



Friday, February 14, 2014

Tennessee State University, Avon Williams Campus

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- 8:30 Registration begins
- 9:00 **Welcome and Opening Remarks**  
Mr. Tim Walker, Executive Director, Metro Nashville Historical Commission  
Mrs. Linda T. Wynn, Conference Co-Chair  
The Honorable Karl Dean, Mayor, Metropolitan Nashville and Davidson County
- 9:20 ***Black Soldiers and the War of the Rebellion***  
Mr. Norman J. Hill, Commissioner, Tennessee Historical Commission
- 9:40 ***A Magnificent Beginning: Remembering the Battle of Nashville***  
Dr. Timothy Johnson, Lipscomb University
- 10:10 **Break**
- 10:30 ***Libraries as Cultural Keepers: Sharing Information, Building Communities, Preserving Stories***  
Dr. Janet Walsh, Avon Williams Library, Tennessee State University
- 11:00 **Remarks**  
The Honorable Brenda Wynn, Davidson County Clerk  
Dr. Glenda Baskin Glover, President, Tennessee State University
- 11:30 ***The Watsons Go To Birmingham, 1963***  
Fisk University Stagecrafters, Prof. Persephone Fentress, Director
- Noon **Lunch (provided)**
- 1:30 **Musical Performance**  
Tennessee State University Jazz Collegians, Prof. James Sexton, Director
- 2:00 ***James Weldon Johnson, Songwriter***  
Dr. Don Cusic, Belmont University
- 2:30 ***Reading, Writing, and Segregation: A Century of Black Women Schoolteachers in Nashville***  
Dr. Sonya Ramsey, University of North Carolina at Charlotte
- 3:00 ***Preserving a Legacy: The National Civil Rights Museum***  
Mrs. Beverly Robertson, President, National Civil Rights Museum
- 3:30 **Closing Remarks**  
Dr. Reavis L. Mitchell, Jr., Conference Co-Chair

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# Profiles of *African Americans* in Tennessee



## Fort Negley

On February 25, 1862, following Confederate defeat at Fort Donelson, the Union Army occupied Nashville. In March 1862, President Abraham Lincoln appointed U. S. Senator Andrew Johnson of East Tennessee military governor. Throughout the spring and summer of 1862, Confederate soldiers, irregulars, and civilians threatened to recapture the city. Responding to Johnson's nervous pleas for protection, General Don Carlos Buell commanding the Army of the Ohio, sent Captain James S. Morton, chief engineer, to Nashville with orders to fortify the city. By August, Morton succeeded in designing a series of fortifications but lacked sufficient supplies and manpower. With only about 6,000 soldiers tasked with garrisoning Nashville, Morton identified another available labor source. On August 3, he wired Buell, "Only 150 Negroes so far, no tools, teams, etc. I wanted to employ 825 Negroes by the 11th."

In mid-August, nearly 2,000 free and enslaved blacks, recruited or forced into service in return for certificates of labor to be paid later, commenced construction of Fort Negley, a large fort on the crest of St. Cloud Hill. Workers cleared trees, blasted solid rock, and dug underground magazines. Expert stone masons shaped the stone and laid thick masonry walls. Women washed clothes, cooked food, and hauled debris in wheelbarrows. One observer reported, "To the credit of the colored population be it said, they worked manfully and cheerfully, with hardly an exception, and yet lay out upon the works at night under armed guard, without blankets and eating only army rations" (Fitch, 665).

Morton, although not authorized to issue wages, encouraged his superiors to pay laborers

\$7.00 per month to prevent desertion and to entice enlistment. Staggering rates of desertion; deaths from disease, exposure, and accidents; and confusion among officers over whether to pay laborers or their owners resulted in unpaid wages. Before the project ended, the army owed over \$85,958 in wages. Ultimately only 300 laborers received pay.

On December 7, 1862, laborers completed Fort Negley, the largest inland masonry fortification built during the Civil War. From this impressive structure located 620 feet above the Cumberland River, thousands of soldiers protected the southern approaches to the city. Based on a seventeenth century French design, Fort Negley consisted of three levels of defense, covered four acres, and consumed 62,500 cubic feet of stone and 18,000 cubic yards of dirt.

The twelve-foot high wooden stockade, the topmost structure or third level of defense, contained water cisterns, a telegraph station, observation platforms perched in two tall trees, and rifle turrets resting on each corner. The second level of defense, the inner works comprised of high cut limestone and earthen walls, contained four cannon and two powder magazines. Located below the east and west inner works, soldiers erected tents and small cabins in the ravelin ditches. Four triangular points or salients called redans constructed of earth and stone extended from each ravelin ditch. Each redan supported cannon capable of pivoting 180 degrees. Below the southern inner works, two multileveled bastions containing chambers and tunnels protected by tons of earth, stone, iron and wood, jutted out of the fort. Forming the first level of defense, the redans and the bastions gave the

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fort its distinctive star-shaped appearance. On the north side, the entrance or sally port, complete with gateway, a timber guardhouse, and a bomb shelter, overlooked the gently sloping terrain and the city two miles beyond.

Imposing and bristling with eleven guns, Fort Negley successfully deterred direct attacks throughout the war. On November 5, 1862, a delegation of black laborers asked Morton for arms to defend against 1,000 Confederate cavalymen attempting to invade the city from the east. Refusing, he allowed the blacks to form a symbolic defensive line with picks and axes. Union forces including guns installed at Fort Negley drove the Confederates off inflicting sixty-eight casualties. On December 15 and 16, 1864, Fort Negley's guns also participated in the Battle of Nashville.

From February 1862 through December 1864, thousands of troops garrisoned and improved Nashville's five major fortifications, twenty-one minor installations and more than twenty miles of earthworks. At the end of the war, troops dismantled all the defenses, with the exception of Fort Negley, where a small contingent of soldiers remained until the official end of Reconstruction in Nashville in September 1867. The army removed the cannon and sold the iron and timber before abandoning the stone remains.

From 1867 until 1869, the local Ku Klux Klan held secret meetings in the fort's blockhouses. During the early 1900s, local black Republican Party leaders and others unsuccessfully petitioned the federal government to restore the fort. In spring 1935, the Works Progress Administration (WPA), a product of New Deal legislation, hired 1,150 men to restore Fort Negley. Although The Tennessean declared, "Restoration of Fort Negley finally complete" on December 13, 1936, the city delayed opening Fort Negley Park featuring a new parking lot, walkways, and a small museum located in one of magazines until the summer of 1941. While the city maintained the softball and little league diamonds also built by the WPA, the fort fell into ruins and closed in 1945.

The Centennial commemoration of the Civil War, from 1961-1965, revived interest in the site, and the Metro Parks department and volunteers cleared vegetation and debris. In 1975, Fort Negley was listed on the National Register of Historic Places. The Metropolitan Historical Commission installed a plaque at the entrance to the site in 1980, and the Tennessee Historical Commission placed a historical marker noting the involvement of blacks in the Civil War and in the construction of Fort Negley. Throughout the latter part of the twentieth century, local leaders and community activists such as Joe Kelso, pushed for the restoration of the fort. In 1994, the City Council approved \$500,000 to begin restoration of Fort Negley as a historical, tourist, and community resource. Between 2003 and 2007, Nashville spent more than two million dollars completing the first two phases of the 1996 Master Plan. In 2004, a stabilized Fort Negley featuring boardwalks and interpretive panels reopened. The Fort Negley Visitors Center opened in 2007. In 2013, the Fort Negley Technical Advisory Committee oversaw the completion of a Historic Structures Report documenting the fort's complex history, current conditions, and preservation needs. Programming and interpretation at the site includes antebellum Nashville, the city's importance during the Civil War, Reconstruction, the WPA era, African American heritage, and the Civil Rights Movement.

Revised and expanded by  
Krista Castillo,  
from the 1993 *Profile* by  
Bobby L. Lovett

Selected source:

John Fitch. *Annals of the Army of the Cumberland: Comprising Biographies, Descriptions of Departments, Accounts of Expeditions, Skirmishes, and Battles.* Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott & Co., 1864.

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# Profiles of *African Americans* in Tennessee



## James Weldon Johnson

Songwriter, poet, novelist, journalist, critic, autobiographer, lawyer, diplomat, and civil rights activist, James William Johnson, much like his contemporary W. E. B. Du Bois, was an individual whose life spanned several historical and literary periods. Born during the era of Reconstruction on June 17, 1871, in Jacksonville, Florida, Johnson was imbued with a diverse set of talents. The second child and first son of the three children born to James and Helen Louise Dillet Johnson, his given middle name was William, which he changed to Weldon in 1913.

Johnson inherited his ancestors' amalgamation of productive energy and service to community, as exhibited by his maternal grandfather's longevity in Bahamian public service, where he was a member of the House of Assembly for thirty years. His father, James, Sr., worked as the headwaiter of the St. James Hotel in Jacksonville, and his mother taught in the Jacksonville public schools for many years. After completing the eighth grade at Jacksonville's Stanton Grammar School, James W. Johnson entered the preparatory school and later the college division of Atlanta University, from where he was graduated in 1894. In 1895, the same year that Booker T. Washington delivered his Atlanta Compromise speech, Johnson founded the *Daily American* in Jacksonville, a weekly newspaper committed to reporting on matters relevant to African Americans. Although the paper was extant for only a year, the *Daily American* addressed racial injustice and stressed a self-help philosophy that echoed Booker T. Washington's ethos. Johnson then became principal of Stanton School, and at the same time studied law; in 1898 he became the first African American to pass the bar exam in Florida. While at Stanton, he and his brother, musician and composer J. Rosamond Johnson, wrote the words and music to "Lift Every Voice and Sing," commemorating the birthdate of Abraham Lincoln. The song was first performed by Stanton schoolchildren in 1900, and would later be adapted by the National Association for the

Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), subsequently becoming known as the "Negro National Anthem."

"Lift Every Voice and Sing" was not the only song on which the Johnson brothers collaborated. In 1899, they spent the summer in New York City; there they sold their first popular song, "Louisiana Lize," and began writing and composing in earnest. In 1902, James Weldon Johnson resigned his position as principal of Stanton School and the brothers left their hometown to join Bob Cole, a young songwriter they met while in New York. The trio became the successful Broadway songwriting team of Cole and the Johnson Brothers. Over the next few years, Johnson was largely responsible for the lyrics of such hit songs as "Nobody's Lookin' but de Owl and de Moon" (1901), "Under the Bamboo Tree" (1902), and "Congo Love Song" (1903).

While in New York, Johnson became involved in politics and sought to further his education. In 1904, he served as treasurer for the Colored Republican Club. Around the same time, he began to study literature at Columbia University, under professor, critic, and novelist Brander Matthews, and he ended his role in the Cole/Johnson musical partnership to pursue a life as a writer. Actively involved in the Harlem Renaissance as an author and as a supporter of young talent, Johnson emboldened writers and other artists to look at and draw upon the life experiences in American Black communities for their artistic ingenuity. Two years later, Theodore Roosevelt appointed him as the United States consul in Puerto Cabello, Venezuela through the influence of Booker T. Washington. Fluent in Spanish and French, Johnson was the first American Black to serve as the United States consul to Venezuela and Nicaragua. Johnson married his wife, Grace Nail, in New York City in 1910, and she joined her husband at his post in Nicaragua. In 1912 revolution broke out in that country, and Johnson's role in aiding U.S. Marines in

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defeating the rebels drew high praise from Washington. It was during his tenure in the consul corps that Johnson wrote *The Autobiography of an Ex-Coloured Man*, published anonymously in 1912. Johnson's novel grabbed renewed attention when he revealed in 1927 the book as a work of fiction. Because the reading public associated the novel's hero with Johnson, he deemed it necessary to pen his autobiography *Along this Way*, in 1933. Johnson's political life fused with his creative curiosities and personified his life as an artist and activist.

Because he felt there would be little opportunity for an American Black in the newly elected Democratic administration of Woodrow Wilson, Johnson left the Consular Service in 1913. He joined the staff of the NAACP in 1915, and just one year later became the first African American to serve as field secretary and later as executive secretary of the NAACP. He advanced his own ideas on reducing the maltreatment of minorities in America. As executive secretary of the NAACP, Johnson organized the Manhattan Silent March of 1917 to protest lynching. During his tenure with the NAACP, Johnson led a national campaign against lynching that garnered significant congressional support in the form of the Dyer Anti-Lynching Bill of 1921, a bill that would have made lynching a national crime. However, because of the lack of support in the U. S. Senate, the Anti-Lynching Bill failed.

Johnson continued writing throughout the 1920s, editing the first anthology of African American poetry, *The Book of American Negro Poetry* in 1922, followed by *The Book of Negro Spirituals* in 1925, a two-volume collection of sacred songs he co-edited with his brother J. Rosamond. *The Book of Negro Spirituals* also contained an introductory essay in which the Johnsons traced the origins and importance of this earliest of African American art forms. Johnson also adapted Black preaching in verse form, publishing *God's Trombones: Seven Negro Sermons in Verse* in 1927. Stepping away from poetry and song, Johnson chronicled the history of African American life in New York City in his 1930 book *Black Manhattan*.

After retiring from the NAACP in 1930, Johnson joined the faculty of Fisk University as the Adam K. Spence Professor of Creative Writing. Commenting on his decision to go to Fisk, Johnson said, "I feel that on this favorable ground I shall be able to help effectively in developing additional racial strength and fitness in shaping fresh forces against

bigotry and racial wrong." Students often met in the Johnson home for spirited discussions of literature and Blacks role in America.

James Weldon Johnson's life ended on June 28, 1938, at the age of sixty-seven, when he was killed in an automobile accident in Wiscasset, Maine. Fifty years after his death, on February 2, 1988, the U.S. Postal Service released a commemorative stamp honoring the songwriter, poet, novelist, journalist, critic, autobiographer, lawyer, diplomat, and civil rights activist, and educator. The first day of issue ceremonies were held at Fisk University, where Johnson had taught creative literature. In 1991, the Tennessee Historical Commission approved the placement of the James Weldon Johnson Home historical marker on the campus of Fisk University. Fisk University restored the James Weldon Johnson Home in 2004.

Linda T. Wynn

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# Profiles of *African Americans* in Tennessee



## Beth Madison Howse

Over the course of her more than four-decade long career, legendary librarian and archivist Beth Madison Howse was the oracle of the Fisk University Special Collections and Archives. Encouraging them with the sweetness of her spirit and smile, she undergirded scores of researchers with her mastery of archival knowledge and African-American history.

Beth Irene Madison was born on September 24, 1943 to Archie and Daile Madison, Sr. Her parents doted on her and soon after welcomed a sister, Gail and brother, Archie, Jr. into the family. Being a big sister was a role Beth assumed with all the loving kindness a little girl could muster, especially after the untimely death of her father when she and her siblings were young children. With the help of their Uncle Bud, her mother Daile reared Beth along with her sister and brother at 1034 17th Avenue North in the home of her maternal grandmother Mother Moore, beloved longtime dorm director at Fisk University.

Growing up in the shadow of the historic Fisk Jubilee Hall, the Madison children attended Nashville's public schools and enjoyed a wonderful childhood in the environs of the Fisk campus at the height of its golden years. The Madison family were members of the Fisk Memorial Chapel, and now-famous luminaries of the Harlem Renaissance period were the parents of their childhood friends. Poet and librarian Arna Bontemps lived a few streets over, while artist Aaron Douglas lived just two doors down; the famous musicologist John W. Work III was her family's next door neighbor.

Beth Madison graduated from Nashville's renowned Pearl High School in 1961 and she entered Fisk University that fall amid the

burgeoning modern Civil Rights Movement. Her choice to attend Fisk was unsurprising; her familial relationship to Fisk, had, even by that time, stretched almost a century. Her maternal great-grandmother Ella Sheppard Moore entered Fisk as a student in 1868, and was one of nine singers that formed the original Fisk Jubilee Singers troupe that departed on October 6, 1871 to raise money to save the school. As pianist and assistant director for the singers, Sheppard Moore was the most-recognizable and longest-serving member of the group which introduced spirituals to the world, and provided funding to erect Jubilee Hall as the first permanent structure for the education of blacks in the South.

From the time she was a teenager, Beth Madison had dutifully represented her family every year at Jubilee Day, a tradition that she continued throughout her life. A fourth generation Fiskite, she excelled at Fisk, graduating with her bachelor's degree in 1965 before later attending Peabody College, from which she was awarded a master's degree. She married Wilfred B. Howse in July 1964, and together, they began a family that included two sons, Bryan and Scott, and one daughter, Bethany.

In 1970, Beth Howse returned to work at her alma mater Fisk University; and five years later began her career as a Special Collections Librarian in the John Hope and Aurelia E. Franklin Library, under the tutelage of Ann Allen Shockley, whom she succeeded. Beth thrived in her role as the caretaker of priceless Fiskiana and African-American archival materials. She took special pride in painstakingly processing a number of Fisk's more than one hundred processed collections including the Fisk Jubilee Singers Collections. She was never too busy to help

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researchers, whether student, novice, or expert, reach their highest heights. In recognition of her tireless work, countless local, national and international authors have recognized the debt they owe to her as both a professional and as an enthusiast in their book's acknowledgements.

During her summers, Howse nurtured scores of children over her more than three decade-long tenure as director of Fisk Mini-College, a summer enrichment program for children aged 7 to 12. With classes offered in math, music, art, literature, African American History, speech, drama, dance as well as the history of Fisk and Nashville, hundreds of children were exposed to campus life at Fisk. The summer prior to Howse's passing, more than fifty children were the beneficiaries of her unfailing commitment to the program. Their young voices could be heard gleefully squealing her name as they competed to be the center of her attention.

For more than thirty years, Beth also served as archivist for Sigma Pi Phi Fraternity, Incorporated (Boulé). She also enjoyed helping members of the wider community including the Girl Scouts, with whom she helped to create the curricula for a Jubilee Singers patch. For several

decades, she was also a faithful member of the Howard Congregational Church where her great-grandfather the Reverend George W. Moore had once been a minister.

Above all, Beth was a loving family person and a faithful friend. She was an avid reader, loved turtles, enjoyed cooking and was devoted to her sister Gail. Beth died of leukemia on September 26, 2012, after an almost two-year battle with myelodysplastic syndrome.

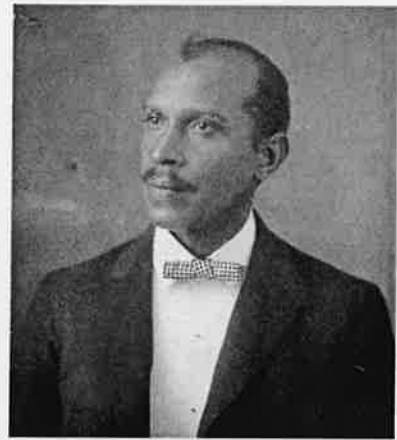
Crystal deGregory

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# Profiles of *African Americans* in Tennessee

## Thomas Washington Talley



Fisk Chemistry professor and pioneering African-American folklorist, Thomas Washington Talley was born on October 9, 1870 in Bedford County, Tennessee. His parents, Charles Washington Talley and Lucinda Talley were former slaves who had moved with their extended family from Mississippi to near Shelbyville, Tennessee, shortly after the Civil War. One of nine children, young Thomas attended a school for African-American children built on a relative's property, and after six years of education, taught at the school before leaving Bedford County for Nashville. In Nashville, he received both his high school and college education at Fisk University, where he studied science and participated in several musical endeavors, including touring with the Fisk Jubilee Singers. Talley graduated from Fisk in 1890. He continued his studies at Walden University, receiving graduate degrees from Walden and Meharry. Talley pursued additional graduate work throughout the course of his life, including summer sessions at Harvard University, and he received a doctorate from the University of Chicago in 1931.

Talley dedicated his adult life to education, holding instructional positions at Alcorn A&M, Florida A&M, and Tuskegee Institute. While at Florida A&M, he also served as Vice-President of the university, and there he met Ellen Eunice Roberts, whom he married in 1899. In 1903, Talley returned to Fisk University, where he spent over thirty years teaching chemistry, biology, and science, and served as the chairman of the Chemistry Department for twenty-five years. Talley was professor and advisor to St. Elmo Brady, who left Fisk following his

graduation and became the first African-American to earn a doctorate in Chemistry, at the University of Illinois. Talley-Brady Hall on the Fisk campus is named in their honor. Talley also published numerous articles in the sciences in highly-regarded journals. He retired from Fisk in 1938.

Remembering the jubilee songs of his youth, Talley enjoyed performing these songs with choral groups, including the Fisk Mozart Society (now Fisk University Choir), with which he participated and directed, along with singing with the choir at the Fisk Union Church. Preparing for a Christmas program, he wrote a Christmas jubilee song based on the traditional music of his past, entitled "Behold That Star," which has become a widely performed Christmas carol.

A talented singer and musician, and long interested in the stories and traditions learned from his family members on the farm near Shelbyville, Talley began writing down the stories, rhymes, songs, and games he remembered from his youth. He cultivated a friendship with other Fisk scholars interested in African-American music and folklore, including John Work II and William J. Faulkner, and collected additional songs and folk tales from his friends, family, colleagues, and students, including from other countries of the African diaspora. His collection of folksongs was published in 1922 as *Negro Folk Rhymes (Wise and Otherwise)*, with a lengthy scholarly analysis by Talley and an Introduction by Vanderbilt literature professor Walter Clyde Curry. Although ignored by many contemporary white folklorists and journals, *Negro Folk Rhymes* received favorable reviews in the African-American and foreign press, and

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today is highly regarded as the "first serious collection of folksongs from Tennessee, the first compilation of black secular folksong, and the first to be assembled by a black scholar" (Cockrill).

Talley's work in folklore was not limited to collecting songs and stories. His analyses of folkloric tales, including one published posthumously in the *Tennessee Folklore Society Bulletin* of "De Wull er de Wust (The Will o' the Wisp)" demonstrate a scholarly understanding of the insight these tales offered in the expression and intellect of African-American society from its earliest days. Talley had compiled many other introductory essays and comments on some fifteen lengthy folktales in a manuscript found in his papers after his death, published in 1993 by the University of Tennessee Press, as *The Negro Traditions*. Another book-length manuscript he titled "The Origins of Tradition," was published in part and in an early form in *Phylon*, the journal founded by his college friend W.E.B. DuBois, but otherwise remains unpublished.

Talley and his wife Ellen were the parents of three daughters, two of whom survived to adulthood. Both were accomplished musicians. Their daughter Sonoma excelled in piano, studying at the Institute of Musical Art in New York (now Julliard), touring internationally and teaching music at Pearl High School in Nashville. Talley's daughter Thomasina graduated from Fisk, studied at Julliard, and received a doctorate from Columbia, eventually becoming chair of the music department at North Carolina College for Negroes (now North Carolina State University). She married historian and Civil Rights pioneer Lorenzo Johnston Greene. Ellen Talley died in 1939; Thomas Washington Talley died July 11, 1952, in Nashville. Both are buried in Nashville's Greenwood Cemetery. Fisk University recently restored the Talley home as the Talley Alumni House; the project received a Preservation Award from the Metropolitan Nashville Historical Commission in 2011.

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