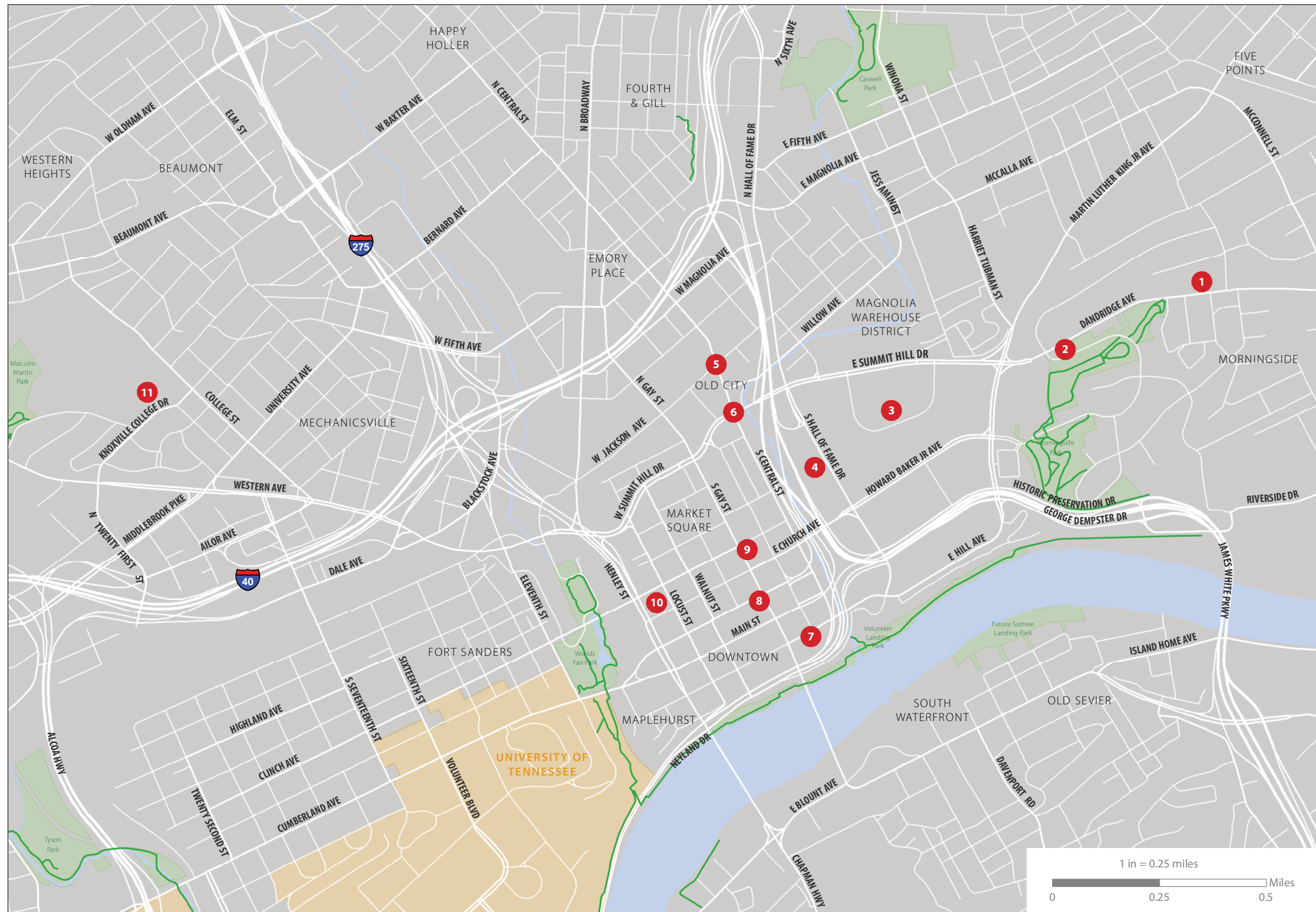


A GUIDE TO KNOXVILLE'S AFRICAN AMERICAN HERITAGE

This guide highlights several points of interest that help explain the heritage of Knoxville's African-American community. Going back to the days when Knoxville became an established river town in the late 1700's, the images and descriptions show that African-Americans have been an integral part of every-day life in the community from the beginning.



This map guide, which is not an exhaustive resource, draws from information obtained from Mr. Robert Booker and the Beck Cultural Exchange Center, primarily through the mobile tourism application, *Knoxville African American Tours of Cultural Heritage*, which was developed by the University of Tennessee Community Partnership Center (go to <http://isse.utk.edu/cpc/beck/> for more information and a link to this free tour guide iphone app).



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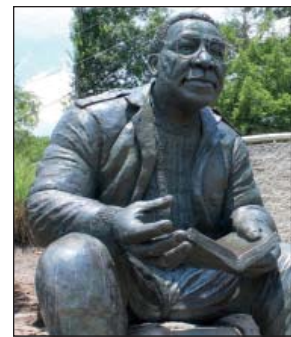
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1 BECK CULTURAL EXCHANGE CENTER

1927 Dandridge Avenue

Named for James Garfield Beck and Ethel Benson Beck, the Beck Cultural Exchange Center has served since 1975 as a forum of artistic expression and historical perspective for African Americans in Knoxville and East Tennessee. The Becks were two of the most influential members of Knoxville's black community from the 1920's to the 1960's. The Beck Center is a place that researches, collects, preserves, and exhibits African-American achievements and culture.



2 HALEY HERITAGE SQUARE

1620 Dandridge Avenue

Located at the entrance to Morningside Park, Haley Heritage Square features the bronze statue of renowned author, Alex Haley. It is one of the largest statues of an African American in the world. Haley, who is best known for his world famous book, *Roots: The Saga of an American Family*, lived in the Knoxville area for several years until his

death in 1992. Noted sculptor, Tina Allen, was commissioned to design the statue, which was supported by the State of Tennessee, Knoxville City Council, and the Knoxville Community Development Corporation. The Alexander Murray Palmer Haley Statue was dedicated on April 24, 1998, before a large crowd, that included noted actor, Louis Gossett.

3 GREEN SCHOOL

(Green Magnet Math and Science Academy)

801 Town View Drive (formerly 900 Payne Avenue)



Built in 1909 and named for local black physician, Dr. Henry Morgan Green, the school was initially a primary school. In 1916 the city doubled its size to accommodate grades 1 through 11, and it was renamed Knoxville Colored High School. After a new Austin High School was built in 1929 on E. Vine Avenue, the school's original name was restored and it served as both an elementary and junior high school until 1951. A new Green Elementary School building was completed in 1957. The school was designated a "magnet school" in 1993 and occupies the same building site as the original 1909 school.



4 CAL JOHNSON PARK

507 S. Hall of Fame Drive

Dedicated to one of Knoxville's leading citizens in the late 19th Century and early 20th Century, Cal Johnson Park recognizes the achievements of a successful businessman, race horse enthusiast, and real estate investor. Caldonia Fackler Johnson was born a slave in 1844 and lived with his family on the site of the old Farragut Hotel, at the corner of Gay Street and Clinch Avenue. His interests included several saloons frequented by some

of Knoxville's leading men, the city's only horse race track, and real estate holdings that included several downtown buildings. Johnson served as a city alderman from 1883 to 1885 and contributed a house for the city's first black YMCA building. The park was established in 1922, and a recreation center was built there in 1957. Johnson died in 1925.

5 THE OLD CITY

Jackson Avenue/Central Street intersection



Stretching in four directions from the intersection of Central Street and Jackson Avenue, the Old City was the center of commerce after Knoxville was founded in 1791. With the arrival of trains

in the mid 19th Century, loading docks, saloons, warehouses, and retail shops sprang up and flourished. Also known as "The Bowery", the area included several bars and clubs and was a place where the color line was lightly regarded. The only thing that mattered, for black or white, was whether one had enough money to pay for a drink. Early establishments included the Tri-City Barber College, JFG Coffee Company, and Sullivan's. Black businesses included the Palace Grill, the Elks Pressing Club, H.W. Keaton's Barber Shop, Royston Brothers Auto Service, and the Gem Theatre.

6 THE GEM THEATRE

Summit Hill Drive/Central Street intersection

The city's premier black movie house, the Gem Theatre, was established in 1913 at 102 W. Vine Avenue. After moving to a larger space at 106 E. Vine Avenue in 1922, the 800-seat Gem began a long run as a movie house, a performance venue for the likes of blues legend, Ida Cox, the Five Royals, and the setting for plays presented by Knoxville College. An unusual feature of the Gem Theatre



was the fact that the stage and movie screen were located near the front entrance. All theater patrons had to walk in front of the screen to get to their seats, so everyone could see who came and went at the Gem. With the desegregation of downtown movie theaters, the Gem became a night club and restaurant in 1965 and was demolished in 1972 for the expansion of James White Parkway.

7 BLOUNT MANSION

200 W. Hill Avenue



Built between 1792 and 1796 by William Blount, Governor of the Territory Southwest of the Ohio River, which included present day Tennessee, Blount Mansion stood out

prominently against Knoxville's early landscape. The house served as the de facto capitol of the Southwest territory and was the setting of the drafting of the first Tennessee state constitution. Like most of his neighbors, Blount owned several slaves and argued that "Negroes are the most valuable property in this country." Although slaves worked the Blount farm, located on or near the University of Tennessee campus, it is thought that several slaves lived and worked on the mansion grounds. As such, these slaves were probably Knoxville's first African-American residents.



8 BIJOU THEATRE

803 S. Gay Street

Built in 1909, the Bijou began as a venue for high class Vaudeville shows. Over time, it grew to be a performing arts theater, attracting such stars as John and Ethel Barrymore,

Alfred Lunt and Lynn Fontaine, various stock companies, and later the Knoxville Symphony and Knoxville Opera Company. Giving way to the much larger and newer Tennessee Theatre, the Bijou underwent several transformations until it became in the 1930's the only white theater that admitted blacks, although they had to purchase tickets at the Cumberland Avenue entrance and sit in the second balcony.

9 TENNESSEE THEATRE

604 S. Gay Street

The Tennessee Theatre, one of the South's grand movie houses, was built in 1928 and opened to a packed house of moviegoers. The movie house



played a pivotal role in the segregation of the city's public facilities and was one of the last venues to open its doors for all Knoxville residents. Performers such as Cab Calloway and Lionel Hampton could entertain in the theatre, but neither could watch a movie there. The theatre was the scene of protests in the early 1960's, until the Tennessee finally opened its doors in 1963 to all Knoxville citizens.

10 RICH'S DEPARTMENT STORE

(University of Tennessee Conference Center)

600 Henley Street



Few people realize that the structure housing the University of Tennessee Conference Center was the location of Rich's Department Store, the first location outside the state of Georgia for the Atlanta-based retailer. This 1955 example of mid-century modern commercial architecture was the scene of largely peaceful protests to integrate the store's dining facilities, which were open only to white patrons. In July of 1960, and after several demonstrations and sit-ins at other whites-only eating places, Rich's and other Knoxville retailers desegregated their facilities.

11 KNOXVILLE COLLEGE

901 Knoxville College Drive

Founded in 1875 by the United Presbyterian Church of North America, Knoxville College is a historically black liberal arts college. The college is rooted in a mission school established in 1864 to



educate Knoxville's free blacks and freed slaves and was initially located on Gay Street in the former site of the First Baptist Church. The school was

designated a college by the State of Tennessee in 1877 and received its charter in 1901. In 1957, Knoxville College was among the first group of predominantly black institutions to become members in the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools. During the summer of 1960, students from the college engaged in sit-ins to protest the segregation of lunch counters in downtown Knoxville, which resulted in most downtown businesses ending the practice. Noted alumni include Dr. Edith Irby Jones, first female president of the National Medical Association, and Jake Gaither, legendary Hall of Fame football coach at Florida A & M University.