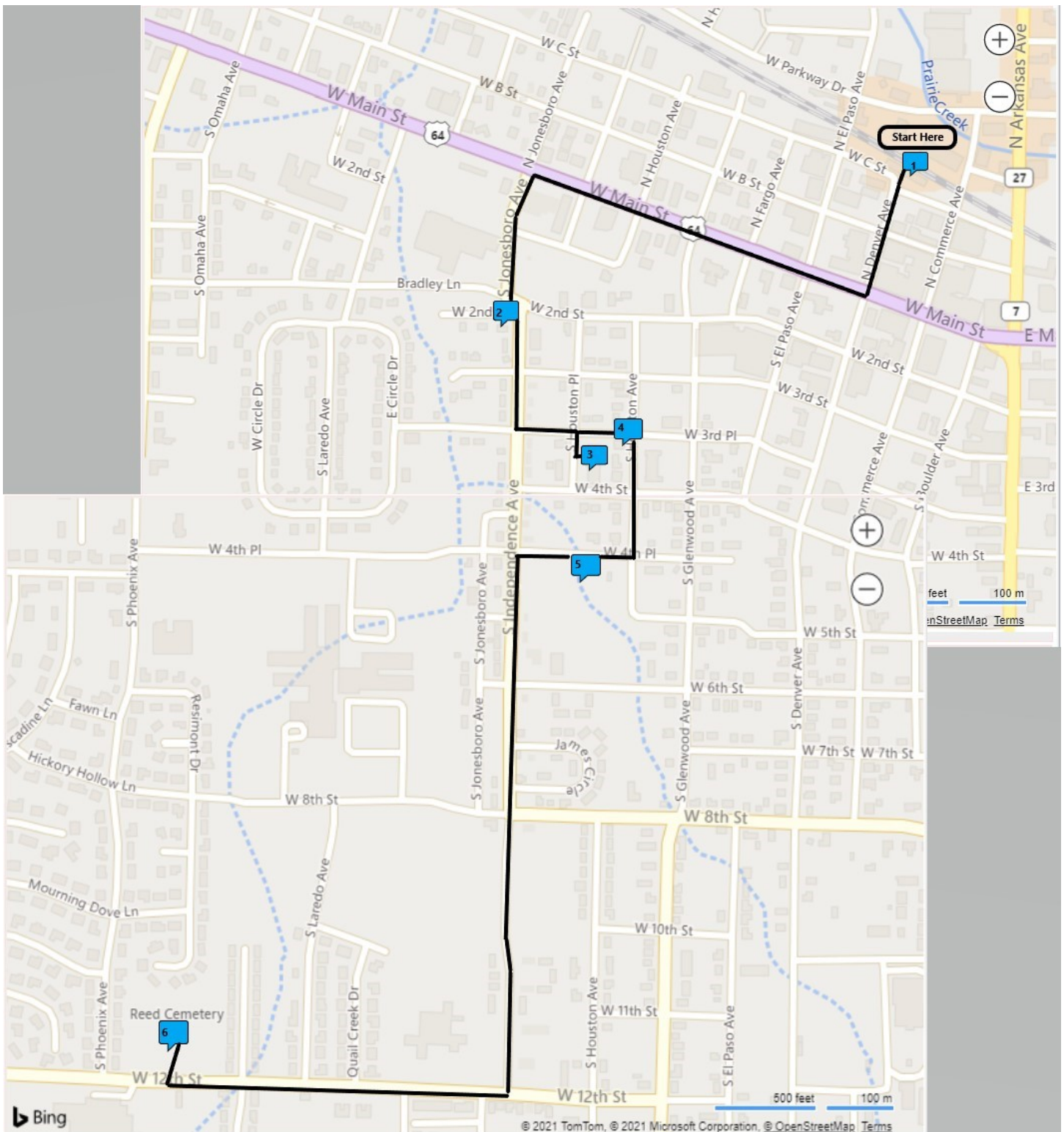


Self-Guided Tour of Black Historical Sites of Russellville, Arkansas



**Created by: Charity Park, Digital & Special Collections Librarian
Ross Pendergraft Library, Arkansas Tech University
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Black Historical Sites of Russellville

1. Russellville Train Depot - 320 West C Street



Photo by Charity Park

In 1873, the Little Rock-Fort Smith Railroad first ran through Russellville, and the original depot was built in the 1880s. The current building, once called the Missouri-Pacific Railroad Depot, was constructed in 1916-17 (Hull and Pollard 79). It served train passengers from 1917 until the passenger train service stopped in 1960 (Silva 4). The building was placed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1992 (Zollner 2). In 1999, the city took over the building and it was restored with the help of a group of local citizens called the Friends of the Depot, a committee of Main Street Russellville.

This depot is the first stop on this tour because it is located in downtown Russellville and it is one of the few local visual reminders of this town during Segregation. From the main entrance, there is a large room on the right that once served as the White waiting room. On the left side of the building, a much smaller area served as the Black waiting room.

Russellville Train Depot is also the home of [Main Street Russellville](#). The building also contains a local museum that is open to the public on weekdays from 9 AM to 5 PM.

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2. Central Christian Church – 224 South Independence Avenue



Photo by Charity Park

Central Christian Church, once known as Edwards Chapel Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), has been located in this building since 1939 when it was converted from a house to a church (Ark. Hist. Pres. Prog.). The congregation of what is now Central Christian Church originally established the church in 1868 in Coal Springs, a community located in present-day London, Arkansas. The biracial congregation was lead by Pope Kelley, and later Dr. George W. Harkey. As the church grew, it moved to Ouita, near Norristown Mountain (Pop. Co. Hist Assoc. 79).

In the 1934, the church divided and many members transferred to the Church of Christ. The remaining few members continued to meet for several years before they decided to purchase the lot on Independence in 1939 (AHPP).

In 1990, the church name was changed to Central Christian Church after they completed a renovation project on the church building (Cent. Christian Church). On December 6, 2017, the church was listed on the Arkansas Register of Historic Places (AHPP). Pastor Rita Richardson currently leads the church.

References

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"Our History." *Central Christian Church of Russellville*. <https://centralchristianchurchrsvl.weebly.com/our-history.html>. Accessed 24 Jan. 2021.

Pope County Historical Association. "Edwards Chapel Christian Church." *History of Pope County, Arkansas, Volume I.*, 1978, p. 82.

3. New Prospect Missionary Baptist Church - 321 Houston Place



Photos by Charity Park

The New Prospect Missionary Baptist Church was first organized in 1884. Services were lead by Reverend I. S. Nelson in the Christian Methodist Episcopal Church on two Sundays each month (New Prospect 13). In the next year, a building was constructed on Independence Avenue on land donated by church member Will Jones (Hook 1). Services continued in that building until the new church was completed on land purchased on the corner of Houston and Third Street in 1920. In 1926 the church was reorganized. The two-story structure served the church until the current building was completed in 2003 on the opposite side of the street. It was demolished in April 2008 (Hook 2).



Photo from 125th Anniversary of the New Prospect Missionary Baptist Church provided by Cecilia James.

In October 14, 1984, under the leadership of Dr. N. H. McGill, the church celebrated its 100th Anniversary and compiled a history of the church and congregation (New Prospect 1). The church created another history booklet for its 125th Anniversary in 2009.

The church is currently lead by Pastor A. Lee Tyus. Near the front entrance, a brick structure holding the church bell contains the rededication stones of 1974 and the building dedication stone from 1920, listing names of Deacons, Trustees, and the Building Committee members.

References

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4. Latimore Tourist Home – 318 Houston Avenue



By Atuprof - Own work, CC BY-SA 3.0, (2012), <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=21849528>

The Latimore Tourist Home was built around the turn of the century. By 1944 or earlier, owners Eugene “Gene” and Cora (Wilson) Latimore had opened it as an African American tourist home. (Ark. Hist. Pres. Prog.). It holds a special place in history because it was listed for many years in the [*Negro Motorist Green Book*](#), a Tourist Guide for Black Americans in the time of Segregation by Victor H. Green & Company. The Latimore Tourist Home was the only place listed between Little Rock and Fort Smith that

offered overnight lodging to Black Americans (Rodriquez 10). The Latimores continued to operate the tourist home into the 1970s after the Green Book ceased publication because of the Civil Rights Act of 1964.

The building was listed on the National Register of Historic Places in January 2012 (Ark. Hist. Pres. Prog.). The building is currently owned by the New Prospect Missionary Baptist Church. Unfortunately, it is badly in need of restoration. The Church and the City of Russellville are working together to find a way to preserve and restore this historic landmark (Bowden).



Photo by Charity Park

Resources

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“Latimore House.” National Register for Historic Places Registration Form. On file at Arkansas Historic Preservation Office, Little Rock, Arkansas. Online at <http://www.arkansaspreservation.com/National-Register-Listings/PDF/PP0415.nr.pdf>. Accessed 21 Jan 2021.

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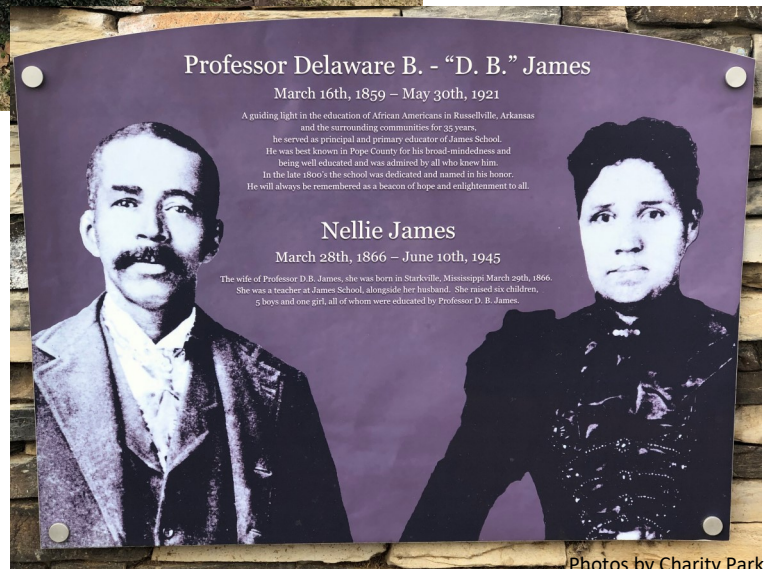
5. James School Park – 807 West Fourth Place



Photos by Charity Park

James School Park, an important historical site in Russellville, was dedicated on the land once occupied by the James Elementary School. According to Mrs. Cecilia James, the school was located near the area of the park now covered by basketball courts. The sign pictured is actually the original site of the Lane Chapel Methodist Church.

The school was named after Professor Delaware B. “D. B.” James, the principal of an earlier



Photos by Charity Park

African-American school, known then as the “Russellville Colored School.” It was built in 1927 and educated students through the eighth grade. The dedication of the four-room stone structure took place on September 12, 1927 (Shull 1). Older students had to either move to Little Rock or Fort Smith, or take the long daily bus ride to the L. W. Sullivan High School in Morrilton every day to receive a high school education (Rodriquez 37).

According to the Arkansas Historic Preservation System, the James School was the only Rosenwald School in the county (Ark. Hist. Pres. Prog.). These were southern African American schools that received money from the Julius Rosenwald Fund, named after the CEO of the Sears Roebuck and Company (Ark. Hist. Pres. Prog.).

Resources

“AHPP Seeking Information on Rosenwald Schools in Pope County.” Press Release from the Arkansas Historic Preservation Program. 22 Jan. 2003, pp. 1-2.

Rodriquez, Jeannie. “Memories of James School.” *ABOUT the River Valley*, (February 2019), pp. 34-39.

Shull, Laura L. “James Elementary School.” *Pope County Historical Association Quarterly*, vol. 37, no. 2, June 2003, pp. 1-6.

6. Reed Cemetery

West 12th St. between S. Muskogee Ave. & S. Phoenix Ave.



Photos by Charity Park

Reed Cemetery is the largest Black cemetery in Russellville. It was established in 1884 on West 12th Street (Shull 12). The land was sold to the City of Russellville by Eliza Carlock Shinn Reed and Claiborne Freeman with the intention of creating a cemetery for the Black citizens of Russellville (Shull 12).

According to the Ballards and Boyds cemetery census book, the earliest burials listed are from 1889 and 1890, (97-99.) The authors used a list provided by Randall Hendrix to complete the survey (97).

In this cemetery, you can find the historically significant headstone belonging to Elizabeth Neal (d. 02 Mar. 1919), which is engraved with a Mosaic Templars of America symbol. According to the MTA Registry listed on Little Rock's Mosaic Templars Cultural Center website, Ms. Neal was a member of the Russellville Enterprise Chamber, 3835 (Mosaic Templars Cult. Cent.).

In recent years, several improvement projects have been completed in the cemetery. Rev. Jerry Allen Linton has worked to clean up the cemetery, get new fencing installed, and honor the United States veterans buried there. The Veterans memorial wall has name plaques to remember loved ones who have served in all branches of the Armed Forces.



Resources

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