

Nominee's Accomplishment Biography  
William S. Scales (1878-1949), Winston Salem NC

W.S. Scales was an early movie-maker and entrepreneur who contributed to the entertainment and cultural life of the Twin City's African American community in the early to mid - 1900's. Born here in 1878, he left the factory where he began work as a laborer (RJR Tobacco), and opened a small "café" to serve his former co-workers a hot meal at lunchtime. Because that venture and others were successful, he eventually was able to open three theaters in Winston Salem to serve African Americans. This was during the era of segregation; therefore, this was one of the first outlets for entertainment located in the minority community. When white – owned theaters did finally permit African American customers, they had to go up into the balconies rather than be seated in the main auditorium.

The "Lincoln Theater", the "Lafayette Theater", were located in what was considered to be the 'black business district'. This area was Third and Fourth Streets, between Chestnut and Church Streets. The Lafayette was located at (approximately) 124 ½ E. Fourth Street; the Lincoln was around the corner westward on Church, near the intersection of 4<sup>th</sup> Street and Church. Both these theaters were in the shadow of the rear of the towering Reynolds Building and within walking distance of the Safe Bus Company's downtown terminal stop, at Third and Chestnut. Today's Public Safety Building on Church Street sits on the former physical site of the Lincoln. The "Rex" was a third theater operated by W.S Scales.

1920 – 1960's:

The Lafayette began with Vaudeville acts in the 1920's, and, for example, the parents of the Nicholas Brothers (Fayard and Harold who went on to Hollywood fame), performed there. This theater was sustained until the early 1960's, when urban renewal, the unrest of the Civil Rights movement, and deterioration combined to cause its closing.

During the early years, W. S. Scales, in addition to arranging for entertainment acts to come to Winston, dabbled with movie making. One early attempt in 1922 was "A Shot in the Night" (as recorded in an unpublished Scales family history by Willa Mae Scales Heningburg - 1983). An earlier film was entitled: "A Giant of His Race" and was shown at the Lafayette in 1921. I have attached a copy of the advertisement; that document is courtesy of Mr. Alex Albright of East Carolina University, Greenville, N.C. This film was later shown in Chicago, Ill and a few other cities.

The Museum of NC History in Raleigh previously created an exhibit in 2015 entitled "Starring North Carolina", and W.S. Scales received mention as an early movie maker, with 'North State Films'. Information obtained from their exhibit is as follows:

Name: W. S. Scales                      Title: Director, Producer

Date: 1879–1949

Credit: Linda Scales

Text: W. S. Scales was one of the earliest African American producers, and his studio, North State Film Corporation, was possibly the first in North Carolina run by a North Carolinian.

From Madison (Rockingham County), Scales became a successful businessman and theater owner in Winston-Salem. In the 1920s he started producing "race films" that targeted black audiences—including A Giant of His Race (1921), His Great Chance (1923), and The Devil's Match (1923), all with African American director Ben Strasser'.

*Courtesy of Sallie Bloom-919-807-7965*

*North Carolina Museum of History \**

*Longleaf Film Festival, Online Teacher Workshops and Producer, North Carolina: Long Story Shorts!*

Other documentation was found by Mr. Albright in the Chicago Defender paper, after a showing of "A Giant of His Race" in that city. It reads as follows:

Letter from Ada L. Booker, 739 Depot St., [Pratt's Palace Hotel] Winston-Salem, says 'Scott's Players are at Scales' Lafayette Theater & doing good business'. (Chicago Defender, Oct 1921).

1923 – Elected as Assistant Secretary of the Theater Owners Booking Association or TOBA. (Alex Albright, East Carolina University, Greenville, N.C.)

Please also note the paragraph from the local tourism website in which W.S. Scales' venture into night club ownership is discussed. ([www.visitwinstonsalem.com/experiences/exp\\_aaguide02.html](http://www.visitwinstonsalem.com/experiences/exp_aaguide02.html))(10-26-2007)

#### Civic and Community Involvement

- W.S. Scales was an active church member. For many years, he was the Treasurer as well as trustee for St. James AME (African Methodist Episcopal) Church. This church is still located at 1501 Patterson Avenue. The AME Church dates to 1787 when Richard Allen (a former slave) and others were pulled off their knees while praying in church. Thus, they left St. George Methodist Episcopal Church in Philadelphia in protest, and the AME Church was born.
- Scales founded Scales Bonding Company (1924-1949), for the purpose of getting workers out of the local jail, so they could return to work. Most of his early customers were arrested for minor charges: loitering, excessive drink, and the like. This business lasted and was transferred to his son after his death in 1949.
- He was a chairman of the North Carolina Colored Fair – again, this was a time of segregation, so blacks and whites had separate events. There he often coordinated a horse and buggy race for the community with his own animal as one of the entrants -"Madie Dare". (Heningburg, 1983).
- For a time, he agreed to take the helm of an early local bank or credit union, which was established for colored customers only.
- And, W.S. participated with male friends in brotherly fellowship, as a member of the Knights of Pythias, a fraternal organization. This is no longer in existence.
- Finally, oral family tradition states that he, being the oldest sibling of nine, helped some sisters and a brother in starting their own businesses, whether a small café, or a neighborhood grocery. (Heningburg, 1983)

For these reasons, I request that my grandfather, William Samuel Scales (1878-1949), may be considered as a recipient for the Walk of Fame at the Convention Center. Thank you.

*The N.C. Museum of History is located at 5 E. Edenton Street in downtown Raleigh. The museum collects and preserves artifacts of North Carolina history and educates the public on the history of the state and the nation through exhibits and educational programs*