

Please note that an approved grant may be canceled if your project has not started within six months of the date it was approved. The project must be completed within one year of the date it was approved by the CCDC.

## APPENDIX I: GRANT APPLICATION

Date of Application:	August 22, 20024	
Building/Property Address:	492 Vance Ave, Memphis, TN 38126	
Applicant's Name:	492 Vance, LLC	
Ownership Status: (check all that apply)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> I own the property <input type="checkbox"/> I am purchasing the property <input type="checkbox"/> I lease the property <input type="checkbox"/> Other _____	
If you lease the property, when does your lease expire?	N/A	
Primary Project Contact:	Name: <b>Stephanie Wade</b>	
	Phone: <b>901.609-6027</b>	Email: <b>stephanie@jsrealestatedev.co</b>
	Mailing Address: <b>492 Vance Ave, Memphis, TN 38126</b>	
Proposed Improvements: (check all that apply)	<input type="checkbox"/> Exterior building repair <input type="checkbox"/> Tuck-pointing/masonry <input type="checkbox"/> Exterior painting <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Exterior signage <input type="checkbox"/> New awning(s) <input type="checkbox"/> Fencing <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Landscaping	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Sidewalk repair <input type="checkbox"/> Door repair/replacement <input type="checkbox"/> Window repair/replacement <input type="checkbox"/> Storefront repair/replacement <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Exterior lighting <input type="checkbox"/> Public art <input type="checkbox"/> Other (describe below)
If you listed <i>Other</i> above, Please briefly describe	N/A	

<p><b>Project Goals:</b></p> <p>Why are you applying for the grant?</p> <p>What positive impacts do you anticipate for your business and the neighborhood?</p>	<p>The funds will focus on a multifaceted project that includes restoring the historic Griggs Business and Practical Arts College sign, enhancing the surrounding landscape, and repairing the existing stairway. The restoration of the historic sign is more than a preservation effort; it stands as a powerful symbol of transformation for a neighborhood that has long been marginalized. As the sign's colors are revived and its letters regain their vibrancy, it becomes a beacon of resilience and hope, signaling to residents that their past struggles do not define their future. This project transcends mere cosmetic improvement, acting as a catalyst for positive change and fostering a sense of pride and determination within the community.</p> <p>The landscaping enhancements and stairway repair contribute significantly to this transformation by improving both the safety and aesthetics of the area. By clearing overgrown foliage, enhancing the landscape, and ensuring safe access through a newly repaired stairway, the project creates a welcoming and functional environment that complements the restored sign. Together, these efforts not only beautify the space but also encourage community engagement and ownership. The revitalized surroundings, coupled with the restored sign, serve as a rallying point for discussions about local history and culture, inspiring residents to actively participate in the neighborhood's renewal. Ultimately, this comprehensive project demonstrates that even in the face of adversity, positive change is not just possible but achievable through collective action and perseverance.</p>
<p>Architect (if applicable)</p>	<p>Name: <b>Juan Self</b> Phone: <b>901.261-1505</b>  Company: <b>Self+Tucker Architects</b></p>
<p>Total Project Budget:</p>	<p><b>\$45,000</b></p>
<p>Total Grant Requested:</p>	<p><b>\$25,000</b></p>
<p>Property Owner: (If not the applicant)</p>	<p>Name: N/A</p>
	<p>Phone: _____ Email: _____</p>
	<p>Mailing Address: _____</p>
<p>Applicant's Certification:</p>	<p>This application is made in order to induce the CCDC to grant financial incentives to the applicant. The applicant hereby represents that all statements contained herein are true and correct. All information materially significant to the CCDC in its consideration of the application is included. The applicant acknowledges that it has reviewed the descriptions of the CCDC financial program for which it is applying and agrees to comply with those policies. The applicant shall also be required to show best faith efforts with regard to the employment of minority contractors. The applicant specifically agrees to pay all reasonable costs, fees and expenses incurred by the CCDC whether or not the incentive is granted or project completed.</p> <p> <b>8/22/24</b></p> <p>Signature: _____ Date: _____</p>

**Attachments**

In addition to this completed and signed application, don't forget to include the following attachments when you submit your grant request:

- Photograph(s) showing all sides of the building or property facing a public street
- Drawing(s) showing proposed improvements
- Itemized budget for proposed improvements (example attached)
- Lease agreement and approval letter from property owner (if applicable)
- Equal Business Opportunity Program Proposed Utilization Plan (Form A attached)















## 492 Vance Ave Budget

### Sources

Owener's contribution	\$ 5,000	11%
Tennessee Historic Development Grant	\$ 15,000	33%
Good Neighbor Grant request	\$ 25,000	56%
<i>Total</i>	<i>\$ 45,000</i>	<i>100%</i>

### Uses

Historic sign restoration	\$ 27,680	62%
Landscaping	\$ 1,320	3%
Demo and pour new stairs	\$ 15,000	33%
Contingency	\$ 1,000	2%
<i>Total</i>	<i>\$ 45,000</i>	<i>100%</i>



**BALTON SIGN CO.**

**Emma J. Griggs:  
A Lifelong Commitment to African American  
Education in Nashville and Memphis**



*Figure 1: Section of Advertisement for the School of Practical Arts and Business, 1943 Negro Year Book and Directory. Courtesy of J.S. Real Estate.*

Prepared by the MTSU Center for Historic Preservation  
for J.S. Real Estate, Memphis, Shelby County, Tennessee



August 2022

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<p><b>"CONTINUE YOUR EDUCATION AT GRIGGS"</b> APPROVED BY THE STATE OF TENNESSEE AND THE NATIONAL ASSOCIATION AND COUNCIL OF BUSINESS SCHOOLS.</p>		<p><b>COURSES OFFERED</b> SECRETARIAL, STENOGRAPHIC, JUNIOR ACCOUNTING, HIGHER ACCOUNTING, RADIO AND TV, BUSINESS ADMINISTRATION. GRIGGS BUSINESS AND PRACTICAL ARTS COLLEGE</p>
<p>492 Vance Avenue                      Phone 374917 Memphis, Tenn.</p>		

Figure 2: Advertisement for Griggs College, undated. Courtesy of J.S. Real Estate.

**This report was prepared by:**



Dr. Antoinette G. van Zelm, Assistant Director

## Introduction

In 2021, J.S. Real Estate, LLC, applied to the MTSU Center for Historic Preservation for a Professional Services Partnership. Founded in 2019, J.S. Real Estate is a boutique real estate development and property management firm that focuses on the renovation of minority-owned historic properties. The firm owns the historic nineteenth-century building at 492 Vance Avenue in Memphis, which housed the Griggs Business and Practical Arts College from 1949 to 1974. 492 Vance Avenue is located southeast of downtown Memphis and was once part of a thriving African American residential and business district. Today, the area is known as South City or the Memphis Medical District. In 1980, the Vance-Pontotoc Historic District was added to the National Register of Historic Places for its architectural significance, only to be delisted in 1987 as fires and demolition ravaged the neighborhood.

J.S. Real Estate has started the Griggs Legacy Project to restore the former college building, which will become the headquarters of the firm. The project is also working to share the story of the college's community impact, in part by creating a documentary about the college. The Griggs Legacy Project also seeks to educate the public about the college's founder, Emma J. Griggs (1872-1948), and her husband, the Reverend Sutton E. Griggs (1872-1933), a well-known Baptist minister, writer, and orator. An educator and lifelong student, Emma Griggs established the college in the mid-1940s in the Vance-Pontotoc neighborhood, expanding the School of Practical Arts and Business that she had first organized at her husband's Memphis church, Tabernacle Baptist, in 1916. That school had its antecedents in a school Emma had founded in Nashville during the 1900s and in the educational institutions she had attended in Virginia and Tennessee from the 1880s to the 1900s.

The Center for Historic Preservation's assistant director, Dr. Antoinette G. van Zelm, has used her background in women's history and African American women's organizational activities to research Emma Griggs, whose history is little known.<sup>1</sup> Emma was part of an influential generation of African American women born just after the Civil War who created the schools and community organizations that became the building blocks of flourishing African American urban centers in the post-slavery South. Without these communities, the Civil Rights Movement of the second half of the twentieth century would not have been possible. Learning, teaching, and uplifting were the watchwords of Emma Griggs's life as a student, educator, minister's wife, and administrator.

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<sup>1</sup> Emma does appear in Miriam DeCosta-Willis, *Notable Black Memphians* (Amherst, N.Y.: Cambria Press, 2008), pp. 143-144, a biography largely based on this extensive, detailed obituary: "Mrs. Griggs Dies; Founded Business & Arts College," *Atlanta Daily World*, Jan. 30, 1948, p. 4.

Dr. van Zelm would like to thank Stephanie Wade, co-founder and chief executive officer of J.S. Real Estate, for generously sharing the research materials collected by the Griggs Legacy Project.

## Virginia Origins

Emma Jane Williams Griggs grew up in a working-class household in Portsmouth, Norfolk County, Virginia. Her parents, Edmund and Cherry Williams, were probably born into slavery, although they may have been born free. Edmund Williams, who was listed as a laborer on the 1880 federal census, could read and write. Cherry Williams, who worked as a domestic servant, could not, according to the census taker. The family lived at 55 County Street in downtown Portsmouth. Emma had an older sister, Mournia Williams, who also worked as a domestic servant, and an older brother, James E. Williams. In 1880, both James and Emma were attending school.<sup>2</sup>

It is fitting that one of the first documents to register Emma's existence—the 1880 census—stated that she was attending school. She became a lifelong student. It is likely that her parents instilled in her a deep love of education, no doubt sharing the reverence for learning that has been documented among Civil War-era African Americans, especially those formerly enslaved, in the South.<sup>3</sup> This embrace of education propelled the growth of a strong middle-class of African Americans in southern cities and resulted in huge gains in literacy for black Americans by the turn of the century.

While growing up in Virginia, Emma attended Norfolk Mission College, a quintessential, Christian-based, post-Civil War school established to educate freedpeople.<sup>4</sup> Founded in 1883 by the United Presbyterian Board of Missions to provide grade school through high school, its primary objective was “to prepare colored young men and women for teachers of their own people.” The school provided an education in academic subjects, Bible study, sewing, cooking, and several industries. Teachers were involved in all aspects of their students' lives and sought to influence the students' parents' lives as well. With its varied curriculum, which included practical subjects that later prevailed in “training schools” for African Americans, and socially conservative paternalism, Norfolk Mission College was very likely one of the prototypes for the schools that Emma later founded in Nashville and Memphis.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Nine percent of the African American population of Virginia was free in 1860. “Emma J. Williams,” 1880 U.S. Population Schedule, Portsmouth, Norfolk County, Virginia, Ancestry.com; Steven E. Woodworth, Kenneth J. Wrinkle, and James McPherson, *Oxford Atlas of the Civil War* (N.Y.: Oxford Univ. Press, 2004), p. 41.

<sup>3</sup> James D. Anderson, *The Education of Blacks in the South, 1860-1935* (Chapel Hill: Univ. of North Carolina Press, 1988), pp. 4-6.

<sup>4</sup> “Mrs. Griggs Dies.”

<sup>5</sup> W.N. Hartshorn, *Era of Progress and Promise, 1863-1910: The Religious, Moral, and Educational Development of the American Negro since His Emancipation* (Boston: Priscilla Pub. Co., 1910), pp. 220-21.

Emma next attended a similar school in Richmond, Hartshorn Memorial College, which was founded the same year as Norfolk Mission College. Significantly, Hartshorn was a school for young women and may well have influenced Emma's later attention to female education. Hartshorn began in the basement of Ebenezer Baptist Church (previously home to a Freedmen's Bureau school and an early black public school). Hartshorn was one of the first institutions in the United States to offer higher education to African American women, who could take high school and college classes. An archivist's recent description of Hartshorn's graduates is also applicable to Emma, who is little known despite her many accomplishments: "...the vast majority of the graduates have gone unnoticed despite the fact that they made up the vanguard of African American education in the United States as some of the first Black college educated teachers." Notably, Hartshorn encouraged student teaching to prepare young women for the field. Emma began teaching at age 17.<sup>6</sup>

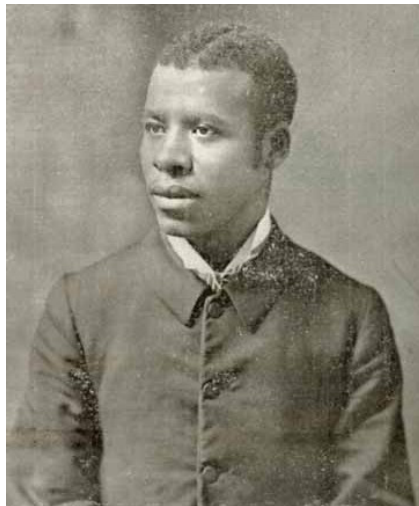


Figure 3: Reverend Sutton E. Griggs (public domain image courtesy of Blackpast.org).

On May 7, 1897, Emma married the Reverend Sutton E. Griggs in Portsmouth, Virginia, and would spend more than three decades as his wife. The couple shared a deep Christian faith, a love of education, and a profound optimism that progress was possible for African Americans in the South.

Rev. Sutton Griggs, the son of Allen and Emma Griggs, grew up in Texas and was mentored by his father. Born enslaved, Allen R. Griggs had become a renowned Baptist minister who founded hundreds of churches throughout Texas and nearby states. Educated at Bishop College and Richmond Theological Seminary, Sutton became an influential member of the National Baptist Convention and a popular orator. A prolific author of both fiction and non-fiction, he is best known for his first novel, *Imperium in Imperio* (1899), which treated the issue of black nationalism seriously. A member of the Niagara Movement that resulted in the founding of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) and initially a critic of Booker T. Washington, Sutton became increasingly conservative in his approach to race relations (this transition took place about the time that the Griggses moved to Memphis in 1913.) Unable to sell many of his self-published novels to African Americans or to penetrate the entrenched racism of the white majority, Sutton eventually focused on how African Americans could better themselves. His later writings

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<sup>6</sup> Two of Hartshorn's founders came from Nashville's Roger Williams University, which Emma would also later attend. Samantha Willis, "Ahead of Its Time," *Richmond Magazine*, richomndmagazine.com, September 19, 2018; Virginia Union University Archives & Special Collections Blog, "An Exponential Education: The Early Students of Hartshorn Memorial College," March 27, 2017; "Mrs. Griggs Dies."



and speeches reflected the classic accommodationist stance that if African Americans became more acceptable to white southerners, they would be able to be more successful in a white-dominated society. The subject of several monographs, Rev. Sutton Griggs continues to be studied by contemporary scholars, in part because of his trajectory from promoting black pride to arguing that African Americans needed to reform themselves as a race.<sup>7</sup>

## Nashville, 1900-1913

By June 1900, Emma and Sutton Griggs had relocated to Nashville, Tennessee, where Sutton served as the pastor of First Baptist Church, East Nashville, and ran the Orion Publishing Company, which he had founded. According to the 1900 federal census, Emma and Sutton boarded with George Newson and his wife, Minnie Newsom, at 724 Smiley Street. George worked as a day laborer, and Minnie's three children from a previous marriage lived with them.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> The literature on Rev. Sutton E. Griggs is extensive. See Arnold Rampersad, "Griggs, Sutton E.," in Rayford W. Logan and Michael R. Winston, eds., *Dictionary of American Negro Biography* (N.Y.: W.W. Norton & Co., 1982), p. 271; Brian D. Page, "Sutton E. Griggs," *Tennessee Encyclopedia of History and Culture*, <https://tennesseeencyclopedia.net/entries/sutton-e-griggs/> (accessed Mar. 21, 2022); James W. Byrd, "Griggs, Sutton Elbert," Texas State Historical Association Handbook, <https://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/entries/griggs-sutton-elbert> (accessed May 26, 2022); David M. Tucker, *Black Pastors and Leaders: Memphis, 1819-1972* (Memphis: Memphis State University Press, 1975); Randolph Meade Walker, *The Metamorphosis of Sutton E. Griggs* (Memphis: Walker Pub., 1991); Finnie D. Coleman, *Sutton E. Griggs and the Struggle Against White Supremacy* (Knoxville: Univ. of Tennessee Press, 2007); Eric M. Curry, "Sutton E. Griggs and the African American Literary Tradition of Pamphleteering" (Ph.D. diss., University of Maryland, 2015); John Gruesser, "Seeking Justice Through Novel Writing and Book Publishing: Sutton Griggs's Commitment to Literature and Battles in Print," *Baptist History and Heritage* 50, no. 2 (Summer 2015), [https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/A432383883/AONE?u=tel\\_middleten&sid+ebsco&xid+134d7678](https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/A432383883/AONE?u=tel_middleten&sid+ebsco&xid+134d7678) (accessed May 23, 2022). Dr. Gruesser's article and Web site (see Footnote 9 below) feature the most extensive contemporary research on Rev. Griggs's life and writings, and were very useful for this report.

<sup>8</sup> "Emma J. Griggs," 1900 U.S. Population Schedule, Davidson County, TN, Ancestry.com; *Nashville City Directory* (1905), p. 513, (1909), p. 546, (1911), p. 425, Ancestry.com.



Figure 4: "Roger Williams University--Nashville, Tenn.--Normal class," [1899], Library of Congress. This image may predate Emma's attendance, but the young woman in the middle of the front row bears a resemblance to her.

In Nashville, Emma continued her education at institutions that were similar to the ones she had attended in Virginia. In 1901, she was a first-year college preparatory student at Central Tennessee College, first opened by missionaries from the Methodist Episcopal Church, North. By 1901, the college was transitioning to its new identity as Walden University. Pursuing her interest in both the arts and practical subjects, Emma took courses in piano, shorthand, and typing. From

1901-1903, she was a special student at Roger Williams University, which had begun as a freedmen's school for African American Baptist preachers in 1864 and had been incorporated in 1883. The school provided "normal" classes to train both women and men to become teachers.<sup>9</sup>

By 1905, Emma and Sutton were living at 610 Webster Street, and by at least 1910, they owned their home there, free of any mortgage. Webster Street was a prototypical early twentieth-century urban black neighborhood, with a mix of middle- and working-class residents. Occupations of the street's inhabitants included barber, real estate agent, nurse, doctor, laundress, waiter, servant, an expressman who owned his own wagon, powerhouse boiler worker, coal yard driver, and coffee mill laborer.<sup>10</sup> As the couple lay down roots in Nashville, Sutton supported such causes as the 1905 streetcar boycott in protest of segregation, the effort to bring to light incidents of police brutality

<sup>9</sup> "Biography and Family Tree," Sutton Griggs Web site, <https://sites.google.com/a/kean.edu/suttongriggs/biography-and-family-tree-with-a-timeline-of-and-poems-by-a-r-griggs-jr> (accessed May 23, 2022); Bobby L. Lovett, "Walden University (1868-1925)," Tennessee State University Library Digital Collection, <https://ww2.tnstate.edu/library/digital/walden.htm> (accessed May 17, 2022); "Roger Williams University," *Tennessee Encyclopedia of History and Culture* (Nashville: Rutledge Hill Press for the Tennessee Historical Society, 1998), 809.

<sup>10</sup> "Sutton E. Griggs," 1910 U.S. Population Schedule, Davidson County, TN, Ancestry.com; *Nashville City Directory* (1912), p. 1270.

against African Americans, and the Niagara movement that led to the founding of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP).<sup>11</sup>

**MRS. GRIGGS IN TEXAS.**  
Mrs. E. J. Griggs, wife of Rev. Sutton E. Griggs, of Nashville, Tenn., arrived in Dallas Dec. 18 on her first visit to Texas to see her mother and father-in-law, Rev. A. R. Griggs and wife, at 328 Hall street, this city. She is highly pleased with Dallas and its people. She and her mother-in-law were entertained at Mrs. T. G. Smith's with Dr. Hamilton and wife, Dr. Cooper and wife, Mr. and Mrs. Hallum, Prof. Darrett and wife, Mr. Miller and Mr. Caldwell, of North Carolina, December 29th, and on the 30th were tendered a reception at the Caroline Bishop Missionary Training School by the faculty and students, Miss E. L. Miller, principal. She has had many pleasant callers, Prof. J. A. Starks and wife, Mrs. F. L. Harris, Mrs. J. Wagoner, Mrs. Blair, Mrs. Bradley, Miss Winn, Miss Codwell, Mrs. G. T. Smith, Mrs. Dr. Bluett and mother, Mrs. Dr. Brooks, Mrs. Dr. Cooper, Miss Mattie Mansfield, Rev. and Mrs. Shaw, Misses Lillie and Hattie Shaw, Mrs. Dr. West, Prof. and Mrs. Darrell, Messrs. H. T. Tyler, Mrs. Annie Wright and others. She will remain in Texas several weeks and will visit Fort Worth on Sunday, Jan. 3. On her return to Nashville she will again open her private industrial school, where she teaches stenography, typewriting and art needle work.—Dallas Express.

Figure 5: Nashville Globe, Jan. 15, 1909. From Newspapers.com.

During their years in Nashville, Emma and Sutton adopted a young girl named Eunice. She appears in the 1910 census as their twelve-year-old daughter. Not surprisingly, both she and Emma were listed on the census as having attended school within the past year.<sup>12</sup>

Even as she was still taking university classes and raising her daughter, Emma began to teach the practical arts and business courses that would be her hallmark throughout her life. She had opened her own school in Nashville in 1906, with fifty students. In January 1909, the *Nashville Globe* ran an item from the *Dallas Express* reporting that Emma had been visiting her in-laws in Texas but would return soon to Nashville, where she would “again open her private, industrial school, where she teaches stenography, typewriting and art needle work.” On May 11, 1910, Emma received her diploma as a member of the Commercial Class at Walden University. That same year, Sutton became the corresponding secretary of the National Baptist Convention’s educational board.<sup>13</sup>

In addition to being a mother and teacher, Emma was active in the community. As the wife of Rev. Griggs, she was heavily involved with activities at First Baptist, East Nashville, which held two services on Sunday, Sunday School classes, meetings of the Baptist Young People’s Union, prayer meetings on Tuesday,

<sup>11</sup> Booker T. Washington considered Sutton Griggs a radical leader in 1907. Paul Harvey, *Redeeming the South: Religious Cultures and Racial Identities among Southern Baptists, 1865-1925* (Chapel Hill, N.C.: Univ. of North Carolina Press, 1997), p. 234, 248.

<sup>12</sup> “Sutton E. Griggs,” 1910 U.S. Population Schedule; “Mrs. Griggs Dies.”

<sup>13</sup> “Mrs. Griggs Dies;” “Mrs. Griggs in Texas,” *Nashville Globe*, Jan. 15, 1909, p. 2; “Walden University,” *Nashville Globe*, May 6, 1910, p. 8; Gruesser, “Seeking Justice Through Novel Writing and Book Publishing,”

[https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/A432383883/AONE?u=tel\\_middleten&sid+ebSCO&xid+134d7678](https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/A432383883/AONE?u=tel_middleten&sid+ebSCO&xid+134d7678).

and services on Tuesday and Friday nights.<sup>14</sup> In 1909, Emma presided over the Woman's Day event at the church, which was organized by the Ladies Aid Club and featured presentations by women from other churches. An offering for sick church members also took place. The next year, the event featured Nashville's Woman's Missionary Union, and well-known Baptist leader Virginia W. Broughton spoke.<sup>15</sup>

Emma was also very active in the Fleur-de-Lis Art Club, which may have been connected to her husband's church.<sup>16</sup> The club featured music and singing programs, talks by members and guests, parlor games, updates on the current news, and three-course meals. At one of the meetings, Emma read a paper on "The Relation of Art to Industrial Education," again demonstrating her interest in both the artistic and the practical. Another meeting featured a presentation by two speakers from the Woman's Christian Temperance Union.<sup>17</sup> As president of the club in 1907, Emma hosted the annual Christmas party at her house, and Rev. Griggs gave a speech. The *Nashville Globe* described some of the decorations, which featured Emma's skill as a seamstress:

A very striking picture was the table spread with a pretty hemstitched cloth with red and green candles and shades. The tall vase of dark red roses amid the ferns, upon a centerpiece which was the handiwork of the hostess, was charming.

Yet the women did more than enjoy themselves. They planned a "food shower" for their next meeting to benefit the local Day Home. In addition, the women left the Christmas meeting with cards that contained quotes about women, which they were to memorize for the next meeting.<sup>18</sup>

As a member of the African American middle class in Nashville, Emma was also involved in other city organizations, where she sometimes spoke. She delivered a talk on "Temperance" at the monthly meeting of the Sunshine Home in 1907. That year, she was also working with other members of the "Busy Bee Club," created to assist Roger

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<sup>14</sup> "Church Directory," *Nashville Globe*, Oct. 8, 1909, p. 6.

<sup>15</sup> Virginia Broughton was an accomplished teacher, speaker, scholar, and writer who served as a home missionary for the National Baptist Convention. *Nashville Globe*, Jul. 30, 1909, p. 2; *Nashville Globe*, Apr. 22, 1910, p. 5; Summary of Tomeiko A. Carter, *Virginia Broughton: The Life and Writings of a Missionary*, University of Tennessee Press Web site, <https://utpress.org/title/virginia-broughton/> (accessed Aug. 28, 2022).

<sup>16</sup> The club was founded in 1900, about when the Griggses arrived in Nashville. A First Baptist Church, East Nashville, Art Club is referred to in May 1909 and could possibly be the Fleur-De-Lis group. *Nashville Globe*, Nov. 22, 1907, p. 7, May 21, 1909, p. 2.

<sup>17</sup> *Nashville Globe*, Oct. 25, 1907, p. 4, Nov. 22, 1907, p. 7, Nov. 19, 1909, p. 7, Dec. 10, 1909, p. 8, Dec. 24, 1909, p. 3, May 27, 1910, p. 5, Oct. 28, 1910, p. 5, Nov. 25, 1910, p. 5.

<sup>18</sup> The Day Home may have been the Day Home Club founded in Nashville by Nettie Langston Napier by at least 1907; the club assisted the children of poor, working African American mothers. "Fleur-De-Lis Art Club," *Nashville Globe*, Dec. 13, 1907, p. 1; "Nettie Napier Day Home Club," *The Historical Marker Database*, <https://www.hmdb.org/m.asp?m=147505> (accessed Aug. 9, 2022).

Williams University, to raise money to buy new window shades for the college's building. Emma participated in the Phyllis Wheatley Club, joined the Culinary Art Club and attended its first annual dinner at Mr. and Mrs. Henry A. Boyd's home, and spoke at the YWCA. The latter meeting took place in 1912 at the Majestic Theater, where "Mrs. Sutton E. Griggs stirred sparks that were kindled in fire which will burn into ideal homes by her able and helpful address on 'Marriage.'"<sup>19</sup>

In Nashville and later in Memphis, both Emma and Sutton worked to reach out to their Baptist brothers and sisters, as well as to African Americans within the larger community. Just a few years after Emma gave her talk on "Marriage" to the YWCA, Sutton published the autobiographical pamphlet *The Story of My Struggles* (1914). Biographer Finnie D. Coleman has written about how Sutton portrayed Emma as a soulmate and ideal preacher's wife in the pamphlet. Sutton also indicated that Emma shared the difficulties of life with him, as he sought unsuccessfully to become a widely read writer of fiction and to counter the racist depictions of African Americans in the works of white writers. Sutton described Emma as a "fellow sufferer" and the "companion of my struggles"—struggles that included serious financial debt from his failing publishing business.<sup>20</sup>

The couple often worked in tandem. In Nashville, Emma promoted a women-centered version of the concept of "Sentiment Moulding" promoted by Sutton. For him, this was an effort to create a more positive public attitude toward African Americans nationwide, in part through the distribution of literature that challenged the widely accepted, standard racist narratives about black people. He established a "Sentiment Moulding Bureau" to further this work in Chicago in 1912.<sup>21</sup>

For Emma, "Sentiment Moulding" was an attempt to uplift the needy, in part through home mission work, and she started disseminating the idea of "Sentiment Moulding" in Nashville in 1910. The Woman's Day event held at First Baptist, East Nashville, in April 1910 was presented "under the auspices of the 'Woman's Sentiment Moulding Movement.'" The goal was to encourage "a higher realm of thought of doing good for others." Emma, who served as president of the movement, "reported that every successful Kinderkarten [sic] Mission school had been in operation all the winter whereby children from the streets had been taught and cared for[,] that many of the needy of our people have been helped and much good done by the weekly visits of our missionary, Mrs. H.J. Allison, who would carry relief and the word of Jesus Christ into the destitute places of the city." The meeting raised \$13.12, probably to support this

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<sup>19</sup> *Nashville Globe*, Oct. 11, 1907, p. 3, Nov. 22, 1907, p. 1, Feb. 4, 1910, p. 2, Dec. 8, 1911, p. 5, Sept. 27, 1912, p. 3. One has to wonder if Rev. Griggs, known for his flowery prose, wrote the YWCA description!

<sup>20</sup> Coleman, *Sutton E. Griggs*, p. 19 (quotations are from *The Story of My Struggles*; I have not yet been able to find a copy of this pamphlet).

<sup>21</sup> Gruesser, "Seeking Justice," [https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/A432383883/AONE?u=tel\\_middleten&sid+ebSCO&xid+134d7678](https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/A432383883/AONE?u=tel_middleten&sid+ebSCO&xid+134d7678).

ongoing work. In April and May 1910, Emma held meetings of the “Sentiment Moulding Movement” in the Griggs’s home. She declared at the April meeting, “we have much work to do among the poor and needy.”<sup>22</sup>

While Emma was working with other Baptist women to help the poor, Sutton was experiencing significant financial difficulties. His novels had not sold well, and he was in debt, including to R.H. Boyd, a founder of the National Baptist Convention and the National Baptist Publishing Board in Nashville. Griggs and Boyd had an acrimonious split in about 1912, and soon thereafter the Griggses moved to Memphis.<sup>23</sup>

## Memphis, 1913-1948

In Memphis, Emma and Sutton boarded at a few different locations before taking up residence at 569 East Georgia Avenue in 1917, where they would live until 1931 (they lived less than a mile from where Emma would later establish Griggs Business and Practical Arts College). Sutton served as the pastor at Tabernacle Baptist Church, which occupied a new building at 658 South Lauderdale Street just around the corner from the couple’s home.<sup>24</sup> The effects of Sutton’s financial troubles as a result of his publishing-related debts is evident in the fact that Emma and Sutton rented their home the whole time that they lived in Memphis and were not able to purchase a home as they had in Nashville. In fact, when they first moved to Memphis, the Griggses took on lodgers themselves. Joseph and Lucy Clark, who were about ten years younger than Emma and Sutton, boarded with the family; Joseph worked as a chauffeur for a private family. Luke Larry, a janitor for a church (possibly Tabernacle Baptist), also lodged at the home.<sup>25</sup>

The neighborhood around Tabernacle Baptist and the Griggs’s home was similar to the community in which Emma and Sutton had lived in Nashville, with a mix of small business owners, tradesmen, and service workers. Its residents prided themselves on being exemplary members of their race. Still, the residents lived within the context of a segregated city and a metropolitan police force intent on harassing African Americans. Some black residents of the city, however, fought back. Both working- and middle-class residents, including middle-class women who sought to force whites to recognize their

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<sup>22</sup> “Woman’s Day Exercise,” *Nashville Globe*, Apr. 22, 1910, p. 5; “Sentiment Moulding Club,” *Nashville Globe*, Apr. 29, 1910; “Sentiment Moulding Club,” *Nashville Globe*, May 20, 1910, p. 5.

<sup>23</sup> In 1914, the National Baptist Convention was roiled by the feud between Boyd and Griggs, and in 1915 a schism occurred within the Convention as a result. Gruesser, “Seeking Justice,” [https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/A432383883/AONE?u=tel\\_middleten&sid+ebSCO&xid+134d7678](https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/A432383883/AONE?u=tel_middleten&sid+ebSCO&xid+134d7678).

<sup>24</sup> Pioneering African American businessman Robert R. Church, Sr. (1839-1912) had lived at 384 S. Lauderdale, and educator Julia Hooks had a school in her home at 578 S. Lauderdale. *Memphis City Directory* (1913), p. 649, (1914), p. 593, (1916), p. 492, (1917), p. 517, (1918), p. 521, (1921), p. 648, (1923), p. 483, (1924), p. 476, (1925), p. 591, (1927), p. 589, (1928), p. 587, (1929), p. 574, (1931), p. 539, all at Ancestry.com; “Vance Avenue Community Transformation Plan,” preliminary draft (2012), pp. 21, 24, Historic Documents File, J.S. Real Estate, Memphis.

<sup>25</sup> “Emma J. Griggs,” 1920 U.S. Population Schedule, Memphis, Shelby County, TN, Ancestry.com.

respectability, sought justice in the courts against insult and injury experienced on segregated streetcars during this period. Within this context, the May 22, 1917, lynching of Ell Persons signaled ongoing white intimidation through extralegal violence. Black leaders in Memphis created a chapter of the NAACP in response to this horrific crime, and half of the paying members listed on the chapter's application lived in the Griggs's community southeast of downtown. By 1919, the Memphis chapter was the South's largest.<sup>26</sup>

According to the 1920 federal census, Emma and Sutton's daughter, Eunice, now an adult, lived with her parents. Although the census did not list an occupation for either Emma or Eunice, according to the 1921 *Memphis City Directory* Eunice worked as a clerk at the Mississippi Life Insurance Company, a black-owned business in the city. She would later marry Edward F. White in 1930. During the 1920s, rezoning in south Memphis would bring more industry into the thriving black residential and business district where the Griggses lived.<sup>27</sup>

In Memphis, Sutton started a new publishing company called the National Public Welfare League, and as the head of the National Baptist Convention's educational board, he published a paper called the *National Beacon Light*.<sup>28</sup> He also sought to make Tabernacle Baptist more than a church: "Religion ought to do more than help a man reach heaven when he dies. It ought to help him to live in this world. It ought to help people meet every problem of life."<sup>29</sup> Sutton aspired for the church to serve people's many and varied needs, almost like a community center today, and the new 1916 building housing Tabernacle Baptist was designed to further this goal. It eventually included both an employment bureau and a swimming pool. Local white Memphians supported these programs at Griggs's church because they fit within the system of segregation and did not threaten the status quo. Likewise, Sutton's publications, which increasingly focused on how African Americans could adapt their behavior to please white people, went over well with white residents. These writings, however, were routinely criticized by such Memphis black leaders as Robert R. Church, Jr., and George W. Lee.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid; Kenneth W. Goings and Brian D. Page, "African Americans Versus the Memphis Street Railway Company: Or, How to Win the Battle but Lose the War, 1890-1920," *Journal of Urban History* 30, No. 2 (Jan. 2004): 132-134, 138-140, 146-47; "Vance Avenue Community Transformation Plan," preliminary draft (2012), p. 27.

<sup>27</sup> "Emma J. Griggs," 1920 U.S. Population Schedule; *Memphis City Directory* (1921), p. 648; "Biography and Family Tree," Sutton Griggs Web site; Vance-Pontotoc Historic District research document, Historic Documents File, J.S. Real Estate, Memphis.

<sup>28</sup> Curry, "Sutton E. Griggs and the African American Literary Tradition of Pamphleteering," pp. 13-14; Gruesser, "Seeking Justice Through Novel Writing and Book Publishing,"

[https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/A432383883/AONE?u=tel\\_middleten&sid+ebSCO&xid+134d7678](https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/A432383883/AONE?u=tel_middleten&sid+ebSCO&xid+134d7678).

<sup>29</sup> Byrd, "Griggs, Sutton Elbert," <https://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/entries/griggs-sutton-elbert>.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid; *Memphis Commercial Appeal*, Mar. 12, 1921, p.9, Dec. 5, 1926, p. 24; Gruesser, "Seeking Justice Through Novel Writing and Book Publishing," [https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/A432383883/AONE?u=tel\\_middleten&sid+ebSCO&xid+134d7678](https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/A432383883/AONE?u=tel_middleten&sid+ebSCO&xid+134d7678). Add CA?

### TO OBSERVE LINCOLN'S BIRTHDAY.

The negroes of Memphis will celebrate the anniversary of the birth of Abraham Lincoln with an elaborate programme at Avery Chapel Church, Wednesday night. There will be an oratorical contest, the winner of which will be presented with a gold medal by B. M. Roddy.

Dr. T. O. Fuller will deliver the principal address of the evening. Dr. R. S. Brown of the Plymouth Community House will direct a chorus of overseas soldiers.

Wm. S. Joy, fresh from the war stricken country, will tell of experiences at the front.

Musical numbers will be presented by clubs from Lemoyne and Howe institutes, Kortrecht High School, School of Practical Arts and Henderson Business College.

Douglass Post No. 86, G. A. R. veterans, will conduct a flag salute.

Dr. R. L. Langford will preside.

The exercises will be conducted under the auspices of the Negro Talent Development League.

Figure 6: A club from Emma Griggs's school performed at Memphis's President Lincoln's birthday commemoration in 1919 (Commercial Appeal, Feb. 9, 1919, p. 31).

As the head of the School of Practical Arts, Emma played a major role in her husband's effort to transform Tabernacle Baptist. The school was located in the church and had its first commencement in May 1916. Under Emma's direction, twelve young women graduated that spring, concentrating in the areas of stenography, cake decoration, and personal service. The following year, the graduates created an alumni association during a meeting at the Griggs's home that included a five-course dinner.<sup>31</sup>

The school also taught performance art, including both music and drama. At the 1918 graduation, students performed "a moral play" entitled "Every Youth," and in 1919, members of a musical club at the school participated in the celebration of President Abraham Lincoln's

birthday at Avery Chapel Church.<sup>32</sup>

Into the 1920s, the focus of the school continued to be female education. A 1921 article promoting the church's various activities stated, "Many colored girls have greatly increased their efficiency and earning capacity by attending [the School of Practical Arts]."<sup>33</sup>

In addition to her work at the School of Practical Arts, Emma taught at the Baptist theological seminary associated with Howe Institute (originally the Memphis Baptist and Normal Institute for West Tennessee Baptists), as did Sutton. The Reverend T.O. Fuller served as the dean of the seminary and as the principal of the Howe Institute. Virginia Broughton was one of the other teachers.<sup>34</sup> During Emma and Sutton's years in

<sup>31</sup> "Sutton E. Griggs Busy Man," *Memphis Commercial Appeal*, May 7, 1916, p. 15; *Memphis Commercial Appeal*, Dec. 5, 1926, p. 24; "Organize Alumni Association," *The Chicago Defender*, Jul. 7, 1917, p. 7.

<sup>32</sup> *Memphis Commercial Appeal*, May 10, 1918, p. 5; "Colored Churches," *Memphis Commercial Appeal*, Feb. 9, 1919, p. 21.

<sup>33</sup> "Speaks in Factories," *Memphis Commercial Appeal*, Mar. 12, 1921, p. 9.

<sup>34</sup> "Colored Church Notices," *Memphis Commercial Appeal*, Dec. 23, 1917, p. 28; Carroll Van West and Jen Stoecker, "Thomas Oscar Fuller," *Tennessee Encyclopedia of History and Culture*,



Memphis, Sutton also played a prominent role in plans to relocate the black Baptist seminary to Nashville and is credited with convincing southern white Baptists to pledge \$50,000 to turn these plans into reality. He served as the first president of American Baptist Theological Seminary in 1925-26, and the Nashville school's historic first building is called Griggs Hall today after him and his father.<sup>35</sup>

As she had in Nashville, Emma contributed to the larger African American community in Memphis. When S. Willie Layten, president of the National Baptist Convention for Colored Women, came to speak at the First Baptist Colored Church in 1916, Emma was among the local leaders to welcome her to the city.<sup>36</sup>

During the mid-1920s, the School of Practical Arts sought to expand to include the culinary arts. Emma had educated herself in this emerging field by taking courses in domestic science at the University of Chicago and attending the American School of Home Economics, which was also located in Chicago.<sup>37</sup> An October 1925 notice about Emma's school in the *Commercial Appeal* read, "Dressmaking, the making of lamp shades, music, millinery, stenography, typewriting and various other practical arts are taught. Courses in domestic science and domestic art will be offered when an equipment for this purpose has been secured."<sup>38</sup> Three years later, the school was offering free demonstrations in cooking, cake baking, preserving, and jelly making. In addition to these new initiatives, Emma's school also had a Bible Study Department and a kindergarten. Pottery classes were held as well.<sup>39</sup>

The School of Practical Arts, particularly the domestic science curriculum, played a role in the increasingly accommodationist stance taken by Sutton Griggs with respect to race relations.<sup>40</sup> In 1928, Sutton promoted the School of Practical Arts' cooking

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<https://tennesseencyclopedia.net/entries/thomas-oscar-fuller/> (accessed Aug. 9, 2022). Fuller was similar to Sutton Griggs in his combination of black pride and accommodationism.

<sup>35</sup> Gruesser, "Seeking Justice Through Novel Writing and Book Publishing," [https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/A432383883/AONE?u=tel\\_middleten&sid+ebSCO&xid+134d7678](https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/A432383883/AONE?u=tel_middleten&sid+ebSCO&xid+134d7678); "American Baptist Theological Seminary Historic District," *National Register of Historic Places Registration Form* (May 2013), p. 16.

<sup>36</sup> A graduate of LeMoyné College, Dr. Sarah Willie Layten was the first president of the Baptist Women's Convention. *Memphis Commercial Appeal*, Oct. 24, 1916, p. 8; "History of the Women's Auxiliary," National Baptist Convention, Inc., Web site, <https://www.nationalbaptist.com/departments/auxiliaries/womans-auxiliary/history> (accessed Aug. 9, 2022).

<sup>37</sup> "Mrs. Griggs Dies;" "Biography and Family Tree," Sutton Griggs Web site.

<sup>38</sup> "Tabernacle Baptist," *Memphis Commercial Appeal*, Oct. 25, 1925, p. 14. See also, "To Complete Plans for Dr. Griggs' Anniversary," *Memphis Commercial Appeal*, Mar. 14, 1926, p. 15.

<sup>39</sup> "Cooking Demonstrations at Tabernacle Baptist," *Memphis Commercial Appeal*, Oct. 17, 1928, p. 19; "Negro Churches," *Memphis Commercial Appeal*, Mar. 27, 1927, p. 9; "Negro Church Exhibits," *Memphis Commercial Appeal*, May 13, 1928, p. 26.

<sup>40</sup> Biographer John Gruesser attributes Sutton Griggs's growing conservatism while living in Memphis to his frustration with the lack of progress among African Americans, the depressing state of racial politics in the country as a whole, and his inability to gain a respectable literary following. Gruesser, "Seeking

demonstrations as a way for domestic servants to improve themselves and to increase their employers' respect for them. While he said that both employees and employers should support these efforts, he put the onus on African American domestic workers to shape white attitudes: "At present we have charge of the domestic service of the white race to a large extent. In proportion as we do this work well we increase respect for ourselves and increase our value."<sup>41</sup> Given that she was constantly seeking to improve her skills and was a lifelong student, Emma no doubt shared her husband's support for self-improvement. Whether she viewed African Americans as largely responsible for changing white attitudes, as Sutton increasingly did, is not known, given available sources at this time.

While the 1930 federal census indicated that the Griggses had the disposable income to own a radio, they felt the effects of the Great Depression that was devastating the country. Soon, Tabernacle Baptist could not make its mortgage payments and was sold at public auction. Emma and Sutton moved to Sutton's home state of Texas, where he became the pastor of his father's previous church, Hopewell Baptist Church, in Denison. Emma apparently attended school in Denison, and it is highly likely that she continued teaching as well.<sup>42</sup>

By 1933, the couple had relocated to Houston, where Sutton aimed to create a Baptist center focused on religious and civic affairs. However, he died of kidney failure on January 2, 1933. *The Pittsburgh Courier* wrote, "The Baptist denomination and the race lost one of its most upstanding men." Sutton was buried in Freedman's Cemetery in Dallas, which his father had helped found in 1879. A park at the location of the historic Hopewell Baptist Church in Denison honors Sutton (and likely his father), Augustus H. Terrell, and Thurgood Marshall.<sup>43</sup>

As Emma began what would be a fifteen-year widowhood, she dedicated herself to honoring her late husband. In July 1933, the *Pittsburgh Courier* reported that she hoped

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Justice Through Novel Writing and Book Publishing,"

[https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/A432383883/AONE?u=tel\\_middleten&sid+ebSCO&xid+134d7678](https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/A432383883/AONE?u=tel_middleten&sid+ebSCO&xid+134d7678).

<sup>41</sup> "Cooking Demonstrations at Tabernacle Baptist."

<sup>42</sup> Emma's obituary says that she attended the "Dennison School." "Sutton E. Griggs," 1930 U.S. Population Schedule, Memphis, Shelby County, TN, Ancestry.com; "Mrs. Griggs Dies," Perre Magness, "Black Writer Took on Issues of Race Early," *Memphis Commercial Appeal*, Feb. 4, 1993, p. 42; Rampersad, "Griggs, Sutton E[ibert]."

<sup>43</sup> The cemetery is now known as Freedman's Memorial Cemetery after a 1930s highway project destroyed most of the original cemetery. Byrd, "Griggs, Sutton Elbert," <https://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/entries/griggs-sutton-elbert>; "Rev. Griggs Buried in Texas," *The Pittsburgh Courier*, Jan. 21, 1933, p. 20; "Biography and Family Tree," Sutton Griggs Web site; Rev. Sutton Elbert Griggs, Find a Grave Memorial, <https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/131554236/sutton-elbert-griggs> (accessed Aug. 26, 2022); Historical marker for Freedman's Cemetery, <https://www.dallasparcs.org/Facilities/Facility/Details/Freedmans-Memorial-Cemetery-769?mobile=ON> (accessed Aug. 26, 2022); "Legacy Park," Denison, Texas, Grayson County TXGenWeb, [http://usgenwebsites.org/TXGrayson/ANewLand/Towns/Denison/legacy\\_park/legacy\\_park.html](http://usgenwebsites.org/TXGrayson/ANewLand/Towns/Denison/legacy_park/legacy_park.html) (accessed Aug. 26, 2022).

to create a memorial library of Sutton's book collection, which consisted of more than 2000 volumes, including those he had written. By 1934, Emma had moved back to Memphis and was living and teaching at 741 Walker Avenue, just steps away from the church she had joined, Metropolitan Baptist.<sup>44</sup> She did not waste any time in working to re-establish the school she had taught out of Tabernacle Baptist for so many years. In August 1934, *The Chicago Defender* reported that Emma had launched a building fund to house her school in Memphis, which would be named after Sutton:

Mrs. E.J. Griggs, 741 Walker Ave., is in the midst of a huge building fund program in the interest of her new school that is to be known as the Griggs Memorial Institute so named in honor of her late husband, Rev. Sutton E. Griggs, who was active here for a number of years as a pastor, orator, writer and civic worker. This is a worthy cause and is thereby attracting a large number of donors.<sup>45</sup>

Despite the optimism of *The Chicago Defender*, it would be more than ten years before Emma could purchase the school building that she dreamed of and name it after her husband. By 1938, she was living at 1003 Mississippi Boulevard and was described in the *City Directory* as both a teacher and the widow of Sutton E. Griggs. By 1940, she had moved to 846 East McLemore and was listed as a seamstress. According to the 1940 census, Emma was also working as a teacher under the auspices of the New Deal's Works Progress Administration (WPA), and she earned \$720 per year. Emma and Eunice, both widows, lodged with another widow, Bettie Lamar, who owned the home.<sup>46</sup>

Coming full circle from the 1910 census, which indicated that both Emma and Eunice were attending school, the 1940 census revealed their extraordinary achievement: both women had completed four years of college at a time when only 3.8% women in the United States over age 25 had achieved a B.A. or higher degree.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> "Biography and Family Tree," Sutton Griggs Web site; *Memphis City Directory* (1934), p. 420; "Mrs. Griggs Dies."

<sup>45</sup> "Memphis, Tenn.," *Chicago Defender*, Aug. 11, 1934, p. 19.

<sup>46</sup> The 1940 city directory gives Emma's address as 846 East McLemore while the census lists 840 E. McLemore. *Memphis City Director* (1938), p. 409, (1940), p. 363; "Emma Griggs," 1940 U.S. Population Schedule, Memphis, Shelby County, TN, Ancestry.com.

<sup>47</sup> The figure for Tennessee in 1940 was 2.7%. "Emma Griggs," 1940 Population Schedule; "Table 6. Percent of the Total Population 25 Years and Over with a Bachelor's Degree or Higher by Sex, for the United States, Regions, and States: 1940 to 2000," in *A Half Century of Learning: Historical Census Statistics on Educational Learning in the United States, 1940-2000* (April 2006), U.S. Census Bureau Web site, <https://www.census.gov/library/publications/2010/demo/educational-attainment-1940-2000.html> (accessed Aug. 28, 2022).

A full-page advertisement for “The School of Practical Arts and Business” in the 1943 *Negro Year Book and Directory*, published by Memphis’s Negro Chamber of Commerce, provides an excellent introduction to the school Emma had re-established under challenging economic circumstances. The ad features a photograph of Emma with the caption, “Mrs. Sutton E. Griggs, Principal and Founder.” As in her previous school at Tabernacle Baptist, Emma’s school offered business classes like stenography and typewriting and artistic courses like flower-making and decorating, along with home economics and religious education. The aim of the school was “to give a practical turn to Education by equipping those who have acquired a Literary Education with a further means of earning a liv[e]lihood.” Further, the school sought “to help those whose Education was short in the regular schools to a point where they can be self-supporting through a knowledge of useful arts.” The ad is clear that real-world skills will be taught: “The World Needs Skilled Workers!”<sup>48</sup>

The *Negro Year Book* ad also shows that Emma was seeking to keep her school relevant in changing times. One of the topics listed under the Business Department was “Guide in Civil Service.” Having worked for the WPA herself, Emma recognized the significance of the expansion of federal government programs under the New Deal and World War II, so she offered training to help people get government jobs. After the end of the war, Emma worked to reach out to veterans, getting her school certified by the Veterans Administration for the training of men and women who had fought for the country.<sup>49</sup>

Finally, the ad reflects the optimistic outlook that Emma and Sutton shared over the years: “Opportunity is Sure to Knock at Your Door! Prepare Now!” The ad listed the location of the school as 1029 Mississippi, which was less than half a mile from her former home/school at 741 Walker Avenue.<sup>50</sup>

As a teacher during the 1940s, Emma continued to work in the community as she had for so many years. In the summer of 1943, she taught a nutrition course to 26 African American women at the recently opened Foote Homes, a sprawling public housing unit that significantly changed Memphis’s black residential and business district. The public was invited to a ceremony in the recreation room to celebrate the end of the course, and Emma showed a movie on nutrition. (Perhaps to appeal to the residents of Foote Homes and to make her school easily accessible to them, Emma would soon relocate

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<sup>48</sup> 1943 *Negro Year Book and Directory* (Memphis, TN: Negro Chamber of Commerce, 1943), p. 94, Historic Documents File, J.S. Real Estate, Memphis. For the significance that middle-class women placed on being addressed by their husband’s surnames (which white southerners often refused to do), see Goings and Page, “African Americans Versus the Memphis Street Railway Company: Or, How to Win the Battle but Lose the War, 1890-1920,” pp. 139.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid, “Mrs. Griggs Dies.”

<sup>50</sup> 1943 *Negro Year Book and Directory*, p. 94.

her school (and her residence) about a mile and a half north of Walker and Mississippi to 303 South Lauderdale, “where the institution began developing rapidly.”<sup>51</sup>

During her second stint living in Memphis, Emma also continued to be involved in Baptist women’s organizations. In 1937, she served as president of District No. 1 of the Metropolitan Baptist Church. As her obituary would later state, “Mrs. Griggs was a member of Metropolitan, devout worker in women’s circles of the Baptist Church, and remained in close touch throughout her active life with affairs of the Baptist ranks of this city and state.”<sup>52</sup>

In 1944-1945, Emma took significant steps with respect to her school. In 1944, she succeeded in having the school chartered as the “Griggs Business and Practical Arts College.” In July 1945, she purchased 303 South Lauderdale from Jesse B. and Ella Cook; three months later, she sold the property to the college. Interestingly, Emma used Sutton’s name on the deed paperwork, which identified her as “S.E. Griggs, unmarried.” This would be the location of the school at her death in 1948, and Griggs College would remain in this neighborhood until it closed in the 1970s. African American families had lived in this neighborhood since the 1880s, and it is the same neighborhood that Emma and Sutton had lived for more than a decade. In addition to being near the new Foote Homes, 303 South Lauderdale was close to a public library for African American residents that had opened at 531 Vance Avenue in 1938 (perhaps in an effort to mitigate the havoc that urban renewal had begun to wreak on this thriving residential and business neighborhood).<sup>53</sup>

The mid-1940s was a difficult time for Emma personally. Eunice passed away in about 1946, and Emma’s own health declined. In January 1948, she suffered a heart attack. Students and colleagues visited with her at Collins Chapel Hospital before she passed away on January 27, 1948. Emma was buried in Elmwood Cemetery. A lengthy and detailed obituary with a photograph appeared in the African American-owned *Atlanta Daily World*, probably picked up from its sister publication, *The Memphis World*. The obituary chronicled Emma’s many significant achievements in the field of education, as

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<sup>51</sup> Foote Homes initially attracted middle-class families affected adversely by the Depression, including the Hooks family, and was viewed positively during its early years, a perception that would change markedly later in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. *Memphis Commercial Appeal*, July 7, 1943, p. 9; “Vance Avenue Community Transformation Plan,” pp. 28-31; Mrs. Griggs Dies” (quotation); “Emma J. Griggs,” Certificate of Death, Department of Public Health, Division of Vital Statistics, State of Tennessee, Ancestry.com.

<sup>52</sup> *Chicago Defender*, Apr. 24, 1937, p. 22; “Mrs. Griggs Dies.”

<sup>53</sup> “Mrs. Griggs Dies;” Deed between S.E. Griggs and Griggs Business and Practical Arts College, a Corporation, Oct. 15, 1945, Tom Leatherwood, Shelby County Register of Deeds, Book 1914, p. 152, Historic Documents File, J.S. Real Estate, Memphis (this deed refers to the July 5, 1945 deed); *Memphis City Directory* (1948), p. 329 (interestingly, the school is listed under Sutton E. Griggs’s name even though he had been deceased for 15 years at this point); Division of Housing and Community Development and the Memphis Landmarks Commission, “Vance Pontotoc Historic District Designation Report,” (undated but c. 1975), 30, 34, Historic Documents File, J.S. Real Estate, Memphis; “Vance Avenue Community Transformation Plan,” p. [6].

well as her support for her husband and his ministerial and community work. The white-owned Memphis *Commercial Appeal* also contained a short notice of Emma's death, describing her as "president and founder of the Griggs Business & Practical Arts College."<sup>54</sup>

The Griggs College of Business continued for almost thirty years. At the time of Emma's death, the Reverend S.A. Owen, pastor of Metropolitan Baptist, chaired the college's board of directors, and C.J. Gaston, a WWII veteran and insurance executive, served as the secretary of the board and as the school's business manager. On December 15, 1949, Owen and Gaston purchased 492 Vance Avenue, just around the corner from 303 Lauderdale. The college would remain there until April 1974, when the property was sold to the Bluff City Elks Lodge.<sup>55</sup>

The story of Griggs College continues in the National Register nomination for 492 Vance Avenue being prepared by Stephanie Wade and Kelsey Lamkin.

## Conclusion and Questions for Future Research

Emma J. Griggs has long been treated mainly as a footnote in studies about her prominent and sometimes controversial husband, Rev. Sutton E. Griggs. Yet this study demonstrates that she is worthy of much more than a footnote. As a teacher, administrator, Baptist club woman, and business college founder, Emma influenced her community significantly in both Nashville and Memphis. She persevered in a virulently racist society as part of the post-Civil War African American middle class that created enduring institutions in urban areas of the South. This group of women and men helped build the communities that would sustain the Civil Rights movement of the 1950s and 1960s.

This study is a first step to a greater understanding of Emma Griggs and the origins of Griggs College. The next step would be to dig even deeper to find some personal papers or writings by Emma. This would help to identify whether she followed a similar ideological trajectory as her husband, becoming increasingly conservative with respect to race relations. One fruitful area of inquiry may be in the archives of colleges that Emma attended in Virginia and Tennessee. Might there be some not-yet-digitized collections that indicate more about Emma's views on education, race, and politics? We know that the post-Civil War missionary schools that she attended were paternalistic

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<sup>54</sup> "Mrs. Griggs Dies;" "Emma J. Griggs," Certificate of Death; Vance Lauderdale, "Griggs Business College," *Memphis: The City Magazine*, Sept. 15, 2020, online version, <https://memphismagazine.com/ask-vance/griggs-business-college/> (accessed Mar. 21, 2022); *Memphis Commercial Appeal*, Jan. 28, 1948, p. 16.

<sup>55</sup> "Mrs. Griggs Dies;" Deed between the Griggs Business and Practical Arts College, a Tennessee Corporation, and the Bluff City Lodge #96, I.P.B.O.E. of W., April 5, 1974, Tom Leatherwood, Shelby County Register of Deeds, Instr. #J52293, Historic Documents File, J.S. Real Estate, Memphis (this deed refers to the December 15, 1949, deed).

and fairly conservative, even as they provided the education in such demand by newly free African Americans in the South. Emma took to heart the “practical,” or “training school,” education promoted for African Americans by many white missionaries after the Civil War, but she saw this as a supplement to literary education, not as a replacement for it. Still, might she have been the more conservative member of her marriage; perhaps Sutton’s increasing conservatism was influenced by Emma?

Finally, additional research into Emma’s teaching career as a widow could shed more light on how she operated and how she interacted with government bureaucracies. Might she have written to city, state, and national figures as she pursued her goal of establishing a college in honor of her late husband? Certainly, she had to apply to the WPA for a teaching position, and perhaps that application is available in federal records. What is more, her dealings with the city of Memphis and Shelby County, evident in the deed records, could include additional sources related to her efforts to establish Griggs College of Business and Practical Arts during World War II.