



Beck Cultural Exchange Center

African American History & Culture

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Dear Friends and Colleagues:

As President and CEO of the Beck Cultural Exchange Center and the City of Knoxville's Historian of African American History, I am honored to support the development of the Women's Suffrage Museum in downtown Knoxville.

Knoxville holds a remarkable place in the story of women's suffrage and in the broader history of American democracy. Creating a permanent institution dedicated to preserving and interpreting that history matters not only for Knoxville and Tennessee, but for visitors from across the nation and around the world who come to better understand the people, struggles, sacrifices, and movements that shaped the right to vote.

I am particularly encouraged by the museum's commitment to preserving and interpreting the history of the women's suffrage movement through accurate, immersive storytelling. Its vision of telling the full story through diverse exhibits, while adding nuance and depth to women's often untold contributions, is especially important. A fuller, more inclusive history depends on that commitment.

History is not always preserved in neat, complete records. Some stories survive in documents and artifacts, while others must be carefully reconstructed from newspapers, organizational records, photographs, church and community records, oral histories, family collections, material culture, and the historical context of what has been preserved and what has been omitted. Telling the full story requires us to seek out voices too often absent from the traditional record.

That responsibility is especially important when telling the history of women's suffrage and the struggle for voting rights. African American women were part of that history, as were women whose names may never appear prominently in the traditional narratives of the movement. Their experiences, contributions, organizing, sacrifices, and forms of activism are essential to understanding the movement's complexity and the meaning of the vote in Tennessee and across the nation.

For more than 50 years, the Beck Cultural Exchange Center has been a place where history lives. Through its collections, exhibitions, programs, research, and the Beck Cultural Corridor, Beck preserves and interprets the rich history and culture of African Americans in Knoxville and East Tennessee, bringing people, places, experiences, and stories too often excluded from the historical record back into view. This work connects Black history and culture across the region and shows that history is not confined to the past. It remains present in the places we inhabit, the communities we shape, and the stories we carry forward. As part of a broader effort to tell Knoxville's history more fully, Beck invites people from near and far to experience the places where that history continues to live.

The Women's Suffrage Museum has the opportunity to establish Knoxville as a significant national center for interpreting women's suffrage and the broader struggle for political voice and

citizenship. By embracing this role, Knoxville can become a place where visitors encounter not only Tennessee's pivotal role in the passage of the 19th Amendment, but also the people and communities whose courage, organizing, and pursuit of full citizenship shaped that struggle and continue to define its legacy.

Preserving history means safeguarding buildings, artifacts, and dates, but most critically, it means honoring the people who made that history. Their stories must be remembered, their voices heard, and their legacies carried forward for generations.

I am pleased to support the Women's Suffrage Museum and its vision for downtown Knoxville. I look forward to opportunities for Beck Cultural Exchange Center and the Women's Suffrage Museum to collaborate, learn from one another, and help ensure that the history we share with our community and the world is as full, inclusive, and meaningful as possible.

Knoxville has an extraordinary story to tell. Together, our institutions can help make sure that story is preserved, experienced, and carried forward.

With appreciation,



Reverend Renee Kesler
President & CEO
Beck Cultural Exchange Center
City of Knoxville Historian of African American History