

*A Service in Memory  
Honoring and Celebrating the Life of*



*Mrs. Edna Louise Dillon Tillis*

September 6, 1929 – September 8, 2013

Friday, September 13, 2013

Funeral Service 11:00 a.m.

Douglass Funeral Service

87 North Pleasant Street,

Amherst, MA 01002

Pastor Larry Riddle, Officiating Minister

Edna Louise (Dillon) Tillis, 84, of Amherst, passed away at home after a long, difficult illness on September 8, 2013. Born in Houston, Texas on September 6, 1929 though her legal birthday given was January 6, 1930 due to record keeping during segregation. Her parents were the late Edna Mae Levingston and the late Reverend West Levingston, Jr. of Houston. For the past 43 years, Louise and her husband, Dr. Frederick Charles Tillis, along with their two children, Patricia Louise and Pamela Charlene, lived in Amherst until the children moved from the area as adults. The devoted couple recently celebrated 63 loving years together.

One of two children, she and her late brother West Levingston, III were raised in the Greater New Hope Baptist Church in Houston and attended schools there. Louise and Frederick met at Wiley College at the age of 17 and 16 respectively in Marshall, Texas in 1946, where they were both pursuing Bachelor of Arts degrees in music. Louise studied piano and voice. She was head cheerleader, a sister of the Sigma Gamma Rho sorority, and was crowned college queen "Miss Wiley" in 1949. She became the first queen to break the color barrier for complexion diversity at this historically black institution. They became college sweethearts in their sophomore year. Frederick graduated in three years and taught at Wiley during what would have traditionally been a fourth year while Louise completed college in the spring of 1950. Following graduation, they married on July 9, 1950. During the early years of their marriage, Louise taught music in elementary schools in Texas while Frederick continued teaching at Wiley College. Frederick obtained his Master's Degree in Music from the University of Iowa in 1952 and then joined the United States Air Force during the Korean Conflict. Louise taught music at elementary schools in Texas while Frederick was in the service from 1952 through 1955 and after the war, resumed his studies at the University of North Texas College of Music on the G.I. Bill. At Louise's suggestion and encouragement, the couple then returned to Iowa for Frederick to complete his PhD in Music Composition from the University of Iowa. During those years, Louise taught management courses at the University of Iowa.

After completing his PhD in 1963, Frederick's next academic appointment was at Grambling College, Louisiana where they started a family in 1964. Louise also held a position as the assistant to the Dean of Grambling College. The family then moved again to Louisville, Kentucky in 1967 where Louise was assistant to the Dean at Kentucky State University while Frederick was on the faculty as the Head of the Music Department. In 1970, Frederick was recruited to the University of Massachusetts, Amherst by his former University of Iowa professor and mentor, Philip Bezanson to initiate a jazz studies program at UMass. Louise continued her administrative career first at Smith College as assistant to the Class Deans in 1972 and then as Chief Administrator in the Dean's Office at the School of Health Sciences at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst in 1974. Louise remained at the School after it was reorganized into both Public Health and Nursing, becoming Executive Administrator in the Dean's Office of the School of Nursing for seven years until her retirement from dedicated service to the university in 1996. As an educator and administrator throughout her life and career, Louise was known and admired for her meticulous managerial integrity, exceptional organizational skills, and pragmatic wit.

Louise and Frederick have been active members of the Amherst community over the years. Louise served for two terms as a member of the Amherst Citizens Review Commission as appointed by the Amherst Board of Selectmen and was also a volunteer at Jones Library. Louise's many interests included cultural pursuits such as music, theater, dance, art, fashion, and travel. She and Frederick were longtime philanthropists of cultural and educational organizations such as Wiley College, The Fine Arts Center at the University of Massachusetts, the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, the United Negro College Fund, the NAACP, and the Alvin Ailey Dance Company. She also enjoyed watching collegiate football and basketball and following such sports as tennis, track and field, swimming, golf and the Olympics. Other pastimes included gardening, bird watching, reading, sewing, crossword puzzles, games, classic movies and television viewing.

A wonderfully charming, beautiful, stylish, sassy woman with an engaging sense of humor and grace, she will be greatly missed by her beloved husband Frederick of Amherst; daughters Patricia of Fort Pierce, Florida and Pamela and son-in-law Paul Hammacott of New York City; nieces Edna Louise Richards, (husband Jervis) and Janet Williams of Houston; great nieces Nicole Eaglin (husband Freddie) and Myosha Smith; great nephew Christopher Smith and great nephew, godson and Sweet Baboo Jervis II; and newborn great, great nephew Freddie Fitzgerald, all of Houston; and a host of dear friends and family near and far.

Louise's funeral will be Friday morning at 11 a.m. at the Douglass Funeral Home, 87 North Pleasant Street in Amherst. The burial will be at Wildwood Cemetery. The family welcomes flowers or if desired, contributions may be made in Louise's memory to their alma mater Wiley College under the Dr. Frederick and Edna Louise Tillis Scholarship at Wiley College in support of students majoring in music, 711 Wiley Avenue, Marshall, Texas 75670.

# *The Order of Service*

Prelude – Ray Charles

Song – “Someone to Watch Over Me”  
Jeffrey Holmes

Scripture and Prayer – Pastor Larry Riddle

Song – “A City Called Heaven” and “Come Sunday” medley  
Avery Sharpe

Obituary – Pastor Larry Riddle or read silently for time considerations?

Remarks – 3-5 minutes, please  
William Darity  
Edna Louise Richards  
Esther Terry

Song – “Amazing Grace”  
Jacob Epstein

Eulogy – John Bracey

Recessional

Postlude – Paul Robeson “Going Home”

For Louise

April 5, 2013

The Center for Extended Care  
Chance full of suspense  
Not knowing how, when  
What or where things will be.

The world will be free and fair  
To a sweet and tender soul  
Who for years has been my love  
The one who is darling and loves to share

Some sixty plus years of soul  
Traveling on land, ocean, and sea  
A wonderful person and partner to be  
Someone gracious to behold

Louise at the Center for Extended Care  
Someone who I wish to be very well  
A wonderful soul whom I dearly love  
My hope and prayer is in the best of a spell

-Fred, with love

Arrangements Entrusted to  
Douglass Funeral Services  
87 North Pleasant Street  
Amherst, MA 01002

Interment  
Wildwood Cemetery  
70 Strong Street  
Amherst, MA 01002

#### Acknowledgment

The family of the late Mrs. Edna Louise Tillis wishes to acknowledge with deep appreciation the many comforting messages, floral tributes, prayers, and other expressions of kindness and concern evidenced at this time and throughout these past months. The family is truly grateful for such love and fellowship and extends theirs in return.