

# Black Composer Returns to Kansas

by Tom Averill

Kansas honored Coffeyville-born Dr. Eva Jessye, one of the first black women to attain international musical fame, with an official "Eva Jessye Day" on October 1.

Activities included a performance of Dr. Jessye's folk oratorio, "Paradise Lost and Regained," directed by Dr. Jessye herself, at Pittsburg State University.

Eva Jessye was born in 1895. As she writes in her autobiography, *My Spirituals*, it was "on a Sunday morning, at the very hour the 'Amen Corner' in the Macedonia Baptist Church across the street was at the boiling point. 'Hallelujahs,' 'Praises to God,' and the frenzied 'stomp' of sisters in the throes of religious ecstasy resounded through the air."

Music was an integral part of her childhood. An unsubstantiated story has it that around 1905 an orchestra arrived in Coffeyville by train only to find that the car carrying all of its music had inadvertently been switched off the track. Only the conductor had his score, and in searching Coffeyville for someone to transcribe the music from his score into the various parts for the orchestra he was continually told of a 10-year-old black girl, the only person capable of the work. In desperation, he went to Eva Jessye. She finished the transcribing in time for the concert.

From Coffeyville, Eva Jessye went to Quindaro, Kansas, where she attended Western University, the only university for blacks in Kansas. From there she went to Langston University in Oklahoma, taught public school for a time, and in 1920 became music director at Morgan State College at Baltimore. Six years later she founded what was to be known as the Eva Jessye Choir. In 1927, she wrote *My Spirituals*, songs and reminiscences of her southeast Kansas childhood. By the 1930s, she was directing choir for such famous productions as "Hallelujah" the first black musical motion picture; "Four Saints in Three Acts," Virgil Thomson and Gertrude Stein's opera; and "Porgy and Bess," for which she remained choir director until her retirement in 1958. In 1963, Dr. Martin Luther King chose the Eva Jessye Choir to accompany his March on Washington.

The 83-year-old composer and conductor currently resides in Ann Arbor, but is now in Pittsburg, preparing for "Paradise Lost and Regained." She is also writing a book on her "Porgy and Bess" experiences and leading an active life: "I can touch fingers with the past, the present, and with the future." She gives seminars, workshops and lectures, and stays busy serving as "confidante, advisor, informant, etc." "So many problems students have today," Dr. Jessye remarks. "But it is interesting and rewarding."



photo by Danny Caplan

A record number of bicyclists from several mid-west states rode along in the annual Octoginta. The 80-mile fall tour of Douglas County was sponsored by the Mt. Oread Bike Club. Here, the riders stretch out on the route to Lecompton, early in the ride.

## LAPSAC Favors Legalized Midwifery and Hospital "Birthing Room"

provide immediate care of newborn infants, all in continual collaboration with a physician.

To help change the legal outlook towards midwives in Kansas, two LAPSAC members will speak at the

Public Health and Welfare committee's next hearing. Chris Petr and Garnet Wrigley will propose adoption of the Rhode Island midwifery bill.

The Rhode Island bill provides for the practice and licensing of both nurse midwives and lay midwives. Nurse midwives would qualify by training at an established nurse midwifery school in addition to their nurse certification. Lay midwives would complete a state approved midwifery educational program but need no prior certification.

To prepare for the legislative hearings, two statewide meetings have been held, with the purpose

of unifying the large grassroots support shown for this licensing of midwives in Kansas. LAPSAC hosted the first of these meetings in Lawrence. The latest meeting, in Wichita focused on strategies for the hearings.

Although the state midwifery legislation has been a strong focus of LAPSAC since the organization began, local issues have not taken a back seat. Progress is being made by the hospital alternative committee in establishing a birthing room at Lawrence Memorial Hospital.

The birthing room proposal would rearrange the separate labor/delivery/recovery rooms in favor of one "home-like" room where the entire birth process could occur as naturally as possible with medical standby assistance. The LAPSAC committee has drafted a position paper on hospital birthing rooms and is communicating with hospital authorities

who are now considering plans to implement such a service.

The need to have more control and responsibility in our own lives is expressed in many ways by people in Lawrence. Certainly one of the most basic areas is health care and what literally comes first is birth.

LAPSAC hopes to provide the continually valuable service of exploring and voicing the needs and desires for quality child-birth experiences.

For LAPSAC information, write Chris or Tami Petr, RR#3 Baldwin, Kansas 66006.

## LETTERS



Dear Editor,

I recently read your article in Public Notice titled "North Lawrence in Zoning Grip!" by Diane Luber. As a city employee, I have found the alternative viewpoints expressed in Public Notice to be, for the most part, interesting and informative. Unfortunately, this article went beyond the expression of an alternative viewpoint and grossly misrepresented the facts concerning the Lawrence-Douglas County Planning Office staff's attendance at the June 12 and July 10 meetings of the North Lawrence Improvement Association. I would like to make the following corrections:

1. The overall "tune" of the article gave the impression that the Planning Staff was trying to keep information about Plan '95 and the existing zoning in North Lawrence from being accessible to North Lawrence residents. The facts are that both a copy of the Land Use Guide found in Plan '95 and the official zoning maps were put on display by the staff at the July 10 meeting.

2. The article says that residents were not told how to apply for a rezoning. I personally went over the steps involved in applying for a rezoning at the June 12 meeting.

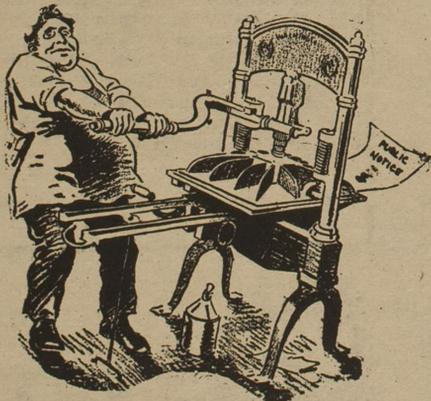
3. The article says that I said the following, "He was able to tell us that according to the present Plan '95, the residential area of North Lawrence will be surrounded by industry by 1995." I did not say this at all, but rather, that much of the area surrounding the existing residential area is designated by the general land use guide plan as a potential location for future industrial expansion.

4. The article says that we did not inform North Lawrence residents how Plan '95 might be altered or modified. At the June 12 meeting, this subject was extensively discussed. One of the points that I made at that meeting was that the neighborhood plans were dealing primarily with land use problems and that land use was going to be a major focus of the North Lawrence Plan.

The article also says that the Planning Office was "not prepared" for the Improvement Association meetings. This remark is especially unfair since I was unable to attend the July 10 meeting because of a previous commitment to the Oread Neighborhood Association. The Planning Staff representative at that meeting was Steve Allison, a CETA employee who joined the staff in May to work on the neighborhood surveys. His purpose at that meeting was to supply the North Lawrence Improvement Association with the information that they had requested at their June meeting, and not to answer technical questions.

Alternative viewpoints are fine, but how about substantiating them with a few facts? Sincerely,

Garner Stoll  
Neighborhood Planner  
Lawrence-Douglas Co. Planning Office



## Public Notice

PUBLIC NOTICE is published by PUBLIC NOTICE INC., in cooperation with the Community Mercantile Food Cooperative. Our office is located at 1101 1/2 Massachusetts, Lawrence, Kansas 66044. Using the Ma Bell connection, call (913)-842-5657.

PUBLIC NOTICE SUBSCRIBES TO PACIFIC NEWS SERVICE AND CPF.

CONTRIBUTORS: joyce kendrick, bill beems, molly vanhee, kate duffy, kathy clarke, richard linker, marti olson, hoaky, earl haehl, val kelly, danny caplan, ann haehl, belle moore, rick wrigley, barry shalinsky, david hann, chuck magerl, john scheirman, barbara willits, terri tork, sheree welch, larry bethel, tom averill, jeffrey ann goudie, diane hueter, trudy rice, bob marvin.  
SPECIAL THANKS TO OUR COMMUNITY OF READERS WHO HAVE BEEN WONDERING WHY OUR LIVES PREVENTED THIS PUBLIC NOTICE FROM HAPPENING SOONER.