



December 3, 1855

Court of Common Pleas
Slave Auction

1863

St. James AME
Established

1873

Lot Purchased for
2nd Missionary Baptist Church

1890

Cobb School
Built

June 1863

Ivers Square
African American Enlistment

1882

Fairmount Cemetery Burial of First
U.S. Colored Infantry Veteran

Ivers Square

44 North Lorimer Street

At the start of the Civil War in 1861, the Court of Common Pleas had become the headquarters for the occupying command of the Union Army. Just eight years after the Sloan auction in front of the Court of Common Pleas the first enlistment of men of African descent was allowed for Union forces in Cape Girardeau. These first enlistees, many of whom left enslavement and their families, were attached to the 56th US Colored Infantry and served primarily in Helena, Arkansas. At least 249 African American men enlisted at the Courthouse from June 1863-June 1864 and were declared free - as long as they survived the war.

The park behind the Courthouse was renamed Ivers Square in 2017, honoring James Ivers and his wife Harriet. Jim and Harriet lived apart after their 1853 marriage for years as they were owned by different families. In 1859 Harriet and the couple's three children were purchased by John Ivers, Jim's owner. Known as "Smith" or "Jim" most of his life, he took the surname of his owner when he enlisted in the Union Army at this site on June 18, 1863. James Ivers served as a private in the 3rd Arkansas Volunteer Infantry of African Descent (later known as the 56th United States Colored Infantry). Like most of his fellow volunteers, he was stationed in Helena, Arkansas, where he unloaded government supplies from steamers. He died of consumption on Oct. 1, 1863, in the regimental hospital, and is buried in an unmarked grave in Helena.

Years later, Harriet received a widow's pension and purchased a home at the northwest corner of Middle and Jefferson streets from James McClean, the son of one of Harriet's former masters, in 1876. Harriet worked as a washerwoman and died in 1897, and was, as local historian Denise Lincoln writes, a "pioneer woman of freedom".



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Second Missionary Baptist Church

428 South Frederick

This building is the historic site of the Second Missionary Baptist Church. Baptist history in Cape Girardeau dates from 1834 when slave owners and slaves attended church together. Second Missionary Baptist Church was organized after the Civil War and Missouri's Emancipation, when black members chose, as an expression of their new freedom, to meet separately from white congregants and took their membership to organize their own congregation. After meeting in the homes of church members, this lot was purchased in 1873 and a frame building was constructed, most likely under the leadership of Reverend John Kelly. Stories of the initial construction detail Amanda Jones carrying bricks in her apron to her husband Charlie as he worked on the masonry. The building you see today replaced that frame building in 1905. The original neighborhood surrounding this church included names you'll recognize among the ranks of the U.S. Colored Troop veterans and widows such as Harriet Ivers and Mahala Swan, who became some of the first women of color to own property along this block. Today, the Second Missionary Baptist Church meets in a newer building at 835 Beaudene Lane.



St. James AME

516 North Street

In 1863, two years before slavery was abolished in Missouri, the St. James Society in the Methodist tradition was established by Rev. Winston, Rev. Burks, Professor Samuel Newlin and Jesse Stanton. Winston was given his freedom and purchased his wife's freedom in the decade before the Civil War and together they took the surname of Johnson. Little is recorded in the historic record about Rev. Burks. Newlin was a free man who taught in the first schools for African Americans after the Civil War while Jesse (who took the surname Stanton upon receiving his freedom) remained enslaved until Missouri's Emancipation in 1865. This group of men set out to organize and provide a station for circuit-riding preachers to hold services for the African American community, and in 1867 St. James held their first services in the old Union Aid building at the corner of Fountain and Bellevue streets. In 1870, St. James' fourth pastor, Rev. Spottswood Rice, a U.S. Colored Troop veteran, led the congregation to purchase property and build the church you see today. Additions over the years include the central square tower added in 1892 and the raised basement that was dug in 1926. St. James African Methodist Episcopal Church is an active congregation that continues advocating for social justice today.

African American History

DRIVING TOUR



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Historic Locations and Sites**

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