society for Old Women, one of several self-help organizations founded by blacks. He was also pleased to place Emma L. Davis, a cosmetologist, in an eleven-room building on Kemper Avenue. As William Stanton, an employee of Sudduth, noted, “Horace Sudduth was a salesman.” In 1950, Time Magazine reported that Sudduth, after forty years in real estate, had built a half-million dollar fortune.

Sudduth might have made millions had he been only concerned with his prosperity. But he had other concerns: the welfare of African Americans, who, during the first half of this century, did not fare well in Cincinnati, a northern city with longtime ties to the South. As a free state on the fringe of slavery before emancipation, Ohio produced Black Laws, statutes that subjugated African Americans. Like most northern states, Ohio had practiced segregation before the policy was formally adopted by southern legislatures. Ohio’s intolerance for blacks permeated every city in the state, especially Cincinnati, separated from slavery by only the Ohio River.

Life for Cincinnati blacks grew desperate. In 1918, for example, Viola Pennie complained that two Cincinnati police officers insulted her at a grocery store. The “two policemen entered the store,” watched her, and then ended their conversation on “getting a nigger.” Blacks were also denied “good jobs.” World War I created many jobs but Cincinnati blacks obtained few of them. Having faced oppression for so long, many became discouraged. Even Carter G. Woodson had been pessimistic about the condition of northern blacks. “He discoursed upon the moral degeneracy of the Negroes in Cincinnati, where vice, prostitution, and crime flourished.” The oppression of blacks in the Queen City troubled Sudduth, especially when local banks denied them mortgage loans.

A less energetic young man might have determined to do nothing, but not Sudduth. Although no black had ever gotten anywhere in the banking industry in
Cincinnati, he started the Industrial Federal Savings and Loan Association. Founded in 1919, the thrift survived until 1970 when it merged with the East End Investment Company, another black-owned corporation, founded by Major Lee Zeigler in 1921. The merger produced the Major Industrial Federal Savings and Loan Association which was bought by Charter Oaks Bank, a Cincinnati-based corporation, in 1987, almost two decades later.29

Black leaders who had gained national prominence also affected Sudduth. Booker T. Washington probably influenced his outlook on financial matters more than anyone else. Washington, the “Wizard of Tuskegee,” had come “up from slavery” to teach blacks habits for their economic survival. In 1900 he founded the National Negro Business League (NNBL) to encourage business development among blacks.30 Sudduth met Washington in 1913. Although he did not know Washington intimately, Sudduth studied Washington’s economic philosophy. Washington’s death in 1915 ended any possibility of a stronger relationship between the two men. Nevertheless, Sudduth admitted that Washington had a profound effect on him.31 It is not surprising that in 1948 Sudduth was elected president of the National Negro Business League.

During his term as president, 1948-1957, Sudduth carefully studied the teachings of Washington and tried to apply them to his business endeavors. At the incorporation meeting of the NNBL in Boston in 1900, Washington had declared that wherever he had “seen a black man who was succeeding in business, who was a taxpayer, and who possessed intelligence and character, that individual was treated with the highest respect by members of the white race.”32 It is doubtful that Washington expected a racial utopia. Certainly he believed that blacks could become more self reliant, thereby weakening their victim psychosis.

Self help produced economic success for some African Americans and Sudduth probably made special note of their achievements. Will L. Abernathy, who did not know Washington, his contemporary, applied self reliance in Alabama. While most blacks had little property, he accumulated approximately 500 acres of land. He created a family that was as self sufficient as possible. “To get ahead ... he ... worked as hard as he possibly could; [and] led a severely disciplined and sober life.”33 Jake Simmons, Jr., a “Washington man” and Tuskegee graduate, experienced greater success. A fearless fighter, he exclaimed to his sons: “How the hell can a black man stay in bed in the morning when the white men ruled the world?”34 Simmons went on to make a fortune in the oil business. So blacks, wittingly and unwittingly, applied the doctrine of self help. Booker T. Washington brought this philosophy into prominence; and Horace Sudduth embraced it. Essentially, Washington and Sudduth believed that material progress would weaken the sting of racial prejudice. They endeavored to empower their generation by the doctrine of self help.

Historians have described Washington’s ideas as “accommodationist.” They argue that he urged African Americans to pursue a conciliatory agenda. Undoubtedly accommodationism has brought notoriety to Booker T. Washington, but some believe that Washington has been misunderstood. His public statements were addressed to target audiences: white liberals in the North and white conservatives in the South. He had the uncanny ability to disarm both. If the audiences assumed that he did not anticipate a society that offered full equality, he did not correct them. Covertly, however, Washington financed civil rights litigation and he anticipated a society where blacks could enjoy full civil rights. Indeed, Washington was a conservative thinker. But he did not desert his race.35

If Washington had lived longer, some whites probably would have been threatened by his leadership. At least he alarmed Thomas Dixon, Jr., author of The Clansman, who alleged that Washington, the pre-eminent diplomat, conspired either to integrate the races or build a separate black
Dixon feared that Washington might produce in blacks the value that they live by liberty and prosperity. This idea would have brought blacks into direct competition with whites. Dixon thought that it would have been impossible for such a people (blacks) to acquiesce under segregation.

Sudduth embraced Washington’s values and, learned much more from Washington than the gospel of wealth. He had faith in the ability of blacks to compete in the American capitalist system. He believed that the accumulation of real and personal property was a weapon that the weak could use. By engaging in manufacturing, marketing, and achieving financial success, Sudduth believed that blacks could do a great deal to achieve civil rights. He also engaged in a one-man crusade against segregation. He rejected social mores that debased blacks. Unable to topple segregation, he refused to cooperate with unjust laws.  

Horvina Sudduth remembers well how her father handled segregation in Cincinnati. Jim Crow laws only permitted blacks to swim in city pools at the end of the week, when the water was dirty and ready to be changed. “Dad,” she said, “forbade Melace and me from swimming in public pools.” Thus, Sudduth removed them from a practice he found humiliating. Benjamin Mays, his contemporary, did a similar thing. When ordered to enter a house that belonged to a white through its rear door, he refused. So did Jake Simmons, Jr., a machinist in a Detroit factory, who invented a defroster. When his white superiors refused to inspect it, Simmons quit the job to become his own boss. These men kept their dignity in spite of racial prejudice. Sudduth, as much as possible, did not submit to the indignities of segregation.

Primarily an entrepreneur, Sudduth was not a civil rights leader per se. Nonetheless, he developed a program for race progress. He read widely, especially in history and philosophy. He interpreted the “race problem” historically, concluding that racial separation was the primary problem which had confronted blacks since their arrival in America in 1619. He viewed the struggle of African Americans as one to gain inclusion in mainstream American life. After Brown he predicted that there would be greater opportunities for blacks, especially entrepreneurs. “America offers every man the opportunity . . . to exercise freely whatever ability he may possess.” Certainly this was an optimistic appraisal of
American society, but Sudduth, who died in 1957, did not have the benefit of hindsight. From his vantage point he encouraged black businessmen to “give a lift to society,” thinking that society would open up to people who contributed to its development.42

Sudduth was not alone in this opinion. Queen City entrepreneurs had shared his optimism since the 1920’s. Confident that blacks could win the patronage of white consumers, Dabney wrote an editorial in the *Union* advising black businessmen to compete for white customers. “There is enough room for us all,” he wrote. Although optimistic, Dabney was not naive. He recognized that the primary market for black businesses was blacks and he urged the community to patronize them.43 But as a businessman he felt that a firm should appeal to all nationalities and races. It is reasonable to conclude that Sudduth and his colleagues thought that if they held to their values, an oppressive system would have little power over them.

As president of the NNBL, Sudduth expounded this theory to black entrepreneurs. He told them that material gains were vital to progress in civil rights. He warned that race progress could never be achieved by acquiring political and social rights alone. Material progress “is the only thing remaining here on earth that we can get for ourselves and our children — social justice — complete civil rights — and equal employment opportunities.”44 In the tradition of Booker T. Washington, he urged blacks to adopt a new value system. Economic success required “a vigorously pursued self help program [which] will chart a pathway that will lead us to the achievements of those rights, recognition, and privileges that undeniably belong to all American citizens.”45 Sudduth embraced this belief throughout his life.

Sudduth did not inaugurate the self help agenda of the NNBL. Washington had insisted on self reliance since the beginning of the organization in 1900. Initially, self help meant that blacks should be inspired to enter into business. Sudduth labeled this era as phase one for the NNBL. Under this program, large numbers of African Americans had started businesses. He considered his presidency the time for expansion. “We do not need an inspirational program to encourage us to enter business. Those days are gone forever!!!”46 Believing that black businesses needed technical assistance, such as demographic and market research studies, and educational support and counseling, Sudduth proposed to restructure the league, so that it could better offer these services.

In 1948 at the Atlantic City meeting, Sudduth inaugurated its restructuring. The new program combined elements from Washington’s self help program and ideas from the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, especially its emphasis on information, training, and lobbying. Headquartered in the nation’s capital, the U.S. Chamber of Commerce lobbied for policies favorable to its members and advised them of current policies and regulations. Sudduth wanted the NNBL to provide similar services.47

Sudduth also recognized the advantages of having the organization headquartered in Washington, D.C., and of employing a few salaried workers. With key full-time personnel, they could provide educational services and resume publication of the *Journal of Negro Business*. He also proposed to form regional league offices throughout the nation. He considered these proposals vital. “The league’s program is designed to unify our thinking — crystallize leadership — and concentrate our energies to a singleness of aim and purpose.” Sudduth urged his colleagues to move away from the fringe into the center of American life. It was no longer possible for blacks “to sit idly by . . . and expect social organizations and the federal and state governments to do the job for us.”48 “These are the major steps . . . [which will] qualify the Negro for integration into the full economic life of this nation.”49 A delegate to the NNBL Convention in Tuskegee, Alabama, echoed these remarks, concluding “The day of philanthropy is behind us. We must be on our own . . . .”50

Horace Sudduth had faith in capitalism and the opportunities promised in the American system. He looked for possibilities when others focused on obstacles. In 1951 he exclaimed, “economic freedom is the greatest cause before the American Negro today.” He understood well that African Americans faced many hurdles due to racial prejudice. But he

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Queen City Heritage

The Ninth Street Branch of the Y.M.C.A., under the leadership of Horace Sudduth, sponsored a number of programs on safeguarding one’s Negro health during National Negro Health Week in April 1925.
believed they could grow stronger if predisposed that struggle was necessary. He conceived their struggle in economic terms: viable black-owned businesses, and full participation in business life were prerequisites for addressing "all of the other just complaints that we have as American citizens." He considered a well-organized business league vital to their success.

Soon after the 1948 meeting, the league launched its capital campaign, to raise $50,000 to cover current expenses, salaries, and office space. After a successful fund-raising drive, the NNBL opened its headquarters in the nation's capital. Sudduth's leadership brought praise from black entrepreneurs throughout the nation. The National Negro Business League Board of Directors hailed his administration as "the dawn of a new day." Emmett Scott, formerly Washington's personal secretary and past secretary of the NNBL, applauded Sudduth's efforts. "You are about to realize the dreams we had [thirty] years ago." A national headquarters and the creation of regional offices will "make the National Business League a powerful instrument of service in developing Negro business in America." Accolades came from others, most notably Louis C. Blount, General Manager of the Great Lakes Mutual Insurance Company, who identified two epochs in the league's history: "First, when Booker T. Washington founded it; second, when Horace Sudduth was elected president."

Sudduth did not believe in chance, so he worked diligently to arouse interest in the league. He mingled with prominent black leaders, hoping to attract others to join. In addition to Scott, whom he admired, his circle of influence included Charles Spaulding, founder of the North Carolina Mutual Insurance Company, and Moses McKissick, architect. According to David Rice, Executive Vice President of the NNBL, Sudduth established the national agenda for the organization.

Sudduth put his zeal to good use locally as well, and made vital contributions to civic affairs in Cincinnati. He was a catalyst in the construction of a segregated YMCA in downtown Cincinnati. Chicago millionaire Julius Rosenwald initiated the project when he offered to donate $25,000 to any city that raised matching funds to create a YMCA for blacks. Sudduth organized black leaders and local politicians to accept the challenge. They launched a capital campaign which raised more than $100,000 to finance the project.

They erected the building downtown on Ninth Street in 1916. Sudduth chaired the YMCA Management Committee for the next twenty-five years. When the Ninth Street YMCA celebrated its fiftieth anniversary in 1931, letters poured into Cincinnati, commending Sudduth for his efforts. As Dr. Jesse E. Moorland, secretary of the YMCA in the nation's capital and trustee of Howard University, put it: "You have had a fine constructive program these years." Sudduth's interest in social problems also carried him to leadership in the New Orphan Asylum for Colored Youth, chartered in 1845. Prominent Cincinnatians helped to establish the organization including white abolitionists Salmon P. Chase and Christian Donaldson and progressive blacks, including John Liverpool, John Woodson, and Richard Phillips. Inspiration for the program came from Philadelphia, the "city of brotherly love." Lydia P. Mott, a Quaker-reformer in Philadelphia, understood the plight of blacks in Ohio better than its residents. The Black Laws denied African Americans benefit of the state's welfare program. Mott recommended that concerned residents create local organizations, funded by philanthropies, to protect indigent black children. Horace Sudduth joined the Asylum in 1924, as a member of the Board of Trustees; they later elected him president. His administration faced at least one hurdle. A rumor surfaced that a rival organization would absorb the Asylum. Sudduth calmed his colleagues, assuring them that the organization had prepared for expanded service. He broadened the Asylum's support to include Cincinnati-based Lady-Managers, who organized an auxiliary to assist the male-dominated staff of the Asylum. This was not unusual. The NNBL, for example, had Lady-Managers. Separated because of gender, these associations illustrate society's treatment of women during the 1950's. Although Sudduth was not a reformer in the women's movement, he lent support to their causes by serving on their boards and committees.

Initially, the Asylum provided shelter, food, and apprenticeships for needy children. Under Sudduth's
leadership it added subsidies for students going to secondary schools and segregated colleges. Since the 1970's it has retooled to provide scholarships for students going to major American universities. According to Matthew Fairfax, president of the Asylum Scholarship Fund, several of their students have graduated from schools in a number of fields including law and medicine.  

Sudduth's civic service also included the care of seniors. Philanthropist John Crawford made this possible. Crawford, a white Civil War veteran, had grown bitter because of American neglect of aged blacks, especially elderly men. He had observed their contributions to the Union with their blood. Yet, the federal government ignored their general welfare. Crawford remembered them in his will and bequeathed his College Hill estate to their care. Administrators named the facility in his honor, Crawford's Old Men's Home.  

A visionary who wanted a great deal out of life, Sudduth used Cincinnati as a laboratory to test his ideas. By 1940 he had achieved success in real estate and banking. However, his most daring initiative was achieved in 1950 with the creation of the Manse Hotel. Segregated accommodations for African Americans were not new in Cincinnati. Before emancipation, slaveholders had traveled to Cincinnati routinely, frequently bringing slaves. Their “chattels” needed somewhere to stay. Black entrepreneurs met this need when they established the Old Dumas House in downtown Cincinnati. In addition to being the first segregated hotel in the Queen City, it holds the distinction as “The first colored hotel in the United States.” It was the most successful black-owned establishment in ante-bellum Cincinnati. Segregated accommodations and housing continued to arouse the sympathy of white philanthropists and produce business opportunities for black entrepreneurs into
the twentieth century. The Cincinnati Model Homes Company dominated the black real estate market during the first few decades of this century. Founded in 1914 by Jacob G. Schmidlapp, a German millionaire philanthropist, the CMHC constructed million dollar projects in Walnut Hills. The building of spacious houses and apartments and well-constructed efficiencies, earned the Cincinnati Model Homes Company a "reputation as a leader in housing reform and community development." Some of these buildings remain in use today.

Schmidlapp provided a different role model for Horace Sudduth. Concerned that hotel accommodations were unavailable to blacks, Schmidlapp established the Gordon Hotel in 1917. Obviously, rooms could be found for transients but rarely could traveling blacks find adequate accommodations. This situation brought shame to black residents who asked Schmidlapp to construct a hotel. The Gordon was the first twentieth century hotel to cater to blacks. Schmidlapp considered this venture a major success.64

In real estate and accommodations, Sudduth joined concerned residents who wanted to offer adequate accommodations for black residents and travelers. He began to invest in accommodations for transients in 1931 when he purchased the Hotel Terry located in Walnut Hills. Mozilla Terry, its proprietor, maintained the facility as a boarding house. It was not officially a hotel, at least in the modern sense of the word. Well constructed from brick and concrete, Hotel Terry was a multi-family facility. Sudduth made a few improvements initially. He changed its name to Hotel Manse and advertised it as a hotel. A few years later he purchased a nearby building and annexed it to Hotel Manse. But he still attempted only modest improvements.65

At mid-century, Sudduth put his resources into a massive renovation project to upgrade Hotel Manse to a first-rate facility. More than a half-million dollars went into the project. The construction produced 108 bedrooms, private baths and showers, and circulating ice water in each room. In addition to guest quarters, thirteen efficiency apartments were added along with the Sweetbriar, an air-conditioned dining room, modern music boxes, and an ultra-modern coffee shop opened twenty-four hours a day. Finally, he

As president of the Asylum, Sudduth (center of first row) worked with other trustees to expand its services and its support through the inclusion of a board of Lady-Managers.
constructed a huge ballroom, capable of accommodating more than 400 guests.66

Sudduth, who had high standards and impeccable taste, intended to make the establishment comparable to other hotels. “The entrance is across the center of a long solarium extending the width of the building’s front, and serving as an adjunct to the handsomely appointed lobby within.”67 The lighting division of the Cincinnati Gas and Electric Company planned its “soft and brilliant” lights, adding special fixtures and placements to achieve a subdued, yet sharp illumination. Sudduth wanted the hotel to express elegance. As William Stanton put it: “Horace was class.”68

After nearly a year of renovations, on Easter Sunday 1950, when blacks looked their best in spite of their impoverishment, Sudduth staged a grand opening. Along with structural changes came a new name: The Manse Hotel. More than 6,000 guests strolled through the building that Easter. Uniformed hosts and hostesses greeted guests. Gourmet dishes were served on elegant china. It was a most auspicious occasion for African Americans. Reporters came too. A reporter for the Enquirer gave the hotel high marks: “The Manse Hotel on Chapel Street is the finest hotel in the United States owned and operated by Negroes. It is a credit to the city and to the man whose enterprise, energy and money made it possible. The Manse is as finely equipped and beautifully furnished as any of our downtown establishments.”69

Frank L. Williams, Sudduth’s high school principal, praised his former pupil. Williams, at age ninety and in poor health, declined his invitation as a guest of honor. But he seized the moment to confirm instructions he had given to Sudduth and Lincoln-Grant students. “You are a typical American citizen. You saw what could be done and did it.” His words emboldened Sudduth who stated the Manse Hotel “is definitely in direct competition with the larger downtown hotels.” Certainly he meant white hotels; but he did not view entrepreneurship in that way and he seldom described himself as a black businessman. He always accentuated the positive, claiming the Manse provided “every imaginable service,” including suites, dining, room service, parking, and a coffee shop.70 Feeling he had done the right thing, Sudduth anticipated success.

Sudduth had traveled widely, and he decided against a “soul food” menu, typical for African American restaurants during this period. He liked the word “Sweet-briar,” and called his restaurant by that name. He convinced Fred Good, a chef who enjoyed a city-wide reputation, to manage the food service at the Manse. Good, who had worked at the Broadway Hotel for over twenty years, joined the staff in 1950. There is a second reason why Sudduth lured Good from the white-owned establishment downtown. He considered Good to be among the best in his profession. And he believed it prudent to have him work in a first-rate, black-owned establishment.71

It is not surprising that Sudduth enticed Good to join his staff. In light of the historic experience of African Americans, it was Sudduth’s practice to provide employment opportunities for blacks. And he assigned Good the responsibilities he probably would not have obtained at the Broadway Hotel. This thinking enabled William Stanton to work with Sudduth, who contracted with Stanton to install and maintain commercial radios in guest rooms. As an employee of the National Refrigeration Company, Stanton
His civic service also included service on the board of Crawford’s Old Men’s Home in College Hill. Pictured are other trustees in 1932, from left to right “Snake” Jameson, “Orator” Wilber Page; “Editor” W.P. Dabney, “Politician” Bill Copeland, Sudduth, and Pee Wee Wilkins.

The Old Dumas House, known as the “first colored hotel in the United States,” was located on McAllister Street in downtown Cincinnati.

Cincinnati Model Homes Company, under the leadership of Jacob G. Schmidlapp, constructed housing for blacks in the early twentieth century.
In 1917 Schmidlapp established the Gordon Hotel which offered accommodations for blacks traveling to the city. The Gordon was the first twentieth century hotel to cater to blacks.
also sold appliances for the kitchen to Sudduth. Another young black, Sammy Whiteman, who was a prominent salesman, sold Sudduth furniture and interior decorations for the Manse.\(^72\)

The Manse Hotel enjoyed a monopoly at first, as segregation barred blacks and their associations from downtown hotels. Sudduth, an eminent salesman, immediately attracted conventions. The National Union of Red Caps, the Atlanta Life Insurance Company, the Negro Life Insurance Company, and the NNBL are among a dozen businesses that held their annual meetings at the Manse Hotel. Naturally, this pleased city leaders who enjoyed economic benefits from these conventions.\(^73\)

The Manse attracted prominent African Americans visiting Cincinnati. Athletes, including Joe Louis, stayed there, as did musicians Tina Bradshaw, Lula Reed, and Lionel Hampton. Sammy Davis, Jr. was another prominent guest to lodge at the Manse Hotel. Glen Alexander, hotel manager, and Jacob Elder, bellhop, doubted that there were many visiting entertainers who didn't stay at the Manse.\(^74\)

Segregation was obviously the biggest factor behind the Manse's success. But it had acquired a larger appeal, especially among middle-class African Americans.

For mature blacks, the Manse offered an opportunity to dress in formal attire: the women in full length gowns, the men in tuxedos. Allen Howard, a Cincinnati Enquirer editor, explains their excitement: to "glide down the hallway on plush wall-to-wall carpet in the ballroom; to be served a well-prepared dinner on expensive chinaware from silver trays; to light a cigarette, reach out, and let it dangle from a silver ash tray on the table; this was part of the very finest of black social life in Cincinnati."\(^75\)

Although he had overcome a lot, Sudduth did not win the approval of all white Cincinnatians. But this had to do more with racism than with his character. Born to impoverished parents, and unable to go to college, he never forgot his limited options. He had wanted to study law, and said that he had enrolled at Howard University. The university

In 1950 Sudduth completed a major renovation of the Manse Hotel and on Easter Sunday held a grand opening which attracted some 6,000 guests to view the newly completed project.
The new Manse Hotel boasted an ultra-modern coffee shop opened round-the-clock. Organizations and churches such as the Mt. Zion Methodist Church in Walnut Hills held dinners and banquets at the Manse Hotel. (Picture courtesy of Martin Clinton)
has no record of him. Nevertheless, it was possible that he sat through a course during his employment with the Pullman Company. He obviously valued formal education and insisted that his children apply themselves. A vigorous organizer, Sudduth read widely and developed a lucid writing style. He worked his way to success.

But he could not overcome institutional racism. In 1954 the Cincinnati police ordered his arrest on a charge fabricated by twisting a property ordinance. They claimed that Sudduth was not maintaining some property to standards and sent out a paddy wagon to haul him to jail. At breakfast when the officers arrived, Sudduth told the men to go to his office where he conducted business. The police crashed through the door, handcuffed him, and hauled him off to jail. Glen Alexander, his son-in-law, arranged for his release hours later, and the charges were ultimately dropped. There is no official record of his arrest. Horvina Sudduth admitted that her father had maintained some property poorly but doubted that this warranted his arrest. It is reasonable to assume that property standards had little to do with his arrest. Racist elements in the city probably wanted to teach Sudduth a lesson.

He had experienced humiliation before. His work as a porter had made him uncomfortable. Porters were expected to be yielding to white passengers. As president of the NNBL Sudduth could not find adequate lodging in Washington, D.C., the corporation’s headquarters. These experiences developed in him an urgency to create “something nice” for African Americans which explains his dedication to the Manse Hotel, and why he poured most of his resources into the project. “Sudduth made millions,” said Stanton, “and he spent millions.”

By any standards, the career of Horace Sudduth was remarkable. In less than fifty years, he had made a fortune in real estate. He had provided decent housing for black residents. Undeterred by white controlled mortgage companies which sometimes denied loans to blacks, he founded a savings and loan company. He served on the board of several civil organizations and spearheaded the construction of a segregated YMCA. He served as president of at least two organizations. Along the way Sudduth made time to experiment with hotel management. The Manse Hotel experienced success until the mid-1960’s. It employed more than thirty people, with an annual payroll of over $85,000. During its heyday, it consistently grossed over $200,000 annually. Sudduth and his wife Melvina enjoyed these boom years. In addition to helping with the business, Melvina supported civic causes and held membership in the City Federation of Colored Women’s Club. She died in 1956. Sudduth, in poor health, died one year later.

Showdown came for Sudduth’s enterprises during the onset of desegregation in the 1960’s. Although he had little to do with desegregation, it has a great deal to do with his legacy. He favored a common American culture, especially in education, politics, and business. However, he did not anticipate the appeal of desegregated facilities to African Americans, and the possibility that they might desert him as soon as downtown hotels welcomed them.

Sudduth represented a generation of entrepreneurs who developed an economic solution to the race problem. He believed the American system offered huge benefits for persons who had capital, and he committed his life to the capitalist system. He doubted that a person who
had no capital could ever expect much from America. To him, such a person could not even hope for a decent job. Sudduth expected little from desegregation until African Americans gained economic parity. And to gain parity, black entrepreneurs had to succeed in banking, industry, and commerce. Only this approach could create jobs and earn for them dignity in a society that had oppressed them.

The majority of African Americans in Cincinnati and the nation had other goals, however. They assumed integration would automatically produce parity. They paid less attention to creating viable black institutions than they did to seeking admission and service in white-controlled organizations. Their preoccupation with integration created an illusion. Consequently, when integration came to Cincinnati, African Americans deserted the Manse Hotel. Visitors, including national organizations, looked for lodging and convention halls downtown.

Sudduth was not so naive. Yet, he contributed to this unthinking decision among blacks. Sudduth opened the Manse in a black section of town. This would have been reasonable had he not expected to achieve cross-over status. He did; and he gave whites too much credit during segregation. They never patronized the Manse. Secondly, Sudduth did not educate his patrons well. He assumed that they would appreciate the contributions his enterprises made: jobs, ownership, and dignity. But they never learned the importance of supporting ethnic-based businesses. Sudduth's vision of the American dream created the illusion that black businesses would survive without special effort. This decision proved costly. Although a major force in the business life of Cincinnati, Sudduth's enterprises barely survived his death.

The Manse Hotel sputtered along during the mid-sixties, then disappeared by the end of the decade. After its demise it was transformed into the Walnut Hills Apartments. The Walnut Hills Redevelopment Corporation purchased the building in 1979 to provide low income housing. The Manse Hotel remains only a memory now; a ghost in the minds of barbershop gurus.
"We Must Not Fail!!"

19

*Taken from a speech made by Sudduth at the Fifty-first Annual Convention of the National Negro Business League, October 10-12, 1951.


4. For a discussion of Cincinnati politics see Wendell P. Dabney, *Cincinnati's Colored Citizens: Historical, Sociological and Biographical* (Cincinnati, 1926).


6. Jacob Elder, owner of House of Style, University Avenue, Cincinnati, Ohio, September 17, 1985. Mr. Elder led regular informal conversations into Cincinnati history during the months of September- November 1985. These discussions whetted my appetite to pursue this biographical sketch.


11. The school changed its name frequently during this period. Its names included William Grant High School, Lincoln-Grant High, and Covington High. Cyndy McQuillan, Secretary, Holmes High School to Stephen Middleton, January 17, 1988, author's file.


21. The *Union*, July 9, September 17, 1921; April 22, 1922.


25. The *Union*, October 12, 1918.

26. Ibid., October 5, 1918.


41. *Brown v. Board of Education*, 349 U.S. 294 (1954). The Supreme Court ruled racial separation unconstitutional in the school segregation cases. Sudduth envisioned that this opinion would apply to other institutions.

42. 56th Annual Convention, Address, October 24, 1956.

43. The *Union*, July 9, 1921.

44. President's Report to Mid-year Meeting, National Negro Business League, Manse Hotel, May 11-12, 1953.

45. Annual Address of Horace Sudduth, Eighth President of the National Negro Business League, Detroit, Michigan, August 24, 1949.


47. 56th Annual Convention, Address, October 24, 1956; Sudduth to Emmett Scott, February 7, 1949, Emmett Scott Papers, Series 2,
Miscellaneous, Box 92, Folder 4, Morgan State University Library, Baltimore, Maryland.

49. 56th Annual Convention, Address, October 24, 1956.
51. 56th Annual Convention, Address, October 24, 1956.
52. “The Dawn of A New Day,” p. 3; Rosa Brady to Sudduth, March 10, 1949, Scott Papers.
53. Scott to Sudduth, March 5, 1949, Scott Papers.
57. Jesse E. Moorland to Sudduth, March 10, 1931; B.W. Overton to Jesse E. Moorland, March 2, 6, 1931, Jesse E. Moorland Papers: 126-122, Folder 106, Moorland Spingarn Library, Howard University, Washington, D.C.
60. Interview, Matthew Fairfax, March 31, 1988; *Orphan Asylum*, May 2, 1927.
64. Ibid.
78. Interview, Glen Alexander, March 9, 1988; Interview, William Stanton, March 22, 1988; Mays, *Born to Rebel*; Harris, *Keeping the Faith*.
80. Interview, Glen Alexander, March 9, 1988; *Cincinnati Enquirer*, January 5, 1956; *Cincinnati Post*, March 20, 1957.
81. Horace Sudduth, Hamilton County Administration Building, Auditor’s Office, Cincinnati, Ohio; *Cincinnati Enquirer*, June 2, 1969.