



Scarritt and National Colleges International Alumni/ae Association

NEWS

Spring 2024

From the Chair

"I've learned that people will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel." -Maya Angelou

The buildings and campus, now known as the Scarritt Bennett Center, has seen many iterations over the past 100 years. No matter what the institution was called throughout the years—National College, Scarritt College for Christian Workers, Scarritt College, Scarritt Graduate School, and now the Scarritt Bennett Center—unique experiences have happened which people will never forget. The campus has seen thousands of students from around the world over the years who chose Scarritt for an education that would enable them to bring change to the world, grounded in the belief of a God-given calling to serve others. As written on the arches over the cloisters, "Expect great things from God, Attempt great things for God," the education provided and received has included heart-centered, transformative experiences.

What has been your Scarritt experience? How have you felt the grace and love of God in your time at Scarritt, be it one class or many? How has it impacted your life throughout the years? The above quote from Maya Angelou expresses that what I and so many others received from Scarritt goes far beyond "head knowledge." We received so much more than a college education. Our experiences were transformative—God working in ways we never could have anticipated. So many times, I've heard graduates proclaim that the trajectory of their lives was impacted far beyond anything they ever imagined.

In October, there will be a homecoming celebration of the 100 years on the Nashville campus. We will be sharing stories of our experiences and celebrating the amazing ways we have served God and humankind over the years because of our experiences at Scarritt. The leadership of the Scarritt and National Colleges International Alumni Association (SNCIAA) offers a glimpse into the impact of the Scarritt Experience in this newsletter.

I invite you to share your experiences also. We will be compiling these experiences for an anthology of Scarritt. We will collect stories at the Homecoming celebration as well. It is important

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Greetings from the Scarritt Bennett Center Executive Director

*Here, the winter is past;
the rains have come and gone.
Blossoms have appeared in the land;
the season of singing has arrived,
and the sound of the turtledove is heard in our land.
The green fruit is on the fig tree,
and the grapevines in bloom are fragrant.*

Song of Solomon 2:11-13 CEB

We are enthusiastic as we walk into a new season. It is our commitment to grow the vision, the legacy of our successors, and the mission of Scarritt Bennett Center. We strive daily to create a more just world! Through faith, prayer, and extensive work, we continue to recognize the work previously accomplished and move forward with intention for a brighter future!

We are pleased to announce that our 100th Celebration, "A Century of Vision: Building a Lasting Legacy" is off to a resounding start. We kicked off our yearlong celebration with the initial "Belle H. Bennett Speaks" webinar series with Scarritt College and Graduate School alum, Bishop Debra Wallace-Padgett as our guest speaker on March 20. If you missed this dialogue or would like to share it with others, please visit our YouTube page, Facebook page or website.

We are extremely excited to welcome Rev. Dr. Bernice King to Scarritt Bennett for conversation "Transforming A Dream into Legacy" on April 2 to commemorate her father, Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s speech in historic Wightman Chapel on April 25, 1957, sixty seven years ago. A reception and book signing will follow.

In furtherance of Scarritt Bennett's tenet of transformative education and global impact, we will host the inaugural



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From the Chair continued

to preserve the legacy of Scarritt and the impact of the people who have served God throughout the years. You can email your stories to me at dpsarah@gmail.com or bring them with you in October.

In this newsletter, you will hear brief testimonies about the Scarritt Experience of your SNCIAA leadership. Believe me when I say, it was difficult to keep these vignettes short. We all could write chapters!

We hope you enjoy getting to know a bit of your fellow alumni and are inspired to share your own Scarritt-inspired story. We encourage you to set aside October 16-19, 2024, and plan to join other classmates on the campus for time to celebrate and give thanks for the impact of the Scarritt Experience on your life.



Blessings of Gratitude!

Donna Patterson, SNCIAA Chair



What's in the Cornerstone?

The cornerstone of the Belle Harris Bennett Memorial and Administration Building contains a copper box, including among other things Bennett's personal Bible and hymn book, a picture of Bennett, a picture of the Scarritt Bible and Training Institute in Kansas City, church literature, and copies of the Nashville Tennessean and Banner announcing that Nashville had won over competing cities for Scarritt's home.

Why Did Scarritt Buy a Quarry?

Scarritt's first President, Jesse Lee Cuninggim purchased a quarry in middle Tennessee to ensure enough crab orchard stone to complete the Gothic buildings. The Vanderbilt Alumni magazine described Cuninggim as "a man who built a chapel-size college with a cathedral proportioned dream."

Greetings from the Scarritt Bennett Center Executive Director continued

Transformative Global Leadership Conference, September 5-7, "The Cross of Diaspora: Shouldering the Charge to Lead in Faith & Justice" with Africa University, American Baptist College, and Vanderbilt University Kelly Miller Smith Institute. For more information, please visit our website www.scarrittbennett.org.



We are also capturing Alumni stories to be highlighted throughout the year as well as codified as your precious memories. Please email your thoughts and pictures to Cori Bechler at cbechler@scarrittbennett.org.

Please don't forget to mark your calendars for our Centennial Celebration and Homecoming that will be held October 16-20. We look forward to seeing you!

In this Centennial year, Scarritt Bennett stands to capture and continue Belle Harris Bennett's vision to make radical change in women's empowerment, racial justice, spiritual formation, and transformative education. We will continue the dream, vision, and legacy in 2024! Remarkable things are happening here at Scarritt Bennett Center! We are overjoyed and bountifully blessed that you are a part of Scarritt Bennett. Thank you!



Peace and blessings,

Rev. Sondrea L. Tolbert, J.D., M.Div.
Executive Director
Scarritt Bennett Center



A glorious spring day on the Scarritt Bennett Center campus!

Alumni/ae Homecoming

SAVE THE DATE - OCTOBER 16-19, 2024

Schedule TBA

A Century of Vision:
Building a Lasting Legacy

Celebrating 100 YEARS IN NASHVILLE



Contact your classmates and invite them to come!

THE SCARRITT EXPERIENCE

of Your Current SNClAA Executive Board Members

Barbara Barden was trying to discern her call to full-time ministry when she heard about Scarritt Graduate School at a VBS training in 1977. She grew up in churches that had only one pastor and no staff, so a preaching pastor was the only model she had for full-time ministry. She came to Scarritt to further discern her call and to be equipped for the specialized ministry of Christian Education, lay or ordained. She graduated with a Master of Christian Education degree in 1980. She appreciated learning both inside and outside the classroom alongside a diverse student body. Meeting visiting missionaries and persons serving in many different settings gave her exactly what she needed to grow in her own calling and to appreciate the many people and settings in which God was working. She also appreciated the way individuals who served on the United Methodist boards and agencies, as well as editors and writers at the publishing house, connected with the students, giving the students opportunities to serve as well as to lead trainings while students at Scarritt. They continued to be a support for her and a great resource throughout her 39 years of full-time ministry.

Sandra Cohron became a student in her middle age, when she wanted to take a few conducting lessons. In 1987, she graduated with a Master of Choral Conducting degree. It changed her life. She found a way to use her music with others. She also found friends for life in her fellow students. "It was a special time and place in our lives."

Stacy Douglas completed his Master of Church Music degree in 1986. Scarritt Graduate School was the embodiment of transformation for him. The campus, the faculty, the staff, and, of course, the classmates resonated with those affirming words over the arch: "Attempt great things for God, expect great things for God." He returns often to Scarritt in his thoughts, prayers, and through relationships as a source of strength and especially perseverance. Every time he remembers Scarritt, his spiritual journey is confirmed and empowered.

Jim Hawk graduated from Scarritt Graduate School in 1988 with a Master of Christian Education. First and foremost, the Scarritt experience gave him the space and time to develop as a professional and as a human being. It also was a great opportunity to develop meaningful relationships, some of which have lasted over 35 years. Today, Jim still utilizes the knowledge, skills, and attitudes he obtained at Scarritt in his nonprofit work with resident leaders across the metropolitan area and beyond.

Rick Isbell attended Scarritt from 1971-1974. He received his BA in Drama and MA in Christian Education. Upon graduation, he served three churches in the Tennessee and Holston Conferences of the United Methodist Church from 1975-2019

in the field of Christian education and discipleship ministries. Those churches were First UMC, Maryville, TN; Belmont UMC, Nashville, TN, and Church Street UMC, Knoxville, TN. "Scarritt College meant everything to me." It prepared Rick for his life's vocation of Christian education in the local church. He also met his wife of 49 years at Scarritt.

They were in ministry together in various forms of Christian education. Scarritt College was more than just a place of higher education for Rick. He met life-long friends at Scarritt who meant the world to him then and now. Scarritt was also a place where professors and students interacted inside and outside the classroom; a place to explore crazy new things; and a place to ask the hard questions and have a whole lot of fun. "I owe my career/vocation, my marriage, and the wonderful memories to those gothic stone buildings on 19th Avenue and everything that happened in and around them."

Henrietta Burnley McCroskey attended Scarritt College for Christian Workers in 1962-63 with a major in Christian Education. She became a teacher in Cecil County, Maryland, where she retired as a Guidance Counselor. Her memories of Scarritt include the friends she made with whom she still keeps in touch. She enjoys recalling a lot of her Scarritt experience—Mr. Warren's classes and plays, dinners in Susie Gray Hall, and the campus itself in all seasons, "I still get that feeling of belonging when I step on campus."

Donna Patterson graduated from Scarritt Graduate School in 1988 with a master's degree in Christian Education. Her Scarritt experience was transformational, providing opportunities to not only expand in conceptual knowledge, but more importantly, grow spiritually in ways she never could have imagined. Her unique field placement at Scarritt was to serve as a graduate assistant in Clinical and Research Ethics at Vanderbilt Medical Center. Her Scarritt experience broadened her world view and significantly informed her life in pastoral ministry for over thirty years.

Jim Polk completed his master's degree in Urban Church and Community Work in 1973. He directed the United Methodist Community Centers in Birmingham, AL after graduation until 1978, then returned to Nashville, where he soon began working in the city's community education program, which turned out to be a perfect vocational match. He served many roles in the public school community education movement at the local, state and nation levels until his retirement in 2010. Jim reports that Scarritt's Church and Community program and our many excellent professors prepared him well for a life's work in public and community service.

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THE SCARRITT EXPERIENCE Continued

Sue Thrasher graduated from Scarritt in 1963 with a BA in Religion. While at Scarritt, she became involved in the local civil rights movement, an engagement that changed the trajectory of her career. For the next twenty years she worked for social change organizations in the South, helping to found the Southern Student Organizing Committee and the Institute for Southern Studies and its journal, *Southern Exposure*. She joined the staff of the Highlander Research and Education Center in 1978. Her work there in grassroots adult education led to graduate studies at the University of Massachusetts Amherst where she received her Master of Education degree in 1994 and doctorate in Education in 1996. She worked with the Five Colleges, Inc. consortium, retiring in 2013. She has been actively involved with the SNCIAA and the board of the SBC since 2017. She is forever grateful to Scarritt College, its faculty, staff and her fellow students who introduced and encouraged her work in social justice.

Martha Hicks Touchton completed a bachelor's degree in Accounting at Westmar College in LeMars, Iowa, where she also studied Christian education, music, and theology under Drs. Dwight and Linda Vogel. She moved to Nashville from her home state of North Dakota, graduating from Scarritt Graduate School in 1987 with a master's degree in Christian Education. While at Scarritt, she was involved in both the Christian Education and Sacred Music programs and groups, developing friendships in both disciplines that continue to this day. She also worked for Dr. Towner in Scarritt's International Museum and served as an Admissions Ambassador and Resident Assistant. As part of her field placement at the General Board of Discipleship's Section on Christian Education, she traveled the US, giving pilot workshops for "Invitation" curriculum, a tremendous leadership experience. As a consecrated Diaconal Minister and an ordained Deacon in the United Methodist Church, she has served as a Christian Educator and Musician in churches in the Holston and Tennessee Conferences for the past 36 years. Currently, she serves as the Minister of Adult Discipleship and Missions at St. Mark's UMC in Murfreesboro, TN. In 2022, she was the Rutherford County ATHENA Award recipient, which recognizes one who excels in her profession, gives back to the community, and helps raise up other leaders, especially women. She is married to Butler and together they have raised four children to adulthood.

Ruth Williams graduated from Scarritt College for Christian Workers in spring, 1976 with a Master of Arts degree in Church and Community. Deciding to work in the secular world, she went on to get a Master of Science in Social Work in spring, 1979. She was grateful for her Scarritt experience, "a true gift." The professors and staff, the students, the amazing atmosphere, and the historic campus - all provided a wealth of opportunity for personal and spiritual growth. She primarily utilized her social work degree professionally (remaining in the Nashville area); however, her Scarritt experience was indeed an invaluable turning point in her growth and development. She discovered a passion for writing and reaffirmed a love of music. Since her time at Scarritt, she has written songs and authored two books. Now she's embarking on a whole new career of professional speaking, primarily based on the theme of her first book "The Prescription for Joy," to help other mental health professionals prioritize their own mental health.

Milestones

PASSINGS

Sarah Frances Bowden (SC '51-'52) Brooks Howell, Asheville, NC d. 7/20/23

Pat Cary Evans (SC mid 60's) Fredericksburg, TX d. 8/29/23

Cathryn Signe Babcock Good (SC '87) Tucson, AZ d. 1/5/23

Margaret Naylor Spaude (SC '53) no location given d. 4/18/23

Mark Tsai (SC '67 Emma) Brentwood, TN d. 11/27/23

Margaret Wade Campbell (SC '59) Pineville, LA d. 10/4/23

Marian Wengert (SC '45) Dayton, OH d. 6/27/23

Correction: Phyllis Hail (SC '64) Lexington, KY, was mistakenly listed in the Passings section of the summer 2023 edition of the newsletter.

CHANGE OF ADDRESS

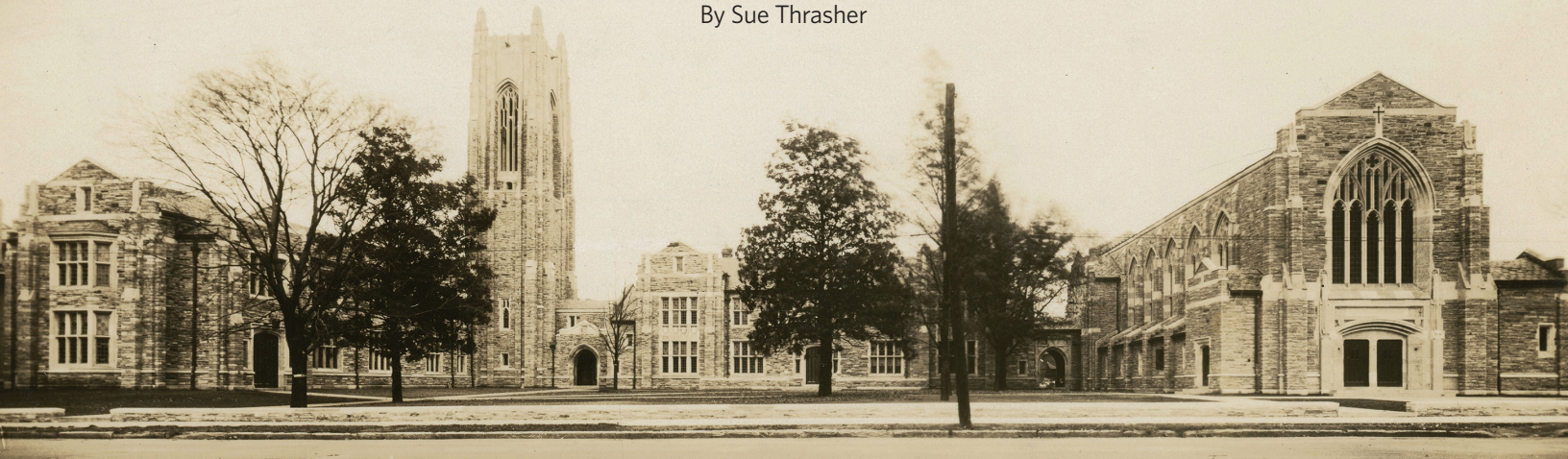
Jane and Legrand Smith (SC '50's)
Charter Senior Living of Newport News
655 Denbigh Blvd.
Newport News, VA 23608

Send your MILESTONES to

**Cyndy Goodrich (SC-66) at cyndygoodrich@aol.com or
202 Old 31W | Cottontown, TN 37048**

Scarritt Moves to Nashville

By Sue Thrasher



On October 1, 1924, Scarritt College for Christian Workers, a newly chartered senior college and graduate school, welcomed its first students. The “campus” consisted of the nine houses that were on the property when purchased; they would serve as administrative offices, classrooms, and dormitories until new facilities could be built. The costs for each student that fall totaled \$100 per quarter.

The move to Nashville and the closing of the Scarritt Bible and Training Center in Kansas City, MO had its origins in 1917, when Belle Harris Bennett, the President of the Women’s Missionary Council, returned from visiting missions in East Asia; she was convinced that mission training needed to be more rigorous and that it should include specialists in industrial and community work.

The ensuing story of the development of Scarritt College is one of great intrigue, involving a unique partnership between Bennett and Jesse Lee Cuninggim, the man she handpicked as the college’s first president. Together, they navigated competition among agency boards, geographic rivalries, Bishop power plays, and the resistance of the Nathan Scarritt family to the move. Underlying this drama was the ongoing struggle of women in the church to attain equity and fairness – even as they were often paying the bills. The implicit assumption by the Church’s male leadership was that the theological seminaries were the best place for educational training, even if it meant admitting women. Both Bennett and Cuninggim proved adept at negotiating these minefields. Cuninggim, in particular, used this time to clarify the kind of institution needed and the constituency it would serve. He enlarged Bennett’s vision of missionary training to an expansive program for training lay leaders that was academically rigorous and targeted to the needs of the whole church.

Bennett’s first order of business was to improve and professionalize the Scarritt Bible and Training Institute. In 1918, she hired Dr. Edmund Cook, a Professor of Missions at the Moody Bible Institute as the new President. Although his tenure was short, Dr. Cook enlarged the faculty, improved academic standards, and increased enrollment. Before his resignation in 1921 he proposed three options to the Board of Managers for

remaking Scarritt into a four year college: move to Dallas or Atlanta and cooperate with SMU or Emory, move to Nashville and establish a partnership with Peabody College, or remain in Kansas City and radically enlarge the facilities and faculty. This proposal set in motion the long series of surveys, institutional visits, and inter-agency jockeying that can best be described as both cooperative and competitive.



Bennett made up her mind early that the school should relocate to Nashville. Her preference was completely understandable; It offered the possibility of a partnership with Peabody College, a teacher’s training college when teachers were primarily female. The alternative, a move to Dallas or Atlanta, meant running the risk that Scarritt, which had by this time trained well over a thousand women for church service, would be subsumed by the male seminaries.

She never doubted that the school should move from Kansas City even though she was the one who had persuaded Nathan Scarritt to donate funds and property to establish the school.

Following Dr. Cook’s resignation, Bennett hired Jesse Lee Cuninggim, a faculty member at SMU and a graduate and former faculty member of the Vanderbilt School of Religion. It was Cuninggim who worked with Bennett and representatives of the Women’s Missionary Council for the next two years through the long series of planning meetings and political gamesmanship that characterized the birth of the new college. Finally, at a meeting in May of 1923, it was agreed that Scarritt would move to a new location but retain the name of Scarritt, and that its mission would be broad and address the needs of lay education for the whole church.

The choice of location, however, was still contested. New sites were considered and new surveys done. There was a last minute effort by Emory to have the college affiliated with Candler, a

power play by the Bishop representing Kansas City to have the school remain there, and a deliberate and obstructive delay by the President of the Board of Missions. Approval for Scarritt's move to Nashville finally came on September 12, 1923, when the Board of Missions accepted the recommendations of the Women's Missionary Council.

Belle Harris Bennett died in July of 1922 before she could see her dream of moving to Nashville become a reality. But the work done by Cuninggim and the Women's Missionary Council resulted in a plan that achieved all the things that she and the Council wanted. In addition, thanks to the work of its new president, the nature and character of the new college had become more explicit, particularly in its push for academic excellence. Most importantly, Scarritt would remain an independent institution.

The Nashville Chamber of Commerce had guaranteed a donation of \$25,000 and a number of Methodists in the city had agreed to match that amount. As a result, the college received a total of \$65,000 to help with its establishment in Nashville. The Belle Harris Bennett Memorial Fund of the Women's Missionary Council raised an additional \$46,000.

Work began immediately to establish the new college. Subcommittees were appointed to find property, to establish a charter, and to begin fundraising. Numerous properties were considered with preference for a site close to Peabody. On November 9, 1923, the committee unanimously selected Scarritt's current location. The committee also obtained adjacent lots on the west side of 19th Avenue so that the space between Scarritt and 21st Avenue could be held as open space. Additional lots were later purchased on 21st and 18th Avenues for recreational fields.

Henry Hibbs, a Nashville architect, was hired to design the new campus; he inquired about the "character" of the college as well as the facilities needed. Dr Cuninggim replied that the social aspects of the school were as important as the educational, domestic and religious, and asked that the campus emphasize hospitality, fellowship, service, brotherhood, and international friendship. The cornerstone for the Belle Harris Bennett Memorial and Administration Building was laid on January 26, 1926, a little over two years from the decision to move to Nashville.

Jesse Lee Cuninggim served as President of Scarritt from 1924-1943. Wightman Chapel, Bennett Hall, Susie Gray Dining Hall, and Gibson Hall were all built under his presidency. He was the driving force behind creating the Joint University Center and a joint school of graduate social work, which later became the University of Tennessee School of Social Work. He wrote *The Family of God*, published after his retirement in 1948 (Nashville: Parthenon Press), which contains his philosophy of education.

Belle Harris Bennett's impact on Scarritt is so profound that one might be forgiven for thinking that her legacy is entirely reflected in Nashville, but her accomplishments transcend Scarritt. She established Sue Bennett College in London, Kentucky; Gingling College in Nanking, China; Woman's Christian Medical College in Shanghai; Bennett College in Brazil; and over forty community centers in US cities. She was involved in the suffragist movement as early as 1895 as one of the leaders of the Kentucky Equal Rights Association. In 1910, Bennett was the first woman to speak at a General Conference, advocating that women be granted full rights and privileges as laity. It took Bennett two more attempts before the 1918 General Conference voted in favor of the proposal — a move promptly vetoed by the College of Bishops. The measure was then sent to the 40 annual conferences and passed in 1919.

