

## THE ORIGINAL FISK JUBILEE SINGERS®, THEIR TOUR AND THEIR MUSIC.

### 1871 FISK JUBILEE SINGERS®



Photo: Courtesy of Special Collections Department;  
John Hope and Aurelia Franklin Library, Fisk University.

The Fisk School was established by the American Missionary Association in Nashville, Tennessee. Following the establishment of the institution in 1866, it became necessary for the administration to seek funding to sustain the educational programs and related matters. George L. White, the school's treasurer and music teacher formed a choral ensemble with the purpose of traveling around the United States of America to raise funds for the school.

With the help of some of the students including Ella Sheppard, Negro spirituals were collected and arranged, thus transforming them into high art forms. These newly arranged were performed in their concerts. The ensemble left Nashville on October 6, 1871 and traveled as far as to the East Coast of the country. The challenges they faced did not prevent them from completing their mission. The ensemble raised enough money to help with the purchase of land for the current location of Fisk University. The ensemble also introduced the Negro spirituals to the world as a result of their tour.

The story of each member of the original ensemble is unique and important to the history of Fisk University and the United States of America.

**Important to the founding of the Fisk School were the following individuals:**

- Reverend Edward P. Smith
- Erastus Milo Cravath
- General Clinton B. Fisk
- John Ogden

An Early Building at Fisk University



Photo: Courtesy of Special Collections Department;  
John Hope and Aurelia Franklin Library, Fisk University.

George L. White



Photo: Courtesy of Special Collections Department;  
John Hope and Aurelia Franklin Library, Fisk University.

### **Who were members of the original Fisk Jubilee Singers®?**

The story of each member of the original ensemble will be discussed in class.

**Phebe Anderson** started the journey on October 6, 1871 with the ensemble but never completed that first tour. Here is a list of the original Fisk Jubilee Singers who completed the first tour.

- **Soprano:** Ella Sheppard, Jennie Jackson and Maggie Porter
- **Alto:** Minnie Tate and Eliza Walker
- **Tenor:** Isaac Dickerson and Thomas Rutlin
- **Bass:** Greene Evans and Benjamin Holmes.

### **What were some of the first songs the ensemble performed?**

Didn't my Lord deliver Daniel?

My Lord says there's room enough.

Children, you'll be called on to march in the field of battle.

Go down, Moses.

Singing for Jesus.

Steal away to Jesus.

O, redeemed, redeemed, I'm washed in the blood of the Lamb.

Swing low, sweet chariot.

What was the importance of the Negro spirituals to the Fisk Jubilee Singers and their tour? This is one of the questions that will be discussed in class.