

HISTORIC MARKER PROGRAM

Forsyth County Historic Resources Commission

Safe Bus Company

100 W. Fifth Street

The Safe Bus Company operated in Winston-Salem from 1926 to 1972. It was formed to provide transportation to African-American workers in Winston-Salem. At the time the Safe Bus Company was formed, public transportation did not operate near the portions of the city where most of the African-American population lived. As a result, several different “jitneys” began operating largely to transport African-American workers to their employment in the city’s tobacco factories. During the early 1920s, there were approximately 22 African-American men operating 35 jitneys in a competitive fashion. Each jitney owner had a designated area that he served. If another jitney came along and picked up passengers usually covered by someone else, it sometimes made for confrontations between jitney owners.

On April 24, 1926, Mr. Clarence T. Woodland organized a meeting of all the jitney owners and suggested that they organize to form a single company. Out of the 35 jitney owners operating in Winston-Salem at the time, 21 men showed up for the first meeting, which was held in a small office in the Lincoln Theatre Building on Church Street in Winston-Salem. During this meeting, several jitney owners joined forces and formed the Safe Bus Company. The founders of Safe Bus Company were as follows: John M.



Adams, Elliot A. Davis, George I. Dillahunt, Jefferson H. Hairston, Elijah T. Miller, Joseph Miller, Harvey F. Morgan, Ralph R. Morgan, Charlie R. Peebles, George Ragsdale, and Clarence T. Woodland.

Safe Bus Company’s name originates from a promise made to Mayor Thomas Barber in 1926 to operate a safe and organized bus system, as the company transitioned from individually-owned jitneys to a fleet of 35 city buses. Harvey F. Morgan was the first president of the company; Jefferson H. Hairston, the first vice-president; Charlie R. Peebles, secretary-treasurer, and Clarence T. Woodland, assistant secretary. In 1926, a charter was granted to the organization and the Safe Bus Company corporation was officially formed.



Safe Bus in Front of Atkins High School
Courtesy of Forsyth County Public Library Photograph Collection

On June 1, 1926, Safe Bus Company began offering transportation to the African-American citizens of Winston-Salem. With the motto “safety and service,” Safe Bus Company eventually employed more than 80 drivers and carried 8,000 passengers a day, earning the distinction of being the largest African-American-owned and operated transportation business in the world. The first offices for the company were located in the Atlantic

Building on E. Third and N. Church Streets, while the first garage was opened in a building on the corner of E. Third Street and Patterson Avenue. By 1968, Safe Bus Company was the sole public transportation provider for Winston-Salem’s African-American residents. In 1972, the Winston-Salem Transit Authority purchased the assets of the Safe Bus Company.

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This information is also available
at the Forsyth County
Historic Resources Commission’s web site:
<http://www.ForsythCountyHRC.org>