METROPOLITAN HISTORICAL COMMISSION

For Immediate Release

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SAVE THE DATE! Nashville Conference on African American History and Culture to be held February 8, 2019

NASHVILLE—December 12, 2018
On Friday, February 8, 2019, join Tennessee State University's College of Liberal Arts and the Metropolitan Historical Commission for a celebration of the contributions of African Americans to Nashville and Tennessee history. For thirty-eight years, this award-winning conference has brought together historians, students, educators, community leaders and others interested in African American history and culture. This year's conference, entitled **"MEMORY, MOBILITY, AND SOUND,"** will examine the myriad ways African Americans have made an impact in Nashville and Tennessee, through history, story, and song.

This year's speakers will cover a variety of topics sure to be of interest to the audience. Interested in community history? Dr. Joel Dark (Tennessee State University) will discuss the Civil War beginnings of Edgehill while Dr. Erica Hayden (Trevecca Nazarene University) focuses on oral histories of the Napier community. Looking to learn more about Reconstruction and the Jim Crow Era? Dr. Susan Knowles (Middle Tennessee State University) with Tiffany Momon and Kellie Gibson delve into Jim Crow-era travel made possible by the Green Book, while Lt. Col. Sharon Presley (USAR/ Tennessee State University) highlights the life of "buffalo soldier" Lt. William McBryar, and Metro Council member Ed Kindall examines the remarkable Black community that thrived in Nashville under Jim Crow law. Don't worry, we haven't forgotten the music! Dr. Don Cusic (Belmont University) will take us through a timeline of African American music and musicians in Nashville. Then singer/songwriter and activist Mr. Eric Dozier will remember the story of Black gospel music as a source of praise, protest, and purpose. Morning entertainment will be provided by Eric Dozier and Friends. Afternoon entertainment will be provided by Carlos DeFord Bailey and Band.

Please make plans to join us for this exceptional program on Friday, February 8, 2019, at the Avon Williams Campus of Tennessee State University. The Conference will begin at 8:30 am and will conclude at 4:00 pm. Cost for student registration is $20, pre-registration (through January 21, 2019) is $30, and day-off registration is $35. All registration levels include admission to all speakers and performances and additions to the Profiles of African-Americans in Tennessee series. Lunch and parking are also included. Online registration is available at https://events.eventzilla.net/e/38th-annual-nashville-conference-on-african-american-history-and-culture-2138707499. Registration brochures are available at http://www.nashville.gov/Historical-Commission/Events-and-Programs/Conference-on-African-American-History-and-Culture.aspx or by calling 615-862-7970.

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Metropolitan Historical Commission
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Nashville, Tennessee 37204-2901

TENNESSEE STATE UNIVERSITY
AND THE
METROPOLITAN NASHVILLE
HISTORICAL COMMISSION

38th Annual

NASHVILLE CONFERENCE ON
African-American
HISTORY AND CULTURE

MEMORY, MOBILITY & SOUND

Friday, February 8, 2019
8:30-4:00 pm

Tennessee State University
Avon Williams Campus
330 10th Avenue North
Nashville, TN 37203

Please Join Us!

On Friday, February 8, 2019, join Tennessee State University's College of Liberal Arts and the Metropolitan Historical Commission for a celebration of the contributions of African Americans to Nashville and Tennessee history. For thirty-eight years, this award-winning conference has brought together historians, students, educators, community leaders and others interested in African American history and culture.

This year's speakers will cover a variety of topics focused on the Memory, Mobility, and Sound of the African American experience. Interested in community history? Dr. Joel Dark will discuss the Civil War beginnings of Edgehill, while Dr. Erica Hayden focuses on oral histories of the Napier community. Looking to learn more about Reconstruction and the Jim Crow Era? Lt. Col. Sharon Presley will highlight the life of "buffalo soldier" Lt. William McBryar, while Dr. Susan Knowles, Tiffany Momon, and Kelli Gibson will delve into Jim Crow-era travel made possible by the Green Book, and Metro Council member Ed Kindall will examine the remarkable Black community that thrived in Nashville under Jim Crow law.

Don't worry, we haven't forgotten the music! Dr. Don Cusic will take us through a timeline of African American music and musicians in Nashville, while singer/songwriter and activist Mr. Eric Dozier will remember the story of Black gospel music as a source of praise, protest, and purpose. Morning entertainment will be provided by Eric Dozier and Friends. Afternoon entertainment will be provided by Carlos DeFord Bailey and Band.

Conference Registration

NASHVILLE CONFERENCE ON African-American HISTORY AND CULTURE

February 8, 2019

Registration Levels:
Students- $20
Pre-registration (through January 21, 2019)- $30
Registration (January 22 through day-of conference)- $35

New this year! Check out our online payment and registration form https://events.eventzilla.net/e/38th-annual-nashville-conference-on-african-american-history-and-culture-2138707499

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Questions? Call us at 615-862-7970
Preregistration is strongly encouraged.
Registration cannot be taken over the phone.

Preliminary Program

9:00 am **Welcome and Opening Remarks**
Tim Walker, MHC Executive Director
Linda T. Wynn, Conference Co-Chair

9:20 am **African American Music and Musicians in Nashville: A Timeline**
Don Cusic, Ph.D.

9:45 am **Coolness, Bravery, and Marksmanship: The History of Lt. William McBryar**
Lt. Col. Sharon Presley, USAR/
Tennessee State University

10:10 am **Remarks by Equal Justice Initiative/ We Remember Nashville community group**

10:20 am **Break**

10:50 am **Praise, Protest, and Purpose: Remembering the Story of Black Gospel Music**
Eric Dozier

11:10 am **Entertainment: Eric Dozier & Friends**

11:40 am **Remarks by David Briley, Mayor of the Metropolitan Government of Nashville and Davidson County, and Dr. Glenda Glover, President of Tennessee State University**

Noon **Lunch (provided)**

1:30 pm **Tennessee's African American Travel and Tourist Establishments: The Green Book, 1938-1963**
Susan Knowles, Ph.D.,
Tiffany Momon, and Kelli Gibson

1:50 pm **A Portrayal of How a Remarkable Black Community Thrived During the Era of Segregation and Jim Crow Law in Nashville, Tennessee**
The Honorable Edward T. Kindall

2:10 pm **Entertainment: Carlos DeFord Bailey and Band**

2:40 pm **From Contraband Camp to New Bethel: The Civil War Beginnings of Nashville's Edgehill Community**
Joel Dark, Ph.D.

3:00 pm **Grassroots Voices: Oral Histories of the Napier Community**
Erica Hayden, Ph.D.

3:30 pm **Closing Remarks**
Dr. Reavis L. Mitchell,
Conference Co-Chair

Planning Committee

Conference Co-Chairs

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Fisk University

Linda T. Wynn
Tennessee Historical Commission/Fisk University

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NASHVILLE CONFERENCE ON African-American HISTORY AND CULTURE

"MEMORY, MOBILITY, AND SOUND"

Friday, February 8, 2019 — Tennessee State University, Avon Williams Campus

8:30 am	Registration begins
9:00 am	Welcome and Opening Remarks Mr. Tim Walker, Executive Director, Metropolitan Historical Commission Prof. Linda Wynn, Conference Co-Chair
9:20 am	"African American Music and Musicians in Nashville: A Timeline" Dr. Don Cusic, Belmont University
9:45 am	"Coolness, Bravery, and Marksmanship: The History of Lt. William McBryar" Lt. Col. Sharon Presley, USAF/ Tennessee State University
10:10 am	Remarks from Equal Justice Initiative/ We Remember Nashville Community Group
10:20 am	Break
10:50 am	"Praise, Protest, and Purpose: Remembering the Story of Black Gospel Music" Mr. Eric Dozier, cultural activist and singer/songwriter
11:10 am	Entertainment: Eric Dozier and Friends
11:40 am	Remarks by Mr. Ashford Hughes, Mayor's Office of Economic and Community Development Chief Equity and Diversity Officer and Dr. Alisa Mosley, Interim Vice President for Academic Affairs at Tennessee State University
12:00 pm	LUNCH
1:30 pm	"Tennessee's African American Travel and Tourist Establishments: The Green Book, 1938-1963" Dr. Susan Knowles, Middle Tennessee State University, Ms. Tiffany Momon, MTSU and Ms. Kelli Gibson, TRC Environmental Corporation
1:50 pm	"A Portrayal of How a Remarkable Black Community Thrived During the Era of Segregation and Jim Crow Law in Nashville, Tennessee" The Honorable Edward T. Kindall, Metropolitan Council
2:10 pm	Entertainment: Carlos Deford Bailey and Band
2:40 pm	"From Contraband Camp to New Bethel: The Civil War Beginnings of Nashville's Edgehill Community" Dr. Joel Dark, Tennessee State University
3:00 pm	"Grassroots Voices: Oral Histories of the Napier Community" Dr. Erica Hayden, Ms. Marina Yousef and Mr. Charles Layne, Trevecca Nazarene University
3:30 pm	Closing Remarks Dr. Reavis Mitchell, Conference Co-Chair

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Profiles of *African Americans* in Tennessee

DeFord Bailey (1899-1982)

DeFord Bailey was born on December 14, 1899 at Carthage, Smith County, Tennessee. His mother died when he was a little more than a year old, and his father's sister and her husband reared DeFord. Stricken with infantile paralysis at the age of three years, the bedridden child was given a harmonica as a means of amusement. Bailey overcame polio, although he had a deformed back and never grew taller than four feet, ten inches. However, his skill with the harmonica and his musical talent gained Bailey renown in the field of country music.

Bailey's impressionable years were spent around the rural communities of Newsom's and Thompson's Stations, located near the railroad, where Bailey composed many of his tunes on the harmonica. He had to go under a train trestle on the way to school, and Bailey said he would wait for the train to go over; then "I would get under it, put my hands over my eyes, listen to the sound, and then play that sound all the way to school." Bailey became famous for recreating the sounds of rushing locomotives. During teenage years, Bailey worked for a white storekeeper in Thompson's Station and played the harmonica, to the delight of the customers and the proprietor. He remained with the storekeeper for some time before joining his family in Nashville, where he held several jobs. He continued to play the harmonica.

On December 6, 1925, DeFord won second place with his rendition of "It Ain't Gonna Rain No More" in a French harp contest on radio station WDAD. Soon after, Bailey made his first appearance on WSM Radio, after overcoming some racial opposition from the station's director. The young black performer was given the title "Harmonica Wizard."

Bailey played a role in the naming of the "Grand Ole Opry." In 1926, the WSM Barn Dance followed an hour of symphonic music, and one evening its programming concluded with a selection by a young composer from Iowa reproducing the sound of a train. Bailey opened the country music program with his rendition of "Pan American Blues." The difference in the musical genres caused the director, George D. "Judge" Hay, to observe, "For the past hour we have been listening to music taken largely from grand opera; from now on we will present 'The Grand Ole Opry.'"

Bailey toured with other stars of the Opry, including Roy Acuff, Uncle Dave Macon, Bill Monroe, and others. During his travels throughout the South in the 1930s, he was well received by the country music public, although racial segregation laws caused Bailey problems in hotels and restaurants. To get a hotel room, on some occasions either he posed as a baggage boy for the white performers or pretended to be Uncle Dave Macon’s valet.

In April of 1927, Bailey teamed with the black Golden Echo Quartet to make his first recordings of "Pan American Express" and "Hesitation" for Columbia Records in Atlanta.

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The Columbia recordings were never released. Two weeks later he recorded eight titles for Brunswick label in New York. On October 2, 1928, DeFord recorded for Victor records during a Nashville session. "Ice Water Blues/Davidson County Blues" became so popular that the Victor label released it three times.

Bailey's popularity peaked and waned over the next fifteen years. During the height of his popularity, he was allowed a twenty-five-minute performance on the three-hour Opry show. By 1941, he was off the Opry and beginning a thirty-year career of shining shoes at his shop on Twelfth Avenue South. Apparently, WSM dropped Bailey because of his limited repertoire and his failure to convert to new tunes and written music. Bailey denied that he refused to learn new tunes; he claimed that the audience and the director insisted on hearing the old tunes.

During the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s, Bailey's career was revived. He made an appearance on a local syndicated blues television show, "Night Train," and in 1965 he made a rare concert appearance at Vanderbilt University. He appeared on the Opry's oldtimers show in 1974 at the Ryman Auditorium. On December 14, 1974, Bailey celebrated his 75th birthday by appearing in the new Grand Ole Opry House and playing several of his old tunes. He played for the homecoming show on April 3, 1982. DeFord Bailey died at the age of 82 on July 2, 1982. On June 23, 1983, the country music industry celebrated DeFord Bailey as the first African-American star of the Grand Ole Opry. The mayor unveiled a historical marker in Bailey's honor, and a monument was placed at his grave site in Nashville's Greenwood Cemetery. Bailey's memorabilia was presented to the Country Music Hall of Fame and Museum.

Linda T. Wynn

Further Reading:

“Deford Bailey: A Legend Lost,” *Nashville Public Television*, 2002.

David C. Morton, with Charles K. Wolfe, *Deford Bailey: A Black Star in Early Country Music* (Knoxville, Tenn.: The University of Tennessee Press, 1991).

Profiles of *African Americans* in Tennessee

Interstate 40 and the Decimation of Jefferson Street

Once a bustling thoroughfare in North Nashville's African-American community, the construction of Interstate 40 decimated Jefferson Street. The destruction of this African-American community had its genesis with the passage of the 1956 Interstate Highway Act, also known as the National Interstate and Defense Highways Act. Passed during the administration of President Dwight D. Eisenhower and enacted on June 29, 1956, the Act provided for approximately 41,000 miles of an interstate highway. Highway planning for the purpose of clearing deteriorated or poverty-stricken areas began in 1938, when the United States government first deliberated giving assistance to states for interstate highways. Henry Wallace, Secretary of Agriculture under President Franklin Roosevelt, proposed that highways routed through cities could accomplish "the elimination of unsightly and unsanitary districts." In the early 1940s, the American Concrete Institute urged the building of expressways through urban areas for "the elimination of slums and blighted areas." According to Richard Rothstein's *The Color of Law: A Forgotten History of How Our Government Segregated America,* over the next twenty years, the connection between highway construction and removal of African Americans was a common leitmotif of those who stood to profit from a federal road-building program. The American Road Builders Association informed President Harry S. Truman, near the end of the 1940s that if interstates were properly channeled through municipal areas, they could "contribute in a substantial manner to the elimination of slum and deteriorated areas."

In planning for the interstate system in the Tennessee, one of the consultations that the city of Nashville planners received recommended a route that went "eastward from Memphis along Route 70 S, then hugged the Louisville & Nashville Railroad tracks for several miles before continuing directly downtown between Broadway and Charlotte Avenues." However, this path came near Belle Meade, Vanderbilt University, Baptist Hospital, and Centennial Park. Ignoring the consultants' recommendations, the State offered Nashville an alternative proposal. The substitute plan called for the expressway to parallel Charlotte, bend to the north to cross 28th Avenue North, and curve again toward Jefferson Street. While functionaries discussed the various plans, they never informed those who would be impacted how the area would be disrupted. This design effectively eviscerated North Nashville. Interstate 40 demolished a hundred square blocks, including sixteen blocks of stores along Jefferson Street. In addition to the hundreds of homes and business adversely impacted by Interstate 40, its route swerved between the nearly contiguous campuses of Tennessee A&I State University and the area around Fisk University and Meharry Medical College.

Jefferson Street's business and recreational corridor took on even more importance for African-American commerce after the Capitol Hill urban renewal program annihilated much of its African-American commercial district. Planners Clarke and Rapuano knew that the construction of the interstate expressway would form a "Chinese Wall" dividing and destroying the neighborhood. For much of the planning process, people in the African American community were uninformed. While officials filed the plan with Tennessee's Department of Highways and Public Works on September 15, 1958, the department "consistently refused" to admit that a path had been selected. Some nine years later—after reports revealed that 18th Avenue North was going to be widened to accommodate interstate traffic—the African American community finally became aware of its imminent threat. In response to the threat posed by the construction of the interstate, professors from Fisk and Tennessee A&I State Universities formed the Interstate 40 Steering Committee. As noted by Ben Houston in *The Nashville Way: Racial Etiquette and the Struggle for Social Justice in a Southern City*, after a search of

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the archives, it was revealed that that the original interstate route had been "somewhere near Vanderbilt." This caused an eruption of anger and adding insult to injury, they discovered that a public hearing had taken place as required by law on May 15, 1957. However, notice of the hearing was not distributed to the press; rather, notices were displayed in post offices in all white neighborhoods, and each notice had the wrong date for the public hearing.

Members of the I-40 Steering Committee included Flournoy A. Coles, Iman Otey, Curlie McGruder, Dr. Edwin Mitchell, and Attorney Avon Williams, Jr. In October of 1967, Dr. Mitchell appeared before the Chamber of Commerce where he gave a scathing rebuke to the city's white elite. He indicted the City as being a place where "super highways form concrete moats between Negro and white communities" and "huge jungles of compact housing" marked the homes of African Americans, whom he called "consumers of the slum rather than producers thereof." In describing recent public policies that helped shape the realities facing African Americans in the way of Interstate 40, Mitchell stated, "Gentlemen, you of the chamber, the city, and state administrations endorsed this program, You Did Not Speak for US!" Dr. Mitchell ended his razor-sharp discourse by stating: "What brave and unthinking men you are!" Nashville's role in the Civil Rights Movement possibly played a part in the racial tone of highway plans and opposition there; racial violence followed the death of Martin Luther King, Jr., in Nashville, which was already a hot-bed for demonstrations and civil rights organizing. Scholars assert that in Nashville, "many public policies had racial implications and racial intentions," and the steering committee argued that the proposed highway route through the latter city was no exception.

Ultimately, the I-40 Steering Committee filed a legal suit to stop the construction of the interstate through the North Nashville community. Attorney Avon Williams, Sr. filed the suit in the U. S. District Court in Middle Tennessee claiming that the interstate planning discriminated against Nashvillians who lived in the path of the Interstate. On November 2, 1967, Judge Frank Gray determined that the public hearing was inadequate and filled with "irregularities, agreeing with the plaintiffs that I-40 would adversely impact North Nashville. However, after agreeing with the I-40 Steering Committee, Judge Gray ruled in favor of the defendants stating, "most of the evidence presented by the plaintiffs goes to the wisdom and not the legality of the highway department's decision." The Sixth Circuit Court of Appeals upheld Judge Gray's decision and the U.S. Supreme Court denied a review, effectively ending the Steering Committee's legal battle. This was one of the first legal battles to stall the construction of an interstate on the grounds of racial discrimination. However, one result was a new federal directive "that no highway or other public works shall be implemented on the basis of hearings more than five years old."

The outcomes of the Nashville stretch of Interstate 40 are difficult to challenge. Within a year of the I-40's completion, most businesses in the neighborhoods surrounding the expressway experienced financial difficulty and some ceased operations. Additionally, property rates declined by nearly a third. More than 620 black homes, twenty-seven apartment houses, and six black churches were demolished and fifty local streets were dead-ended. As the Reverend Dr. Kelly Miller Smith noted, the interstate was "a bitter thing which tore the community apart." Once a thriving residential, business, entertainment and recreational center within the African-American community, I-40 dissected and decimated Jefferson Street.

Linda T. Wynn

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Edward T. Kindall. *A Walk Down Historic Jefferson Street: From the 1940s to the Early 1970s, Dark Clouds and Silver Linings During the Era of Segregation*. Nashville: Curtis' PrintAll, 2012.

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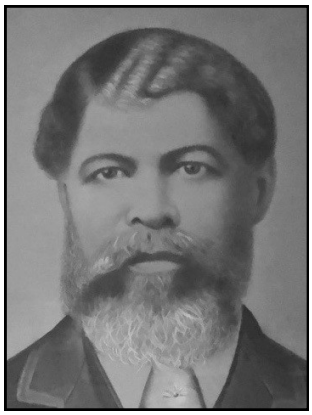
_____. "Citizen Activism and Freeway Revolts in Memphis and Nashville: The Road to Litigation" in *Journal of Urban History* 40(5):870-893. July 2014.

Richard Rothstein. *The Color of Law: A Forgotten History of How Our Government Segregated America*. New York: Liveright Publishing Corporation, 2017.

Profiles of *African Americans* in Tennessee



Lewis Winter, Nashville Entrepreneur (1839-1911)

Lewis Winter lived an amazing life in an era when most Blacks suffered from poverty and the hardships that resulted from Jim Crow laws and practices established after Reconstruction. It was indeed a rare phenomenon for a former slave to find an avenue for success that led to the building of a business empire that made him and his descendant's millionaires.

Winter's amazing story from the rags of slavery to the riches of a successful entrepreneurship in business and banking started in 1839, the year of his birth to a slave mother in Lebanon, Tennessee. Separated from his mother at the age of six and sold to another farmer, he remained enslaved until 1865. With the outbreak of the Civil War and Tennessee's occupation by the Union, Nashville had become a center for a large contraband camp and he was able to seek safety and opportunity there at age 26. Nashville had become a center for a large contraband camp. With only a few dollars to his name Winter started selling chickens and eggs. Before long he had nurtured his modest poultry business into a success. By 1895 he had turned a cart operation into a four-story brick building, which he owned at 211-213 Cherry Street (now Fourth Avenue) and employed twelve people.

Located near Broad Street, competition between black and white merchants selling the similar products became intense. However, much of Winter's business came from blacks who lived in the old contraband camps behind Union Station, in the area now known as the Gulch. When the age of big business caused economic prosperity for whites, blacks suffered economic instability. Nevertheless, Winter prospered because he used the newly invented refrigerated railroad box cars to ship his products throughout the South. He sold live and dressed chickens, as well as other country eggs, wool, ginseng and bacon in his expanded business. In 1900 he chartered L. Winter Produce Company with $3,000 in capital and five board members.

Lewis Winter had become one of Nashville's leading elites. He served on the board of Wilberforce (Ohio) University, which is the oldest private historical black colleges in the nation, helped establish two of Nashville's financial institutions, was president of the home Banking Loan Association, and was also one of the founders of the One Cent Saving Bank. In 1920 the latter bank became Citizens Savings and Loan Bank and Trust, which remains today.

When the state of Tennessee decided to celebrate its Centennial Anniversary in 1895, Winter was appointed to the Negro Committee to plan the prominent Negro Building and special events for the exposition, now the cite of Centennial Park. Booker T. Washington was invited to be the keynote speaker on Negro Day, a Jim Crow day set aside for Negro visitors to the Exposition.

Lewis Winter married Elinora Davis (1847-1919) in 1860. She would become a leader

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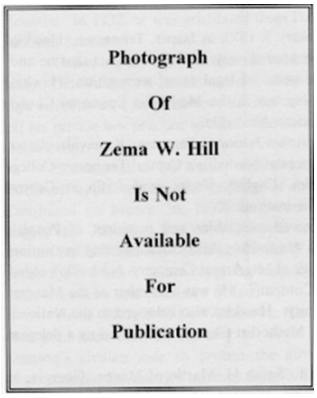
among black women to promote relief programs for the poor. She was active in women's groups, such as the Phillis Wheatley Club. They made their home at 74 Maury Street. The prominent couple had four children: a son and three daughters. Only Miranda P. Winter would outlive her father (1879-1955) and become the sole heir of her father's fortune. Miranda married Moses McKissack III, a pioneer architect and co-founder of McKissack and McKissack Architect Firm. Lewis, without a son to bear his name, paid Moses a nice lump sum to name his first-born son Lewis Winter. As the sole heir to a fortune worth over a million dollars, Miranda was able to help her husband financially while he pursued his business venture and established clientele. The company became the oldest black architectural firm in the nation. It is credited with countless homes, public schools, city buildings and structures on Fisk, Tennessee State University, and Meharry campuses, all built during Moses III lifetime. In 1912 the couple built their spacious home in the historic Edgehill neighborhood. It remains today.

Unfortunately, in 1911 Lewis Winter had become paralyzed, but the quiet and unassuming, yet bold and daring businessman, did not let his health stand in the way. He continued to manage his produce business from a wheel chair until his death on May 12, 1911 of dysentery. He was buried in the city's black Mount Ararat Cemetery. Many of his direct descendants still live today as part of Moses McKissack's family.

Gloria H. McKissack

Profiles of *African Americans* in Tennessee



Zema W. Hill (1891-1970)

Zema W. Hill was a faithful and devoted minister, a funeral-home owner, and a notable leader in the Nashville African-American community. He was born in Franklin County, in the community of Asia near Winchester, Tennessee, on April 2, 1891. He became a Christian at an early age, joined the Macedonia Primitive Baptist Church during its revival services, and became an evangelist during his teenage years. In 1916, Hill moved to Nashville where he preached and evangelized in Hightower Hall. His elegance, good looks, and magnetic preaching style enlarged his South Nashville congregation until the services had to be moved under a large tent.

In 1919, a house of worship was dedicated at Overton and Division streets. Elder A. M. Bedford, the moderator of the Cumberland River Association of the Order of the Primitive Baptist Church, dedicated the building as "Hill's Tabernacle." Elder Zema Hill faithfully served the congregation for thirty years.

In the year his church building was dedicated, Hill also established the Zema W. Hill Funeral Home at Fourth Avenue South and Peabody Street. During this period, no black insurance companies existed in Nashville and there were few black funeral homes. The demand for services caused the Hill funeral business to expand so rapidly that a large facility was acquired at Fourth Avenue South and Franklin Street. Hill not only arranged the funerals, he also preached and sang at the services. Although he catered to the black elite, Hill's civic-minded zeal caused him to arrange funerals for the destitute as well. These were known as his "silver services," where the plate was passed to collect money from the audiences.

The Zema W. Hill Funeral Home moved to 1306 South Street and became one of the first black businesses in the area. He purchased a fleet of Packard automobiles in the mid-1930s, and his business flourished despite the economic depression. Over the years, Hill bought many other fine automobiles, including Cadillacs, Chryslers, and Lincolns. He attracted attention to his business by printing "Zema W. Hill" in gold letters on his cars' windows . He also placed two six-and-a-half-feet concrete polar bears in front of the funeral home--two more bears were placed in front of Hill’s Edgehill home.

Elder Hill left his imprint on the African-American community in Nashville through 1930s and 40s, whites and blacks, political leaders, and famous persons attended services at Hill's Tabernacle. Even some of Nashville's underworld figures could be seen at Hill's Sunday night services. He was renowned for sermons such as "The Resurrection of the Dead" and "If a Man Should Die, Shall He Live Again." Elder Hill's ministerial work was highlighted with his selection as a moderator emeritus of the Cumberland Association of Primitive Baptists and builder of the Cumberland Tabernacle in 1944.

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Zema W. Hill died on February 5, 1970, after 17 years of illness. A year before his death, Hill's Tabernacle was rebuilt. At his funeral services on the morning of February 9 at the Cumberland Primitive Baptist Tabernacle, Elder C. R. Wooten and others lauded the late Elder Hill as ". . .a faithful and devoted minister, a loving father, neighbor and friend, and [who] was respected by all who he came in contact with of both races...." Hill, who was interred in Mount Ararat Cemetery in Nashville, was survived by two children: Doris Hill Griner and Clarence D. Hill.

Reavis L. Mitchell

Further Reading:

Zema Hill recoded by John Vincent, “Service at a Baptist Church in Nashville, Tenn.” American Folklife Center, Library of Congress.
https://www.loc.gov/item/afc9999005.17367/