

The Gracious Builder:
A Tribute to Sister Ethel B. Beck, Past Grand Worthy Matron
By
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Grand C.C.F.C



*Official Proceedings of the Sixty-Eighth Annual Session of the Excelsior Grand Chapter Inc.
Order of the Eastern Star, Tennessee Jurisdiction Prince Hall Affiliation
August 7-9, 1950
A&I State College
Nashville Tennessee*

The Builder's Voice:

“Big things are done under stress and strain. A man will make more progress in a storm than in a fog has been aptly stated by a noble philosopher. Opposition develops the power to overcome. Let us make the trails of whatever nature serves as stepping stones, yea, corner stones, in the structures we are building for tomorrow.” - Sister Ethel B. Beck

Excerpt from Sister Ethel B. Beck's Annual Address as Grand Worthy Matron in Nashville, Tennessee on August 7, 1950

When these words were spoken among the hundreds of members of the Order of the Eastern Star one can only imagine the motivational tone it set for her audience. The Tennessee Advisory Committee to the United States Commission on Civil Rights spoke to the segregated times in which sister Beck spoke these words. The committee wrote in a report entitled *School Desegregation in*

Tennessee “Tennessee has a long history of racial segregation. A former slave state, following the Civil War and continuing into the 1950s Tennessee enacted a series of statutes that legalized racial segregation. These laws mandated a *de jure* segregation of the races in many parts of social and community life to include marriage and cohabitation, different modes of public transportation, and public accommodation.”¹ While the Order of the Eastern Star, Prince Hall Affiliation has members of all nationalities and it has been largely recognized as a predominantly black organization. Thus, its members withstanding the racial injustices of our nation. Brother C. D. Stamps, Past Grand Worthy Patron encouraged “We must ever go on. The unborn members of the future are calling to us that we lay down for them the traditions and heritage of the coming years. Today is but a moment in pause-less eternity, and God requires only that we take advantage of each moment that he gives us. There may be times when our hands shall grow tired and our work may have to be torn down and raised again. Upward, always, shall be our building. Days may come when our hearts shall be weary. Onward is our journey. By the steps we shall cut, others shall climb: by the trail we shall blaze, others shall mount; through our work they shall find truth.”²

Tennessee A & I College/Tennessee State University

The Sixty Eighth Annual Session for Excelsior Grand Chapter, Order of the Eastern Star, Tennessee Jurisdiction, Prince Hall Affiliation was hosted at the Tennessee Agricultural and Institutional State College from August 7-9, 1950.³

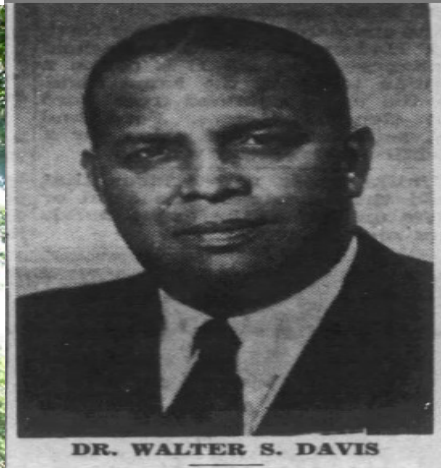
¹ School Desegregation in Tennessee, 12 Districts Released from Desegregation Orders, 17 Districts Remain Under Court Jurisdiction, Tennessee Advisory Committee to the United States Commission on Civil Rights, Pg. 1

² Official Proceedings of the Sixty- Eighth Annual Session of the Excelsior Grand Chapter Incorporated, Order of the Eastern Star, Tennessee Jurisdiction, August 7-9, 1950, Pg. 29

³ Ibid.



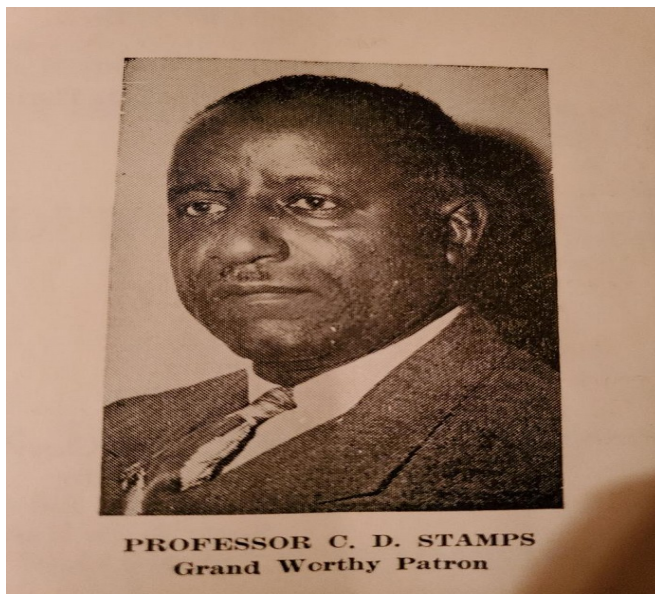
Picture Courtesy of
http://www.tnstate.edu/about_tsu/history.aspx



Dr. W. S. Davis, President of Tennessee
A&I State College, *Chattanooga Daily
Times (Chattanooga, Tennessee) 17
June 1955 Page 19*

On the first day of session the Canton, Mississippi native Dr. Walter Strother Davis was in attendance to give warm remarks and welcome the body of members to Nashville. Dr. Davis served as the president of Tennessee A & I. “In 1948 when the college needed energy, wisdom and fore-sight, Walter Strother Davis was offered the challenge, and accepted the responsibility of guiding the ever expanding program of higher education for Negroes in Tennessee.” The article proceeds “In 1951 educational leaders and statesmen came from far and near to witness the birth of a university. The birth they saw and the leadership responsible for this birth was Walter Strother Davis.” wrote Jacquetta Armstrong in the *Johnson City Press (Johnson City, Tennessee)*.⁴ Shortly after Sister Gertrude Lewis Johnson, Worthy Matron for Electa Chapter No. 1 of Nashville, TN completed the occasional opening for Excelsior Grand Chapter. Sister Beck was escorted to her proper place in the east accompanied by her counterpart Brother C. D. Stamps. The chapter was then notified of Dr. Davis’ arrival. “As Sister Hazel Stuart was about to give the welcome, we were notified that Dr. W. S. Davis, President of Tennessee State College, was awaiting admittance so that he might extend greetings to Excelsior Grand Chapter, Order of the Eastern Star. He was admitted, and the members stood to receive him at the behest of our Grand Worthy Matron. A splendid, heartfelt welcome was given to Excelsior Grand

Chapter, and declared that the facilities of this great institution were at our disposal. He explained the history of the school, its program, philosophy, and tremendous growth. He not only commended Excelsior Grand Chapter for its remarkable work, but challenged the organization to do greater work.”⁵



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Dr. Davis’ words were a testament to Sister Beck’s leadership in Tennessee. Furthermore, It was a testament of his expectations of the Grand Chapter. Following the visitation of Dr. Davis, Sister Ethel B. Beck proceeded the session with a profound annual address. In the jurisdiction of Tennessee the Grand Worthy Matron’s address is read among the membership at each annual session. The membership responded with the following “The scholarly, philosophical, and well-planned address which she gave as usual reminded us forcibly of the magnitude of her leadership, personality, and zealous interest in the work of our beloved Excelsior Grand Chapter, and on the faces of the members there was the indelible expression that Excelsior Grand Chapter’s illustrious leader and Grand Worthy matron is unrivaled and unexcelled. She dwelt on the theme, “We build today for the youth of tomorrow”, and she warned us to build wisely in these perilous times with heavy war clouds and other

obstructing agencies to deter our purposes. We were warned against communism and its threat to Democracy. We were admonished to make impediments our stepping stones, to hold high the cross and guide wisely the youth of our times. The Worthy Matrons were termed the safety valves and backlogs of their chapters and asked to be thermostats and not thermometers. The golden rule is to be our guide, with the knowledge that what we do for ourselves soon passes away, but what we do for others becomes immortal. We must work together, she says, in building the superstructure for the youth of tomorrow.”⁶

The Gracious Builder:

Sister Ethel Beck was born March 11, 1896. She and her husband Brother James G. Beck were members of Queen Esther Chapter No. 3 in Knoxville, TN.

65	1307	139	155	Beck James G.	Head	10	#6000	No	71	Mar	48
66				Ethel B.	Wife			✓	71	Mar	34
67				Quarles Jesse M.	Boarder			✓	71	Mar	27
68				Coleman Willie M.	Boarder			✓	71	Mar	28

1930 United States Federal Census

There were two “Boarders” living with the Beck couple in 1930. They were William M. Coleman and Jesse M. Quarles.⁷ Although, this writer has not identified any relation of the boarders to the Beck family they have been identified as educators at Austin High School in Knoxville, TN.⁸

⁴ Johnson City Press (Johnson City, Tennessee) 25 February 1954, Thursday, Pg. 28

⁵ Ibid. Pg. 10

⁶ Ibid. Pg. 25

Isabelle Payne.
NEGRO SCHOOLS
 Austin High: T. R. Davis, principal; R. I. Anderson, Edna Arter, W. M. Brooks, Sylvesta Brown, Emma O. Brown, L. R. Cansler, Emma T. Chairs, Leo F. Chilton, Almeda Ford, A. L. Greenway, J. A. Matthews, Gennie Morgan, Leon Nance, Arvella Pickett, Jessie Quarles, J. I. Seals, M. D. Senter, Margaret Singleton, Mary Estella Smith, R. J. Tate, E. R. Taylor, Ozonna Vineyard, librarian; J. B. Watson.
 Eastport: Mrs. Hattie B. Johnson, principal-teacher; Willie M. Coleman, Lucile Douglas, Carroll P. Franklin, C. Maynard James, Edith Morrow.
 Edgewood: Louis C. Flack, principal-teacher; Gertrude A. Lee.
 Green: Charles W. Cansler, principal; Otta Mae Asher, Mrs. Allie Brewer, P. W. Dawkins, Mrs. LaPerle Flack, Lottie Gordon, James Henderson, Leslye Henderson, Mrs. Sadie Jones, Ruby P. King, George Lennon, Myrtle McGowan, Edna Murdock, Mrs. Alexine S. Page, Dewey W. Roberts, Georgia Stone, Nora Turner, Ravine Williams.
 Heiskell: Lois H. Tinsley, principal-teacher; Mrs. Ruth Brice, Estelle Cary, Alfreda Delaney, Mrs. Mary Hamilton, Alberta Pickett, Julia Randolph, Lenora Tate.
 Sam Hill: Mrs. Ethel Downer, principal-teacher; Ada Anderson, Sal-

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Austin P-TA Meeting Draws 200 Delegates

More than 200 delegates from over the state were attending the Tennessee Congress of Colored Parents and Teachers at Austin High School today. The convention continues through tomorrow. A public meeting will be held at 8 p. m. today at Austin auditorium with Mrs. Ethel B. Beck, Knoxville, first vice president of the state, in charge.
 Mrs. E. J. Dailey supervisor of

The Knoxville Journal (Knoxville, Tennessee) 8 September 1933, Fri, Pg. 2

The Knoxville News-Sentinel (Knoxville, Tennessee, April 25, 1947, Page 20

One can assume that they met at Austin High School where Sister Beck served as the first vice president of the state-for the Tennessee Congress of colored parents and teachers. The boarders were twenty- seven and twenty- eight at the time of this census record it is not a far stretched thought to presume that Brother and Sister Beck opened their home to young educators in need of room and board. As previously mentioned Sister Beck's personality was unmatched. The compassion she showed throughout her life was very rare. Sister Beck transitioned to eternal peace on August 12, 1970. Sister Ethel B. Beck was arrested and taken into custody after a minor traffic stop. The police suspected that she was driving while drunk. Days following her arrest she was found unconscious in a jail cell. She was transported to University hospital where it was confirmed that she had transitioned. Following the autopsy, it was communicated by the county medical examiner Dr. Robert Whittle that revealed that her unstable driving prior to the traffic stop was related to a stroke. Marches took place outside of the police

department by community leaders and residents who wanted to talk about the details of the case. They wondered why she was arrested instead of taken to the hospital.⁹



Sister Beck held many titles. She sought to assist many people and she surely impacted many lives. It is apparent to this writer that she left a lasting impression on the members of Excelsior Grand Chapter, Order of the Eastern Star, Tennessee Jurisdiction, Prince Hall Affiliation. “Determination and decision are the Siamese twins of irresistible power. These two form the background and foundation in everything. First, we wish, second, we decide, third, we determine and then pressing on and on until our ultimate has been translated into a fact, a building for tomorrow.”¹⁰ May the Order continue to honor her memory.

⁷ 1930 United States Federal Census

⁸ The Knoxville Journal (Knoxville, Tennessee) 8 September 1933, Fri, Pg. 2

⁹ Kingsport Times (Kingsport, Tennessee) Page 29, Thursday December 3, 1970/

The Daily News- Journal (Murfreesboro, Tennessee) Page 16, Friday August 14, 1970

¹⁰ Ibid. Pg. 14