

TENNESSEE STATE UNIVERSITY
AND THE
METROPOLITAN NASHVILLE
HISTORICAL COMMISSION

42nd Annual



“Tell it Like It Is: Exploring
African American Public,
Oral, and Written History
in Tennessee”

Friday, February 10, 2023
9:00 am – 2:00 pm

Presented Virtually

Please Join Us...Virtually!

On Friday, February 10, 2023, join Tennessee State University’s College of Liberal Arts and the Metropolitan Historical Commission for the 42nd Annual Nashville Conference on African American History and Culture (NCAAHC), a dynamic celebration of the contributions of African Americans to Nashville and Tennessee history. For four decades, this award-winning conference has brought together historians, students, educators, community leaders and others interested in African American history and culture.

This year's conference will be a virtually-held event and is packed with many new presenters, engaging sessions, and talented entertainers. Our theme this year is **“Tell it Like It Is: Exploring African American Public, Oral, and Written History in Tennessee.”**

Attendees will enjoy thoughtful sessions from distinguished Tennessee historians, researchers, and authors and will be treated to entertainment from the TSU Meister-singers chamber choir and a theatrical performance from the Fisk University Stagecrafters. The \$20 registration fee covers access to the half-day online event and helps ensure that the conference continues for future generations. Registration is now open. We hope you will join us in celebration of the 42nd annual Nashville Conference on African American History and Culture!

1:15 pm
Closing Remarks

Dr. Learotha Williams, Jr.

Tennessee State University

Conference Registration



Friday, February 10, 2023

Registration: \$20

Register online at:

www.NCAAHC.org

(go to "Conferences" and "2023 conference")

OR

Make checks payable to:

TSU Foundation: TSU/MHC Conference

Mail by February 8* to:

**Metro Historical Commission
3000 Granny White Pike
Nashville, Tennessee 37204**

note: the MHC cannot accept walk-in registrations at this time

Name

Address

City, State, Zip

Email Address (REQUIRED)

Phone

Questions? Call us at 615-862-7970

*Checks MUST be received by February 8.

We recommend early/online registration.

Registration cannot be taken over the phone.



Preliminary Program

9:00 am

Opening Remarks

Tim Walker, Metro Historical Commission
Linda T. Wynn, Tennessee Historical Commission
John Cooper, Mayor of Metropolitan Nashville & Davidson County

9:20 am

Black Placemaking on the Tennessee Landscape

Dr. Tiffany Momon, Sewanee: The University of the South

9:45 am

Mapping Tennessee's Rural African American Communities: A Digital Prototype

Zada Law, Middle Tennessee State University (co-authors Dr. Susan Knowles & Ken Middleton)

10:10 am

BREAK

10:15 am

To Care for the Sick and Bury the Dead: Tennessee's African American Lodge Cemeteries

Leigh Ann Gardner, Vanderbilt University

10:40 am

Performance: "God's Trombones" by James Weldon Johnson

Fisk University StageCrafters

11:00 am

Prince Hall Order of the Eastern Star: Women Dedicated to the African American Communal Experience in Tennessee

Darneasha C. Pickett, writer & historian

11:25 am

BREAK

11:30 am

Oral History and Archaeology of the Black Civil War Veterans, Residents, and their Descendants at the Bass Street Neighborhood, Fort Negley Park

Dr. Angela Sutton, Vanderbilt University;
Andrew Wyatt & Clelie Cottle Peacock (MTSU)

11:55 am

The Political Worlds of George Washington Lee

Dr. Charles W. McKinney, Jr., Rhodes College

12:20 pm

BREAK

12:25 pm

Musical Performance

Tennessee State University Meistersingers

12:45 pm

Billy Easley, Photojournalist and Historian

Cassandra Easley, author & journalist

1:10 pm

African American Perspectives on Metro Consolidation

Dr. Carole Bucy, Davidson County Historian

1:35 pm

Closing remarks

Dr. Learotha Williams, Jr., Tennessee State University

Planning Committee

Conference Co-Chairs

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Tennessee State University

Linda T. Wynn

Tennessee Historical Commission/Fisk University

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Pamela Bobo

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Dr. Joel Dark

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“Tell It Like It Is: Exploring African American Public, Oral, and Written History in Tennessee”

(Virtual) Friday, February 10, 2023

- | | |
|---------|--|
| 9:00AM | Opening Remarks
Tim Walker, Metropolitan Historical Commission
Dr. Samantha Morgan-Curtis, Tennessee State University College of Liberal Arts
Linda T. Wynn, Tennessee Historical Commission
Sharon Hurt, Metropolitan Nashville Minority Caucus
John Cooper, Mayor of Metropolitan Government of Nashville and Davidson County |
| 9:35AM | <i>Black Placemaking on the Tennessee Landscape</i> , Dr. Tiffany Momon,
Sewanee: The University of the South |
| 10:00AM | <i>Mapping Tennessee’s Rural African American Communities: A Digital Prototype</i> ,
Zada Law, Dr. Susan Knowles and Ken Middleton, Middle Tennessee State University
<i>BREAK</i> |
| 10:30AM | <i>To Care for the Sick and Bury the Dead: Tennessee’s African American Lodge
Cemeteries</i> , Leigh Ann Gardner, Vanderbilt University |
| 10:55AM | Performance #1: Fisk University StageCrafters, “God’s Trombones,”
Persephone F. Fentress, Director |
| 11:25AM | <i>Oral History and Archaeology of the Black Civil War Veterans, Residents, and their
Descendants at the Bass Street Neighborhood, Fort Negley Park</i> , Dr. Angela Sutton
(Vanderbilt University), Dr. Andrew Wyatt & Clelie Cottle Peacock (MTSU) |
| 11:50PM | <i>A Rising Imbalance: George Lee Civil Rights Ascendancy & the Demise of Black
Republicanism In Memphis, Tennessee, 1958-1962</i> , Dr. Charles W. McKinney, Jr.,
Rhodes College
<i>BREAK</i> |
| 12:20PM | Performance #2: Tennessee State University Meistersingers, Dr. Angelica
Dunsavage, Director |
| 12:40PM | <i>Billy Easley: Photojournalist and Historian</i> , Cassandra Easley, <i>The Nashville Historical</i> |
| 1:05PM | <i>Positives & Negatives: The African American Community’s Responses to the Creation
of Metropolitan Government for Nashville</i> , Dr. Carole Bucy, Davidson County Historian |
| 1:30PM | Closing remarks, Dr. Learotha Williams, Jr., Tennessee State University |

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Tim Walker, *Executive Director, Metropolitan Historical Commission*

RESOLUTION NO. RS2023-1971

A resolution honoring the life of Dr. Bobby L. Lovett and recognizing his outstanding leadership and many accomplishments as Professor Emeritus at Tennessee State University.

WHEREAS, Dr. Bobby L. Lovett passed away on December 23, 2022. He was a champion for the history of civil rights in Nashville and the United States, and he had the desire to spread the word of this history to his students and to the masses. Dr. Lovett was a scholar and a gentleman who advanced Tennessee State University's reputation as one of America's best historic Black universities; and

WHEREAS, Dr. Lovett was Tennessee State University Professor Emeritus and prominent author and scholar of African American history. Prior to publishing a book on African American history in Nashville, Dr. Lovett also co-founded the Planning Committee for the Nashville Conference on African American History and Culture. The Conference celebrates the contributions of African Americans to Nashville and Tennessee, and will hold its 42nd anniversary in Nashville on February 10, 2023; and

WHEREAS, Dr. Lovett was a longtime professor and administrator in Higher Education. A lifelong learner, teacher, and mentor, he was well known and respected in his profession. Dr. Lovett was not only a pillar in the Tennessee historical community, he was also a civically engaged leader in the Nashville community throughout his life. Dr. Lovett talked and wrote about subjects that had national significance, but always related them to Nashville; and

WHEREAS, Dr. Lovett authored eight books, most on Black history in Nashville and Tennessee, and he acted as an historical adviser as a member of various board and commissions in the city and state. Dr. Lovett also served as historian for his longtime church, First Baptist Church Capitol Hill in Nashville; and

WHEREAS, Dr. Lovett started his career in his hometown of Memphis, Tennessee, teaching in the public school district, a job he took after attending college and graduate school in Arkansas. He became a professor at Tennessee State University in 1973, where he taught and eventually became Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences until retiring in 2010; and

WHEREAS, Dr. Lovett wrote a comprehensive history on Tennessee State University after publishing another book on historically Black colleges and universities throughout the United States. Dr. Lovett served as a model and set the example for many historians that came through Tennessee State University's College of Arts and Sciences; and

WHEREAS, Dr. Lovett was deeply devoted to his family. He is survived by his wife Lueatrice Green Lovett and his five children; and

WHEREAS, it is fitting and proper that the Metropolitan Council recognize Dr. Bobby L. Lovett for his many years of dedicated service to Tennessee State University, to the Nashville community, and to the entire State of Tennessee.

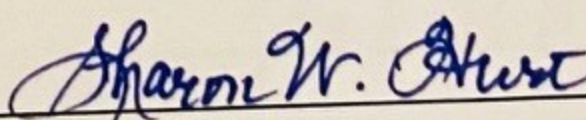
NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED BY THE COUNCIL OF THE METROPOLITAN GOVERNMENT OF NASHVILLE AND DAVIDSON COUNTY:

Section 1. The Metropolitan County Council hereby goes on record as honoring the life of Nashville historian and Tennessee State University Professor Emeritus Dr. Bobby L. Lovett and recognizing his outstanding leadership and many accomplishments as Professor Emeritus at Tennessee State University.

Section 2. This Resolution shall take effect from and after its adoption, the welfare of The Metropolitan Government of Nashville and Davidson County requiring it.



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Profiles of *African Americans* in Tennessee

Gardner's Gold Coast: Nashville's First African American Subdivision



Kossie Gardner, Sr. was born in Pulaski, Tennessee, to Carthegeuis and Orleans Cosby on May 24, 1897. However, before age two, his father left the family. Unable to provide for her young son, Orleans Cosby apprenticed him as an indentured apprentice to farmers Daniel and Ella Gardner. Young Gardner stayed with his new parents and helped them on the farm. As Gardner grew into a young man, he decided to seek better opportunities in Nashville, approximately seventy-five miles from Pulaski. He promised his parents that if they allowed him to go to Nashville, he would return home and help them harvest the crops.

After an unsuccessful attempt at farming, he became a Pullman porter for a short period of time. He returned to Nashville and his great-uncle Pete Hayden and his wife invited Gardner to move in with them. When Hayden died, Gardner was asked to go Preston Taylor's funeral home. However, Gardner thought, "If I was in the undertaking business, here's one body I could get."

With absolutely no experience and financial resources, that thought ushered Gardner into the undertaking business. He borrowed a friend's car and engaged Jim Pillow, an embalmer. He borrowed five-hundred dollars, purchased a license, casket, and a car that he transformed into an ambulance. Gardner's first office was located in the YMCA building on Fourth Avenue, North and Cedar Street. By 1925, the *Nashville Colored Directory* listed him as the "youngest funeral director in the city." Prior to locating to 1511 Jefferson Street, Gardner's funeral business was located at 12th Avenue, North and Jefferson Street. Gardner and his two embalmers, Odel Dawner and Dewith Payne, competed with Nashville's other morticians in a business that appeared to be recession-proof.

Gardner's business acumen brought him success as he entered into other commercial endeavors. He owned, developed, and built the first house in the "Gold Coast," Nashville's first African American subdivision, founded a trade school for Clarksville veterans, and established a school in Nashville for waiters. For more than ten years he sponsored a live radio program on WNAH from K. Gardner's Funeral Home chapel at 1511 Jefferson Street. Gardner also established and developed the Hills of Calvary Cemetery in Northwest Nashville. A 32nd degree Mason with the Hella Temple 105 of the Shrine and a member of the Pride of Tennessee Elks Lodge, Gardner bought and was instrumental in the development of the African American Masonic Lodge on 4th Avenue, North, which fell prey to urban development a year later. Reportedly, Gardner ran for a seat on the Nashville Council because he felt an African American could best represent the interests of those living in the predominately African American ward. He said, "I want to serve the best interests of the people of the ward, who are for the most part colored." He wanted to promote amity among those in the community, irrespective of background. The nonagenarian's long and productive life came to an end on March 1, 1990 and he was interred in Hills of Calvary Cemetery. Notwithstanding all of the accomplishments of this self-made entrepreneur, perhaps, the Gold Coast development was one of Gardner's more enduring business ventures.

Nashville's affluent African Americans had few neighborhood choices that reflected their successes until Kossie Gardner, Sr, developed Gardner's Gold Coast. Platted in December 1953, this Bordeaux enclave became Nashville's first affluent African American subdivision. Constructed between 1957 and 1966, most houses in the neighborhood exhibit either

traditional Ranch or Split-Level styles. The Gold Coast subdivision included twenty-four new homes and two new streets. Houses in the original section of the subdivision line Windover Drive, while those along Red Rose Court are part of the Gold Coast Addition, platted in October 1960. The Gold Coast attracted noted African American physicians, entrepreneurs, and academicians, both collegiate and secondary. From 1961 to 1963, the Rev. Dr. Joseph Lowery, a co-founder of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, lived in the neighborhood. In 1958, residents of this neighborhood--then considered the most affluent African American subdivision in Nashville--fought to defend their homes and investments from a planned Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA) power line routing through the neighborhood, when there were other plausible alternate options. After robust vocal support from the Hydes Ferry Civic Group and Dr. Matthew Walker (Meharry Medical College and founder of the Matthew Walker Comprehensive Health Center) reinforced their position, TVA re-routed the line, which allowed homes to be built across four then-vacant lots. Another affluent African American subdivision, Enchanted Hills, was later developed in the Bordeaux area not far from the Gold Coast.

Enchanted Hills was platted between 1962 and 1989 as one of Nashville's most prestigious African American neighborhoods. In a November 1988 real estate advertisement published in *The Tennessean*, Enchanted Hills was considered as the "Belle Meade of North Nashville." The architect-designed "ultra-modern" houses retain striking examples of Mid-Century Modern and Contemporary architecture. Like their neighbors in the Gold Coast, residents of Enchanted Hills fought against several issues including environmental injustices. They rallied against a proposed routing of a Briley Parkway extension to connect Cockrill Bend with Interstates 40 and 24. In 1986, the residents of Enchanted Hills joined together to defend their neighborhood from activity at a 32-acre excavation site on Hydes Ferry Pike that endangered their health and property values. In 2002, resident Melvin Gill, Jr., filed suit over a state re-districting plan, in which he claimed illegally

diluted and disenfranchised the African American voting power of Enchanted Hills residents.

In 2020, Nashville paid homage to Kossie "K." Gardner, Sr., when the Metro Nashville Parks Department established a pocket park in his memory, situated on Jefferson Street across the street from his funeral home's former location. The park celebrates Gardner's contributions to the community, which included the creation of the Gardner's Gold Coast and creation of the first motorized ambulatory service in the Nashville area. The youngest funeral owner in Nashville, Gardner's commercial enterprise was part of Jefferson Street's establishment as an economic hub that produced a successful African American middle class. While many of the original owners of homes in the subdivisions no longer live there, several of their children or heirs continue living in Gardner's Gold Coast. Like other neighborhoods in the city that became desegregated, a few Whites have moved into the neighborhood. Many of the homes on the Gold Coast and in Enchanted Hills have been deemed eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places.

Linda T. Wynn

Sources Used:

Ashley Benkarski, "A Self-Made Man: Kossie Gardner, Sr. Honored with Park," *The Tennessee Tribune*, February 6, 2020.

N. A. Crippens, "Pluck and Luck the Keys to K. Gardner's Success," *The Sunday Tennessean*, October 5, 1986.

Metro Historical Commission, "Gardner's Gold Coast." Short History for Historic Preservation Month, 2021.

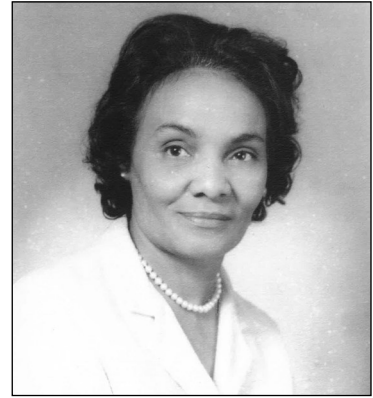
Metro Historical Commission, "Enchanted Hills." Short History for Historic Preservation Month, 2021.

Nashville Banner, November 22, 1976.

Nashville Banner, March 3, 1990.

Profiles of *African Americans* in Tennessee

JohnEtta Hayes (1915-2008)



JohnEtta Featherstone Hayes began her life on April 7, 1915 in Dechard, Franklin County, Tennessee. As one of eleven children born to Henry and Maude Featherstone, she moved to Boise, Idaho at the age of twelve to live with her grandmother after her parents' passing. JohnEtta finished high school in Boise and returned to Nashville, where she attended Tennessee Agricultural & Industrial College and met her husband of sixty-one years, Culous McCoy Hayes, Sr. The couple went on to have three children together, Culous Jr., William, and Elaine.

Beginning in the 1940s, Hayes became a well-known and respected fixture in Nashville's African American community through her numerous civic roles and ongoing commitment to the local civil rights movement. Deeply engaged in her children's education through the Parent Teacher Association (PTA), in 1953 she was elected to serve a three-year term as the President of the Nashville Council of the Tennessee State Congress of Colored PTAs. The "Negro Parent-Teacher Association" was an involuntarily segregated group who worked in partnership with volunteers from local chapters of the NAACP and the Congress on Racial Equality (CORE, founded in 1956) to support school desegregation efforts in the late 1950s. As community outreach became a larger priority in her work, Hayes also co-chaired an intergroup relations study course, "Creating Better Relations Between Races," sponsored by the Nashville Council of Colored PTAs in 1958.

Hayes further expanded her community involvement by working for the Nashville chapter of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP, est. 1909). In January 1957, the Nashville branch of the NAACP elected the Rev. Kelly Miller Smith to his second consecutive term as President and JohnEtta Hayes as the new Vice President. There she chaired the Education and Community Coordinating committees and used this platform to participate in local panel discussions and mass meetings, calling out needs in the educational system like youth assistance with school desegregation and overcrowded facilities. During a June 1957 community meeting at Clark

Memorial Methodist Church, she advised, "Parents of children who are being integrated must go in with the idea of cooperation. We must have faith in the board of education and be assured of their support as we integrate." Hayes was keenly aware of the challenges that Nashville schools--and those across the nation--faced as they moved towards eventual desegregation, but her words of assurance elicited a spirit of unity from those around her. This mindset and dedicated community activism prepared her well for several subsequent leadership roles.

The first day of school desegregation in Nashville came on September 9, 1957, beginning with children in the first grade as part of the approved "stairstep" plan. Hayes, then the state chairperson of the PTA's Intergroup Relations Committee, and groups of volunteers from the NAACP, CORE, and local churches accompanied parents and their children attempting to integrate Nashville's elementary schools. She walked proudly alongside twenty-one-year-old mother Grace McKinley and her daughter Linda Gail, whose terrifying journey through crowds of agitated White protestors were immortalized in the local media coverage, as they walked to Fehr Elementary for Linda's first day at the formerly all-White school. Hayes and the other volunteers provided unwavering, silent moral support for these families and children whom they didn't even know. She later recalled those tense and pivotal moments, "It was unbelievable coming from mature human beings. Crowds of jeering Whites met us as we made our way to the school entrance. White policemen stood guard. White parents and their children vented their hate by striking out at the Black parents and children." She modestly characterized her own role in these events as "it was something positive we could do."

During this time, Hayes also served on the Executive Council of Highlander Folk School, located in Monteagle, Tennessee. Founded in 1932, Highlander functioned as an incubator for the civil rights movement by offering trainings and workshops geared towards community improvement and most notably

This publication is a project of the 2023 Nashville Conference on African American History and Culture. The author compiled the information. The Metropolitan Historical Commission edited and designed the materials. Image credit: Portrait of JohnEtta Hayes, undated. Courtesy: First Community Church.

stood as a staunch supporter of desegregation. Many of Tennessee's most well-known civil rights leaders attended Highlander's seminars, including Marion Barry, C.T. Vivian, Diane Nash, James Bevel, and John Lewis. At a 1961 "New Alliances in the South" Highlander workshop, Hayes, Lewis, and Vivian led a session called "A Case Study in Community Action: The Nashville Story," which examined the impacts of the Nashville sit-ins.

In early March 1959, Hayes was installed as the assistant secretary for the Nashville Christian Leadership Council (NCLC, founded in 1958), alongside President Rev. Kelly Miller Smith, 1st Vice President Rev. Robert W. Kelley, 2nd Vice President Rev. C.T. Vivian, and Secretary Rev. Andrew White. NCLC's mission followed that of its parent organization, the Southern Christian Leadership Council (SCLC), both of which implemented a strategy of non-violent resistance throughout the civil rights protests. At a May 1960 mass meeting and fundraiser after the bombing of Z. Alexander Looby's home, Hayes spoke alongside NCLC President Rev. Kelly Miller Smith, Councilman Looby, Dr. Matthew Walker, and the Rev. Ralph Abernathy of Montgomery, Alabama. This public meeting, held at Clark Memorial, brought together some of the most significant civil rights leaders in the South and spurred community contributions to the Looby-Ezell Fund for repairs to the damaged properties.

After a year of service in the Vice President capacity, Hayes succeeded A.Z. Kelley as President of the Nashville branch NAACP on January 31, 1961, and concurrently took on the role of Chair on its executive committee. She became the first person to assume this dual leadership role of the local NAACP branch as granted by a changed constitutional ruling. Under her directorship, the branch established a "Freedom Fund" in April 1961 to assist with legal fees incurred by the student protesters arrested during sit-ins in Mississippi. This fund fed into the Education and Legal Defense Fund, Inc., a separate division of the NAACP geared towards civil rights matters including school desegregation cases. That fall, the Nashville NAACP branch published its first newsletter, including an open letter from Hayes asking local pastors to make announcements about school desegregation, especially as it pertained to transfer possibilities. Throughout her NAACP presidency, Hayes grew their membership, created a program to increase job opportunities for African Americans, and extended support to distressed Black families in Fayette and Haywood counties. Claude Walker succeeded her as

Nashville NAACP President in January 1962, but she continued her work with the organization in other ways. In February 1962, Hayes presented a petition to the Nashville Board of Education calling for desegregation of Hume-Fogg Technical High School. She once again chaired the Nashville chapter's Education Committee (1964), served as interim President (February 1966) and 2nd Vice President (April 1966), and was later elected to the executive committee (December 1966).

In addition to her numerous leadership roles, Hayes' penchant for grassroots galvanization around social and civil rights causes also translated into "boots on the ground" work and significant advisory roles. She and her fellow members of First Community Church, under the Rev. C.T. Vivian's pastorship, participated alongside students and other supporters in marches and sit-ins at segregated restaurants, theaters, businesses, and churches that occurred locally in 1959 and 1960. Hayes maintained her connections with other local and regional civil rights organizations and leaders through her September 1960 appointment as Assistant Secretary of the Tennessee Christian Leadership Conference (TCLC, an SCLC affiliate) and as an NCLC board member (1961-1962). Her robust experience in the civic and civil rights realms and informed leadership approach distinctly qualified her to serve on a committee that provided input to President Lyndon B. Johnson and Congress as part of an equal opportunities study associated with the Civil Rights Bill of 1964. In September 1966, Nashville Mayor Beverly Briley established a permanent 15-member Metro Human Relations Commission, of which Hayes was the only female member.

Among her various other affiliations, JohnEtta Hayes served on the Nashville City Federation of Colored Women's Clubs, College View Club, the Board of Phyllis Wheatley Homes, American Baptist College Women's Auxiliary, and the Trustee Board of First Community Church (where she was a member for seventy-one years). She passed away in 2008 and was interred at a family plot at Greenwood Cemetery.

Caroline Eller

Profiles of *African Americans* in Tennessee

Z. Alexander Looby, Robert E. Lillard, and the Chartering of Metropolitan Nashville and Davidson County



In 1951, Zephaniah Alexander Looby and Robert E. Lillard became the first African Americans elected to the Nashville City Council since 1911. These two attorneys played a role in the establishment of Metropolitan Nashville and Davidson County. Both men came from humble beginnings, one originally from Antigua, British West Indies, and one a native Nashvillian. Despite their humble beginnings, both men became leaders in Nashville's African American Community.

Zephaniah Alexander Looby, son of John Alexander and Grace Elizabeth (Joseph) Looby, was born in Antigua, British West Indies, on April 8, 1899. After the death of his father, young Looby departed for the United States, arriving by 1914. He earned a bachelor's degree from Howard University, a Bachelor of Law degree from Columbia University, and a Doctor of Juristic Science from New York University. In 1926, he came to Fisk University as assistant professor of economics and remained until 1928. He later served as a lecturer at Fisk University and Meharry College. In 1929, Looby was admitted to the Tennessee bar. He practiced law in Memphis for the next three years and met a schoolteacher named Grafta Mosby, whom he married in 1934. Unwilling to "pay the moral price" demanded of Memphis' attorneys and "Boss" Edward H. Crump, Looby returned to Nashville. He helped establish the Kent College of Law, Nashville's first law school for African Americans since the old Central Tennessee College's department of law (1877-1911).

Robert Emmitt Lillard was born March 23, 1907, in Nashville, Tennessee, to John W. and Virginia (Allen) Lillard. He received his education at Immaculate Mother's Academy and in local public schools, then attended Beggins Commercial College, although his ambition was to become a lawyer. In 1932, Lillard enrolled at Kent College of Law, where he graduated in 1935, and organized the 15th Ward Colored Voters and Civic Club. Though Lillard passed the bar exam in 1936, he was appointed to Nashville's Fire Engine Company No. 11, where he remained until 1950. Lillard moved into full-time legal practice and participated in local

politics. He also founded the Tennessee Federation of Democratic Leagues. He championed the city's transformation of Cameron Junior High School into the second high school for local African Americans and secured an ordinance to desegregate the Parthenon in Centennial Park. During the 1960s, he opposed the plan to consolidate the Nashville and Davidson County governments because he felt this would dilute the Black voting strength. Lillard became the first African American to serve as Vice Mayor Pro Tem (1967) and retired from the Metro City Council in 1971.

When the African American civil rights movements of World War II began, Looby became the local leader. From 1943-1945, he presided over the James C. Napier Bar Association. He ran for the city council in 1940, although a White opponent beat him in a runoff election. In 1946, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) hired Looby, Maurice Weaver, and Thurgood Marshall to represent Black residents of Columbia, Tennessee, who were charged with murder following race riots. Looby's legal defense helped acquit twenty-three defendants. He crisscrossed the state in the company of other Black lawyers, arguing against Jim Crowism and discrimination. Looby is credited with desegregating the Nashville Airport's dining room and the city's non-private golf courses.

Looby felt politics could change an oppressive system. In 1951, he and Lillard became the first Blacks elected to Nashville's city council since 1911. Nashville's 1951 elections presaged a shift in race relations in the "Athens of the South" that perceived itself as a forward-looking southern city. As older leaders within the African American community left the scene, a new generation of leaders came to the forefront and like those before them, worked for the benefit of their community. Although they came from different backgrounds and represented different electorates within the African American community, both Looby and Lillard dedicated themselves to increasing the African American influence and power within city government.

This publication is a project of the 2023 Nashville Conference on African American History and Culture. The author compiled the information. The Metropolitan Historical Commission edited and designed the materials. Image credit: Looby (left) and the Charter Commission, c. 1962. Courtesy: Metro Nashville Government Archives.

Nashville's 1951 election also connoted a changing of the guard for the city's White political establishment. Councilmen Looby and Lillard focused on legislation and policies that benefited their constituents, abolishing Jim Crow-era laws that stipulated the separation of the races. Attorney Looby introduced bills to desegregate public facilities. In addition to sustained strained race relations, the city's tax base decreased as Whites moved out to the county, which struggled to provide the services needed to sustain the population growth. In response, the city council and Davidson County Court created a joint commission of fifteen members to investigate and make recommendations, including merging the two governments. In 1952, the Community Services Commission published "A Future for Nashville," a comprehensive study of the challenges of growth and possible solutions to the problems of providing adequate government services to all residents in an efficient manner. During the course of the study, it became apparent that Nashville and Davidson County both had something to offer the other. The study provided the foundation for the creation of a city-county commission that would write a charter for a unified system of government. In 1954 the United States Supreme Court handed down its unanimous *Brown v. Board of Education Topeka, Kansas* verdict which outlawed racially segregated schools on a national level. A year later, known as the "Dean" of Nashville's African American attorneys, Looby filed a suit against the local public schools on behalf of African American barber A. Z. Kelley, whose son Robert was denied access to a nearby White school. In 1957, the same year a federal court issued an order for Nashville's public schools to desegregate one grade per year, a city-county commission was established to write a charter that would consolidate the city of Nashville and Davidson County governments.

City mayor Ben West and county judge Beverly Briley each appointed five members, including African Americans, to serve on the commission. West appointed Looby and Briley appointed pharmacist and prominent African American business leader Dr. George S. Meadors (1893- 1977), founder of People's Pharmacy. In 1958, the committee produced a charter endorsed by both West, Briley, and the *Nashville Banner* and *Tennessean* newspapers. Nashville's African American community found itself divided over the governmental merger. African Americans who followed Looby's reasoning felt that if consolidation generated economic growth, all Nashvillians would

benefit, including African Americans. Lillard's supporters feared that if the city and county governments merged, the political gains realized would be lost. While the charter referendum passed in the city in June 1958, county residents voted against it over concerns about increased taxes. Four years later, officials attempted a second charter.

In 1962, a second charter commission convened and the mood in Nashville changed. African American college students largely managed to sustain their movement to desegregate public accommodations causing the town that saw itself as a moderate southern city to change, although many Whites opposed desegregation of the city's public facilities. African Americans lost faith in Mayor West because he did not endorse complete desegregation of all public facilities. Although West and the *Banner* opposed the second charter as written, it was presented to the voters for their approval. Looby remained steadfast in his support of a consolidated government and Dr. Vivian Henderson, an economics professor at Fisk University who implemented the economic withdrawal during boycotts of downtown merchants, joined Looby in support of the consolidated government. They believed that through consolidation, African Americans could sustain political power by drawing intentional district lines for the thirty-five member Metropolitan Council outlined in the new charter. As a result of Attorney Looby's relentless justification for majority African American councilmanic districts during the commission meetings, six of the thirty-five districts were drawn to preserve and represent Black majorities. Dr. Henderson and Looby contended that economic gains promised by consolidating the two governments would create additional employment opportunities for both African Americans and Whites.

On June 28, 1962, the charter passed in both the city and the county, despite being rejected by fifty-five percent of African American voters. On April 1, 1963, Beverly Briley was sworn in as the first mayor of Metropolitan Nashville and African American council members Mansfield Douglas, John Driver, and Harold Love, Sr. joined Looby and Lillard among the forty members of the first Metropolitan Council.

Linda T. Wynn

Profiles of *African Americans* in Tennessee

Marion James-Majors (1934-2016)



Born Mary Agnes Childress on October 8, 1934, Nashville native Marion James, later known as the city's "Queen of the Blues," was fated to be a star. During her formative years, Marion's musically-inclined family significantly influenced what would become her legendary musical style. Her grandparents sang and played instruments, her mother served as a pianist for large local churches, her uncle played guitar and banjo, and her sister sang with gospel group the Clara Ward Singers. At the tender age of five, Marion learned to sing and began to develop her own vocal and performance styles with her mother playing piano accompaniment. She drew inspiration from her mother's record collection and Blues singers at Black vaudeville shows. By age 12, she found herself singing in churches and soon after became interested in venturing out solo to sing R&B.

Nightclub performances along Jefferson Street characterized James's early career during the 1950s and early 1960s, when the North Nashville corridor was bustling with activity from nightclubs, restaurants, shops, and other businesses built and owned by and for the local African American community. During this time, patrons could start at 6th Avenue and work their way west through entertainment venues all the way down Jefferson Street to Tennessee State University. Many talented African American Nashvillians lent their talent and spirit to this rich musical scene, including Earl Gaines, Roscoe Shelton, DeFord Bailey, Jimmy Church, Johnny Bragg, Harold and Bobby Hebb, and Memphis great Hank Crawford, who jammed at 28th and Jefferson. Bigger stars like Little Richard, Gorgeous George, Etta James, and Fats Domino also gravitated to these clubs, drawing huge crowds at their shows. Marion's lively and raucous performances earned her the moniker "House Rockin' James," and she followed an alternating pattern of being "on the road" and performances back along Jefferson Street.

James met her husband, trumpeter, songwriter, and Nashville native Jimmy "Buzzard" Stewart, after he left the band of prolific Memphis blues singer Bobby "Blue" Bland. During the early 1960s, Stewart formed and led Marion's band, an ensemble that included bassist Billy Cox and the up-and-coming guitar legend Jimi Hendrix, a former Ft. Campbell paratrooper. Notably, Hendrix got his professional start and gained a deep appreciation for gospel through this band. Though the styles of Stewart and Hendrix clashed, they played together at Club Del Morocco, and Marion considered both to be musical geniuses. By the summer of 1962, James had already attained local fame, advertised as "the Great Miss Marion James with her famous Continentals" for a show at Sunset Park in Madison. The band often played the Chitlin' Circuit at venues in Alabama or places like Lebanon, Fayetteville, Lewisburg, and Murfreesboro in Tennessee. Stewart and James often let struggling and hungry traveling Black musicians stay at their two-bedroom apartment between gigs, as they did for Gene Allison, Little Johnny Taylor, Lattimore Brown, Billy Cox, Larry Lee, and Jimi Hendrix.

James's first major commercial success came in 1966 with the Top 10 hit, "That's My Man," recorded under Nashville-based Excello Records with sidemen Stewart, Cox, and Johnny Jones, who helped write and record the song. In 1967, she went on to record "Find Out What (You Want)(Before You Lose What You Got/I'm the Woman for You" by Billy Cox and "It's a Walk Out/I'm the Woman for You" under Nashville label K & J Records. That same year, she also recorded "Don't Come Around/Hound Dog" as the first artist under J & J Records, a recording label operated by Jimmy Stewart and Johnny Terrell. In 1969, James attained membership in the American Society of Composers, Authors & Publishers (ASCAP) and recorded "Sardines

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and Turnip Greens” with Guy Moland on J & J Records. After this commercial success, she toured the U.S., Canada, and Europe performing oft-sold out live shows and at festivals. She recorded “Children Do What Children Do” and “Our Little Love Song (Don’t You Know It’s Love)” with Frankie Davis on Ma-Fra-Da Records in 1979.

In addition to her performative legacy, Marion James served as a philanthropist for Nashville’s music community. She established an annual Musicians Reunion Benefit in 1982 to help musicians in need and other causes including the American Cancer Society and the Nashville Rescue Mission. Typically held at the former Club Baron, the benefit evolved into the Marion James Aid Society, which she spearheaded for over three decades.

In the mid-1980s, James took a break from performances and chose to travel for a few years. She returned to the stage in the 1990s, when she joined up with guitarist Casey Lutton and The Hypnotics. They performed live shows together and in 1994 released an eponymous album under Italian label Appaloosa Records. James took the spotlight again in 1997 at the Nashville Music Awards, where she sang “Every Night of the Week” with Tracy Nelson and co-presented the R&B awards with Ted Jarrett. Her second CD, *Essence*, was released in 2003 and the following year, she headlined at Franklin’s Jazz, Blues & Heritage Festival. In 2005, her hit “That’s My Man” was reissued on *Night Train to Nashville: Volume Two*, and she played numerous shows at the Bourbon Street Blues & Boogie Bar in Printer’s Alley. In subsequent years, she headlined at various venues and events in Nashville, including a Tennessee Jazz and Blues Society concert at Belle Meade Plantation (2007), the Nashville Blues Awards and Nashville Spring Blues Festival (2009). James released her *Northside* album in 2012, which climbed to #10 on the *Living Blues* chart.

In 2013, James recorded her hit “Back in the Day,” which recalls the musical history of Nashville’s Jefferson Street, at the Jefferson Street Sound (JSS), a combination recording studio and history museum. Her last large-scale stage performance was at the

Metro Nashville 50th anniversary celebration; this concert included Emmylou Harris, Sam Bush, and Del McCoury and drew over ten thousand fans. She officially earned the title “Nashville’s Queen of the Blues” in 2015 and thereafter enjoyed performing in her signature rhinestone tiara.

Reflecting on her career, James recalled some of her most memorable gigs, which included shows on the road to Steven’s Rose Room in Jackson, Mississippi, and jams with Ted Taylor and Joe Hinton (“Release Me”), with Clarence Gatemouth Brown in Amsterdam, and back in Nashville with Bobby Blue Bland. She experienced most of the stories in her songs and felt that the Blues should tell the true story of one’s life. Though she achieved early stardom and international success, she never forgot to help others, including her fellow musicians. She played a show with Rufus Thomas in Memphis at the Blues Extravaganza at BB King’s on Beale Street and helped him get to Nashville. She also helped Chick Willis get into the local Blues scene and the Blues Society in Nashville. James credited Etta James, Ella Fitzgerald, and Big Maybelle as her biggest influences.

During her final years, James worked to preserve the musical heritage of Jefferson Street, which she deemed the “first Music Row,” by leading a fundraising campaign for two statues to honor Jimi Hendrix and Little Richard. She wanted to ensure that Nashville would be known as more than just the capital of country music. “Nashville’s Queen of the Blues” passed away in January 2016 at the age of 81 and is buried at Greenwood Cemetery North. Marion’s Hallet, Davis & Co. upright piano and several of her belongings are on display at JSS Museum, where her legacy lives on.

Caroline Eller

Profiles of *African Americans* in Tennessee

Nashville Christian Institute (1940-1967)



The Nashville Christian Institute (NCI) played a prominent role as a socio-cultural center in the Nashville community from 1940-1967. The idea to create NCI as a Black preparatory school started in 1920 from the friendship of Marshall Keeble, Andrew Mizell "A.M." Burton, and numerous Black members of the Church of Christ in Tennessee and Arkansas. The initial property purchased for NCI in 1928 near Fisk University was sold to the City of Nashville at a profit, since the City wanted that land for an elementary school. In exchange, the Ashcraft City School building was sold to the NCI organizers and NCI had its home at 801 24th Avenue, Nashville.

When NCI initially opened in 1940, it served as a night school for working adults to complete their secondary education. By 1943, it also offered 6–8 week preacher training courses and a co-ed K-12 education with residential housing. Andrew Clarence "A.C." Holt was the first principal of NCI. Holt brought experience as a former State Department of Education employee and transitioned NCI into a fully accredited elementary and secondary school with only Board-certified teachers.

Keeble served the school as President from 1944 to 1958, when he became President Emeritus. Many referred to Keeble as "the man with the boy preachers" who traveled the country collecting donations and showing his fellow Christians the best and brightest from NCI. Fred Gray recalled Keeble's statement from their travels, "These are the type of boys that we produce at the Nashville Christian Institute. You send your son to us and we will send him back a good man."

Many men and women of faith were called to NCI over the years it was in operation. E.R. Wilson of Statesville, North Carolina attended the 1943 Minister Lecture Course. The 1944 Minister Lecture Course included seven attendees: Bennie Arms, W.H. Bates, and Mark McCloud of Montgomery, Alabama; John Henry Clay of Decatur, Alabama; Quincy Cater of Bowling Green, Kentucky; George Reeves of College Park, Georgia; and C.L. Capteron of Atoka, Oklahoma.

Jack Evans attended NCI as a teenager and in 1959 he graduated from Southwestern Christian College. Being one of Keeble's "boy preachers" understandably played an instrumental role in Evans serving as Southwestern's President from 1967 to the end of 2016. Evans took a public stance against White racism, practices of White brethren, and the need for Blacks to financially support their own institutions.

As an NCI adult student, Shelton T. W. Gibbs, Jr. received additional ministerial development to become one of the first preachers in the Church of Christ to have his sermons mass produced in record album format, including "Going Home Without Jesus," "The Minister, His Support and Security in Retirement," and "God with Us."

John W. Harrison of Indianapolis, Indiana was a traditional aged high school student who attended NCI from 1940-1944. Harrison is but one example of the students who traveled from other states to attend this institution. One could argue that his rationale for leaving the Midwest and attending NCI was to receive the finest spiritual preparatory education.

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Albert Johnson, a 1954 graduate of NCI, later became the first Black mayor of Las Cruces, New Mexico.

John Oscar Williams attended NCI as an adult and took theology classes at nearby Fisk University. It was during this time that he became editor of NCI's newspaper, *The Crusader*.

Minnie Beatrice Keeble, daughter of Marshall Keeble, was one of the first females enrolled at NCI at the age of seven. Her husband, Jimmy Lymon, graduated from NCI and later went on to teach Bible and history, while also serving as the basketball coach. This union bore their two daughters, Gwendolyn and Laura, who both finished at NCI.

While NCI did have dorms, female students were housed with Keeble's second wife, Laura Catherine Johnson Keeble, at their private residence. Marshall Keeble's first wife and mother of his five children, Minnie Womack, died on December 11, 1932.

A White Station, Tennessee native, Minister General Andrew Jackson and his wife Elizabeth Thomas Jackson made the decision to enroll as the first adult students at NCI seeking Christian training in 1940. Elizabeth made the sacrifice to work outside the home to help finance her husband's high school and ministerial instructional training at NCI.

The cause of NCI's closure is complex. On June 2, 1967, a predominately White school board decided to close the school, citing low enrollment. NCI alumni argued that NCI closed "without giving the Black members of the church an opportunity to raise enough money to keep it open." The premise of the lawsuit was that Lipscomb and NCI's Board of Directors had violated the rights of many benefactors to NCI by turning the monies over to a college that just started integrating. But the court's decisions on federal district and appellate levels found that the \$400,000 NCI assets would be awarded to Lipscomb College, under the guise of scholarship monies for Black students at Lipscomb.

Steps toward racial reconciliation between members of the church were made evident in April 2012 when the president of Lipscomb University, L. Randolph Lowry III, awarded Fred Gray an honorary doctorate. The university awarded \$1.6 million in aid to 216 Black students at Lipscomb as a means to right the wrongs of the past.

Some saw Marshall Keeble as one who passively acquiesced to White racism out of necessity and who accommodated the southern practice of segregation in order to gain favor among White leaders within Churches of Christ who financially supported NCI. Others would argue that he had redemptive principled vision as a man of faith and subtle diplomacy in an era that minimized Black voices. But all would agree his actions were grounded in love and his conviction in God. It is this legacy that was instilled in the NCI alumni producing leaders of faith across the nation.

In 2005, the National Park Service listed the NCI Gymnasium in the National Register of Historic Places as the last remaining vestige of the former NCI campus. Built in 1956, this building served as an auditorium, gymnasium and dormitory. It stands as a testament to Nashville's religious education during segregation and the civil rights era.

Elizabeth Johnson, Ph.D.