

# Profiles of *African Americans* in Tennessee

## Lettie Stanley Galloway (1915-2007)



Lettie Galloway's obituary in *The Tennessean* headlined "Humanitarian Lettie Galloway Dies" (11/13/2007). The same article quoted her as saying, "You've got to get out and do the things that need doing. You can't wait for someone else." That statement exemplifies her life.

Lettie Ellen Stanley was born in Tennessee on January 31, 1915 to Burt Elliott Stanley and Gabriella Fowler. Not long after her 1932 graduation from Pearl High School, she married Alfred C. Galloway (1915-1986) in Williamson County on June 7, 1933. Around 1937, Alfred was the maintenance supervisor of the Andrew Jackson Homes and in 1940 Lettie and Alfred lived at 956 Blank Street in the public housing complex. Alfred was better known as a contractor who later became the president of Community Federal Savings and Loan.

Galloway was an honor student at Tennessee Agricultural and Industrial School (A and I, now Tennessee State University/TSU) in 1937, the year she graduated. When the local chapter of the Southern Negro Youth Conference was organized at the Bethlehem Center in 1939, she was elected secretary. The civil rights organization was also known as the Southern Negro Youth Congress. In 1939, Galloway worked with women and girls at the Fisk University Social Center. She was involved with Nashville's Blue Triangle, the African American YWCA, on their Committee of Management and as secretary.

When the South Street Community Center opened in July 1942, Galloway was a board member and in charge of the nursery school. She wrote a play in 1943 titled "Wouldn't You Like to Know" that was performed by students of the Center. She resigned as the director of the South Street center in 1945 when Alfred was stationed in California. In 1946, Galloway was the program director at Nashville's Bethlehem Center. She was at the

Eighteenth Avenue Youth Center the following year.

The September 25, 1950, *Nashville Banner* reported that the Eighteenth Avenue Youth Center (Center) would be open on October 2 with Lettie Galloway as its executive director. Begun in 1934 as the Negro Youth Work Committee, the Center had a full array of recreational and educational programs. Their fall retreat was sponsored by the Blue Triangle and the Community Chest. The Center was expected to serve 16,000 youth and adults during 1950 and 1951. A dozen social science students from Fisk and Tennessee A and I were working at the Center. By 1953, the Center served 25,518 people across their group programs.

The year 1953 was busy with Galloway serving as a member of the agency executive board of the Community Chest, chair for the local NAACP membership drive, and president of the Nashville Federation of Settlements, a social services association established in 1929. She was NAACP membership chair again in 1954. Galloway took a leave of absence from the Center to study at the University of Tennessee school of social work. A new building for the Center was designed by Nashville architect Leon Quincy Jackson and located at 1811 Osage Street. During the October 13, 1958 dedication, Galloway and others discussed the history of the Center.

Early in 1961, Galloway was recognized by Nashville's chapter of the National Council of Negro Women along with ninety-seven others because they "distinguished themselves by their consistent efforts to advance community standards of social justice..." (*Nashville Banner* 3/27/61). In October 1961, Alfred and Lettie Galloway purchased the house at 1812 Morena Street. A building permit for the two-story, eight-room brick veneer house was issued to B. F. Cox on May 29, 1940. As part of an interview printed in *The Tennessean* on January 2, 1972, Galloway said

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that Alfred was “reconstructing a colonial home we bought,” trying to return it to its original design and studying the history of the period.

Two years later (1963), Galloway resigned her position at the Center to become a sociology instructor at Tennessee A and I. She had been at the Center for seventeen years. Galloway took on more responsibility in 1968 when she became the director of social services at Meharry Medical College North Nashville Community Health Center. A September 4, 1968, *Tennessean* article noted that Galloway was “active in Nashville civic and social club work and is immediate past president of the Nashville Social Service Club. Among her other club affiliations are Alpha Kappa Alpha (AKA), Links, Inc., and the Negro Business and Professional women’s Club.” The article neglected to mention that she was also the vice-president of Nashville’s Planned Parenthood Association. In 1969, Galloway became the first African American to be president of Planned Parenthood of Nashville. In addition, Galloway served as a member of the national Planned Parenthood board in 1972.

*The Tennessean* named Lettie Galloway as one of four Nashville Women of the Year in January 1972. The article on Galloway began with “Lettie Galloway has always been able to do many things and do them all well.” Sponsored by the newspaper and Davidson County Business and Professional Women’s Club, the awards were for achievements in their field, community service, and national recognition. In an interview with the paper, Galloway stated that she was a faculty member at Meharry Medical College as part of the Matthew Walker Health Center. She spoke about living in San Diego while her husband served in WWII and how she became interested in helping others when she first volunteered at the Bethlehem Center. Her volunteer work eventually led to her choosing to pursue education and a career in social work.

Continuing to do many things, Galloway was a member of the Nashville Club of the National Association of Negro Business and Professional Women’s Club when she took on the chairmanship of the Southeast District conference in Nashville in 1975. More recognition came to Galloway in 1976 when she and nine others were honored for their volunteer work. The award was

sponsored by Cain-Sloan Company department store and Germaine Monteil Cosmatesque Corporation, and Galloway’s award was for volunteer work with the local chapter of AKA sorority. The *Tennessean* article mentioned she also had a citation for her work with Planned Parenthood and her testimony to the U.S. Senate on Aging four years prior. A lifelong learner, in a 1972 interview for Fisk about Dr. Charles S. Johnson, Galloway stated that she would write down words from his lectures and look up their meaning later.

Although retired from her work by 1979, Galloway continued to volunteer at community and service-focused organizations such as AKA, Middle Tennessee Health Systems Agency, League of Hard of Hearing, American Red Cross, and Nashville Public Library. She was awarded the Health Advocate of the Year by the National Association of Health Service executives in 1978. In 1985, Galloway was appointed by Gov. Lamar Alexander to the advisory panel of the Capitol Restoration Committee. She was involved with the Vintagers club for TSU, a group for “vintage” graduates. Another award came to Galloway in 1993 when she and two others were recognized for their contributions to Nashville by the Council on Aging and Social Action Group on Aging. Galloway was noted as being active since the 1930s and for being the first director of the South Street Community Center (Edgehill Center) and the first African American female director of the Eighteenth Avenue Community Center. She was later recognized in a 2002 Metro Nashville Council resolution for 100 Black Women, Inc. for her instrumental work in initiating My Sister’s Closet, where donated clothing helped women in need.

Galloway’s daughter, Jean Galloway Reed, summed up her mother’s life for *The Tennessean*’s article on her 2007 death by saying, “She was a ‘caring person’ who believed in trying to conquer health problems – yours, mine and hers!”

*Claudette Stager*

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