

DEDICATION OF POLK REPLACEMENT TOMBSTONES

On March 4, 2017 at 1:30 P.M. Nashville City Cemetery in coordination with the James K. Polk Home and Museum in Columbia, Tennessee will honor the lives of Elias Polk, Mary Polk, and Matilda Polk through a dedication ceremony that will include the laying of replacement tombstones at Nashville City Cemetery.

Elias Polk was born into slavery in 1806 in Mecklenburg County, North Carolina in the same house as future President James K. Polk. As an infant Elias was moved with the Polk family west to Tennessee where they settled on a small farm in Maury County. At age eighteen Elias was sent to live with James and Sarah Polk at the time of their marriage.

Over the next twenty-five years, Elias worked very closely with James Polk as he rose through the political ranks as a U.S. Congressman and Governor of Tennessee. In 1844 when James Polk became President of the United States, Elias traveled to Washington, D.C., but would frequently return to Tennessee doing various jobs for the Polks.

After the death of President Polk in 1849 Elias remained at "Polk Place" in Nashville with Sarah Polk. Shortly after the Civil War he began his own political career. Elias became a strong conservative voice promoting the Democratic Party. In 1867 he was even considered as a candidate for the General Assembly. He worked to create many clubs for African Americans throughout the south, including: The Colored Seymour and Blair Club, the Colored Men for Greeley, the Colored Tilden and Hendricks Club, the Independent Colored Conservative National Club, and the Colored Agricultural and Mechanical Association of Tennessee. Elias was appointed Porter in the Tennessee State Legislature in 1871 and was appointed a similar post in the U.S. House of Representatives in 1876. Throughout his life Elias Polk often boasted to have seen every president from John Quincy Adams to Grover Cleveland and would continue to see them all as long as he should live. Elias Polk died in December 1886 in Washington, D.C. After his death his wife, Mary Polk of New York (who was forty-one years younger than her husband) was left with a vast amount of debt. She had to take out advertisements in newspapers asking for funds to be raised to send Elias's body from Washington, D.C. to Nashville. With the help of many people Elias's remains were brought to Nashville by train and interred in Nashville City Cemetery on February 13, 1887. Mary Polk continued to live in Nashville until her death on August 22, 1888. She was laid to rest next to her husband in Nashville City Cemetery.

Matilda, sometimes called "Aunt Matilda," was born into slavery in 1739. She lived with the Childress family outside of Murfreesboro until 1824, when she was sent to live with James and Sarah Childress Polk in Columbia. Following the Polks' tenure in the White House, Matilda was moved to "Polk Place" in Nashville for the remainder of her remarkably long life. Sadly, she died in the 1849 cholera epidemic at the age of 110 and was buried in Nashville City Cemetery.