

Title: Greater Kansas City Black History Study Group

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The Greater Kansas City Black History Study Group (GKCBHSG) is a branch of the Association for the Study of African American Life and History (ASALH). Its mission is to educate its members and the community, deepening their understanding of African American life and history, with the belief that knowledge and pride in African American heritage will preserve African American culture for future generations. It seeks to create a diverse community understanding its sameness in humanity while respecting its cultural differences. The GKCBHSG accomplishes its mission through educational programming and community outreach. The organization draws its membership from the greater Kansas City metropolitan area, with members from both Kansas and Missouri.

While only recently recognized as an official branch by ASALH, the Greater Kansas City Black History Study Group traces his origins to two previously existing ASALH branches: the Lorenzo J. Greene Branch in Kansas City, Missouri, and the Burks / Beasley Branch in Kansas City, Kansas. These branches had long and rich histories but were unable to continue meeting ASALH requirements and ceased to function as branches. In January 2011, a group of former members from both branches – including former Greene Branch president Dennis Robinson – sought to resurrect the Greene Branch. When the national office of ASALH made clear this was not possible, the group began the work of developing a new branch. ASALH recognized the GKCBHSG as an organizing branch in October 2013 and received official branch status in September 2015.

The initial focus of the Greater Kansas City Black History Study Group was community outreach and the creation of educational programming for the membership and the public, much

of it organized around a yearly theme decided by the national ASALH office. During the 2014-2015 year, the GKCBHSG initiated a public lecture series in partnership with the National Archives at Kansas City entitled *The Civil Rights Century: Milestone in Black History*. Over the last several years, the GKCBHSG has also developed institutional partnerships with the Black Archives of Mid-America, the National World War I Museum and Memorial, and the University of Missouri-Kansas City Black Studies Program.

The Greater Kansas City Black History Study Group meets on the third Monday of the month, September through June. The organization, as of this writing, holds meetings at St. Mary's Episcopal Church in downtown Kansas City, Missouri; it previously held regular meetings at Second Baptist Church in Kansas City, Missouri. The organization's year begins with a Founder's Day Program in September, which commemorates the creation of the Association for the Study of Negro Life and History – now known as the Association for the Study of African American Life and History – by Dr. Carter G. Woodson in 1915. Monthly meetings bring in speakers from around the greater Kansas City metropolitan area that address the annual ASALH theme. In recent years these themes have included “Hallowed Grounds: Sites of African American Memories” (2016); “The Crisis in Black Education” (2017); and “African Americans in Times of War” (2018). Also in recent years, the GKCBHSG has hosted a monthly film series in partnership with the National Archives at Kansas City; these programs provide the public an opportunity to see award winning documentaries concerning African American life, history, and culture with commentary from local scholars and experts. The GKCBHSG advertises its programming through flyers, email blasts, and Facebook posts. In the last two years, the GKCBHSG has participated in the annual Juneteenth parade through the Eighteenth and Vine Historic District in Kansas City. The organization's year ends in June with a picnic.

The Greater Kansas City Black History Study Group undertook a new project in March 2018 to celebrate local African American women as part of Women's History Month. Members, under the leadership of current President Larry Lester, wrote short vignettes of thirty-one influential Black women who lived or worked in the greater Kansas City metropolitan area. The women included activists, civic leaders, educators, entertainers, politicians, and others. The organization posted these short biographies on its Facebook page on a daily basis in March 2018. The GKCBHSG will undertake the project again in 2019.

The Greater Kansas City Black History Study Group has an executive committee composed of a branch president, vice-president, secretary, treasurer, and historian. As of this writing, the current officers are as follows: Larry Lester, president; Dr. Cecelia Robinson, vice-president; Gwendolyn Blue, secretary; Michael Byrd, treasurer; Brenda Vann, branch chronicler; and Dr. Antonio F. Holland, historian. There are a number of standing committees, including fundraising, membership, nominating, and programming. Edith Haney-Galvin has served as programming committee chair for several years.

Bibliography

Vann, Brenda. "Branch history." 2018.