



NALC is proud to take part in commemorating the 50th anniversary of the historic 1963 March on Washington and Dr. Martin Luther King's "I Have a Dream" speech. As a special tribute, we have reprinted this article from *The Postal Record* about the life's work of one letter carrier, who helped many of the hundreds of thousands of people who attended the original march to safely travel to the nation's capital.

The Green Book

The forgotten story of one carrier's legacy helping others navigate Jim Crow's highways

The 1940s and '50s are remembered as the birth of the great American road trip. President Dwight Eisenhower championed the creation of a system of interstate highways that criss-crossed the nation, fueling the construction of service stations, road-side diners and motels. The growing middle class was getting out and seeing America.

But that was also still the time of Jim Crow laws in the South and racial discrimination in other parts of the country as well. The laws and practices were designed to keep African-Americans from voting or even patronizing businesses, including many restaurants and hotels. Some towns had what were known as sundown rules, meaning all African-Americans had to be out of town by sunset, or else.

For many, traveling wasn't simply an adventure to be filled with awe and pleasure, but also embarrassment and fear. Imagine not knowing where you could stop, where you could eat, where you could stay.

An entrepreneurial letter carrier from Harlem saw a need and created *The Negro Motorist Green Book*—commonly referred to as simply the "Green Book"—a travel guide for black- and white-owned hotels, inns and even private residences that would accept African-American travelers. He used his NALC and other postal contacts to find the listings all across the

country. For example, in 1949 for Montgomery, AL, the guidebook recommended the Douglas Hotel and Bonnie's Restaurant as safe places. In 1956, travelers to Hartford, CT, could stay at Mrs. Johnson's house at 2016 Main St.

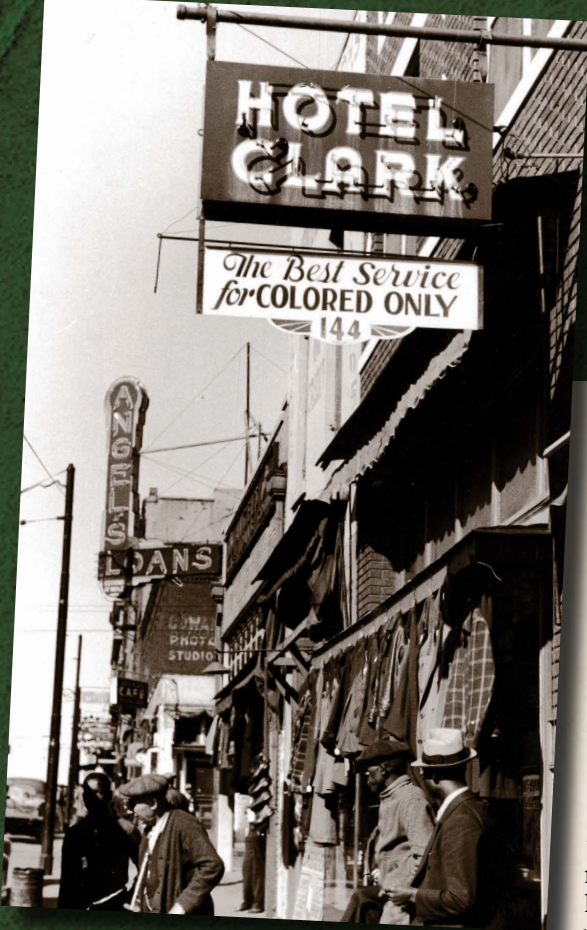
The story of the Green Book had almost been lost completely until a stray remark a few years ago reminded the world of this remarkable tool and the letter carrier who made it his legacy.

The guide was the creation of **Victor H. Green**, a native of New York. In 1913, at the age of 21, Green was living in Hackensack, NJ, and went to work at the local post office as a letter carrier. With schooling that extended only through seventh grade, Green—as did many African-Americans—found a good, dependable, federal job with the Post Office Department, even if the pay was low (see NALC's history book *Carriers in a Common Cause* for more on letter carriers' experiences at the time). Green also joined NALC's Hackensack Branch 425, now known as Bergen County Merged. By 1933, he continued his route in New Jersey but had moved to Harlem, just over the George Washington Bridge.

There the Harlem Renaissance was still in swing, rich with culture, music and art, when important writers and social activists including W. E. B. Du Bois and Langston Hughes were attempting to redefine what it meant to be African-American, creating a new racial pride. Green must have been attracted to this energy, as by



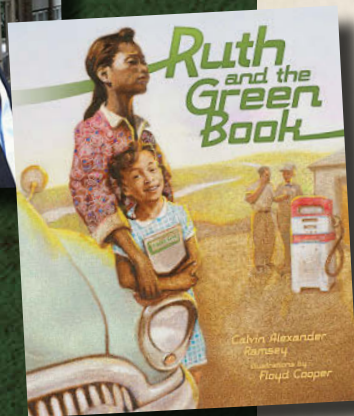
This photo is believed to be Victor H. Green, as it was printed in the Spring 1956 edition of the Green Book opposite the editor's introduction. No other known photos exist.



The Hotel Clark in Memphis, TN, in 1939 specialized in lodging for “Colored only.”



Calvin A. Ramsey’s book, *Ruth and the Green Book*, was written to help teach the importance of Victor Green’s work.



1933 he was managing musician Robert Duke, his brother-in-law.

Green was described as a man of “tremendous drive and energy” by Novera Dashiell, an assistant editor, in the 1956 guide: “Tall, well-built, always impeccably groomed, with an easy affable manner.” People who knew him said that whenever he was out and about, he always dressed fashionably and would only change into his uniform once he got to work.

As a union member and a civic leader, and perhaps because of his work managing Duke, Green heard many stories of humiliation and violence from members of his community. He looked to other travel guides for inspiration on creating a tool for helping African-Americans.

“The Jewish press has long published information about places that are restricted and there are numerous publications that give the gentile whites all kinds of information,” he wrote in his introduction to the 1949 edition, recounting why he had created the guide.

The idea crystalized in his mind in 1932 and would see its first edition printed in 1936, covering just New York City. The demand was so great that the following year it became a national guide, and eventually expanded with international listings. To this day, people who used the guide speak about its importance for providing information and reassurance to African-Americans far from home.

“It didn’t matter where you went, Jim Crow was everywhere then, and black travelers needed this badly,” Julian Bond said in a 2010 interview while he was president of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). “It was a guidebook that told you not where the best places were to eat, but where there was any place.”

Bond spoke from personal experience. “My family had a Green Book when I was

young, and used it to travel in the South to find out where we could stop to eat, where we could spend the night in a hotel or someone’s home,” he said. “I always thought it was called the Green Book because it was green.”

“The Green Book was, I think, an institution in black life,” Ernest Green, no relation, said in a 2011 interview. “It was one of those unknown survival tools for black people that had to move around the country.”

Ernest was one of the Little Rock Nine, a group who became the first African-American students at Central High School. He remembers his family using the book to travel from Arkansas to Virginia in the 1950s. “I knew the Green Book was a necessity for us to have a place to stay,” he said.

The guide was especially popular with African-Americans who traveled frequently for work, such as jazz musicians and ballplayers in the Negro leagues. The Negro Leagues Baseball Museum has a copy of a Green Book that belonged to the legendary Buck O’Neil—a player, scout and manager of the Kansas City Monarchs and a member of the Baseball Hall of Fame.

Victor Green set up extensive contacts to get his information, including using his NALC connections. “There are postal workers everywhere,” Bond explained. “And he used them as guides to tell him: ‘Well, here’s a good place here, a good place there.’”

Green’s most important partnership was with the Esso (now Exxon) gasoline station chain. Esso, a subsidiary of Standard Oil, was progressive for its time, selling franchises to and employing African-Americans in its corporate offices. Esso sold the guides in its service stations and advertised in the guide’s pages, along with helping Green finance the publication.

People in Harlem and the broader African-American community knew the importance of what Green had created, and some supported it financially. Author

Langston Hughes took out an ad in the 1947 edition proclaiming, "To live in a country where we're not hardly welcomed anywhere and where our money is no good and our dignity is trampled on daily says a lot about us as a people and not giving up our right for full citizenship."

While the book's main goal was to offer protection and reassurance, overtly it looked like and offered the services of a travel guide. (In St. Georges, Bermuda, for example, the 1949 guide suggested renting bicycles from Dowling's Cycle Livery on York Street.)

In 1947, Green expanded the book to include a vacation reservation service, to help travelers make advance plans. And by 1952, as the book had broadened its scope from mainly hotel and restaurant listings to include barbers, beauty salons, bars and nightclubs, it was renamed *The Negro Travelers' Green Book*.

"White barbers would not cut black people's hair. White beauty parlors would not take black women as customers," Bond explained of the need for expanded listings. "You needed the Green Book to tell you where you can go without having doors slammed in your face."

Victor Green believed that the entrepreneurial spirit that propelled his guide could be a driving force for advancing the African-American community, especially through the expanding use of advertising that marked the late 1950s and early 1960s.

"If Negro-owned business is good, it can be better with advertising," Assistant Editor Dashiell quoted him in the 1956 edition. She explained, "His philosophy is that we can create our OWN 'name brands.'" He encouraged youngsters to enter the advertising field and noted to his readers that white-owned businesses had seen the power of advertising in the guide and "have come to value and desire your patronage."

Green worked on the annual guides while continuing to deliver the mail, though records suggest he didn't profit much from the guides. In 1940, he reported his income as \$2,100, which

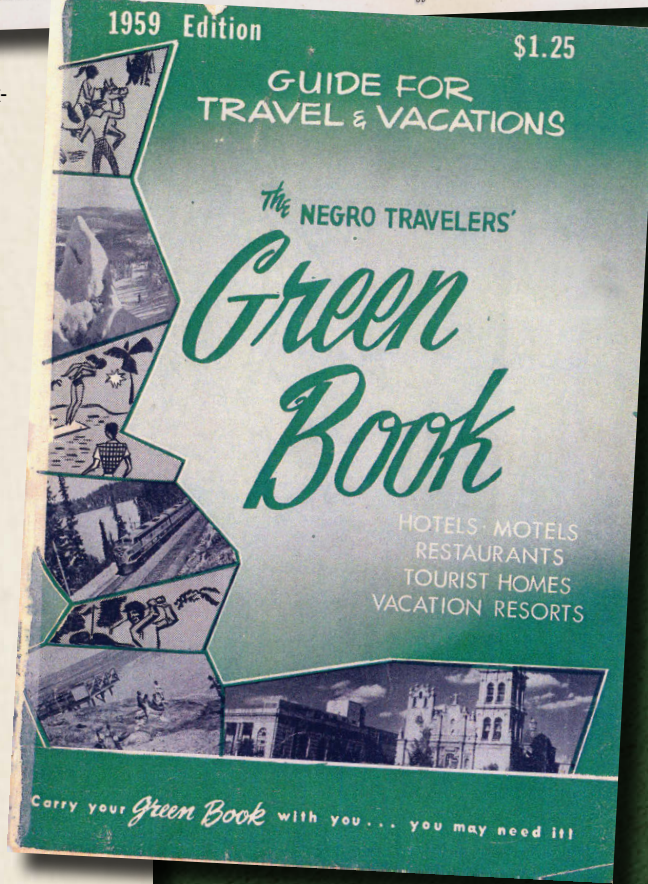
IN PATRONIZING THESE PLACES

<p>Minnesota Mississippi</p> <p>ROCHESTER HOTELS Aviation—301 North Broadway</p> <p>ST. CLOUD HOTELS Grand Central—5th & St. Germaine</p> <p>RESTAURANTS Squadron—11 4th Avenue, N.</p> <p>ST. PAUL TOURIST HOMES Villa Wilson—697 St. Anthony Ave.</p> <p>RESTAURANTS C. & S. Bar-B-Q—291 No. St. Albans Jim's—St. Anthony and East Carter—386 West Central Nitty's—Hondo and Central SERVICE STATIONS Anderson—Western and Central Gino's—Hondo and Arundel</p> <p>GARAGES Milligan's—1008 Rondo Ave.</p> <p>TAILORS Dress—1097 University Ave. Liquor Stores Bond—471 Washaba First—Robert at Fifth Commerce—14 East 4th St. Seven Crown—158 West 7th St. Swedish—628 University Ave. St. Paul—200 East 7th St. City—444 St. Peters St. Rite—442 Washaba Jack's—517 Washaba</p> <p>MISSISSIPPI BILOXI TOURIST HOMES Mrs. G. Bell—630 Main St. Mrs. A. J. Alcina—443 Washington</p> <p>SERVICE STATIONS Dudes—Hwy 49 So. CANTON</p> <p>RESTAURANTS TOLLIVER'S CAFE Was You Ever In Skanton? TRAVELING PEOPLE WHEN HUNGRY OR THIRSTY THINK FIRST OF TOLLIVER'S L. M. Tolliver, Prop. 115 N. Hickory Canton, Miss.</p>	<p>NIGHT CLUBS BLUE GARDEN NIGHT CLUB 51 Highway Meals of All Kinds • Refreshments Open Daily 4 P.M. - 2 A.M. Sat. and Sun., All Day 5 Liberty St. Canton, Miss.</p> <p>FUNERAL HOMES PEOPLES FUNERAL HOME 116 N. HICKORY</p> <p>CLEVELAND SERVICE STATIONS 7-11—Highway 61 at 8</p> <p>COLUMBUS HOTELS Queen City—15th St. & 7th Ave. TOURIST HOMES M. J. Harrison—915 N. 14th St. H. Sommerville—906 N. 14th St. Mrs. J. Alexander—512 12th St. Mrs. I. Roberts—12th & 5th Ave. N. Mrs. Corwin—1425 11th Ave. N.</p> <p>GREENVILLE TOURIST HOMES Mrs. E. E. Clark—258 Oles St. SERVICE STATIONS People's—Sutton & Eddie St.</p> <p>GRENADA TOURIST HOMES Mrs. R. D. Fisher—77 Adams St. F. Williams—Hwy 51 & Fairground Rd. Henry's Lodge—Hwy 51 & Fairground Rd.</p> <p>HATTIESBURG TOURIST HOMES W. A. Gobbel—409 E. 7th St. Mrs. A. Crabb—413 E. 6th St. Mrs. S. Vans—636 Mobile St.</p> <p>JACKSON HOTELS SUMMERS HOTEL 619 W. PEARL ST. EDWARD LEE HOTEL 144 W. CHURCH ST.</p> <p>TOURIST HOMES WILSON HOMES 154 W. OAKLEY STREET STEVENS TOURIST HOME HWY 49 WEST</p> <p>RESTAURANTS THE TOP CLUB WHITFIELD MILL ROAD</p>	<p>JACKSON (Cont.) SHEPHERDS KITCHENETTE 604 N. FARISH ST. THE CHOP HOUSE 703 N. FARISH ST. STEVENS BAR-B-QUE INN HWY 49 WEST</p> <p>BEAUTY PARLORS Davis Salon—703 N. Farish</p> <p>BARBER SHOPS City—127 N. Farish</p> <p>TAILORS PARIS CLEANERS 800 N. FARISH ST. DRUG STORES PALACE DRUG STORE 500 N. FARISH ST.</p> <p>SERVICE STATIONS Johnson's—536 N. Farish</p> <p>GARAGES Farish St.—1485 N. Farish</p> <p>TAXI CABS VETERANS CAB CO. 116 W. AMITE ST. SKATING RINK 49 Highway N. Finest of Musical Entertainment Refreshments Willie Miller, Prop. Jackson, Miss.</p> <p>LAUREL HOTELS Bacon—5 Pine St. TOURIST HOMES Mrs. S. Lawrence—902 Meridian Mrs. E. J. Brown—212 E. Kingston Mrs. F. Garner—509 Joe Wheeler's Ave. Mrs. S. G. Wilson—802 S. 7th</p> <p>MACOMB HOTELS Commerce—231 Summit St. TOURIST HOMES D. Mason—218 Denawide St.</p> <p>MENDENHALL SERVICE STATION BOBS SERVICE STATION HIGHWAY 49</p> <p>MERIDIAN HOTELS Beale—2411 Fifth St.</p> <p>TOURIST HOMES C. W. Williams—1208-31st St. Mrs. M. Manning—1ch St. betw. 16 & 17 A. Charley Leigh—5th St. & 16th Ave.</p> <p>MOUND BAYOU TOURIST HOMES Mrs. Selma Price Mrs. Charlotte Strong</p> <p>GARAGES Liddie's</p> <p>NEW ALBANY HOTELS Foot's—Railroad Ave. TOURIST HOMES S. Dreyer—Church St. Patt. Bacon—Cleveland St. C. Morganfield—Cleveland St.</p> <p>YAZOO CITY HOTELS Calwell—Water & Broadway Sts. TOURIST HOMES Mrs. A. J. Walker—321 S. Monroe</p> <p>MISSOURI CAPE GIRARDEAU TOURIST HOMES G. Williams—405 S. Frederick St. W. Martin—18 N. Hanover St. J. Randall—422 North St.</p> <p>CARTHAGE TOURIST HOMES Mrs. M. Wood—S. Fulton St.</p> <p>COLUMBIA HOTELS Austin House—108 E. Walnut St. TOURIST HOMES Mrs. W. Harvey—41 E. 3rd St.</p> <p>CHARLESTON Taverns Crook Cafe—111 Elm St.</p> <p>EXCELSIOR SPRINGS HOTELS The Albany—408 South St. Moore's—501 Main St.</p> <p>HANNIBAL TOURIST HOMES Mrs. E. J. Jaines—215 General St.</p> <p>JEFFERSON CITY HOTELS Lancien—600 Lafayette St. Booker T.</p> <p>TOURIST HOMES Miss C. Woodruff—114 Adams St. E. Graves—314 E. Duaklin St.</p>
--	---	--

was the average pay for a letter carrier at the time.

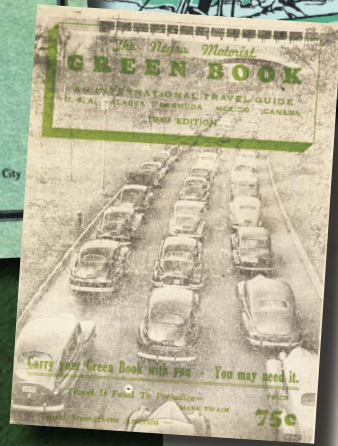
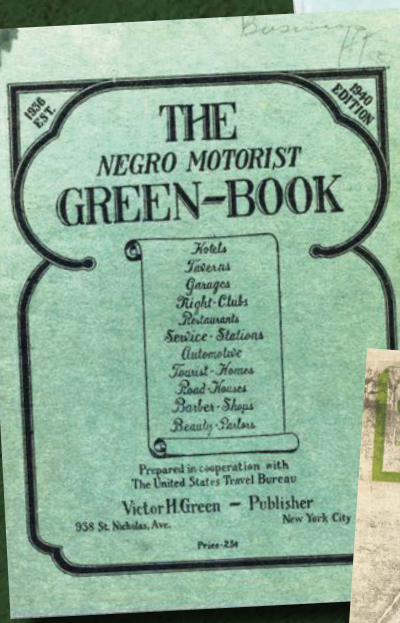
By 1942, he had a route in Leonia, NJ, where he worked until 1952, when after 39 years of carrying the mail, he retired at age 60. With help, he continued publishing some 15,000 guides annually until his death in 1960. The guide remained in publication by others, with the 1959 guide listing his wife, Alma, as the editor and publisher, and the 1966 edition lists two publishers who weren't related to Green. A printer, who printed the Green Book, said that a daughter of Victor's brought him the master pages of the last several guides, until about 1966, after the passage of the 1964 Civil Rights Act had made discrimination by businesses illegal.

In the almost 50 years since the passage of the Civil Rights Act, the Green Book has largely been forgotten except by older generations whose families may have used the guides. Author and playwright Calvin A. Ramsey had never heard of the guides



Listings from the 1949 edition of the Green Book and the cover from the 1959 edition.

The 1940, Spring 1956
and 1949 editions



until he attended a funeral in Atlanta sometime around 2004. The deceased's grandfather, who was from New York and had never been down South before, asked Ramsey where he could get a Green Book, as he thought he still needed one. Fascinated, Ramsey researched the history of the Green Book and got hooked, which inspired him to write a play, *The Green Book*, and a chil-

drren's book, *Ruth and The Green Book*, to help preserve its legacy.

Ruth and the Green Book is the emotional story of a young African-American girl who traveled to the South with her parents. They're turned away from a gasoline station and a hotel before buying a copy of the Green Book at an Esso station. The joy at finding friends on the road comes as a welcome and heartwarming relief.

"[Children today] know about anti-slavery, the period of the Underground Railroad, and about Reconstruction, but even after that, travel was really difficult," Ramsey said. "It just fell on me, really, to tell the story."

The play was staged in Atlanta for a limited run and was put on as a special reading with the cooperation of Bond of the NAACP and the Smithsonian's National Museum of African American History and Culture in 2010. Victor Green makes an appearance in the play on the telephone with Langston Hughes before the narrative focuses on characters at a tourist house. Ramsey also brought the story of the Green Book to the attention of NALC Region 15 Regional Administrative Assistant Orlando Gonzalez, who did his own research and forwarded it to *The Postal Record*.

"Ramsey said he wanted to come in and show me his book and talk about

the letter carrier who helped all these people," Gonzalez said. "When he mentioned Green, I was like, there's no way that's possible that I don't know about it. This guy was completely lost to history."

Not much is known about Green, the man, other than what was written about him in his guides and the historical facts NALC was able to track down. We were not able to locate any of Green's relatives—and have yet to find any documentation on the daughter mentioned by the printer. Not many copies of the Green Book can be found, with only a few known editions residing in academic and museum collections, where they are being used to help research this era.

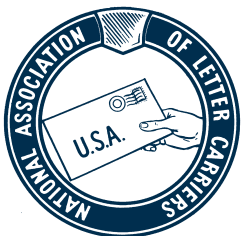
For example, early editions of the Green Book reveal that most of the listings where African-Americans were welcomed in New York City were in Harlem. Over the course of the guidebook's run, hotels in Manhattan started to be listed as well, documenting the spread of the rejection of segregation.

But for the tens of thousands of travelers who used the guides during the three decades they were in circulation, their importance was known firsthand. They were truly a roadmap for friendly faces in hostile territory.

It's likely that Green would not be too upset about his guide being relegated to history books. He often said that he looked forward to the time when the Green Book would no longer be necessary.

"There will be a day sometime in the near future when this guide will not have to be published," he wrote in 1949. "That is when we as a race will have equal opportunities and privileges in the United States. It will be a great day for us to suspend this publication for then we can go wherever we please." **PR**

Special thanks to Orlando Gonzalez, Jeff Fox, Bruce Didriksen, Sonny Guadalupe, and Charlie and Emy Peasha for their help in researching Victor H. Green's life and NALC membership.



**National Association
of Letter Carriers**

100 Indiana Ave. NW
Washington, DC 20001-2144

202-393-4695 / nalc.org