In the Footsteps of Notable Women
A Self-Guided Tour of Rutherford County
Welcome to Rutherford County, Tennessee!
Women have significantly shaped Rutherford County’s history from its very beginnings. They have raised families, tilled fields, taught children, upheld churches, reported news, nursed soldiers, preserved buildings, lobbied for the vote, and governed citizens—while always taking care of their families and serving their communities.

This guide invites you to go see the places where this remarkable, diverse group of women left their mark on our history. Many of the properties listed here are privately owned. Please respect the owners’ privacy and view these sites from the public right-of-way only.

On the cover: Sarah Childress Polk, by Ralph E.W. Earl (courtesy of the President James K. Polk Home and Museum); Myrtle G. Lord; Suffragists (courtesy of the Albert Gore Research Center, MTSU); Hilltop-Rosenwald Park; Heritage Center of Murfreesboro and Rutherford County; Mary C. Scales (courtesy of the Albert Gore Research Center, MTSU); Bradley Academy Museum and Cultural Center (courtesy of Bradley Academy Museum).

1. The Heritage Center of Murfreesboro and Rutherford County
225 W. College St., Murfreesboro

The Heritage Center’s exhibits highlight many of the important women and places found in this booklet, including Mary Ellen Vaughn, Mildred Martha Hopson Williams Jordan, and Jean Faircloth MacArthur. Typically during Women’s History Month every March the center displays the exhibit “From the Nation’s Capital to Neighborhood Classrooms: Rutherford County Women, Past and Present.”

2. Busy Bee Café Site (now Young & Potts: An Association of Attorneys)
119 N. Maple St., Murfreesboro

Born in Italy, Concetta DiGiorgio Meshotto lived in Chicago and Nashville before coming to Murfreesboro in 1916. By 1930, she was a widow and proprietor of the Busy Bee Café at this location. Son Dominick and his wife, Rose Culotta Meshotto, ran the cafe from 1937 to ‘46. The daughter continued
of Italian immigrants, Rose was born in Pennsylvania and later lived in Birmingham, Alabama.

3. **Rutherford County Courthouse and Square**
   Murfreesboro (between the intersections of East Main & Church and West Main & Maple)

In 1920, Sarah Spence DeBow and other women gathered names here on a petition in favor of woman suffrage, while anti-suffragists protested in the yard after Tennessee ratified the 19th Amendment. In the 1950s, Sarah McKelley King and female colleagues led the fight to restore rather than demolish the courthouse, which dates to 1859 and is now on the National Register of Historic Places. The Pride of Tennessee painting honors anti-lynching activist Ida B. Wells-Barnett and suffrage leader Anne Dallas Dudley.

4. **Rutherford County Archives**
   435 Rice St., Murfreesboro

Researchers can access the papers of several prominent women, including preservationist Sarah King, First Baptist Church historian and Sunday School teacher Ida Read, teacher and Rutherford County Historical Society president Nell Blankenship, educator Laura C. Jarmon, and Marthalena Morrisey, a collector of historic images of western Rutherford County. Other collections document the Daughters of the American Revolution (Hardy Murfree Chapter), the Garden Club, and the Little Gardens Club.

5. **Soule College Site**
   415 N. Maple St., Murfreesboro

Located here from 1853 to 1917, Soule College was Murfreesboro’s longest-lived female academy. Operated by the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, Soule educated white girls and young women, and women always made up more than half the faculty. In 1904, 28 women received diplomas from progressive educator Virginia Oceania Wardlaw. The 1908 catalog emphasized that the college was designed to teach women “how to live as well as how to think.”

6. **Rutherford Health Department Building**
   303 N. Church St., Murfreesboro

Built by the Commonwealth Fund of New York in 1931, the Rutherford Health Department was the first of its kind in any rural county in the United States. The partnership with the Commonwealth Fund was continued
the idea of Red Cross public health nurse Maud Ferguson (who lived at the nearby Woman’s Club) and began with the establishment of a child health demonstration unit in 1924 that dramatically reduced death rates among mothers and infants. Remarkably influential, the health department trained women from throughout the country and abroad, and the building is on the National Register.

7. **Historic First Methodist Church Site**
   1 E. College St., Murfreesboro

The 1888 Romanesque Revival church served local Methodists for 115 years. Suffragist Sarah Spence DeBow rang the bell in 1920 to celebrate Tennessee’s ratification of the 19th Amendment. In 1934, the church held the funeral of Will Allen Dromgoole, a poet, novelist, literary editor, powerful public speaker, suffragist, and one of the first women to serve as a yeomanry warrant officer in the U.S. Navy.

8. **Collier Lane Crichlow Wagnon House**
   500 N. Spring St., Murfreesboro

Built in about 1850, this National Register-listed house was purchased in 1858 by Jesse and Newton Collier for their widowed mother, Martha Covington Collier. Ten years later, a nephew of the Collier brothers, Ingram Collier Jr., bought the house for his sister, Martha Collier Lane, and her husband, James Lane. Their daughter, Emily “Emma” Lane, kept a diary for the years 1864–66 (now at MTSU’s Albert Gore Research Center). Extraordinary for her insights into the Civil War’s end and its aftermath, Lane lamented that the war had brought “trouble sorrow & desolation to the hearthstones of so many.” She and husband James Crichlow raised their family here.

9. **Ransom Historic House and School Museum**
   717 N. Academy St., Murfreesboro

Headquarters of the Rutherford County Historical Society, this former private elementary school was administered by two sisters during the early 1900s. Founder Eliza Ransom and her younger sister, Belle Ransom, lived and worked in this c. 1840 building. “Miss Ransom’s School” educated white students (mostly boys). If they got out of line, Eliza made them memorize poetry. Graduates included Judge Whitney
Steagall and businessman/local historian C.B. Arnette, who later owned and restored the building.

10. **Oaklands Mansion**

900 N. Maney Ave., Murfreesboro

Sallie Murfree Maney inherited this land from her father, Col. Hardy Murfree, for whom the town is named. She and her husband, Dr. James Maney, raised their family here and managed the growing plantation. Enslaved women worked both in the fields and in the house. In the late 1850s, Rachel Adeline Cannon Maney and her husband, Lewis Maney, initiated renovations to the house with an Italianate façade. In 1959, local women formed Oaklands Association and restored the house, now on the National Register, into a historic site. The museum’s annual wedding dress exhibit is an eagerly awaited winter event.

11. **King House**

303 E. Lytle St., Murfreesboro

This Queen Anne house (1892–94) is associated with the family of Sarah McKelley King, who purchased it in the 1950s. King was born not far from here on North Spring Street. In the 1950s, she became one of Murfreesboro’s most influential preservationists, helping save the county courthouse and Oaklands Mansion. King once said, “Twenty-five ladies can move the earth.” In 1983, she was the first Tennessean elected president general of the National Society of the Daughters of the American Revolution.

12. **Childress House**

225 N. Academy St., Murfreesboro

Rutherford County was the birthplace of one of the nation’s most significant first ladies. Sarah Childress Polk married lawyer James K. Polk, a member of the General Assembly, when Murfreesboro was the capital of Tennessee. Known for her intelligence and political acumen, Sarah Polk assisted her husband and strengthened the role of first lady from 1845 to 1849. The couple benefited significantly from the work of enslaved people on their lands in Tennessee and Mississippi. The National Register-listed Childress House (1847) belonged to younger brother John Childress, whom Sarah visited in the 1870s and 80s.

13. **Baskette House**

221 E. College St., Murfreesboro

Built as a home for Dr. William T. Baskette in 1856, this National Register-listed building has been owned by the Murfreesboro Woman’s Club since 1916. A social, philanthropic, and community-improvement organization founded by local women’s groups,
the new club began with 175 members. Over the years, members have made bandages during wartime, joined the woman suffrage movement, hosted recitals, and produced plays. The Woman’s Club also started and maintained the city’s first lending library. The club integrated sometime after the mid-twentieth century.

14. **Windrow-Jordan House**  
403 S. Academy St., Murfreesboro

This house was built in 1903 for Delora and James Windrow by her nephew, Preston H. Scales. After Delora Windrow’s death in 1917, her sister, Cora Scales Jordan, moved in with husband Fred Jordan and their three children. A graduate of Bradley Academy, daughter Lillian Jordan Hammons taught in the county for more than 50 years and briefly held her nursery school here. Daughter Ola Jordan Hutchings became the first black woman on the Rutherford County Board of Education (1972) and served as church clerk at First Baptist Church for 50 years. Both of these inspiring community leaders belonged to the Criterion Club, an African American women’s group.

15. **Bradley Academy Museum and Cultural Center**  
415 S. Academy St., Murfreesboro

Originally open to white boys only, Bradley became a co-educational school for African American students in 1884 and evolved into a thriving community center after this National Register-listed building was constructed in 1917. One of Bradley’s best-known graduates was local icon Myrtle Glanton Lord, who returned to teach here and later served on the museum’s board; the Heritage Classroom is named for her. Exhibits feature such accomplished women as Emma G. (Rogers) Roberts, a principal at Bradley and the first African American county educator inducted into the Tennessee Teachers Hall of Fame (1995), and Bradley graduate Olivia Murray Woods, who became the first African American undergraduate student at Middle Tennessee State Teachers College when she enrolled in 1962 (she eventually obtained both a bachelor’s and a master’s degree).
In the Footsteps of Notable Women

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Map Created by Brittany Jackson
Rutherford County GIS
July 2020
Murfree Spring Wetlands Park and Discovery Center
502 SE Broad St., Murfreesboro

For centuries, women lived at Murfree Spring, site of a Native American campground. During the Civil War, celebrations of freedom here by African Americans included a speech about the war by a young woman dressed in the stars and stripes. Billie Little, one of the founders of the Discovery Center, served as its executive director from 1987 to 2012, overseeing the children’s museum’s development into a popular regional attraction.

Mary Ellen Vaughn Home Site (now entrance to Parkside Apartments)
Corner of S. Highland Ave. and Vaughn Street (state historic marker to be installed in 2020 or 2021)

Mary Ellen Vaughn was highly educated and multi-talented. As a journalist, she established the Murfreesboro Union newspaper in 1920. As a nurse, she worked with the rural health effort funded by the Commonwealth Fund. In order to assist African Americans with passing the literacy test requirement for voting, she started Vaughn’s Training School in her home at this location in 1933. She is one of the few local women to have a street named for her.

Patterson Park Community Center
521 Mercury Blvd., Murfreesboro

The community center, which first opened in 1979 and was expanded in 2003, includes the Myrtle Glanton Lord Memorial Library, a branch of the Rutherford County Library System. Lord, a renowned educator and activist, was instrumental in Patterson’s creation. An inspirational leader, she was involved in multiple community organizations, including Church Women United, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, and the League of Women Voters. Lord was named Tennessee’s Most Outstanding African American Woman in 1999.

Albert Gore Research Center, MTSU
128 Todd Hall

Founded in 1911 to train teachers, MTSU has always been co-educational. The Gore Center has a wealth of materials by and about women who have contributed to the university and the community. Among the highlights are oral interviews with notable women educators and activists Ruth Bowdoin and Mary Scales.
and the papers of Smyrna writer Adeline King. Collections document women’s athletics at MTSU, the American Association of University Women, Business and Professional Women’s Club, Charity Circle, June Anderson Women’s Center, League of Women Voters, Tennessee College for Women, Frances Bohannon Music Club, Craddock Study Club, and Dromgoole Literary Society.

20. **Homer Pittard Campus School**

923 E. Lytle St., Murfreesboro

Since its inception as part of Middle Tennessee Normal School in 1911, Campus School has provided practical training for thousands of teachers, predominantly women. First located in a wing of the normal school’s administration building, the current structure opened in January 1929 and is listed on the National Register. Over the years, women have made up the vast majority of the school’s faculty, many of whom devoted decades of service.

21. **Tennessee College for Women Site**

701 E. Main St., Murfreesboro

The Tennessee College for Women opened here in 1907 and educated white girls of all ages. The school later became a standard college, and graduates received lifetime Tennessee teaching certificates. Courses in art, music, physical education, and drama enhanced the curriculum. In 1946, the college merged with Lebanon’s Cumberland University and five years later became part of Ward-Belmont School for Women in Nashville, now Belmont University.

22. **Historic Rutherford Hospital Site**

Corner of University and Bell Streets, Murfreesboro

The historic Rutherford Hospital, built in 1927, was constructed by the Commonwealth Fund of New York as part of its commitment to rural health care and to the child health.
demonstration program established in the county three years earlier. Mary E. Marshall and Margaret B. Haynes served on the initial board of directors. As the first superintendent of the hospital, public health nurse Mary F. Petitte ran everyday operations.

23. **Clardy House**
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**435 E. Main St.**

In 1948, Hattie Moore opened a guest house in this building, which dates to 1898. Moore had the house’s red brick painted white. In 1954, Betsy and Frank Clardy purchased the house, where they raised their family and continued to welcome guests. Daughter Barbara Deaton and her husband, Robert Deaton, next operated the business, which closed in 2000 as one of the oldest bed-and-breakfasts in the country.

24. **McFadden School**
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**221 Bridge Ave., Murfreesboro**

McFadden is the first school in Rutherford County named for a woman, Elvie McFadden. Dedicated to Christian benevolence work, she assisted the poor in this working-class neighborhood, then called Westvue. Before her death from tuberculosis, she led efforts to establish a mission church and received a promise from the county school board chair that a school would be built here. A year later, the Elvie McFadden School opened with Madge Manson as principal and three female teachers. The school served only white children until desegregation in the 1960s. The current building (1939) replaced two earlier structures lost to fire. Once located nearby off Old Salem Road was the railroad freight depot where prominent local suffragist Annie Brawley Jackson worked as a clerk.

25. **Stones River National Battlefield and Cemetery**
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**3501 Old Nashville Highway, Murfreesboro**

Before the December 1862 battle, widow Hollie McFadden fled her prosperous nearby farm for safety and returned to find the Army of the Cumberland had confiscated livestock, food, fence rails, and timber. She unsuccessfully applied for compensation of more than $2,000. United States Sanitary Commission volunteers Ann Hosmer and Carrie Tinkham delivered supplies and nursed wounded soldiers. Writer Mary Noailles Murfree penned a novel about the aftermath of the battle titled *Where the Battle Was Fought* (1884). African American members of the Woman’s Relief Corps commemorated Memorial Day at the cemetery for decades. Several women’s heritage groups helped plan the battlefield’s dedication as a national park in 1932.

26. **Rucker Betty LaRoche House**
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**3978 Betty Ford Road**

This is the childhood home of award-winning artist Willie Betty Newman, whose mother, Sophie HOW TO FIGHT WITH A WINDMILL

continued

(Courtesy of the Ridley Wills II Postcard Collection, Center for Historic Preservation, MTSU)
Rucker Betty, inherited the house (1832) shortly after Willie was born. Newman studied at Soule College, the Art Academy of Cincinnati, and the Julian Academy in Paris. After 12 years in Paris, she returned to Tennessee, where she taught art in Nashville and painted posthumous portraits of John C. Bell and James K. Polk for the U.S. Congress. She received the Parthenon medal from the Nashville Museum of Art. The house is listed on the National Register.

27. Piedmont
9473 John Bragg Highway

Mary Ella Hall, renowned for her contributions to elementary education, lived here until after her retirement from MTSU’s Education Department in 1960. Growing up at Piedmont, “Miss Mary” developed the compassion and independence that characterized her career as a teacher, pioneering regional supervisor of elementary education, and founding member of the Tennessee chapter of Delta Kappa Gamma, an honorary society for women in education. MTSU’s Miss Mary Hall dormitory is named for her. Described by first lady Rosalynn Carter as “a perfect role model for generations of young women,” Hall is buried here in the family cemetery.

28. Hilltop-Rosenwald Park
565 Mason Tucker Drive, Smyrna

Built in 2003, the park honors several inspirational Hilltop community leaders, including Annie Malone, Lucille “Honey” Miles, Kathryn Wright, and Lottie Sublett, who was the first student from Smyrna to attend Holloway High School and later worked at Meharry Medical College. In 2005, a replica of the Smyrna Rosenwald School that educated African American students here from 1927 to 1960 opened as the Rosenwald Community Center. Its outdoor exhibit highlights two of the early female principals, Nannie Glass and Maude Collier.

29. Tucker House
112 Oak St., Smyrna

This house (c. 1860) became the property of Tucker descendent Frances Neel Cheney and her husband, Brainerd Cheney, in 1939. A graduate of Vanderbilt University, the George Peabody College for continued
Teachers, and Columbia University, Frances Cheney had an influential career as a librarian and professor of library science. She worked at Vanderbilt, the Library of Congress, and the Peabody School of Library Science. She remains renowned for her reviews of reference books and essays. The Tennessee Library Association’s librarianship award is named after her.

30. **Sam Davis Home and Museum**

1399 Sam Davis Road, Smyrna

Captured by Union forces during the Civil War, 21-year-old Sam Davis, a Confederate scout, refused to reveal his source and was hanged in Pulaski in November 1863. In his final letter to his parents, Sam wrote, “Mother, I do not fear to die.” Women later helped immortalize Davis as the “Boy Hero of the Confederacy,” which became a prominent feature of “Lost Cause” mythology. Women also preserved the house (1850) after the state bought it in 1927 and ran the Sam Davis Memorial Home Association. The National Register-listed property includes a family cemetery, as well as slave cabins moved to the site in the 20th century.

31. **Mary Kate Patterson House**

158 Fergus Drive, La Vergne

Confederate spy Mary Kate Patterson lived here from the mid-1880s to the early 1920s. During the Civil War, in 1863 she brought provisions to Sam Davis before his capture and may have helped with the identification and return of his body after he was hanged. Widowed three times, she was the first woman buried in the Confederate Circle at Nashville’s Mt. Olivet Cemetery, a prominent site for glorification of the “Lost Cause” for many decades.

*The MTSU women’s basketball team in 1982–83, from the Midlander yearbook. (courtesy of the Albert Gore Research Center, MTSU)*
Please visit the Heritage Center at 225 W. College St. in Murfreesboro if you have questions or would like additional information about historic sites related to women in Rutherford County. The Heritage Center is open 10:00 a.m.–3:00 p.m., Monday–Friday. Admission and parking are free.

The Heritage Center of Murfreesboro and Rutherford County is a partnership between the Tennessee Civil War National Heritage Area, Main Street Murfreesboro/Rutherford County Inc., and the MTSU Center for Historic Preservation. It also receives support from the city of Murfreesboro and the Rutherford County government.

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Additional information about many of the women in this brochure can be accessed through the “Leading Ladies of Rutherford County History: Women Who Inspire Us” website, a community project commemorating the centennial of woman suffrage.