TAYLOR, Preston  Born in Shreveport, Louisiana in 1849, of enslaved parents. He dreamed of becoming a preacher after hearing a sermon in Lexington, Kentucky in 1855. A drummer boy with the Union Army at 15, Taylor saw the surrender of Lee at Appomattox in 1865. Unable to find work in Louisville after the Civil War because of his color, Preston Taylor returned to school. He then became a train porter with the Louisville and Chattanooga Railroad. By the age of twenty, he was an elder in a black Christian Church. High Street Christian Church was the first church, Taylor was called to serve as minister. To create work for black workers, otherwise barred from employment, Taylor succeeded in winning contracts to build two sections of the Big Sandy Railroad, under construction between Mount Sterling, Kentucky and Richmond, Virginia. The work was successfully completed in fourteen months. Between 1884 and 1888, Rev. Taylor worked for M. S. Combs, a white Christian preacher and undertaker. In 1886, Taylor was called to be preacher at Gray Street Christian Church in Nashville, Tennessee. In 1887, with H. McSalem Ayres, Rev. Taylor tried to establish a permanent national organization called the National Convention of the Churches of Christ which met until the end of the century. Always using his phenomenal business acumen, Taylor worked hard to create jobs for black workers. In 1888, he started a mortuary. In 1899, he purchased thirty-six acres to be used for Greenwood Amusement Park and Greenwood Cemetery. On September 5, 1917, Preston Taylor called together the first National Christian Missionary Convention where he was elected president, an office which he held until his death in 1931.


WELCH, Rosa Page  A distinguished graduate of Southern Christian Institute (now Tougaloo College), Rosa Page Welch spent a lifetime witnessing in word and song throughout the life of the church. Known as the "Ambassador of Good Will", Rosa was the first African American to lead convention singing. After graduating from Southern Christian, Welch taught school in Mississippi, Kentucky and Virginia. A classically-trained mezzo-soprano, Welch's musical career blossomed. A Disciple staff person arranged for her to lead the singing at a Nebraska student conference, which led to numerous invitations from throughout the Disciples and other denominations. Welch abandoned a promising concert career to work for a regular future during her recitals. In 1952 Welch went on a "global mission of goodwill", singing to audiences in Africa, East Asia, Europe and South America. This led her to serve during 1961-63 as a missionary in Nigeria for the Church of the Believers. Afterwards she worked with the Disciples United Promotion office (Church Finance Council). Welch also took part in the civil rights movement, working in Hattiesburg, Miss. and marching in Montgomery, Ala. Frequently discriminated against as she travelled, Welch repeatedly won over her persecutors with an ironic spirit.

Biographical details from Journey Toward Wholeness: A History of Black Disciples in the Mission of the Church: National Convocation, 1990, Brenda Cardwell and William K. Fox, Sr. Thanks to the Disciples Historical Society and May Reed who supplied the photographs and biographical material. Also thanks to Disciple News Service (Communications Ministries) and Clifford L. Wills for the Rosa Page Welch biography.

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"It was a model church, insomuch as all being under one shelter, the master, the freedman, and the slave all worshiped together."

Quoted from booklist
The African-American History by
Rev. Dr. Raymond E. Brown

Black Disciples #2
Who Made A Difference

Preston Taylor, photograph courtesy of Disciples Historical Society.
Black people have made an enormous contribution to the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ). This brochure contains a brief listing of African Americans whose lives are significant parts of our legacy.

BROWN, Raymond E. Raymond E. Brown, working with Emmet J. Dickson, was one of the key architects of the merger between the National Christian Missionary Convention (NCMC) and the International Convention of the Christian Church, Disciples of Christ. Elected the last president of the NCMC in 1965 serving until 1969, Dr. Brown finished what would have been a two-year term serving as the first president of the National Convention of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ). Dr. Brown was the first African American vice-moderator of the Christian Church, Past President of the National Convention, and the only person to serve as senior vice president of Church Extension. In the early 1960s, while pastor of Second Christian Church in Hannibal, Missouri, with the church's Christian Men's Fellowship president, James P. Greggory, Dr. Brown was given the permanent ownership of the state trophy for the best fundraising for the Star Supporter Fund for three years in a row. In 1969, Raymond Brown became the first African American general field representative of Church Extension (formerly Board of Church Extension). In the first five years after Brown’s appointment, twice as many African American congregations were requesting loans and services as requested services in the prior ten years. By 1987, Raymond Brown had become the senior vice president of Church Extension.

HYLTON, Samuel W. Rev. Dr. Hylton was very active in the Piedmont Tri-State Convention of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ). His service on the Convention’s Board of Trustees included the period when Christian View Camp and Conference Grounds were developed. Hylton received degrees from Christian Theological Seminary, Indianapolis and Eden Theological Seminary, Saint Louis, Missouri. Hylton was pastor of Cleveland Avenue Christian Church, Winston-Salem, North Carolina, having previously served as assistant pastor of Second Christian Church (now known as Light of the World Christian Church) in Indianapolis. From 1961 until 1997, Hylton served as pastor of Centennial Christian Church in Saint Louis, Missouri. During his lengthy service in Saint Louis, Hylton was actively involved in the community and served on committees of the National Benevolent Association, Inc. (NBA).

PEOPLES, Robert Hayes From 1935 to 1944, Robert Hayes Peoples was the first African-American national secretary of all African-American church work at the National Christian Missionary Convention (NCMC). People’s study of the status of African-American ministry in twenty three states from 1934 to 1939 was instrumental in causing the NCMC to effect a number of initiatives to upgrade the education and preparation of African-American clergy. People’s study showed, among other things, that only four of eighteen institutions cooperating with the DOCC Board of Education in the training of ministers, admitted African-Americans—Drake University, Eureka College, Chapman College and Butler University. The initiatives which followed included the establishment of Taylor Co-op House for African-American ministerial students attending Butler University. The Star Supporter Scholarship Fund, now administered by the director of Black Minister’s in Home End ministries, was started in 1948. In 1955, Peoples, then president of the National Convention (NCMC), first showed his vision in the “Proposed Plans for Merging the National Christian Missionary Convention with the International Convention of Disciples of Christ and the United Christian Missionary Society (UCMS).” This began the merger process.

RAND, Earl W. Dr. Earl W. Rand was president of Jarvis Christian College, during which time much of the modernization of the campus buildings took place. With Charles Albert Berry, Dr. Rand wrote a 1939 study on “Negro Education in the Disciple Brotherhood.” This landmark study stressed the need for church-affiliated colleges to take the lead and that the whole church needed to “perpetuate the ideal of freedom, justice and dignity of the individual by offering to its Negro youth an educational program comparable to that of White youth.”

REDD, Odatta Odatta Redd has served on the General Board and General Nominating Committee. She was vice-president of the International Christian Women’s Fellowship (ICWF) from 1986 to 1990. Redd has served in several capacities of the Regional Church in Virginia, as well as on the Virginia CWF Cabinet.

STONE, Albert “A.C.” Albert Stone is co-founder with Lorenzo Evans of the Star Supporter Fund. The Star Supporter Fund has been and remains and eminently successful tool to continuously expand the number of African American pastors who are seminary trained. Stone, a University of Kentucky-trained mathematician, spent 31 years in the insurance industry, then becoming a housing rehabilitation specialist in the Cincinnati area. A very active layperson, Stone served as Sunday School Superintendent and deacon, elder and as a national vice-president of the National Christian Missionary Convention (NCMC).