

Wednesday, February 9, 2000
Avon N. Williams, Jr., Campus
Tennessee State University
10th and Charlotte
8:40 a.m. – 2:40 p.m.

Afro-American Culture & History

19th Annual Local Conference

- 7:30 – 8:40 Registration and Refreshments, Atrium
- 8:40 – 9:00 Opening Remarks
Mayor Bill Purcell
Ms. Ann Roberts, Executive Director, Metropolitan Historical Commission
Dr. Bobby L. Lovett, Dean, College of Arts and Sciences, TSU
Mr. Michael McBride, Curator, Department of Art, TSU
- 9:00 – 9:25 "Church Women and Their Role in Improving Race Relations in Murfreesboro, Tennessee, 1960s"
Melinda Johnson-Lickiss, Murfreesboro
- 9:30 – 9:55 "Patti Julia Malone, a Fisk University Jubilee Singer from Athens, Alabama"
Mary Glenn Hearne, Public Library of Nashville and Davidson County, Nashville
- 10:00 – 10:25 "In Their Own Voices: An Account of the Presence of African Americans in Wilson County, Tennessee"
Patricia W. Lockett, Nashville
Mattie McHollin, Needmore
- 10:30 – 10:55 "Research Opportunities in Special Collections at Fisk University"
Jessie Carney Smith, Fisk University, Nashville
- 11:00 – 11:15 Break and Refreshments, Atrium
- 11:20 – 11:50 "Research Opportunities in Special Collections at Tennessee State University"
Sharon Hull, Tennessee State University, Nashville
- 12:00 – 1:00 Lunch (free with registration, must have name tag), Atrium
- 1:05 – 1:50 The Tennessee State University Jazz Band, Charles Dungey, Director
The Tennessee State University Show Stoppers, Diana K. Poe, Director
- 1:55 – 2:20 "Craig's Chapel AME Zion Church: An Underground Railroad Connection"
Caneta Hankins, Middle Tennessee State University, Murfreesboro
Melanie Henry, Maryville
- 2:25 – 2:40 Wrap Up Discussion
- 11:00 – 3:00 Art Exhibition: "The African-American Jockey"
Michael McBride, Curator of TSU's Hiram Van Gordon Memorial Art Gallery

Planning Committee Financial Supporters

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Anne-Leslie Owens
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Leaders of Afro-American Nashville



LUTHER PLATO CARMICHAEL 1905-1998

Photograph courtesy of Floyd C. Redd

A pioneer in the field of black journalism, Luther P. Carmichael was born in Snow Hill, Alabama, on July 1, 1905. He was the youngest of nine children born to Michael and Frances (Rivers) Carmichael. He was educated at the Snow Hill Institute where he studied music and played the bass horn, clarinet, and saxophone. During his senior year, he was a member of the school's football team. In 1925, Carmichael was graduated from Snow Hill Institute as class valedictorian. For a brief period after graduation, he found employment in print shops in Montgomery and Selma, Alabama. On September 30, 1925, Carmichael moved to Nashville and was employed as a linotyper by the Sunday School Publishing Board of the National Baptist Convention, U.S.A. Inc., where he remained for 47 years.

Carmichael began his journalistic career in 1932 and is believed to have been among the first African-American journalists to contribute to *The Tennessean*. In addition to contributing to *The Tennessean*, he wrote for the *Nashville World*, *The Chicago Defender*, the *Nashville Globe*, and the Associated Press.

Two years after beginning his career in journalism, Luther P. Carmichael united with the Spruce Street Baptist Church and became a member of the Sanctuary Choir, the Spruce Street Orchestra, and later directed the Spruce Street Men's Chorus. His baritone voice contributed to the popularity of the choir and was often compared to that of Paul Robeson. A member of several choral groups, including the Hopkins Singers, the Allegro chorus, and the Nashville Jubilee Singers, he made numerous radio and television appearances, including the *Teddy Bart Noon Show*. Carmichael composed the music and lyrics to *Dear Ole Masons*, the *Alma Mater* for the Mason's School of Business (1952-1982). The same year he united with Spruce Street, he met and

married the former Irma Haynes on November 29. They became the parents of one daughter, Agnes Regina Carmichael Hall.

From the time he began his journalistic profession until his retirement from the Sunday School Publishing Board of the National Baptist Convention, U.S.A., Inc., in 1976, Carmichael covered athletic events at Tennessee State University. His coverage of the university's athletic programs included the career of Forrest Strange, the university's first All-American football star, as well as a host of other athletic competitors who proved to be superior on the school's athletic courts, fields, and tracks. During the late 1960s, he served as part-time sports information director at Tennessee State University. In 1972, Carmichael began a four-year tenure as the school's Sports Information Director. He also served in the athletic department at Fisk University.

In 1997, for his contributions to the field of journalism, the National Association of Black Journalists elected Luther P. Carmichael to the Region VI National Association of Black Journalists Hall of Fame.

Nine months before Carmichael's death, the Spruce Street Baptist Church congregation recognized and honored him for his 64 years of devoted service and publicly bestowed upon him the title of Deacon *Emeritus*. After an extended illness, Luther Plato Carmichael died on December 16, 1998. Funeral services were held three days later at the Spruce Street Baptist Church and his remains were interred in the Greenwood Cemetery.

-Linda T. Wynn

This publication is a project of the 2000 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 assisted with editing and design.

Leaders of Afro-American Nashville



Photograph courtesy of the Disciples of Christ Historical Society

MARSHALL KEEBLE 1878-1968

Marshall Keeble, one of the few African Americans to participate in the "Restoration Movement" of New Testament Christianity on a national basis, was a world-wide evangelist. He preached to racially diverse audiences, baptized thousands of persons, established hundreds of congregations, worked with a number of schools, and served as president of the Nashville Christian Institute. A well-known and effective traveling proselytizer, Keeble rose above the twentieth-century's dilemma of "the color line," and brought white believers into the Church of Christ.

Keeble was one of four children born to ex-slave parents Robert and Mittie Keeble on December 7, 1878, in Rutherford County, Tennessee. According to two of his biographers, Keeble's father was the slave of John Bell Keeble, who served as dean of Vanderbilt University Law School. During the Civil War, Keeble's grandfather (also named Marshall), the slave of Confederate Major Horace Pinkney Keeble, traveled with and served as the major's personal valet.

At the age of four, Keeble moved to Nashville with his parents. The family resided on High Street (now Sixth Avenue, North). Attending Bellview and Knowles Schools, Keeble's formal education did not extend past the seventh grade. Ten years after he moved to Nashville, Keeble was baptized by the Reverend Preston Taylor in the Gay Street Christian Church.

In 1896, Keeble married Minnie Womack, a graduate of Fisk University. To this union five children were born, two of whom died in infancy. A third child died suddenly at age ten when he touched an exposed high voltage wire on a utility pole in front of the Keebles' home. After 36 years

of marriage to Keeble, Minnie Womack Keeble died on December 11, 1932. In November 1935, approximately three years after the death of his wife, Keeble's daughter, Beatrice Elnora died. Robert Keeble, his only surviving child died in 1964.

To support his family, Keeble worked in a soap factory owned by the Cassety Coal Company. Later, he went into business for himself and opened a small grocery store on Hamilton Street. Keeble also operated a produce wagon and later opened a second store on Jefferson Street managed by his wife. Philistia Womack, his sister-in-law, managed the Hamilton Street Store.

One year after marrying Minnie Womack, Keeble entered the ministry in 1897. He preached his first sermon at the Jackson Street Church of Christ where he remained a member until his death. In 1914, Keeble decided to "preach the gospel" on a full-time basis. Considering data submitted by Keeble to the *Gospel Advocate*, between 1915 and 1918, he traveled more than 23,000 miles, preached 1,161 sermons, and baptized 457 persons. Because of Keeble's success he came to the attention of affluent and influential whites such as Nashville millionaire A.M. Burton, founder of the Life and Casualty Insurance Company. After 1920 he traveled extensively at Burton's expense and was supported by the Nashville company.

According to Don Haymes, less than a year before his death, Keeble stated that Booker T. Washington's style of instructions helped him. "I got a lot out of how he made his points," said Keeble "...any man who can make things simple is a great teacher." Keeble, like his mentor, made things clear. Similar to Washington, Keeble also

(continued)

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influenced others. Early in his career, Ira North (Madison Church of Christ) traveled the evangelistic circuit with Keeble and later credited Keeble with influencing his style of preaching. An astute observer of Washington's fund raising activities, Keeble later utilized Washington's paradigm to raise money from whites for the Nashville Christian Institute.

In 1934, after a formal courtship, Keeble married his second wife, Laura Catherine Johnson (1898-) of Corinth, Mississippi. Eight years after Keeble's marriage to Laura Johnson, he became the first president of the Nashville Christian Institute (NCI) in 1942. Opening in 1940, NCI served as a night school for adults. The same year that Keeble became president, NCI opened as a fully accredited elementary and high school. He served the school as president until 1958 when he became President Emeritus. Nashville Christian Institute closed on June 2, 1967.

Marshall Keeble spoke annually in the Tennessee State Prison for approximately 30 years. From the 1930s to the 1950s, the decades of Keeble's greatest fame and accomplishments, his unique gifts influenced race relations in the Churches of Christ. It has been said that Keeble was the first person in the Churches of Christ who transcended the twentieth-century's color line. Notwithstanding, according to historian Bobby L. Lovett's *The African-American History of Nashville, Tennessee, 1780-1930*, Keeble infuriated many African Americans by "reserving racially segregated seating for white visitors."

During his long career, Marshall Keeble received many honors. He was the first African American to become the subject of academic studies among leading preachers of the Churches of Christ. In 1954, Keeble

was honored as the "Man of the Hour," on WLAC sponsored by the Business and Professional Women's Club. Two years later, he was presented a citation by President Hugh H. Tiner of George Pepperdine College. In 1960, he was made an honorary chief of the Nigerian tribe; in 1964, he was featured in the "Magazine Section" of the Nashville *Tennessean*. A year later, Harding University in Arkansas awarded him an honorary doctor of Laws degree; Governor Frank G. Clement appointed him the first African-American "Colonel Aide-De-Camp," an honorary colonel on the Governor's staff, and Mayor Beverly Briley presented Keeble (on his birthday) with a bronze plaque.

Marshall Keeble preached his last sermon on April 17, 1968. He died on April 20, 1968. Five days later, Keeble's funeral service was held at the Madison Church of Christ where his eulogy was delivered by Benton Cordell Goodpasture, editor of the *Gospel Advocate*. Keeble's body was buried in Greenwood Cemetery. In 1984, the African Christian Schools foundation established the Marshall Keeble Scholarship Fund.

Some thirty years after Keeble's death, his life's work continues to be recognized and honored. In 1996, Tracy Blair completed a master's thesis, "For a Better Tomorrow: Marshall Keeble and George Philip Bowser, African-American Ministers," at Middle Tennessee State University. On October 15, 1999, The Tennessee Historical Commission approved the placement of a historical marker commemorating the life of Marshall Keeble, one of the most notable and most conquering itinerant ministers of the Churches of Christ.

-Linda T. Wynn

Leaders of Afro-American Nashville



*Photograph courtesy of the Nashville Room,
Public Library of Nashville and Davidson County*

PATTI JULIA MALONE 1859-1897

Patti Julia Malone was born a slave to Mahalia Malone at The Cedars Plantation in Athens, Limestone County, Alabama, in 1859. After the Civil War, Mahalia bargained with her former master, Dr. Thomas Stith Malone, for her work and that of her daughter Patti. They made arrangements for Patti to attend Trinity School, a school for African Americans operated by the American Missionary Association. It was here that Patti Malone first came to know Mary Frances Wells, the principal from Michigan and a graduate of Mt. Holyoke Seminary for Women. Miss Wells befriended Patti, employed her and sent her to Fisk University in Nashville, Tennessee.

Patti first entered high school at Fisk in 1873-74 as a boarding student. In 1877, Dr. George White asked Patti to join the Jubilee Singers, already an internationally-acclaimed chorale group. Ella Sheppard, one of the nine original Jubilee Singers, kept a daily diary of her travels. At Christmas in 1877 she wrote about Dr. White's announcement that Georgia Gordon and Patti Malone would soon join the group. Patti made her debut with the group in Hamburg, Germany, on January 14, 1878.

After Dr. White disbanded the Jubilee Singers in 1882, Frederic Loudin, a former member, organized the Loudin Jubilee Singers. The group performed in Europe and Australia. In Paris, Patti purchased opera glasses which today are housed in the Houston Library in Athens, Alabama. The Jubilee Singers spent thirteen months on tour in Australia and were very well received there. When Patti left the tour for a two-month rest at home in Athens, the group's patrons presented her with a purse of 63 sovereigns. It was even rumored that she was to wed a wealthy white Australian.

On January 26, 1884, Patti Malone purchased from her mentor and benefactor, Mary Frances Wells, a

lot, seven-eighths of an acre for \$300 on Brown's Ferry Road on Coleman Hill in the Village View section of Athens. For \$1400 she erected a spacious two-story residence which she named "The Oaks." The home later became the Oaks Funeral Home but is now no longer standing.

In 1897, while the Jubilee Singers were touring the United States, Patti became ill. The local physician in Omaha, Nebraska, advised surgery and Patti prayed over her condition all evening. Shortly after the group left for their next engagement, Patti entered the hospital. She died on January 20, 1897, the first Jubilee Singer to die while in active service. Her companions returned with her body to Athens, Alabama, where she was buried in the black cemetery in a lot with an iron fence around it. Her fellow Jubilee Singers sang at the funeral. The local press gave considerable notice to the occasion and praised her for "her genuine worth and true womanliness."

Almost a century passed before someone rediscovered Patti's grave and the local historical society raised money for a grave marker. The occasion was truly celebratory with services at her graveside. Following the dedication, the public was invited to see local actors and singers portray various historical scenes from Patti Malone's life.

Patti Malone spent almost twenty years of her young life as a Jubilee Singer. Her legacy is one of good deeds, an unsurpassed soprano voice, and a touring agenda that included visits to seventeen countries and appearances before six crown heads of Europe. Two different photographs of her with the Jubilee Singers remain, though she is not in the 1873 mural at Fisk University's Jubilee Hall. Her legend continues to live and flourish in her church and her community.

-Mary Glenn Hearne

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