

Murray Atkins Walls (1899-1993)



Murray Atkins Walls was a pioneering civil-rights leader who worked for five decades to help integrate Louisville's Girl Scouts, public libraries, department stores, hotels, restaurants and schools. She served the Girl Scouts of Kentuckiana for over 20 years as a camp committee member, council board member, council vice-president, volunteer trainer and as a champion of civil rights.

Originally from Indianapolis, Indiana, Walls received a bachelor's degree from Butler University and a master's degree from Columbia University in New York. In 1935, she married Dr. John H. Walls and settled in Louisville.

Walls joined the Girl Scouts in 1940 to serve on the "Committee for Negro Scouting" where she worked to establish a camp for black Girl Scouts. Louisville's first African-American Girl Scout troop was formed in 1940 in the Beecher Terrace housing complex. Although troops were still strictly segregated in Kentucky, the national organization recorded that its membership among black girls had more than doubled. In 1945, she became the first black member of the council Board of Directors.

In 1954, Walls led the movement that resulted in a shared Camp Shantituck, with black and white girls attending different sessions, the first time in Louisville history that black Girl Scouts and white Girl Scouts used the same camp. Just two years later, Walls led the board in a vote for the integration of Camp Shantituck, one camp session for all girls. This bold action is considered by some to be an early victory in the civil rights movement in the United States.

In 1962, Walls received Girl Scouts' highest award, the Thanks Badge. To honor Murray Atkins Walls as an outstanding role model and courageous agent of change, the Commonwealth of Kentucky erected a Historical Highway Marker in front of the Girl Scouts of Kentuckiana Lexington Road property in Louisville. This location will be the site of the new Girl Scouts council headquarters and Metro Program Service Center. Walls died September 16, 1993. She was 93 years old.