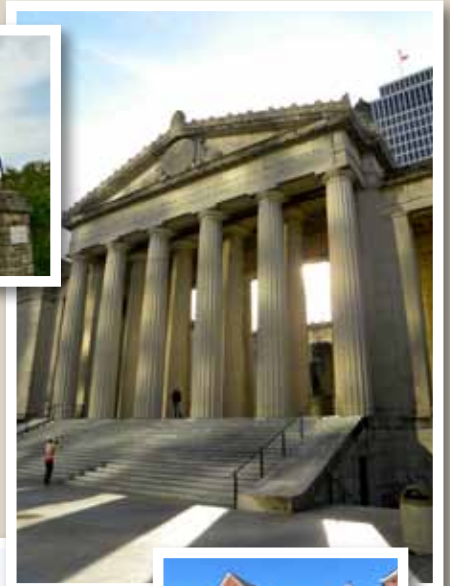


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# NASHVILLE'S CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT



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PHOTOGRAPHY / GRAPHIC DESIGN BY DANNY PROCTOR

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# A WALKING AND DRIVING TOUR

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# NASHVILLE'S CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT: A WALKING AND DRIVING TOUR

This walking and driving tour brochure provides the locations and history of places that played a key role in Nashville's Civil Rights Movement. These places included churches, schools, universities, commercial buildings, recreational facilities, and other types of properties. The identification of these places provides a direct physical connection to the past and helps people today to understand how local civil rights activists worked to promote a free and just society in Nashville. Published by Historic Nashville, Inc., with support from the Tennessee Preservation Trust and the MTSU Center for Historic Preservation, this brochure's goal is to promote sites in Nashville associated with the Civil Rights Movement and help preserve the remaining places where important events occurred.

The following properties are organized into six broad chronological and thematic sections:

- **EARLY CIVIL RIGHTS EFFORTS, 1866-1955**
- **PUBLIC SCHOOL DESEGREGATION, 1955-1957**
- **THE NASHVILLE CHRISTIAN LEADERSHIP COUNCIL, 1959**
- **THE NASHVILLE STUDENT MOVEMENT AND THE SIT-INS, 1959-1960**
- **THE AFTERMATH OF THE SIT-INS, 1960-1964**
- **THE PUBLIC SCHOOL BUSING CRISIS, 1971-1980s**

Each section is introduced by a brief contextual statement and is followed by a list of significant properties and their descriptions. The survey only includes extant buildings and places with their construction dates if they are known.





# EARLY CIVIL RIGHTS EFFORTS, 1866-1955

**A**fter the Civil War, African Americans in Nashville and across the state worked to secure the right to vote, hold public office, and lobby for civil rights legislation. Higher education institutions were established in Nashville during this time for freedmen, including Fisk University (1866) and Meharry Medical College (1867). These schools were later joined by the Tennessee Agricultural and Industrial State Normal School (1912), later renamed Tennessee State University. Nashville's growing African-American population established new businesses like banks, real estate and law firms, insurance companies, business leagues, and philanthropic organizations. Perhaps most significantly for the modern Civil Rights Movement of the mid-twentieth century, black people after the Civil War founded scores of churches in Nashville which would form the religious, social, and political base for the community. When more radical civil rights activism erupted in the 1950s and 1960s, Nashville's long history of African-American leadership helped to guide it to ultimate success.

## 1. FISK UNIVERSITY

1000 17th Ave. N. between Charlotte Ave. and Jefferson St.

Founded in 1866 by northern missionaries, Fisk University attracted black students and faculty from around the nation and provided a ready environment for the discussion of race relations in Nashville and America. Fisk's progressive reputation was solidified in 1924 when racial tensions between students and the school's white administration resulted in a student strike and forced the president's resignation. In 1944, sociology professor Charles S. Johnson established the university's Race Relations Institute to study the social problems of racial discrimination and promote equality. Fisk's many activist faculty members and students, both black and white, played a central role in Nashville's movement for civil rights in the 1950s and 1960s.



## 2. TENNESSEE STATE UNIVERSITY

3500 John A. Merritt Blvd.

TSU was founded in 1912 as the Tennessee Agricultural and Industrial State Normal School, a teacher training institution for blacks in Middle Tennessee. Many students from the university were involved in the sit-ins and other protests during the late 1950s and 1960s.

## 3. HADLEY PARK

1025 28th Ave. N.

Established in 1912, the 34-acre Hadley Park is considered the first public park in the United States built for African Americans and is located on the former site of John L. Hadley's plantation. In 1873, Frederick Douglass addressed former slaves from the front porch of the Hadley house which stood in the park until 1948.



MORRIS MEMORIAL BUILDING

## 4. MORRIS MEMORIAL BLDG.

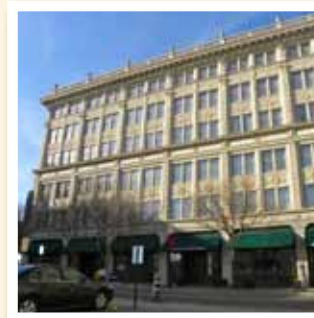
330 Charlotte Ave. (1924)

Built by the National Baptist Convention, U.S.A., Inc., this building was designed by Nashville architects McKissack & McKissack, one of the first African-American architectural firms in the nation. It is the last remaining building of the historic black business district at the corner of Fourth and Charlotte Avenues.

## 5. MEIGS SCHOOL

123 Douglas Ave.

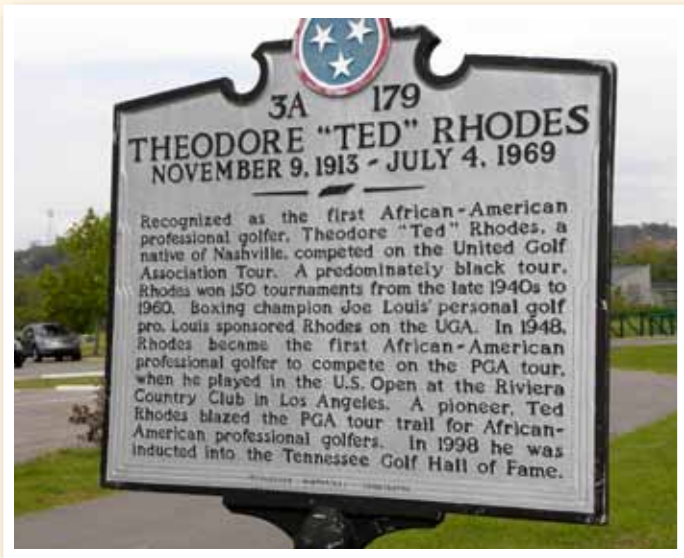
Meigs was established in 1883 as an African-American elementary school. In 1886, an African-American woman named Sandy Porter attempted to enroll her son, James Rice Porter, in the all-white Fogg High School in downtown Nashville where he was denied admission on account of his race. After Porter and the black community protested to the board of education and city council that Nashville provided no high school facilities for their children, the city converted Meigs into the city's first black high school.



## 6. DOCTOR'S BUILDING

706 Church St.

In 1947, a Jewish doctor and Nashville native named Lawrence Grossman opened the city's first integrated medical clinic on the third floor of the downtown Doctor's Building. At the time, African Americans had few options for medical treatment and the only hospitals open to them were Hubbard Hospital and Nashville General Hospital. Dr. Grossman felt compelled to open his integrated clinic as a result of his experience treating black troops during World War II, where he served as an Army surgeon. Grossman's bold effort resulted in a boycott of his office by many of his regular white patients, the alienation of his colleagues, and even death threats. By 1958 Grossman had overcome this controversy and was elected president of the Nashville Academy of Medicine which he then promptly integrated.



## PUBLIC SCHOOL DESEGREGATION, 1955-1957

### 7. CUMBERLAND GOLF CLUB (now known as Ted Rhodes Golf Club), 26th Ave. N. and Metro Center Blvd.

In June of 1954, the nine-hole Cumberland Golf Club opened in order to meet local African Americans' demands for access to public golfing facilities. Before this time, the city owned and operated three other golf courses – Percy Warner, McCabe, and Shelby – all off-limits to black players. Though the Cumberland proved very popular with black golfers in the city, its construction was opposed by civil rights luminaries like Z. A. Looby and Avon Williams, who argued that the city ought to integrate its existing courses rather than build a new one. Looby and Williams' wishes were granted on November 7, 1955, when the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that the "separate but equal" segregation standard was unconstitutional at all tax-supported facilities, including public parks, playgrounds, and golf courses. By February of 1956, all of Nashville's golf courses and other public recreational facilities were legally desegregated.



### 8. FRIERSON OFFICE BLDG. 1310 Jefferson St.

John Wesley Frierson was a successful black real estate professional and supporter of civil rights activities in Nashville during the early and mid-twentieth century. Frierson built this two-story brick commercial building on Jefferson St. in 1954 and was a home for the Nashville branch of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). Nashville's local NAACP branch still resides in the building.



On September 1, 1955, one year after the landmark 1954 U.S. Supreme Court case *Brown vs. Board of Education*, a black student named Robert W. Kelley attempted to enroll at East High School where he was turned away because he was black. In response, Kelley's father, A.Z. Kelley, secured representation by two of Nashville's most prominent African-American lawyers, Z. Alexander Looby and Avon N. Williams, Jr., as well as future Supreme Court justice Thurgood Marshall, and filed the class-action suit *Kelley vs. Board of Education of Nashville*. Kelley's victory in 1956 led to the desegregation of Nashville's school system in 1957 according to an innovative grade-a-year plan, subsequently called the "Nashville Plan."

Under this arrangement, one grade per year was desegregated starting with the first grade. During the first year of desegregation six formerly all-white elementary schools admitted a total of fifteen black first graders. These schools included Hattie Cotton Elementary (demolished), Buena Vista Elementary, Clemons Elementary (demolished), Glenn Elementary (demolished), Fehr Elementary, and R. W. Jones Elementary. Davidson County schools caught up with Nashville in 1961 when they desegregated grades 1-4 all at once and then proceeded with a similar grade-a-year-plan. The Nashville plan received criticism from many black leaders, including Looby and Williams, who believed that it did not integrate schools fast enough or as thoroughly as it should have.

In 1966 the Metro Council abandoned the grade-a-year plan and desegregated the entire school system at one time.

### 9. EAST HIGH SCHOOL

110 Gallatin Ave. (1932)

East High triggered the desegregation case *Kelley vs. Board of Education of Nashville*.

### 10. BUENA VISTA ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

1531 Ninth Ave. N. (1931)

Buena Vista was one of the six formerly segregated schools to admit black first-graders in 1957. Three black students were admitted on the first day of school under the Nashville plan.







### 11. FEHR ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

1620 Fifth Ave. N. (1924)

Fehr admitted four black students in 1957.

### 12. R.W. JONES ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

1800 Ninth Ave. N.

R.W. Jones admitted four black students in 1957.



## THE NASHVILLE CHRISTIAN LEADERSHIP COUNCIL, 1959

**T**he Nashville Christian Leadership Council (NCLC) was organized in 1958 as a local branch of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC), established a year earlier in Atlanta by Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. A grassroots civil rights organization, the NCLC held as its guiding principles the notion of Christian brotherly love, liberation through the social gospel, and non-violent protest techniques. The organization's board of directors was composed of several local pastors and other leaders, including the Rev. Kelly Miller Smith, the minister of First Baptist Church Capitol Hill and the NCLC's principal leader. Rev. Smith began his work as pastor of First Baptist in May of 1951 and was president of the local chapter of the NAACP in the mid-1950s. The NCLC was initially formed to help initiate the SCLC's voter registration drive and to supplement the pre-existing legal work of the NAACP through community organization and activism. The organization served as the institutional link between Nashville's older generation of civil rights leaders and the younger generation of student activists who were eager to confront segregation through direct non-violent protest.



CAPERS MEMORIAL CME

### 13. CAPERS MEMORIAL CME, 319 15th Ave. N. (1925)

Built by the local African-American architectural firm McKissack & McKissack, Capers Memorial is one of the oldest black congregations in Nashville. Capers hosted the inaugural meeting of the NCLC on January 18, 1958. The pastor of the church at this time was Joseph A. Johnson, Jr., the first African American student at Vanderbilt University.

### 14. CLARK MEMORIAL UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

1014 14th Ave. N. (1945)

The fellowship hall of Clark Memorial housed most of the NCLC's non-violent training workshops conducted by James Lawson from the autumn of 1958 through the early 1960s.



## THE NASHVILLE STUDENT MOVEMENT AND THE SIT-INS, 1959-1960

**T**he university students who took part in the Nashville sit-ins and other non-violent protests were intimately associated with and received guidance from the NCLC but they thought of themselves as a separate organization with their own officers, committees, and rules of conduct. In 1959 they took as their official name the "Nashville Student Movement." This group included students from all of Nashville's black universities as well as Vanderbilt University. Among the most important young people associated with the Nashville Student Movement were James Lawson, the Vanderbilt divinity student who taught classes in non-violent protest, John Lewis, and Diane Nash.

By 1959, student activists focused on downtown retail stores as the most galling example of racial hypocrisy and injustice in Nashville, for African Americans were allowed to purchase clothing and other goods here but they were not allowed to rest or refresh themselves at the stores' lunch counters. The NCLC and the Nashville Student Movement waged a two-pronged attack on segregation in downtown. The first strategy used student sit-ins to publicly dramatize the moral injustice of lunch-counter segregation. The second strategy took place simultaneously to demonstrate the black community's buying power through an economic boycott of downtown retail establishments.



The sit-in campaign involved mass sit-ins at downtown lunch counters by students from local historically black universities. This effort was built on the nonviolent protest techniques taught by James Lawson. The sit-ins occurred from late 1959 through the spring of 1960. These nonviolent protests drew intense anger from shopkeepers and violence by many local whites as well as national media attention.

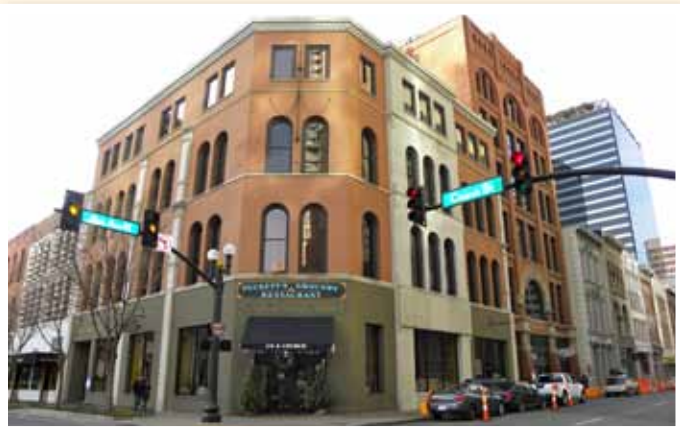
The pressure placed on downtown merchants by the highly disruptive and public nature of the sit-ins was compounded by the success of the economic boycott. It was estimated at the time that African-American customers spent nearly \$7 million annually in downtown stores, often representing up to 15% of stores' revenue. Under pressure to restore public order and improve flagging business, Harvey's and Cain-Sloan department stores finally agreed to integrate their lunch counters and eventually persuaded other downtown retailers to do the same.



### 15. HARVEY'S DEPARTMENT STORE

530 Church St. (1894)

Harvey's was one of the largest and most popular department stores in downtown Nashville from 1942 until 1984. Because of its conspicuous location and the fact that many black Nashvillians shopped there, it was chosen as the site of the first of two "test" sit-ins conducted by students on November 28, 1959. The test sit-ins were intended to officially demonstrate that downtown lunch counters were segregated, a move that gave legitimacy to the students' crusade. Harvey's was also the first of two downtown retailers, along with Cain-Sloan department store, to succumb to the protestors' pressure and desegregate its lunch counters on May 10, 1960. Most of Harvey's complex was demolished for a parking lot in the 1990s, but a corner section of the store remains at the corner of Sixth Avenue and Church Street.



### 16. CAIN-SLOAN DEPT. STORE

501 Church St. (in St. Cloud's Corner building, 1869)

Just one block east of Harvey's, Cain-Sloan was the site of the second test sit-in on December 5, 1959, and was later a target during the actual sit-in campaign on February 27, 1960. The main building was located across the street from this location and was eventually demolished for a parking lot, but by 1960 the store had expanded into St. Cloud's Corner.



### 17. WOOLWORTH'S

221-225 Fifth Ave. N. (c. 1930)

Now home to Dollar General, the Woolworth building was the site of two sit-ins, the first on February 13, 1960, and the second on February 27, 1960.

### 18. S.H. KRESS & CO.

237 Fifth Ave. N. (1935)

The Kress building was the site of two sit-ins, the first on February 13, 1960, and the second on February 20, 1960.



### 19. WALGREENS

224-226 Fifth Ave. N.

Walgreens lunch counter was the site of a sit-in on February 20, 1960.



### 20. GRIGGS HALL

American Baptist College, 1800 World Baptist Center Dr.

Built in 1925 as the first building on the campus of the American Baptist Theological Seminary, now known as American Baptist College, Griggs Hall was the dormitory that housed and provided meeting space for several of the Nashville Student Movement's most important activists, including John Lewis, James Bevel, and Bernard LaFayette. The seminary's campus was listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 2012 due to its role in the local Civil Rights Movement.







## 21. DAVIDSON COUNTY COURTHOUSE (1936)

In the early morning hours of April 19, 1960, a bomb was thrown at civil rights lawyer Z. Alexander Looby's Meharry Blvd. home. The bomb damaged the front of the modest brick house but Looby and his wife, who were sleeping in the rear of the house, emerged unharmed. That afternoon, several thousand protestors gathered at nearby Fisk University and began a silent march to the Davidson County courthouse on the Public Square in downtown Nashville. The protestors confronted Mayor Ben West on the courthouse steps where, after pointed questioning by Fisk student Diane Nash, the mayor conceded that segregation was immoral and that the city's lunch counters should be integrated.

This confrontation was one of the most important moments of the Nashville Civil Rights Movement and represented a distinct turning point in the downtown desegregation campaign.

## 22. HENDERSON A. JOHNSON GYMNASIUM, FISK UNIVERSITY

On April 20, 1960, the day after Z. A. Looby's house was bombed by segregationists, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. visited Nashville to show support for the city's local movement and encourage activists to continue their work. That evening, King addressed a crowd of four thousand assembled in the Fisk University gym where he proclaimed the now-famous words, "I came to Nashville not to bring inspiration, but to gain inspiration from the great movement that has taken place in this community."



## THE AFTERMATH OF THE SIT-INS, 1960-1964

Following the success of the initial lunch counter sit-ins, Nashville students and other activists expanded their desegregation efforts between 1960 and 1964 to include other businesses and public facilities throughout downtown and the rest of the city. In addition to the desegregation of services, protestors focused on fair employment practices. Targets for protests and other negotiations included restaurants, movie theaters, hotels, grocery stores, and recreational facilities. Most of the places chosen for demonstrations during this time no longer exist. Though occasional protests continued to bubble

up after 1964, by this time public demonstrations had for the most part given way to behind the scenes negotiations.

## 23. YWCA

211 Seventh Ave. N.

Both the YMCA and YWCA were picketed by protestors during the winter of 1961.



## 24. HERMITAGE HOTEL

231 Sixth Ave., N.

The NCLC negotiated with several segregated hotels in the city, including the Hermitage and Andrew Jackson (demolished) hotels in downtown. By the summer of 1963 the Hermitage Hotel's services were integrated, but not its employment practices. Historic Nashville owns a preservation easement on this property, which protects its exterior from demolition and inappropriate renovations.

## 25. THE ARCADE

228 Fifth Ave. N. (1903)

The site of many individual retail shops and restaurants, the Arcade was the site of desegregation demonstrations after the sit-ins.





## 26. WAR MEMORIAL BLDG.

Between 1960 and 1964, the NCLC organized weekly mass community meetings as a way to keep the community informed about the progress of the sit-ins and other desegregation issues. Mass meetings were usually held at black churches throughout the city, but organizers also managed to host one in the downtown War Memorial Auditorium in September of 1961.

## 27. EL DORADO HOTEL

*2806 Ed Temple Blvd.*

The NCLC arranged for Harry Belafonte and Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. to stay in this hotel while they were in town for Belafonte's SCLC-sponsored concert at the Ryman Auditorium in September of 1961. Belafonte became ill and the concert was cancelled. Only the roadside neon sign remains today.



# THE PUBLIC SCHOOL BUSING CRISIS, 1970-1980S

**T**hough Nashville and Davidson County's public schools were legally desegregated by 1970, pre-existing patterns of residential segregation and neighborhood school zoning meant that most schools remained either all black or all white. In response to this embedded pattern of community segregation, Avon Williams, Jr., who was by this time a state senator, lobbied in federal court for a new plan to ensure racial balance in all public schools. The Federal government responded with a controversial plan for busing students. Implemented in 1971, the court-ordered busing plan essentially redrew school attendance zones across neighborhood boundaries in order to guarantee racial balance. The result was a new system of "comprehensive high schools" that combined black and white high school student bodies and used buses to transport students, sometimes from very far away, to the newly zoned schools. A total of seventy one schools were included in the court-ordered area. The busing plan was met with staunch resistance from parents of both races, but especially from whites. When public school desegregation began in 1957, the school system began to suffer from "white flight" when white parents moved their children to suburban public schools or enrolled them in so-called "segregation academies," private schools intentionally designed to exclude black students. But with the advent of the busing plan, the floodgates of white flight flew open. When the plan was implemented in 1971 the public school system lost 8,600 white students, or eighteen percent of its white student body.

## 28. PEARL HIGH SCHOOL

*613 17th Ave. N.*

Just a few blocks south of Fisk University, Pearl High School was built in 1936. Until desegregation, Pearl and Cameron were the only two black high schools in Nashville. Many of Pearl's students were actively involved in the Nashville Student Movement, participating in marches and demonstrations in the city. When the Tennessee Secondary School Athletic Association (TSSAA) desegregated in 1966, Pearl's boys' basketball team won the state championship. The school closed in 1983 to meet federal court-ordered busing requirements and was combined with the nearby Cohn High school to create the Pearl-Cohn Comprehensive High School. Today, Pearl is home to the Martin Luther King Magnet High School for Health Sciences and Engineering.



## 29. COHN HIGH SCHOOL

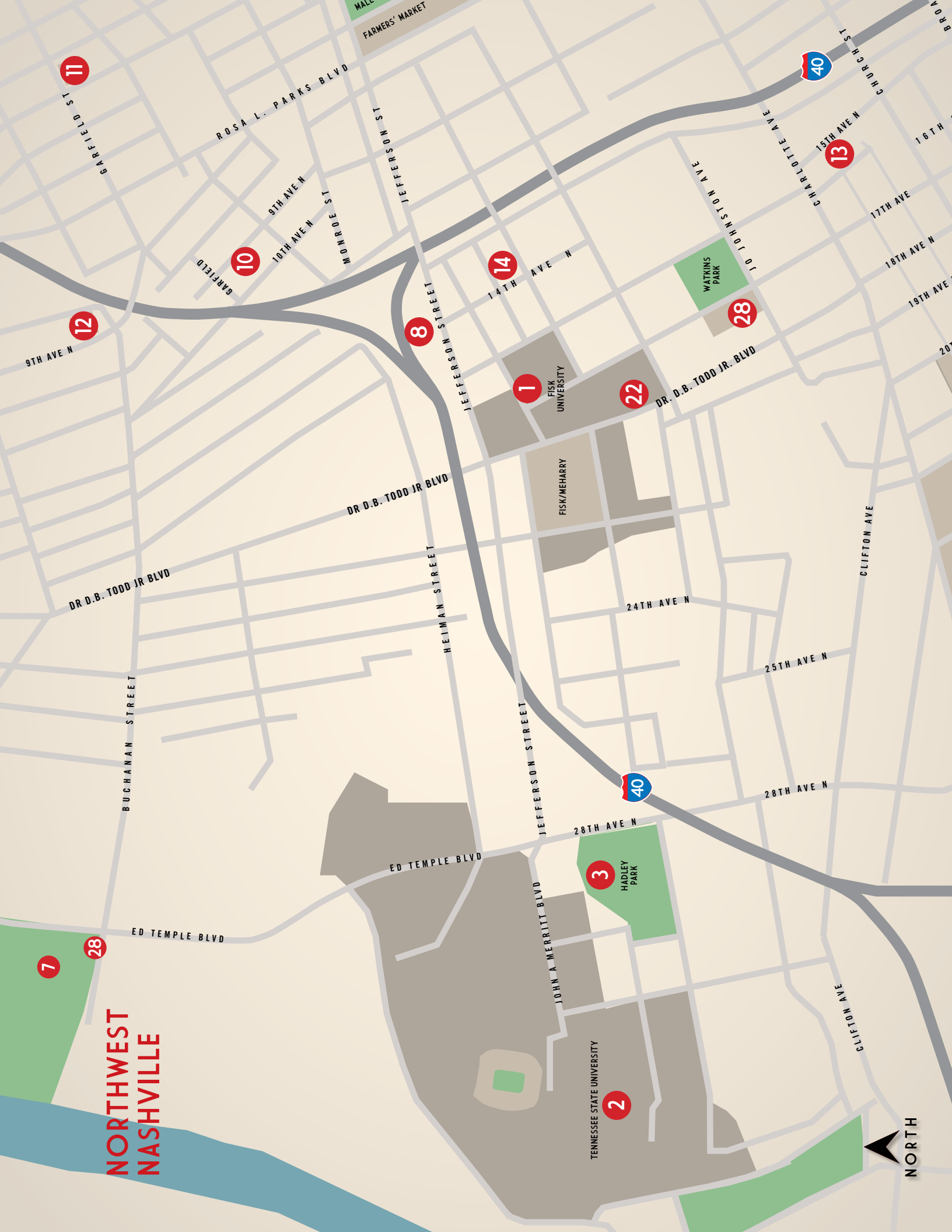
*4801 Park Ave.*

The predominantly white Cohn High School was combined with Pearl High School in 1983 to create Pearl-Cohn Comprehensive High School.





# NORTHWEST NASHVILLE



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NORTH