

Mrs. Dorothy Ethel Nash Tookes

Mrs. Dorothy Ethel Nash Tookes was a staunch advocate for Leon County Schools and for the City of Tallahassee. In 1935, at the age of 31, Mrs. Tookes became the founder and first Principal of Bond Elementary School. In addition, she is also believed to be the first state – certified teacher in Leon County. In 1941, Mrs. Tookes accepted a teaching position with the Gadsden County School District, commuting from back-and-forth from Leon and Gadsden Counties until her retirement in 1971. A firm believer in equal rights for all, little did Mrs. Tookes know that she was about to make history with a small business endeavor.

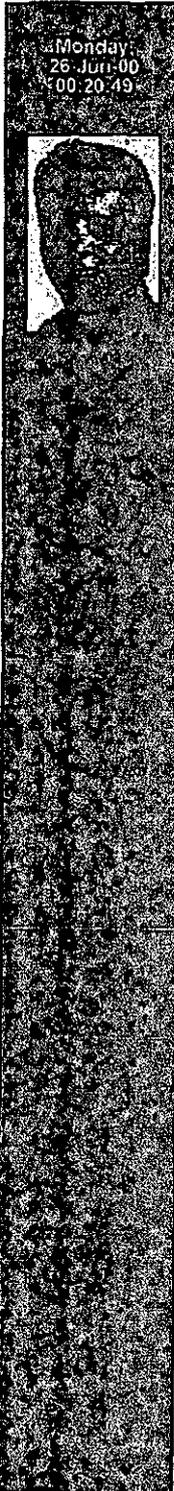
During the mid – 1940's, Mrs. Tookes saw the need for a Hotel within the African – American community. With this, and as an innovator, Mrs. Tookes, along with her husband, James in 1948, turned their home into Tookes Hotel, therefore distinguishing her business as the ONLY hotel in Leon County that would allow lodging to African – Americans until the early 1970's. She received such distinguished guest as *Entertainer* James Brown; *Writer* James Baldwin; *Singer* Lou Rawls; and *Composer* Duke Ellington. As a pioneer businesswoman, Mrs. Tookes also became the owner and operator of The Hot Spot Restaurant at 319 North Macomb Street in 1949, of which she operated for two decades. She worked as a nurse for several years at the Florida A&M University Hospital and served as an Assistant Manager with the Atlanta Life Insurance Company. She also served as President of the Gadsden County chapter of the Florida A&M University National Alumni Association. She ran her Hotel, at 412 West Virginia Street in Tallahassee until her death in 1988, and was a member Saint Mary's Primitive Baptist Church under the tutelage of the late Reverend R.N. Gooden. She was the mother of James Tookes and the late Delores McCoy.

Mrs. Tookes served as a member of the Mother's Board and the Pulpit Aid Board of Saint Mary's Primitive Baptist Church; was affiliated with the Leon County Teacher's Association; was President of the Gadsden County Chapter of the Florida A&M University National Alumni Association; and was an active member of the House Hold of Ruth Lodge.

In 1992, Mrs. Tookes received a resolution, posthumously, from the City of Tallahassee recognizing her outstanding service to the Tallahassee community during and after the turbulent segregation era for nearly five decades. In 2000, the Tookes Hotel at 412 West Virginia Street in Tallahassee was added to the National Register of Historic Places.

Please see attached items commemorating the life of the late Mrs.

Dorothy Ethel Nash Tookes



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History in these Frenchtown walls

Tookes House to be added to historic register

By GERALD ENSLEY
Tallahassee Democrat

Singer Lou Rawls and writer James Baldwin were guests, as were a host of traveling salesmen.

But mainly, it's because of Dorothy Nash Tookes that the white clapboard house at 412 W. Virginia St. will soon be added to the National Register of Historic Places.

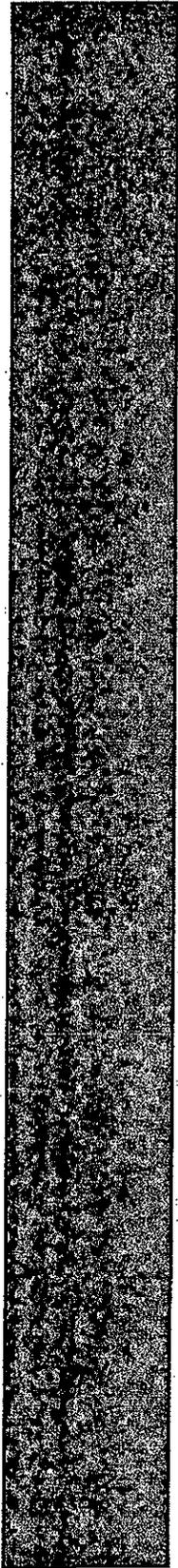
Tookes, who died in 1988, was the founder of Tallahassee's Bond School and one of the noted entrepreneurs of Frenchtown's heyday. By turning her home into the Tookes Hotel, she provided the only place for black visitors to stay in Tallahassee during the era of segregation.



Dorothy Nash Tookes, pictured wearing glasses in the center, greets guests after her son's wedding in this 1958 photo. "She was a remarkable woman," said her grandson Ron McCoy. "I meet people all the time who say 'Your grandmother kept me in line and taught me so much.'"

"I decided to honor my grandmother in this way because she was so deserving," said Ron McCoy. "She was multifaceted and touched so many lives."

McCoy, a Tallahassee native who is now a financial analyst in Jacksonville, spearheaded his family's efforts to place the Tookes House on the national register. The family currently leases the home to the state Department of Corrections, which uses it as a halfway house for female inmates just released



from prison.

McCoy's extensively documented and researched petition for national register status was approved by a local architectural review board on June 7. The application must now be approved by state and federal committees later this year. But Bob Jones, a historic sites specialist with the Florida Division of Historic Preservation, said "99 percent of the time" local approval is a precursor to final approval.

If approved, the Tookes House will become the 154th property in Tallahassee to earn a spot on the National Register of Historic Places. There are more than 32,000 buildings and sites in Florida on the National Register of Historic Places.

"What is really great is (the Tookes House) is the first property in Frenchtown on the national register," said Beth LaCivita, executive director of the Tallahassee Trust for Historic Preservation. "This can be part of the revitalization of Frenchtown."

A history lesson

The Tookes House is a "one-story, (wood) frame vernacular, hipped-roof cottage with bungalow influence." Built in the late 19th century, it was purchased for \$700 in 1914 by James Tookes, who was a chef at the Governor's Mansion for Govs. Dave Sholtz and Millard Caldwell and later the family of John Phipps, founder of the WCTV television station.

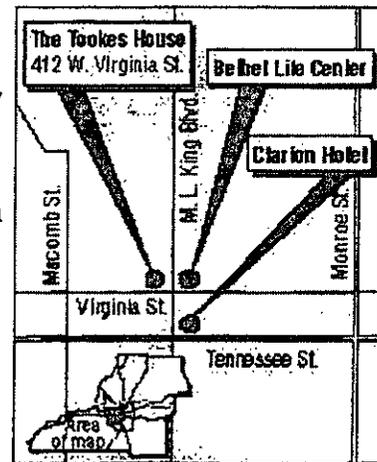
In 1930, James Tookes married Dorothy Nash, a 26-year-old schoolteacher at one of Leon County's numerous rural schools for blacks. The couple had two children, and Dorothy Nash Tookes, a graduate of Florida A&M, is believed to have been the county's first state-certified teacher.

In 1935, Leon County School Superintendent Frank Hartsfield asked Tookes to start an elementary school in the Bond community and serve as principal. The school was established in the St. John's Missionary Baptist Church, and later expanded to include Flipper Chapel AME Church. In 1938, the Leon County School Board paid for construction of what became today's Bond Elementary School.

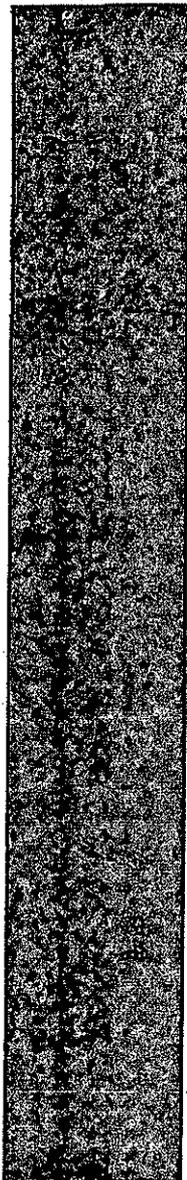
Tookes left Bond in 1940 for a teaching position in Gadsden County, where she taught until her retirement in 1971.

In 1948, Tookes began her business pursuits by adding three bedrooms and a bath to her house and starting a rooming house for black travelers who were unable to rent rooms elsewhere in Tallahassee.

Her rooming house became the first overnight accommodations for blacks since the long-defunct Boulevard Hotel (near today's Civic Center), which had



SHAUN WATSON/Democrat



been Tallahassee's first hotel for blacks in 1888.

By the early 1950s, the establishment was operating as the Tookes Hotel, as identified by one of Tallahassee's first neon signs. For many years, Dorothy Tookes also operated the Hot Spot restaurant at 319 N. Macomb St., now the site of Economy Drugs.

In 1971, Tookes added four more bedrooms and a bath and continued to receive hotel guests into the 1980s. In 1993, five years after her death, the family took down the neon sign and leased the house to the Department of Corrections.

"She was a remarkable woman," said McCoy, who made beds and signed in guests as a child. "I meet people all the time who say 'Your grandmother kept me in line and taught me so much.'"

McCoy said his family intends to do additional restoration to the home and hopes someday to turn it into a museum, perhaps with the neon sign out front again. McCoy believes national designation for the house can help preserve the history of Frenchtown, which was once a thriving business and social center for blacks.

"There is a lot of history in Frenchtown," McCoy said. "This is a way of saying 'Let's don't lose it.'"

Gerald Ensley has been with the Tallahassee Democrat since 1980. A former sportswriter, he is now a senior writer and columnist. He has won more than 20 state and national awards for his writing.

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