

Wednesday, February 14, 1996
Avon Williams, Jr., Campus
Tennessee State University
10th and Charlotte

Afro-American Culture & History



15 th Annual Local Conference

- 8:00-8:45 AM Registration and Refreshments, Atrium
- 8:50-9:20 AM Opening Remarks
Dr. James A. Hefner, President, Tennessee State University
Mayor Philip Bredesen
Ms. Ann Reynolds, Executive Director, Metropolitan Historical Commission
Dr. Bobby L. Lovett, Dean, College of Arts and Sciences, Tennessee State University
- 9:25-9:45 AM "Aaron Douglas: Harlem Renaissance Artist in Nashville," Dr. Amy Kirschke, Lecturer, Vanderbilt University
- 9:50-10:15 AM "Davidson County Chancery Records in Antebellum Times: Sources on Local Black History," Mr. Kenneth Fieth, Director, Metropolitan Government Archives
- 10:20-10:40 AM "African American Church History and Archives in Nashville," Dr. Evelyn Fancher, Vanderbilt University
- 10:45-10:55 AM Break and Refreshments, Atrium
- 11:00-11:25 AM "The Culture and the History of Blacks in Knoxville," Mr. Robert J. Booker, Beck Cultural Center, Knoxville
- 11:30-1:00 PM Lunch (free with registration), Atrium
- 1:05-1:50 PM Tennessee State University's New Show Choir, "A Medley of Music," Mrs. Diana Poe, Director
- 1:55-3:15 PM Panel Group Discussions on Local Black History Projects:
"The Black History Book Committee in Wilson County," Mrs. Patricia Lockett, Lebanon
"The African American Heritage Society of Franklin and Williamson County," Mrs. Mary Mills, Franklin
"The African American Genealogy and Historical Society of Nashville-Davidson County: Promoting Black Family History," Dr. Tommie Morton-Young, Nashville
- 3:20-3:45 PM Discussion/Adjournment
- 11:00-3:20 PM Art Exhibition: Michael McBride, Curator of Tennessee State University's Hiram Gordon Memorial Art Gallery

Planning Committee:

Yildiz Binkley
Bobby L. Lovett
Michael McBride
Lois C. McDougald
Reavis Mitchell
Ophelia T. Paine
Vallie Pursley
Linda T. Wynn

Financial Supporters:

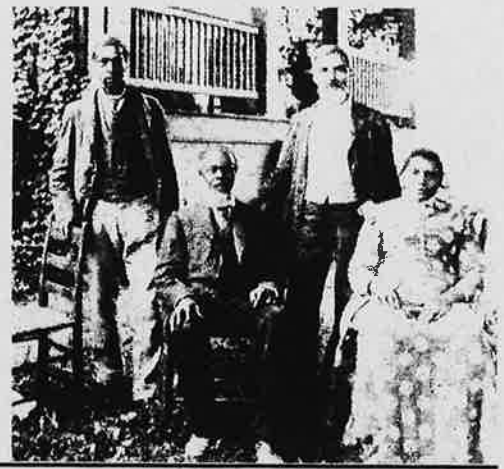
AME Review
Fifteenth Avenue Baptist Church
First Baptist Church, Capitol Hill
First Baptist Church, East Nashville
First Baptist Church, South Inglewood
Frierson Church of Christ
Development Foundation

Holy Trinity Episcopal Church
Jefferson Street Baptist Church
National Baptist Publishing Board
Spruce Street Baptist Church
Tennessee Historical Society
Victory Baptist Church
Winston-Derek Booksellers
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Leaders of Afro-American Nashville



The Wessyngton Plantation: A Piece of Black History

Much of the history of local African Americans begins in the chapter on slavery in America. That chapter includes slave farms and plantations which were common in Tennessee, particularly in Middle and West Tennessee. Whereas white families dominated the history of the plantations, it was the majority residents (the black workers; the slaves) who built and maintained the economy of Tennessee's plantations. Much black family history and genealogy can be traced through the slave farms and the large plantations – like the Wessyngton Plantation in Middle Tennessee.

Wessyngton Plantation was settled in 1796 by Joseph Washington (1770-1848) and African and African American slaves he brought with him from Southampton County, Virginia. It was not unusual after the Revolutionary War (1775-1783) for ambitious men to move their slaves from the worn lands of the eastern slave states to the cheaper and more fertile lands of the western territories like Tennessee. Joseph was a second cousin to President George Washington. Wessyngton is the Old English spelling of the Washington surname which dates back to 1260. Washington and his slaves were among the first settlers in Robertson County, Tennessee, to begin the cultivation of dark-fired tobacco. With the wealth generated by the black workers, the Wessyngton mansion was built in 1819 by slave labor and still stands on the original land.

After Joseph's death in 1848, the estate passed to his son George Augustine Washington, Sr. (1815-1892). Under George's management, and with the labor of even more African American slaves, the estate was increased from 3,700 acres of land, 79 slaves, and 15,000 bushels of tobacco in 1850 to 15,000 acres, 274 slaves, and 250,000 bushels of tobacco by 1860. A year before the Civil War, Wessyngton became America's largest tobacco plantation and the world's largest single producer. The outbreak of the Civil War in mid-1861 brought operations at Wessyngton to a halt. Despite the empty rhetoric and boasting of Tennessee's minority Confederates, the Union army and pro-Union

citizens quickly took control of Middle Tennessee in early 1862. Many of Wessyngton's black men enlisted with the Union army after the office for the Recruitment of United States Colored Troops (USCT) opened at Nashville in September of 1863. After the war and the Emancipation, many of the USCT returned to their families and Wessyngton to farm. Because the Washingtons never sold any of the slaves from the plantation, the African American families remained intact through recent times. As many as five generations of black families lived on the Wessyngton Plantation at the same time, and many of them continued to use the Washington surname after slavery.

Wessyngton Plantation remained in the hands of direct white descendants of the original settler until 1983. Then the estate was sold to Glen and Donna Roberts. Wessyngton is located in Cedar Hill, Tennessee, about thirty-five miles northwest of Nashville.

In 1964 the Washington family deposited their family records with the Tennessee State Library and Archives (TSLA). These TSLA records span the 17th through the 20th centuries and are stored on nearly seventy rolls of microfilm. The records yield valuable information on the lives of African Americans before the Civil War; they provide a wealth of data on black genealogy as well as black life on one of Tennessee's premier plantations.

In the photograph above, the writer of this article identified four Wessyngton servants, all former slaves and the writer's relatives. From left to right they are: Allen Washington (b. 1825), head dairyman; Emanuel Washington (b. 1824), the cook; Granville Washington (b. 1831), body servant to George A. Washington; and Hettie Washington (b. 1839), Emanuel's wife and head laundress. The photograph was taken in 1892.

Indubitably plantation history is important for the reconstruction of black family history and genealogy in Tennessee.

John Baker

This publication is a project of the 1996 Nashville Conference on Afro-American Culture and History. The authors compiled the information. Tennessee State University's College of Arts and Sciences edited the materials. The Metropolitan Historical Commission completed the design.

Leaders of Afro-American Nashville

LeMoyne-Owen College (1871)

LeMoyne-Owen College is a four-year, historically black college located at 807 Walker Avenue in Memphis.

Conceived in 1870 when philanthropist Francis Julius LeMoyne gave \$20,000 to the American Missionary Association, LeMoyne Normal and Commercial School opened during the fall of 1871 in a new building at 284 Orleans Street. LeMoyne directed that the school, which succeeded the AMA's Lincoln Chapel freedmen's school, would admit "all pupils whose conduct is orderly and whose character is creditable." A notable antislavery man, LeMoyne (1798-1879) traveled from his Washington, Pennsylvania, home to visit the new school. He donated a Hutchress striking clock worth \$800 for the school's tower.

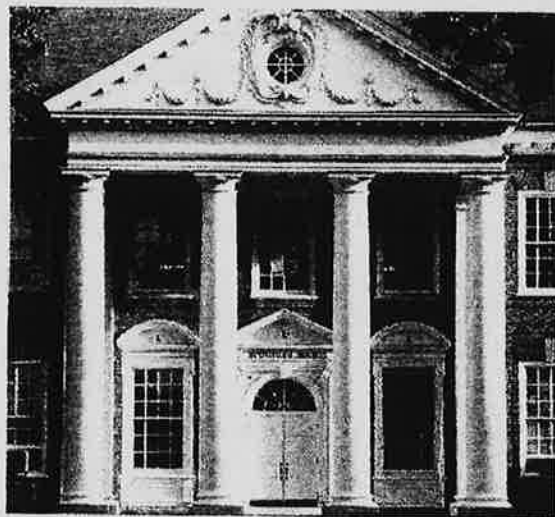
Early classes enrolled 185 students including 75 persons in the Sabbath School. The first principal (1871-1873), J. H. Barnum, reported nearly 300 students and three active departments: normal, commercial, and music. LeMoyne Normal produced many teachers and graduated 200 students by 1908.

The LeMoyne School moved to its present site in 1914. The school became a junior college in 1924 and a baccalaureate institution in 1934, when the name was changed to LeMoyne College. By now LeMoyne had strong debating and football teams that gained name recognition for the school. Hollis F. Price became the institution's first black president in 1943.

Owen Junior College (1954-1968) merged with LeMoyne College in 1968. Owen was founded in late 1953 by the Tennessee Baptist Missionary and Educational Convention, Inc., and located near the corner of Vance and Orleans streets in the former St. Agnes Academy-Sienna College buildings. Some 22 students began their Christian education there on January 18, 1954. The junior college was named for the Reverend Samuel Augustus Owen, pastor of Metropolitan Baptist Church, LeMoyne College's next-door neighbor.

LeMoyne-Owen College continues to educate African Americans and other students for meaningful positions in the world community.

Perre M. Magness



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Leaders of Afro-American Nashville

Historic Jubilee Hall of Fisk University

Fisk School opened its doors in January 1866 in Nashville, near what is today the site of the Union Station railroad depot. The campus's only buildings at the time consisted of small wooden hospital barracks originally built to serve ill Union soldiers. The Union Army occupied Nashville in February 1862 and held the city throughout the Civil War.

By the early 1870s, the wooden barracks were insufficient to serve the population of African Americans who wished to be educated at Fisk School. Through the efforts of Fisk's Jubilee Singers—who introduced Negro spirituals to the world beyond the South—funds were raised to relocate the school on more than forty acres of land in North Nashville.

Funds raised by the Jubilee Singers during an 1871-74 international concert tour were used to construct the school's first permanent building, Jubilee Hall. This imposing six-story building, named in honor of the Jubilee Singers, was designed by architect Steven D. Hatch of New York. Construction began in 1873 and was completed in 1876. The massive Victorian Gothic structure, which first housed the entire college, features a towering steeple. Complementary elements near the entrance are magnificent doors and a beautifully carved staircase created from wood sent from Sierra Leone, West Africa, by a former student.

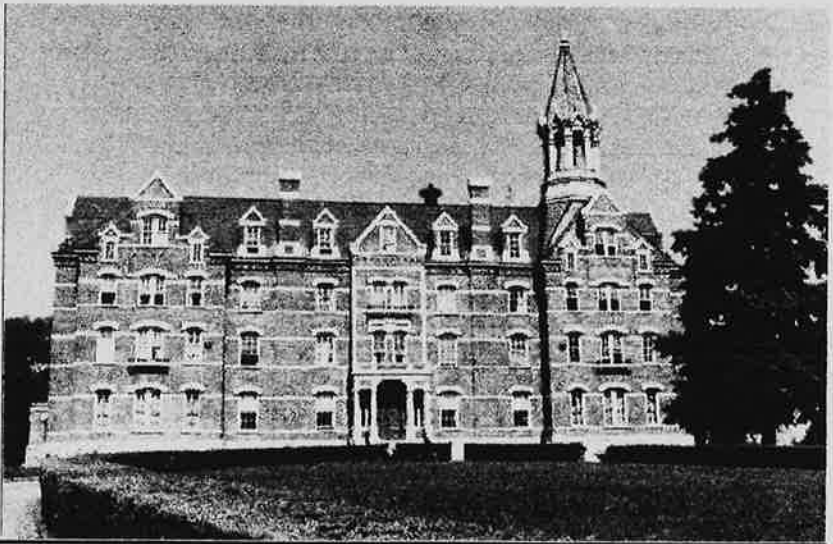
In Jubilee Hall's first-floor Appleton Room hangs a floor-to-ceiling portrait of the original Jubilee Singers. The portrait was created by artist Edward Havell, portrait painter for the court of Queen Victoria, who commissioned this portrait in the 1880s and later presented it to Fisk University. The Appleton Room was totally refurbished in 1992 as a gift to the

university from the William Randolph Hearst Foundation.

Jubilee Hall, dedicated in January 1876, is one of the oldest structures continuously in use for educational purposes by the African-American community. The building today serves as a residence for first-year female students. Over the years, as many as three generations of women in the same family—grandmother, mother, and daughter—have at different times occupied the same dormitory suite. Jubilee Hall is truly one of the most cherished buildings on the campus.

Fisk University's campus has the notable distinction of being listed as a historic district in the National Register of Historic Places, maintained by the U. S. Department of the Interior in Washington, D. C. Jubilee Hall has received recognition from the State of Tennessee in the form of a historical marker denoting the structure's significance. In 1976, Jubilee Hall was designated as a National Historic Landmark by the U. S. Department of the Interior.

Reavis T. Mitchell



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Leaders of Afro-American Nashville

Knoxville College (1875)

Knoxville College was founded in 1875 by the Board of the Freedmen's Mission of the United Presbyterian Church. The church had started educational missions among the Freedmen in 1864. They were located in Mississippi, Louisiana, and Tennessee.

In 1872, Southern states passed legislation to provide some form of education for black children. Since so few black teachers were available, the church that year passed a resolution to discontinue its missions and to concentrate all its educational efforts in a good normal school to train teachers.

After a trip through the Carolinas, Alabama, Mississippi, and Tennessee, the site selection committee was convinced that Knoxville offered the best opportunity for such a school. It had a healthful climate, good transportation facilities, and a fairly large black population with too few schools.

Dr. John S. McCulloch became the first president of the College in 1877. In order to have a supply of college students, the school organized an elementary department and a high school department to feed the college department. It graduated its first two college students in 1883.

In 1895, Knoxville College organized a medical department to train physicians. Unfortunately, it was never properly staffed or financed to carry on the work of an accredited medical school. It graduated only two students in 1900 and closed later that year.

Knoxville College had more success with its hospital which opened in 1907. It was the only hospital within 200 miles of Nashville or Atlanta where black doctors and nurses could practice their professions. Knoxville General Hospital did not accept black physicians or nurses on its staff.

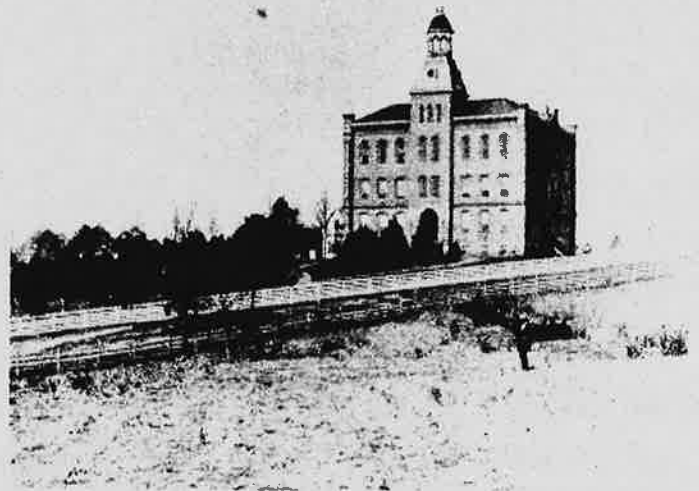
When the Knoxville College Hospital opened, there were only seven black physicians in the city. By the time it closed in 1926, there were twenty. It offered a modern setting for black patients who

were treated in a basement ward at General Hospital. The college discontinued its elementary department in 1927 and the high school department in 1931 to concentrate fully on college work. College work, of course, included operating a large farm and dairy herd. The most popular department was perhaps the music department with its various quartets and octets which traveled extensively to boost the college's name recognition.

The effects of the Great Depression and of World War II forced the college to sell most of its farm land and other properties across the country during the 1930s and 1940s. It was able to bounce back with a great deal of vigor in the 1950s and 1960s with great building projects.

Although it continues to struggle with financial woes, Knoxville College still plays a vital role in educating those students most at risk and is a valuable asset to the city of Knoxville.

Robert J. Booker



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Leaders of Afro-American Nashville

Spruce Street Baptist Church (1895-)



Known as the "Mother Church" of African-American Baptist churches in Nashville, Spruce Street Baptist Church originally began in 1841 when the congregation of First Baptist Church at Seventh and Broad permitted its "Colored members to hold a separate meeting under the superintendence of a Standing Committee on Negro Problems." Beginning in 1848, the First Baptist Colored Mission moved to Pearl Street (now Nelson Merry Street), and Nelson Merry was allowed to preach regular sermons to the Negro mission. After being examined by local Baptist ministers on November 29, 1853, Merry became the first ordained Negro minister in Nashville. In March of 1865, the Negro members of First Baptist Church requested that they be constituted as a "separate and independent church." A year later, the congregation was incorporated as the First Colored Baptist Church. Eighteen years after its incorporation, in 1884, the Reverend Nelson Merry died on July 14th. Three years after Merry's death, an ideological spilt caused the Reverend Tom R. Huffman to lead a group of members to form the Mt. Olive Baptist Church. The remaining members continued to worship with the Reverend M. W. Gilbert. In 1895, under the Reverend James E. Purdy, the First Colored Baptist Church again divided.

A little more than 100 years ago, the church known as Spruce Street Baptist Church came into existence under the pastorate of the Reverend James E. Purdy. Originally a part of First Colored Baptist Church, Spruce Street became the second branch of the city's first African-American Baptist church to organize a separate congregation. On September 19, 1895, one day after Booker T. Washington delivered his Atlanta Compromise speech, those members who followed the Reverend Purdy were incorporated as the Spruce Street Baptist Church. Purdy served the congregation for two years and in 1897 was succeeded by Pastor E. F. Dennis, under whose leadership the members began the process of rebuilding the congregation and the church building. At the turn of

the century, pastoral leadership was given to the Reverend E. J. Fisher. It was during Fisher's tenure that the church's building program was completed. In 1905, the Reverend E. W. D. Isaac was called to lead the congregation. It was during this same year that African Americans in Nashville protested against the state's newly enacted "Jim Crow" streetcar law. Isaac, who was the editor of the Nashville *Clarion*, a Negro weekly newspaper, urged the black community to cease doing business with the Nashville Transit Company. On July 5, Blacks readily transformed disapproving discourse into protest action and withheld patronage from the local bus company.

Through the years, members of Spruce Street have been served by some of the nation's and the National Baptist denomination's greatest sermonists, religious scholars, and financiers, including but not limited to the Reverends T. E. Huntley, J. J. McNeil, and J. F. Grimmert. In 1947, under the pastorate of the Reverend C. A. W. Clark, Spruce Street opened the Willa A. Townsend Reading Room and the Nelson G. Merry Playground with a paid attendant. Two years later, the Callie P. Brown Nursery opened. The Reverend Dr. Arthur Melvin Townsend, who pastored Spruce Street Baptist Church at various periods between 1917 and 1956, led the congregation in two major building programs. In 1934, he was instrumental in having the church remodeled, when it was located on Capitol Hill, and in rebuilding the church on its present site, when the members were forced to acquiesce to the city's mid-1950s Capitol Hill Urban Renewal Program. In 1954, Spruce Street sold its Eighth Avenue, North, property to the federal government. Today the Nashville Branch of the Federal Reserve Bank stands on the site. Under the leadership of Dr. Townsend and other appropriate church leaders the congregation purchased property at 504 20th Avenue, North, and contracted with the African-American architectural firm of McKissack and McKissack to design the new church

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facility. Groundbreaking ceremonies were held on May 23, 1954.

In the summer of 1954, the last worship service of Spruce Street Baptist Church was held at 311 Eighth Avenue, North. While the site was under construction, the church's membership worshipped in the Head Elementary School auditorium. In 1955, Spruce Street's new church edifice was completed. The stained glass windows from the 311 Eighth Avenue, North, church building were preserved and restored for use in the new building as were the Communion table, pulpit chairs and podium, deacons' chairs, and congregational pews. In the fall of 1955, church members proudly marched from Head Elementary School into the new church building. In February 1958, the Reverend Lewis H. Woolfolk was called to lead the membership of the church. Under Woolfolk's leadership the church continued to move forward. Approximately four years after the completion of the church edifice, on April 20, 1959, the Reverend Dr. Arthur Melvin Townsend, member, former pastor, and secretary of the Sunday School Publishing Board of the National Baptist Convention U. S. A., Inc., died.

During the 1950s and 1960s, Spruce Street was an active participant in the African-American struggle for civil rights in Nashville. Not only did it financially support the student sit-in movement, but many of its members were active participants in the non-violent direct action protests of the era. In 1963, through a bond program under the leadership of Miss Bessie Walton, the mortgage on the church structure was retired and the documents were burned. Pastor Woolfolk served the congregation for sixteen years until ill health forced him to retire from his ministerial duties in the fall of 1974. In recognition of the Reverend Woolfolk's service, the congregation named him Pastor *Emeritus*. The Reverend Woolfolk was followed by the Reverend Drs. Harmon

Stockdale (1974-1980), Cupid Poe (Interim: December 1980-April 1981), Charles R. Hudson (1981-1985), and Robert Blackshear (1986-1987). All of these men made invaluable contributions to the growth of the church. Beginning in 1987, the congregation's horizon beyond denomination and race was broadened when they and the members of Hillsboro Presbyterian Church inaugurated the alternate exchange of pulpits and congregations twice a year, a practice that continues today. On December 17, 1989, the Reverend Raymond Bowman was installed as pastor of Spruce Street Baptist Church.

Spruce Street Baptist Church is active in denominational associations and conventions including the Stones River District Association, the Tennessee Baptist Missionary and Educational Convention, and the National Baptist Convention, U. S. A., Inc. Four of its last five pastors have served as moderators of the Stones River District Association, including Pastor Bowman. The church is an ardent supporter of the American Baptist College of American Baptist Theological Seminary. Scholarship programs have been established to assist students interested in furthering their academic endeavors. Realizing that it has a Christian responsibility to the community, Spruce Street participates through its outreach programs in the Greater Charlotte Feeding Cooperative, supports social agencies in their efforts to assist the less fortunate, and provides tutorial services to the community's children.

Throughout its 100 years of incorporation, Spruce Street Baptist Church has been a steadfast supporter of its denominational affiliations; a tireless proponent of the civic, political, and social rights of the African-American community; and a builder of bridges between the African-American community and the Nashville community at large.

Linda T. Wynn
