

Owensboro's African-American Newspapers

By Jerry Long
c.2026



Owensboro had at least three African-American newspapers:

**Freedman's Clarion
Kentucky Reporter
Owensboro Enterprise**

- established in 1892, ceased publication during 1893-1900
- established in 1900, moved to Louisville in 1911
- established in 1913, ceased publication during 1922-1926



Owensboro Messenger, Owensboro, KY, Saturday, 16 April 1892, p.4:

The colored people of Owensboro, have commenced the publication of a newspaper called the Freedman's Clarion. It will be published from the office of the Western Kentucky Progress, on West Main street.



Owensboro Messenger, Owensboro, KY, Wednesday, 17 May 1893, p.1:

The Alliance Paper Changes.

The Farmers' and Laborers' Journal changes bands again on June 1. Editors W. O. Collins and Moses Turner will seek & other occupations, and the paper falls into the hands of Sam James, who has been its chief financial backer from the first. J. M. Griffin, who has edited a Republican paper in Owensboro for two or three years, lately known as the Freedman's Clarion, an. organ of the colored people, will become the editor.



Messenger-Inquirer, Owensboro, KY, 2 May 1976, Bicentennial Section, Part 1, p.15p.

City read 17 papers in 57 years

.... The following April, [1892] the city's first black newspaper, the Freedman's Clarion, began publishing on West Seventh Street. It lasted a short time....

[note by Jerry Long – the Freedman's Clarion ceased publication during 1893-1900]



Owensboro Messenger, Owensboro, KY, Friday, 31 August 1900, p.1:

A New Paper.

Berry Bros. have begun the publication of a new weekly paper, the Kentucky Reporter. It is to be devoted to the interests of the colored people, and will give its principal attention to the publication of local news of interest to them. The mechanical work on the paper is done in the INQUIRER composing and press rooms. R. T. Berry is editor; Dr. J. M. Peters, associate editor, and S. L. Barker, business manager.



Owensboro Messenger, Owensboro, KY, Friday, 17 November 1911, p.10:

Local Laconics

– The Kentucky Reporter, the negro newspaper, which has been published in Owensboro for quite a while by Berry brothers, has been moved to Louisville, where it will be continued.



**Chronicling America – Historic American Newspapers
Library of Congress (<https://www.loc.gov/item/sn86069325/>):**

About Kentucky Reporter (Owensboro, Ky.) 1???-19??

The *Kentucky Reporter*, published in Owensboro and later in Louisville, was a small African-American newspaper with Republican leanings claiming devotion “to the Political, Religious, Educational and Industrial Interest of the Negro.” Co-founded by two brothers, Robert T. and George W. Berry, in 1900, as a weekly, the newspaper continued at least into the early 1940s. Only one issue of the *Kentucky Reporter* from its Owensboro incarnation, dated March 3, 1902, and fewer than three years from the 1940s are extant.

While in Owensboro, the *Kentucky Reporter* was edited by Robert T. Berry and managed by George W. Berry. The Berry brothers were tailors before becoming newspapermen and even advertised their business in their publication. One source suggests that Robert edited another newspaper in Daviess County before co-founding the *Kentucky Reporter*. In 1912, the Berrys moved to Louisville and took the publication with them, possibly due to its declining circulation. George worked as a United States Storekeeper and Gauger, with duties involving issuing revenue stamps, and measuring and storing beverage alcohol. Robert opened a print shop on Seventh Street where he published the *Kentucky Reporter*. He also worked as an investigative reporter for the *Courier-Journal* and a city sanitary inspector. When Robert died on July 28, 1967, his *Courier-*

Journal obituary simply noted that “for many years [he] was the editor of a small Negro-community newspaper.”

By 1921, the *Kentucky Reporter* offices had moved to a building in the heart of the African-American business district of Louisville, which was also home to other African-American newspapers such as the American Baptist, the Louisville Leader, and the Louisville News. Strong leaders in the African-American community—William H. Steward, I. Willis Cole, and William Warley—founded and edited these publications. Though some sources suggest that the *Kentucky Reporter* did not compete with these papers, certain incidents and anecdotes suggest otherwise, specifically when certain African-American leaders formed the Lincoln Independent Party (LIP), contributing to a rift with the Republicans in 1921. Soon after the formation of the LIP, the *Kentucky Reporter* printed 10,000 copies of an article, which was distributed free of charge to the African-American community, denouncing the leaders of the new party. Willis Cole, the editor of the Louisville Leader, stated that Republicans must have funded the publication of this issue, since Robert Berry typically printed 500 copies of the *Kentucky Reporter* and had difficulty selling them.

With so few surviving issues of the *Kentucky Reporter*, it is impossible to comment meaningfully on its content throughout its long publication history. Nonetheless, Berry seemed to have remained true to the publication’s mission to promote the interests of the African-American community. Though some describe its politics as neutral, even the earliest extant issues of the *Kentucky Reporter* hint at its Republican leanings, and one could even infer a more conservative political outlook than that of the other Louisville African-American newspapers of the time.

Robert T. "R. T." Berry and George W. Berry

R. T. Berry (1874-1967) was editor and publisher of the *Kentucky Reporter*, a weekly pro-Republican newspaper first published in Owensboro, KY, then in Louisville, KY, from 1899 to 1953 [source: Bibliographic Checklist of African American Newspapers, by B. K. Henritze, p. 58]. He co-founded the newspaper with his brother George W. Berry (1873-1939).

The U.S. Census notes that the two had been tailors in 1900 in Owensboro and in 1910 operated a newspaper there. They were the sons of George and Molly Berry, and the family lived in Glasgow, KY in 1900.

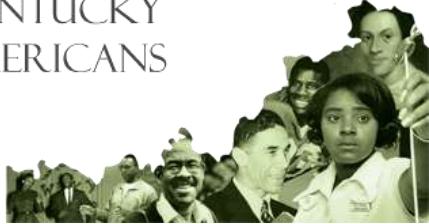
George was born in Allensville, KY, according to his death certificate. Both R. T. and George Berry's World War I draft registration cards, 1917-1918, give the following information: the newspaper was then located at 445 7th Street in Louisville and managed by R. T.; George was employed as a U.S. storekeeper and gauger, and his wife was Florence H. Berry; George, his wife, and R.T. all lived at 1711 W. Chestnut Street; and their mother Mollie Berry was still living in Glasgow.



Head banner of the 22 March 1902 issue of the Kentucky Reporter copy is at the University of Kentucky, Lexington, KY.



NOTABLE KENTUCKY AFRICAN AMERICANS DATABASE



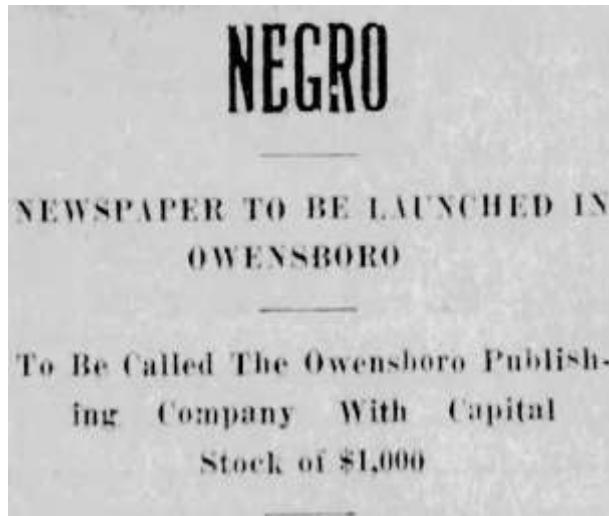
Notable Kentucky African Americans Database
(<https://nkaa.uky.edu/nkaa/items/show/3084>)

The following two entries appeared in a list of “Kentucky African American Newspapers”:

- Kentucky Reporter / Robert T. Berry and George W. Berry / Owensboro, then Louisville / 1899-1953
- Owensboro Publishing Company / Dr. R. F. White, Dr. R. B. Bell, Dr. R. L. Washington, Gilbert Cundiff, Richard Jackson, F. L. Simmons, incorporators / Owensboro / 1913-?
[note by Jerry Long – this entry does not list that the name of the newspaper published by the Owensboro Publishing Company was the Owensboro Enterprise]



Owensboro Inquirer, Owensboro, KY, Friday, 24 October 1913, p.6:



Articles incorporating the Owensboro Publishing company, a negro newspaper that is to be launched in Owensboro, were filed for record in the county clerk's office.

The incorporators are Dr. R. F. White, Dr. R. B. Bell, Dr. R. L. Washington, Gilbert Cundiff, Richard Jackson and F. L. Simmons.

The capital stock is fixed at \$1,000 divided into 200 shares of \$5 each. The indebtedness of the incorporation is not to exceed \$1,000, and the private property the stockholders is to be exempt from the corporate debts.

There are 89 stockholders who have subscribed from one to three shares of stock in the concern, which is to be in existence for 25 years.

The business is to be conducted by a board of directors, and a president, vice president, secretary and treasurer.

[note by Jerry Long – this article does not list that the name of the newspaper published by the Owensboro Publishing Company was the Owensboro Enterprise]



Owensboro Messenger, Owensboro, KY, Saturday, 25 October 1913, p.2:



The Owensboro Publishing company is the name of a new corporation, articles of which were filed in the office of the county court clerk on Friday. The founders of the new institution are negroes, and the object of the company is to publish a newspaper and to do general job printing as well.

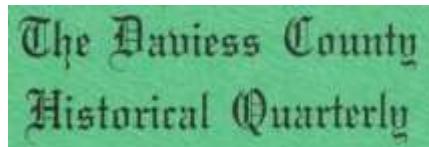
The capital stock of the company is placed at \$1,000 divided into 200 shares of \$5 each, practically of which is subscribed by prominent colored men of the city. The usual officers of a corporation, a president, vice-president, secretary and treasurer are provided for the management of the corporation. The stockholders will elect a directorate seven members on the second Monday in November, who will direct the affairs of the corporation for a period one year.

The name of the publication which it is proposed will be printed is not given in the articles of incorporation. The following signed the document as incorporators: F. L. Simmons, Rev. C. Bean, Richard Jackson, Dr. R. F. White, Dr. R. B. Bell, Dr. R. L. Washington and Gilbert Cundiff.



Owensboro, KY City Directories:

1922-1923	p.154: Enterprise Publishing Company (publishers of the Weekly Enterprise) 802 West Fifth, S. L. Barker – editor, S. L. Powell – manager p.252: Samuel L. Powell, manager The Enterprise Publishing Company and Mam. Life & A. Insurance Co, h. 624 Poplar p.333: Publishers – The Enterprise Publishing Company, 802 West Fifth
1926	p.147: S. L. Powell – not listed as manager of The Enterprise p.249: Newspapers & Publications – The Enterprise is not listed
1928	p.158: Samuel L. Powell – not listed as manager of The Enterprise p.333: Newspapers – The Enterprise is not listed
1930	no reference to The Enterprise found



The Daviess County Historical Quarterly, Vol. I, No. 4, October 1983,
Lee A. Dew, Editor (Owensboro, KY: Daviess County Historical Society)
p.73 (The Editor's Page) & pp.93-94:

Jim Parr's discovery of the career of Alice Allison Dunnigan and the Owensboro Enterprise gives us a fleeting glance at a forgotten element of the history of journalism in Owensboro, as well as an introduction to an important and fascinating woman. Perhaps this article will result in more information being discovered about the Owensboro *Enterprise* and the career of Mrs. Dunnigan.

AN OWENSBORO BLACK WOMAN JOURNALIST
By Jim Parr

The first black woman to be admitted to the press galleries of the U.S. House and Senate, Alice Allison Dunnigan, got her first newspaper job as "hometown correspondent" for the Owensboro *Enterprise*. She worked in this capacity during her final two years of high school, ending in 1923.

Mrs. Dunnigan attended high school in her hometown of Russellville. She says in her 1974 book *A Black Woman's Experience—From Schoolhouse to White House*:

There was no Negro Newspaper published in my town, nor did any circulate there. Negro newspapers were practically unheard-of and unthought-of by most people in my community...

I expressed my desire (to be a newspaper reporter) to a cousin, Virginia Herald, who taught school in Owensboro. She put me in touch with a friend, who was editor of the Owensboro *Enterprise*.

What is known about this black Owensboro newspaper, the *Enterprise*? The 1922.23 *Owensboro City Directory* lists the Enterprise Publishing Company as publishers of the weekly *Enterprise*. The office address is listed as 805 West Fifth street. The editor is identified as S. L. Barker, who was also listed as the principal of Eastern school. The manager of Enterprise Publishing was S. L. Powell who was also listed as manager of Mammouth Life and Accident Insurance Company, a black owned and operated company, with offices as the same address as the publishing firm.

The 1925-26 city director lists only S. L. Powell with the *Enterprise*, listing him also with Mammouth Life. S. L. Barker, no longer associated with the paper as editor, is now listed as principal of Dunbar school.

By 1928 the city director identifies Mr. Powell as manager of Mammouth Life and Mr. Barker as Principal of Dunbar. There is no mention of the *Enterprise*, so by then it was apparently out of business.

In her book, Mrs. Dunnigan mentions a Mr. R. L. Berry as once editor of the *Enterprise*. She says Berry later became editor of the *Kentucky Reporter* in Louisville.

Mrs. Dunnigan described her contributions to the *Enterprise* as "one-sentence stories on the happenings of our little city:"

The column carried such insignificant items as: Born to Mr. and Mrs. So-and-So, a baby girl. Mrs. Jane Doe was Thursday dinner guest of Mr. and Mrs. Hands First. Rev. Holier than Thou filled the pulpit at the First Baptist Church Sunday. . .etc.

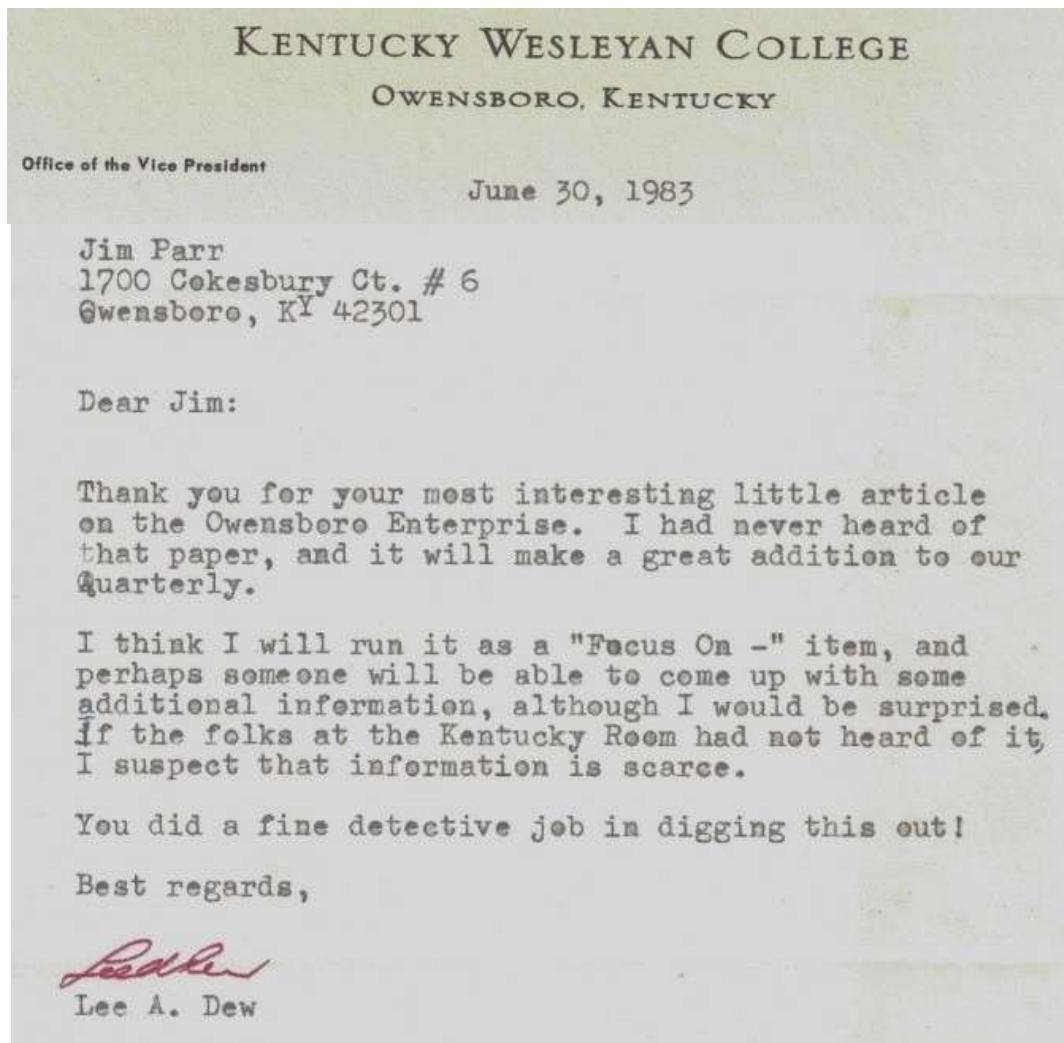
"There was no cash payment attached to such writings," she remembered. A number of papers would be sent to her each week, which she was to sell at five cents each. "I was allowed to

keep three cents out of each sale and return the two cents to the company. The more papers I sold, the more space would be allotted my column. The more space I had the more names could be included. The more names used the more papers I could sell."

While Mrs. Dunnigan was not a resident of Owensboro, her connections with the *Enterprise*, for the two years she was a student at Knob city high school in Russellville, ties her to this unique and little-known part of Owensboro's history.

[note by Jerry Long – Alice Allison, age 13, born KY, daughter of William & Lena Allison, is listed in the 1920 federal census of Russellville, Logan County, KY]

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The Kentucky Encyclopedia, John E. Kleber, editor
(Lexington, KY: The University Press of Kentucky, 1992), p.274:

DUNNIGAN, ALICE (ALLISON). Alice (Allison) Dunnigan, journalist and civil rights leader, was born April 27, 1906, near Russellville, Kentucky, to Willie and Lena (Pittman) Allison. She graduated from the two-year Knob City High School and attended Kentucky State University in Frankfort. She taught in local rural schools and continued her education during vacations. Alice Allison married Charles Dunnigan in December 1931; they had one son, Robert. In 1942 Dunnigan went to work at the U.S. Labor Department in Washington, D.C., where she started her lifelong fight against discrimination.

Dunnigan became a reporter for the Associated Negro Press and in August 1947 was accredited to cover presidential press conferences. In the 1940s she reported the early Washington, D.C., sit-ins to desegregate restaurants. Dunnigan gained greater access for black journalists at even the highest level of government. As a reporter she came to know four presidents. The first black journalist to accompany a U.S. president when traveling, she covered Harry S. Truman's 1948 campaign trip up the West Coast. In the 1960s she was a member of the President's Committee on Equal Opportunity under both John F. Kennedy and Lyndon B. Johnson. Dunnigan was a world traveler, a well-known speaker, and a leader in the civil rights movement. She was inducted into the Kentucky Journalism Hall of Fame in 1982. For a time, she wrote a weekly column for the *Louisville Defender* on the achievements of Kentucky blacks. Her book *The Fascinating Story of Black Kentuckians: Their Heritage and Traditions* was published in 1982. She died May 6, 1983, and was buried in Maryland National Memorial Park.

See Alice Allison Dunnigan, *A Black Woman's Experience—From Schoolhouse to White House* (New York 1974).
By Rena Milliken



Alice Allison Dunnigan (1906-1983); statue honoring her at the Seek Museum in Russellville, KY



Messenger-Inquirer, Owensboro, KY, Wednesday, 31 March 1982, p.1C:

Hager selected for hall of fame

By Stewart Jennison, Messenger-Inquirer

Lawrence W. Hager Sr., a founder and chairman of the boards of the Owensboro Publishing Co. and Owensboro Broadcasting Co., will be among 10 distinguished journalists and broadcasters inducted into the Kentucky Journalism Hall of Fame next week.

Also selected was Alice Allison Dunnigan, a Russellville native who became the first black woman to receive press credentials to the U.S. Congress and the White House.

While still a high school student in Russellville, Ms. Dunnigan was a contributing writer for the Owensboro Enterprise, a weekly newspaper published in the early 1920s.

The awards will be presented Monday evening in Lexington at the University of Kentucky Center for the Arts....

William Safire, nationally syndicated columnist of the New York Times, will deliver the fifth annual Joe Creason Lecture.

The Kentucky Journalism Hall of Fame was established by the UK Journalism Alumni Association to honor Kentuckians who have made significant contributions to the profession of journalism.

The honorees may be natives of the state or people who have spent a significant portion of their careers in Kentucky working in newspaper or broadcast journalism....

.... Ms. Dunnigan, 75, began her journalism career as the Logan County reporter for the Owensboro Enterprise, which was sold in black communities throughout western Kentucky.

After training to be a teacher at Kentucky State University, Ms. Dunnigan taught in rural schools, but her interest in journalism led her to Washington, D.C., where she was a bureau chief of the Associated Negro Press from 1947 to 1961. She left newswriting in 1961 when President Kennedy appointed her to his committee on equal employment opportunities.

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Messenger-Inquirer, Owensboro, KY, Monday, 3 February 2014, p.1A:

Three with ties to region honored in Gallery of Great Black Kentuckians

By Keith Lawrence, Messenger-Inquirer

Two men and a woman with connections to the Owensboro area are among 56 people whose framed posters are hanging in the Gallery of Great Black Kentuckians at The Paul Sawyer Public Library, 319 Wapping St., in Frankfort during February.

* In 1969, Moneta J. Sleet Jr. (1926-1996), an Owensboro native, became the first black American to win the Pulitzer Prize in photography.

He covered the funeral service for the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. in 1968. His photograph of King's widow, Coretta, and their youngest daughter, Bernice, at the funeral won him the Pulitzer.

Sleet covered the Civil Rights movement for several magazines from the early 1950s until the 1970s.

* Marnel C. Moorman (1943-1994), a Central City native, was the first black educator to be elected president of the Kentucky Education Association.

During his two terms in the office, Moorman was instrumental in helping teachers implement changes mandated by the Kentucky Education Reform Act.

* Alice Dunnigan (1906-1983) was born in Russellville.

She never lived in the region. But when she was 14, Dunnigan began writing a weekly column, "Home Town News," in the Owensboro Enterprise, a newspaper aimed at black families.

Later, she became a reporter for the Associated Negro Press and became the first black woman to have a Capitol press pass and the first elected to the Women's National Press Club. In 1967, she was appointed to the President's Council on Youth Opportunity.

The gallery opened Friday morning.

"It is our pleasure and privilege to host this high-quality display that recognizes and honors the remarkable accomplishments of women and men who through talent, hard work and determination have contributed and continue to contribute so much to enrich our history, our lives and our society," Donna Gibson, the library's executive director, said in a news release.

Starting in March, the posters will be permanently displayed at the Department of Public Advocacy's main state office at 100 Fair Oaks Lane, Frankfort.

The posters and articles about those being honored are available electronically at <http://kchr.ky.gov/about/gallergreatblack.htm>

