

Profiles of *African Americans* in Tennessee



Pleasant Green Baptist Church*

Pleasant Green Baptist Church (Pleasant Green) began as part of Mount Zion Baptist Church. In 1885, a group of about sixty parishioners split from Mount Zion to form the new Pleasant Green Missionary Baptist Church. The Rev. William Haynes served as Pleasant Green's first pastor beginning in 1886. That same year, he purchased the lot on Jefferson Street where the current church sits. The first church building was a frame structure, dedicated in May 1886. Haynes was involved with the Sunday School Publishing Board and was an astute businessman. He bought properties in other neighborhoods, including areas now known as Haynes Manor and Haynes Heights.

Pleasant Green records show the next pastor as the Rev. John Charles Fields, who served in that role from 1901 to 1937. Fields was on the board of the National Baptist Convention, U.S.A., and part of the Nashville Ministers and Deacons Conference during his tenure at the church. As the congregation grew, there emerged a need for a new building; the church hired the architectural firm of McKissack and McKissack for its design. Completed in 1926, the classically detailed brick edifice still stands today. Based in Nashville, the McKissack firm was well-known in the U.S. In 1926, partners Calvin and Moses McKissack had created plans for buildings in Tennessee, Kansas, and Texas. In 1927, the *Nashville Banner* reported that Pleasant Green was issued a building permit for a brick and concrete building valued

at \$35,000. The Fisk University Glee Club gave a benefit performance at the Morris Memorial Building in Nashville to benefit the church, and a rally was held in 1929 to help fund the "new and commodious church...which is an ornament to the community...as well as a spiritual lighthouse" (*Tennessean*, August 2, 1929).

After Rev. Fields, the Rev. Samuel H. James, Sr., served as pastor from 1937 to 1940. In 1941, the Rev. Isaiah Henderson, Jr. was Pleasant Green's pastor. He grew the congregation by 300 members and began a program to make the church debt free. Henderson pastored Pleasant Green until 1943. As with previous pastors, Henderson was involved with various Baptist organizations.

The Rev. Richard O. Otey was an interim pastor during 1943-1944, followed by the Rev. Andrew L. Porter, who pastored at Pleasant Green from 1944 to 1982. Another mortgage on the church building was retired during his tenure. Calvin and Moses McKissack attended the Mortgage Burning Ceremony, held during the congregation's 60th anniversary celebration. Rev. Porter taught at American Baptist College and helped form the Eighteenth Avenue Community Center and the All Negro College Fund at Fisk. He made the church available for meetings on civil rights, and collected bail money for students jailed during the movement. The church's anniversary book noted that he made Pleasant Green a "social service church." Porter was noted in *The Tennessean* as one of several "local leaders" who sent telegrams to

the White House regarding the White House Conference on Civil Rights in 1966.

During Rev. Porter's pastorage, the church underwent an exterior cleaning, a change in some stained-glass windows, and added new front doors, maple floors, carpeting, and new parsonages. Porter died soon after his retirement from Pleasant Green in 1982.

Pleasant Green was one of many churches supporting civil rights activities in Nashville. When the 8th Annual Stones River Baptist Association was held at the church in August 1957, the Rev. Maynard P. Turner, president of American Baptist College, served as the main speaker. His topic was "The Church's Influence in Desegregating the Community." There was also a talk on the Clinton School desegregation efforts and what Nashville should do. The church was available for NAACP meetings, including a membership rally in 1958 where 600 people attended to hear the NAACP's regional secretary. April 1960 saw Pleasant Green opened for 500 people to hear Fisk University economist, Dr. Vivian Henderson, talk about a "No fashions for Easter" boycott. A few months later, in September 1960, the church hosted the state NAACP meeting. Topics included school desegregation, voting, and working with the Southern Christian Leadership Conference and the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE). Noted speakers included activist Rev. Metz Rollins, CORE co-founder James Farmer, and Rev. C. T. Vivian of Nashville's First Community Church.

When looking for a new pastor around 1983, the church history book accurately noted that "Pleasant Green at 1410 Jefferson Street is located on the north side of the city in a commercial-residential area within strolling distance of Fisk University and Meharry Medical College. Tennessee State University is

a short bus ride away on a direct line. The location of the church – at the edge of the university community and close to two major Housing establishments, affords the Church a challenge and an opportunity to serve a diverse population."

The Rev. Frederick G. Sampson III was chosen as the new minister and began a building program. In October 1986, the building committee chose Leon Quincy Jackson as the architect for improvements to the existing building and the construction of a new education wing. Jackson began his career in Oklahoma but was then working in Nashville. There had been several pastors of the congregation, but it was under the Rev. Forrest Elliott Harris, Sr., who served from 1990-1999, that the addition was completed. The Andrew L. Porter Educational Center was named for the long-time pastor and dedication ceremonies were held in February 1991. The modern glass and brick addition was designed in stark contrast to the older church building. Rev. Harris started several new ministries and eventually went on to be president of American Baptist College.

Pleasant Green Baptist Church and its ministry have continued to reach out and work with the Nashville community.

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Sources:

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