

EXP. 12/31/84

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Inventory—Nomination Form

See instructions in *How to Complete National Register Forms*
Type all entries—complete applicable sections

For NPS use only
received **NOV 21 1984**
date entered **JAN 2 1985**

1. Name

historic McKissack and McKissack Buildings in Nashville (1908-1930) Thematic Resources

and/or common N/A

2. Location

street & number See Inventory Forms

N/A not for publication

city, town Nashville

N/A vicinity of

~~Congressional District~~

state Tennessee

code 047

county Davidson

code 037

3. Classification

| Category | Ownership | Status | Present Use | |
|--|---|---|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> district | <input type="checkbox"/> public | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> occupied | <input type="checkbox"/> agriculture | <input type="checkbox"/> museum |
| <input type="checkbox"/> building(s) | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> private | <input type="checkbox"/> unoccupied | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> commercial | <input type="checkbox"/> park |
| <input type="checkbox"/> structure | <input type="checkbox"/> both | <input type="checkbox"/> work in progress | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> educational | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> private residence |
| <input type="checkbox"/> site | Public Acquisition | Accessible | <input type="checkbox"/> entertainment | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> religious |
| <input type="checkbox"/> object | N/A in process | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> yes: restricted | <input type="checkbox"/> government | <input type="checkbox"/> scientific |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Thematic | <input type="checkbox"/> being considered | <input type="checkbox"/> yes: unrestricted | <input type="checkbox"/> industrial | <input type="checkbox"/> transportation |
| Group | | <input type="checkbox"/> no | <input type="checkbox"/> military | <input type="checkbox"/> other: |

4. Owner of Property

name Multiple Ownership - See Inventory Forms

street & number N/A

city, town N/A

N/A vicinity of

state N/A

5. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Davidson County Courthouse

street & number Public Square

city, town Nashville

state Tennessee

6. Representation in Existing Surveys

title Nashville - Davidson County Survey has this property been determined eligible? ☐ yes ☒ no

date 1978 ☐ federal ☐ state ☒ county ☐ local

depository for survey records Metropolitan Nashville Historical Commission

city, town Nashville

state Tennessee

7. Description

Condition

☒ excellent
☒ good
☐ fair

☐ deteriorated
☐ ruins
☐ unexposed

Check one

☐ unaltered
☒ altered

Check one

☒ original site
☐ moved date _____

Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

The buildings of the McKissack and McKissack (1908-1930) comprise this thematic nomination of four properties in Nashville, Tennessee. McKissack and McKissack was the first black owned and operated architectural firm in the United States. They designed buildings throughout the state from 1905 to the present and continue to be recognized as a leading architectural firm in the Southeast. The buildings included in the nomination are the most architecturally and historically significant structures designed by the firm before 1930.

The four buildings included in the nomination are: the Fisk Carnegie Library constructed in the Classic Revival style in 1908 (#1 NR 1978); the George Hubbard residence built in 1920 in the Colonial Revival style (#2 NR 1973); the Morris Memorial Building constructed in the Neo-Classic style in 1925 (#3); and the Capers C.M.E. Church completed in 1925 in the Neo-Classic style (#4).

The buildings included in the nomination represent the most important works of the McKissack and McKissack designed between 1908 and 1930 in Tennessee. The buildings represent a wide range of the firm's designs including a library, residence, church and commercial structure. All of the buildings are located in Nashville. Few alterations have occurred to any of the buildings and they still retain their original design and integrity.

The nomination includes the Carnegie Library which is the first large building designed by the firm's founder Moses McKissack. This building is a simple version of the Neo-Classic style in its symmetry and details. Also included is the Hubbard house completed in the Colonial Revival style which is the firm's best early residential design. McKissack and McKissack designed many churches in the early 20th century of which the Neo-Classic Capers C.M.E. Church is the best remaining example. The Morris Memorial Building is a commercial structure with Neo-Classic detailing.

The buildings in this nomination were selected from those identified through archival research to have been constructed by the firm prior to 1930. Advisement in the selection of the buildings was received from representatives of the Tennessee Historical Commission in 1984. Research was provided by Philip Thomason and Jim Draeger of Thomason and Associates of Nashville, Tennessee.

Over thirty buildings were designed by McKissack and McKissack in Tennessee between 1908 and 1930. Of these only fourteen remain standing or have been identified and of these four have been selected for inclusion in the nomination. The remaining buildings were not selected because they did not possess sufficient architectural or historical significance to meet National Register criteria.

8. Significance

| Period | Areas of Significance—Check and justify below | | | |
|---|--|---|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> prehistoric | <input type="checkbox"/> archeology-prehistoric | <input type="checkbox"/> community planning | <input type="checkbox"/> landscape architecture | <input type="checkbox"/> religion |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 1400–1499 | <input type="checkbox"/> archeology-historic | <input type="checkbox"/> conservation | <input type="checkbox"/> law | <input type="checkbox"/> science |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 1500–1599 | <input type="checkbox"/> agriculture | <input type="checkbox"/> economics | <input type="checkbox"/> literature | <input type="checkbox"/> sculpture |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 1600–1699 | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> architecture | <input type="checkbox"/> education | <input type="checkbox"/> military | <input type="checkbox"/> social/ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 1700–1799 | <input type="checkbox"/> art | <input type="checkbox"/> engineering | <input type="checkbox"/> music | <input type="checkbox"/> humanitarian |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 1800–1899 | <input type="checkbox"/> commerce | <input type="checkbox"/> exploration/settlement | <input type="checkbox"/> philosophy | <input type="checkbox"/> theater |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1900– | <input type="checkbox"/> communications | <input type="checkbox"/> industry | <input type="checkbox"/> politics/government | <input type="checkbox"/> transportation |
| | | <input type="checkbox"/> invention | | <input type="checkbox"/> other (specify) |

Specific dates 1908–1930 **Builder/Architect** McKissack and McKissack

Statement of Significance (In one paragraph)

The McKissack and McKissack Buildings in Nashville (1908–1930) Thematic Resources are nominated under criteria A and C. All of the buildings possess significance in Black History and were designed by architects McKissack and McKissack, the first black architectural firm in the United States. The buildings included in this grouping represent the best remaining works of the firm designed in the early 20th century.

The firm of McKissack and McKissack was the first architectural firm in the United States organized and staffed by black architects and draftsman. The heritage of the McKissack family has been traced to the Ashanti tribe of West Africa. In 1790 an Ashanti tribesman was sold into bondage and transported to America where he became the property of William McKissack of Charlotte, North Carolina. McKissack gave the tribesman the name of Moses and Moses later adopted the McKissack surname. William McKissack was a noted builder and he trained Moses in the arts of carpentry and construction. Moses McKissack married a Cherokee indian named Mirian in 1822 and together they produced fourteen children. Their ninth child, Gabriel Moses McKissack, was born on November 8, 1840 and he was taught the skills of carpentry and building by his father. Moses McKissack I died in 1865 and after his death Gabriel McKissack moved his family to Pulaski, Tennessee.

After moving to Pulaski Gabriel McKissack worked for many years as a craftsman and builder for several companies. His son, Moses McKissack III, was born on May 8, 1879 and grew up assisting him on many construction projects and learning building techniques through first hand experience. In addition to practical experience Moses McKissack III also completed eleven years of formal education at the Pulaski Colored High School. In 1890 Moses McKissack III began formal training in architecture as an apprentice to architect James Porter in Pulaski. For the next five years McKissack assisted Porter producing drawings, designs and helping with building construction. In 1895 McKissack worked as a construction supervisor for builders in the Pulaski area. During the period between 1895 and 1905 McKissack supervised the construction of the Vale Rolling Mill, the Ice Plant and Storage building and the Riverburg Mill. He also constructed houses in Pulaski, Mt. Pleasant and Columbia, Tennessee.

In 1905 Moses McKissack III moved to Nashville to work as a builder and architect. Granberry Jackson, Dean of Architecture and Engineering at Vanderbilt, is credited with giving McKissack his first job in Nashville which was to design his residence on 24th Avenue, North (demolished). Fellow faculty members were impressed by McKissack's building skills and he was hired to design other residences in the West End area. During these early years

9. Major Bibliographical References

See continuation sheets

10. Geographical Data

Acreeage of nominated property See inventory forms

Quadrangle name Nashville West, Tennessee

Quadrangle scale 1:24,000

UMT References See inventory forms.

A

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Verbal boundary description and justification

See inventory forms

List all states and counties for properties overlapping state or county boundaries

state N/A code N/A county N/A code N/A

state N/A code N/A county N/A code N/A

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Philip Thomason, James Draeger

organization Thomason and Associates

date August 17, 1984

street & number 1700 Hayes Street, Suite 202

telephone 615-320-5732

city or town Nashville

state Tennessee

12. State Historic Preservation Officer Certification

The evaluated significance of this property within the state is:

 national state X local

As the designated State Historic Preservation Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the National Park Service.

Deputy
State Historic Preservation Officer signature Herbert L. Haysen

title Executive Director, Tennessee Historical Commission

date 11/7/84

For NPS use only

I hereby certify that this property is included in the National Register

Patrick Anderson

date 1/2/85

Keeper of the National Register

Attest: See Continuation Sheet for Justification date

Chief of Registration

United States Department of the Interior
National Park ServiceNational Register of Historic Places
Inventory—Nomination Form

McKissack and McKissack

Continuation sheet Buildings in Nashville

Item number 8

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(1908-1930) Thematic Resources

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McKissack also completed an International Correspondence School architecture course. In 1907 McKissack was listed in the Nashville City Directory as a contractor with offices at 1001 Eleventh Avenue, North. In 1908 McKissack moved his office into 413 Fourth Avenue, North which was in the black business section of the city.

In 1908 McKissack received his first large commission, the Carnegie Library on the campus of Fisk University (1). The building has not been significantly altered and is listed on the National Register as part of the Fisk University Historic District. This two-story brick building was designed in a restrained Neo-Classic style with a stone columned porch, a stone belt course and a large hipped roof of clay tiles and bracketed eaves. The interior contains a two-story light well which provides illumination into the building. The building stands as one of the first major structures designed by a black architect in the country.

In 1909 Moses McKissack III began to officially advertise as an architect in Nashville. The City Directory lists McKissack as a "colored architect" along with eighteen other architects in the city. In 1912 McKissack designed the three-story main campus building for the Turner Normal and Industrial School for Negroes in Shelbyville, Tennessee. This building has an extended central bay and rests on a limestone foundation. Although the building still stands it has been badly altered and is not eligible for the National Register. During these early years McKissack also designed dormitories on the campuses of Roger Williams University in Nashville and Lane College in Jackson, Tennessee. None of these buildings have survived.

During the early years of the firm Moses McKissack's younger brother Calvin also worked in the company. Calvin McKissack was born in 1890 and attended Fisk University from 1905 to 1909. Like his brother, Calvin also received an architectural degree through an International Correspondance School course as well as receiving instruction at Springfield College in Springfield, Massachusetts. After receiving his practical training from his brother, Calvin moved to Dallas, Texas in 1912 where he practiced architecture for three years. While in Texas he designed several black schools and churches. In 1915 Calvin McKissack returned back to Nashville and taught architectural drawing at Tennessee A&I State College and Pearl High School.

By 1920 Moses McKissack's architectural practice increased and he began designing buildings on a regular basis for both black and white clients. Residences designed by McKissack began to appear in all sections of the city. The majority of these were in the Colonial Revival style of the period. Between 1918 and 1922 McKissack designed over a dozen residences in east and west Nashville and Belle Meade. Among those still in existence are: the Bastian residence at 3722 Central Avenue, 1921; the Sexton residence at 3506 Byron Avenue, 1921; the House residence at 340 Chesterfield, 1919; and the Comer residence at 1411 Eastland Avenue, 1920. All of the houses are good examples of the Colonial Revival style and show McKissack's designs to be in the

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(1908-1930) Thematic Resources

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mainstream of architectural theory during the period. The Bastian residence and the Comer residence are both contributing buildings in two of Nashville's residential historic districts.

One of the most significant residences designed by McKissack in these years was the George Hubbard home at 1109 First Avenue, South built in 1920 (2). Located in Nashville, the Meharry Medical College was one of the first institutions in the country to train black doctors. Doctor George Hubbard was one of the first directors of the institution and the alumni and trustees raised \$17,000 to construct his home on First Avenue, South. Moses McKissack was hired as architect and his design was a large Colonial Revival home in the "Four-Square" tradition. This house features rectangular porch columns, a fanlight and sidelight at the front entrance, bay windows and a hipped roof with exposed rafters. This home has not been significantly altered and is the best remaining example of McKissack's early residential designs. Because of its architectural and historical significance the Hubbard House was listed on the National Register in 1973.

In 1922 Calvin McKissack joined his brother Moses to form McKissack and McKissack, Architects and the firm also offered contracting services with a number of masons, carpenters and laborers on staff. In 1922 both Moses and Calvin submitted their credentials to be licensed by the newly formed Tennessee Board of Architects and Engineers Examiners. Their applications listed the many buildings they had designed but several of the Board's members questioned granting a license to the firm. The majority of members agreed with Carlton Brush when he wrote "I...request you act on without regard to color as we have no authority to disqualify any race". After further review the firm of McKissack and McKissack was duly licensed to practice architecture in Tennessee.

A rising black middle-class in Nashville in the 1920s opened up new opportunities for the firm and this decade saw McKissack's architectural practice gain statewide recognition. In 1924 the firm was awarded a contract to design the Morris Memorial Building at the corner of Fourth Avenue and Charlotte Avenue (3). This building was commissioned to hold the offices of the Sunday School Publishing Board of the National Baptist Convention, U.S.A. The building was completed in August of 1925 and formally dedicated in April of 1926. This black religious organization originally used one half of the building for its printing operations while the other half was set aside to provide space for Nashville's growing black businesses.

This large four story building is one of McKissack and McKissack's finest designs of the 1920s. It is designed in the Neo-Classic style with an exterior sheathing of Indiana limestone. Over the main entrance is a large fanlight and Doric motif pilasters are spaced evenly along the first story. Above the first story is a cornice with modillion blocks, metopes and guttae. At the roofline is

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an elaborate frieze with garlands and wreaths, a modillioned cornice and balustrade. The interior also contains significant detailing with a central light well and a stained glass skylight which illuminates the first floor lobby. After the Morris Memorial building was completed McKissack and McKissack moved into offices on the first and second floor and it continues to be the main offices of the firm.

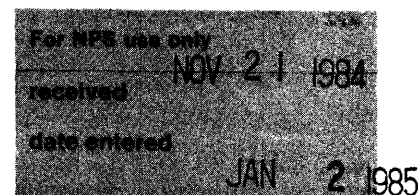
One of the major sources of work for the company during the early 20th century was the designing of black churches throughout America. One of their best designs of the period can be found in the Capers C.M.E. Church at 319 15th Avenue, North (4). This building was constructed in 1925 in the Neo-Classic style. The two-story brick structure has a large portico of four Doric pilasters supporting a pediment. Windows on the building have rounded arches with stone shoulders and keystones. The interior of the church features large stained glass windows and a coffered ceiling. Many in the McKissack family have been members of the church and several of the stained glass windows are dedicated to the family. The building has not been significantly altered and is one of the best examples of the firm's ecclesiastical buildings.

Throughout the mid-1920s McKissack and McKissack gained recognition and respect for its designs and prominence in black business throughout the state. The firm continued to design residences and churches for many individuals and congregations. The McKissacks also became recognized as leaders in the black business community. In 1925 Calvin McKissack was elected president of the city's Negro Board of Trade. Moses McKissack was a major stockholder in black business's such as the Universal Life Insurance Company of Memphis and the Penny Savings Bank in Nashville. The firm's involvement with black business affairs increased the McKissack's reputation and attracted to them a growing number of clients including the City of Nashville and the State of Tennessee.

In the late 1920s the firm received several contracts to design school buildings for the city and the state. Founded in 1911, Tennessee State was originally known as the Tennessee Agricultural and Industrial College for Negroes. The school was one of the most important black colleges in the state and many new buildings were constructed in the late 1920s. McKissack and McKissack received the contract to design the main library in 1927 which was completed in the Neo-Classic style. This building was remodeled by the firm in 1950 and is not eligible for the National Register. Many other buildings were completed by the firm on the campus in the 1930s and 1940s.

In addition to buildings on the campus of Tennessee State McKissack and McKissack also designed several high school buildings in Nashville. Perhaps their best early design was Washington Junior High School on Nineteenth Avenue, North (demolished). This building featured a large central portico with an Ionic colonnade. Other high schools designed by the firm included Pearl High School built in 1936 and Ford Green School constructed in 1939.

Moses McKissack was one of the major stockholders in the Universal Life

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McKissack and McKissack
Continuation sheet Buildings in Nashville Item number 8
(1908-1930) Thematic Resources

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Insurance Company which was formed in 1923 in Memphis. This company was the first black owned and operated insurance company in Tennessee and in 1929 McKissack and McKissack was chosen as architects for the new headquarters of the company to be constructed on Hernando Street in Memphis (demolished). This period also witnessed the construction of several other notable buildings by the firm which are not longer extant. The finest Art Deco design by the firm was the C.M.E. Publishing House constructed in Jackson, Tennessee in 1931. This building featured entrances with stepped geometric doors and transoms, inset floral decoration on the upper facade and a stepped parapet. This building was occupied by a black publishing house until its demolition in the late 1970s. A second Art Deco publishing house was the A.M.E. Publishing House constructed on Eighth Avenue, South in Nashville. This building featured extensive decoration at the roofline and it also stood until the 1970s. Both of these designs show the expertise of the firm in the Art Deco style but regrettably are no longer extant.

By 1930 the number of black architects in the United States had risen to forty-five, however, most black architects were employed by firms headed by whites. The majority of architectural firms headed by blacks were centered in the large cities of the Midwest and Northeast and McKissack and McKissack continued to be one of the only firms owned and operated by blacks in the South. Like many other architectural firms, McKissack and McKissack had difficulty surviving the Depression. By 1935 the firm was forced to layoff most of its work force and secure a \$125,000 loan to avoid bankruptcy. Fortunately the firm received several Works Progress Administration contracts to design public schools in the late 1930s and remained in business. The firm also designed a residence in 1937 for the son of former Tennessee Governor Albert Roberts on Lebanon Road.

By the early 1940s the firm began to bid on contracts outside of Tennessee. The architectural licensing boards in states such as Alabama and Georgia questioned the qualifications of the firm when requested for practicing licenses. The Tennessee Board responded that the firm was "...somewhat unique in the fact that it is one of the few Negro architectural firms in the country. They have done some creditable work in Nashville, including several large school buildings running into a total cost of several hundred thousand dollars". In 1941 the firm was registered to practice architecture in Alabama and in 1943 licenses were granted in Georgia, South Carolina, Florida and Mississippi.

McKissack and McKissack received international recognition in 1942 when they were hired by the federal government to construct the 99th Pursuit Squadron Air Base at Tuskegee, Alabama. The contract award of \$5,700,000 was the largest contract ever granted by the federal government to a black company. During construction the company had a payroll of 1,600 persons with one-fourth of them white laborers and three-fourth black laborers. Construction was completed on time and as one author noted "No racial friction occurred among the mixed working men". Because of their achievements Moses and Calvin

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McKissack received the Spaulding Medal in 1942 as the outstanding Negro business firm in the United States.

The company also gained prominence in the 1940s through their work on public housing projects. They designed several government housing projects throughout the country, the most notable of which was the one million dollar College Hill development in Nashville. Their efforts in this area led to Moses McKissack's appointment to a conference on housing problems during the Roosevelt administration.

After 1945 McKissack and McKissack's volume of business grew rapidly and they began to design buildings throughout the United States. In 1952 Moses McKissack died at the age of 73 and Calvin McKissack took over as president. In recognition of Moses McKissack's contribution to Nashville, the city named McKissack Elementary School on 38th Avenue, North in his honor in 1954. Calvin McKissack remained as president of the firm until his death in 1968 and the company became operated by Moses' son, William DeBerry McKissack. By 1975 McKissack and McKissack had completed over 3,000 projects of which 2,000 were church buildings. The firm is recognized as one of the leaders in ecclesiastical architecture in the country.

The architectural firm of McKissack and McKissack was the first black owned and operated architectural firm in the United States. Established by Moses McKissack in 1905 the company continues to be an important contributor to the architectural profession. The four buildings included in this nomination represent the best remaining designs executed by the firm before 1930.

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Multiple Resource Area
Thematic Group

dnr-11

Name McKissack and McKissack Buildings in Nashville 1908-1930 Thematic Resources
State Davidson County, TENNESSEE

accept cover-PWA 1/2/85

Nomination/Type of Review

Date/Signature

1. Carnegie Library

Substantive Review *for* Keeper

Patrick Andrews 1/2/85

Attest

2. Hubbard House

Entered in the
National Register

for Keeper

Shelene Byers 1/2/85

Attest

3. Morris Memorial Building

Entered in the
National Register

for Keeper

Shelene Byers 1/2/85

Attest

4. Capers C.M.E. Church

Entered in the
National Register

for Keeper

Shelene Byers 1/2/85

Attest

5.

Keeper

Attest

6.

Keeper

Attest

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10.

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