DRAFT
Franklin, Tennessee's Green Book House
Heritage Development Plan

May 2021
Project Background

In January 2021 the Rev. Dr. Kenneth Hill of Shorter Chapel AME Church asked the Center of Historic Preservation at Middle Tennessee State University to explore the preservation needs and future community use of a dwelling directly adjacent to the church that the congregation owned. Known as the “Green Book” house, the historic Ruth Gaylor dwelling served African American travelers in the 1950s during the times of Jim Crow segregation along the nation’s highways. On March 23, 2021, Abigail Coomes, Emily Huffer, and Samantha Brickel, three MTSU graduate students in public history, investigated the property along with Dr. Hill and Dr. Carroll Van West, the director of the MTSU Center for Historic Preservation. Special thanks to Dr. Hill and the Shorter Chapel AME Church for allowing the team to visit the home and document the building in its current condition.

Brief History

The Gaylor House at 253 Natchez Street is a contributing building in the Natchez Street Historic District, which was listed in the National Register for Historic Places in 2003. The house is immediately adjacent to Shorter Chapel AME Church.
The house was initially built ca. 1900, with the prominent stone veneer exterior probably dating a bit later c. 1920-1930. In the late mid-1950s the owner, Ruth Gaylor (1902-1982), hired a contractor to add a side addition—which looked like a motel room—that she would rent to Black travelers. Ruth was a nurse while her husband E. B. Gaylor was the manager of the Gem Theater, which also stood on Natchez Street. From 1956-1961 she advertised her business as “Mrs. E. B. Gaylor’s Guest House” through the pages of the *Negro Motorist’s Green Book*, a publication of the Victor H. Green Company from 1936 to 1966. The *Green Book* was invaluable for Black travelers who needed to know where they could safely stay, eat, and shop across America. The 1957 edition of the Green Book states that Mrs. E. B. Gaylor's Guest House was "Your Home Away From Home," and it had reasonable rates. Gaylor had one room at least in the house that she rented along with a detached garage (no longer extant) at the rear of the property that had an apartment over it. This apartment was used for lodging until Ruth's sister and brother-in-law moved into it in the 1960s, shortly after the birth of their daughter.

In the 1970s, the trustees of Shorter Chapel bought the home and rented out the house for a generation. Then in 2019 the church explored demolition because of needed repairs and wanting to get out of the rental business. Several Franklin residents came forward with information that showed the home was listed in the Green Book. When congregation members learned of the property's significance, they decided that they could not destroy this historically noteworthy house because it told the story of a time when African Americans could not travel freely due to Jim Crow laws and segregation. In 2019 the Williamson County Historical Society placed an interpretive marker at the house, and the community formally dedicated the marker in February 2020.
Notable Architectural Features:

- The Gaylor house was initially constructed in circa 1900. Several additions were completed to the house during the timespan from the 1930s to 1960s; these additions include the Green Book room (c. 1955) and the kitchen (c. 1965).
- The stone exterior is not original to the house and is believed to be added during the 1930s. The property across the street from the Gaylor House at 256 Natchez Street, known as the Blakely House, has stonework on the house's exterior that is identical to the Gaylor House.
- The front door is deemed to be original to the construction of the house.
- The beadboard tongue and groove wall paneling of the interior on the first-floor rooms are considered to be original to the house, with displaying the craftsmanship of the house.
The closets in the Green Book room, c. 1955, are considered to be original to the construction of the Green Book room. In both closets, there are cubbies and a rod across the top for hanging clothes.

Above the closets are two small windows for ventilation in the room.
Preservation Needs Assessment and Recommendations

Exterior

- The main concern for the property right now is the flat roof on the Green Book room addition, which does not allow water to run off the roof efficiently, leading to water damage. A solution for better drainage from the addition’s roof needs to be identified.
- The lack of proper drainage on the c. 1955 addition and the west wall of the house has caused water damage to the interior of the Green Room addition. The addition of French drains to the property will help guide water away from the house.
The side of the home facing the church has rotting issues with the roof and window, as well as lifting in parts of the foundation. This is due to a lack of drainage and can be prevented by addressing the roof and adding French drains. It is recommended that the fence and shrubbery be removed between the home and the church. These objects are retaining water. It is also recommended that the vines on the side of the house be removed since they will damage the natural surface of the stone.

The roof of the home would need to be assessed by professionals to determine if there is any rot or water damage anywhere. Depending on the assessment, the roof may need to be replaced or fixed.
• The next preservation issue would be to address any rotting wood on the exterior of the home. This includes windows, the roof, and exterior doors.

![Image of rotting wood on exterior](image1.jpg)

• The “AstroTurf” type material on the front porch needs to be either repaired or removed. Any rot in wood window frames will need to be addressed. The shrubs in the front yard are fine as long as they are maintained.

![Image of front porch](image2.jpg)
• The rear entrance to the home is probably the best place for a handicap-accessible ramp to be installed into the house. The rear carport would be removed to make room for the ramp into the side door (being held open in the image below) and a handicap parking space installed on the concrete pad.

![Image of the house with a ramp and shed roof bathroom]

• This image also shows the shed roof bathroom (left side of the photo), which would be kept in the renovation.

**Interior Recommendations**

The Addition or "Green Book Room"

• The first room to be addressed is the addition. The first step is to remove the carpeting to see if there is any damage to the subfloor. This inspection is when any other water damage issues that are present in this room should be noted.
● It would also be beneficial to find out if the drop tile ceiling is original to the room; if it is not authentic, then it needs to be removed.

![Image of drop tile ceiling with indications of water damage]

*Figure 18*

● There needs to be work done on the two closets in the room to be as close to the original as possible. The wallpaper in the closets needs to be determined if it is original to the closets. If the wallpaper is authentic, it needs to be restored.
In the addition, there are two windows along the back wall above the closets. They will need to be looked at for any damage and be repaired if rot is found.
- The addition has a separate entrance to the home from the front porch. The door will be checked for any damage and need to be replaced with a door that is close to the original. This includes the knobs on the door as well.

- The door that leads from the addition into the main living area needs to be inspected for damage and repairs made as needed. There is a knocker on the front of the door that faces
into the main living area. This detail needs to be preserved as it is significant to the home's history.

Historic Living Room

- There is a need to repair the bead board on the wall underneath the stairs in the main living area.
• There needs to be a determination on the date of the partition that separates the living room from what would have been the original dining room. This partition could be removed to make room for display cases, but if it is an important feature it needs to be kept.

The second floor, which originally held a bedroom, will only be used for storage purposes; however, there needs to be railing added to the top of the stairs to make it safe for staff to go up and down the stairs.

The Kitchen

• The kitchen needs to be checked for any water damage that might be present.
The flooring in the kitchen would need to be leveled out and replaced.

The Bathroom

- The entrance to the bathroom needs to be widened to a minimum of thirty-six inches to meet handicapped standards. The entrance is currently thirty-four inches.
- To continue to make this bathroom handicapped accessible, the tub and or vanity need to be moved or removed.
- A comfort-height commode will need to replace the commode in the existing bathroom.
- Adequate space needs to be available for handicapped visitors in the bathroom. "A single wheelchair must be able to rotate freely inside a bathroom. For this kind of motion, a clear floor space of at least 60 inches in diameter is required, allowing a 180-degree turn. In some cases, the available clear space can be supplemented by open space under a fixture to meet the minimum requirement."
● Grab Bars need to be installed on the wall closest to the commode. "An ADA-compliant grab bar handrail must be fully anchored and have a smooth surface that can be easily grabbed. Grab bars with circular cross-sections must be 1 1/4 to 1 1/2 inches in diameter. Those with non-circular cross-sections must have cross-sections of no more than 2 inches and a perimeter between 4 and 4.8 inches. Grab bars must be installed between 33 and 36 inches above the floor, and there must be a separation between the grab bar and the wall surface of at least 1 1/2 inches.

● Grab bars must have round edges and must return to the wall (or another anchor point), so there are no exposed ends."

Draft Heritage Center Design:

The Green Book Room:

Below is a diagram that can be used to illustrate what the room could have looked like during its time as the Green Book room.

● Against the wall facing the church, two twin beds can be placed against the wall with a nightstand and a lamp between the beds.
● The doors could be open in the closet, displaying suitcases or period outfits hanging up of guests that stayed in the room.

● The wall shared between the Green Book room, and the rest of the Gaylor house could have a dresser or a chair in the corner or along the wall.

![Floor plan of the Front Room or Living Room](image)

**The Front Room or Living Room:**

● This room can be addressed in several different ways. The first example is to have display cases along the walls in this room. The cases can be filled with artifacts that are correct to the period of significance or have a personal connection to the home or community. Pictures of the Gaylor family who previously lived in the house would be an excellent addition.
- On the partition, a television can be mounted to play a video that can be created for the history of the Gaylor House and its significance in the Green Book.

- Facing the partition on the back wall, a bookcase can be placed here to hold local records, yearbooks, and any materials that would be useful to community members trying to trace their ancestry or learn more about the area. This bookcase can either be in this room or the back room.

- The stairs would be for authorized people either working or volunteering. The loft upstairs can be used for storage.

The Rear Room or Genealogy Room

- The back room where the kitchen is can be used for a genealogy room. There are ample electrical outlets in this room that a computer or computers can be placed on a desk or table for community members to use. A printer could be an excellent addition but is not necessary. Having paper with a genealogical framework printed on it could be helpful to patrons visiting, mapping out their family trees.
• Tables could be set up in the room for a potential meeting in this space, or they can be moved into the front room for a larger number of people.
• As mentioned earlier, the back door would need to become handicapped accessible with a ramp for entry into the home.

The Restroom
• To make the bathroom handicapped accessible, the bathtub should be removed, and the vanity is relocated to the bathtub's location. This allows access for wheelchairs to be able to enter the room and to turn around.
• The commode will remain in the same position, replacing the commode with a handicapped accessible commode.
• Handrails will also need to be placed on the walls.
• New wallpaper can be chosen to replace the current wallpaper due to water damage. Paint can be used instead of wallpaper.
• Either an electric hand dryer or paper towels need to be provided.
• Flooring such as tile is recommended for ease of maintenance and cleaning.

Final Recommendations

Grassroots movements and nonprofits have unique opportunities and challenges that have been garnering much respect over the years. Here are a few suggestions that you may supplement. While some of these options or suggestions may be familiar, hopefully, some of the suggestions prove beneficial. Of course, every suggestion would be following your specifications and adjusted as needed as the Green Book Overground Railroad House is in the various stages of development.
Some of these suggestions may differ depending on whether you choose to focus more on the museum aspect, the heritage center aspect, or a balanced approach, including determining if a seasonally. It would be helpful for the museum to create community partners with local organizations. Some of the community partners could possibly be with the McLemore house, the African American Heritage Foundation of Franklin and Williamson county, and the historical commission of Franklin. A partnership with the Williamson county archives and libraries would be beneficial for the genealogical research program.

A general financial plan should be made that includes the cost of maintenance, landscaping, security, and marketing. A "rainy day fund" provides extra cushioning to the budget in case of an emergency. The cost for general maintenance, landscaping, marketing, and security will likely shift depending on whether it is a tourist season, near a holiday or local event, or off-seasons like the winter. Another part of the financial plan is determining whether the museum and heritage center can benefit from paid or volunteer staff. Volunteers save the establishment money and allow people the opportunity to assist the community in a way that works for their schedule, especially for the younger generations and the elderly. However, there are also benefits to having a paid professional staff member. Perhaps there could be a rotational schedule of volunteers and full-time specialists. It was also noted that the home already has the ADT system as a security source, which may be may more than suffice; however, it should be discussed if there should be any security adjustments as the museum continues to develop.

Shorter Chapel AME Church already has an aesthetically pleasing website, so adding a category about the Green Book house would be simple. However, creating a website solely dedicated to the Green Book house may also prove beneficial. It would benefit the home greatly to have a Facebook page and possibly an Instagram account to keep the public updated on events.
the museum is hosting. The next step is deciding if you would rather post on social media as a
team or delegate or hire one person with experience with outreach through social media.
Creating a pamphlet is an easy way to get the message across to visitors if they cannot spend
much time at the museum. The brochure can be about the home's history and its time as a Green
Book house. The social media accounts and the website can be added to the said brochure for
patrons to view after leaving the home.

It is hope that the project’s summer intern can produce a pamphlet for the property as well as a
webpage for the Shorter Chapel site along with a moe focused and detailed interpretive plan for
the Green Book house public programming.

Sources

“2010 ADA Standards for Accessible Design.” Information and Technical Assistance on the

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book-house/.

https://support.gofundme.com/hc/en-us/articles/360056094812-Charity-Fundraiser-Fees-.

Coomes, Abigail, and Emily Huffer. Photograph. Franklin, March 23, 2021. MTSU Center for
Historic Preservation.


