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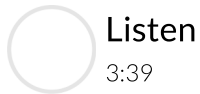


Queen City Tours Focusing On Charlotte's Black History For 26 Years

By SARAFINA WRIGHT (/PEOPLE/SARAFINA-WRIGHT) • FEB 7, 2019

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WFAE's Sarafina Wright reports on Queen City Tours. A group that has highlighted Charlotte's black history for 26 years.

In 1993, Juan “Jay” Whipple held his first Queen City Tour, an excursion that highlights black history throughout Charlotte. Whipple, a Miami native, first took an interest in the city’s history in the early ‘80s when he visited for the first time.

With the tall buildings in uptown and people dressed in suits, Charlotte left an impression on him.



“I actually envisioned everything that’s happening today, back then,” Whipple said. “I didn't know that back then. Charlotte is a little Wall Street. I said, 'You know this city has a lot of promise.'”

He soon landed a job at Duke Power, bringing him to Charlotte. As a newcomer, he went to an event at the Charlotte Museum of History and that began his 26-year journey with Queen City Tours.

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"And from that, I started going to the library – my favorite place in Mecklenburg County.

Downtown, they have a room on the third floor that is a repository for Charlotte history,"

Whipple said. "I ended up spending about 127 hours [there]. I mostly had written notes and then from that, I developed a script. And then I started promoting the tour in '92. And in '93 I gave my first tour."

Whipple's first bus tour started at McDonald's Cafeteria on Beatties Ford Road. Not the golden arches, but a little known black history landmark. And that's still the first site on that particular black heritage tour.

Whipple said the significance of John McDonald is that he was one of the most successful African-American entrepreneurs in Charlotte in a time when there weren't many.

"Now we've had some more that came behind him, but at that time he took a seventh-grade education and left Charlotte in 1949 and ended up in Brooklyn, New York," Whipple said. "He started his first restaurant, McDonald's dining room and then operated it for 20 years."

McDonald returned to Charlotte in the late 1960s, opening his first restaurant at Beatties Ford Road and LaSalle Street.

"The building is still there, it's a check cashing place now," Whipple said. "And business and sales were doing so well that by the 1980s, he was able to buy the land where that restaurant sits today at the corner of Beatties Ford and Interstate 85."

McDonald also built a hotel and the Fun City amusement park. His story is one of the many stories of black history in Charlotte that Queen City Tours features.

After 9/11, Whipple almost went out of business. Then came the 2008 financial crisis. To survive, he diversified his business.

Whipple booked bus trips to places like Charleston, Miami and Washington, D.C. But the foundation of his business, and his inspiration, remains the Charlotte-area African-American history.

"It had to be done, because no one else had done it on that scale," Whipple said. "And my motivation was rather than just reading about that history, we'll take you to these places and say there it is right there. If I can tell someone something they didn't know, then to me that's worth its weight in gold."

And, Whipple said, that's priceless.

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