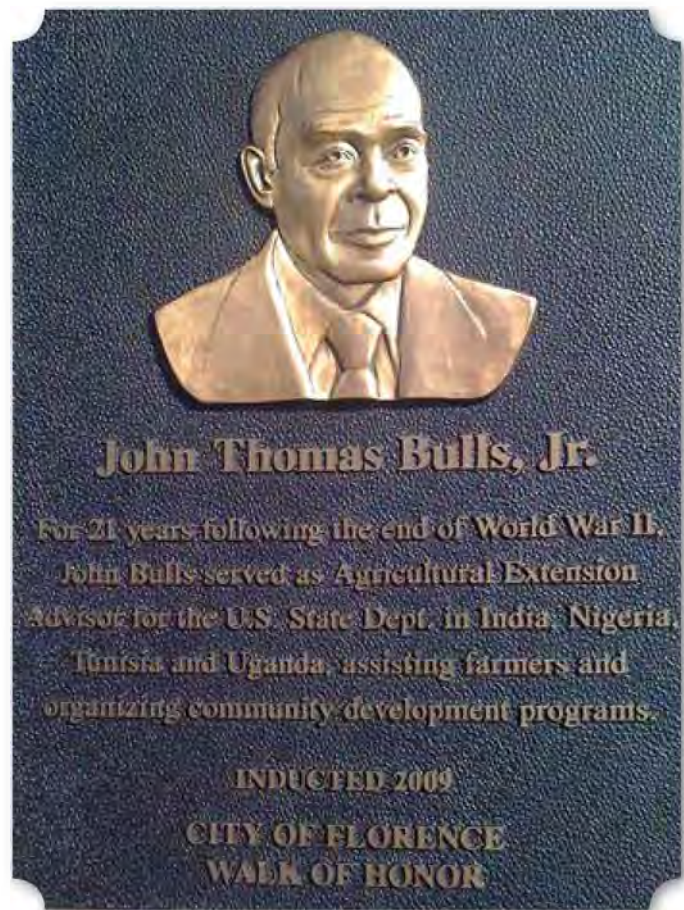


before receiving the opportunity to work for the U.S. Department Agency for International Development. Dr. Ella Bulls left her position at A&M to follow her husband abroad.

For 21 years the Bulls served as Agriculture Extension Advisors for the Foreign Service Division. They helped to organize community development programs in India, Tunisia, Nigeria, and Uganda. When they returned to the U.S., they officially retired in Florence. However, Dr. John T. Bulls spent 16 years on the board of trustees for UNA, among a multitude of various other social clubs and organizations that both he and his wife belonged. He was at times, the President of the Lauderdale County Extension Council and the Muscle Shoals Tuskegee Alumni Association, and a member of the Center Star Lodge No. 25 of Free & Accepted Masons for 50 years. Dr. John T.

**(Below)** Plaque for John Thomas Bulls, Jr. on City of Florence Walk of Honor ([www.HMdb.org](http://www.HMdb.org), User Sandra Hughes, 2010)



Bulls, Jr. received the James T. Rapier Award for his contributions to the history of the black community of the Shoals.

This remarkable couple truly embodies the spirit of North Alabama's African American community and the possible investment that farming and landownership can have on future generations. From former slaves, George and Jerry, buying land and establishing farms and churches, to John and James Ella obtaining doctorates and traveling the world helping communities establish better agriculture, the Bulls and Turnleys deserve their hometown's praise.

### William Christopher "W. C." Handy (1873-1958)

William Christopher "W.C." Handy (1873-1958) is often called the "Father of the Blues." Born in Florence, Handy grew up surrounded by the music and teachings of the St. Paul AME Church, where both his grandfather and father were pastors. Although his father and his schoolmaster influenced and instructed him in music, neither encouraged Handy to pursue a musical career. An accomplished musician from a young age, Handy was the organist for the AME Church and later took up the guitar, trumpet, and cornet.

His talent took him traveling to perform at places like the World's Fair in Chicago in 1893, and St. Louis, Missouri; Evansville, Indiana; and Henderson, Kentucky. From 1901 to 1903, Handy was a professor of music at Alabama A&M University. However, he quickly became unsettled by the push for a "classical" musical education which excluded the sounds of local African American musical traditions of the South. The search for this sound led Handy to the Mississippi Delta in 1903. He found himself in Clarksdale, Mississippi among cotton plantations where he traced his discovery of the Blues.

While always influenced by Florence and his spiritual upbringing, Handy was drawn to the secular music of fiddle player Jim Turner and "Uncle" Whit Walker, as well as by songs sung by cotton pickers and laborers



**(Above)** Handy as a Teenager, Circa 1893 (Florence-Lauderdale Public Library) **(Below)** The Cover of the Memphis Blues, 1913 **(Top Right)** The Cover of The Yellow Dog Rag, 1914 **(Middle Right)** A Sheet from the Beale Street Blues, 1919 **(Bottom Right)** Cover of the Beale Street Blues, 1919 (Duke University, Rare Book, Manuscript, and Special Collections Library, Digital Scriptorium)

