

McCown, Lisa

From: Eric Wilson <ericstephenwilson@gmail.com>
Sent: Thursday, January 03, 2019 12:18 PM
To: Rockbridge Historical Society
Subject: Re-Visiting Rockbridge, 1939: A New Year's Journey with RHS, and "The Negro Motorist Green Book"

Happy New Year - RHS' 80th!! - wishing you well, on this occasion to herald 2019 with the first of our journeys into the Rockbridge past.

Over the course of the past two years, we've periodically shared these RHS-Essays: more extended reflections that write their way into the concerns and curiosities of Public History. Beyond notice of our RHS Programs and partner promotions, these articles reflect on relevant themes, distinct anniversaries, unique and sometimes surprising people and social patterns that shape Rockbridge history.

In framing a diverse range of topics, they've explored the interconnections of Nature and History; examined the evolution of American picnics and Rockbridge flags; reflected on the shifting history of Memorial Days, the origins of International Women's Day, as well as the wartime conclusions witnessed by Juneteenth, the World War I Armistice Centennial.

**Today, in new launch, we'll turn a page to
The Green Book.**

... In 1939, the year that The Rockbridge Historical Society was founded, Lexington also made its first appearance in The Negro Motorist Green Book: a resource guiding African-American travelers to accommodations that were open to and safe for them. The book included business names and addresses, and featured promotional plugs for housing, restaurants, entertainment sites, gas stations and mechanics, barbershops and beauty parlors. For 30 years, the series was published by African-American WWI veteran and US Postal Carrier Victor Green. It became a widely-used guidebook during the years when American automobile culture was growing rapidly, but legal and de facto segregation still held sway across the South, and the nation more broadly.

In days ahead, we'll post to our website a more fully illustrated version of the essay below about The Green Book, and its footprints in Rockbridge County and Virginia. And stay tuned, for more details on a related program on 'Black Histories at The Bridge,' Saturday, February 23, 1:30 PM, part of Natural Bridge State Park's Winter Speaker Series.

As a coda to the holiday travel season, we hope you'll enjoy this journey into journeys past. And whether in reply here, or on our RHS Facebook page, please share with us your own histories of travel: whether holiday-tied, Green Book-supported, or well beyond.

Through your feedback and responses, your service as volunteers, or your financial contributions, we hope you'll invest in our ventures, and help us to start the year strong when you click here to

Join, Volunteer, or Give to RHS



**Re-Visiting Rockbridge, 1939:
A New Year's Journey with RHS,
and "The Negro Motorist Green Book"**

Have you been traveling for the Holidays this year? Somewhere familiar? Somewhere new?

What's helped you on your way? GoogleMaps? TripAdvisor reviews? The trusted recommendations of family and friends?

We've all relied on resources like these. In fact, they're often vital to the very anticipation – and hopefully, excitement – of leaving home.

But sometimes our travels remain more uncertain, en route. Or unclear, when and where we arrive.

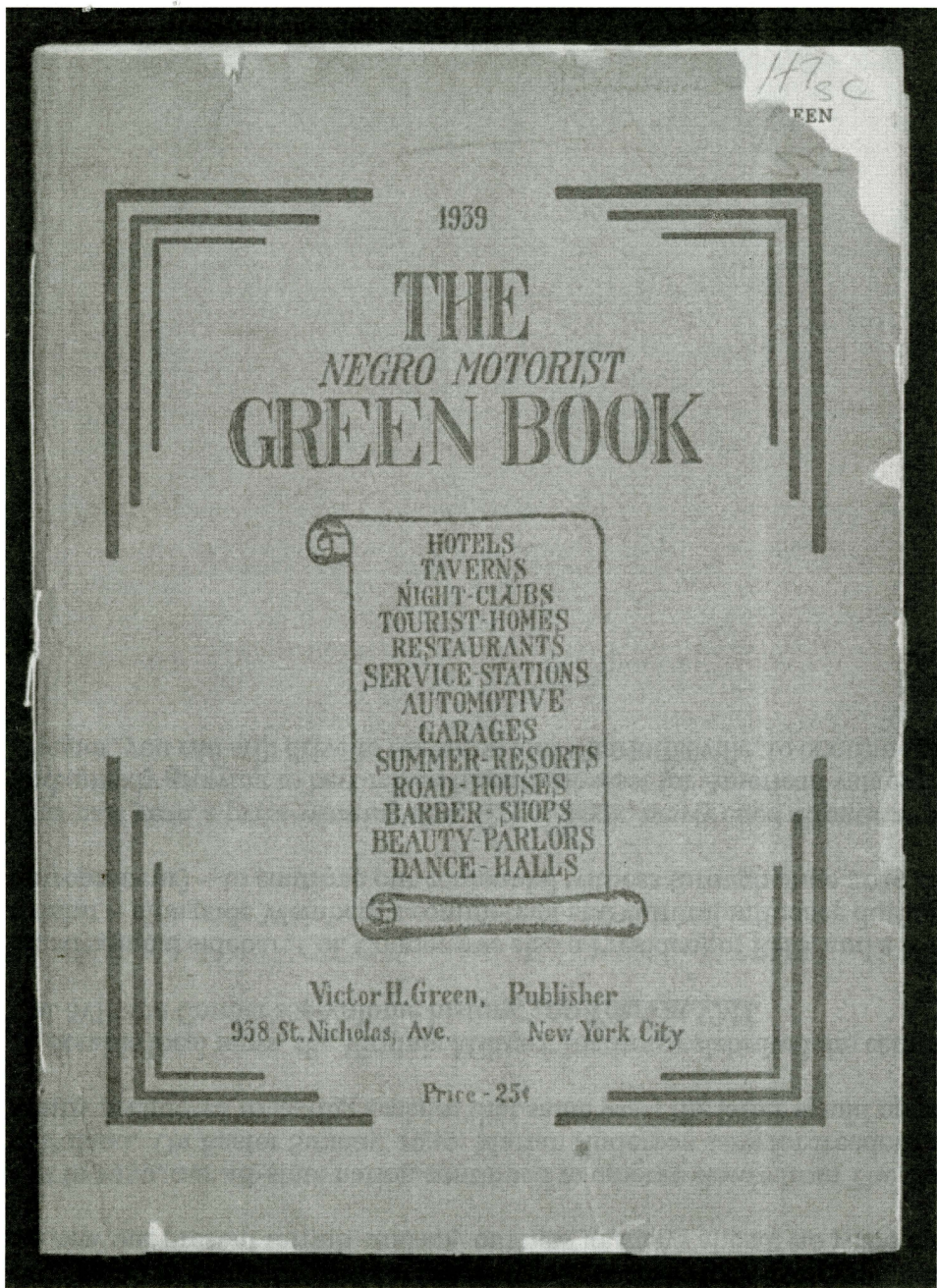
How do we navigate along the way?

Who and what do we trust as our guides?

In an important sense, a central part of RHS' mission is to help you travel into the past...

It's part of our service to the Rockbridge community to more broadly and distinctively illuminate what happened locally, regionally, nationally, to better lens our present perspectives, and pathways ahead.

Now at the turn of the New Year, we'll travel back 80 years, to 1939: the year that RHS was founded, the year that The Negro Motorist Green Book came to Lexington.



But before turning more specifically to that volume, and series – a publishing enterprise that helps us to re-think the dynamics of mobility and hospitality, across the South, and the United States, at large – let's take a moment to pause and reflect on what was happening nationally and internationally at that time.

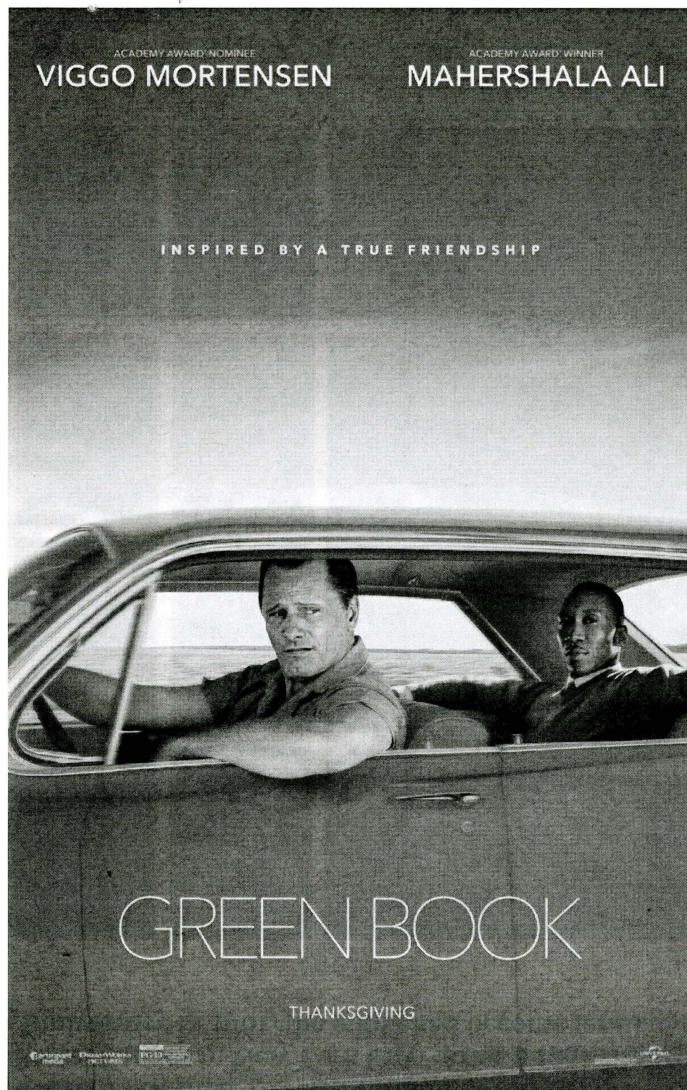
On August 9, 1939, The Rockbridge Historical Society was established in Lexington, beginning 80 years of historic presentation and community service that we continue today. 80 years before that, in December 1859, Rockbridge saw cadets from the recently established Virginia Military Institute march to Harper's Ferry, to provide security for the execution of abolitionist John Brown. As history keeps marching on, RHS stands in good position to marshal historical resources and networks to help our community reflect, and project. As we look back to where we've come from, we can also re-view our present terrain, and spy out new journeys ahead: 80 years more, we hope, to the turn of the 22nd century, in 2099.

But in 1939, our 48-state nation continued to emerge slowly from The Great Depression, with a wary eye cast toward War in Europe, and the Nazi invasion of Poland. On Easter Sunday, 1939, Marian Anderson sang for freedom on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial. The Wizard of Oz and Gone with the Wind jointly premiered to lasting acclaim that same year; the latter would open in Lexington at Isaac Weinberg's State Theater, in February 1940.

In notable local news, the Virginia Military Institute celebrated the centennial of its own founding, which was duly commemorated with the publication of Col. William Couper's 4-Volume history, 100 Years at VMI.

[Institutional sidebar: Col. Couper was also a President of RHS, and a leading civil engineer in WW1. He is presently featured in our 'WW1 and Rockbridge' exhibit – alongside Weinberg's commercial and cultural influence during that homefront era, as one of Lexington's leading businessman (and first Jewish entrepreneur) – to continue our centennial witness through June 2019].

This past year, a prize-winning film, Green Book, newly cued attentions to an important if often overlooked book series, first published in the later 1930s, and quickly growing to become an important asset for American values on mobility and accessibility. Though the movie's not yet screened here at the State Theater, you can still drive to Staunton and Charlottesville, to continue the automotive trail; click here for a Trailer, or range of Reviews.

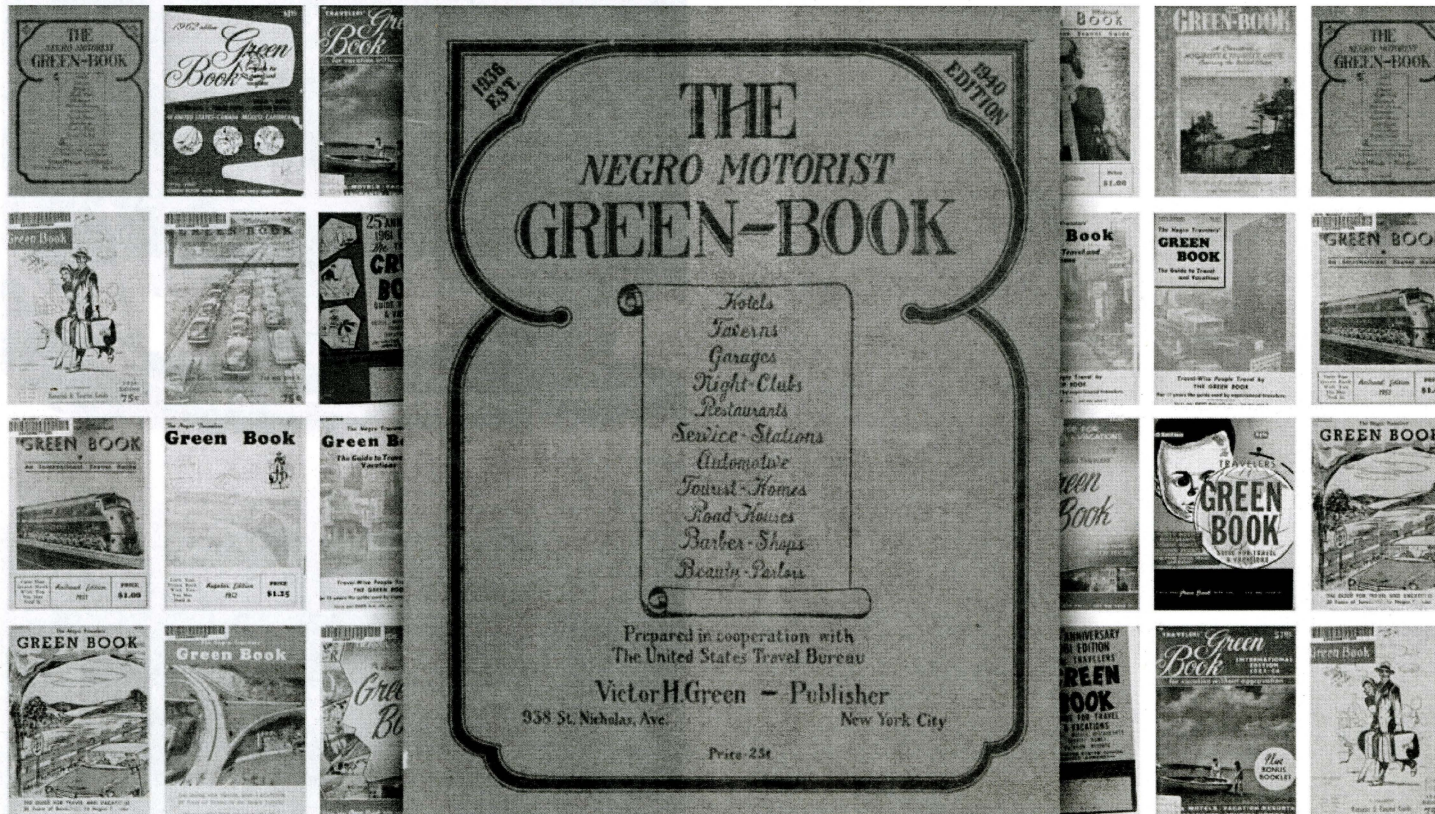


Most broadly, the film steers audiences a half century into the past, trafficking the roads from New York City, through the Deep South, and to its climax in New Orleans, as a streetwise Italian-American driver is hired to drive a posh Jamaican-American concert pianist for a series of performances for well-heeled white audiences. Their own interpersonal and social assumptions evolve over the course of the trip: in the volleyed exchanges between front and back seats of their 1962 Cadillac, and sharpened through the separate-but-unequal provisions of roadside tourist motels, cafes, country clubs, and “sundown towns,” which required blacks and other minorities to leave the city limits before nightfall.

Reviewers have differed on how realistically or optimistically the film represents an era fraught with local and national tensions, risk, and violence. But the movie does purposefully navigate many of the subtleties, contradictions, and also connections marking the transition from legal segregation to desegregation, as well as various social networks and cross-cultural alliances that would help to bring about change, over the long arc of Jim Crow.

Notably, here, the film takes its title from The Negro Motorist Green Book a popular travel guide published from 1936-1966, extending from the heart of the Great Depression through the passage of the 1964 Civil Rights Act and the Fair Housing Act taken up by Congress in 1966. These 30 volumes – and the movie’s narrative, based on a true story – help connect our contemporary perspectives and experiences about travel, race, family arrangements with the historical and regional habits of the 1960s, and the 1930s; those signposts, by turns, all preceded by the longer run of travels and travails the Civil War, as chronicled in Elizabeth Pryor’s Colored Travelers: Mobility and the Fight for Citizenship before the Civil War.

Lexington first appeared in “The Green Book” in 1939, a year when few here today were likely of an age to have pored through a copy, themselves. That said, many in our community will recall from personal experience that The Negro Motorist Green Book was a vital guide for black travelers during the middle third of the 20th century. By 1940 – just before a hiatus in publication during World War II – the lengthening volumes would boast their vibrant, verdant cover, to match the series’ namesake, Victor Green: an African-American World War I veteran from Harlem, and US Postal Carrier in New York City. After a 1951 “Railroad Edition,” the series would retitile itself slightly as The Negro Travelers’ Green Book. By its 25th Anniversary in 1961, the guide had become familiar enough to simply and more broadly title itself: The Travelers’ Green Book.



For a comprehensive view of all thirty editions, click here to see the [Online Gallery of Green Books](#): all covers, pages, photos, featured promotions, and testimonials have been fully digitized by The New York Public Library's Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture.

Though eventually national in scope, the reach of this guidebook would gradually extend from its narrower regional and cultural origins. In targeting a specifically "Negro" audience, amid a growing American automobile culture, these slim but convenient 50-page publications were first modeled on earlier guides for Jewish travelers looking for welcoming accommodations in the Catskills and "The Borscht Belt." The Green Book itself began as a guide centered on African-American establishments New York City. Later volumes would double in size, would add an additional "Vacation Section" for resorts and destinations in Mexico, the Caribbean, Canada, and Alaska, and begin including major promotional essays and ads from Ford Motor Company and Esso Oil (Esso was unusually progressive for the time in franchising their filling stations to African-American entrepreneurs). Over time, Green's publication increasingly crowdsourced recommendations from black travelers themselves -- not unlike social media review portals today. But already in the 1939 issue, he was offering \$5 for "manuscripts accepted by the publishers ... on Negro motoring experiences, scenic wonders encountered in your travels, places visited, of interest, and one's motoring experiences."

Locally... from personal experience or family stories, many of our Members and neighbors may still readily recognize the handful of businesses and restaurants in Lexington and Natural Bridge that were annually foregrounded in those pages. Their inclusion in this increasingly international guide signals an important local foothold in understanding the complexity of 'Southern Hospitality,' then and since. By looking out for each other in a wider landscape of exclusion, these African-American havens were beacons of support for the growing number of travelers who used the book. At the same time, sponsoring hosts clearly valued the advertising opportunity to further build their enterprises.

CHARLOTTESVILLE**HOTELS**

Carver Inn—701 Preston Ave.

TOURIST HOMESVirginia Inn—W. Main St.
Chauffeur's Rest—129 Preston Ave.
Alerander's—413 Dyce St.**BEAUTY PARLORS**

Apex—211 W. Main St.

BARBER SHOPS

Jokers—North 4th St.

CHRISTIANBURG**HOTELS**

Eureka

DANVILLE**TOURIST HOMES**Yancy's—320 Holbrook St.
Mrs. M. K. Page—434 Holbrook St.
Mrs. S. A. Overby—Holbrook St.**DUNBARTON****TOURIST HOMES**

H. Jackson—Route No. 1, Box 322

FARMVILLE**TOURIST HOMES**

Mrs. Kate Wiley—626 S. Main St.

RESTAURANTS

Reid's—236 Main St.

TAVERNS

Ried's—200 Block, Main St.

SERVICE STATIONS

Clark's—Main St.

FREDERICKSBURG**HOTELS**McGuire—521 Princess Ann St.
Rappahannock—520 Princess St.**RESTAURANTS**

Taylor's—505 Princess Anne St.

HAMPTON**RESTAURANTS**Paul's—216 W. King St.
Abraham's—39th St. & Hi-Way**BARBER SHOPS**

Paul's—154 Queen St.

BEAUTY PARLORS

Tillie's—215 N. King St.

SERVICE STATIONS

Lyle's—40 Armitstead Ave.

GARAGES

Walton's—W. Mallory Ave.

TAXI CAB

Abraham's Taxi Service

HARRISONBURG**RESTAURANTS**

Frank's—145 E. Wall St.

HEWLETT**TAVERNS**

Beverly Bros—R. F. D. No. 1

LEXINGTON**TOURIST HOMES**

The Franklin—9 Tucker St.

RESTAURANTS

Washington—16 N. Main St.

TAVERNS

Rose Inn—331 N. Main St.

LURAY**TOURIST HOMES**

Camp Lewis Mountain—Skyline Drive

LYNCHBURG**HOTELS**

Phyllis Wheatley YWCA—613 Monroe St.

TOURIST HOMESMrs. C. Harper—1109 8th St.
Mrs. M. Thomas—919 Polk St.
Mrs. Smith—504 Jackson
Happyland Lake—812 5th Ave.**BEAUTY PARLORS**

Selma's—1002 5th St.

NATURAL BRIDGE**TOURIST HOMES**

Mountain View Cottage

NEWPORT NEWS**HOTELS**

Cosmos Inn—620 - 25th St.

TOURIST HOMESMrs. W. E. Barron—2123 Jefferson
Thomas E. Reese—636-25th St.
Mrs. W. Herndon—752 26th St.
Mrs. C. Stephens—1909 Marshall Ave.
J. H. Tallaferrro—2206 Marshall Ave.**RESTAURANTS**Tavern Rest—2108 Jefferson
Savoy—637 - 25th St.
Stop Light—601 - 25th St.
Webb—619 - 25th St.**BEAUTY PARLORS**

Alice—628 - 25th St.

SERVICE STATIONS

Ridley's—Orcutt Ave. & 30th St.

BARBER SHOPSV & R—636 - 25th St.
Anthony—609½ - 25th St.**TAILORS**

Faulk—638 - 25th St.

DRUG STORES

Woodard's—25th St. & Madison

1949 Negro Motorist Green Book, with four entries for Lexington and Natural Bridge

In 1949, when Rockbridge's Green Book listings peaked at 4, only 123 establishments were included across Virginia, at large. By regional comparison, Staunton registered 3 entries that year, Roanoke 7. About half of all entries came from smaller towns (Bedford, Farmville, Luray, Lexington) with only 2-4 businesses characteristically noted.

Of course, these published listings – locally and elsewhere – were only the leading edge for commercial hospitality, and private offerings: well before our more transparent, virtual TripAdvisor and Airbnb markets, today. Beyond the roadmap of The Green Book itself, most of this web of work and of welcome extended more interpersonally and informally, whether provided by other local businesses or home-based operations nearby. Word-of-mouth advanced less visible but no less broadly vital recommendations for a range of establishments that earned their credibility within the community, as well as reputations relayed by other travelers over time.

From their joint first appearances in 1939, the Rose Inn and Franklin Tourist Home would annually represent Lexington in every issue until publication ceased in 1966. What follows here are thumbnails of the four sites that were advertised in Lexington and Rockbridge over that near 30-year span.

Clicking on the hotlinked names below will direct you to the Virginia Green Book Project, a growing database that maps every listing in the Commonwealth, over time. A left-sided ribbon allows you to readily locate these historic sites: listed by town, and color-coded by type of business, often with a photo of the present location (note: dates in parentheses below signal dates listed in The Green Book, not their overall business history).

Rose Inn (Tavern) – 331/329 Main Street (1939-1966)

On the site where the VMI Training Facility now stands, the Rose Inn was part of an industrious corridor of black businesses that constellated along North Main Street in the 20th century. It stood just north of the lively Knights of Pythias building, home at the time to the fabled 'House of Fun' where Louis Armstrong, Cab Calloway, Count Basie's orchestra and others once memorably performed.

My own first cue to the Rose Inn – shortly after I'd started researching The Green Book for other purposes – came a few years back when preparing RHS' school programs on the Histories, Stories, and Arts of Diamond Hill (we're now in our 5th year of this interactive learning experience featuring local black history, performing arts, and neighborhood engagement with students finishing their 4th Grade Virginia Studies Curriculum). While following some broader leads, I was connected with the granddaughter of the woman who'd run the business. While there's much still to learn here, such personal witness, family papers, and oral histories of the sort – no less than local advertising, tax records, and archival and digital research – will all remain vital in returning these stories to light, in their comparative, contemporary contexts.

The Franklin (Tourist Home) – 9 Tucker St. (1939-1966)

For more on this two-story 19th century house – two blocks off Main St., in Lexington's Diamond Hill community – see the pamphlet and self-guided tour prepared by the Historic Lexington Foundation. The architectural survey includes a range of information about local African-American histories, families, churches, businesses, and schools, including this tourist home, occupied and operated by Arlene Franklin herself, until her death in 1952.

Once editions of The Green Book resumed publication after World War II (having bowed to national rationing constraints), the Rose Inn and Franklin Tourist Home would be joined in 1947 by two others options within Rockbridge: one Main Street restaurant in Lexington, and another Tourist Home near the County's most iconic tourist site, at Natural Bridge.

Washington (Restaurant) – 16 N. Main (1947-1957)

With its notably large plate glass windows, the site is now occupied by Sugar Maple Trading Company and, before that, Duke's Antiques. The restaurant welcomed customers just uphill from the former Willson-Walker House, where Walker & Wood Brothers Sanitary Meat Market and grocery store had long served as its own pillar in North Main's black business center, and the Lexington community at large. Across the street, beginning in 1883, Lexington Lodge No. 2461 hosted meetings of the Grand United Order of Odd Fellows, the town's most prominent African-American fraternal organization, and an important means of cultural connection, across the United States.

Mountain View Cottage (Tourist Home) -- Natural Bridge (1947-9).

Though only listed for three years, the Cottage's inclusion in this state and national network signals its presence in more rural settings, as well as the tourist industry's draw to Rockbridge County's namesake icon. Tourist amenities at the Bridge were nationally advertised in mid-20th century, before and after the catastrophic fire that destroyed the iconic Natural Bridge Hotel. The large hotel segregated access and provisions for its "white" and "colored" guests. But attention to Mountain View Cottage's welcoming of African-American lodgers opens another vital chapter in chronicling four-century tradition of Visiting Natural Bridge: stretching back to the ownership of Thomas Jefferson, and his free black caretaker at the Bridge, Patrick Henry (for a recap of RHS memorable joint program on this topic in 2015, see our website's RHS Newsletter Archive).

'Black Histories at The Bridge' (Saturday, February 23, 1:30 PM) will revisit these narratives as part of Natural Bridge State Park's Winter Speaker Series. Partnering with NBSP Ranger and Education Specialist Matthew Jackson, I'll be presenting a program that looks at Mountain View Cottage in light of these related period materials mid-century tourism and travel, along with other lesser-known African-American histories involving Natural Bridge. Stay tuned to our RHS Website, RHS Facebook, and promotions from Natural Bridge State Park for more details!

Coda:

In the Introduction that fronted each edition of The Green Book – describing its purpose, its resources, and its goals – founder and publisher Victor Green wrote:

If this guide has proved useful to you on your trips, let us know. If not, tell us also as we appreciate your criticisms and ideas in the improvement of this guide from which you benefit...

There will be a day sometime in the near future when this guide will not have to be published. That is when we as a race will have equal opportunities and privileges in the United States. It will be a great day for us to suspend this publication for then we can go wherever we please, and without embarrassment. But until that time comes we shall continue to publish this information for your convenience each year.

Indeed, it's now over 50 years since The Green Book has ceased publication. But in important ways, to echo Green, it can still prove "useful."

The fade of time now finds RHS – like a number of other organizations, journalists, documentarians, and community-based projects – working to preserve that illuminating cultural archive. Locally and collectively, these efforts aim to re-construct some of the more personal experiences that were not only mapped out in The Green Book, but played out on the roads of Rockbridge, and of America. Among some of these remarkable digital ventures, hotlinked here:

Interactive “Green Book Project” supported by Harvard’s Hutchins Center

Smithsonian’s “Green Book Traveling Exhibit” and Digital Archive

“Green Book Chronicles” Documentary Film, and “Mapping Jim Crow” Motion Media

Social Media of The Green Book and Facebook

As a local history organization, we’re poised to add more local texture, and traction, to these broader narratives: connective if not always coordinate with wider histories of regional and American travel. As we expand our own digital footprint, these projects offer innovative multi-media models through which local knowledge can both be shared, and more fully developed. It’s exciting to continue our wayfinding in this journey back into a ‘history of journeys.’ But there’s much to be done:

- **Exploring, at a macro scale, some of the economics of advertising in The Green Book, and its relation to other national and local tourist promotions;**
- **Detailing the commercial foundations and daily rhythms, the rise and fall of some of the local businesses featured here, and others in near orbit;**
- **Bringing more personal life to the social networks that brought people to homes or tables, to communal, commercial, or spiritual space, here on familiar streets.**

For your part, we need to hear and record more local stories in this terrain, particularly from this mid-20th century era, as we march ahead through the 21st. We welcome accounts and memories from families and neighbors in Buena Vista, Lexington, and Rockbridge who hosted strangers traveling through our area. Or who directed them to others nearby – whether public businesses, or private homes – that might have been similarly accessible and hospitable.

Looking outward, when traveling away from Rockbridge: how and where did your people – across class or color lines or different decades – find good hospitality in the region and beyond?

Though all our itineraries are ever and variously beset by dead-ends and blind-spots, a good sense of history, and good-neighborly communication, may help speed us along our desired paths toward good welcomes.

Best wishes to you in your own journeys ahead, and reflections past. Hoping you’ll continue to travel with RHS in 2019, to explore the ever-evolving histories ahead of us.

Onward!!

Eric



Eric Wilson, Executive Director

ROCKBRIDGE HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Director for History, Governing Council, Virginia Association of Museums

P. O. Drawer 1409/101 East Washington St.

Lexington, VA 24450

(540) 464-1058

RockbridgeHistory.org

The Past Educating the Present: 1939-2018