



Roll of Honor

**Greene County
Tennessee**

*“They achieved most
at the price of
Great Sacrifice”*

**Greene County Heritage Trust
Greeneville, Tennessee
1988**



never daring to return to their home state. Ross became a political outcast, but one whose courage and integrity had saved the Presidency of the United States. By his firm stand during the ominous post-Civil War period, that has been called the greatest political crisis in American history, Ross became a true, but obscure, hero.

His courage and integrity were later recognized by President Cleveland who appointed him as governor of the Territory of New Mexico.

The Black Community 1700s-1988

Into the dense forests of the Cherokee domain, along with the white settlers came also the Black pioneers. Although seldom mentioned in the recorded accounts of the time, the Black men and

women shared more than an equal portion of the perils and privations, and certainly more than their portion of the grueling labor, in establishing a civilization on the hazardous frontier. Not only did the Black community accept an unequal share of the onerous burden of bringing the wilderness under cultivation, they, for the most part, did it with willing hand and heart.

In the development of Greeneville, Blacks have made many contributions. We can't forget the families who made bricks for older homes, and downtown buildings. Sidewalks were laid by hand. Dray services, barber services, restaurants, grocery stores and dry cleaning shops were furnished, and churches and schools were provided by work and sacrifices.

The miracle of transforming the wilderness into a civilization within a relatively short time would have been impossible without the unstinted manual labor and devotion of the Black people. Throughout our history, they have led lives of dedication to the enhancement of the local society. Collectively, their labors and their skills represent great achievement; individually, they represent personal sacrifice and devotion to the common welfare.

A few of the older families included the McGhees, Gasses, Fowlers, Vances, Manuels, Farnsworths, Easterlys, Forts, Snapps, Kirks, Hills, Carters, Bowers, Crums, Gudgers, Hamiltons, Robinsons, Carsons, Broyles, Campbells, Ripleys, Riles, Browns, Alums, Woodfords, Hendersons, Joneses, Reeders, Cannons, Pattersons, and others.

Miss Elsie Gass 1882-1980

Two generations had the rare privilege of growing up in Greene County when the responsibility for caring for the underprivileged was assumed by Miss

Elsie Gass and her volunteers — people who were directly and personally involved in helping those less fortunate. Their daily ministries exemplified Christian charity. The ramification of that influence no doubt continues to the present time.

Miss Elsie was an inspiration to old and young alike and her sincerity seemed to be infectious. Serious concerns for the less fortunate became a way of life for many local people — inspired by this one angel of mercy.

"Call Miss Elsie" was the first reaction of those in need, and for those who had something to donate to charity, the call was always answered. "Call Miss Elsie" also became a good-natured put-down whenever people began to complain about wanting something they didn't need. Everyone recognized Miss Elsie although many never knew, nor needed to know, her last name. "Miss Elsie" was sufficient to identify her. She was an institution in her own right.

Love and concern permeated the very fiber of her being. She was, in effect, the charity institution of Greene County, taking care of much of the responsibilities now assumed by the United Way and other organizations. Hers was a perennial message of hope to the despondent, of cheer to the depressed. Inspired by her unflagging zeal, volunteers young and old alike were attracted to her.

Concerned also with the spiritual welfare of "her people," Miss Elsie established a mission church on Leonard Street for those who wanted to worship with her. Her concern included also those confined to jail. These people she visited regularly. Only those involved will ever know how much her personal concern meant. One wonders who received the greater blessing, those ministered to or the minister herself.

For decades, Greeneville's holiday tradition featured Miss Elsie with her little bell standing by her "dime board" on the corner of Main and Depot. Most shoppers, including children, laid at least a dime on the board. Most gave more. "Every dime helps" was her motto. (At that time it was true.) Inclement weather sometimes drove her into her car, but her little bell continued to ring, and dimes continued to accumulate. Many stockings were filled and other needs met from the perennial dime board.

Perhaps the happiest surprise of Miss Elsie's life came when the people of Greene County presented her with a new automobile. Her old car was approaching the stage of repair, portending problems which she did not need. Perhaps the car expressed a long overdue vote of appreciation.

As age and infirmity gradually overtook her frail frame, she no doubt longed for someone to assume her mantle of responsibility — evidently a forlorn hope.

Alert, cheerful and concerned to the last, Miss Elsie went to her reward on Christmas Day. She is buried in Oak Grove Cemetery. "Miss Elsie's" come along all too rarely.



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