

Ella Sheppard Moore  
February 4, 1851 – June 9, 1914

Section 28.9 # 280007

Ella was born a slave in Davidson County, Tennessee, on February 4, 1851. Her father Simon Sheppard bought his freedom and then bought her freedom. They lived in Nashville. In 1856 racial unrest in the city caused Simon to take his daughter and flee to Cincinnati. Ella studied singing and piano in Cincinnati. After her father's death Ella returned to Nashville in 1868 and enrolled in the Fisk Free Colored School. When Professor George L. White organized a tour of the Fisk choir in 1871, he selected Ella as his pianist and assistant. Their first tour was launched on October 6, 1871 (a date still annually celebrated at Fisk University). The choir became known world-wide as the Fisk Jubilee Singers. During the seven years of touring the United States and Europe, the Jubilee Singers raised \$150,000, for Fisk.

Ella Sheppard travelled with the Fisk Jubilee Singers for eleven years as a soprano, piano accompanist and assistant to the Director. She participated in all the U.S. and European tours.

According to research by Marsha Mullin, Chief Curator at The Hermitage, Ella and her mother were owned by Benjamin Harper Sheppard and his wife Phereby Donelson Sheppard who was a niece of William Donelson. Family letters relate that the Sheppard family was living with William Donelson on this property next to The Hermitage. By the middle of the 1850's the Sheppard family and their slaves, including Ella's mother, had relocated to Mississippi. After many years of searching, Ella finally found her mother and sister in Mississippi.

In 1882 Ella married George W. Moore. Following his graduation from Oberlin, they moved to Washington, D.C., where he served with the American Missionary Society. After returning to Nashville, Ella Moore assisted with the Fisk choirs and became a lecturer for the American Missionary Society and for women's issues. The Moores built a house across from the Fisk campus. On December 7, 1907, *Nashville Globe* ran an article about the Moores' 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Party held at their home on 17<sup>th</sup> Avenue North. Readers were told that their marriage had taken place on December 20, 1882, at the residence of George L. White in Fredonia, New York. Attending the Anniversary Party was Ella's 81 year old mother Mrs. Sarah H. Sheppard who had come to live with her daughter in 1877.

Sarah Sheppard died on August 5, 1912. Ella Sheppard Moore died two years later on June 9, 1914 and her funeral was held at Fisk Memorial Chapel. Ella and her mother were buried at City Cemetery. Husband George & son Dr. George S. Moore would also be buried at City Cemetery.

#### Sources

*Profiles of African Americans in Tennessee*, 1996. On-line  
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