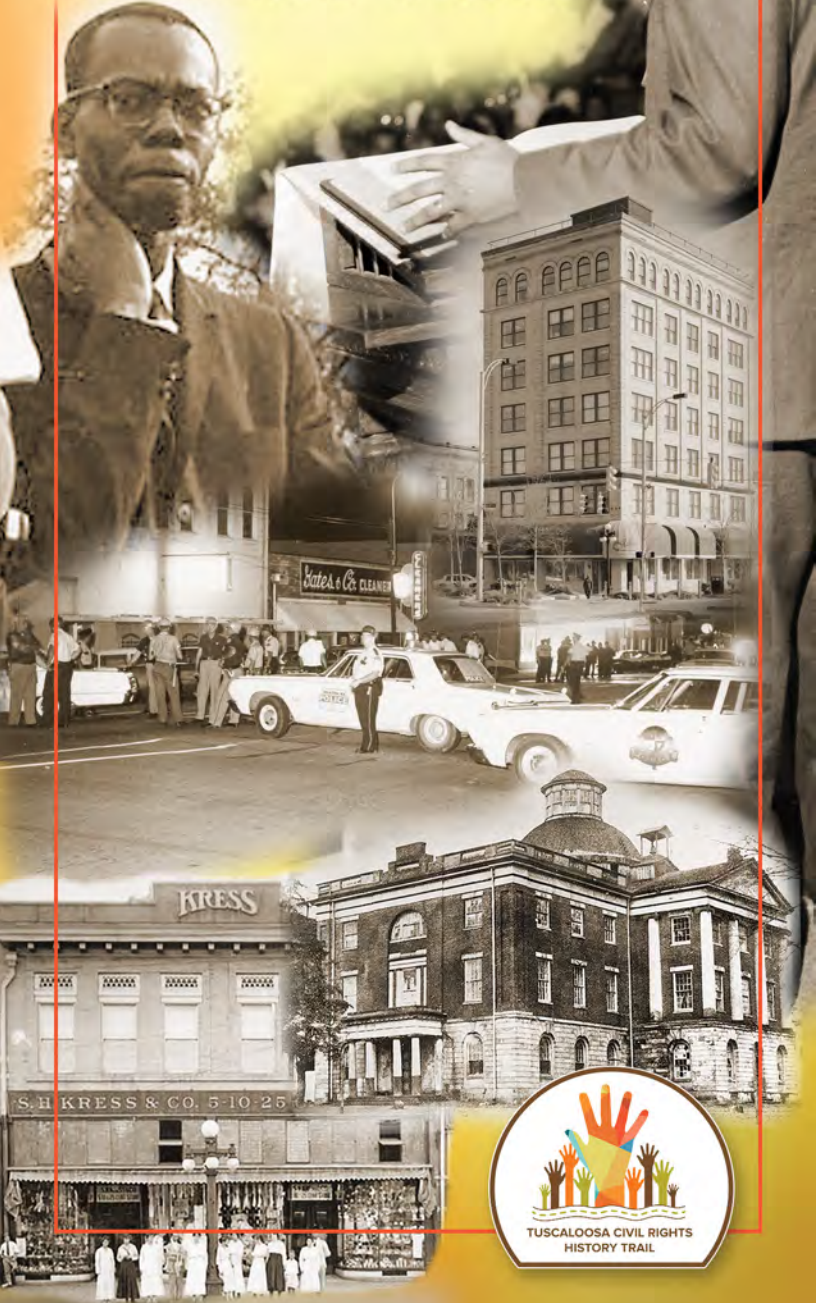


# TUSCALOOSA CIVIL RIGHTS HISTORY TRAIL





## **Tuscaloosa Civil Rights History Trail: Introduction**

“If you cannot march, you can make sandwiches. If you cannot make sandwiches, you can drive your car. If you cannot drive, you can help with office work. Everybody can do something. WHAT WILL YOU DO TO HELP US WIN FREEDOM?” This is the story of ordinary citizens taking extraordinary action in Tuscaloosa, Alabama.\*

The downtown portion of the Tuscaloosa Civil Rights History Trail focuses on events surrounding “Bloody Tuesday.” On Tuesday, June 9, 1964, one year after Gov. George C. Wallace, Jr.’s “Stand in the Schoolhouse Door” at the University of Alabama failed to block the arrival of two black students, a group of peaceful citizens gathered at the First African Baptist Church to march to the new courthouse in protest of its segregated features. Ignoring warnings not to march by local law enforcement, hundreds followed the leader of the movement in Tuscaloosa and pastor of First African, Rev. T. Y. Rogers, Jr., and hit the streets. They didn’t get very far. Police and members of the Ku Klux Klan attacked the marchers as they spilled out of the church, swinging night clubs and cattle prods and firing tear gas into the church itself. Many of the wounded were treated at the nearby Howard- Linton Barbershop. Thirty-three were sent to Druid City Hospital;

*\*This is some of the Tuscaloosa story, photocopy of photograph album, June 6, 1964, box 1, folder 3, Will Herzfeld papers 1964-1990, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, New York Public Library.*





Photo courtesy: *The Tuscaloosa News*

ninety-four were arrested and jailed. All charges were subsequently dismissed, but no formal apologies were ever issued.

Importantly, Tuscaloosa had a rich tradition of black armed self-defense. During the civil rights movement, black men with rifles and pistols often protected key leaders like Rev. Rogers and Rev. Linton. Most worked their regular jobs during the day and volunteered in the evenings. They guarded First African during Monday night mass meetings. They patrolled black neighborhoods to provide a measure of deterrence to and defense from attacks from white supremacist groups. One leader, Joe Mallisham, a Korean War veteran and local labor organizer, went on to become the first black Tuscaloosa County Commissioner.

To understand Tuscaloosa's place in civil rights history, it is necessary to consider the factors that led to the local movement. Our trail includes stories of enslaved people auctioned before the Civil War, Native Americans exiled from their homelands, exclusionary legislation passed at the Alabama State Capitol in Tuscaloosa, lynchings in the local area, and the presence of the United Klans of America, headquartered in Tuscaloosa. It also includes stories of segregated schools, churches, stores, restaurants and movie theaters. Most importantly this trail is the history of how Tuscaloosa's color barrier was broken by the courageous efforts of many black and a few white foot soldiers.



## Capitol Park

2800 6th Street



Photo courtesy: *Historic American Buildings Survey, Library of Congress*

Tuscaloosa was the seat of Alabama State government from 1826 to 1846 when the state legislature met in a building here in Capitol Park. In 1833, the legislature

enacted slave codes to regulate the lives of enslaved people as well as free persons of color. These codes, like those used widely in other southern states, reflected white views of blacks as undeserving of basic human rights and strictly regulated slave travel, education, employment, and marriage. They aimed at curbing the rising numbers of slaves running away from their masters, preventing slave rebellions, and maximizing profits for the slave owners.

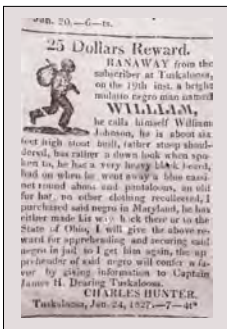


Photo courtesy: *Alabama Dept. of Archives and History*

After the Civil War and the emancipation of slaves, the promise of racial equality was never fully realized. While the era of Reconstruction (1865-1878) brought unprecedented freedoms to blacks, including the right to vote and

enjoy due process under the law, it was short lived.

A rash of new laws put in place by the state legislature in the late 1800s restricted the liberties of blacks in new ways. And what could not be accomplished by law was often accomplished through violence and terror. The Ku Klux Klan and similar groups began to use physical assault and lynching as a way to subjugate blacks, control their labor, and to prevent them from voting and moving freely. Blacks remained second-class citizens until the advent of the Civil Rights movement in the 1950s and the passage of Civil Rights laws in the 1960s.



## Lynching and Old Jail

2803 6th Street

Designed and built in the late antebellum era by William B. Robertson and featuring Georgian, Federal, Greek Revival, and Italianate flourishes, the Old Tuscaloosa City Jail boasts 28-inch-thick walls and heavy floors hewed from local timber. From 1856 to 1890 it served as the county jail and then as a boarding



Photo courtesy: *The Tuscaloosa News*



house and private residence. An historic marker on the corner of the property was erected by the Equal Justice Initiative in March 2017. It describes the terror of lynching in Alabama from 1870-1940, and specifically chronicles eight lynchings that took place in Tuscaloosa County.

During its decades as a jail, it held both black and white prisoners. At least one black man—Henry Burke, who was accused of sexually assaulting a white girl but never prosecuted—was seized from the jail by a white mob and lynched.



## **Druid Theatre and Hollywood**

2400 Block of University Blvd.

The Civil Rights Act of 1964 ended legal segregation in all public places, including movie theaters. Previously blacks were barred from entering theaters or forced to use separate entrances and sit in the balcony. The other option was to attend all-black theaters. Tuscaloosa was no exception. The Druid Theater and the Bama Theatre served white patrons only. An earlier version of the Bama Theatre—called the Ritz/Capri—had a balcony for black patrons. The Diamond Theater, located in a nearby black commercial area dubbed the Blue Front District, served the African-American community.

After the passage of the Civil Rights Act on July 2, 1964, blacks immediately tested the scope of their newfound rights. On the evening of July 8, 1964, a



Druid Theatre  
courtesy  
*The Tuscaloosa  
News*

group of black teenagers entered the Druid Theater. When they were leaving they were met by a mob of whites. Armed blacks rushed to the scene and secreted the teenagers away under a hail of bottles and rocks. The next night an incident that brought Tuscaloosa into the national spotlight occurred.

Jack Palance, a movie actor who would win an Academy Award later in his life, was in town with his wife and children to visit relatives and attend a movie at the Druid Theater. Rumors surfaced



Police barricade courtesy  
*The University of Alabama Libraries Special Collections*

that Palance and his family were in town to support integration. Another rumor mistakenly asserted Palance, who was heavily tanned, was a black man escorting a white woman into the theater. During the movie, the Palances endured a steady volley of insults. Once outside they confronted a mob of at least a thousand whites. The mob began throwing rocks and bricks at them, shattering the doors and windows of the Druid. Using fire hoses and tear gas to disperse the crowd, the police were able to escort the Palances to safety. Police subsequently imposed a curfew for several weeks.



## **The Mob at the Flagpole**

2410 University Boulevard

The flagpole, erected by the city to honor its war dead, was the site of protest during the civil rights movement.



It anchors the commercial corner of the city, at Greensboro Avenue and University Blvd. (formerly Broad Street), and has long been a meeting place for citizens. During the attempt by Autherine Lucy

Buford Boone. Photo courtesy:  
*The University of Alabama Libraries  
Special Collections*



to be the first black to attend the University of Alabama in 1956, white students and white extremists twice marched from the university to the flagpole to stage anti-integration protests.



Photo courtesy:  
*The Tuscaloosa News*

On February 4, 1956, more than 1,000 people marched downtown from the university, singing “Dixie.” They came to confront integration at the exact location Confederate cadets faced Union soldiers 91 years earlier. Two students stepped forward to address the crowd. The first, Leonard Wilson, told

racist jokes as the crowd waved Confederate flags and howled. Walter Flowers, Student Government Association president, spoke next. He was greeted with hisses and boos. “I am just as proud of this flag as you, but I believe our ancestors who fought under this flag would not be proud of you tonight. Go home!” Two days later, the university’s board of trustees met. Claiming the university cannot provide for her safety, Autherine Lucy was expelled. Jefferson Bennett, assistant to UA President Carmichael, when asked what he thought of the board’s decision, stated, “The mob won.”

Leonard Wilson became the leader of the West Alabama Citizen’s Council, whose membership eventually reached 3,000.

Walter Flowers was elected to the US House of Representatives, where he cast the deciding committee vote to impeach President Richard M. Nixon.

The victory won by these mobs and others on campus over Lucy's effort to join the student body prompted Buford Boone, publisher of *The Tuscaloosa News*, to pen "What a Price for Peace," which condemned the rule of violence and demanded that blacks be welcomed at the university in full accordance with the law. Boone's editorial won the Pulitzer Prize for Editorial Writing in 1957.



## Woolworth and Sit-Ins

2319 University Boulevard

Blacks seeking to protest segregation often turned to sit-ins. Popularized in North Carolina in 1960 as a nonviolent way to call attention to the righteousness of

their cause, protesters would ask to be served at all-white lunch counters. If refused, the protesters would simply sit quietly and wait. Violence often came next, as angry whites jeered the activists, threw food at them, and even beat them at times.

As part of a local effort to desegregate restaurants and shops, Rev. T. Y. Rogers, Jr., and the Tuscaloosa Citizens for Action Committee first attempted to



Photo courtesy:  
Jason D. Townsend

negotiate with downtown merchants. Unsuccessful, they began to picket businesses June 2, 1964, including S.H. Kress Store, F.W. Woolworth, and H&W Drug Store, demanding that blacks be treated in the same manner as whites and be hired in well-paying positions. Demonstrators endured taunts, threats, and assaults. Segregationists often doused them with “mustard oil,” an acidic mix, which burned their eyes and skin. Between June 2 and June 5 some 60 demonstrators were treated in the hospital for mustard oil burns and air rifle wounds.

On June 3, 1964, approximately 30 blacks walked into Kress’s and staged a sit-in at the lunch counter when their request to be served was ignored. When the police arrived, they left peacefully. The next day a similar incident occurred at Woolworth’s. After being turned away from H&W Drugs, black protesters organized a small 100-person march downtown. Despite its peaceful character, the march angered many white segregationists and helped set the stage for “Bloody Tuesday” on June 9, 1964.



## **First Black Legislator: Shandy Jones**

2328 6th Street

Born a slave in 1816 and emancipated as a young child, Shandy Wesley Jones was a successful barber who bought land with his savings. He pushed for blacks to move to Liberia in the antebellum period but emerged later as a leader of the local black community and started Tuscaloosa’s



first black Methodist church (now Hunter Chapel AME Zion) and black school. He was Tuscaloosa's first elected black



Photo courtesy: *Guy Hubbs*

representative to the State House (1868-1870), and he hoped that his son could enter the University of Alabama.

Hunted during Reconstruction by the Ku Klux Klan, Jones fled to Mobile in 1876, where he pastored the Little Zion AME Zion Church. Shandy Jones died there in 1886 and was buried in Magnolia Cemetery. Jones was recognized in 2009 by the city of Tuscaloosa as the first black elected official from Tuscaloosa County to serve in the Capitol.



## **Kress Building and Bus Boycott**

2223 University Boulevard

In front of the Kress store the Druid City Transit Company maintained a popular bus stop. On May 5, 1962, six years after the federal courts had ruled segregation on public transportation to be unconstitutional, a white Druid Transit

Co. bus driver ordered three black Stillman students and a high school student to give their seats to two white riders. An argument ensued. Rev. Willie Herzfeld, a Lutheran minister and civil



Photo courtesy:  
*The Tuscaloosa News*

rights activist, was summoned for help by other Stillman students who ran from the bus—Merjo Merriweather, Samuel Pitts, and William Jones. His efforts were not successful and the four

students were charged and jailed for disorderly conduct. That night the students were bailed out by Dr. Woody Robinson, a local black physician. The same evening The Ministers Alliance met and formalized the Tuscaloosa Citizen's Action Committee (TCAC), and elected Reverend Herzfeld as president. The TCAC inaugurated the civil rights movement in Tuscaloosa.

Following the 1962 episode, the Druid Transit Co. promised integration, but harassment continued for years. On August 3, 1964, a white bus driver allegedly shot at a black man,



Photo courtesy:  
*Mildred Westervelt Warner  
Transportation Museum*

saying the man had cursed him. In response, on August 10 protesters demanded an end to discrimination and the immediate hiring of African-American bus drivers. Protesters sang “If You Miss Me from

the Back of the Bus” at a mass meeting that evening. There, Rev. T. Y. Rogers, Jr., called for a bus boycott and forwarded an ultimatum, “If you want our business, make non-discrimination policies public.”

The boycott began and ridership quickly decreased by 60 percent. The bus company ignored Rogers’ demands and on November 10 surrendered its commission.

For the next six months, blacks who had depended on the bus scrambled. They relied on an informal network of “courtesy cars” to ferry them to work, stores, and school. By Christmas, extra financial help was needed and Rev. Rogers successfully recruited funds from the SCLC. Finally on April 12, 1965, the new Tuscaloosa Transit Co., complete with integrated staff and a public non-discrimination policy, began service.



## **Paul R. Jones Museum**

2308 6th Street

Paul R. Jones’s life was testament to his pursuit of justice in an exclusionary society. He graduated from Howard University in Washington, DC, in 1949. Jones applied and was accepted to the University of Alabama Law School—only to be rejected in February 1949 once Jones’ identity as an African-American became known. A letter from William F. Adams, Dean of Admissions, made it





Photo courtesy: *The University of Alabama*

clear that Jones' race was the reason for his rejection.

*"While this may be gratuitous, I am adding that we at the University of Alabama are convinced that relationships between the races, in this section of the country at least, are not likely to be improved by pressure on behalf of members of the colored race in an institution maintained by the State for members of the white race. On the contrary, we feel that inter-racial relationships would suffer if there is insistence that the issue be joined at this time. The better elements of both races deplore anything that tends to retard or jeopardize the development of better relationships between the races. For these reasons, therefore, we hope that you can persuade yourself not to press further your application for admission here."*

(From *Living art: The life of Paul R. Jones, African American art collector* (p. 67), by M. L. Andresen and N. F. Thomas, 2009, Cranbury, NJ: Rosemount Publishing & Printing Corp. Original letter reproduced in this text (p. 68) with permission of Paul R. Jones.)

Undaunted, Jones fought for Civil Rights as a federal employee and earned a

master's degree in urban studies from Governors State College in Illinois in 1974. Jones began amassing his renowned collection of African-American art in the 1960s. At a time when the work of black artists was overlooked and undervalued by much of the art world, Jones encouraged black artists, purchased their work, and lobbied galleries and museums to display it.

In an extraordinary act of generosity to the university that once rejected him, Jones donated 1,700 pieces valued at \$5 million to the University of Alabama in 2008. The Paul R. Jones Museum was created in 2011 to exhibit Paul R. Jones's collection of American Art. Over the course of his life, Jones amassed one of the most comprehensive collections of modern African-American art in the world. The current 2,000+ item collection is housed both at the University and at this museum. It offers a rare sustained opportunity to study the long journey to civil rights through African-American visual arts.



## **Alston Building and the KKK**

2400 6th Street



The Alston Building (also known as the Alston Place Building) is a seven-story office building located on the corner of Greensboro Avenue (originally

Photo courtesy:  
*The Tuscaloosa News*



Photo courtesy: *The University of Alabama Libraries  
Special Collections*

called Market Street) and 6th Street in downtown Tuscaloosa. Built in 1909 on the site of the former Tuscaloosa County Courthouse, it was praised as Tuscaloosa's first "skyscraper" and locals bragged that it was the "tallest building east of Chicago on a dirt road." Its namesake, Samuel Fitts Alston, was a city alderman and president of City National Bank. Former Alabama governors George and Lurleen Burns Wallace were married in the Alston Building at the former justice of the peace office.



Photo courtesy: *Alabama Dept. of Archives and History*

During the civil rights movement, the Alston Building housed the office of Robert Shelton, Imperial Wizard of the United Klans of America (UKA). From his three-room suite on the fourth floor, Shelton directed one of the largest and most powerful Klan groups in the country. His followers numbered in the thousands, though many more backed the Klan's belief in white supremacy. By the 1980s, membership had dwindled to 1,500 after UKA members were indicted by a grand jury in connection with violent racial events in Talledega County. The group was later bankrupted after a lawsuit granted Michael Donald's mother \$7 million after her teenage son was lynched by Klansmen in Mobile.



## **Dinah Washington Cultural Arts Center**

620 Greensboro Avenue

Dinah Washington (1924-1963) was a legendary American jazz and blues singer born in Tuscaloosa. With such memorable recordings as "*What a Difference a Day Makes*" and "*Unforgettable*," she earned the title "Queen of the Blues." She was inducted into the Big Band and Jazz Hall of Fame as well as the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame. On August 29, 2013, Tuscaloosa dedicated the former Allen & Jemison Hardware building as the newly renovated Dinah Washington Cultural Arts Center. Washington spent her early years in Tuscaloosa before her father, frustrated by the ever-increasing



Photo courtesy: *James Kriegsmann*

violence by the Ku Klux Klan, moved the family to Chicago. In 2008, parts of 30th Avenue were renamed to Dinah Washington Avenue.

The Allen & Jemison building was built in 1878 as a one-story structure and continued to expand until 1911 when the four-story addition was built. After changing hands a few times, the building was to be demolished in 2008 before the city intervened.





## County Courthouse and Marchers

714 Greensboro Avenue

In 1955 voters approved a bond measure to build a \$2.5 million county courthouse and jail. During construction, the black community asked for and received assurances that the facility would be completely integrated. But when Gov. George C. Wallace, Jr., formally dedicated the courthouse on April 12, 1964, signs stipulating “white” and “colored” water fountains were in place and blacks were forced to use the restrooms in the basement.

Angered by this betrayal, the Tuscaloosa Citizens for Action Committee met with the County Commission to pressure them to fulfill their promise to integrate the courthouse. The denial of their requests prompted Rev. T. Y. Rogers, Jr., pastor of First African Baptist Church and executive secretary of the TCAC, to organize a protest march to the courthouse.

The status of the courthouse—should it be segregated or integrated—quickly became a flashpoint for racial tensions building in the community. The Lyndon Johnson administration was pushing for a new Civil Rights Bill. Governor Wallace was touring the state and the country and proclaiming the need to segregate public schools and institutions. In Tuscaloosa, Rev. Rogers promised to follow Dr. Martin Luther

King, Jr.'s, example and conduct direct action campaigns on segregated businesses. Local white officials nervously called for all to follow the law, despite its segregated nature.

On June 9, 1964, peaceful demonstrators from across Tuscaloosa met at the First African Baptist Church. The march had barely begun when Police Chief William Marable moved to arrest Rev.



Photo courtesy: *Tuscaloosa Sheriff's Dept.*

Rogers and other leaders. What followed was a violent incident known as “Bloody Tuesday.” Thirty-three protestors went to Druid City Hospital and scores more were wounded while ninety-four were jailed. The protest led to a successful federal lawsuit filed by Rev. Rogers and his colleagues to force the courthouse to integrate.



## Greensboro Avenue Churches

800 Greensboro Avenue

In Tuscaloosa, four Christian denominations established churches on or near Greensboro Avenue before the city itself was formally incorporated. Collectively they formed a critical core of leadership as the city grew and helped settle the question raised by the Declaration of Independence—are all men created equal? The churches generally answered “no” and supported the growth of a pro-slavery ideology that defined blacks as naturally inferior to whites. Exemplary of the early church leaders is Dr. Basil Manley, one of the earlier pastors of First Baptist, President of the University of Alabama, slaveholder, and ultimately Chaplain of the Confederacy.

These churches typically preached a version of Christianity that permitted slavery. They incorporated black members during slavery to varying degrees but always under white control and as unequal members. Some churches held separate services for blacks, others held biracial services but forced blacks to sit apart from whites. Importantly, most blacks worshipped on their own



**Dr. Basil Manley**

Photo courtesy:  
*The University of Alabama  
Libraries Special Collections*

and out of the sight of the master, where they testified to their worth and dignity in front of God.

After the Civil War and emancipation, some blacks sought to remain in their antebellum churches but only as full-fledged congregants. When their request was denied, most joined one of the newly formed independent black churches, such as Hunter Chapel African Methodist Episcopal Zion (1866), First African Baptist (1866), Bailey Tabernacle Christian Methodist Episcopal (1870), and Salem Presbyterian Church (1880, which was renamed Brown Memorial in 1932). These churches emerged as leaders in the fight for religious freedom, equality, justice, and education over the course of the next century. Many of their members were at the forefront of the modern civil rights movement.

Significantly, Rev. Charles Stillman of First Presbyterian Church organized the Tuscaloosa Ministerial Institute in 1876 to educate local blacks. It later became Stillman College.

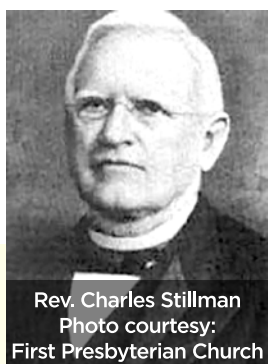


Photo courtesy: *Stillman College*



## **Bluefront District**

811 23rd Avenue

A cluster of successful black merchants formed the nucleus of a small African-American commercial district near the corner of 23rd Avenue and 7th Street, forming in the years immediately after World War II. They did so because blacks were denied access to the main commercial centers in Tuscaloosa because of the color of their skin. While most black-owned business were located in black neighborhoods, this area became a small central hub for black clients who lived nearby as well as those who came to Tuscaloosa from other parts of the city and the county on Saturday to shop and socialize.

These stores became an important commercial space for blacks during segregation and offered more dignified consumer environment than they typically experienced. In white-owned stores, black customers could buy clothing but couldn't try it on beforehand; if they did they had to buy it. They could never return an item if it didn't fit properly or proved defective. If a black was in line at a white-owned store and a white patron was also in line, the white patron would be served first. The Blue Front stood as an important bastion against the constant indignities and unfairness that characterized the experience of shopping during segregation.



Photo courtesy: *James Baughman*

It was in the Bluefront District that the Diamond Theatre was opened specifically for the African-American community. Originally built in 1910 for vaudeville shows, the New Diamond Theatre opened in 1946. Dr. Andrew D. McKenzie, an African-American doctor, and Dr. Marshall P. Gilmer, an African-American dentist, had their offices in the Bluefront District, along with the New Deal Restaurant operated by Oscar Fair.





## **Bailey Tabernacle CME Church**

1117 23rd Avenue

Bailey Tabernacle Christian Methodist Episcopal (CME) Church was founded in December of 1870 when the last 45 black members of Tuscaloosa's First Methodist Church formed their own church. The original church building was designed by the first black architect in Alabama, Wallace A. Rayfield, and was named for Rev. Virgil L. Bailey, one of its early pastors

Bailey Tabernacle played a crucial role during the fight for civil rights in Tuscaloosa. During the "Bloody Tuesday" incident on June 9, 1964, the sanctuary of First African Baptist Church was damaged by tear gas canisters hurled through the stained glass windows and water from fire hoses shot through the front door. It could no longer serve as the site for mass meetings of the black community. Bailey Tabernacle temporarily became the new nerve center of the movement.

A mass meeting at the church on June 10, 1964, drew about 350 blacks, including three ministers sent by Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr., to help plan the next stage of the movement: Rev. James Bevel, Rev. Richard Boone, and Rev. Harold Middlebrook. They and local ministers charted strategy and engaged in a dialogue with city officials as they continued the struggle for civil rights. Among the church's notable pastors was Rev. Dr. Willie Clyde Jones, who served for forty-five years, beginning in 1966, an active voice for civil rights until his death in 2016.



Photo courtesy: *Anonymous*



## **Hunter Chapel AME Zion Church**

1105 22nd Avenue

Hunter Chapel African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Zion Church, founded in the 1850s, is the oldest African-American church organized in Tuscaloosa. First known as the Freeman Methodist Society, it was founded by Shandy Wesley Jones, a one-time slave who rose to become an advocate for black literacy and education. Jones won a seat in the Alabama House of Representatives, which he held from 1868 to 1870.

In 1866 more than 500 former slaves left First Methodist Episcopal Church, now known as the First United Methodist Church, and aligned themselves with the Freeman Methodist movement. Hunter Chapel congregants first worshiped in a small rented building just a few yards away from where Bryant-Denny Stadium currently stands on the University of Alabama campus. The church's first permanent structure was built in 1878 on the grounds it still occupies. The present building was completed in 1881. Renovations occurred in 1910 when bricks were added to the structure's exterior.



Photo courtesy: *George Davis*

Named for Rev. E.H. Hunter, who served as pastor during the 1880s, Hunter Chapel was often referred to as the “father of black education” in Tuscaloosa because it provided the first formal educational program for children of freed slaves during the Reconstruction Era of the 1870s. Hunter Chapel was the first church to host Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., to speak in Tuscaloosa in June 1955.



## **First African Baptist Church**

2621 Stillman Boulevard



*Photo courtesy: First African Baptist Church*

First African Baptist Church played a central role in the fight for civil rights in Tuscaloosa because it was the home church of Rev. T. Y. Rogers, Jr., the most important local leader in the

movement; the primary site for mass protest meetings; and the setting for the most violent local incident, known as “Bloody Tuesday.” It sat next to Van Hoose-Freeman, and Mauldin (now Van Hoose & Steele), a black-owned funeral home founded in 1923 and the longest-running black business in the county.

First African Baptist Church was first established in November 1866 by blacks who rejected the discriminatory



Photo courtesy:  
*William Marable II Family*

practices of First Baptist Church. The founding pastor was a one-time enslaved person, Rev. Prince Murrell. Members initially met in private homes before securing a church building at the corner



of 4th Street and 24th Avenue in the black neighborhood of Riverhill. In 1900, they built the current structure at a cost of \$25,000. The architecture was inspired by the work of Robert Taylor, a Tuskegee faculty member and the first black person professionally trained and licensed as an architect at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

When Rev. T. Y. Rogers, Jr., became the church's pastor in 1964, Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr., delivered the installation sermon. Rogers had studied with King when he was pastor of Dexter Avenue Baptist Church in Montgomery and served as his assistant minister. When a new courthouse for Tuscaloosa was opened in spring 1964, signs separating bathroom facilities and drinking fountains by race were in place despite promises that the facility would be fully integrated. At this point the Tuscaloosa Citizens for Action Committee, of which Rev. Rogers was executive secretary, began organizing the local community to demand that the courthouse become fully integrated. A peaceful march from the church to the courthouse was planned.

On June 9, 1964, a group of nearly six hundred protesters were beaten and tear gassed by the Tuscaloosa Police Department and white extremists. The Fire Department turned a fire hose on the activists as well. Thirty-three protesters were hospitalized and ninety-four blacks were arrested and jailed.



Photo courtesy: *Edward Jenkins*

The violent incident, which became known as “Bloody Tuesday,” led to a lawsuit filed by the local black community to demand a courthouse free of segregation. On June 26, 1964, federal Judge Seybourn Lynne, citing the 14th Amendment, ordered Tuscaloosa County to remove the discriminatory courthouse signs.



## **Murphy-Collins House**

2601 Paul W. Bryant Drive

Tuscaloosa's first licensed black embalmer and mortician, Will J. Murphy hired black contractor George Chopton to build this two-story craftsman bungalow in the early 1920s as his private residence. Materials from the old state capitol building a few blocks away, such as bricks and window-sills, were salvaged when it burned in 1923 and used in the house's construction. This area was where mainly professional African-Americans lived, with beautiful homes adorned by white lace curtains, which gave the area the name "The Lace Curtain Community."

After Murphy passed away, Sylvia Collins, a local educator, purchased the home before selling it to the city in 1986. Today, the structure operates as the Murphy African American Museum, focusing on the lifestyle of blacks during the early 1900s. During the school year, the museum hosts school children with special programs about the long fight for civil rights in Alabama, as well as black heritage and culture.



Photo courtesy: *George Davis*



## **Howard-Linton Barbershop**

1311 TY Rogers Jr. Avenue

The barbershop was one of the central gathering places for the black community apart from churches. In Tuscaloosa, the Howard-Linton Barbershop was a center for civil rights protest.

Long-time owner and civil rights leader Rev. Thomas Linton maintained the story of the local struggle by preserving and showcasing mementos and artifacts in his shop.

Beginning in the 1950s, black ministers met here and planned their campaign for civil rights. Autherine Lucy sought refuge here after a mob of about 1,000 whites threatened to kill her as she sought to be the first black to attend the University of Alabama. Here beauticians bathed and cleaned Lucy after she had been pelted with stones, garbage, and eggs. During “Bloody Tuesday,” injured blacks lined the floors of the barbershop and sought treatment after being beaten by police. Linton himself coordinated relief efforts with Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr., and Robert F. Kennedy.



Photo courtesy: *The Tuscaloosa News*



Photo courtesy: *Library of Congress*

Rev. Thomas Linton played a critical role in the civil rights movement in Tuscaloosa. He worked closely with Rev. T. Y. Rogers, Jr., to direct the local movement and served on the Tuscaloosa Citizens Action Committee. Working with former Tuscaloosa Mayor Snow Hinton and civic leader Ward McFarland, Linton helped blacks get jobs at the local mall. He convinced white leaders to hire blacks as clerks and cashiers outside of the black district. The Chamber of Commerce relied on Linton for references for jobs at department stores and businesses. Linton lived his conviction that everyone—black or white—should be treated fairly.



Black Warrior River

Tuscaloosa  
Ampitheater



Capitol Park

3rd St

27th Ave

6th St

7th St

29th Ave

8th St

28th Ave

Martin Luther King Blvd

Stillman Blvd

15th St

1. Capitol Park
2. Lynching and Old Jail
3. Druid Theatre and Hollywood
4. The Mob at the Flagpole
5. Woolworth and Sit-Ins
6. First Black Legislator: Shandy Jones
7. Kress Building and Bus Boycott
8. Paul R. Jones Museum
9. Alston Building and the KKK
10. Dinah Washington Cultural Arts Center
11. County Courthouse and Marchers
12. Greensboro Avenue Churches
13. Bluefront District
14. Bailey Tabernacle CME Church
15. Hunter Chapel AME Zion Church
16. First African Baptist Church
17. Murphy-Collins House
18. Howard-Linton Barbershop





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# **Tuscaloosa Civil Rights History Trail**

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