Preserving African American Historic Places

Suggestions and Sources

Prepared by the MTSU Center for Historic Preservation

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INTRODUCTION

"Preserving African American Historic Places: Suggestions and Sources" reviews the varied historic resources that document the stories of African Americans in Tennessee from the antebellum period to the Civil Rights movement. In addition to providing historical context for these resources, this publication sets forth hands-on suggestions for their preservation and interpretation.

A forerunner of this publication was a 60-page booklet entitled Powerful Artifacts: A Guide to Surveying and Documenting Rural African-American Churches, which was published by the Center for Historic Preservation (CHP) in 2000 with partial funding from the National Trust for Historic Preservation. Links to some of the materials from that publication, which is now out of print, are included in "Preserving African American Historic Places."

We welcome information from the public on these significant and remarkable resources, and we will try to provide updates to this publication when possible.

Several CHP staff members and students have contributed to the development of this publication over the years. They include Dr. Carroll Van West, director; Dr. Antoinette van Zelm, assistant director; Leigh Ann Gardner, Tennessee Civil War National Heritage Area interpretive specialist; Caneta S. Hankins, former assistant director; Anne-Leslie Owens, former programs manager; Cassandra Bennett, graduate assistant; and Jessica French, graduate assistant.

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Unless otherwise credited, the information and photographs in this publication are from the collection of the Center for Historic Preservation (CHP), a collection that has been compiled by students and staff over the past 30 years.

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A Note on Sources

These online resources include in-depth material and primary sources about the history of African Americans in Tennessee:

- **Historic African American Schools of West Tennessee: A Driving Tour**
- **Landscape of Liberation: The African American Geography of Civil War Tennessee** (Interactive Map Linked to Primary Documents)
- **Shades of Gray and Blue: Reflections of Life in Civil War Tennessee** (Web Site Highlighting Art and Artifacts, with Lesson Plans)
- **Southern Places** (CHP Digital Database of Photos and Research from 30 Years of CHP Field Work, including Rosenwald Schools and Rural African American Churches)
- **Southern Rambles** (CHP Blog)
- **Teaching with Primary Sources--MTSU** (Resources for Teachers, including Lesson Plans and Primary Source Sets on African American Topics)
- **Tennessee Century Farms Web Site**
- **Tennessee Encyclopedia of History and Culture**
- **Tennessee State Library and Archives** (Guides to African American Research and Genealogical Resources)
- **Tennessee State Museum: Tennessee4Me** (Overviews of Tennessee History and Teacher Lesson Plans)
- **Tennessee's African American Lodges** (Leigh Ann Gardner's Blog)
- **Tennessee’s Historic Landscape** (Dr. Carroll Van West's Blog)
- **Tennessee’s Reconstruction Past: A Driving Tour**
- **Trials and Triumphs: Tennesseans Search for Citizenship, Community, and Opportunity** (Digital Collection Focused on 1865-1945 and including Lesson Plans on African American Topics)

These model multiple property nominations to the National Register of Historic Places were completed by Dr. Carroll Van West and graduate students at the CHP:

Here is a selection of the sources used to prepare this publication:


Additional online resources related to African American history and genealogy include:

- Ancestry.com (Membership Genealogy Site, including Section Related to African American Genealogy)
- Chronicling America (Historic Newspapers from the Library of Congress)
- FamilySearch (Searchable Family History and Genealogy Web Site, including section about African American Genealogy)
- Fold3.com (Membership Site for Military Records)
- The Freedmen’s Bureau Online (Selected Records from the Freedmen’s Bureau)
- Guide to African American Newspapers
- Mapping the Freedmen’s Bureau (Maps Freedmen’s Bureau Field Offices, USCT Engagements, and Freedmen’s Bank Branches)
- Visualizing Emancipation (Maps Slavery’s End)
- Voices from the Days of Slavery (Audio Interviews from the Library of Congress)
COLLECTIONS CARE AND OTHER TOPICS RELATED TO PRESERVATION AND MUSEUM MANAGEMENT

Across Tennessee, many African American historic places, particularly former schools, have opened to visitors as heritage sites with displays and public programs. Managing a museum or historic site usually involves the collection and care of artifacts. One of the primary rules to remember related to your collection of historic artifacts is to try to make sure that any effort that you make to conserve an item can later be reversed if necessary. Many national and regional archives and conservation organizations have step-by-step guidelines available online for you to follow so that your collection will be preserved for future generations. Below are listed several of the best resources online for you to consult regarding the care for traditional artifacts, as well as the development of digital collections. Also included below are some resources to assist you in historic building upkeep and restoration, as well as resources related to museum management and assessment.

National Archives and Records Administration
http://www.archives.gov/preservation/
❖ "What Do You Want to Preserve?" section has advice related to family archives, photographs, books and scrapbooks, digital media, and audiovisual materials.

Library of Congress
http://www.loc.gov/preservation/
❖ Includes information about emergency management preparedness, finding a conservator and an appraiser, digital preservation, and building digital collections, as well as FAQs.

Smithsonian Institution Museum Conservation Institute
http://www.si.edu/mci/english/learn_more/taking_care/index.html
❖ Offers hands-on advice on taking care of a range of artifacts, including furniture, paper artifacts and documents, textiles, paintings, and dolls and toys; printed copies of brochures can also be ordered.

American Institute for the Conservation of Historic and Artistic Works
http://www.conservation-us.org/about-conservation/caring-for-your-treasures#.Vl3X9l62psR
❖ "Caring for Your Treasures" is geared toward the preservation of family treasures and includes hands-on suggestions for a variety of artifacts, as well as information about when you might need to consult a conservator.
The Henry Ford Museum and Greenfield Village
http://www.thehenryford.org/research/caring.aspx
  ❖ Provide "preservation fact sheets" on a range of artifacts, including log buildings and motorized vehicles.

Partners for Sacred Places
  ❖ This repair and maintenance guide for churches and other sacred places includes checklists and tips for keeping your building in good shape and making sure it is around for the next generation.

National Park Service, Trail of Tears National Historic Trail, and MTSU Center for Historic Preservation
  ❖ While the first section of this booklet is focused on the Trail of Tears, the hands-on section about the restoration of log buildings is pertinent to any log structures, including slave and tenant cabins.

National Park Service, Museum Management Program
http://www.nps.gov/museum/
  ❖ "Conserve O Grams" provide advice on a wide variety of topics, including museum collections, fire safety, insects and other pests, archaeological objects, and disaster recovery.
  ❖ A 3-part museum handbook is available and can be downloaded as a PDF.

American Association for State and Local History
http://resource.aaslh.org/view/complete-list-of-technical-leaflets/
  ❖ For more than five decades, the AASLH has produced technical leaflets on numerous topics related to the management and upkeep of museums and historic sites; some of the leaflets are available to download for free, while others are available to download for a minimal cost. Subjects include black genealogy, historical markers, docent-training, walking tours, sustainability, and African American community history.

http://tools.aaslh.org/steps/
  ❖ For a fee, the AASLH's Standards and Excellence Program for Historical Organizations (StEPs) assists small and mid-sized organizations with assessment and management.
See "Appendix C: Basic Considerations for a Community Museum," pp. 64-76, in Heritage Development Plan for West Bemis Rosenwald School (2014) for how-to information on establishing a community museum; collections care, management, and use; and programming.


African American group dedicated to educating people about cemeteries and preserving them.


The group also has a pdf for identifying different features (fence types, marker types, etc.) at cemeteries at http://chicora.org/pdfs/ID%20Sheet.pdf and information on cleaning cemeteries at http://chicora.org/cleaning.html

User-friendly digital photo editing site.
HERITAGE TOURISM

Heritage tourists travel to learn more about history and culture. Studies have shown that these visitors tend to stay longer at their destinations and spend more money. In Tennessee, tourism is a thriving sector of the economy, bringing in tens of billions of dollars annually and generating more than a billion in local and state sales tax revenues. Heritage tourism is an important part of the Volunteer State's overall outreach to travelers.

The Tennessee Department of Tourist Development oversees the state's tourism efforts and works with communities throughout the state to attract visitors. Contact the department via its Web site or by calling (615) 741-2159. The department administers Welcome Centers located off the Interstates, and organizations can place brochures at the Welcome Centers after receiving approval from the department. The department's Tennessee Vacation Web site (http://www.tnvacation.com/) also includes information about local sites across the state, as does the Vacation Guide booklet that is available in print form. The History and Heritage section of the Web site includes a section on African American Heritage.

Regional and local driving tours help communities and historic sites raise visibility and attract new partners. The Center for Historic Preservation (CHP) and the Tennessee Civil War National Heritage Area have worked with many local organizations to produce driving tour brochures. Recent examples that feature African American historic sites include Historic Orange Mound: Past, Present, and Future: A Driving Tour of Community Landmarks, Tennessee's Reconstruction Past: A Driving Tour, and The Selma Civil Rights Trail: 50 Landmarks for a 50th Anniversary. Contact us at the CHP if you are interested in developing a driving tour brochure for your community.
In the digital age, outreach via the Internet and social media is essential for educating your partners and potential visitors about your historic site and your community. Advances in technology have resulted in lower costs and more user-friendly platforms so that smaller organizations can more easily develop and sustain a Web presence. Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram are cost-free and just require you to take the time to market your organization clearly and uniformly. Some Tennessee African American historic sites with active Facebook pages include the Promise Land Heritage Association (search for Promise Land on Facebook) and the Gibson County Training School/Polk-Clark School Alumni Association (search for GCTS Polk Clark on Facebook). Learning more about social media for non-profits is a good way to get started.

Historic markers can also help generate interest in your site. The state historic marker program is administered by the Tennessee Historical Commission. Although the commission itself can only afford a few new markers each year, markers can also be sponsored locally. State markers are a recognizable feature along Tennessee's roads and help inform visitors about state and local history. Some urban areas also have their own historic marker programs to highlight local sites. The Metropolitan Historical Commission of Nashville and Davidson County administers one such program, as does the Shelby County Historical Commission.

If your organization would like to know more about how to best prepare your site for heritage tourists, you may want to contact the CHP to discuss creating a heritage development plan. A few examples of recent heritage development plans that the CHP has produced in partnership with historic African American schools are listed to the right.

Heritage Tourism--See Also:


Polk-Clark School Heritage Development Plan (2013).

RAISING FUNDS & VISIBILITY

There are many resources available for small- and medium-sized nonprofit, educational organizations interested in raising funds for ongoing expenses or special projects. Before soliciting funds, however, be sure that you have established your organization as a nonprofit, tax-exempt entity (meaning that you have applied for and received 501 (c) (3) status from the Internal Revenue Service and tax-exempt status from the state of Tennessee). The Web site of the Center for Nonprofit Management, listed on p. 13 under "Sources for Research, Instruction, and Assistance in Developing Grant Proposals," can help you get started if you still need to establish your organization as a nonprofit.

Before fundraising, also be sure that you understand the rules governing nonprofits (see A Guidebook for Tennessee Nonprofits developed by the Tennessee Attorney General's Office) and have a clear idea of your organization's mission and goals.

The following information is divided into sections on Tennessee grant funders, grant funders from outside Tennessee, fundraising research and planning resources, and suggestions for community-based fundraisers and "friendraisers."

A Guide to Proposal Planning and Writing, by Oryx Press, is a helpful online resource. Also, African American museums and historic sites in Tennessee might want to consider joining the Association of African American Museums, the Tennessee Association of Museums, and/or the Southeastern Museums Conference to benefit from the support they offer to their members.

Selected Grant Funders in Tennessee
Tennessee Historical Commission (THC)
Clover Bottom Mansion
2941 Lebanon Rd.
Nashville, TN 37243-0442
615-532-1550
http://www.tn.gov/environment/article/thc-federal-preservation-grants

- The THC administers federal historic preservation grant funds in Tennessee. Priorities are architectural and archaeological surveys, design guidelines for historic districts, and restoration of historic buildings that are listed in the National Register and have a public use.

- The Tennessee Wars Commission, which falls under the administrative oversight of the THC, may also have funding for sites associated with military actions in Tennessee. http://www.tn.gov/environment/article/thc-tennessee-wars-commission
The Tennessee Department of Transportation (TDOT) provides federal funding for trails, signage, and historic building renovations (especially transportation buildings).

The Tennessee Department of Tourist Development (TDTD) provides funding for brochures, flyers, and partnership marketing programs.

Humanities Tennessee provides funding for public humanities projects (such as film discussions or readings with local authors) and humanities education.

The Community Foundation of Middle Tennessee provides grants for education, the arts, conservation, and preservation.

The Community Foundation of Greater Chattanooga provides funding priorities include neighborhood revitalization and public education.
East Tennessee Foundation  
520 W. Summit Hill Drive  
Suite 1101  
Knoxville, TN 37902  
Toll-free 877-524-1223  
http://www.easttennesseefoundation.org/  

- Funding is available for arts and culture, community development, youth-at-risk, or a particular East Tennessee county or region.

Tennessee Arts Commission  
http://tnartscommission.org/  

- Provides grants for nonprofits, schools, artists, and arts educators to promote the arts in Tennessee communities.

Certified Local Governments  
http://www.nps.gov/clg/  

- States must distribute 10% of their annual federal historic preservation funds to certified local governments. Click on "Find a CLG (CLG Database)" to see if your community is a CLG.

Funding Sources Beyond Tennessee  
National Park Service  
American Battlefield Protection Program  
1201 Eye Street, NW (2287)  
Washington, DC 20005  
202-354-2037  
http://www.nps.gov/abpp/grants/planninggrants.htm  

- Funds battlefield preservation projects once per year, with an average grant of $32,000; funds research, planning, and interpretation, not land acquisition or capital improvements.

National Trust for Historic Preservation  
The Watergate Office Building  
2600 Virginia Avenue, Suite 1101  
Washington, DC 20037  
202-588-6000  
800-944-6847  
http://www.preservationnation.org/resources/find-funding  

- Provides funding for preservation projects, mostly for planning and education through its National Trust Preservation Funds grant program, and also has a Rosenwald Schools Initiative (contact Rosenwald@savingplaces.org).

South Arts, Inc. (formerly the Southern Arts Federation)  
1800 Peachtree St. NW, Suite 808  
Atlanta, GA 30309  
404-874-7244  
http://www.southarts.org/grants/apply-for-a-grant/  

- Has several grant programs for nonprofit performing and literary arts presenting organizations.
National Endowment for the Arts (NEA)
Name Office/Program
400 7th Street, SW
Washington, DC 20506-0001
(Include the office and/or program name you are trying to contact).
202-682-5400
https://www.arts.gov/grants/apply-grant/grants-organizations

- In addition to grants for artists, grants are available for place-based community arts projects and for arts programming for underserved communities.

Save America’s Treasures
2600 Virginia Avenue NW
Suite 1100
Washington, DC 20037
info@savingplaces.org
202-588-6000
800-944-6847

- Administered by the National Park Service, this federal grants program "helps preserve nationally significant historic properties and collections that convey our nation’s rich heritage to future generations of Americans."

National Historical Publications and Records Commission (NHPRC)
National Archives and Records Administration
700 Pennsylvania Avenue NW, Room 114
Washington, DC 20408-0001
202-357-5010
nhprc@nara.gov
http://www.archives.gov/nhprc/apply/program.html

- Provides funding for archives, the preservation of historical records, and access to those records.

Sources for Research, Instruction, and Assistance in Developing Grant Proposals

Center for Nonprofit Management
37 Peabody Street, Ste. 201
Nashville, TN 37210
615-259-0100
http://www.cnm.org/

- Provides advice, networking, educational workshops, etc., for nonprofits. Information for starting a nonprofit can be found here.

Partners for Sacred Places
1700 Sansom St., 10th Floor
Philadelphia, PA 19103
215-567-3234
partners@sacredplaces.org
http://www.sacredplaces.org/tools-research/fundraising-guide

- Provides guidance to the owners of historic churches and other sacred buildings on developing feasibility studies and capital campaigns.
The Foundation Center
32 Old Slip, 24th Floor
New York, NY 10005-3500
Phone: 212-620-4230
http://www.foundationcenter.org

- Web site has information about multiple topics related to fundraising, including grant writing, statistics and trends in foundation philanthropy, and nonprofit management. Free access to the organization's Foundation Directory Online, a database of funders throughout the United States.

The Grantmanship Center
P.O. Box 17220
Los Angeles, CA 90017
213-482-9860
800.421.9512
https://www.tgci.com/

- Resources for program planning, proposal writing, and finding potential funders. See https://www.tgci.com/funding-sources/tennessee for a listing of funders in Tennessee.

Small-Scale Fundraising Events and Projects
Churches and non-profit organizations have a long history of building community support, raising awareness for their causes, and raising needed funds with small-scale fundraisers. Before investing time and money into any event or activity, consider the following:

- How many members of our organization have time/interest in this event/activity?
- What space do we need for this event, and do we have it?
- How does the timeframe and date of the event work (or conflict) with other events in the organization and the community?

Possible Ideas:

BBQs, fish frys, and spaghetti suppers are traditional meals for community gatherings. Consider asking local grocers or restaurants to donate all or a portion of the meal. With good advertising, this could give an organization needed publicity, promote goodwill in the community, and raise funds.

Raffles can work for any size organization. See if you can get sponsors to donate the prizes. Please note that charitable organizations in Tennessee are required to file a gaming event application with the Tennessee Secretary of State’s Office.

An auction is a classic fundraiser. It can be adapted for different communities and can be combined with other events, such as cook-offs or bake sales. Silent or live auctions can provide a variety of items to bid on that suit everyone’s tastes, from travel packages and antiques to an hour of housework or a piano lesson.

Knowing the customers, picking the correct location, and having enough volunteers all help bake sales to be
successful. One idea is to make the sale part of a larger event, such as a flea market or an auction. A **cook-off** or a **bake-off** of any kind can bring in funds and participation, with people vying for the blue ribbon. Chili and cakes are some of the best options for these fundraisers, but you may want to cater to local tastes. **Cookbooks** can bring a community together. There are few people who cannot claim to have a secret family recipe that has been around for generations. With at least one recipe from every family in a community, a sizeable cookbook could be compiled that would contain a variety of recipes that reflect different tastes and backgrounds. It would be a valuable historical tribute to the community, and it could be sold locally in order to raise funds for projects.

**Flea Market** fundraisers are somewhat akin to garage sales, except in addition to attic treasures, vendors also might sell arts and crafts or homegrown produce. These allow people to come and go as they please, and the sponsors of the market can provide refreshments for a small fee.

A **pancake breakfast** appeals to people of all ages. Pancakes are easy to make and easy to eat. You can start off a Saturday or Sunday morning with an all-you-can-eat pancake breakfast.

**Community gardens** are ways that churches or other organizations can work together and supplement meals for the community's families during the summer months. Depending on the acreage, there may be additional produce that can be sold or shared with neighbors or those in need in the community. If a church or organization has a lot of land but a small or elderly congregation, consider partnering with another organization in this effort.

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**Raising Funds--See Also:**

Sections of these recently completed reports for sites in Tennessee contain suggestions for raising funds and increasing visibility that can be applied at other historic sites as well.


Community members who had attended the Sitka Rosenwald School in Gibson County, Tennessee, shared their experiences at the school with CHP graduate research assistant Amanda Barry.
BUSINESSES

Although Robert Rentfro, an African American living in eighteenth-century Nashville, operated an inn, few African Americans achieved a measure of business success in Tennessee before the Civil War. With emancipation, African American-owned businesses flourished throughout the state; in fact, the tightening of Jim Crow segregation had the effect of creating a space for African American businesses.

African Americans owned a variety of businesses to serve their communities, including neighborhood grocery stores, funeral homes, saloons, billiard halls, newspapers, barbershops, beauty shops, and restaurants.¹ Larger towns, such as Nashville and Memphis, saw the formation of black business districts that became the backbone of the community. Memphis had 248 African American-owned businesses by 1900 and 599 by 1910. Nashville had 338 African American owned-businesses by 1900 and 534 by 1910.²

Some African American-owned business, such as restaurants, catered to both the white and African American communities.³ In addition to service-oriented businesses, African Americans formed several banks in Tennessee, such as the People’s Saving Bank, Citizen’s Bank, and Solvent Savings Bank & Trust.

Numerous African American Tennesseans achieved noted success in their business ventures. Eva Lowery Bowman of Nashville trained at Madame C.J. Walker’s Lelia College in Indianapolis; she later opened the

² Ibid., 648.
Bowman Beauty and Barber College and the Bowman Art School in Nashville. Isaac Dockery of Sevier County ran a successful brick masonry business following the Civil War; several prominent Sevier County structures were built using his bricks, including the Sevierville Masonic Lodge and the Sevier County Courthouse. Lewis C. Buckner, born a slave in Jefferson County, built houses throughout Sevier County; several of his houses have been placed on the National Register of Historic Places due to their unique architecture. Bert M. Roddy of Memphis owned the first African American grocery chain in Memphis.

There were several African American businesses prominent in the media throughout the state. Although white-owned, WDIA in Memphis became the first all-black radio station in the country. Prominent newspapers included the Memphis World, the Chattanooga Blade, and the Nashville Globe. Organized in 1896, the National Baptist Publishing Board became the largest black publishing house in the United States in the twentieth century.

Although many African American businesses were opened, it was difficult for many of them to survive, and many did not last long. Capital was a perennial problem as African Americans rarely had valuable property to use as collateral for loans. If a white business did not offer competition, black businesses that catered to the African American community could do well. Others that survived took the tactic of catering to a white clientele or operating in a white shopping area. Businesses that flourished and still exist today include the Citizen’s Bank in Nashville (the oldest operating African American bank in the country), McKissack and

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7 Ingham, “Building Businesses, Creating Communities,” 643.
Businesses

Preserving African American Historic Places

Under Jim Crow, African Americans were not allowed to stay in white hotels, so some entrepreneurs opened hotels, such as the Sumner House that was run by and for African Americans in Nashville in the 1880s. A later hotel was the Colored Hotel in Union City, Obion County, which opened in 1945. It was located near U.S. 51, and some suggest it may have been the only hotel available for African Americans between Memphis and Chicago. The building remains and has been listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

McKissack Architects, and Scales & Son Funeral Home in Murfreesboro.

Businesses--See Also:


Teaching with Primary Sources—MTSU Lesson Plans:

- African American Medical Recognition
- Jim Crow Laws and African American Discrimination
- The Leaderships and Impact of Booker T. Washington


Businesses—See Also, continued:

Teaching with Primary Sources—MTSU Primary Source Set: Jim Crow in America.

Tennessee Encyclopedia of History and Culture Entries:
- “Caldonia Fackler “Cal” Johnson.”
- “Henry Allen Boyd.”
- “Richard Henry Boyd.”
- “Robert R. Church, Sr.”
- “Robert R. Church, Jr.”
- “Fraternal & Solvent Savings Bank & Trust.”
- “Tri-State Bank.”


CEMETERIES

The first section of this essay is from the Web site of the Tennessee Civil War National Heritage Area, a partnership unit of the National Park Service that is administered by the Center for Historic Preservation.

"For black Americans," writes historian John Michael Vlach, "the cemetery has long had special significance. Beyond its association with the fear and awe of death, which all humans share, the graveyard was, in the past, one of the few places in America where an overt black identity could be asserted and maintained."¹⁰

For Tennessee’s black population, the Civil War engendered both hope and hardship. Despite the Emancipation Proclamation, the defeat of the Confederacy, and the abolition of slavery by the Thirteenth Amendment, African Americans faced the reality of widespread racism in both the political and social arenas. In part as a response to such discrimination, black Tennesseans created their own vibrant communities, where they could gather, learn, and embrace the opportunities of their new freedom. They established churches, businesses, schools, lodges, and cemeteries throughout the state during the postwar period.

African American cemeteries are unique historical resources that contribute significantly to our understanding of African American life and culture in the decades following the Civil War. Not only do they serve as the final resting place for countless African Americans who have "gone home," they also document more than a century of history.

The significance of these sacred places extends far beyond the outward simplicity of the artifacts found there. A complex system of belief and social practice, shaped by more than a century of interaction between black and white cultures, has produced a landscape of multiple layers. While recent scholarship has focused more attention on the presence of African Americans in the Civil War landscape, cemeteries still remain under-explored as historic sites.

Historic black cemeteries are sometimes difficult to identify and can be easily overlooked. Many are situated in remote locations, often on what was once the poorest or least developed land in a community. In rural areas, black cemeteries can be hard to reach or difficult to spot during a survey, especially because they may lack prominent or even visible grave markers. In more urban locations, they are sometimes established just outside city limits, which excludes them from municipal upkeep and thus adds to their neglected appearance. Many African American cemeteries succumb to development pressures.

The most important step in preserving and protecting African American cemeteries is to keep their history alive. The lack of documentary evidence presents a challenge for those who seek to study and understand historic black cemeteries. Even when they have been in use for generations, these cemeteries are seldom documented through deeds or other legal records. Nevertheless, the local black population usually retains strong ties to the property. A detailed and accurate record of many African American cemeteries can be created by seeking out local sources. Black funeral home directors will likely know of a cemetery's existence and may have records of interment. Older residents can frequently provide at least a partial oral history of the site. If the cemetery is associated with a church and/or school, as is often the case, these records may also shed light on the site.
Many African American cemeteries, because of their locale and encroaching development, face an uncertain future. For example, the migration of families and an aging population has affected the continued use and upkeep of many rural cemeteries. Those most intimately connected with the sites are moving or passing away, taking with them their knowledge of these traditional burial places. In other instances, the cultural customs of those using the cemeteries are changing or being modernized, causing some historic burial grounds to be abandoned. Subsequently, the generally more temporary and/or smaller nature of the grave markers in black cemeteries makes them disappear into the landscape more easily so that people often don’t think there’s a cemetery there anymore. Both historic black and white cemeteries located in remote areas are also an easy target for vandalism.

**Cemeteries: Significance**

African American cemeteries are significant historical, archeological, religious, and cultural sites. In each of these places of mourning and remembrance exist many clues to the histories of those buried there and the identities of the surrounding communities. The stones, monuments, landscapes, enclosures, and epitaphs are a commentary on both the religious traditions and the cultural heritage of a people.

In 1859, Elias Leavenworth called the cemetery the "last great necessity" of any American city worth its salt. For post-Civil War African Americans, the cemetery more often represented the first great necessity of the community. Many historic black cemeteries in the South date to the 1860s and 1870s, when freed slaves began to establish their own communities and churches following the Civil War.
When headstones do not identify those buried or a grave is unmarked, older community members are likely to have insight into the identities of those interred. With limited information on the headstones at the Pleasant Hill Missionary Baptist Church cemetery in Henderson County, conversations with older community members will likely provide more detailed information.

Black cemeteries are tangible expressions of more than three centuries of combining African, European, and American lifestyles. As historic places in a community, cemeteries associate a rich African heritage with the legacy of slavery and the joy of freedom. The peripheral location of many historic black cemeteries illustrates the limited resources of newly freed slaves and may indicate a desire to carry out mourning and burial traditions beyond the scrutiny and surveillance of white society.

African American burial grounds are rarely landscaped like Euro-American cemeteries, and they often differ greatly in appearance. Graves most often seem to be scattered or randomly placed, with little symmetrical arrangement. Most black cemeteries display little or no formal landscaping. This is intended. Trees and shrubs are generally native to the area, though the use of ornamental vegetation and plantings to mark graves is fairly common.
Formal landscaping is uncommon but frequently ornamental vegetation and plants mark graves, as at the New Zion Christian Methodist Episcopal church in Fayette County.

In other burying grounds, more often in urban than rural settings, the prominence of the family burial plot reveals the importance of family ties in the African American community. Until the twentieth century, black cemeteries rarely featured elaborate monuments. Rather, simple monuments constructed of stone or wood predominated, many of which were made or inscribed by hand, indicating traditions of folk art and craftsmanship. When visiting these cemeteries today, you will notice that many graves are unmarked or are marked only with fieldstones set on end. The use of grave vaults, a technique frequently used in white cemeteries to maintain an even surface for mowing and walking, remained rare when many African American cemeteries were created. Deep depressions reveal the location of many otherwise unmarked graves. The use of simple, even temporary, markers suggests that it was not necessarily important for future generations to know the exact location of specific graves. Before modern health regulations brought more standardization to American burial rituals, this practice also ensured that space would always be available for those who desired to be buried with their kin. To the uninformed observer, these cemeteries may appear neglected, although this is generally not the case. More often they are deliberate articulations of a particular philosophy toward death and burial.

Funeral and mourning traditions vary greatly based on class, religion, and personal preference. Although the influence of Euro-American burial customs is evident, especially among upper- and middle-class families, African American cemeteries often demonstrate the abiding presence of an African past. African antecedents are most visible in grave-marking practices, such as the use of "grave offerings." This is a traditional African American
practice in which various items, including pottery and personal artifacts, are placed on top of a grave. Although the meaning of this custom is not clear, some have suggested that it can be traced to the African tradition of decorating a grave with items used by the deceased. The items are often "killed," or deliberately broken, to ensure they will remain in the afterlife with their owner.

Epitaphs sometimes contain important genealogical information, though most stones are marked with the basic information of name, birth date, and death date. Often, an affiliation with a lodge or organization will be engraved on the tombstone.

Markers occasionally reflect the artistry of a local stonemason, though more often the stone carving is not professionally done. In the following examples, folk artists and untrained craftsmen made headstones at cemeteries affiliated with churches in Madison, Cocke, and Chester counties from the 1930s to the end of the 1990s.
Cemeteries: Traditions

The African American cemetery in the South derives much of its significance from the rich funerary traditions that have endured for generations within the African American community. Lingering African influences have mingled with Euro-American customs and a long heritage of Christian faith to produce a strong tradition of culturally significant burial practices.

As in other cultures, African antecedents appear in the deep respect and reverence shown to the dead and in the emphasis placed upon providing the deceased with a proper burial. As black people encountered the New World, parallels between Christianity and the traditional practices of various African cultures allowed the survival of certain African ideas and symbols. Traditional beliefs, such as the distinction between the body and spirit, and the existence of a separate world for the dead, transferred easily to life in America. Africanisms persisted in such customs as the use of ornamental plantings, reflecting an African belief in the living spirit, and the placement of “offerings” on top of graves. While such practices remained most prevalent in the coastal areas, where a greater proportion of the black population descended directly from Africa, they are evident to some degree in African American communities all across the South. The importance and sacredness of the funeral, in particular, are universally recognized among African Americans.

Other distinctly African American funeral customs emerged from the crucible of slavery and from the severe economic and social limitations placed upon black southerners for many years afterward. The conditions of slavery rendered the funeral an especially significant occasion for African Americans, who savored it as one of the few opportunities given enslaved people to gather and socialize. Funeral rituals usually lasted all day and far into the night, a tradition that endured until well into the twentieth century. African American burial traditions, in many ways, were also reflections of the enduring Christian faith that developed
in the context of slavery. Funerals emphasized the spiritual rather than the physical aspects of death and presented it as a natural transition from one life into the next. Services took on a hopeful, and sometimes celebratory, tone as attendees rejoiced that a loved one was "going home" to be with the Lord. "Homegoing" celebrations allowed family, friends, and community members to pay their last respects to a loved one who had passed on to a better place.

Occasionally, cemeteries also allowed black southerners to receive accolades for accomplishments not safely recognized publicly during life. In the first half of the nineteenth century, for example, the clandestine work of African Americans who served as conductors on the Underground Railroad or provided schooling for blacks was often made public upon their deaths and commemorated in a descriptive epitaph.

African American mourning practices included a strong tradition of mutual aid and cooperation, especially in rural communities. Although similar traditions existed in rural white communities, such practices often took on greater importance for African Americans, whose family and social ties had been disrupted by slavery. A death often brought an entire community to a virtual halt. Friends and relatives arrived at the home of the deceased with food and condolences to comfort and encourage the grieving family. Wakes and "setting ups" were common practices in which those gathered spent the night singing, praying, sharing memories, and mourning with the family.

Throughout much of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, economic adversity fostered many black burial practices. Since the services of professional grave diggers remained beyond the means of most turn-of-the-twentieth-century black families, community members often volunteered to perform the task. Simple wooden coffins were common. Because grave vaults were rarely used, many African American cemeteries, even those without markers, are easily identified by their uneven terrain.

Burial associations, which gained popularity among African Americans during the late nineteenth century, served as a kind of insurance that helped offset the cost of funerals. For a weekly premium of 25 cents, burial associations agreed to provide a casket, burial garments, and funeral services, thus fulfilling the twofold need of most African Americans to practice frugality while ensuring their loved ones could be buried with dignity. Fraternal organizations for men and women also played a significant role for African Americans in both life and death. Black Americans belonged to affiliate chapters of traditionally white organizations such as...
as the Masons and the Elks, as well as to local African American fraternities such as the Circle of Liberia. It was not unusual for such organizations to conduct special burial services for their members, a practice that continues today.

Customs related to death and burial often reflected the resourcefulness and resilience of the black community, as well as the challenges it faced. African American funeral homes and mortuary businesses, for example, which appeared for the first time in the early decades of the twentieth century, were products of the black self-help movement that emerged during segregation. Along with the church and the school, the funeral home became a center of the black community. The funeral home was one of the first black-owned businesses whose entrepreneurial owners were willing to perform a service that white southerners were unwilling to offer to black southerners. Funeral home directors, generally well-educated and well-respected, were leaders in the community. The local population depended on them to provide a myriad of services, from death benefits to investment advice, as well as to contribute generously to community functions and needs.

Since the turn of the twentieth century, increasing educational and economic opportunities have gradually transformed black burial rites. As growing numbers of black Americans reached middle-class status, black mourning and funeral traditions began to reflect more closely the artistic traditions and symbolism of white funeral customs. Anglo-American symbols and motifs, such as the cherub, the dove, or the gates of heaven, began to appear in black cemeteries. Some cemeteries even developed a spatial hierarchy, with the community's most influential members buried in the cemetery's most prominent or desirable location.

With the Civil Rights movement of the 1960s, African American funerary practices became more mainstream. Black mortuary businesses introduced viewing and visitation services. Formal funeral services took on a shorter, less spontaneous format, and funeral homes began to offer printed programs. Contemporary funerary practices also tend to place less emphasis than before on the spiritual aspects of death. Alterations in the outward rituals, however, have not decreased the importance and the sacredness of the burial in African American life. The
funeral home continues to play a central role, providing such important services as insurance, counseling, and investment planning.

The activities surrounding death possess cultural significance for African Americans and serve as a galvanizing force in black communities.

Cemeteries--See Also:


Forgotten Places, Living Traditions: The Rutherford County Cemetery Survey Project Online Driving Tour (see also Fletcher, Michael. "Progress on the Rutherford County Cemetery Survey," Southern Rambles Blog.)


Southern Places Database: Cemeteries.


Trials and Triumphs: Tennesseans' Search for Citizenship, Community, and Opportunity, Finding Community: Cemeteries.

See also the section of this guide entitled "Collections Care and Other Topics Related to Preservation and Museum Management."


DENOMINATIONAL & CHURCH HISTORY

Once freedom came during and after the Civil War, many African Americans began forming their own churches in their communities, away from the control of white society. The African American church faced its own unique set of issues; as historian Edward L. Ayers notes, “black church leaders constantly negotiated between the desire of their congregations for autonomy and the need of their churches for money, the demands of young assertive blacks and the caution of the more conservative older leaders.” The church was central to the African American community, and several African American denominations started in Tennessee or are headquartered in Tennessee.

The Christian Methodist Episcopal Church (CME) had its start in Nashville, with the Capers Memorial Church dating to 1866, although the CME church did not formally begin until 1870. The Church of God, established in the early

--- Teresa Douglas, Heather Fearnbach, Rebecca Smith, and Carroll Van West,
twentieth century, located its headquarters in Nashville in 1924.\textsuperscript{13} The National Baptist Convention, USA, has had a relationship with Nashville since the end of the nineteenth century, when the Reverend Richard H. Boyd established and located the National Baptist Publishing Board in Nashville in 1896.\textsuperscript{14} The Church of Christ had several large African American congregations in Tennessee, including the Jackson Street Church of Christ in Nashville. The Church of God in Christ (COGIC) convened its first Pentecostal General Assembly in Memphis in 1907, and the headquarters for the Church of God in Christ is in Memphis.\textsuperscript{15} Other denominations with African American congregations in Tennessee include the African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Church, the AME Zion Church, United Methodist, Disciples of Christ, Primitive Baptist, and the Missionary Baptist Church.

Several Tennesseans became prominent in African American church history. Jackson Street Church of Christ is known for producing Marshall Keeble, who is reported to have established three hundred churches and baptized more than 40,000 whites and African Americans between the 1890s and 1968.\textsuperscript{16} Mary Magdelena Tate is a Tennessean recognized as one of the founders of the holiness movement. She and her sons established the House of God in 1903.\textsuperscript{17} Bishop Isaac Lane of the CME Church was born a slave in Madison County, Tennessee. He was the fourth bishop of the CME Church and started a school in Jackson that became Lane College.\textsuperscript{18} Nelson Merry was the first African American ordained bishop in Nashville, founded fourteen black Baptist churches, and was the founder of the Tennessee Colored Baptist Association in 1866.\textsuperscript{19}

The architecture of church buildings in Tennessee itself changed over time. Few African American church buildings remain that were built in the 1850-1890 period. Carroll Van West notes in \textit{Powerful Artifacts} that those that do remain are typically one-story, gable-roofed buildings. The buildings are often rectangular in shape and the entrance is often on the gable end of the building.\textsuperscript{20}

\textsuperscript{13} Ibid., 14-15.
\textsuperscript{14} Ibid., 21.
\textsuperscript{15} Ibid., 15.
\textsuperscript{17} Douglas, et al., “Denominational Histories,” 14.
\textsuperscript{18} West, “Historic Rural African American Churches,” Section E, Page 10.
\textsuperscript{19} Ibid., Page 26.
During Jim Crow segregation, from 1890-1945, African American churches in the state began to take on more distinctive characteristics. Congregations began building multi-story buildings of brick or concrete. Many were influenced by the Gothic Revival style of the late nineteenth century. Churches constructed from the 1930s show influences of the popular Colonial Revival style.21

21 Ibid., 37.
This era also witnessed the emergence of dedication stones on church buildings. These stones are often important sources of historical information about churches, and may provide information about a congregation's founding date, early pastors, and date of construction. The images to the right are varying examples of dedication stones. During this period schools, lodges, and cemeteries were also located adjacent to churches, all three often standing side by side.22

The period from 1945-1970 saw an increase in physical comforts in African American churches as congregations replaced frame buildings with brick buildings and added indoor plumbing and electricity.23 Churches also added new wings, often at the rear but sometimes at either end. Churches made these additions to serve their religious and social missions.24 Many churches during the 1951-1970 period were also

22 Ibid., 39.
23 Ibid., 43.

24 Ibid., 46.
involved in the Civil Rights movement across Tennessee. The period 1945-1970 saw a dramatic increase in the use of the Colonial Revival style in the construction of churches.25

The church styles shown here are only a few examples. More styles and architectural features can be identified by using the Rural African American Church Visual Survey form (pp. 50-52 of Powerful Artifacts). This form can help you assess a church building. Also refer to the Rural African American Church Survey form (pp. 53-54 of Powerful Artifacts) if you would like to conduct a rural church survey.

The Bowman Chapel United Methodist Church in Dickson County has an addition to the rear of the original church building.

25 Ibid., 47.
The Mt. Zion Baptist Church in Henry County has unmatched twin towers; one is flat and the other is conical.

The Miles Chapel Christian Methodist Episcopal Church in Lauderdale County has a single side tower.

Clayborne Chapel African Methodist Episcopal Church in Maury County has a center conical tower with a covered entry.
Denominational and Church History--See Also:


Southern Places Database: Churches.

Tennessee Encyclopedia of History and Culture Entries:

- "William Herbert Brewster, Sr."
- "First Baptist Church, Capitol Hill Nashville."
- "Sutton E. Griggs."
- "Marshall Keeble."
- "Isaac Lane."
- "Charles Harrison Mason."
- "Rural African American Church Project."
- "Kelly Miller Smith Sr."
- "Hardin Smith."
- "Preston Taylor."
- "Wiley Memorial United Methodist Church."


West Tennessee Historical Society back issues (for church-related pieces).

FARMS

People of African descent were among the first to practice agriculture in Tennessee. In the early settlement period, some free black Tennesseans owned land, but the majority of those who worked the land were enslaved. The planting, cultivation, and harvesting of row crops, vegetables, and fruits was done by enslaved workers on many farms and most certainly on plantations. Enslaved individuals were often among the most knowledgeable people on a farm with reference to the breeding and care of livestock. Black men were highly skilled blacksmiths, horse and mule trainers, and gardeners, while enslaved women worked in the fields or were responsible for the preservation of harvested food stores.

Following emancipation, the desire to own and work their own land became a reality for many former slaves and their children. Between 1865 and 1919, black citizens acquired 15 million acres in the southern states. For many reasons, including Jim Crow laws and the inability to secure loans for machinery, seed, fertilizer, and land improvements, many African Americans gave up trying to make a living farming and turned to...
The Matt Gardner Homestead in Dixontown, Giles County, Tennessee, is a Century Farm founded by Matt Gardner, who was born into slavery and became a successful farmer, minister, entrepreneur, and community leader.

other occupations. Many left the South for jobs in factories in the North.

Within the Tennessee Century Farms Program, a recognition program for families that have owned farms for more than 100 years, only a handful of the more than 1600 certified farms were founded by emancipated slaves and their children. These are among the most remarkable stories told by Century Farmers. More about these farmers can be found in the book *Plowshares and Swords: Tennessee Farm Families Tell Civil War Stories* (2013), by Michael T. Gavin and Caneta Skelley Hankins. The Century Farms program also has an active Facebook page for up-to-date information on farms newly added to the program. You can learn more about Tennessee’s Century Farms and access the Facebook page via the Tennessee Century Farms Program Web site.

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**Farms--See Also:**


*Southern Places* Database: Farms.

*Trials and Triumphs: Tennesseans' Search for Citizenship, Community, and Opportunity, Claiming Space: Work.*

Carroll Van West, *"Historic Preservation Can Mean Transition," Southern Rambles* Blog.
By 1860, the U.S. census reported that 275,784 slaves lived in Tennessee. More slaves were held in the counties of Middle Tennessee than in West Tennessee, and considerably fewer lived in East Tennessee. Quarters for slaves varied. Some were one-room log houses, referred to as single-pen cabins, with an end chimney of stone or brick and perhaps a loft for sleeping or storage. They might have earthen or wooden floors, one or two doors, a small window (if one at all), and a single fireplace for heat and cooking.

The current owner of the Burrow-Gregory Century Farm in Macon County explains that farm founder William Burrow purchased Roda and her child Hannoh for $1,126.50 in 1858. The 1880 census lists Roda and two children living on the farm as servants. This wooden slave house was typical living quarters. Courtesy of current owner.

Slave housing might also be in long brick buildings, duplexes, triplexes, or in wings attached to the owners' house or in the basement of the farmhouse or mansion. A separate cook's house or kitchen might also have a loft or second floor that was the living quarters for the enslaved worker(s) who prepared and served the farm's meals. Some slave houses were frame and fewer still stone.

On some farms, slaves occupied what was once the original residence that served the owners until a larger house could be built. When the “big house” was completed, the smaller dwelling reverted to slave housing. Slave housing continued in use as housing for servants or tenants after the Civil War and emancipation.
A slave kitchen/cookhouse at the Fermanagh-Ross Century Farm, also called Maden Hall, in Greene County, may date to 1840. The size of the chimney and firebox, which is 4 feet tall and 4 feet by 8 inches wide, suggests that slaves prepared the meals for the farm in this building. Courtesy of Michael Strutt.

On larger plantations, slave housing was generally built in one area of the farm referred to as the “slave quarters.” This grouping of houses was sometimes in a row, somewhat removed from the owner’s residence, and closer to fields and barns where many of the enslaved residents worked. Other farm buildings that may remain on the landscape and are most often associated with the work of slaves and, later, tenants, are detached kitchens, wash houses, blacksmith shops, and barns. Obviously, buildings directly associated with the period of slavery in Tennessee are rare.

This is the only remaining dwelling of at least ten slave cabins that once stood on the Murray-Jernigan Farm in Rutherford County.

**Slave Housing--See Also:**

National Park Service, Trail of Tears National Historic Trail, and MTSU Center for Historic Preservation, *Restoration Guide for Historic Log Buildings on the Trail of Tears National Historic Trail* (2015). The hands-on section of this restoration guide is pertinent to all log buildings in Tennessee, including slave and tenant houses, not just those along the Trail of Tears.
Slave Housing—See Also, continued:

Southern Places Database: [Houses](#).

Strutt, Michael, [Abstract](#) for ""Yes I was a house slave; I slept under the stairway in the closet." Slave Housing and Landscapes of Tennessee 1780--1860: An Architectural Synthesis (Ph.D. diss., Middle Tennessee State University, 2012).

*Tennessee Encyclopedia of History and Culture* Entry: [Slavery](#).

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**HOMES: TENANT HOUSING**

With emancipation, newly freed men and women and their families had few options to make a living and a new life. In many cases, farming was the only skill and occupation they had.

At the other end of the evolving post-Civil War agricultural system, farms and plantations that had relied on slave labor were not able to return to production without workers. Some farm owners were able to hire freed men and women and pay a wage to those who worked in the fields, tended livestock, and worked as domestic servants in and around the house.

In the postwar environment, a transitional labor system also emerged that allowed former slaves to work for a landowner for wages or a portion of profit earned from the sale of livestock and crops. As intended, both landowner and tenant or sharecropper should benefit. Farms could return to production and freed men, women, and children could work to earn money to purchase their own property.
These images show before and after photographs of a renovated dwelling on the Crawford Century Farm in Fayette County, built just after the Civil War in about 1867. It is referred to as the "servants' home" and may have been built for and used by individuals or a family that once worked as slaves on the large plantation. Courtesy of the Crawford Family.

In this image, Laura Smith stands with a young Carolyn Crawford in c. 1918. Laura and her family may have lived in the "servants' home" shown to the left. The photograph was taken on the historic Crawford Century Farm, in Fayette County. Courtesy of the Crawford Family.
The tenant or sharecropper arrangement did work for some African Americans, who slowly began to save and accumulate their own property in the hopes of one day buying a farm. White landowners saw fences repaired and crops and livestock returned to the fields with a hope of marketing the surplus. For many former slaves, though, this situation was slavery by another name. While the arrangements differed from farm to farm, many tenants paid rent for housing—often the same houses they had lived in while enslaved—from their modest wages. Workers were charged by the landowner for food, seed, and tools. Tenants and sharecroppers who could supply nothing more than their efforts to the venture often found themselves in debt year after year. Some employers took advantage of this system and would not allow tenants to leave until their debt was paid in full. In these situations, the landowner's hold over the workers might last for years or even generations.

At Kirkland Pleasant Valley Century Farm in Marshall County are the remains of a tenant house along with a barn that was built for the use of the tenants. The barn continues to be used and is still referred to as the “tenant barn.”

In the Rosemark Community of Shelby County, this ca. 1920s tenant house is located on what was then the Moore Farm.

While the majority of the workers who became sharecroppers or tenants were black, hard economic times resulted in whites becoming tenants and sharecroppers as well. With the migration of many black families to jobs and opportunities in the North, and the increased mechanization of farming in the early-to-mid-twentieth century, tenant farming generally diminished in the South by World War II. While increasingly rare on the twenty-first century landscape, some tenant houses, even a few still occupied and remodeled over the years, remain as evidence of the dominant agricultural system that emerged after the Civil War.
This dwelling on the E. S. Williams Farm in Rutherford County is typical of tenant housing across the state from about the 1870s until about the 1950s.

**Tenant Housing—See Also:**

National Park Service, Trail of Tears National Historic Trail, ant MTSU Center for Historic Preservation, *Restoration Guide for Historic Log Buildings on the Trail of Tears National Historic Trail* (2015). The hands-on section of this restoration guide is pertinent to all log buildings in Tennessee, including slave and tenant houses, not just those along the Trail of Tears.

*Southern Places Database:* [Houses](#).

*Tennessee Encyclopedia of History and Culture* Entry: [Sharecropping](#).

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**HOMES: PUBLIC HOUSING**

Following World War I, the need for affordable and improved housing for much of the American population that lived in both larger urban centers and smaller towns was recognized. Housing for black citizens in urban areas was often crowded and sub-standard. Older buildings had outdated or nonexistent electrical wiring and no running water. Community spigots located outside were the only sources of water, and outhouses served many as no plumbing existed in the dwellings. Heat was inadequate in the winter, and residents sweltered in summer months in the close and cramped rooms. Infestations of vermin and insects were common. Sickness, death, and crime rates were high in what could only be described as slums.

As the years of the Great Depression made living conditions even worse for many people, the New Deal policies of President Franklin D. Roosevelt pushed for better housing in urban areas. When constructed, largely with federal funds, the rent for these apartment units were heavily subsidized by the government.
and made available to those termed “deserving” people, both blacks and whites, with low incomes. Theoretically, this would improve the daily lives of residents by providing better living spaces and arrangements, with basic conveniences such as modern plumbing and electricity; these improvements would not only make for a healthier and easier lifestyle, but would, in time, build self-pride and, ultimately, affect the behavior of residents in productive ways. Ideally, the entire community would benefit from this approach to urban renewal.

With the passage of the United States Housing Act in 1937, Tennessee towns began to make changes in their landscapes through urban renewal projects, large and small, and to construct public housing. In Memphis, the first housing projects completed were Lauderdale Homes for whites and Dixie Homes for blacks. In 1939, the Nashville Housing Authority (NHA) applied for funding to build two low-rent developments—Boscobel Heights, later renamed in honor of James A. Cayce, who was the first chair of the NHA and died while the project was under construction, and the J.C. Napier Homes, named for prominent turn-of-the-century African American James C. Napier. Many of the residents of these and other early public housing ventures were relocated to this new housing as part of the Capitol Hill Redevelopment Project. This early urban renewal effort cleared 97 acres of mostly small derelict houses around the state Capitol to make way for the James Robertson Parkway, commercial and government buildings, and a park (now the Bicentennial Mall). The Chattanooga Housing Authority was chartered in 1938, and other similar governmental entities dealing with housing across the state also began their work in the late 1930s and early 1940s.

The Public Works Administration (PWA) was the federal program most widely recognized for its effect on public housing in that it bought land, razed slums, and built new dwellings. Half of the housing built by the PWA was allocated for black citizens and the same amenities were intended for those units as for the white public housing projects. In reality, that was not always the case, however. In Tennessee’s New Deal Landscape (2001), historian Carroll Van West noted, “In Tennessee, at least, PWA idealism could not crack Jim Crow reality; public housing was separate but certainly not equal.” He went on to say that public housing for black Tennesseans probably only existed because federal rules required it.

Although some of the public housing units from the late 1930s and early 1940s, like the all-black Merry Lane Courts in Jackson, are still in use, most of the older buildings now date from the 1960s, when another wave of urban...
renewal coincided with integration. Federal programs continue to be at the forefront of subsidizing, building, and managing public housing, though private initiatives, such as Habitat for Humanity, have made an impact on efforts to provide affordable and desirable housing for low-income Tennesseans.

Public Housing--See Also:

Southern Places Database: Houses.


HOMES: NEIGHBORHOODS

Within most Tennessee towns, large and small, are neighborhoods that are traditionally African American. These areas may have grown up around a former plantation, a contraband camp, the railroad, local mills, a cotton gin, or another industrial establishment. After the Civil War, some neighborhoods developed in close proximity to the most prosperous streets where the town’s wealthier white residents lived. This made it easier for domestic servants and laborers who worked for the white families to be near to their places of employment. Alternatively, in some towns, the traditionally black section was located in an area separated from the predominantly white neighborhoods by the railroad tracks, an industry, or other buildings and spaces.

As schools, churches, cemeteries, lodges, and businesses were built or expanded within black neighborhoods, the identity of these places was strengthened. Black neighborhoods, while still segregated, became a vital and vibrant part of the town or city. Today, the houses within these neighborhoods range from modest and similar in style, as in mill villages, to higher style Victorian and Craftsman designs.

An example of a traditional African American neighborhood is the Natchez Street District in Franklin (Williamson County). It was established between 1870 and 1899 as former slaves began to purchase property and settle along Natchez Street, which was just outside the Franklin city limits. The area was within easy walking distance of both Main and Fair streets, where some of the most prosperous white families maintained homes and employed domestic servants and day workers.

Homes, businesses, industries, and churches were built in the Natchez Street neighborhood, and by 1888 a school served the growing black population. Within the neighborhood existed various economic and social levels within the black community, as individuals and families of varying income, education, and professions lived in close proximity because of segregation. Neighborhoods like the Natchez Street District were the center of the social, cultural, religious, and educational life of black citizenry. Many of these neighborhoods remain at least partially intact today, although public housing and urban renewal policies of the 1950s and 1960s brought about significant changes to these areas.
Neighborhoods like the Natchez Street District in Franklin, Tennessee, were the center of the social, cultural, religious, and educational life of black citizenry.

In the twentieth century, primarily after World War II, African Americans began to move into traditionally white neighborhoods in urban and suburban areas. Eventually, some of these areas became solidly African American and retain that identity today. Places within these neighborhoods are often associated with the Civil Rights movement and with religious, social, and cultural advancements, making their significance to local, state, and national events and contributions a part of the collective history of Tennessee counties and towns.

The Glenview neighborhood in Memphis was originally settled in the early twentieth century by small business owners, skilled craftsmen, professionals, and people in sales, bookkeeping, and similar vocations. It was a planned suburban community for the middle class, and its streets, houses, and amenities reflected this lifestyle. Until the early 1960s it was predominantly white. The only African Americans seen in the area were domestic workers, black laborers, and sanitation workers.

Following World War II and in the two decades following, as changes in education, politics, and opportunities took place, members of a new generation of black leaders chose to reside in Glenview. Integration of this neighborhood was met with strenuous resistance by some of the white homeowners for about two years.
Primarily, those who moved to Glenview, despite racial disharmony, were educated and professional middle-class residents or factory workers with well-paying jobs.

By 1968, Glenview was considered an African American middle-class neighborhood. The construction of the Glenview Community Center in 1971 solidified the neighborhood and served to support a neighborhood with a high degree of integrity, with well-maintained houses and yards where people with pride in home ownership lived. The Glenview Historic District is listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

**Neighborhoods--See Also:**


*Landscape of Liberation: The African American Geography of Civil War Tennessee.*


*Southern Places Database: Houses.*
**Neighborhoods—See Also, continued:**

*Trials and Triumphs: Tennesseans’ Search for Citizenship, Community, and Opportunity, Claiming Space: Towns, Neighborhoods.*

Examples of model multiple property nominations to the National Register, completed by Dr. Carroll Van West and graduate students at the CHP:


**LODGES**

Fraternal lodges, benevolent societies, and clubs were important institutions in African American communities. Benevolent societies, also referred to as voluntary associations, beneficial associations, and fraternal groups, allowed African Americans a place to socialize with each other and offered a self-help philosophy that used membership dues to provide illness and burial benefits. The number of these groups exploded after the Civil War; Memphis had as many as thirty in the decade after the war. A contemporary estimated that half of all African American men in Nashville belonged to such groups after the Civil War.

One historian in the 1930s noted that thousands of these organizations came into existence after the Civil War. Membership in fraternal groups rivaled that of any other voluntary association, with the only exception possibly being the church. Sociologist Howard Odum noted in 1910 that lodges prospered in both towns and rural areas and often became centers of community life. Some associations had the guise of fraternal union, such as the Colored

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Masons, while others focused increasingly on benevolence and insurance. Some historians speculate that as African Americans were increasingly excluded from political organizations, they formed clubs and lodges as a way to socialize and be a part of a larger organization.

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<td>Colored Benevolent Society</td>
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<td>United Sons of Relief</td>
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<td>Knights of Pythias of North and South America, Europe, Asia, and Africa</td>
<td>Nashville Provident Association</td>
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<td>Order of Calanthe (female auxiliary of the Knights of Pythias)</td>
<td>Working People's Labor &amp; Art Association</td>
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While not a complete list, above are some of the names of the different lodges and benevolent associations that once thrived in Tennessee.

There were basically two types of fraternal and benevolent organizations: those that paralleled a white organization (such as the Masons or the Elks) and distinctive orders that did not directly resemble any white organization. Such distinctive groups included the Working People's Labor and Art Association, formed in Nashville in 1890 and dedicated to racial uplift. It also provided sickness and burial benefits to the members of the organization. Often organized as representatively governed federations, lodges offered leadership opportunities within the African American community.

One of the oldest lodges in West Tennessee is the United Sons and Daughters of Charity Hall, initially formed in the 1870s. Its lodge building, dating to 1909, still stands in Bolivar, Hardeman County. Many lodge buildings, once such a vital part of the African American community, have vanished from the landscape.

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33 Constitution of the Working People’s Labor and Art Association, “Preface.”


National fraternal orders, such as the Prince Hall Masons, Knights of Pythias, Knights of Tabor, and Black Elks, were also vital components of African American communities in Tennessee. However, these groups still had to navigate the boundaries of social etiquette in Jim Crow society. A chapter of the Improved and Benevolent Order of the Elks of the World was started in Memphis in 1907. Some whites observed the Elks pin on the jackets of several African American men walking down Main Street. The white Elks went to the Chancery Court in Shelby County and had the black Elks prohibited from using the name, title, or ritual of the Elks. By 1909, the black Elks had been banned from organizing in Shelby County, and almost thirty years would pass before the courts lifted the Memphis injunction and allowed another Elks lodge to form.\(^{36}\) Many African American fraternal orders maintain an active presence in African American communities across the state.

African Americans joined fraternal and benevolent groups for a variety of reasons. Beneficial and benevolent associations offered sickness and death benefits, a place to socialize, a source of entertainment, and a place to exercise leadership roles. The monetary benefits provided a safety net for people struggling to make ends meet in a time before the emergence of government welfare agencies. African Americans were frequently members of more than one group, sometimes belonging to as many as three to five organizations.\(^ {37}\) Membership in these organizations gave African Americans a chance to develop leadership and organizational skills and to build community ties.

Not all segments of southern society looked with favor upon African American lodges and clubs. Whites often looked askance at African American lodges; one white historian of the lodge movement derisively characterized African American lodges as “scrawny and pathetic.”\(^ {38}\) Others feared that the groups would become incendiary, promoting racial warfare against whites.

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and creating unrest among African American workers.\textsuperscript{39} Despite these views, African American lodges remained a vital part of their communities.

Some lodges operated cemeteries for the burial of their members. The Cemetery for the Sons of Ham lodge (left) and the Benevolent Cemetery Lodge #16 (right) in Davidson County, are two examples.

Excerpt from the Articles of Incorporation for the Benevolent Society of Cross Bridges (Maury County). The group undertook to “provide for the sick and afflicted, the support of widows and orphans, and doing charity to the needy.”

Excerpt from the Articles of Incorporation for the Colored Sisters of Charity No. 1 of Brownsville, organized in 1891. One of the purposes of this lodge was to “visit each sister, and sing and pray with them.”

The Articles of Incorporation for the Faith, Hope & Charity Society of Colored People of Tennessee, organized in Wilson County in 1896.

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\textsuperscript{39} Odum, "Social and Mental Traits of the Negro," 140.
**Lodges--See Also:**


*Trials and Triumphs: Tennesseans’ Search for Citizenship, Community, and Opportunity, Finding Community: Lodges.*

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**SCHOOLS—PUBLIC ELEMENTARY & SECONDARY**

By controlling educational policies through funding and admission, the prevailing white majority in Tennessee and other southern states created a dual public education system based on race that prevailed for generations. These separate schools were anything but equal, and it was not until 1954 that legal integration was mandated by the U.S. Supreme Court. With limited public funding, it was mostly the commitment of Tennessee’s African American educators and parents, along with the support of philanthropists like Julius Rosenwald, that was responsible for building and maintaining African American schools from the Reconstruction period through the mid-twentieth century.

Despite the inequity in resources, Tennessee’s African American schools became the educational, social, and cultural centers of their communities and shaped the lives of all who passed through their doors. These schools served as powerful institutions representing education, social history,
and ethnic heritage. Many schools received alterations or additions over the course of their active use, and these changes illustrated a range of architectural styles and construction methods. Even after the schools ceased to operate, their significance has been evident in the careers of esteemed alumni and teachers whose formative years were spent in these schools.

The 1954 Supreme Court decision in *Brown v. Board of Education* declared segregated education to be unconstitutional. Though the ruling called for all schools to be desegregated with “all deliberate speed,” the changes took years to be fully realized in Tennessee and around the country. The transition was at times tense and violent, as the *Brown* decision met with intense opposition. Consolidation brought by integration led to the closure of many former African American schools as students were sent to or opted to attend former all-white schools. Some former African American schools remain in operation, now open to all students. School integration was handled differently by each school district, giving every Tennessee county and its many individual schools a distinct integration history.

While some of Tennessee’s traditionally African American schools continue to operate as public schools, most have taken on new uses after being closed in the 1960s and 1970s. Across the state, several active alumni organizations are working with local and state governmental and heritage organizations to restore these historic school buildings and share their unique stories.

The schools mentioned below illustrate the variety of construction funding programs, architectural styles and forms, and Civil Rights achievements represented in school buildings across Tennessee.

**Prior to 1900: Free Black, Early Missionary, and State Building Efforts**

State-supported public education was largely nonexistent before the Civil War. The few opportunities for slave or free black education were routinely met with resistance, leaving more than 90 percent of the southern adult black
population illiterate in 1860.\textsuperscript{40} Though most states had laws making it illegal to educate slaves, Tennessee never enacted such a law.\textsuperscript{41} Despite many obstacles, free black educators Alphonso Sumner, Daniel Wadkins, Sarah Porter, Joseph Manly, and Rufus Conrad are known to have operated schools in Nashville between 1833 and 1857.\textsuperscript{42} In Memphis, Sabbath schools—church-sponsored schools held in the evenings and on weekends—operated until 1856 when pressure from white residents forced the city’s Board of Mayor and Alderman to pass an ordinance against them. In the words of one writer in the \textit{Memphis Daily Appeal}, “letter instruction to slaves is dangerous in a high degree, [since] however excellent a thing it may be to for the slave to read the Bible, it is by no means probable that his reading will be confined to that.”\textsuperscript{43}

Indeed, African Americans embraced every opportunity to learn. Free black Tennesseans, with the assistance of northern benevolent organizations and the federal government, quickly established schools for children and adults during and immediately after the Civil War. Free blacks in Nashville reopened their schools as soon as the Union army occupied Nashville in 1862.\textsuperscript{44} In 1865, Congress created the Freedmen’s Bureau to oversee many of the schools for former slaves. Among them was Nashville’s Fisk Free Colored School, the predecessor of Fisk University, opened on January 9, 1866. In 1867, the assistant commissioner for the Freedmen’s Bureau in Tennessee stated, “Everywhere in the State the colored people are fully alive to the importance of educating their children and themselves. Nearly every school contains a class of adult persons, some middle-aged and some older.” Lizzie Wilson of Nashville, enslaved for 56 years, perhaps expressed it best: “I have been praying for this very time for near 20 years and now that it is here I must work with all my heart…..my whole heart is set on learning to read.”\textsuperscript{45}

Education, intentionally denied to so many under slavery, was fundamental to the African American understanding of freedom.

As attendance soared, disgruntled white Tennesseans reacted with school burnings and violence towards teachers and students. Undeterred, Tennessee’s

\begin{footnotesize}
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\item \textsuperscript{41} Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{42} Bobby L. Lovett, \textit{The African-American History of Nashville, Tennessee, 1780-1930, Elites and Dilemmas} (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 1999), 34-36.
\item \textsuperscript{43} Beverly Bond, \textit{Memphis in Black and White} (Charleston, SC; Arcadia Publishing, 2003), 40; \textit{Memphis Daily Appeal}, December 28, 1856.
\item \textsuperscript{44} Lovett, 131.
\item \textsuperscript{45} Antoinette van Zelm, “Hope Within a Wilderness of Suffering: The Transition from Slavery to Freedom During the Civil War and Reconstruction in Tennessee,” \end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
freed blacks secured educational facilities and instructors, aided by the Freedmen’s Bureau. One bureau official observed, "The desire of the freed people to own school property is increasing and 20 school houses are now reported as belonging to them. One school has been closed on account of the white people refusing to rent a building for it; and another because of the alarming demonstrations against the teacher." The sometimes violent opposition to African American schools was matched by the persistence of blacks and their white allies, who donated land or sold it at a low price. These Freedmen’s Bureau Schools, 30 of which still operated by 1870, laid the foundation for African American education in Tennessee.47

Part of the state’s post-Civil War rebuilding efforts included the establishment of a public educational system in 1867. After much debate, the Tennessee General Assembly adopted a plan to include black students, but with the clear stipulation that there would be two separate school systems. This duplicity provided enormous financial challenges to an already fledgling system, and Tennessee’s school fund grew slowly.

In 1867, 72,350 African American children attended these public schools. By 1868, that number grew to 88,866 and by 1869 to 89,503.48 With the closing of the Freedmen’s Bureau, the state assumed control over its schools, along with those founded by northern missionary societies. While the number of black public schools increased, their success was limited by a shortened school calendar (especially in rural areas); a focus on the primary level (Tennessee law did not require the establishment of facilities for secondary education in each county until 1899); and lack of resources (many white

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47 Ibid.

48 van Zelm, "Hope Within a Wilderness of Suffering."
schools were only marginally better).  

1896 to 1954: Public Commitment and New Philanthropic Partnerships

The Supreme Court case of *Plessy v. Ferguson* (1896) upheld the segregation of races in schools as long as each race enjoyed parity in quality of education, known more commonly as “separate but equal.” However, few, if any, African American students received an equal education. The southern educational system remained underfunded, and rural black children suffered the most. Funding for black schools was dispersed at the discretion of the state government and local school boards. White leaders’ repeated reluctance to fund black schools stemmed from fears that an educated black populace would challenge white authority and grow discontented with work in farm labor and domestic service. Consequently, textbooks at black schools were few and out-of-date, school facilities were sub-standard, and pay for black teachers was a fraction of that received by their white counterparts. Despite these inequalities, significant gains were made. Educator and civil rights activist W.E.B. DuBois concluded that, by 1900, 30,000 black teachers and been trained and were working in the South, and through their efforts a majority of the black population had overcome illiteracy.

African American schools from this era are growing increasingly rare, but can still be found in towns and in rural communities across the state. During this period, there was still a great disparity in educational resources and especially in the school buildings themselves.

*The schools highlighted below do not constitute a comprehensive listing of Tennessee’s many schools with significance in African American history*

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Bradley Academy (Rutherford Co., National Register of Historic Places, 6/14/1990) was a primary and secondary school for African Americans in Murfreesboro from 1884 until the 1950s. While a white school existed on the site as early as 1811, an African American neighborhood developed there after emancipation, prompting the city and county to designate the school exclusively for African American use. The current building, designed by the architectural firm Manley and Young, was built from 1917 to 1918, taking advantage of a new state educational reform program. With its athletic teams, domestic science curriculum, music and glee clubs, and health clinics provided by the Commonwealth Fund of New York, Bradley became a social, cultural, and educational facility for adults as well as children. The school closed in the 1950s and became a maintenance facility for the city schools. During the 1990s, the Bradley Historical Association totally renovated the historic building and reopened it in 2000 as a meeting and cultural center.

Price Public School (Hawkins Co., National Register of Historic Places, 11/10/1988) sits on land purchased in 1868 by Alexander Fain, Jordan Netherland, Albert Jones, and Nathaniel Mitchell "for the purpose of building a schoolhouse for the education of colored children." The first school, a two-room log building constructed in 1870, was used until 1922, when construction of a new building began. The present structure, built in 1923, served grades one through eight until 1958. The building serves as a community center and museum housing a permanent exhibit of Swift Memorial Junior College and Price School memorabilia.

Rosenwald Fund Schools: Matching Grants to Build Modern Schools

The most widespread impact on African American education emerged in 1912. Northern white philanthropist Julius Rosenwald, then president of Sears Roebuck, along with African American educator Booker T. Washington, principal of Tuskegee Institute in Alabama, developed a program to build modern schools across the South for African American children during the Jim Crow period of legal segregation. The contributions were conditional on the raising of matching funds by the communities. The Rosenwald Fund offered standardized plans, ranging from 1-teacher frame buildings to multi-teacher brick buildings complete with an office, library, industrial room, and auditorium. The plans, offered free of charge to school boards, were not limited to Rosenwald-funded schools and were routinely used by county boards of education for the construction of white schools.

Alumni of the Sitka Rosenwald School in Gibson County, Tennessee, met with CHP graduate research assistant Amanda Barry at the school.
Between 1914 and 1927, the Rosenwald Fund contributed $214,700 to various rural communities in Tennessee for the building of schoolhouses for black children. Black Tennesseans donated $242,298 to these projects. At the same time, the state contributed $890,520 in tax dollars, and white Tennesseans gave an additional $21,977.

Key to the program’s success was its ability to build alliances across color lines and to empower the local community. Tennessee’s building agent, Robert E. Clay, himself an African American, would meet with farm families to determine what size school they needed and how much support they could commit. Clay would often select respected members of the local African American community to accompany him to meet with city or county officials to secure the use of public funds and negotiate the community’s match in terms of labor and funds. The community might agree to dig the basement or grade the property, in addition to cash funds raised through door-to-door solicitations, chicken sales, or designated offerings from local churches.

Of the 354 Rosenwald Schools constructed in Tennessee, approximately 65 are still standing, though some have major alterations or later additions that obscure the original buildings. Most schools were referred to by their community name exclusively and only a few continue to carry the Rosenwald name. While Rosenwald schools have gained national attention of late, those designed and built without Rosenwald funds are, in fact, rarer.

These Tennessee Rosenwald schools are listed in the National Register:

- **Cairo Rosenwald School** (Sumner Co., built 1922-23, listed 11/15/1996)
- **Dunbar Public School** (Loudon Co., built 1923, listed 11/15/2007)
- **Durham’s Chapel School** (Sumner Co., built 1923, listed 11/8/2006)
- **Free Hills Rosenwald School** (Clay Co., built 1929-30, listed 11/15/1996)
- **Gibson County Training School** (Gibson Co., built 1926, listed 3/12/2012)
- **Lincoln School** (Bledsoe Co., built 1925-26, listed 7/15/1993)
- **Wells School** (Shelby Co., built 1925, listed 3/31/1995)

The 1916 Bemis School is one of the oldest intact Rosenwald schools in Tennessee.
New Deal Schools: Federal Funding to Build Schools

During the nationwide Depression of the 1930s and 1940s, the federal government attempted to stimulate economic recovery by putting people to work constructing numerous public buildings, among them schools. Several African American schools were built in Tennessee using such New Deal programs as the Tennessee Emergency Relief Administration (TERA), the Works Progress Administration (WPA), and the Public Works Administration (PWA). Some of the schools built using New Deal funds include:

Bridgeforth High School (Giles Co., National Register of Historic Places, 8/9/2006) was built in 1936-37 in Pulaski and was the first high school to serve the county’s black students. Using WPA funds, this Colonial Revival-style school was designed by the African American architectural firm of McKissack and McKissack. The Greater Richland Creek Missionary Baptist General Association now occupies the building. A larger, more modern school was built behind the school in 1959. In 1965, Giles County became the first county in Tennessee to integrate its schools voluntarily.

Cameron Junior High and Senior High Schools (Davidson Co., National Register of Historic Places, 3/15/2005) served the African American neighborhoods of South Nashville. Designed by Nashville architect Henry C. Hibbs, the original Gothic Revival-style school was built 1939-40 using PWA funds. Officials enlarged the school in 1954 with a new African American high school designed by architects McKissack and McKissack. Cameron students earned a reputation for excellence in athletics, marching band, choir, and theater, due in part to the school's new athletic fields and auditorium.

Melrose School (Shelby Co., National Register of Historic Places, 5/2/2001), located in Orange Mound’s African American community, was completed by the PWA in 1938. This structure added to the original Rosenwald school’s capacity to accommodate students in grades one through twelve. The first senior class graduated in 1946, and the school was well-known for academic programs, theater, and sports. The school closed in 1979.

West Side Elementary School for Colored (Hamilton County) was built with PWA funds in 1936-37. Adjoining the College Hill Court public housing project, the two-story Colonial Revival-style building has, since its construction, been a local landmark. The school consolidated thirteen previously existing schools and included a library, handicraft education room, and a clinic. The once-segregated facility has continued to serve its community as the James A. Henry Resource Center of the Westside Community Development Corporation, and more recently as a charter school, the Chattanooga Girls Leadership Academy.
Since 1954: School Desegregation and Civil Rights

In 1954, the United State Supreme Court decision of Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas outlawed segregation in public education. Complying with this federal ruling would prove to be one of the most difficult challenges the South had faced since the Civil War. Communities all over Tennessee braced for the worst as they observed integration difficulties and violence in neighboring states. While there was both unrest and destruction of property in the state, Tennessee’s public officials urged respect for the Supreme Court decision because it was the law of the land.

All eyes were on Tennessee in 1956 when the formerly white Clinton High School in Anderson County became the first high school in the South to integrate. Those students, sometimes called the “Clinton Twelve,” made history by walking from the all-black Green McAdoo School (National Register of Historic Places, 11/8/2005) on August 26, 1956, to Clinton High School. With mounting national attention, opponents of integration resorted to violence, and Governor Frank Clement sent in state troopers to restore order. The Green McAdoo Cultural Organization, formed in 2004, tells this story of integration in Clinton at a cultural heritage museum developed at the former Green McAdoo School.

Nashville’s school desegregation occurred on September 9, 1957, when sixteen six-year-olds walked past crowds of white protestors, angry over the children’s admittance to seven previously all-white elementary schools. The students’ brave actions were made possible not only by the Brown decision, but also by Kelley v. Board of Education of Nashville, Tennessee. In 1955, Alfred Z. Kelley, a barber and the father of black student Bobby Kelley, was the lead plaintiff in a lawsuit against the Nashville school board. His son commuted to the all-black Pearl High School across town though he lived closer to the all-white East Nashville High School (National Register of Historic Places, 1/25/2002).

The 1954 desegregation ruling also led to significant upgrades to long-neglected African American schools. Local school boards delayed integration as long as possible by developing integration plans and attempting to placate local black residents with amenities found at white schools. Throughout the 1950s, African American schools in Memphis received cafeterias, auditoriums, shops, additional classrooms, and gymnasiums (Public Schools in Memphis, Shelby County, Tennessee, National Register).
The Gibson County Training School (National Register of Historic Places, 3/12/2012), an African American school in Milan, has its own unique integration story due in part to Milan’s growth as a federal military base. Originally built as a Rosenwald school in 1926-1927, it had large additions built every few years throughout the 1950s and 60s. These changes were made possible with Congressionally-appropriated funding for schools educating children of military and other federal personnel. In 1961, the school name changed to Polk-Clark School and ownership transferred to the City of Milan school board in 1963. The city made small steps toward desegregation, making changes to equalize school facilities and instituting a “freedom of choice” policy whereby parents could select the school their children attended in the fall of 1964. Polk-Clark graduated its last high school seniors in 1970. Kindergarten through second grade used the school until 1996.

Polk-Clark School was the first four-year high school for African Americans in Gibson County. It is now a community center with exhibits about its history.

Today, part of the building is being used as the Polk-Clark Enrichment Center while the school’s active alumni association, owners of the building, is looking for new ways to utilize the large campus and restore its historic buildings.

Integration also brought major changes in high school athletics. From 1939 to 1964, Tennessee’s black high schools participated in the Tennessee High School Athletic Association, formerly known as the Tennessee Colored Secondary School Athletic Association. That changed in 1964, when the Tennessee Secondary School Athletic Association’s Board of Control began accepting black schools as affiliate members.

Pearl High School (Davidson Co., National Register of Historic Places, 8/2/2002) is located in the center of the large African American community of North Nashville. Designed by the African American architectural firm of McKissack and McKissack, the school was constructed in 1936-37 using PWA funds. Its modernist design featured Art Deco decoration at its entrance and contained modern laboratories, a library, and an auditorium. Officials added a
vocational educational building in 1945-46, and a new gymnasium in 1964. In March 1966 the first integrated boys’ state basketball tournament took place at Vanderbilt's Memorial Gymnasium with Pearl High School, led by Perry Wallace, winning the title. Integrated since the 1970s, the school is now known as Martin Luther King Jr. Magnet High School.

**Preserving the Legacy: New Uses for Historic African American Schools**

After their closure, these school buildings have often faced uncertain futures. Sometimes sitting vacant and left vulnerable to vandals, weather, and time, many former African American schools were ultimately considered liabilities and finally demolished. Lost schools are remembered through county histories and the sites marked with historical markers.

While relatively few of Tennessee’s former African American schools are still being used as schools, the above examples show that many continue to serve their communities and are utilized by non-profit organizations, churches, local governments, businesses, and private individuals. Still others have taken on new uses as administrative offices, rental venues, history museums, artist studios, and even residences. These new uses are often the result of public-private partnerships across communities, including school, alumni, and community members committed to sharing their history. Through these efforts, Tennessee's African American schools remain powerful artifacts in our community landscape.

**Some of the Identified African American Schools in Tennessee:**

Allen-White School (Hardeman County)  
Bemis School (Madison County)  
Bodenham School (Giles County)  
Bradley Academy (Rutherford County)  
Bridgeforth High School (Giles County)  
Cairo School (Sumner County)  
Cameron School (Davidson County)  
Carver High School (Haywood County)  
Dunbar School (Loudon County)  
Durham’s Chapel School (Sumner County)  
East High School (Davidson County)  
Flagg-Grove School (Haywood County)  
Free Hills School (Clay County)  
Green-McAdoo School (Anderson County)  
Gibson County Training School (Gibson County)  
Lincoln School (Bledsoe County)  
Melrose School (Shelby County)  
Montgomery School (Henderson County)  
Mt. Zion School (Gibson County)  
Pearl High School (Davidson County)  
Polk-Clark High School (Gibson County)  
Price Public Elementary School (Hawkins County)  
Promise Land School (Dickson County)  
Public Schools in Memphis (Shelby County)  
Trenton School (Gibson County)  
Webb School (Carroll County)  
Wells School (Shelby County)
Schools—Public Elementary and Secondary--See Also:

By no means a comprehensive list, the following sources give a sampling of the historic records and recently published histories exploring African American education across the South, across Tennessee, and within individual Tennessee counties and schools. Please visit the Tennessee State Library and Archives and your local library for additional sources. For more information on schools in Tennessee listed in the National Register of Historic Places, search the National Register database. The Tennessee Historical Commission administers the National Register program in Tennessee and manages Tennessee’s historical marker program.


Whitman, Robert H. *Negro Education in Franklin County, Yesterday and Today.* Nashville: Tennessee A & I State Teachers College, 1942.


**Additional Links:**


Historic African American Schools of West Tennessee: A Driving Tour.

Southern Places: *Rosenwald Schools* and *Schools*.

Teaching with Primary Sources—MTSU Primary Source Set: *Jim Crow in America*.

Teaching with Primary Sources—MTSU Lesson Plans: *Education Reform During the Progressive Era and Rosenwald Schools of the American South* and *Jim Crow Laws and African American Discrimination*. 
Schools—Elementary and Secondary—See Also, continued:

Tennessee Encyclopedia of History and Culture Entries:

- Bradley Academy
- Cairo Rosenwald School
- Charles Warner Cansler
- Robert E. Clay
- Clinton Desegregation Crisis
- Elementary and Secondary Education
- Freedman's Bureau
- General Education Board
- Julius Rosenwald Fund
- Kelley v. Board of Education
- McKissack and McKissack Architects
- Hardin Smith
- Almira S. Steele
- Tennessee Vocational School for Colored Girls
- James Herbert White

Trials and Triumphs: Tennesseans' Search for Citizenship, Community, and Opportunity: Embracing Citizenship: Public Education.

SCHOOLS—HIGHER EDUCATION

Tennessee is home to many historically black colleges and universities. Following the Civil War, numerous educational institutions formed for newly freed slaves. Very few opportunities for education had existed prior to emancipation for freedmen and fewer still for slaves. Keeping African Americans from becoming literate was an important mechanism of control for slaveholders. Thus, education became extremely important to African Americans after the Civil War, signaling the opportunity to fully participate in society. Walter R. Allen and his colleagues write:

“For African Americans, education embodies not only a means toward gaining equality and progress, but the very essence of citizenship and personhood. We have pursued higher education with faith, perseverance and desperation, absolutely convinced that the keys to our deliverance from racial oppression lay hidden in the pages of books we were forbidden to read.”

Because of the prevalent system of white supremacy across the state, African Americans were forced to form their own institutions of higher education. Although some existing colleges and universities admitted African American students, many

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Following the Civil War, Maryville College opened its doors to all races, making it one of the nation’s first institutions of higher learning to do so. Anderson Hall was built with financial assistance from the Freedman Bureau.

Southern states quickly blocked African Americans from attending. The 1870 Tennessee constitution banned public educational institutions from serving black and white students together and a later 1901 statute extended this to include private institutions.

At first, schools were organized by the Freedmen’s Bureau with funding assistance from religious institutions. The Freedman’s Aid Society of the Methodist Episcopal Church assisted with Meharry Medical College in Nashville and Morristown College in Hamblen County. The Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A. Board of Missions for Freedmen supported Swift Memorial College in Rogersville and Knoxville College in Knoxville. Some local churches also supported colleges. Owen Junior College was tied to the Tennessee Baptist Missionary and Educational Convention. When Owen merged with LeMoyne to become LeMoyne Owen College, the school retained its affiliation with the church along with the United Church of Christ. The American Missionary Association and the American Baptist Home Mission Society also supported the formation of schools in Tennessee.

Clinton B. Fisk was the assistant commissioner of the Freedmen’s Bureau in charge of Tennessee. In 1866 he helped organize Fisk Free Colored School with assistance from the American Missionary Association, which at first mainly offered primary and secondary education. When the demand for teachers increased following legislation creating a system of public education, Fisk reorganized as Fisk University and focused primarily on higher education, especially training teachers. Many other schools in Tennessee followed this same trajectory, first providing primary and secondary schooling, then moving to higher education.
Jubilee Hall at Fisk University was built in 1876 with the funds raised by Fisk’s Jubilee Singers and is recognized as a National Historic Landmark.

Prior to 1912, there were no publicly funded institutions of higher learning for African Americans in Tennessee. The Tennessee Agricultural and Industrial State Normal School for Negroes was formed in 1912 as one of four normal schools created by the General Assembly in 1909. At first the school offered primary and secondary instruction and issued teaching certificates after the completion of the normal certificates. In the 1930s the primary and secondary components were dropped and in 1951, the school became Tennessee A & I University, now Tennessee State University (TSU).

Martha M. Brown Memorial Library (1927), now the Harold M. Love Senior Resource Center. Brown was TSU’s first librarian and secured the Rosenwald Fund grant used to construct the library.

Funding from religious institutions began to dry up after the first decade of the twentieth century. Although many institutions retained their religious affiliations, many schools had to rely on philanthropic funding to keep their doors open. Unaffiliated colleges like Fisk University and Tennessee A & I also benefitted from private contributions. The Julius Rosenwald Fund, originally focused on primary education, expanded its scope in 1928 to include higher education and contributed to a variety of African American institutions in Tennessee. Other sources of funding include the George Peabody Fund, the John F. Slater Fund, and the Phelps-Stokes Fund.
Following the 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education* Supreme Court decision that struck down segregation, African American colleges and universities entered a period of transition. As educational opportunities opened up at formerly all-white institutions, there was some concern that African American institutions may no longer be necessary. However, historically black colleges and institutions continue to play an important role in forming leaders for the African American community and providing a space to preserve African American culture and traditions: “This has been the daunting charge to this unique group of institutions of higher learning; they have been called to preserve a culture, prosper a community, equip a new generation of leaders, and model what is best to America.”

The role that these institutions have played in the formation of community leaders can be seen in the participation of students in the Civil Rights movement. A number of students involved in the Nashville movement became leaders in the larger movement. C.T. Vivian, John Lewis, and James Bevel from American Baptist Theological Seminary (now called American Baptist College), along with Diane Nash from TSU and the Reverend James Lawson from Vanderbilt Divinity School, all were involved in organizing the Nashville sit-ins and continued to be involved in the major civil rights campaigns from St. Augustine, Florida, to Selma, Alabama. American Baptist hosted a number of planning and educational sessions for the Nashville movement. Following the Nashville sit-ins, students from across Tennessee began organizing and participating in the national movement.

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Morristown College, Knoxville College, and Lane College have all been listed in the National Register as historic districts. The earliest buildings at Knoxville College were built using student labor and donated materials, illustrating the austere conditions that the institutions had to deal with during their early years. Since Morristown College closed in 1994, its buildings have begun to deteriorate.

**Schools—Higher Education--See Also:**


Southern Places Database: Schools and Rosenwald Schools.

Teaching with Primary Sources—MTSU: Lesson Plan: Historically Black Colleges and Universities in Tennessee.

Tennessee Encyclopedia of History and Culture Entries:
- Higher Education
- Roger Williams University
- Zion College
- Tennessee Manual Labor University

Trials and Triumphs: Tennesseans' Search for Citizenship, Community, and Opportunity, Finding Community: Schools and Embracing Citizenship: Public Education.