



# NEWSLETTER

APRIL 2025

## African American Heritage Society of Maury County

**QUARTERLY LECTURE SERIES**  
~~MEETING PLACE~~  
**MAURY COUNTY ARCHIVES**  
**201 East 6<sup>th</sup> Street**  
**Columbia, TN 38401**



### **2025 LECTURE SERIES** **Saturday, April 19, 2025, at 10 a.m.** **“Hidden Figures of Maury County”**

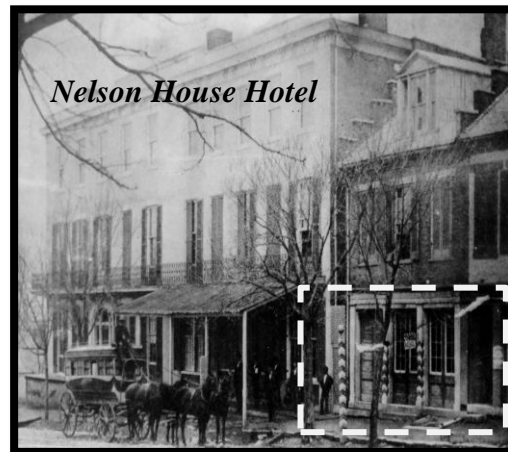
In April, we will continue the series, “Hidden Figures of Maury County,” featuring African American men and women who were born in Maury County or called Maury County home and contributed to community-building or played major roles in events that had an impact in this city, county, state, or country.



*Michelle Cannon, Archivist  
Maury County Archives*

Maury County Archivist, Michelle Cannon, will discuss the “Life and Legacy of John Brown, the Barber.” Brown, an entrepreneur, was born in Virginia in 1809 and by 1850, he was a free man living Maury County, Columbia, with his wife Caroline.

John Brown’s story is an interesting one, sad and lonely at times, but full of ambition and determination. He wanted to succeed, and he did!



*Nelson House Hotel*  
*John Brown’s Barber Shop*  
*North Main Street*

Prior to emancipation, African Americans, both enslaved and free, demonstrated a strong enterprising spirit. They mastered trades such as blacksmithing, barbering, painting, plastering, and chairmaking, and accumulated property worth up to \$10,000.

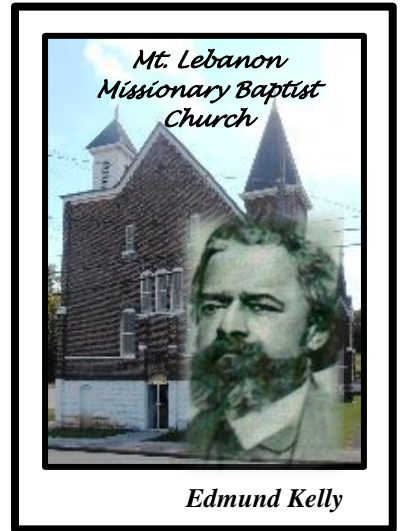
# CELEBRATING BLACK HISTORY

## *Mt. Lebanon Missionary Baptist Church*

AAHSMC President, Jo Ann McClellan, was invited to discuss the “Life and Legacy of Edmund Kelly.” Kelly, the co-founder of the Mt. Lebanon Missionary Baptist Church was one of the first African American ordained ministers in Tennessee; and is at the top of the Society’s list of “Hidden Figures of Maury County.”

He began advocating for the civil rights of African Americans in 1863, as demonstrated by his meetings with Presidents Lincoln and Johnson as a leader in the National Baptist Association and through various publications. Historians often compare Kelly to Frederick Douglass.

Sons William D. and John H. continued Kelly’s legacy by working to improve the communities where they lived. John H. gave up his plans to become a lawyer, moved back to Columbia, and was the founder and first principal of the Colored Public School on College Hill, later named the College Hill School; and William D. served with the United States Colored Troops 54<sup>th</sup> Massachusetts Regiment. He was a letter carrier and politician in Kansas before moving Columbia where he became the president of the Colored YMCA in Maury County.



## AAHSMC’s Traveling Exhibitions on Display

### **Maury Regional Hospital: Black History EXPO**

The AAHSMC’s exhibition “Voices of Maury County” was on display at the Maury County Hospital Black History Expo. This exhibition features Maury County citizens who called Maury County home and fought for civil rights as early as the 1860s.



### **UAW 1853, Spring Hill, TN**

Two AAHSMC traveling exhibitions were on display at the UAW Hall from February 19<sup>th</sup> -March 5<sup>th</sup>. The “Path to Freedom (pictures on the left)” calls attention to the importance of education to former slaves. After the Civil War, thousands of newly freed slaves were clamoring for educational opportunities. The former slaves, however, saw education as the true path to freedom!

The “Education in Maury County: The African American Experience (pictures on the right),” provides an overview of the history of African American education in Maury County from the Civil War through desegregation.

The AAHSMC exhibitions are made available to churches, libraries, and schools, at no charge



*Pictured (L-R): AAHSMC Director, Eric Cox, Jackie Miles, and Jo Ann McClellan, AAHSMC President*

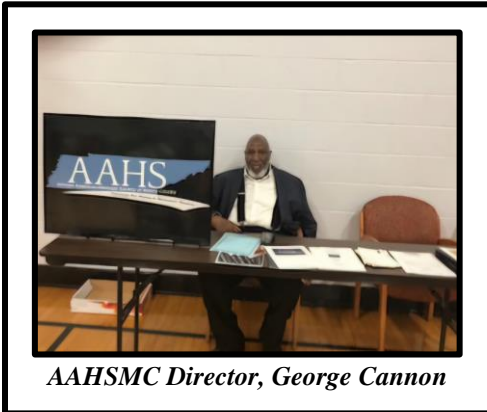


*UAW 1853 Members*



# COMMUNITY OUTREACH

## College Hill School Reunion



The African American Heritage Society of Maury County participated in the 2025 College Hill School Reunion by hosting an information table during the reunion. This event was organized by Dedra Dawson, the Principal of the Horace O. Porter Alternative School at College Hill and Community Activist James Martin and was well attended by former students and members of the College Hill community.

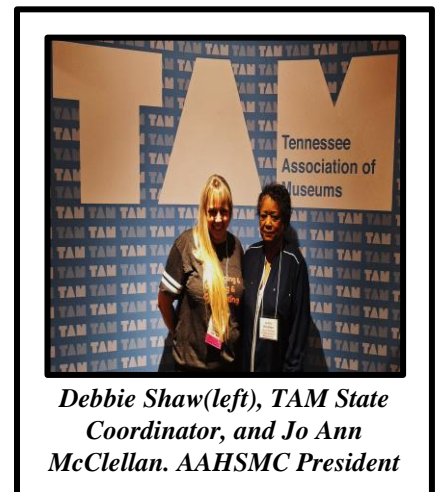
This year's honorees were Mrs. Myrtle Byrdsong and Mrs. Gayle Martin, former directors of the Independent Band of Hope (IBH) Day Care Center; and Reverend Talvin Barner, a local minister, and Maury County Commissioner. The purpose of this event is to remind and promote the legacy of the College Hill School and its students.

## TAM CONFERENCE

Almost two hundred people attended the 64<sup>th</sup> Annual Tennessee Association of Museums (TAM) Conference in Knoxville, TN. TAM was founded in 1960 to foster communication and cooperation between museums, cultural societies, and other members on matters of common interest to all. Museum professionals conducted lectures and roundtable discussions

TAM's goal is to inform the public about the importance of understanding and preserving Tennessee's cultural, historical, and scientific heritage, as well as the development of professional standards for members who bring that past to the public.

The conference attendees toured the museums in the downtown area including the Beck Cultural Exchange Center. The vision of the Beck is "to be the desired place that people go to learn, discover and experience the rich legacy of African Americans." While the stories of the dark days during "Red Summer" in 1919 are included, the stories of success and resilience of those who called Knoxville home are told at the Beck, such as the nationally known poet, Nikki Giovanni; the widely known artist, Ruth Brice; and the first African American mayor of the City of Knoxville, Daniel T. Brown.



*Beck Cultural Exchange Center  
Knoxville, TN*



*Rev. Renee Kesler, Director of the Beck Cultural Exchange Center,  
speaking to the TAM Conference attendees.*

### Return Service Requested



*Stella Howse Smith*

Born in Rutherford County, TN, Smith received a Bachelor of Science degree in history and social science from Tennessee A & I State University in Nashville, TN. She was awarded scholarships to attend Tuskegee and Hampton Institutes to pursue a course of study that would prepare her for this new position. She was married to Dr. William P. Smith of British Guinea in South America. They had no children.



*Stella Howse Smith*  
1897-1948