President James K. Polk Home and Museum
Columbia, Tennessee

DEDICATION OF REPLACEMENT TOMBSTONES FOR ELIAS, MARY AND MATILDA POLK

The project of Replacement Tombstones at City Cemetery is an ongoing endeavor of the Nashville City Cemetery Association and Metro Historical Commission.

This dedication was made possible by the Nashville City Cemetery Association, Metro Historical Commission, the James K. Polk Memorial Association, and Clark Memorial United Methodist Church

Program for the Dedication of the Replacement Headstones of Elias Polk, Mary Polk, and Matilda Polk

Welcome by James A. Hoobler, President, Nashville City Cemtery Association

The Life of Elias Polk by Zach Kinslow, James K. Polk Home and Museum, Columbia, TN

Words of Praise by Rev. Dr. Herbert Lester, Clark Memorial United Methodist Church, Nashville

Hymn to be sung by Paula Chavis, Clark Memorial United Methodist Church, Nashville

Attendees will please move to the gravesite of Matilda Polk

The Life of Matilda Polk by Thomas Price, Curator, President James K. Polk Home and Museum

Words of Praise by Rev. Lester

Hymn to be sung by Paula Chavis

Thank you for attending.

In Memory of Elias Polk, Mary Polk, and Matilda Polk

ELIAS POLK.

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 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 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 frequently returned 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 including 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 to a similar post in the U.S. House of Representatives in 1876. He 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 was left with a vast amount of debt. She took out advertisements in newspapers asking for funds to be raised to send Elias's body from Washington, D.C. to Nashville. Meeting with success, Elias's remains were brought to Nashville by train. His funeral was held at Clark Methodist Chapel and he was interred in Nashville City Cemetery on February 13, 1887. Mary Polk remained 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 probably in North Carolina. 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.