



VICTOR GREEN

BERGEN CO. MERGED, NJ BRANCH 425

The 1930s through 1960s are remembered as a time of racial discrimination throughout the country. The laws and practices were designed to keep African-Americans from voting or even patronizing businesses, including many restaurants and hotels. For many, traveling was less an adventure to be filled with awe and pleasure, and more a risky undertaking involving embarrassment and fear.

Victor H. Green, an entrepreneurial letter carrier from Harlem, saw a need and created *The Negro Motorist Green Book*—commonly referred to as the “Green Book”—a travel guide listing black- and white-owned hotels, inns and even private residences that would accept African-American travelers.

In 1913, at the age of 21, Green was living in Hackensack, NJ, and went to work at the local post office as a letter carrier. Green joined NALC’s Hackensack Branch 425, now known as Bergen County Merged. By 1933, he had moved to Harlem but continued his route in New Jersey.

Green was described as a man of “tremendous drive and energy” by Novera Dashiell, an assistant editor, in the 1956 guide: “Tall, well-built, always impeccably groomed, with an easy affable manner.”

The idea for the guide crystalized in Green’s mind in 1932 and would lead to the first edition being printed in 1936, covering just New York City. The demand was so great that the following year it became a national guide, and eventually expanded to contain international listings.

“It didn’t matter where you went, Jim Crow was everywhere then, and black travelers needed this badly,” Julian Bond said in a 2010 interview while he was president of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). Bond spoke from personal experience. “My family had a Green Book when I was young, and used it to travel in the South to find out where we could stop to eat, where we could spend the night in a hotel or someone’s home,” he said.

Victor Green set up extensive contacts to get his information, including using his NALC connections. “There are postal workers everywhere,” Bond explained. “And he used them as guides to tell him: ‘Well, here’s a good place here, a good place there.’ ”

The Green Book was especially popular with African-Americans who traveled frequently for work, such as jazz



musicians and ballplayers in the Negro leagues. People in Harlem and the broader African-American community also knew the importance of what Green had created. Author Langston Hughes took out an ad to support the 1947 edition.

Victor Green believed that the entrepreneurial spirit that propelled his guide could be a driving force for advancing the African-American community, especially through the expanding use of advertising that marked the late 1950s and early 1960s.

Assistant Editor Dashiell quoted him, in the 1956 edition, as saying, "If Negro-owned business is good, it can be better with advertising." She explained, "His philosophy is that we can create our OWN 'name brands.'"

Green worked on the annual guides while continuing to deliver the mail. By 1942, he had a route in Leonia, NJ, where he worked until 1952, when after 39 years of carrying the mail, he retired at age 60. With help, he continued publishing some 15,000 guides annually until his death in 1960. The guide remained in publication, with the 1959 guide listing his wife, Alma, as the editor and publisher; the 1966 edition lists two publishers who weren't related to Green. The guides stopped thereabouts, after the passage of the 1964 Civil Rights Act had made discrimination by businesses illegal.

The NALC judges noted the timeliness of recognizing Green with the Legacy Award during the same year that the United States is celebrating the 50th anniversary of the Civil Rights Act. "We must never forget the racial inequalities of our past, but by recognizing the important work that Victor Green did, and continuing to honor his spirit and his dedication, we can all get closer to seeing Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s dream come true," NALC President Fredric Rolando said.

It's likely that Green would not be too upset about his guide being relegated to history books. He often said that he looked forward to the time when the Green Book no longer would be necessary.

"There will be a day sometime in the near future when this guide will not have to be published," he wrote in 1949. "That is when we as a race will have equal opportunities and privileges in the United States. It will be a great day for us to suspend this publication for then we can go wherever we please."

