

# FRATERNAL & SOCIAL ORGANIZATIONS

Like churches, fraternal & social organizations presented for the Black community opportunities to gather with like-minded individuals for common purpose. Although social clubs were not expressly religious, there was considerable crossover between religious & social institutions in Black Kingsport. Religious leaders often participated in & led social civil associations. Clubs such as Hasan Shrine Temple 150 or the NAACP leaned into religious characteristics in order to bolster their authority & public support.

Unlike religious congregations, however, the bodies of civil societies were often comprised of individuals who displayed particular characteristics (such as gender, marital status, age, etc.) in order to attain membership. The selective nature of these organizations allowed members to celebrate shared experiences -- often while working to change others' lives for the better.

## N.A.A.C.P. KINGSPORT BRANCH

The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (N.A.A.C.P.) hurtled into national fame, accord, and controversy in the nineteen-fifties. The Great Depression and WWII set the stage for the modern Civil Rights Movement. With President Roosevelt's New Deal and the return of Black servicemen with their experience of some semblance of equality abroad, the time had finally arrived for renewed Black activism and enfranchisement efforts.

The board members predicted the Negroes, through the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, are going to challenge the schools everywhere to speed up action on the decision.

A board member said the organization has representatives here, and it was reported that local representatives attended a meeting at Greeneville this week of the N. A. A. C. P.

Reports on the Kingsport Branch N.A.A.C.P. during the nineteen-fifties prove relatively scarce. In 1954, one week after *Brown v. Board*, the Kingsport Board of Education discussed the inevitability of desegregation at their regular meeting.

Kingsport's N.A.A.C.P. remains difficult to track between 1949 & 1965. In 1963, Reverend John Price Jr. recalled that the local N.A.A.C.P., "...wasn't very active, & we soon disbanded." By 1965, the association was largely defunct. On June 16, 1966, the Kingsport Chapter N.A.A.C.P. re-formed; Horace Curry was elected president, Reverend J.B. Gaines as vice president, Reverend William H. Stokely as recording secretary, & 54 members were counted in the organization.

Horace Curry explained clearly that the Kingsport N.A.A.C.P.'s first goal was to secure open housing for Black residents. Open housing proved a long, drawn-out battle in Kingsport that did not come to fruition until eight years later in 1974. The N.A.A.C.P. experienced their most prolific period of activity between their re-founding in 1966 & the early seventies; with Horace Curry the driving force.



Horace Curry  
Kingsport N.A.A.C.P.

Housing 'Anywhere'  
New NAACP Target

NEGRO HOUSING  
GROUND BROKEN

Kingsport Times, June 7, 1966

Kingsport News, September 13, 1967

In May 1967 Curry arranged a meeting between three candidates running for the Board of Mayor & Aldermen, & the Black community. The meeting, held at Curry's Mortuary, allowed an all-Black audience of Riverview residents to question the candidates about their stances on open housing. Curry often worked with W.H.Y. chairman Reverend John Price Jr.; together, Curry & Price argued that open housing would benefit Kingsport as a whole by allowing African Americans to move to the city without having difficulty finding housing. The two also travelled to Washington D.C. to meet with Congressman James H. Quillen about the issue. Upon returning from the meeting, Curry organized a public meeting with the Kingsport Board of Realtors in order to go over the situation which he characterized as the Black community's "...biggest problem in Kingsport".

The meeting took place September 1967, and although the real estate agents & Black community "...established a line of communication," & discussed establishing an integrated housing development, "none of the real estate men was willing to pledge personally that he would never practice discrimination against Negroes in selling houses." The agents claimed they could not make such a promise due to the fact that they could not disregard the wishes of white clients who did not want to sell to African Americans. They were quick to mention that they could not sell to white buyers if their clients disliked them as well.



Kingsport Times, April 8, 1968

**Negroes To March**

Kingsport Negroes will conduct a memorial march for Martin Luther King, Jr. today from Riverside square to Church Circle.

The march, beginning at 1 p.m., will be led by Horace Curry, president of the local chapter of N.A.A.C.P. The route which will start on Lincoln Street and end with a brief service conducted by Rev. John Price, pastor of St. Mark's Methodist Church.

The group will walk past all Kingsport Negro churches starting with Zion and Ebenezer and Central Baptist in Riverside, on to Maple Street to pick up parishioners of Ebenezer Baptist Church AME Zion and St. Mark's, and then on to East Square to pick up parishioners of St. Paul's.

The group will go down there to East Square past First Street to Church Circle.

The marchants will be escorted by Kingsport city policemen.

**KINGSFORT MARCH** — An estimated 400 persons joined in the Kingsport Memorial March Sunday afternoon for Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Here the march proceeds at Pine Point Circle. (Times-News Photo — Bill Hussey)

**NO INCIDENTS**

**400 March In King Memorial**

On Sunday April 7, 1967, N.A.A.C.P. president Horace Curry led roughly four hundred participants wearing black paper crepe arm bands in a mile-long march memorializing Dr. King's assassination. He was joined at the front of the throng by Reverends John Price Jr. and Douglas Berndt. The procession walked past every Black church in Kingsport and stopped halfway at Church Circle where the crowd sang "My Country Tis of Thee" and "Battle Hymn of the Republic." Once Reverend Price gave his speech, the marchers headed back to Shiloh Baptist Church where the route ended. Since the first MLK Memorial March, the Kingsport community has continued the tradition, providing an annual space for progressive residents to come to together in a spirit of solidarity.

Into the 1970's the activity of the N.A.A.C.P. appeared to be diminishing. The Board of Mayor & Aldermen passed an ordinance enforcing open housing in 1974. In 1980, Oscar Bond received the Kingsport chapter N.A.A.C.P.'s original charter from national headquarters. Under Oscar Bond's leadership, the N.A.A.C.P. sought to, "...discard their old & tenacious reputation as rabble-rousers," initially by catering to new potential members from the business-class. In 1981, the association hosted a fundraising banquet where Bond emphasized the group's disinterest in protesting or otherwise causing civil unrest. The Kingsport N.A.A.C.P. began to focus on contributing to scholarships & other development projects. In 1983, Mildred Davis was president of the local N.A.A.C.P., with a focus on fundraising & banquets. By 1987, Kingsport chapter had eighty-five members, was working to organize a youth council, & continued to advocate for Black employment. Oscar Bond's reorganization of the Kingsport N.A.A.C.P. was solid, & the association continued to function following his passing in 1988. As the organization entered the nineteen-nineties, the N.A.A.C.P. regularly organized political forums at which local candidates were able to converse with the Black community & address their issues.

10A Kingsport Times-News / Thursday, October 15, 1981

**NAACP seeking to change its reputation**

6A Kingsport Times-News / Wednesday, February 25, 1987

**Business development  
Kingsport NAACP focus**

# W.H.Y. (WORKING HOPEFULLY FOR YOUTH)

FEELINGS TO BE SOUNDED OUT MONDAY

## Negroes Call Integration Meeting



**WHY CHARTER** — Officers of the Kingsport WHY group (Working Hopefully for Youth), received their state charter of incorporation at a special service Sunday. Examining the significant charter are, left to right, Horace V. Curry Sr., vice president; Mrs. Alonzo Ervin, secretary; and John Price Jr., president. (Times-News Photo—Earl Carter)

W.H.Y. wasted little time in organizing a mass meeting to address the Kingsport Board of Education's sluggish progress with integration. The landmark Brown v. Board decision had been made a decade earlier, & Sullivan County Schools had only integrated first through sixth grades. W.H.Y. worked to gather the Black community's feelings about the rate of integration, discovering deep dissatisfaction with the School Board's "grade-a-year" plan. When more than fifty members attended a School Board meeting, Chairman John Price Jr. encouraged parents and members to accept total de-segregation of all Sullivan County Schools by 1967. In the interim, W.H.Y. successfully pressured the Board of Education to allow Black students to apply for schools that were still segregated in 1965, such as Dobyns-Bennett High School.

## Most Negro Teachers Will Be 'Integrated'

A delegation of Negro parents was told Thursday night by Kingsport Board of Education that "a majority" of Negro teachers presently at Douglass School will be integrated into other schools with the abandonment of the segregated school this fall.

Members of the Working Hopefully for Youth (WHY) Committee asked about teacher hiring after the board approved a recommendation by Sgt. Dana F. Swick that 273 positions be applied for in 1966-67.

"We will retain all qualified teachers for whom a position is available in accordance with their tenure," the delegation of four WHY members was told.

Board Chairman John Faust said the board cannot be more specific because resignations are not usually handed in until just before the end of school in the spring. He said teachers will be used when slots are open in the field.

Faust said he felt sure the board would be able to use a "majority" of teachers presently at Douglass. He said no new teachers will be hired from outside the system where Negro teachers are available to fill the positions.

There are presently 17 Negro teachers, 14 of whom are "on tenure," at Douglass School. Tenure is attained after two years of teaching in a specified field. Prior to the end of the two-year period a teacher may be released at the discretion of school officials.

The W.H.Y. (Working Hopefully for Youth) Committee was founded in early September, 1965 in order to supplement the then-latent Kingsport N.A.A.C.P. Although the N.A.A.C.P. had been largely inactive for years, many members of Kingsport's Black community felt that racial discrimination was widespread in the city & that they needed to organize in order to address that discrimination. Although W.H.Y. did not remain active for longer than two or three years, the committee was nevertheless of monumental importance in maintaining the local struggle for Civil Rights and reinvigorating the N.A.A.C.P.'s activity in the mid-twentieth century.

In February 1966, W.H.Y. received a state charter of incorporation. The committee had contracted a public transit service to provide transportation to Riverview students who had been accepted to Dobyns-Bennet High School & other schools outside of the Black neighborhood. The group also organized a tutoring service to help Douglass students prepare for integration.

W.H.Y.'s goals included assisting:

- ~ Douglass teachers & students transition through the integration process.
- ~ Black Kingsport residents find employment
- ~ Riverview residents draw attention to physical isolation & city neglect of the neighborhood.

### 'BETTER CLIMATE'

But at the charter ceremony Sunday, Price spoke hopefully of making steady gains in the areas that count.

"We want to create a better climate for men and women to live together with dignity and respect and to continue to work as a great force of good in Kingsport."

The committee is mainly concerned now about the placement of Negro teachers when Douglass High is disbanded, and with the placement of Negroes in other types of work.

Last month, a state report indicated that no Negroes are employed here in full-time sales jobs. Local officials denied this and said there are about a dozen. The WHY committee says there are just two, and that some Negroes who have applied have been brushed off without just reason.



### TUTOR SERVICE

To get these students out of Riverview, they arranged for transportation with a local transit company, and later organized a tutoring service to boost the scholastic rank of 70 who couldn't make the grade.

This winter for the first time, a Negro was buried in an all-white cemetery.

And this week, the first Negro woman will move her family into all-white Lee Apartments, one of Kingsport's three public housing units. One of the others is all-white Cloud Apartments; the third is all-Negro Riverview Apartments.

By November 1966, W.H.Y. had achieved the goal of integrating Sullivan County Schools. Chairman John Price Jr. gave a speech that laid out W.H.Y.'s history & the "... undercurrent of discontent in the Negro community which was not taken seriously until the formation of the WHY ... committee in 1965." Price stipulated that W.H.Y. had been established to facilitate inter-racial ease of communication, and that Black Power was, "...an attempt to communicate once & for all the feelings & frustrations of a segment of our society who have been by-passed and taken advantage of."

# THE HASAN SHRINE TEMPLE 150



The earliest appearance of the Hasan Shrine Temple 150 in the Kingsport Times is dated to 1949, although the article in question makes reference to the Shrine's 1948 fundraiser for cancer and tuberculosis research, which totaled about \$50,000 (roughly \$500,000 when adjusted for inflation). Such a successful fundraising effort earned the Kingsport Hasan Shrine Temple 150 a visit from the international Hasan Shrine Temple organization the Ancient Egyptian Arabic Order of the Mystic Negro Shrine of North & South America. The visit of Raymond E. Jackson, Imperial Potentate, coincided with Hasan Shrine Temple 150's Annual Benefit Ball at the Civic Auditorium. Also in attendance was The Tennessee State Collegians, a nationally recognized swing band.

The Benevolent & Protective Order of Elks & the Hasan Shrine Temple 150 were perhaps the two foremost fraternal organizations in Kingsport's Black community. Both organizations were institutions in the community during the twentieth century – they offered a social space for members to interact with others who shared not only the same gender identity, but the same racial makeup as well. The Elks & the Hasan Shrine Temple appeared to have had overlapping memberships, although any official connection between the two is heretofore unknown by non-members. Organizations of this type (masonic fraternal clubs) are notoriously secretive; the inner workings & goings-on are privy only to members who often refuse to share such information even with their family members. The Hasan Shrine Temple's philanthropic orientation (as opposed to the Elks' social leanings) lends this organization a closer look than its counterpart. Both the Elks club & Hasan Shrine Temple 150 fraternal organizations (& their female auxiliaries for that matter) provided familiar social spaces where members could find camaraderie. Private interactions within the Riverview Elks Lodge & Hasan Temple 150 will likely remain private, but the outlet these social bodies provided for their members was valuable & substantial in its own right.

## BENEVOLENT & PROTECTIVE ORDER OF THE ELKS CLINCH MOUNTAIN LODGE 531 & DUNBAR TEMPLE 344

The Elks Club offered a more strictly social atmosphere in which Kingsport's Black adults could interact with one another. The Elks Club appeared in the Kingsport Times in 1934, fifteen years earlier than Hasan Shrine Temple 150. That mention announced that the fraternal organization was, "...expected to be one of the greatest conventions ever held in Kingsport by the negroes of this city," & "white people of this city [were] asked to cooperate by arranging to let their help off all day on Thursday, December 27." The Elks Club was, by & large, a fraternal social organization. On occasion, the Elks coordinated contests (such as a 1964 public speaking competition), offering the winners scholarship or savings bond prize money. Additionally, the Elks club joined the Negro Citizens Committee in 1949 in an effort to preserve the former Douglass School building as a community center.

Generally, however, the Elks club provided a strictly social outlet for members – some of whom were prominent members of the community, such as Oscar Bond & V.O. Dobbins. Both Dobbins & Bond were also members of Hasan Shrine Temple 150, the N.A.A.C.P. (in its 1940s era), & various other consortiums. The Elks' clubhouse was referred to as the Clinch Mountain Lodge for most of the twentieth century, the fraternal organization had a Riverview clubhouse since at least 1941. The Riverview Elks Lodge was the center of club activity by the nineteen-fifties & the building stands today.



# THE ESQUIRE CLUB

Founded in 1954, the Esquire Club was an association for married men who, "must possess the highest traits of character and community responsibility." Initially, the Club aimed its philanthropic efforts at improving recreational activity in Riverview generally. However, they narrowed this mission to improving recreational life for Riverview's children. They established a Boy's Club in Riverview in 1964, which they managed for three years until it was accepted into the national program and funded by the Community Chest. Additionally, the Esquires put on an annual ball at the Civic Auditorium, where they handed out numerous scholarships to Black students entering college; as well as honoring different figures in the Black community each year for outstanding civil service. Richard Watterson held several official positions in the club including financial secretary, vice president, and president -- he was also awarded the "Esquire of the Year" award in 1964. Cora Cox won the same award in 1965, in no small part because of her phenomenal contributions to Douglass School, where she was a teacher.



**Esquire Club  
Ball Saturday**

TAKING OVER — New Esquire Club officers are from left, Richard Watterson, president; Luther Graves, vice-president; Ralph Watterson, secretary; Charlie Carty, chaplain; and Elroy Webb, business manager. (Times-News Photo — Lowell Harris)

Kingsport Times, August 21, 1972



THEIR LADIES — New officers of the Esquire Club, the distaff group of the Esquire Club, include from left, Helen Patterson, vice president; Fannie Carty, assistant secretary; Frances Graves, financial secretary; Mary Leeper, chairman ways and means; Dallas Watterson, treasurer; and Jessye Lee Welch, secretary.



CLUB OFFICERS—New officers of the Esquire Club include from left, Wilbur Hendricks, vice president; Ray Leeper, chaplain; Luther Graves, business manager; Ralph Watterson, trustee; Richard Watterson, social chairman; Nathaniel Smith, treasurer; Henry Patterson, trustee; Thomas Bond, trustee; Nathan Blye, president; and Charlie Carty, chairman trustee board.

Kingsport Times, August 21, 1967

# THE BUSINESS & PROFESSIONAL LEAGUE (FORMERLY THE NEGRO BUSINESS LEAGUE OF KINGSPORT)

The Negro Business League of Kingsport was organized in 1919 by Robert E. Clay of Bristol (president) & Dr. M.M. Cloud (vice president). The League's initial aims included improving financial agency of Black people in Kingsport, constructing a recreational center, improving sanitary conditions in Kingsport's Black neighborhood, building of a hospital, & promoting "good citizenship." Over the coming thirty years, the League would organize time & again to improve the quality of life for the Black community. They raised funds for a new pool in Riverview, as well at the establishment of a Y.W.C.A., organized a delegation to improve air quality in the area around the new Douglass School in 1949, & held charitable banquets for the Board of Mayor & Alderman while working on various projects with the city in the 1950s. The Negro Business League of Kingsport often served as ambassadors for the Black Community of Kingsport -- improving quality of life while maintaining diplomatic relationships with the rest of the city.

## BUSINESS LEAGUE FOR KINGSPORT NEGROES

**Dr. M. M. McCloud, Vice-President Heads Canvass For Members Here.**

Kingsport negroes, under the leadership of Dr. M. M. Cloud, are making a canvass for members for the Negro Business League of this city, which will be a part of the organization in Sullivan County, Tenn., and Washington County, Va.

"The object of the League," said Dr. Cloud, "is to promote the finan-

Kingsport Times, June 20, 1919



LEAGUE HONORS BOARD—Seated at the banquet table are members of the Kingsport Board of Mayor and Aldermen who were honored with a dinner Tuesday night at Douglass High School presented by the Negro Business League, shown standing. Officers of the League are Jason Taylor, president; the Rev. William H. Stokley, first vice president; James Stafford, second vice president; Mrs. Pearl Graves, secretary; and Mrs. Elouise Long, treasurer.

Kingsport Times, March 26, 1952