

Reclaiming the “Maryville Six”:

The Racial Reintegration of Maryville College, 1954-1960

By Peter Wallenstein *



As summer neared its end in 1954, three young women from East Tennessee stepped out of their homes in the town of Alcoa and headed over to the campus of Maryville College. A few months earlier, all three—Shirley M. Carr, Queen Elizabeth Crossing, and Louise Hill—had become graduates of the Charles M. Hall School, the Black high school in Alcoa. Even more than most teenagers beginning their first term in college, they no doubt approached their new adventure with both anticipation and apprehension. They would have known that they were going to be the first Black students in more than a half-century to take classes at the college. They likely knew, too, that they were the very first Black *female* students ever to enroll at Maryville.

Maryville College had an origin story, or early history, perhaps unique to higher education in all the eleven states that, for four years, had comprised the Confederate States of America. Union victory in the Civil War and its aftermath brought an end to the slave system in Tennessee, plus an opportunity for Black children there to go to school and even advance to higher education. Beginning in 1868, Maryville had enrolled young Black and white students for more than three decades. But a Tennessee state law, passed in 1901, put an end to any such experiment in biracial higher education. After that, for decade after decade, Maryville had been a white-only college—or, rather, a non-Black school, since young people of various Asian ethnicities attended during the long era of segregation.

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In 1954, the legal environment suddenly changed enough to permit the college to reopen its doors to prospective Black students. Six people—four young Black women and two young Black men—jumped at the opportunity to “reintegrate” Maryville College.

The “Maryville Six,” as they came to be known, have been virtually invisible in the historical record of the desegregation of higher education in the South during the 1950s and 1960s. Their experiences as pioneers in college desegregation deserve revisiting regardless—and also can serve as a case study, a guide for appreciating similar pioneers and institutional change elsewhere.¹

Rediscovering the “Maryville Six”

After teaching outside the state (in New Jersey) for many years, Shirley Carr Clowney retired in 1992 and returned to her native Blount County. There she took on projects related to community development and then, increasingly by 2003, to the Black history of the Maryville-Alcoa area. At one point, visiting her former college, she found herself dismayed to see little to no recognition of the time, back in 1954, when she and five other young African Americans had inaugurated a Black student presence at Maryville College.

Perceiving a significant breakthrough in the school’s history as being seriously slighted, she took her concerns to Maryville College president Gerald W. Gibson, a transformative leader who headed the school from 1993 to 2010.² In 2008, the fiftieth anniversary of the year the “Maryville Six” would have graduated, a special tribute ceremony took place at last, with a detailed plaque recounting that history placed in a prominent location on campus.

Indeed, the enrollment of six Black students in 1954 was a big deal, even if long left largely unnoticed by the campus community. Nearly alone among colleges across the South, Maryville had enrolled Black students together with white students from 1868 until 1901. And with scant company across the former Confederate states, Maryville moved briskly to (re)open its doors to a handful of Black applicants when such became legally possible.

¹ For another example from the 1950s, this one of a state-supported school and framed more in a regional context, see Peter Wallenstein, *Virginia Tech, Land-Grant University, 1872–1997: History of a School, a State, a Nation*, 2d ed. (Blacksburg, VA, 2021), 173–97.

² Amy Beth Miller, “Gerald Gibson Dies, Left Lasting Impact as Maryville College’s 10th President,” *The Daily Times*, May 21, 2021; Gerald W. Gibson, *Tenth Watch: Maryville College at the Millennium Mark, a Memoir* (n.p., 2019).

In total, nine Black students had graduated from nineteenth century Maryville College, one in 1880, the others between 1889 and 1898. Then the Tennessee legislature had criminalized all racial coeducation, with a fine of \$50 “for each offense,” plus a jail term of anywhere from 30 days to six months, for teaching both groups, “white and colored,” in the same class or building.³

The case of Berea College—in Eastern Kentucky, in the Upper South—resembled that of Maryville but is generally far better known. In fact, the Kentucky law that similarly targeted Berea, which was passed in 1904, was modeled on the Tennessee statute from three years earlier (though Kentucky’s statute was financially even more punitive).⁴ Each school had to terminate any enrollment of Black students, Maryville in 1901, Berea in 1904.

The new statutes required enrollment segregation not only at state-supported schools, in both Tennessee and Kentucky, as had long been the case, but in private institutions as well. Maryville and Berea each made a sudden change in admissions policy, and each continued to exclude African Americans throughout the 1910s, 1920s, 1930s, and 1940s. But in the 1950s, federal court rulings led both Berea (in 1950) and Maryville, as soon as such behavior seemed legally permissible, to return to some degree of Black enrollment.

This article briefly traces the history of Black enrollment at Maryville College before the 1950s, then recounts the school’s “reintegration” in 1954. Emphasized here are the experiences of the initial group of Black students, the “Maryville Six,” who entered that first year. Maryville College stood far outside the mainstream of higher education in the South by opening the door to even a degree of racial coeducation, first during the decades after the Civil War and then again, beginning in the 1950s, at least ten years before most private institutions in the region began the transition.

³ Lester C. Lamon, “Ignoring the Color Line: Maryville College, 1868-1901,” in *The Adaptable South: Essays in Honor of George Brown Tindall*, eds. Elizabeth Jacoway, Dan T. Carter, Lester C. Lamon, and Robert C. McMath Jr. (Baton Rouge, 1991), 64-89; Ralph Waldo Lloyd, *Maryville College: A History of 150 Years, 1819-1969* (Maryville, 1969), 206-207, 210-12; Carolyn L. Blair and Arda S. Walker, *By Faith Endowed: The Story of Maryville College, 1819-1994* (Maryville, 1994); Jacqueline Burnside, “A ‘Delicate and Difficult Duty’: Interracial Education at Maryville College, Tennessee, 1868-1901,” *American Presbyterians* 72 (Winter 1994): 229-40; *Acts of the State of Tennessee Passed by the Fifty-Second General Assembly, 1901* (Nashville, 1901), 9.

⁴ Treatments of Berea include Elizabeth S. Peck and Emily Ann Smith, *Berea’s First 125 years, 1855-1980* (Lexington, 1982); Christi M. Smith, *Reparation and Reconciliation: The Rise and Fall of Integrated Higher Education [ca. 1840-1910]* (Chapel Hill, 2016); John Frederick Bell, *Degrees of Equality: Abolitionist Colleges and the Politics of Race* (Baton Rouge, 2022). On the beginnings of reintegration at Berea, see Ralph T. Jans, “Racial Integration at Berea College, 1950-52,” *Journal of Negro Education* 22 (Winter 1953): 26-37.

Maryville College, 1868-1901

Isaac Anderson founded a Presbyterian seminary in 1819 that in 1842 took the name Maryville College. Sources on the pre-Civil War years are fragmentary, but it seems that an occasional African American studied at the school, or at least with Anderson. One was George M. Erskine, who subsequently preached to interracial audiences before departing in 1829 for Liberia as a Presbyterian missionary. Anderson and some of his colleagues embodied some sort of antislavery orientation. And when secession and war came, as with large numbers of East Tennesseans, some people associated with Maryville College supported the Union, not the Confederacy.⁵

Regardless, like so many schools throughout the Confederacy, Maryville College closed its doors in 1861. Only multiple miracles and heroic leadership led to a reopening in 1866. Leading the way to an improbable return to viability was Thomas Jefferson Lamar, a Maryville College alumnus and prewar professor.

It soon became clear that a financial lifeline from northern philanthropists and/or the federal government might become available, but only if the school enrolled Black as well as white students. To that end, Maryville College leaders might call upon fragments of its earlier history, together with a receptiveness to rebooting with a biracial constituency. In that light, before the 1867-1868 school year began, Lamar queried his Board of Trustees: "Shall persons be excluded from the benefits of Maryville College because of race or color?" In response, the trustees resolved that "if there was no exclusion during the proscriptive reign of slavery, by reason of race or color, there can be no adequate reason for such exclusion now."⁶

On that basis, Lamar framed his quest for funds, both from the Freedmen's Bureau and from northern philanthropists: "Alone of all the old colleges of the South, [Maryville] stands connected with the Presbyterian Church (North), ignores the color line, and educates the rising generation above an intolerant, narrow, sectional spirit." And in the months that followed, both the Freedmen's

⁵ Lamon, "Ignoring the Color Line," 64-68; Blair and Walker, *By Faith Endowed*, 5, 37-41, 48-52. See also Peter Wallenstein, "'Helping to Save the Union': The Social Origins, Wartime Experience, and Military Impact of White Union Soldiers from East Tennessee," in *Appalachia in the Civil War*, eds. Kenneth W. Noe and Shannon H. Wilson (Knoxville, 1997), 1-29.

⁶ Lamon, "Ignoring the Color Line," 68-70. See also "Lester C. Lamon: Swift and Maryville Colleges," May 11, 2020, YouTube, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qK5IvcrzWZ4>.



Bureau and the first of several northern philanthropists, William Thaw of Pittsburgh, supplied substantial funds. More financial support followed from both sources. And in the years that followed, Thaw and others made annual contributions that supplied operating funds; more substantial donations that permitted new construction; and another burst of funding that supplied an endowment.⁷

Maryville's leaders made the case that the training of Black ministers and teachers, especially under the mentorship of white Presbyterians, had the potential to contribute much to the postwar South in general and to Black communities in particular. The crucial roles of northerners, whose life-giving financial contributions made the school's rebirth and maintenance possible, depended very much on a nondiscriminatory approach, just as had the \$16,000 that came from the Freedmen's Bureau in the late 1860s. But this same support could also curtail local contributions and limit southern white enrollment, and it evoked a series of attacks on the policy.

Three Black students enrolled at Maryville College in 1868. Over the next third of a century, in all some sixty African Americans studied at the college, although a good many (like their white counterparts) were actually in the preparatory department. Nine earned a college degree there, most of them in the 1890s. That was not a lot of people, but it was a lot more than zero, and if the sixty averaged even two years at Maryville each, then an average of four Black students enrolled there each year. The actual average Black enrollment ran around five per year during the first half of the period, more like ten per year between 1885 and 1901.⁸

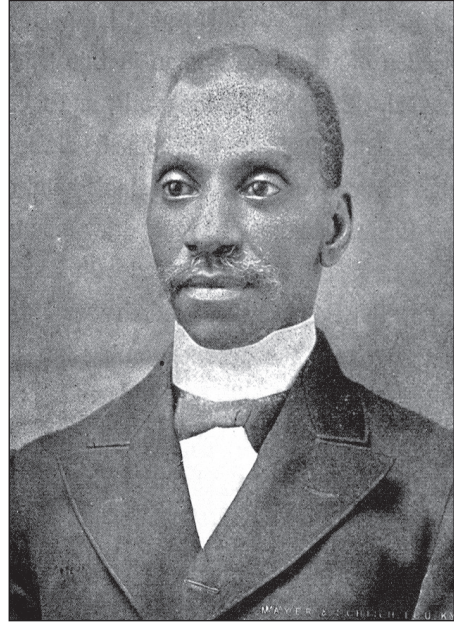
Throughout the 1870s, 1880s, and 1890s, Maryville College was, in degree, both biracial and coeducational. Between the preparatory department and the college department, the college enrolled white boys and men (the majority), white girls and women (in considerable numbers as well), and Black male youth (in small numbers)—but, as a matter of policy, no Black female students. During the 1891-1892 school year, to take one late example, the college department featured one Black senior, Oliver Campbell Wallace, and two Black

⁷ Lamon, "Ignoring the Color Line," 64, 69-76.

⁸ The Black graduates were William Franklin Henderson (1880), John Cates Wallace (1889), William Henry Hannum (1890), Frank Marion Kennedy (1891), Oliver Campbell Wallace (1892), Paris Arthur Wallace (1895), James Allen Davis and James Moses Ewing (both 1899), and Thomas Bartholomew Lillard (1898). Lamon, "Ignoring the Color Line," 76; Lloyd, *Maryville College*, 206-207.



William Henderson Franklin, class of 1880, was the first Black graduate of Maryville College. He later served as president of Swift Memorial College in Rogersville. G.F. Richings, An Album of Negro Educators (Philadelphia?: 1900, 36), Library of Congress, Washington, DC, <https://lccn.loc.gov/00005813>.



sophomores, James Moses Ewing and Paris Arthur Wallace, all three of whom went on to graduate.⁹

An early African American student on a predominantly Caucasian campus, William Henderson Franklin came to Maryville College in the preparatory division in 1872 and completed his bachelor's degree in 1880, the school's first Black graduate. Having joined the baseball club, the YMCA, and the Athenian Literary Society, he fully participated in the life of the college. After his student years, he was active with the Society of Alumni and also from 1893 to 1901 served on Maryville College's Board of Trustees. The pattern of Black enrollment at the college continued for another two decades after his graduation, but the degree of Black inclusion within the institution diminished.¹⁰

Franklin proved to be an extraordinary proponent of educational opportunities for Black East Tennesseans. The Reverend Job Childs Lawrence, another early Black student at Maryville, later served as minister of the Shiloh Presbyterian Church in Knoxville and, for as long as such was possible, involved himself in local politics while pressing for expanded educational opportunities for the city's Black citizens. Yet another member of the Black contingent of late-nineteenth century Maryville students who made a tremendous mark was William Jasper Hale Sr. He became the founding leader of Tennessee's "college of 1890" when the Black land-grant school—Tennessee Agricultural and Industrial State Normal School for

⁹ *Catalogue of the Officers and Students of Maryville College, East Tennessee, for the Year 1891-92* (Maryville, [1892]), 5-6.

¹⁰ Lamon, "Ignoring the Color Line," 76-89.

Negroes, the future Tennessee State University—finally came on-stream in the 1910s in Nashville.¹¹

Charles W. Cansler, whose older brother had attended Maryville College's preparatory department in the 1870s, enrolled at the school in 1887 but did not stay. As he explained many years later in his autobiography, "as a brown boy I did not belong there." He became a lawyer in 1892 at the age of 21 and soon ran for the state legislature, but by the 1890s, no Black candidate could any longer (as had been the case in the 1880s) win a legislative seat in Tennessee. Turning his full attention to education in East Tennessee, for many years he served as principal at Austin High School in Knoxville.¹²

As for William Henderson Franklin, his nearly three decades of involvement in Maryville College came to an end when the 1901 state law abruptly terminated the institution's biracial approach. The Murphy Law (named after its sponsor, state legislator John P. Murphy of Knoxville) made it a crime for a school to enroll Black students, or for a teacher to instruct Black students, together with whites at "any" institution across the state. Under the new legal regime, the five Black students at Maryville in the 1900-1901 academic year would be the last, certainly for the foreseeable future. They could finish up that school year, but the next school year would start with no Black enrollment whatsoever.¹³

The best that could be done for African Americans, as school authorities saw it, was to apportion a share of the college's endowment to the Swift Memorial Institute, which had been founded in Rogersville by its principal, Maryville alumnus Reverend William Henderson Franklin. Back at Maryville itself, school president Samuel Tyndale Wilson, having overseen the implementation of the new regime there, apparently with considerable relief to be shed of an unwelcome challenge, rewrote Maryville College's history to emphasize its significance as a school for Appalachian whites.

¹¹ Lamon, "Ignoring the Color Line," 81-82; Lester C. Lamon, "The Tennessee Agricultural and Industrial Normal School: Public Education for Black Tennesseans," *Tennessee Historical Quarterly* 32 (Spring 1973): 42-58. Reflecting the evolution of the institution's mission, its name, originally Tennessee Agricultural and Industrial State Normal School for Negroes, became Tennessee Agricultural and Industrial State Normal College in 1925, then Tennessee Agricultural and Industrial State College in 1927, and finally Tennessee State University in 1968.

¹² Burnside, "Interracial Education at Maryville College," 233-34, 239n31; Charles W. Cansler, *Three Generations: The Story of a Colored Family of Eastern Tennessee* ([Kingsport], 1939), 94-96. See also Joseph H. Cartwright, "Black Legislators in Tennessee in the 1880s: A Case Study in Black Political Leadership," *Tennessee Historical Quarterly* 32 (Fall 1973): 265-84.

¹³ Lamon, "Ignoring the Color Line," 85-89.

Wilson's tenure as president, 1901-1930, saw the college shift its mission from racially integrated education to white Appalachian uplift.¹⁴ Many years passed before Black students were once again permitted to enroll at the college.

"White" and "Colored" in the Segregation Years

Throughout the first half of the twentieth century, Maryville conducted operations in a way that aligned—far more so than had for years previously been the case—with the South's dominant racial mores, the approach long taken by almost all other private as well as tax-supported institutions. Beginning in 1901, state law made compliance by the college with regional norms imperative. No longer could Maryville College remain unusual, even unique. Black enrollment was barred, and both white students and any prospective Black classmates were denied an opportunity of attending college together at Maryville. And yet matters of race unfolded there in ways that complicate simple narratives of "an all-white school."

During those years, Maryville College enrolled, as the school's 1994 history put it, "all other races and colors," since the Murphy Law was taken to bar only "persons of African blood." President Ralph Waldo Lloyd spoke, in his 1969 history of the school, of the presence of "students of other races . . . throughout the half century of the 1901 law—from the West Indies, India, Japan, the Americas, and other parts of the world."¹⁵

Maryville College's 1954 yearbook the *Chilhowean*, the last edition before the Maryville Six enrolled, supplied various social and cultural vignettes on the eve of reintegration. A survey from the previous September included among its findings that the typical student "would attend MC if Negroes were admitted," not a high bar but an essential condition if the school were to move to "reintegration." An accompanying photo, however, showed a "pretty co-ed" holding a "banner of the South," the Confederate battle flag.¹⁶

¹⁴ Lamon, "Ignoring the Color Line," 86-87; Lloyd, *Maryville College*, 213-14; Burnside, "Interracial Education at Maryville College," 234-38; Greta Rensenbrink, "A Currency of Books: The Smith Sisters in East Tennessee," *The Journal of East Tennessee History* 93 (2021): 8-10. See also Samuel Tyndale Wilson, *A Century of Maryville College, 1819-1919: A Story of Altruism* (Maryville, 1919); *Chronicle of Maryville College: A Story of Altruism* (Maryville, 1935).

¹⁵ Blair and Walker, *By Faith Endowed*, 264; Lloyd, *Maryville College*, 201.

¹⁶ *Chilhowean*, 1954 (Maryville, 1954), 7, 13.

Though never numerous, pictures of people neither white nor Black appeared often in the *Chilhowean*, certainly in the years around mid-century. Most were ethnic Chinese or Japanese students, whether born in the United States or in East Asia. Moreover, Eleanor Jaynes, a newlywed of Chinese ancestry born in Hawaii with the surname Tom, became librarian at Maryville College in 1953.

Students in 1953-1954, the academic year immediately prior to the Maryville Six, included freshman Thomas Chu Hung Tom, who happened to be the librarian’s younger brother. They also included sophomore Anna Chieko Shimomura, of Japanese ethnicity. A native of California, she experienced internment in Arizona during World War II, after which her family moved to the East Coast, eventually to Princeton, New Jersey. Sharing her family history was her older brother Lincoln Shimomura, an honor roll student at Maryville College who had graduated in 1951 after serving as treasurer of both the International Relations Club and the Pre-Med Club and as class vice-president his senior year.¹⁷

As for African Americans, although certainly none could enroll, many came as guests of the school throughout the 1930s and 1940s. Maryville’s former president Lloyd wrote from personal knowledge about “singers, speakers, student visitors in religious services, [and] members of interracial conferences.” He spoke in particular of summer Presbyterian programs occurring for several years with attendees numbering in the hundreds, “divided about equally between white and Negro delegates from seven or eight southern States.” Moreover, the members of both groups reportedly ate, apparently together, in the Pearsons dining room on campus, one aspect that clearly violated regional norms.¹⁸

Lloyd acknowledged that considerable community opposition had sometimes been voiced, but the college had nonetheless gone ahead with its plans, and he was pleased to conclude about those mid-century gatherings that “the values to participants of both races and to the integration movement were marked.”¹⁹ That did not mean, though, no matter how much the president might want to see a change in enrollment practices at his college, that the school was free yet to go that far.

¹⁷ *Chilhowean*, 1951 (Maryville, 1951), 24, 39; “Shimomura Family Profile (13256),” Japanese Americans in World War II, Fresno State Library, <https://guides.library.fresnostate.edu/c.php?g=636720&p=4477468>.

¹⁸ Lloyd, *Maryville College*, 216; Blair and Walker, *By Faith Endowed*, 264.

¹⁹ Lloyd, *Maryville College*, 216.



Maryville College after *Brown v. Board*

On May 17, 1954, the US Supreme Court's ruling in *Brown v. Board of Education* changed the landscape of all levels of education. States could no longer constitutionally mandate that schools be segregated. Maryville College responded quickly to the new possibilities brought by *Brown v. Board*. At a regular spring meeting that May—two days after the Supreme Court's ruling—the Maryville College Board of Directors approved a proposal from President Lloyd that all directors be surveyed as to their position on opening the college to Black enrollment. The results would go to the Committee on Administration, which had authority to act as seemed appropriate.²⁰

The results showed a large majority, 33-2, voting "I favor accepting Negro students this year." On July 19, the Committee on Administration, acting on those results with a 5-1 vote, declared that it "re-establishes the College's policy of accepting qualified students without regard to their race or color."²¹ On August 11, the college released a statement to the press that read in part,

Throughout its history Maryville College has held sincerely to the Christian belief in dignity, worth, and freedom of all people and their equality before God, irrespective of wealth, race, or color. From the beginning most Maryville College students have been of the white race, although representatives of many races have always been in attendance. Prior to 1901 some of these were of the Negro race. But in 1901 the State of Tennessee by legislation made it illegal. . . . The historic decision of the U.S. Supreme Court on May 17 outlawing compulsory segregation in public schools . . . makes all colleges in Tennessee and all other States free to accept Negro students if the colleges wish to do so. The Directors of Maryville College therefore have taken action re-establishing the College's policy of accepting any qualified student without regard to race or color. This policy is now in effect.²²

²⁰ Lloyd, *Maryville College*, 217-18. According to Blair and Walker, *By Faith Endowed*, 265, Maryville College acted in 1954 despite a state court ruling that the 1901 law remained valid regarding private institutions even after *Brown*. The reference seems anachronistic, apparently related to court proceedings involving the Highlander Folk School in 1960. John M. Glen, *Highlander: No Ordinary School, 1932-1962* (Lexington, 1988), 203-205.

²¹ Lloyd, *Maryville College*, 218.

²² Lloyd, *Maryville College*, 200.



On October 15, at its next regular meeting, the Board of Directors ratified the committee’s action, again with just two members dissenting.²³

President Lloyd voiced three considerations that propelled the change: “The opinion that it is now legal in Tennessee; the belief that a church-related college should lead rather than follow [other types of colleges]; [and] the conviction that it is right and in accord with the will of Christ.”²⁴ Therefore two of the three reasons had to do with the institution’s ethos rooted in an understanding of Christianity that it should rightly break free of the old legal constraints—the essential other consideration—as soon as possible.

Ethical considerations required Maryville College to move, now that it legally could. The breakthrough change in the school’s legal environment came with the perception that, while the state law might still be on the books, it had immediately lost its force in view of the Supreme Court’s reinterpretation of the Fourteenth Amendment. According to President Lloyd, as he wrote later, the ruling in *Brown* “was at once understood [by Maryville College, at least] to extend also to private and church schools and colleges chartered to serve the public.”²⁵

The law of the nation, as voiced by the nation’s highest court, controlled the law of the state. In this view, the penalties threatened by the Murphy Law for operating a non-segregated school fell by the wayside. Higher authority had intervened, so Maryville College could return in some fashion to its long-ago non-segregated ways. In fact, by the time the Board of Directors ratified the announced change in policy, a new cohort of Black students, the first in more than half a century, was already taking classes.

Six Black Students Arrive at Maryville College

The Maryville Six traveled various routes to make their way in September 1954 to a school that had announced only weeks earlier that the place was bringing to an end its half-century of Black exclusion. The six had all either lived their whole lives in the Maryville-Knoxville area or were in the area when the word suddenly came.

²³ Lloyd, *Maryville College*, 218; Blair and Walker, *By Faith Endowed*, 265.

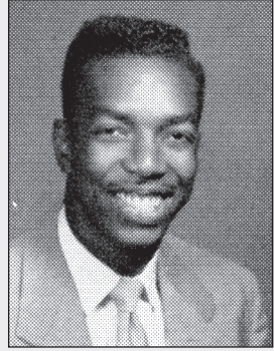
²⁴ Blair and Walker, *By Faith Endowed*, 265.

²⁵ Lloyd, *Maryville College*, 217.



Older (born in 1930) than his Black classmates, Georgia native Freeman Thomas Wyche grew up in Miami, Florida, but moved to Nashville, Tennessee, where he finished high school and began preaching at various local churches. He enrolled there in Nashville at Tennessee Agricultural and Industrial State College but had to drop out for lack of funds, and then, after a tour of duty in the US Air Force, he returned to Tennessee A&I for a year. When a friend urged him to come preach at a church near Knoxville, he later recounted, "At first, I didn't want to go. Then my friend told me the story of Maryville College, near Knoxville, that had once been integrated, then segregated by law, and was being reintegrated"—so "I was one of the six" who reintegrated it. Unlike the others, he came in as a sophomore.²⁶

Nancy W. Smith, having just graduated from Knoxville's all-Black Austin High School, learned about the change at Maryville in church. Her pastor at Shiloh Presbyterian Church, the Reverend Frank R. Gordon, an NAACP leader, urged people in her age group to make good on what the Presbyterian college in Maryville, some 18 miles away, was saying about returning to a policy of enrolling Black students. In fact, a story out of Knoxville published in the *New York Times* just three days after the Maryville College press release already announced her intention.²⁷ Austin was a good high school, so Nancy Smith came to Maryville College well prepared academically, though the racial situation might be something else.



Freeman Wyche entered as a transfer sophomore along with five Black freshmen in 1954. Chilhowean, 1955 (Maryville, 1955), 41, Maryville College Archives, Maryville.



Nancy W. Smith, who came to Maryville from Knoxville, lived on the Maryville College campus during her freshman year, 1955-1956. She left after a single year but returned in 1957 and completed her degree in 1960, the first Black female graduate in the school's history. Chilhowean, 1955 (Maryville, 1955), 46, Maryville College Archives, Maryville.

²⁶ Bea L. Hines, "Community to Honor Freeman Wyche, Retired Pastor of Liberty City Church of Christ," *Miami Herald*, January 23, 2017.

²⁷ John Shearer, "2 Crossed Color Line Quietly in '54," *Knoxville News Sentinel*, February 28, 2011; Allison Franklin, "A Plight of Perseverance," *The Highland Echo*, December 7, 2016; "First Degree to Negro," *New York Times*, August 14, 1954. See also Jeannine Hunter, "Maryville College Opened Doors Again in '55 ['54]," *Knoxville News Sentinel*, February 15, 2003.



Queen Elizabeth Crossing, a graduate of the Charles M. Hall School in Alcoa, enrolled at Maryville College in September 1954. Chillhowean, 1955 (Maryville, 1955), 43, Maryville College Archives, Maryville.



Louise Hill, a graduate of the Charles M. Hall School in Alcoa, enrolled at Maryville College in September 1954. Chillhowean, 1955 (Maryville, 1955), 44, Maryville College Archives, Maryville.

The other four all came from Blount County, where Maryville College was located. Shirley M. Carr, who graduated as class valedictorian at the Charles M. Hall School in next-door Alcoa, decided that she wished to enroll at Maryville. John Harris Fowler—a veteran Black educator, longtime member of the local NAACP, and friend of her father—urged her to consider the new opportunity. She in turn persuaded two classmates—Queen Elizabeth Crossing, who lived just across the street from her, and Louise Hill—to join her in helping reintegrate Maryville College.²⁸ Another local student, Leo “Jackie” Valentine, from Maryville, also joined in the experiment.

The Hall School in Alcoa, like Black schools throughout the South, was slower than the neighboring white schools to obtain funds for a full high school curriculum or even for twelve full years. To complete grades eleven and twelve, John Harris Fowler had had to make his way to Knoxville’s Austin High School, where he graduated in 1930 before embarking on the first of various careers that included the principalship of a school in Huntingdon, Tennessee, named for William Jasper Hale Sr., one of the early Black students at Maryville and the first president of what became Tennessee State University.

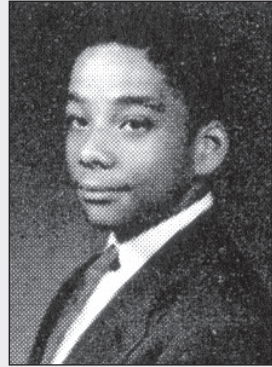
Years later, Shirley Carr described the poor academic preparation that her school had provided—although, she emphasized approvingly by way of partial compensation, “the teachers knew us.” All students took the same courses; there were no electives, and the books they had were hand-me-downs from

²⁸ Shirley Carr Clowney, Interview U-0618, 2011, Southern Oral History Program Collection, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, <https://dcr.lib.unc.edu/record/a04e2ab6-531e-4067-9be6-5d04d1327b26>.

the white school, Alcoa High School. Her courses included no geometry, no foreign language, no science laboratory, “nor even typing.” In sum, “It appeared we were being trained to pursue careers that required menial labor skills only. Needless to say, we were not prepared to be competitive with students who had college-level classes in their [high] schools. So we were really challenged in most [of our college] classes.”²⁹

“While we were generally accepted by most,” she allowed, “our historic moment was not without some painful reminders.” At the top of a list of examples, she began with how “the KKK burned a cross near our houses.” Whenever she mentioned the cross burning on her street, she always seemed to link it directly to the temerity of Black students’ attending Maryville College, an institution that by many people’s lights should have remained off limits to them. She once asked an editor of the local newspaper, the *Daily News*, for any material that might have appeared on Black enrollment back in 1954, “and the comment was, ‘we wouldn’t have written about that. That would have riled up the people.’”³⁰

So the six pioneers entered into a world that, even one year earlier, would have been closed to them. Having made their way past the enrollment obstacle, they still faced all manner of challenges. Even had they attended academically strong high schools, all six were coming out of fully segregated systems. Their teachers, all white, and most of their white classmates, too, would also be experiencing something that they often found radically new.



Leo Valentine finished high school in 1954, just in time to attend college in his hometown of Maryville. Chilhowean, 1955 (Maryville, 1955), 47, Maryville College Archives, Maryville.



Shirley M. Carr, who graduated as class valedictorian at the Charles M. Hall School in next-door Alcoa, enrolled at Maryville College in September 1954. After retiring from school teaching in 1992, she led the effort to increase awareness for the role of the “Maryville Six” in reintegrating Maryville College. Chilhowean, 1955 (Maryville, 1955), 43, Maryville College Archives, Maryville.

²⁹ Clowney interview, 2011; Amy Beth Miller, “Shirley Carr Clowney Tells Maryville College Graduates to Rise up and Make a Difference,” *The Daily Times*, May 21, 2018.

³⁰ Clowney interview, 2011.

Beyond Enrollment

Even well into the 1960s, when historically white colleges and universities in the South enrolled their first African Americans, they typically held the line at extending to Black students such privileges as living on campus or representing the institution in intercollegiate athletics—as if it were actually their school too.³¹ Maryville College did no such thing. Four of the six pioneers continued to live at home, but the other two both lived on campus. And one of the two young men, Freeman Wyche, participated on the cross country team.

That said, the college did not pair a Black student with a white roommate. According to Freeman Wyche, he had no problem with the situation. As he put it years later, he considered having a room to himself a benefit, even if his room was at the gym. But he was several years older than his peers. Nancy Smith, by contrast, had eagerly anticipated what she understood as a full college experience. “You know you look forward to getting a roommate? And how you are going to decorate your room together,” she mourned years later. “That was just a very lonely first year,” and she decided not to return for another such year.³² So a variety of segregation could readily persist even when campus housing was nominally integrated.

In a related situation, one white student, in particular, befriended the three commuter women and invited them to use her room between classes, so they had an on-campus sanctuary. Even that oasis dried up after “a group of girls interfered and put a stop to that.” Then the three had to look for a different refuge; but Shirley Carr Clowney named the white student, “Betts” (Elizabeth Ann) McKenney (class of 1956), who hailed from Pennsylvania, and Clowney reported in 2018 that the two had kept in touch for more than sixty years.³³ Both sets of memories, intertwined, lived on for a lifetime.

As for Freeman Wyche’s experiences with the cross country team, he and his teammates had to navigate a time and place when nobody

³¹ Peter Wallenstein, ed., *Higher Education and the Civil Rights Movement: White Supremacy, Black Southerners, and College Campuses* (Gainesville, 2008); Charles H. Martin, *Benching Jim Crow: The Rise and Fall of the Color Line in Southern College Sports, 1890-1980* (Urbana, 2010).

³² Jessie Pounds, “Onetime Students Honored for Integration Roles,” *Knoxville News Sentinel*, February 26, 2009.

³³ Pounds, “Onetime Students Honored”; Miller, “Shirley Carr Clowney Tells Maryville College Graduates to Rise up and Make a Difference.”





Freeman Wyche was part of the Maryville College cross country team in fall 1954. Chillhowean, 1955 (Maryville, 1955), 90, Maryville College Archives, Maryville.

could assume that the same rules applied to him as to them. Some schools, or teams, he recounted, refused to compete with Maryville if he was on the team, and his teammates would not compete unless he was included. If traveling to an away meet, since again they would not permit him to be excluded, they had to consider where they could all stop to eat. He believed himself to be the first African American to letter in any sport at an historically white school in the South, no small mark of historical significance.³⁴

Black Faculty

During the second year of reintegration, word came that Maryville College would be violating yet another Jim Crow protocol. Not only were there a few Black students, the school soon had a Black faculty member, at least temporarily. A regular language professor, James Howard Schwam, would be away on sabbatical leave during spring 1956, and in his place, James Alexander Hamlett Jr. taught two classes in Spanish.

A native of Nashville, Hamlett had attended segregated Black schools all the way through high school, just like the handful of Maryville's Black students had. Then he had earned a college degree in 1947 at another Black school, Fisk University, also in Nashville, in modern foreign languages. From there he moved to Louisiana, where he was teaching at a Black school in Baton Rouge when, as a state resident—and without the academic program he wished

³⁴ Matthew Stewart, "Students Who Reintegrated Maryville College in 1954 Honored," *The Daily Times*, October 18, 2008; Hines, "Community to Honor Freeman Wyche."

being available at a Black institution in Louisiana—he successfully applied for admission to the master's program in Louisiana State University's department of ancient and modern foreign languages. Thus he became one of LSU's earliest African American students, and he completed his thesis and graduated in 1954.³⁵

Hamlett had subsequently returned to Tennessee, but this time in the eastern part of the state, to teach at Knoxville College, a Black school a short distance from Maryville. So when a new professional opportunity opened, Hamlett simply commuted to another venue that spring. His experience at LSU had exposed him to classrooms in which most students were white, so Maryville would be less a new experience for him than might otherwise have been the case.

For most of Hamlett's white students, however, in fact all who had grown up virtually anywhere in the South, they would have had no prior experience with either Black classmates or a Black teacher. Moreover, from a traditional white perspective in the Jim Crow South, it was bad enough that Black students were enrolled at Maryville as peers together with whites. Worse, Hamlett represented a Black authority figure over white students—moreover a Black male authority supervising white female students. A letter from one parent to President Lloyd chided him on his poor judgment: "It would be just too bad . . . if your daughter should fall in love with your new Spanish teacher and marry him."³⁶

Other correspondents, too, pointed out some of the pressures at work regarding the hiring decisions of a historically white school, certainly as early as the mid-1950s, rather than the 1970s. A letter to President Lloyd from another parent conveyed a divided assessment from her daughter Patsy, who "says he's much better than the [professor] she had last term. All the kids say he's a good teacher." Patsy had reported to her mother, though, that "when one girl's folks found out, they told her either to drop Spanish or quit school."³⁷

Some letters carried direct threats of financial retribution. One reported a widespread conviction among donors that Maryville should "be removed from our approved list of colleges" to benefit

³⁵ James Alexander Hamlett, "The Folklore of the French-Speaking Negro of Evangeline Parish" (Master's thesis, Louisiana State University, 1954).

³⁶ Blair and Walker, *By Faith Endowed*, 265. The rhetorical challenge directed to President Lloyd was not entirely fanciful. All four of his children graduated from the college (as he had), and the younger two were daughters. Ruth had already graduated in 1947, however, and Louise in 1951.

³⁷ Blair and Walker, *By Faith Endowed*, 265.



from future contributions. President Lloyd observed some years later that some individuals and some church congregations had acted on their disapproval by terminating their financial support, at least for a time.³⁸

Redeeming a Lost Past

Shirley Carr Clowney, when she retired back to her childhood surroundings in the 1990s, plunged into a wide range of activities. She especially sought to remedy what she saw as unacceptable deficiencies in what was then known about local Black residents. Among her many accomplishments, she led the formation of a new group, African Americans of Appalachia and Blount County (AAABC), and in 2017 she published a pictorial history of Blount County's Black residents.³⁹

A visit to the Maryville College Archives sparked her activism regarding her long-ago time as a Black freshman. While reading a school history by two longtime faculty members to commemorate the 175th anniversary of the school's founding, Clowney came across what passed for a history of her own experience at the school. In *By Faith Endowed: The Story of Maryville College, 1819-1994* (1994), Carolyn L. Blair and Arda S. Walker summed up the change in racial policy that took place in the 1950s. In a section titled "The Return to Integration," the authors concluded, "The College peaceably and successfully weathered the integration storm of the fifties. Dean [Frank DeLoss] McClelland reported the enrollment without incident of seven [sic] black students in the fall of 1954."⁴⁰ The authors provided no historical context, no names, and even got the number of Black students incorrect. The brevity of information on reintegration demonstrated the authors' ambivalence—or dismissal, even distaste—regarding the subject.

In an interview some years later, Clowney recounted (while paraphrasing) the substance of the brief passage: "In 1954 six blacks were enrolled in Maryville College, period." Then she emphasized the point: "No names, nothing else."⁴¹ Jolted by the absence of names, including her own, she set out to reclaim and highlight a

³⁸ Blair and Walker, *By Faith Endowed*, 265; Lloyd, *Maryville College*, 218-19.

³⁹ Shirley Carr Clowney, *Our Place in Time: Blacks in Blount County* (n.p., 2017).

⁴⁰ Blair and Walker, *By Faith Endowed*, 266.

⁴¹ Clowney interview, 2011.



In October 2008, five members of the “Maryville Six” reassembled for the unveiling of a plaque commemorating the college’s reintegration. From left to right are Queen Elizabeth Crossing, Louise Hill Gilmore, Nancy Smith Wright, Shirley Carr Clowney, and Freeman Wyche. Maryville College Office of Marketing and Communications.

history that had evidently been lost, even on campus. It was time, Clowney insisted, that the six students have names and that they be recognized on the Maryville campus as the pioneers they had been in resurrecting the college’s nonracial approach to its mission of higher education.

She worked with school president Gerald Gibson, whom she found receptive. As a consequence, to mark the fiftieth anniversary of the graduation year for students who had enrolled as freshmen in 1954, Maryville College went public in 2008 with a commemoration of its historic reversal away from state-mandated segregation. On October 18 that year, during Homecoming activities, the school sponsored a Reintegration Celebration. Leo Valentine had died, but the five others returned to campus to be officially recognized and celebrated. The finale of the Reintegration Celebration featured the unveiling of a plaque in Bartlett Hall in their honor.⁴² That plaque held the promise of facilitating a continuing reconstruction and recounting of the pioneers’ experiences—not only the first Black men in more than a half-century but also the first Black women ever to attend the college.

⁴² Stewart, “Students Who Reintegrated Maryville College in 1954 Honored”; Pounds, “Onetime Students Honored.” Curiously, no mention of this event appears in Gibson, *Tenth Watch*; a single sentence, related to the events of both 1901 and 1954, appears on page 8.

The Pioneer Six and Maryville College's Past and Future

None of the Maryville Six, however, had graduated with the class of 1958. Shirley Carr stayed at Maryville College for two years, as long as anyone. But then she moved to Nashville to enroll at Tennessee A&I State College, where she met and married Cato Clowney, and she graduated in 1960 before launching a K-12 teaching career.

The personal and professional lives of Freeman Wyche and Nancy Smith took them each away after a single year. Wyche met and married Anna McCleskey and, leaving school to get a job, rejoined the Air Force. Subsequently—for nearly four decades, until well into his eighties—Wyche pastored the Liberty City Church of Christ back home in Miami.⁴³

Nancy Smith took a new career path by moving to Memphis and studying for two years at the E.H. Crump Nursing School for Negroes. Yet she returned to Maryville in 1957 to complete her final three years and, in 1960, became Maryville College's first Black graduate since the 1890s—and its first Black female graduate ever. She came back, as much as anything, because she saw a need for at least one of the original six to finish there: "It was just something that had to be done," she explained.⁴⁴ Nancy Smith Wright (by then her married name) earned a master's degree at the University of Pittsburgh; and subsequently demonstrating how much had changed in higher education since 1954, she worked for many years in various professional roles at the University of Tennessee.

When she returned to her studies at Maryville in 1957, she found that a few additional Black students had enrolled. Smith's first year back, one of her sophomore classmates was Thelma Lillian Williams, from Albany, Georgia; and in the freshman class that year were Harold Leonard Battle, from Western North Carolina, and Elaine Garner, from right there in Maryville.⁴⁵ Thelma Williams remained only through her third year, however, so she did not graduate with Smith; and Harold Battle married and left the school after that first year.

In the late 1950s, both Harold Battle and Nancy Smith exemplified an enhanced integration of Black students into the life

⁴³ Hines, "Community to Honor Freeman Wyche."

⁴⁴ Pounds, "Onetime Students Honored."

⁴⁵ *Chilhowean*, 1958 (Maryville, 1958), 40, 42, 43.



of the college. Battle served as a class officer, secretary-treasurer of the freshman class. As for Smith, her second tour as a Maryville student had her involved in a variety of campus groups and activities, including the YWCA, International Relations Club, and Messiah.⁴⁶

The year 1968 marked 100 years since the first three Black students' enrollment in the aftermath of Civil War and emancipation. Ten years had passed since the 1958 commencement, at which none of the Maryville Six had graduated. As the 1968 *Chilhowean* revealed, Black enrollment had not yet, even then, climbed very much. Among the Black students that year was at least one freshman, Terry L. Collins, from Chattanooga. A Black sophomore, Iris McKeldin, also from Chattanooga, was secretary of the student group Chi Beta and also a member of the Women's Student Government Association.⁴⁷

Appearing on various pages that year was George Donald Hickman, a sophomore from Kingsport, with memberships that included the Student Council and the varsity basketball team. Hickman went on to graduate with a degree in sociology in 1970, having been an active member of a small host of organizations, quite aside from the basketball, football, and track teams and having become the first Black student at Maryville to be named to the roster of Who's Who among Students in American Universities and Colleges. Maryville College was clearly his school. And the sophomore class during his senior year included Black students James Paxton and Warren Morgan (both also on the varsity basketball team) as well as Phyllis Neal, Linda Ballard, and Frank Taylor.⁴⁸

Toward the end of Don Hickman's time as an undergraduate, former Maryville College president Lloyd wrote that, in the 15 years since the Maryville Six had begun their studies in 1954, 44 Black students had followed them, for a total of 50 African Americans in all. At the time he wrote, they numbered 10, he reported. Five Black students, or only 10 percent of that total, had actually graduated. He termed "disappointingly small" both the total number who had enrolled and the proportion among them who had stayed to complete their degree.⁴⁹

⁴⁶ *Chilhowean*, 1958, 41; *Chilhowean*, 1960 (Maryville, 1960), 29, 48, 58.

⁴⁷ *Chilhowean*, 1968 (Maryville, 1968), 33, 41, 95, 101.

⁴⁸ *Chilhowean*, 1968, 77, 93, 97, 99, 142; *Chilhowean*, 1970 (Maryville, 1970), 69, 71, 74, 75, 87, 99, 109, 124, 127, 128, 129.

⁴⁹ Lloyd, *Maryville College*, 219.



Several decades later, the numbers had grown more robust. And as a rule, Black students were clearly benefiting from Maryville, even as they were contributing to it. But several, when asked, agreed that they would certainly like to see more Black faculty at their school and more Black students who were not also athletes.⁵⁰ Meanwhile, Shirley Carr Clowney, in particular, had seen to it that Maryville College rediscovered the beginnings of its “reintegration.”

Not so Much a Tribute as a Reminder

Naming names and recounting the story of the Maryville Six had highlighted a largely forgotten chapter in the college’s past. Shirley Carr Clowney, as the chief leader in the enterprise, and Nancy Smith Wright, the first Black graduate after a half-century of Black exclusion, were each, in their later years, a frequent presence on the campus. Their point was to look forward more than backwards, to use the past to promote a promising future.

“Some history was made then,” Wright observed of the era that began in 1954; but she wanted the 2008 program, with its ceremony and plaque, to be “not so much a tribute as a reminder.” So, “rather than dwell on those days some 50 years ago,” she urged people to continue the vision “and be what a church college should be.”⁵¹

Five years later, in 2013, the school moved the plaque from its original home, Bartlett Hall, to Anderson Hall, the oldest building on campus, named for college founder Isaac Anderson and newly renovated—itsself a metaphor for the school’s multiple new beginnings. From a perch in the second-floor student lounge, the plaque is readily visible to each new cohort of students as a reminder of, or an alert to, a significant dimension of the Maryville College past—and as a catalyst for the future.

Another five years later, in 2018—ten years after the original installation of the plaque registering the big change of 1954—Shirley Carr Clowney gave the commencement address on the sixtieth anniversary of what would have been her own graduation, had she stayed on to finish at Maryville. And she graduated that day, too, when given an honorary doctorate of public service. She drew from her own experience, and that of other members of her group

⁵⁰ Franklin, “A Plight of Perseverance.”

⁵¹ Stewart, “Students Who Reintegrated Maryville College in 1954 Honored.”



Maryville College unveiled a plaque during Homecoming 2008 to commemorate the six Black students who “reintegrated” Maryville College in 1954. Today it is displayed in a student lounge in Anderson Hall, the oldest building on campus. Maryville College Archives, Maryville.

from 1954, as the source for her advice when she exhorted the new graduates: “Now it is time for you to go out and contribute by making a significant difference in your corner of the world.”⁵²

Nancy Smith Wright had died two years earlier, and Leo Valentine back in 1995, but 87-year-old Freeman Wyche, the elder statesman among the group, had come to Maryville from Miami to be present himself for the occasion. He had finished his undergraduate degree elsewhere and had earned advanced degrees as well, but Maryville remained his school. The “reintegration” generation was growing rickety, and their numbers were diminishing; but they continued to hold on to their school. They continued, too, to seek to propel it forward.

Back in the late 1860s, a usable past had enabled a desolated Maryville College to obtain funding that permitted it to reopen and stay open. In the 1950s, the historical memory of a subsequent past, when Black students and white students had shared the campus in the late-nineteenth century, had nurtured a return to racial coeducation the very first semester it became legally possible. Beginning in the 1990s, Shirley Carr Clowney’s determined work fostered a robust historical memory of a later time, so that a consciousness of the Maryville Six might prod the school forward as an institution as well as shape the worldviews of the college’s students whatever their racial identity.⁵³

⁵² Miller, “Shirley Carr Clowney Tells Maryville College Graduates to Rise up and Make a Difference.”

⁵³ The conversation continued. Two years later, after the murder of George Floyd, longtime faculty member Nancy Locklin-Sofer published “Maryville College Has a Race Problem,” *The Highland Echo*, September 16, 2020.