

South's First Black Millionaire Made Fortune In Memphis

By Paula R. Materre
For Kraft, Inc.
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Robert R. Church Sr., the South's first black millionaire, made his fortune in Memphis, TN. After buying a saloon with money made at his shoeshine stand, Church invested wisely and well in real estate throughout the city. By 1899, he was able to fulfill a need for blacks who were prohibited from the city parks when he constructed Church Park which stands today. In 1906, he started the Solvent Savings Bank and Trust Company. Both the park and the bank were located on Beale Street.

Beale Street may not be the street it once was, but it certainly is an attractive center for locals and tourists alike. Adding to its flavor is W.C.'s Cafe, one of

the city's most popular eateries, located across the street from the Old Daisy Theatre, once a major entertainment center. W.C.'s Cafe is run by Harry Miller who says the concept for the restaurant was appropriate considering the fame of W.C. Handy

and his Beale Street Blues. The walls of the cafe are decorated with sheet music from the Handy Brothers Publishing Company, posters from different eras, and some beautiful art deco light fixtures which were recovered from a junk heap.

Miller moved to Memphis four years ago from Los Angeles with a degree in psychology and a talent for knowing what pleases the customers. Since the opening of W.C.'s last year, he has had time to monitor their food choices. The menu includes fried

chicken wings, catfish, red beans and rice, and sour mash whiskey, to name a few. Miller says the catfish is a favorite, and he was surprised when the deep fried chitlins moved up from appetizer to main dish during the tourist season.

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