Spring 2016

Their Voices: Our History

Moton Magazine

Longwood University

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Their Voices, Our History

Stories of Prince Edward County, Virginia
This publication features individuals engaged in the civil rights struggle over equal education in Prince Edward County, Virginia, from 1959 – 1969. Today, the Robert Russa Moton Museum chronicles the stories of how Prince Edward citizens moved their community and America from a segregated to a more integrated society. In collaboration with the museum, these individuals partnered with Longwood University students in an advanced writing seminar and in a photography course to document the stories. Through this publication, we aspire to open new histories of this time period, histories that we all should hear and know.

Young people’s activism is at the heart of this history. On April 23, 1951, sixteen-year-old Barbara Johns and her fellow students at Robert Russa Moton High School walked out, protesting the inadequate and overcrowded facilities they faced. The strike lasted ten days. Their action resulted in a court case, *Davis v. County School Board of Prince Edward County*, which demanded an end to discrimination and challenged the constitutionality of segregation.

The U.S. Supreme Court bundled *Davis* together with four other cases in its 1954 landmark decision *Brown v. Board of Education*, declaring segregation in education unconstitutional. A year later, in the *Brown II* decision, the court ruled that school desegregation should occur “with all deliberate speed” and sent the cases back to the federal district courts for implementation.

It took four years for the courts to order the county to desegregate its schools in September 1959. In defiance, the Prince Edward County Board of Supervisors refused to fund the public schools, effectively closing them. An estimated 3,300 children were affected. The community again took to the courts to settle the constitutional question of whether a county could refuse to fund public education.

The school closings set citizens in motion. Almost all students faced disruption of some kind. In September 1959, the private Prince Edward Academy opened on a segregated basis in buildings in Farmville and churches around the county. Tuition at the school eventually increased, making some families unable to afford to send their children. Other families decided to move or send their children outside the county so they could continue their education – a costly endeavor both financially and emotionally. Many were unable to move. These families had to find other ways, such as schooling at home, to educate their children. Throughout Prince Edward, women founded grassroots schools and training centers in churches to try to keep the children educated.

In July 1963, twelve years after the Moton High School walkout, young people again organized protests, this time in downtown Farmville. Inspired by the civil rights movement sweeping the South, Prince Edward students demanded the reopening of the schools, as well as an end to the discrimination and segregation they endured in public places.

The school closings crisis drew national attention from civil rights activists and the federal government. The U.S. Department of Justice worked with Virginia state officials to organize the Prince Edward Free School Association. On September 16, 1963, the Free Schools opened to all children, regardless of race. They held classes in four of the closed public school buildings and provided students with a temporary opportunity to recommence their education. In *Griffin v. County School Board of Prince Edward County*, decided on May 25, 1964, the U.S. Supreme Court declared the school closings a violation of Prince Edward children’s constitutional rights and ordered the county to fund the schools.

When Prince Edward County public schools reopened in the fall 1964 on an integrated basis, this was the first time nearly 1,500 students attended public school in five years. These students continued to be challenged with the legacy of the school closings, as the Board of Supervisors provided only the most minimal of funding to continue the operation of the schools. Parents, teachers, and students worked to rebuild a functioning public school system. By 1969, students’ anger and frustration boiled over, launching another student strike.

These stories resonate with action and with movement – in stark contrast to how the history of this period has traditionally been told. Many citizens mobilized in educated and creative ways to enact their right to equal schooling and distribution of information. We hope this publication encourages other individuals to share their stories.

– April 2016
January: State and federal courts declare Virginia’s Massive Resistance laws unconstitutional.

May: U.S. Court of Appeals for the Fourth Circuit orders Prince Edward County to desegregate schools by September 1, 1959. The fight to desegregate the schools will remain in the courts for the next five years.

June: Prince Edward County Board of Supervisors votes to defund public schools, effectively closing them. An estimated 3,300 students are affected.

September: Public schools do not open. Prince Edward Academy opens on a makeshift basis in 15 buildings in Farmville.

In Brown II, the Supreme Court orders desegregation to occur “with all deliberate speed” and sends the Davis case back to the federal district court that will oversee the process of desegregation.

In Montgomery, Al, Rosa Parks is arrested after refusing to give up her seat on a bus for a white passenger.

Students walk out at Robert Rhue Moton High School in Farmville, Va. Davis v. Prince Edward is filed, demanding the county improve segregated school facilities and challenging the constitutionality of segregation.

The United States Supreme Court rules in Brown v. Board of Education, which included the Davis case, that segregation in education is unconstitutional.

Training centers and grassroots schools open. The American Friends Service Committee, a civil rights group, comes to Prince Edward County to assist with efforts to educate students and to mediate the school closings crisis.

Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. visits Farmville and meets with children shut out of school.

In Griffin vs. Prince Edward, the Supreme Court rules that the closed public schools violated the school children’s rights and orders them reopened.

President Lyndon Johnson signs the Civil Rights Act into law.

President Lyndon Johnson signs the Voting Rights Act into law.

Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. is assassinated in Memphis, TN.

As a result of the Davis case, Prince Edward County constructs a new Moton High School at a cost of $800,000. The original Moton High is renamed Mary E. Branch No. 2.

Prince Edward Academy Upper School building opens.

The newly constructed Prince Edward Academy Upper School building opens.

Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. visits Prince Edward Free Schools.

Moton High School students stage sit-in and march to Prince Edward County Courthouse in downtown Farmville.

An estimated 1,500 students return to Prince Edward County public schools.
In summer 1963, Everett Berryman, Jr. had completed the academic year at Carver-Price School in Appomattox County and had returned to his home in Prince Edward. He was drawn to the growing protest movement in downtown Farmville in large part because his friends were also participating. He saw the movement as “just a way to unite or come together. And we didn't have a lot that we had to do, or a lot of places we could go, so when we went to assemble, we always made it a joy-filled experience.” Bringing together young people from across the county, the NAACP Youth Council launched a boycott, organized picket lines, and staged sit-ins to protest segregation and the lack of employment opportunities in downtown businesses. They also protested that the Prince Edward schools had been closed for four long years, as the community waited on the federal courts to resolve the crisis.

On Friday, July 26, Everett and eleven other students staged a sit-in at the lunch counter at the J. J. Newberry Company five-and-dime store on the corner of Main Street and Third Street. Everett recalls ordering a coffee and being served, but when he picked up the cup, it seemed heavier than usual. The waitresses had poured salt in the bottom of it. After the demonstrators left, employees removed the stools, preventing further sit-ins from taking place. Looking back, Everett was not afraid to participate in the protest: “When you have the support of your family and the community, you don’t fear anything. There is no fear.”

Everett believes that the protests brought “the concerned citizens of Prince Edward County and the town of Farmville . . . together as one big family with one goal in mind.” Veterans of World War I and World War II supported the protests because they had been denied their rights and opportunities when they came back after fighting against dictatorship and fascism abroad.

Other concerned citizens were ministers in the area. The two African-American churches in downtown Farmville – First Baptist Church and Beulah AME Church – became organizing centers. The Rev. L. Francis Griffin of First Baptist Church was the preeminent civil rights leader in the community and served as an advisor and spokesperson. Four ministers directly participated in the protests: the Rev. Goodwin Douglas of Beulah AME Church; the Rev. Richard Hale of St. James AME Church in Prospect, the western part of the county; the Rev. J. Samuel Williams, Jr., of Levi Baptist Church in Green Bay in southern Prince Edward County; and the Rev. James Franklin, who lived in Pamplin but pastored churches in Nottoway and Amelia Counties.

“Reverend Williams, along with other ministers, were our line leaders, who told us each morning what areas we were to picket and how long we were going to be there,” Everett recalls. The ministers gave spiritual, as well as practical, guidance. They “taught us to continue to keep an abiding faith as to what we were experiencing and what we were going through. God knew, and he knew the righteousness of the whole thing would eventually turn toward right, so we never wavered from that point.”

Looking back, Everett also believes that God chose Prince Edward County as the site of the thirteen-year struggle over equality in education because of the strength of the families and faith in this community. He grew up in Pamplin, in the western most part of the county, where his family worked on their farm and attended Sulphur Springs Baptist Church. He enjoyed going to school as a child, but when the public schools did not open in September 1959, a month after Everett turned 12, he “didn't think that much of it at the time.” He eventually attended classes at a grassroots training center run by his mother Cula Berryman and another local woman Alberta Simms. He remembers helping younger students with their lessons.

Everett did not realize what he was really missing by not going to school until he spoke to his cousin of the same age, who

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Text by Molly Scoggin
Photos by Briana Adhikusuma
was attending school in Baltimore, Maryland. While his cousin was advancing, Everett was falling behind. At thirteen years old, he realized he needed to do something to focus on his education. Everett needed to find faith to “step out from under this, to get to where I needed to be.”

Having family who lived in nearby Appomattox County, Everett’s parents sent him there to live to attend school. Eventually the county school superintendent required that all students must live in the county instead of being transported from extended families’ homes. His family moved in with a friend of the family in Appomattox, so the children could continue to attend school at Carver-Price. Everett enjoyed his time there, because as a 7th grader, he was on the same floor with the high school students and enjoyed interacting with them. He caught up on his academics, as well as learned how to play basketball and how to drive a school bus. When the Prince Edward Free Schools opened in September 1963, Everett and his family moved back to Prince Edward. He believes that the Carver-Price experience prepared him to come back: “I was ready to be more of a leader than a follower.”

At the age of seven, Everett was awakened to his faith, recognizing that there was a force greater in life than what he was experiencing in church and school. Everett was inspired by his family – his father entered the ministry in 1961 – as well as the ministers who were his role models during the 1963 protests. He himself was eventually drawn to the ministry.

Everett graduated from Moton High School in 1967, and then served an active tour in the Navy until 1969 and in the reserves until 1973. Everett and his wife Doris, who also grew up in Prince Edward County, had three children together, two of whom are still living. He worked for GE and Erickson in the field of electronics when he returned from active duty in the Navy. In 1976, he received his bachelor’s degree in Education from Virginia College and Seminary. In 1988, Everett attended graduate school in counseling at Lynchburg College.

He pastored a traditional church for about eight years. For the past thirty-two years, he has had a teaching ministry, called Christian Fellowship, which focuses on Bible expository teaching, chapter by chapter, verse by verse. The ministry’s objective is to encourage individuals to become aware of how their real-life experiences are connected to something greater than themselves.

Everett’s faith is grounded in learning and teaching, and his love of learning led him to attend classes at Longwood University, mostly with Dr. Larissa Fergeson in the Department of History for 12 years now. Everett finds it interesting to learn more about American and World History because it gives him a context for understanding what happened here in Prince Edward County. “I enjoy being able to share my experience through various cultures or various time periods that she’s teaching, you know, being the dinosaur that I am,” Everett says with a laugh.
“With Change, There Is Growth”

Text by Claire Rew
Photos by Lindsay Manning

Even as a child growing up, I never tried to focus too much on the negatives because it holds you back too far. With change, there is growth.” Mrs. Doris (Williams) Berryman was thirteen years old when she was sitting in a desk at Mary E. Branch Elementary School No. 2, previously known as Moton High School, learning that Prince Edward County Public Schools would close for a time period nobody ever imagined. Times were tough for many, as some students questioned if they would ever finish their high school education. Doris Berryman, however, chose to focus on what she was about to gain.

The first year that the public school doors were closed, Doris showed her leadership as one of the older students at Mrs. Flossie White’s training center. There, she engaged in what she called “a regular school day” starting with a devotion and continuing with school lessons in every subject. Soon after, in 1960, Doris’ fourth eldest brother invited her to live with him in Brooklyn, New York in order to pursue her education. Excited to have such an opportunity, Doris fearlessly accepted and attended school there for her eighth grade year. It was the first time she had been to a place where she interacted with people of all races.

Living home was not ideal for many children Doris’ age, but going to a new place only excited Doris and further prepared her for future experiences she had in store. “I was with lots of people, lots of situations, lots of things I had to get adjusted to. Had I not had a good foundation coming up as a child, I don’t know how I would have survived being away from home.” This foundation helped Doris’ transition to different living and social situations throughout her life.

After finishing eighth grade in New York at the age of fifteen, Doris moved to Blacksburg, Virginia with another young girl, Rita Moseley, where they lived with and assisted two elderly women. With an age gap and a lack of experience separating the two of them, Doris had a much more thrilling experience than her friend. “In Blacksburg, we really had a nice time. I went with a girl from Farmville, Rita, and she was so much younger than I was. Probably had never been away from home or spent the night with anyone, I don’t think,” she recalled. “I felt very comfortable, and still feel very comfortable in being exposed to others.” Doris stayed there for her ninth and tenth grade years, returning back to Farmville for the summers.

In summer 1963, there was talk of schools being opened in Farmville again, leading many African-American students to participate in protests to demonstrate their feelings about equality. In Doris’ words, the protesting was “a getting together and showing others that I wasn’t afraid; that we were about business and we could be happy doing it because we knew happy results were going to come from it.” Most of the town and people of Farmville saw these protests as unacceptable. Many protesters were treated with disrespect and were cursed at, spat upon, and stared at for their actions. With her bold and outgoing personality, however, Doris found these times rewarding. “It wasn’t any fear in it as far as I [was] concerned because I had been away to New York to school, so I was kind of used to this kind of stuff, being around different people.”

After traveling to many different places and meeting many new kinds of people over her teenage years, Doris had an experience of a lifetime. “Look how much I gained from it,” she said. “It’s just so rewarding to have gone away, come back, see other cultures, and be involved with people you would never be involved with before.”

Although Doris was able to continue her education and expand her horizons, other members of her family never had the opportunity. For two of Doris’ older brothers, their seventh grade years in the public schools were their last. After the schools closed, the boys continued their hard work and dedication, only they were out of the classroom, on a “white
Doris stands in the Moton Museum in front of the image of the Farmville she knew when she was young.

"I believe that in every lesson there is a test. And the test is how it is going to break you or make you."

With many community functions and social gatherings taking place throughout Doris’ years as a child, she often spent time with her friend, and now husband, Mr. Everett Berryman. In 1966, Doris and Everett began dating and continued to see each other during his senior year. After high school, when Everett joined the Navy, Doris was very positive about his decision to do so. “I knew that by him going into the military, and by him being away from me, and being out of the country, it would give him the opportunity to experience life and to see what it is like,” just as she had throughout her high school years. “There were other boys in the community, and I had been away to school in New York and I had been away to school in Blacksburg for two years, and I had met boys, you know, but he was just different.”

Everett returned home after some time of being away and found Doris still waiting for him. It was then he knew he would ask her to marry him. Today, Everett says he has always been impressed with Doris’ commitment to him throughout the fifty years they have been together.

Doris’ past has never been something she has wished to diminish, as many learning about this time might think, but her past is something she has grown from. The time that the schools closed, in addition to the time spent away from the ones she loved, could be looked at as more than a struggle, as Doris explained, “I believe that in every lesson there is a test. And the test is how it is going to break you or make you.”

“When you change the way you look at things, the things you look at will change.”

Doris and her husband Everett Berryman. (Photograph by Briana Adhikarirama)

man’s farm.” As they grew old enough to leave home and support themselves, they in time moved away to take on new jobs.

Doris credits most of her family’s positive attitude to her parents and the background she and her brothers come from. Having a formal education played just a small role in Doris’ family; as neither her father nor mother received much of it; however, they chose to raise their family with a strong moral foundation. From this, the encouraging mindset Doris puts forth today is led by her own thought that, “When you change the way you look at things, the things you look at will change.”
In 1958, student teacher Miss Nancy Mae Drudge spent her final semester teaching in the small town of Farmville, Virginia. Nancy was attending the all-girls’ school Longwood College. Longwood was known as an institution for training teachers.

Nancy spent a majority of her final semester at Longwood, walking from the Cunningham dormitory at the heart of campus down two blocks of tree-lined streets in the neighborhood adjacent, until arriving at the local white high school on the corner of First Avenue and School Street.

Originally built in 1912, Farmville High School was a two-story brick building. The front had nine large windows that lit up the hallways and gave the facade a welcoming appeal. This school had many amenities to offer its students such as a separate gymnasium, science labs, sports fields, and a cafeteria.

Here, Nancy co-taught freshman and junior English classes. While student teaching, she never noticed anything unusual about the school system or the surrounding community. However, Nancy was not really looking for anything unusual. “Back then, if you were a student, particularly a student teacher, you didn’t butt in where you didn’t know what was going on. You just did your job and left.”

Several blocks over, another high school was in session. This school was Robert Russa Moton High School where black
students attended. Nancy knew about this school, as segregation was the norm in 1958. “[Segregation] was in all aspects of life. It wasn’t a stated thing.” Things just seemed normal.

This was a common perspective for students at sheltered by Longwood’s rules. Nancy recalls that students always “had to say where [they] were going.” Today, Longwood students can come and go as they please. Longwood even employed housemothers to keep an eye on the students while they were in their dorms. Nancy remembers the “[housemothers] watched you, and if there was any fooling around that shouldn’t be, then the housemother was right there.” The college also enforced phone times and study hours.

Nancy remembers the “[housemothers] watched you, and if there was any fooling around that shouldn’t be, then the housemother was right there.” The college also enforced phone times and study hours.

“See, it was a small school and we couldn’t go downtown on the weekends . . . We could not even wear blue jeans anywhere on campus.”

Nancy’s time on the school board was funding. She recalls that the county was focused on funding two schools. She states, “they [thought] about the academy, even though they didn’t fund the academy.” Since most of the members of the Board of Supervisors had ties to Prince Edward Academy, they were highly invested in it and not the public schools.

Looking back, Nancy Fawcett lived in a time of great change. Going from a Longwood student to a citizen of Farmville and school board member of Prince Edward County, she has seen the changes and in many cases been a part of those changes. The best way to understand those changes is to listen to those who lived it and understand their point of view.

She reflects, “See, it’s all in perspective. You can’t look back and think, ‘Why in the world did they do that?’ But if that’s all you’ve known, that was your life.”

The majority of Nancy’s week at Longwood was spent on campus. Many weekends she went home to King and Queen County.

The closed community at Longwood kept Nancy on track, and she was able to graduate within four years. As soon as Nancy’s education was completed, she left Farmville with no inkling that she would ever return, leaving her college and the surrounding community behind.

Those living in Farmville in 1959 were experiencing something a young teacher like Nancy could never envision. While Nancy was starting the next chapter in her life elsewhere, those enrolled in Prince Edward County were being denied their public education.

Nancy does not remember reading about the closing of Prince Edward County schools in the papers. “I just had no idea what was going on.” In Nancy’s home, they received both the Richmond Times-Dispatch and the Richmond News-Leader, but neither paper had significant coverage of this ongoing struggle.

It was not until Nancy ran into “a friend whom [she] just happened to see while [she] was shopping in downtown Richmond” that she was informed about the public schools closing. “Prince Edward County was really not on my radar . . . When you leave school, your life takes a different turn.”

After graduating from Longwood College, Nancy taught at Thomas Dale High School in Chesterfield, Virginia. One year later, she married her high school sweetheart and became Nancy Mae Fawcett on September 3, 1960. Once they were married, Nancy and her husband Louis Raymond Fawcett, traveled all over the East Coast, while he completed his master’s degree. And yet, Nancy would find herself back in Farmville, Virginia seven years later with her husband.

Upon Nancy’s return, she was offered a position as a teacher in the Prince Edward County Public Schools. “I received a letter from the superintendent of schools, inquiring about my interest in teaching in the school system.” She was also informed that the new school would be ninety-five percent black and five percent white.

Nancy decided to put her growing family first. “We had a six-month-old little girl, and I replied that I was not interested in a teaching position.” Even though Nancy did not take the position, she followed the public schools’ progress and supported them completely.

Nancy’s family left Farmville in 1967 and headed to Blacksburg, Virginia. While they were away, her husband received his Ph.D. in Physics at Virginia Tech. By the time the family returned to Farmville in 1970, the public schools had been open for six years.

Both of Nancy’s children, Monique and Louis Raymond Jr., attended Prince Edward County Public Schools. Nancy never had second thoughts about sending her children to the private school; she had always “supported the public schools.”

With her children’s education in mind and her passion for public education, Nancy grew fascinated with the idea of being a part of the school board. In 1984, Nancy was able to get her name to the school board selection committee, and this committee sent her name to the Board of Supervisors. To her satisfaction, Nancy was selected to the Prince Edward County School Board and she served two terms, resulting in eight years on the board.

During her time, Nancy served under Superintendent James M. Anderson. Nancy remembers Dr. Anderson “as one of the best superintendents [Farmville] has ever had.” He simply, “respected everybody.” Nancy remembers how he was able to “talk and form agreements with all segments of the community. [Dr. Anderson] was strict in many ways, but he was fair . . . he just knew how to do his job and get good results.”

The biggest challenge with the public schools during Nancy’s time on the school board was funding. She recalls that the county was focused on funding two schools. She states, “they [thought] about the academy, even though they didn’t fund the academy.” Since most of the members of the Board of Supervisors had ties to Prince Edward Academy, they were highly invested in it and not the public schools.

Nancy and her husband Raymond in their Farmville home.
A Different Route in Education

Text by Katie Barnum
Photos by Mark Kuhnke

“I was the guy that looked at you and examined you, [felt] your pulse and [looked] for something. I’m the guy that put the toe tag on your toe.”

Charlie Taylor, triage specialist, stands with Army doctor.

Charlie was born in Farmville, Virginia in 1939. He attended the segregated schools in Prince Edward County. Following his junior year at R. R. Moton High School, he traveled to Atlantic City, New Jersey for the summer of 1959 to work as a dishwasher. He knew he could earn more money up North than he could by staying and working as a dishwasher at Longwood College. Near the end of the summer, “I hadn’t communicated with any of my family for almost two and a half to three months.”

When Charlie returned home to Farmville in the fall, his adopted parents sat him down to tell him the schools had closed. “I was stunned — in a state of shock.”

Through the efforts of Rev. L. Francis Griffin of First Baptist Church and the Rev. A.I. Dunlap of Beulah AME Church, “I had the opportunity to go to Kittrell [Junior College]; I didn’t have to go. That was one of the options provided for us by the church and it was a great opportunity.” Rev. A. I. Dunlap had contacted Kittrell Junior College, located in Henderson, North Carolina, in the fall of 1959 to see if any of the seniors from Moton could attend and finish their final year of high school there at the college. Not only did they allow some of the seniors to attend, but Kittrell also opened their doors to some of the juniors and sophomores from Moton.

While at Kittrell, Charlie longed to be on the basketball team. “I found out that I couldn’t play for the basketball team because it was a college athletic program and high school players...
 weren’t allowed to play [college sports].” Even though they would not allow him to play on the team, they still allowed him the opportunity to be part of the team. “They made me the trainer/manager so I could be associated with [them].” Allowing him to be the trainer/manager also granted him the chance to come back to Kittrell the following year on a scholarship as a college student to play basketball. 

Charlie completed his freshman year at Kittrell College in 1961. He then traveled back to Atlantic City, New Jersey to work for the summer. Rather than returning to Kittrell in the fall for his sophomore year, he married his first wife and soon after a daughter, his first of three children, was born. Finding out he was going to be a father was a motivating factor for him to go into the military. “I decided that if I was going to take care of my family, I needed something more concrete than the dishwashing. . . . We had nothing [in Farmville] to prepare [us] for that . . . I chose to go into the military.” On January 2, 1961, Charlie enlisted in the U.S. Army.

“When I went into the Army, they [gave us] a test” to determine one’s aptitude for a career path in the Army. “[As students at Moton], we weren’t taught on the same level [as white kids] . . . we were two grade [levels] below what the white kids [were] learning, but the test [the Army gave] was based on [the level at which] the white kids were learning.”

The results of the initial Army test Charlie took, along with prior experience working in hospital settings in Farmville and Atlantic City, were instrumental in guiding his career path in the Army. “I ended up in the medical field saving lives.” He was sent to Fort Knox, Kentucky for his basic training. Following Fort Knox, he was sent to advanced medical training at Fort Sam Houston in San Antonio, Texas.

Once his two years of enlistment were up, Charlie left the Army. A few months later, two of his children developed severe eczema and needed medical treatment he was unable to afford. “I went down and volunteered to go back into the Army . . . the only military slot that was available to me was in Fort Sill, Oklahoma.”

In 1966, Charlie was deployed to Vietnam with the 2nd Battalion, 27th Infantry Division as a corpsman and eventually was made a battalion triage specialist. Charlie recalled one particular day when he was examining a truckload of injured soldiers. While examining one of the injured soldiers, he was unable to find a pulse. Being unable to detect any vital signs, Charlie placed a toe tag on the soldier and put him in a body bag for grave registration. He moved on to another injured soldier. Shortly after, the body bag began to move. Charlie unzipped the bag to find the soldier was, in fact, alive. He responded to the soldier saying, “Sorry about that.” The soldier’s pulse had been so low that Charlie could not feel it. That was when he learned that patients who are in a state of shock may have vital signs that are hard to detect.

In retrospect, Charlie says the decisions of life and death did not bother him as much as not being able to go to school. “Any time you have a tragedy in your life and you’re able to get through it, when the next one comes along, you’re sort of ready for it, in a way.”

While in the Army, Charlie served one tour in Hawaii, two tours in Vietnam and two tours in Germany. He spent 14 years at the Walter Reed Army Institute of Research where he was the senior non-commissioned officer of the Division of Neurology in the Department of Psychiatry. As part of his military career, he taught race relations classes in Vietnam. He was a special advisor to General H. Norman Schwarzkopf and was a research assistant to Colonel Larry Ingraham — both opportunities gave him the chance to explore his own past and the impact of racial issues in America.

Following his military career, he worked for 20 years at Eastern State Hospital in Williamsburg, Virginia. Charlie worked with people who had been diagnosed with mental retardation, mental illness and those who had substance abuse issues. During his time at Eastern State Hospital, he got to travel throughout the United States and to Canada to present programs about psychosocial rehabilitation and multicultural relationships. Now retired from the hospital, Charlie still volunteers there and helps with hard-to-reach patients.

Charlie has been a member of the R. R. Moton Museum Board for over 13 years. Coming back to Farmville to work with the Moton Museum has allowed him to come full circle. He is a firm believer that he has an opportunity to help right the wrongs of the past. One of Charlie’s favorite quotes is that of an unknown author who said, “Historians would agree that any time an accurate account of American history is written or told [it is] by those who lived [it].”
Mr. Gregory Hicks grew up on a farm in Rice, Virginia, about five miles east of Farmville. Gregory’s life has always revolved around transportation and travel. In fact, Gregory’s lifelong dream was to be a race car driver, while his father wanted him to go to school and study to be an attorney.

He and his siblings attended school in the Prince Edward County Public School system. When the schools closed, it came as a huge surprise to Gregory. He stayed on the farm for a few years and worked. Soon, however, he became involved in helping the children of the county to continue their education through his skill in transportation. Because of the vehicles he drove on his family’s farm, Gregory was able to transport children to the grassroots schools. Gregory remembers he “would attend the class still at High Rock, [a school that was in a church], but I was then transporting the kids from the High Bridge vicinity to High Bridge Church which was a school as well. But then I was coming to High Rock, I would pick up their lunches from High Bridge and High Rock and go to Meherrin up here or Warsaw was another school.” Gregory attended High Rock until the public schools reopened.

While the schools were closed, Gregory constantly made an effort to get the schools reopened in any way he could, including participating in the demonstrations that occurred in Farmville. Gregory participated in the picket line around the State Movie Theater on Fourth Street in July 1963, which he remembered as being a peaceful, not violent protest. To prepare for the demonstration, they were told to remain peaceful, that they were “a symbol.” Gregory felt that the experience at the age of fifteen was “exciting but yet fulfilling a purpose.”

Before the county’s public schools reopened, the students went through the process of being evaluated and tested into the appropriate grade level. Gregory tested into the tenth grade. This was the grade level that he would have been in had the schools not closed. Gregory continued his love of driving as he was asked to drive the school buses once again when the county’s public schools reopened.

Though the transition back to school was easy for Gregory, he continued to feel animosity from white teenagers of the county. “I used to carry . My brother had given me a double barrel shotgun. And I used to drive a ’56 Chevrolet at that time with a bench seat. So right in front of my seat is where I kept that . I can remember [white] people calling names on a few occasions where I had to put my double barrel up in my window, roll my window down, and put it up. And they would disperse, get scared, whatever, but that was those days.”

The town was filled with an animosity that Gregory says is like no other: “It’s kind of like being hated. I don’t know how else
“It’s kind of like being hated. I don’t know how else to tell you but that’s kinda what the reaction was.”

to tell you but that’s kinda what the reaction was from whites. They hated you. They hated you because you were black.” Gregory said he doesn’t feel any hatred or animosity himself towards white people because he understands that “they [didn’t] know what they [were] doing.”

After Gregory graduated in 1968, he moved to northern New Jersey where he worked in a factory, became a mechanic, and was eventually offered a job driving a tractor trailer. He was hired as a driver even though he was too young for the job. His boss hired him because he felt that he possessed the knowledge and willingness necessary to carry out the job.

During his early time in the trucking business, Gregory hauled extra goods for companies on the side. This part of his career was all cash deliveries, which required him to figure out his own invoices and taxes, along with how much money he himself would get from the cash delivery. He also learned all of the zip codes for the different delivery places as he traveled the East Coast.

Eventually, Gregory came back to Virginia in 1985 and began his own convenience store called “U-Stop-U-Save,” in addition to his own trucking business in 1990. He continued both businesses for nine years, closing his store in 1999 when he decided it was better to just focus on his own trucking business.

Through his travels over the years, up and down the East Coast and throughout the Midwest, Gregory has realized that “there’s no place like when you go into public places of business here in Virginia, I mean in Prince Edward County. And you [have] other areas of Virginia that [are] very similar but this, this is the worst. And why, is because of hate, is my only description.”

Gregory believes that in Prince Edward “it’s really a situation where change comes about upon death.”

Though Gregory was not afforded the resources to fulfill his dream of becoming a professional race car driver, he did become a professional driver. After years of working in a factory and later as a mechanic, Gregory had the opportunity to begin driving a tractor trailer and transporting goods. Since then, Gregory has branched out from the company that offered him his first job as a driver. Today, he remains the sole proprietor in his trucking business.
Away From Home

“We were away from home, and we made the best of it.”

Text by Kristen Hall

At the end of the school year in 1959, Mrs. Phyllistine (Ward) Mosley and her basketball teammates at R. R. Moton High School were told to clean out their lockers. This was the first hint of what was soon to come. There had been rumors of the schools in Prince Edward County shutting down. Phyllistine finished her sophomore year, and the county announced the schools would not reopen in the fall.

Phyllistine was born on Ely Street, now Griffin Boulevard, in Farmville and lived there until she was six. Her family then moved to Main Street in Farmville. Main Street looked much different then. Most of the buildings and businesses are gone, replaced with parking lots and buildings for Longwood University. Her family was surrounded by businesses owned by African-Americans and was able to get everything they needed. She knew whites lived around her, but she did not feel the effects of discrimination on a daily basis.

Phyllistine lived on “Baptist Hill.” On one side of her house was Janie Wiley’s Boarding Home, where African-American teachers boarded. On the other side of Phyllistine’s house was Ida Brown’s Tourist Home – a house with rooms to rent for African-Americans visiting Farmville or traveling south. Other black-owned businesses were Mr. Burnell Coles’ Store, Mrs. Mata McKnight’s Service Station and Restaurant, Paige Walker-Reginald White’s Master Cleaner and the offices of Dr. Albert Rawls, Dr. John Baker, and Dr. N. P. Miller.

“We were never exposed to [discrimination] – meaning that we were never put into the position that we were [excluded] – because we had the black businesses to go to. My father Phillip worked at Longwood and my mother Doris was a nurse at the hospital, so we were provided a lot of things. And we knew we couldn’t go over to the white school, and we knew if we wanted to go to the local movie theater, we had to go upstairs to sit the balcony. . . . [Y]ou knew where you couldn’t go, so we were never put into that position to have the racial slurs because we knew where we were supposed to be. We went to school here with what we had available, and we made the most of that.”

Phyllistine’s father, Phillip Madison Ward, was a third generation baker at Longwood College. Phillip Madison Ward followed his father, Charles Bledsoe Ward, who followed his father Phillip Alexander Ward. Phyllistine’s great-grandfather,
Phillip Alexander was enslaved on a plantation in Amelia County prior to the Civil War. In 1934, Phillip Alexander was recognized for fifty years of service at the State Teachers College, now Longwood University.

Whenever Phyllistine and her siblings were able, they would go upstairs to the dining hall to see her father. She would look out of the kitchen to see how the girls were served. She saw family-style meals with waiters and students receiving what they requested from the kitchen. Together, Phillip Alexander (great-grandfather), Charles (grandfather), and Phillip Madison (father) gave 121 years of service to the Longwood College Dining Service.

Education was important to Phyllistine and her family; so when she and her brother got the opportunity to finish high school, they took it. Phyllistine traveled with and without her parents to other states to visit family; this gave her confidence when deciding to continue her education. “I think by me being able to travel, and go, and leave home without my parents that was bad – to close the schools, to lock us out.” She and her classmates did not want to miss out on anything while they were at Kittrell. They even organized a Hawaiian-themed prom. “We wanted the same high school experience and activities as if we were at home, at our home school Moton. We didn’t want to miss out.”

After her brother Ronald graduated from Kittrell, Phyllistine took an opportunity given by the American Friends Service Committee (AFSC), a Quaker civil rights organization. The AFSC set up an Emergency Placement Project in Prince Edward County to assign students host families across the country so they were able to attend school and receive their high school diploma. She traveled to Yellow Springs, Ohio with five other students from Prince Edward. She lived with the Ruopp, a Quaker family. Phillip Ruopp, the father, was a professor at Antioch College and Frankie, the mother, was a homemaker who stayed home and took care of all the kids. “Julia, Douglas, Charlie, and Rebecca were the four children, and then I became the fifth child.” Phyllistine enjoyed her time in Ohio, where she graduated from Bryan High School.

Yellow Springs, Ohio was a small village, much smaller than Farmville. “The community came together to raise funds to purchase bicycles for us and to provide extra funds for any other community activities.” She was among the few African-Americans in her graduating class. “It was just regular everyday school life: going to school, coming home, doing our homework, doing chores.” The school she attended in Ohio was integrated.

“There was no tension, no difference in being away from home. . . . The African-American community and the white community embraced us.” Phyllistine is still in touch with the Ruopp family today.

After high school, Phyllistine continued her education at Bennett College in Greensboro, North Carolina, where she obtained a bachelor’s degree in home economics. She also earned a master’s degree in Adult Education from Virginia Tech. She worked as an Extension Agent for 30 years before retiring 20 years ago. In 2004, Phyllistine was able to reconnect with the students affected by the closing of the schools when she was appointed by Governor Mark Warner to the Board of Education Scholarship Committee.

Phyllistine has compared her own education experience with Massive Resistance to the Manumission Law of 1806. “My great-great-grandfather Beverly had twelve children and eight of them were emancipated in April 1805 from a plantation in Amelia County. Once I got into the history of the Civil War . . . I realized in some of the readings and research that if a slave was freed, they had to leave the state of Virginia within two years once they were emancipated. In 1959, Prince Edward School Board closed the schools because of Massive Resistance and we had to leave the state of Virginia to receive our education. That’s how I compared it because it’s the freedom of education – the freedom of being free.”

On June 15, 2003, Phyllistine received her Honorary Diploma from R. R. Moton High School. “I thought that was the greatest thing the Prince Edward County School Board could possibly do; that I could get my diploma from Robert Russa Moton High School – purple and gold diploma. It’s because that’s where I was supposed to go to school, and I was supposed to finish high school there. We still had property, and we hadn’t moved.” For Phyllistine, receiving her honorary diploma from Moton was a “final closure.”
“You learn from your mistakes in the past and you move forward and you try to make them better,” says a hopeful Scott Harwood, working to reconcile differences in his community, more than fifty years after public education was reinstated in Prince Edward County. Mr. Harwood is the owner of Harwood and Son Insurance, a member of the Farmville Chamber of Commerce, and one of the thousands of Prince Edward County residents who was barred from receiving a public education between the years 1959 and 1964.

Scott was a rising junior at Farmville High School in 1959. For his last two years of school, he attended Prince Edward Academy, a private school for whites in the area founded when the schools closed. The academy held classes in fifteen different buildings, including many local churches. Farmville Presbyterian Church was one of those churches.

“In 1959, my dad told me we weren’t going to Farmville High School anymore. We were going to the Sunday school building of the Presbyterian Church to continue our education.” The building that Harwood spent most of his time in during those years was a brand new addition to the church.

He said, “All the classrooms were nice, well-lit, and they had a big parking lot. Back then I had a car, so I would just drive down, park in the parking lot and we’d go to the Presbyterian Church all day and then go home. It was almost the same as going to a regular school.”

Despite the segregated institutions in town, blacks and whites were not entirely separated from one another. He often played with children of both races during his childhood. “This was in the 1950s, and we didn’t have social media. We had a little neighborhood, and that was our whole world,” he said.

“This was in the 1950s and we didn’t have social media. We had a little neighborhood and that was our whole world.”
“I lived on First Avenue, and Race Street and Griffin Boulevard, which was then Ely Street, were a block away. So you couldn’t help but run into other kids, and they would come over, come to my house, play in the basement. We played games together.”

Scott fondly shares memories of going to a black family-owned restaurant nearby his school and home. Mr. and Mrs. Dean’s Luncheonette sat on the corner of Ely and Redford Street and is now Sprague’s Barber Shop. Many high school students went there for lunch to avoid cafeteria food. “Every day they knew you by name. They’d say, ‘What’ll you have, Scott?’ It was my first time having a hot dog with mayonnaise and relish on it and that’s the way [Mrs. Dean] fixed it.”

“Sprague’s Barbershop, located on Griffin Boulevard, is the former Mr. and Mrs. Dean’s Luncheonette.”

Unfortunately, Scott stopped going to the restaurant. “It might have been my sophomore year. We were walking across First Avenue from school and three or four of the seniors, football players, were lined up in the street shouting, ‘Don’t go over to the Deans. We’re not going there anymore.’ I walked up to one of them and asked why. He responded, ‘They’re big people in the NAACP. We’re not going to do anything with them anymore.’” Scott explained, “That’s just the way it was back then. The big seniors tell you don’t go there anymore, you aren’t going there, especially if they’re football players.”

Scott’s parents would often discuss the people they knew who had become part of the NAACP. “My parents . . . believed in states’ rights back then, and they thought this . . . was an issue of states’ rights. They thought the states had a right to decide if they should integrate. And they didn’t want the federal government to force anything down their throats and this is what I grew up with.”

However, Scott recalled, his parents were never very involved with the politics of the school closings. “My dad was more interested in playing golf and going hunting and his little insurance business.”

In 1961, when Scott graduated, it was not in the anticipated Farmville High School, but rather in a church-turned-classroom. In the years that followed, he graduated from Hampden-Sydney College, moved on to be an Air Force captain, and later returned to Farmville to assume his father’s insurance business.

Despite having attended segregated schools his whole life, the integrated atmosphere of the Air Force didn’t bother him. “It just never did affect me. I think it was from my youth having black friends that I played with.” He said, “We’re all here to do the same job.” He said, “It didn’t seem that unusual for me to work alongside of or be friends with black people.”

This perspective has stayed with Scott throughout his time in Farmville. He participated as a co-chair for a community event “seven or eight years ago” called the Reconciliation Project. The group consisted of approximately fifteen others who had gone through the school closures.

Brought together by a journalist named Sara Fritz from Washington D.C. who wanted to write a book about Prince Edward County, the group met monthly to discuss the school closings, gain closure and ultimately forgiveness. He said, “There was a lot of resentment and bitterness there. The moderator and facilitator asked us each to tell our story, and I told mine. Basically, I didn’t have, obviously, the hardships my black colleagues had.

“T’ll never forget, one of the women in that group, a black woman, she came up to me and she grabbed my hand after the meeting. She said, ‘Mr. Harwood, I have never heard a white person’s story about Prince Edward County and thank you for saying what you said.’ Well, we all got to talking to each other and became close friends, and we all understood, and we tried to take that back to the community.” Unfortunately, Fritz died before the project was able to be completed, but Scott believes it still helped all of those who were a part of it.

Scott reflected, “Prince Edward County has come a long way, but we still have things to accomplish.” He said, “There’s still resentment, and there’s still some things that have to be addressed. I’ve been a firm believer all my life that if you got a problem, you got to talk it out with somebody. And the other thing is you got to learn from your mistakes in the past. I think there’s been need for that in Prince Edward County.”

Scott sitting in his office at his company Harwood & Son Insurance.
“I Could Not Be Held Back”

Text by Ann Sisson Photos by Lindsay Manning

On August 28, 1963, more than 200,000 Americans congregated at the Lincoln Memorial in Washington, D.C., to demand equality and jobs.

Mrs. Elsie (Robinson) Walker was one of the many who witnessed this memorable event. “It was a hot day,” she said. “We rode the bus to D.C., started at [the] Washington Monument where there was a lot of singing by different artists. And then we walked to the Lincoln Memorial to hear talks and speeches by civil rights leaders – ending with hearing Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. give his I Have a Dream speech. I went to voice my opinion for equal rights, improvement of economic conditions, and education for all by participating in the March.”

Before the March on Washington, Elsie participated in many sit-ins, marches, and protests in downtown Farmville earlier that summer. “Several of us lived in Prospect, Virginia – about 10 miles west of Farmville. Many days we started walking to Farmville until someone would stop and pick us up and take us [there]. We were determined to make a difference.”

Elsie (Robinson) Walker proudly holds her high school graduation photograph.

Elsie trained with “the fighting preacher” Rev. L. Francis Griffin, pastor of First Baptist Church. “We found out his fight was with words, peaceful but strong. Firm words that reaped results,” she said. Griffin would teach them how to protest without conflict. “Rev. Griffin met with us in training sessions on demonstrating peacefully, picketing, boycotting, and carrying signs. Rev. Goodwin Douglas, another one of the leaders helping with training sessions, told us that we did not have to just sit and accept what was going on, but we had to do things peacefully.”

Reflecting on a photograph taken of her from a protest in downtown Farmville, Elsie said, “One of these [pictures] is kind of funny because it says ‘Elsie Robinson standing on the street corner.’ You know that’s the way they said it, standing on the street corner. But you know actually what is funny about these pictures is that we did not know they were taking these pictures. . . . Prince Edward Police Department had [photographers] to take the pictures just in case, so [the police] would have something on us. But they couldn’t get anything on us.”

Elsie Robinson participates in a protest at the State Theatre on Fourth Street in 1963. (VCU Libraries Freedom Now Project)
The protest began by a group of young people who would demonstrate by interrupting the daily routine of many whites. “We tried to sit at the counters at J.J. Newberry’s to eat in, and buy a ticket to be allowed to enter the movie theater,” Elsie described. “Each day we met and got instructions for the day. We could not just go out into the street; we were sent out in groups and given instructions. We had other help also.”

Elsie explained how the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee, an organization formed by college students in 1960 to help develop grassroots leaders to challenge segregation, came to Farmville to help demonstrators learn how to handle certain situations. “We were never to fight back if arrested but just to sit down and never talk back. We just wanted our equal rights, eating inside restaurants, or [sitting] where we wanted to at the movies,” Elsie said. “We were never to fight back if arrested but just to sit down and never talk back. We just wanted our equal rights, eating inside restaurants, or [sitting] where we wanted to sit at the movies, “We were never to fight back if arrested but just to sit down and never talk back. We just wanted our equal rights, eating inside restaurants, or [sitting] where we wanted to sit at the movies,” Elsie said. “We were never to fight back if arrested but just to sit down and never talk back. We just wanted our equal rights, eating inside restaurants, or [sitting] where we wanted to sit at the movies,” Elsie said. “We were never to fight back if arrested but just to sit down and never talk back. We just wanted our equal rights, eating inside restaurants, or [sitting] where we wanted to sit at the movies,” Elsie said. “We were never to fight back if arrested but just to sit down and never talk back. We just wanted our equal rights, eating inside restaurants, or [sitting] where we wanted to sit at the movies.”

The second year of the school closings, Elsie’s parents rented a house with two other families in Appomattox, Virginia, so they could start school again. Shortly after beginning school in Appomattox, they were given terrible news. The home was literally on the county line of Prince Edward and Appomattox County; the kitchen was in Appomattox and the bedrooms were in Prince Edward. They were not allowed to continue attending school. “After two months we were put out of school again,” Elsie says. She did not attend school the following year either.

In 1961, Berea College’s Foundation School in Kentucky opened its doors for six high school students; Elsie was one of the six to further their education. “I wasn’t there long and they called me into the Dean’s office and told me they guess someone didn’t fill out all of the paperwork, but you have to be in ninth grade to go there and that I would have to go back home. Then one of the professors said, ‘Why don’t we just let her take the test?’ So I took the test and I passed the test, so I was able to skip the 8th grade. I ended up on the Dean’s list.” During her time at Berea, she said, “It was hard being so far away from my family. I only got to see them at Christmas during the school year but got a lot of letters and care packages.”

One Christmas break, Elsie had a school friend stay with her family. “At that time, there was always a game of checkers set up to be played with my grandfather whenever someone wanted to play, black or white.” Elsie and her friend were playing in the store. Someone reported a white girl in the store. The police came. “They asked questions, got the girl’s parents’ phone number and wanted to take her with them, so they could make sure her parents knew she was staying with a black family. My dad would not have that. She stayed. The police left.”

Today, Elsie notes “the big block of wood is still there. You know they don’t come and play checkers there anymore because everybody, you know, just assumes to come and go.”

On September 16, 1963, the Prince Edward Free Schools opened. “It was kind of rushed to get the schools opened. They only had about three weeks to do it, but it happened. Neil Sullivan, [the Free Schools Superintendent], came and within three weeks, he had buses, drivers, and teachers in place and ready. My mother was the first woman bus driver for the school.”

Elsie left Berea and was able to return home to complete the 11th grade in the Prince Edward Free Schools. The following year, because of the U.S. Supreme Court ruling in Griffin v. County School Board of Prince Edward, public schools reopened on September 8, 1964 after five long years. This allowed Elsie to return and graduate from her original school. “My class was the first class to graduate from the public school after they reopened.”

“There was never any hate within my heart,” says Elsie reflecting back on that era. “I did not like what had gone on, but I always felt that I was as important as anyone. In a way, I guess I could feel sorry for those who felt differently because I, as a Black, could not be held back. I knew then and still know that God is with me, and He will always show me the way.”
“I made it. I kept it all to myself and kept going.”

In 1964, reflecting back, Chuckie realizes the strikes are connected now, but he was too young to remember the 1951 strike at that time.

Mr. Robinson’s firing in 1969 was the last straw for the students. “[He] was well known in the community too, by students . . . When the problem came up that they wanted to get rid of him, that’s when we all banded together and said, ‘This is not going to happen.’” Mr. Robinson, in addition to being a dedicated teacher in the classroom, often spent time outside of school helping students with lessons and information about college.

“He was a very good teacher . . . [and] we thought it was unfair because of the fact that he took time with the black students. He took time with [all of the] students period, but he also associated with us after school.” This strike was to get the word out.

Chuckie knew about getting the right information out. He was already a part of a group that started a newsletter entitled
Chuckie stood with other church elders and leaders as they prayed a blessing at First Baptist Church in Farmville, Va.

Chuckie had many other strong figures in his life, such as his grandmother Lucille Reid. “[She was] a large figure [in the CRASH program] because of the fact she was involved with [First Baptist]. She was well known: ‘Everyone called her Grandma Cille.” Chuckie’s mother and father split up when he was young, and his brothers moved to Ohio and New York, but they still were constant figures in his life.

Just four years later during the summer of 1963, students and citizens organized demonstrations to protest discrimination at the movie theater, department stores, and continued closing of public schools. Citizens of many ages gathered at First Baptist Church in downtown Farmville to make signs and learn nonviolent means of protest from Rev. Griffin and others. “I was the one in the office making the signs.”

Chuckie recalled also cleaning, running errands, and the other jobs that he did for the minister at the church. These tasks allowed him to be around Rev. Griffin and absorb the leadership abilities the minister had. “I just . . . ended up hanging around the church, and I was close to the family,” Chuckie said. “[Rev. Griffin] was somebody you could talk to, and I always ended up talking to him.”

Upon returning from the Air Force, he was encouraged to join the town leadership. “Community leaders . . . talked to me and said, ‘Why don’t you think about running for office?’” He started out as a town council representative and was happy to do so. “My ward at the time was where [I] lived [which was] Race Street [and the adjacent] Griffin Boulevard [and] Hill Street.” This area meant that he was representing “home” for Farmville Town Council. Chuckie later became Farmville’s first black vice-mayor and has now been with local government for 30 years.

Throughout his tenure in town council, Chuckie has worked alongside the relatives of the people who had closed the schools. “When you are sitting around the table [at work] and you hear all these . . . people sitting around . . . and you hear certain names [of some people and think] ‘Man, they were the ones that kept me out of school.’ You always wonder what was what . . . but I made it. I kept it all to myself and just kept going.”

One of the activities in Chuckie’s life that still keeps him going is music. A musician at heart, if it weren’t for the school closings, he would have attended college on a music scholarship. Even though he was awarded financial aid to St. Augustine University in Raleigh, North Carolina for music, he turned it down because he felt he wasn’t prepared for college. “[There were] quite a few of us that . . . from being out of school . . . just felt you couldn’t handle it . . . [We were] just scared to go.” He decided to enter the Air Force.

Today, he plays keyboard in The Royal Supremes, a local gospel group that has been around for 38 years. Chuckie has been with them for 30 and has also worked for the U.S. Postal Service for 25 years.
Blue solemnly looks back on his experience with the school closings.

**The Untold Walkout**

Text by Rachel Love

“*We felt like he was a good teacher, but they said he was incompetent.*”

Blue and others decided enough was enough. On April 21, 1969, Mr. Edward Morton – “Blue” as his friends called him – helped organize a two-day demonstration. There were multiple reasons why the demonstration had to happen. Those reasons had piled up for years as the schools had been underfunded despite being reopened since 1964.

In 1953, a new R. R. Moton High School opened with a cafeteria, gymnasium, and auditorium, but school supplies like books and science equipment were still low. Although the building was 16 years old, they still had to use the football field at the old high school. There were no lights and the fence around the field was falling down. “We wanted football lights on the football field, better equipment, better books. We wanted the school upgraded. The main thing was better materials for the teacher[s].”

The first day April 21, the students held a sit-in at the auditorium of Moton High School. Nearly 300 students came to sit-in, about half the student body. The second day, April 22, the students walked out of school and marched almost three miles down Route 15 to the Prince Edward County Courthouse in downtown Farmville.

Blue reminisced how it all came about. “I was really just talking about it . . . the strike wasn’t going to be because kids just talk. And then I got to school the next morning and another student came up to me and said, ‘Is it still on?’ I said, ‘Yeah.’ So we decided we [were] going do it . . . It was nonviolent. All we did was sing a song, went down, sit at the courthouse, and we let them know what we wanted.”

Text by Rachel Love

Photos by Zane Bolen
Blue sits in the same place on the Farmville, Va., courthouse steps as he did in 1969.

Another reason for the strike was the wrongful termination of Mr. Thomas Burwell Robinson, an English teacher at the high school. Six days before the strike, Mr. Robinson received notice that his contract would not be renewed for the next year. "We felt like he was a good teacher, but they said he was incompetent." The second day of the strike, Mr. Robinson was let go for the remainder of the current term, for being a "disruptive influence on education." In the end, the students did not get what they wanted, but they "made a statement."

According to the April 26, 1969 issue of the Richmond Times-Dispatch, the Prince Edward Public School Board closed schools again after the two-day strike. The school board needed to meet to discuss the demonstrations and what to do next.

This was not the first time the schools were closed for Blue. As a rising fifth grader, Blue was excited to attend school in Farmville. It would mean he would move from his elementary school in Hampden Sydney to the school a few miles away in Farmville, but all that changed when the Board of Supervisors decided to shut down public schools.

During the first three years of the school closings, Blue played ball, worked on a farm, and played school. "We'd have, like, spelling contests, math and stuff like that together. And we just played school, you know, we didn't go to school, so we just played school." After three years of waiting for schools to open, Blue had the opportunity to move to Pennsylvania with his sister to go to school. But it wasn't to be there either. He was not allowed to attend because "they didn't have the paperwork together."

In 1964, Blue returned to Farmville, finishing his education at the new R. R. Moton High School when the schools reopened. Blue and his friends quickly realized that just because the schools re-opened did not mean everything was back to normal. Blacks still were considered outcasts, even though they were the majority of the school's population; teachers did not treat them with respect, but teachers also weren't provided with adequate supplies to teach.

Following the strike, Blue still fought for what he wanted. His good friend Chuckie Reid put together a team, of which Blue was a part, that started a grassroots newspaper called THE VOICE. The paper circulated around the surrounding counties and covered information similar to a regular newspaper. Blue was the sports editor.

In 1969, R. R. Moton High School's name was changed to Prince Edward County High School. Blue graduated in 1970 at the age of nineteen. In 2001, he received an honorary diploma from Moton High School with the dates 1959-1964.

Blue now lives in Richmond, Virginia, a larger city where he has had a 40+ year career as an educator in Richmond Public Schools. He loves working with children the most. He tells them his story and gives them encouragement to excel in school because they have a chance for the kind of education he did not.
“We were told we had an education, but what we got as an education was so inferior that it would be hard to call it an education in today’s world.”

That Wasn’t the Case

Text by Rebecca Jones

In 1959, Beverly (Bass) Hines was entering the fourth grade. However, she would not be returning to public school. Instead, she would be in a church basement that was the size of one regular classroom, holding six different grades, separated by nothing but curtains. Beverly attended fourth through sixth grade at Pisgah Baptist Church in Rice, Virginia, in eastern Prince Edward County. She then attended seventh grade in Moose Lodge 968 in Farmville, about eight miles away, before ending up at Prince Edward Academy upper school for eighth grade.

The church schooling was not much of an education by any means. Beverly, along with her classmates, arrived at school in the morning to be taught in rooms only as wide as her living room, partitioned off with curtains where the first through sixth grades were held. “Can you imagine being taught in one ‘room’ while another class was going on right beside you?” It was hard for Beverly to pay attention in class because of the amount of noise coming from each grade in that basement. On top of the noise, the students sat so closely together at tables that they felt the need to build ‘barricades’ from cardboard boxes so other students wouldn’t look at their work.

In 1964, Beverly crossed over from the seventh grade to the eighth grade in 1964, transitioning from the Farmville Moose Lodge to the upper school of Prince Edward Academy, built in 1961. “I actually remember being taught at the academy. I remember learning Latin. But what I remember the most is the TV cameras.” News crews would come to Prince Edward Academy and the town
of Farmville whenever there was a demonstration downtown. “We got out of school early on those days. Police would escort us in and out safely.”

Beverly’s father Calvin Bass was a professor at Hampden-Sydney College and also served on the Prince Edward County Public School Board. “My father was a conservative man. However, he did believe in a public education, not just for [the white kids] but for everyone.” In 1955, when he chaired the school board, Bass believed it was premature to raise money to organize private schools in the event the courts ordered the county to desegregate. His opinion was widely known and did not sit well with many white people in the community. “There would be times that [my parents] would have threats at home and they would come pick me up from school, and I wouldn’t be allowed to ride the bus.” At night, “my mother sat by the window, watching the road when dad had an evening meeting. She was so scared and so relieved when my father would make it home safely.”

The showdown came in 1960, after the public schools closed and Prince Edward Academy opened, operating in buildings around Farmville. Academy leaders desired to purchase the public school buildings and make them part of the academy. They requested the school board surplus the buildings and sell them. Fearing a tie vote in favor of the academy’s request, Calvin Bass, along with four other school board members including chairman Lester Andrews, walked out of the meeting and resigned in protest. They declared, “In its decision, the school board has been guided by the fundamental belief that education must be provided for all the school-age children of the entire county. Anything short of this we regard as contrary to the best interests of all of us in the long run” (Smith, They Closed Their Schools, 175).

Calvin Bass’ principled stand for public education caused many in the community to retaliate against his family. Beverly’s older sister was supposed to graduate from Prince Edward Academy, but the English teacher failed her because “[the teacher] was directly opposed to my father’s views.” Beverly recalls going into Farmville with her mother to go clothes shopping or to a restaurant, and the owners refused to serve them. “I’m white, so you would think that’s weird. But it’s political.” Beverly would get her clothes from a family member because she couldn’t shop comfortably in town.

Throughout all of Beverly’s years in school, she never understood what was going on within the larger community regarding the school closings. Reporters would come to her house to interview her father as well. Other citizens, especially fathers of some of the poorer families, came by to discuss what would happen to their children. However, Beverly was never told why. “The school closing was never discussed in my family. We never talked about it, so I never knew what was going on.”

It didn’t click in Beverly’s head that the reason her parents wouldn’t come to her powderpuff football games or any of her high school events was because of the school closings. “I tried to bring it up when I was in college [to my parents], but their reply was always the same: ‘It’s over, it’s done, it’s behind us.’” It wasn’t until recently that this understanding has come to light for Beverly. All those years of her mother sitting by the window, she just thought she was the nervous type. Now, Beverly understands so much more.
Make Your Own Road

John Hines has spent almost all his life in Rice, Virginia, an area located in eastern Prince Edward County known for its agricultural community. He began his schooling there, and still continues it there today. However, John does not consider the primary source of his education to be formal schooling. Rather, John looks to his family and community as the bedrock of his education.

“Prior to the ’70s . . . when I say I lived on a tobacco farm . . . [means] usually somebody . . . wealthier owned the farm and land. And you would raise tobacco for [your landowner], and give him [a share] . . . for living in his houses and farming on his land.” Often several families would live as sharecroppers on the same farm. “Nobody owned their own house. I mean it’s hard to believe, but a lot of them didn’t even have a car. All they raised were kids – kids and tobacco,” he adds with a laugh. While John was born in Farmville and lived there for part of his early childhood, he first and foremost considers himself a country man. “My Daddy was a farmer and logger . . . [and] I’d make money by staying home [too]. On a tractor . . . behind a horse . . . building a fence . . . getting up hay . . . or picking up rocks.” John also recollects milking dairy herds, using chainsaws for clear-cutting, and raising cattle.

As a child, John attended school in Rice, Virginia. After school was let out, however, country children still continued working. In order to have a meal on the table by dinnertime, he and other children would fetch firewood to coax a fire in the kitchen wood stove and pails of water for preparation of the food. But even after their work for the day was finished, they continued their time outside. This often meant going down to a nearby creek to skip rocks or horse around in the water, or by playing games like cowboys and Indians, or ones they’d make up on their own.

In a region known for its division among race, division within and between social and economic classes were also factors in the lives of citizens of Prince Edward County. When asked whether the tenants were treated differently on the basis of race or in comparison to outsiders, John reflects that he did not witness any prejudice himself. On this point, John elaborates that “in this area . . . you didn’t really socialize [with] . . . much of anyone you went to school [with].” In contrast with communication practices today aided by technology and interconnection of cultures, twentieth-century agricultural communities in this region tended to band together in mutual labor and by locality. According to his spouse Beverly (Bass) Hines, this effect was present at the local school in Rice and many others. “School kids [from the other communities] did the same . . . the children from the Prospect community, for example, were better friends . . . with others from their community.”

However, when the schools closed in 1959, all children in the county were affected in different ways. John, who ended his
formal education in the seventh grade when the schools closed, states that he was not particularly fazed by the abrupt end of his schooling. In fact, he was not particularly fond of school anyway. He considered school as time that could be better spent outside and often left early in order to help his family make a living back on the farm. Sometimes, he would “play hookie” and skip school altogether.

When asked about the closing of the schools, John is a firm believer that it did not reflect the community as a whole, but rather the “decisions made by older people that had power in the county [and] towns.” This viewpoint is consistent with sociologist Christopher Bonastia’s observation that poor or lower socio-economic class whites did not necessarily support the closing of the schools over desegregation. They were merely “shunned [and] silenced[d], creating the appearance of unanimity” when unanimity was not necessarily present (Southern Stalemate, 7).

Momentarily distracted from the seriousness of the conversation, John chuckles, as he remembers the roughly unanimity was not necessarily present (Southern Stalemate, 7).

“When you were younger and you were playing outside, or you were running around, and I was in the first and second grade, my parents pretty much had to pull me in and tie me up or something,” John’s mother states. “I did not have the best attendance record in the world.”

In one sense, John’s life philosophy served him well through the challenges he has faced in his life. He believes that while life is certain to knock you down, you’ve got to be ready and willing to get back up, and “every time you make a mistake, you’re learning from it.” Even though families and individuals experienced a wide array of pressures that limited their ability to pursue an education, John’s perspective remains innately positive. “I still believe that you can survive in this world without having a college education, if [you’re] a self-motivated, go-getter, you know what I mean? . . . It’s all in the person.”

A common argument today is that opportunity and familial culture are two factors essential to the success of a child’s education. John champions this notion when he states that “support from one’s parents makes as much a difference as morals . . . and hard work.” However, John is firm in his stance that anyone can move on and still make a life for themselves. John believes that it’s all in the mindset a person chooses to wake up with and live out daily. Speaking up then, Beverly states that her father, Calvin Bass, a life-long educator, had said, “that very attitude . . . would’ve ruined [John]” in traditional education. Nodding, John adds, “I wasn’t the only one [to make a good life] . . . regardless I think people make their own road to travel, and I still think [with] today’s kids . . . [that view] doesn’t change with time.”

At the same time, John recognizes that during the years the schools were closed, staying home with no ability for further schooling was some children’s only choice. For John, whose own father did not receive formal education, this notion was reinforced when children he knew personally were rendered unable to continue their education ever again.

Several of John’s younger siblings were in first and second grade when the schools closed and would neither return to further their skills nor finish their education. For other children, though, education was not a part of their socio-economic culture. Rock, one of John’s closest friends, has a family permanently inhibited from considering any further education at all. Several of the seven children in Rock’s family never returned to school when it reopened and never learned more than basic reading and writing skills. The circumstances of John’s life have a lot to do with the timing of the school closing in relation to his age and educational background. Either out of circumstance of age or circumstance of class, many children in Prince Edward County would be affected irrevocably by the closing.

While John serves as an example of a person who made a life out of what he was given, he also acknowledges that others were not so fortunate, and “the ones that didn’t have an education . . . [were] limited . . . to what they could do.”

Even though the five-year educational gap in Prince Edward County was a negative time period and event for many, it was not this way for everyone. The skills and self-reliant perspective that John learned as a child on the farm prepared him to earn a living in agriculture, and eventually to serve in the Vietnam War between 1965-1967 as a supervisor of repairs and maintenance of heavy equipment and vehicles. After his military discharge, John returned home and translated the skills he learned and experiences he had in the military into a future as an entrepreneur and owner of his own logging company, John Hines Logging and John Hines Trucking, LLC. For John, his life experiences were his higher education.

“It doesn’t have to come from somebody trying to teach it to you. I think you can teach yourself a lot. And it all depends on if you wake up one morning and decide you’re gonna pull your bootstraps . . . and [say] we’re gonna do something about it . . . I think you can make what you want to make, regardless of your education.”
My Driving Force

Text by Austin Olson

“I can remember going home crying and asking my mother why the bus was not coming. She said to me, crying herself, ‘The bus is not coming today or tomorrow. The schools are closed.’ I never will forget that day as long as I live.”

Warren Brown as co-captain of his basketball team in 1971.

The schools are closed. I never will forget that day as long as I live.

Like many children who grew up in the late 1950’s and early 1960’s in Farmville, Warren was denied the benefits of a public education for five years. In the summer of 1963, he attended classes in the basement of First Baptist Church in Farmville, but his education was limited to learning the alphabet and how to spell his name.

When the schools finally did reopen in 1963 and Warren was able to attend, the system became confusing. In an effort to meet the students’ various needs, Superintendent Neil Sullivan and the teachers of the Free Schools developed a progressive placement system, of testing students and placing them by ability level in the subject rather than grade or age.

“Mass confusion. It was right here: mass confusion and basically once they opened, I was confused through my whole high school career. To this day, I don’t even know what grade they put me in to start out.” This confusion caused distress and anger in him. Warren had one reprieve in school: sports. Throughout high school he played basketball, baseball, and football. “That was my driving force. If it wasn’t for sports, I probably wouldn’t have stayed in school.” In fact, playing sports eventually led to Warren’s success.

During his senior year, Warren was offered scholarships by three separate schools to play basketball: Longwood College, the College of Saint Benedict, and St. Mitchell College. He turned them down for fear of failure. Eventually, he ended up working security at Powhatan Correctional Facility in Powhatan, Virginia, where he taught himself vocabulary and grammar. “I kept a pocket dictionary with me, and I would start from A to Z. And it taught me pronunciations and all kinds of stuff, words that people misuse.” While working there, he played softball with the Farmville Police Department. After playing with the team for more than three years, he was offered a position on the force. “The chief said, ‘Rick, I think I got a job for you.’ And if I hadn’t been playing ball this never would have come about.”

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Warren Brown served for five years on the Farmville Police Department.

Warren applied to be an officer for the town of Farmville. Later that night, he found out he had already been accepted and would start immediately.

Warren served the town of Farmville for about five years and greatly enjoyed the work. “It was my temperament. I treated everyone the same.” He also knew when to fight for something, and when to be humble. This had not gone unnoticed. After some time on the force, Warren was approached by a fellow officer, Mr. Kelsey. “I knew you were the one for this job.” He reminded Warren about one instance when he hit a home run and was called out at home plate by the umpire. “I knew you were the person for the job ‘cause of the way you acted. You didn’t holler or scream or anything.”

Policing was not a job immune to the racial tension in Farmville. Racism crept in. “We shared vehicles. So, on Saturdays, we had to double up. When I came in, nobody wanted—nobody would double with me, and it was never addressed.” Instead, Warren chose to get a radio, patrol the town on foot, and “had a ball.”

One day, he responded to the call of a young black man allegedly assaulting a white woman at the local Hardee’s and fleeing the scene. On his way to respond, he saw a man running from the area and pulled his patrol car over to confront him. The man dove into a nearby bush, and Warren ordered him to come out with his hands up. “And then I heard someone say, ‘Rick, is that you?’” As it turns out, it was a man he had grown up with. Warren knew it was his duty to enforce the law. He arrested the man.

During the trial, Warren learned that even in Farmville’s legal system, racism still had hold. “The judge looked at the man and said, ‘Son, why did you approach this lady?’ And he said, ‘I just wanted to know why she called me a nigger.’ And the judge [said] to him, ‘Well, you are a nigger, aren’t you?’ This was the judge!” Warren began to reconsider working with the department. On another occasion, he had arrested two men committing the same crime. Once in court, these men were given two different sentences: The black man was given 30 days in jail for stealing. The white man was let off with a warning. Warren resigned the next day.

Warren was not one to be deterred, however, and after several years of working as a lineman for Virginia Power, he returned to law enforcement. He graduated from Central Virginia Training Center as vice president of his class. With 15 years of service, Warren “Ricky” Brown retired as a deputy sheriff for Prince Edward County.
The Power of an Education

Text by Alison Koenigsberg

Mrs. Rita (Odom) Moseley was twelve years old when the schools closed. She went without an education for the two years she would have been in seventh and eighth grade. At fourteen, she was one of many students who moved to another town in order to maintain her education.

At a younger age, she had been a Brownie Scout. So, during those two years at home, her mother enrolled her in Girl Scouts to provide some kind of an educational activity. Through the efforts of a Girl Scout leader, Ms. Annie Mae Griggs, she was given the opportunity to further her education in Blacksburg, Virginia, 140 miles away. It was the very first time she had been away from home. At the time, she had no idea where she was going. “I didn’t even know where it was. It just felt like thousands and thousands of miles away from home.”

The Andersons, the family with whom she stayed during her time in Blacksburg, became like an adopted family to Rita. When she was younger, Rita believed that Ms. Laura Anderson and her daughter Ms. Nettie had opened up their home because they wanted to give others an opportunity for those who didn’t have it. Ms. Laura and Ms. Nettie had been in the education field and recognized the value of a good school. However, since then, Rita has come to realize that there was a second purpose. Ms. Laura was nearly 100 years old at the time, and even though she was capable of taking care of Rita, Ms. Laura also needed someone to spend time with her and assist her if need be, while Ms. Nettie was at work as an assistant principal.

During the years she was living in Blacksburg, she attended Blacksburg Graded School for seventh grade and graduated salutatorian of her class after being out of school for two years. The next year, she attended Christiansburg Industrial Institute for eighth grade, which was high school at the time. She remembers only one time when she was able to go home and visit her family or have her mother come visit her. “It was like separating me from my world. I wasn’t able to see my parents — my mother, friends, or my brother — and I didn’t even know what was going on back home. It was like being taken away from the complete scene of my prior life.”
When the Prince Edward Free Schools opened in September 1963, the Andersons offered to send her to college if she stayed in Blacksburg to finish high school. Instead, Rita chose to return to Farmville and complete her high school education because she was lonely for her mother and wanted to be with her brother again. “At that age, I didn’t understand the significance of a college education. My mom turned down a college education too, so that she could work at Camp Pickett on a military base and help support her family, which led her to eventually meet my dad who was a soldier.”

Coming back to Farmville and attending the Free Schools, Rita experienced confusion. The Free Schools’ administration had to find a way to build a curriculum that adapted to the various ages and levels of the students’ knowledge upon re-entering school. Since Rita had moved away and expanded her education in Blacksburg, “[The Free Schools] interrupted my curriculum path by coming back.”

Many people in class with Rita were her old schoolmates. “We were just happy to finally have an opportunity to go to college. It was joyful; it was an opportunity many of us didn’t think we would have. I never thought we would come together again in a classroom at such a late age.” Rita finished her bachelor’s degree in 2008, and then went back in 2010 to get her master’s in Human Services with a specialization in Executive Leadership at Liberty University completing that in 2013. Rita is now contemplating getting her doctorate.

“Continuation of higher education ceased for me when I was young, but when the chance to obtain it came 40 years later, I chose to take advantage of it.”

In 2004, Rita’s chance to move forward would be offered again. The Virginia General Assembly passed legislation that established the Brown v. Board of Education Scholarship Committee and Fund. The purpose of the program was to “restore” education to persons denied public education during Massive Resistance between 1954 and 1964. The Brown Scholarship allowed Rita to fulfill her dream of a college education without disrupting her career. “Continuation of higher education ceased for me when I was young, but when the chance to obtain it came 40 years later, I chose to take advantage of it.”

St. Paul’s College in Lawrenceville, Virginia provided classes for the Brown Scholars to receive their bachelor’s degree. At the time, classes were offered in several off-campus sites in the towns of Farmville, Franklin, and Richmond. In 2005, Rita started working toward her bachelor’s degree in Business Administration and Executive Leadership. The courses were offered as evening and night classes in Farmville in the Moton School, currently the Moton Museum, to make it more accessible for those who were working full-time.

Many of the students who moved away to further their education did not return to Prince Edward. “I don’t regret [moving back] because when my mom became seriously ill, I was here.”

Both children earned a college degree; her granddaughter will soon follow suit after graduating from high school in spring 2016. Education is so central to Rita that she has written three books of fiction and non-fiction. Her hope is that these books will connect with adults and students of various ages revealing the lengths that students like her went to acquire an education. Rita is now in the process of seeking agents to find a publishing home for her work.
Perseverance to Success

“It has always been my goal to provide quality work at a fair price, to be an honest and respectable person.”
Mr. Oliver Orlando Stiff grew up in Prospect, Virginia, just nine miles west of Farmville, with his parents William Henry and Mamie Lee Stiff, two brothers William and Carlton, and sister Penny. Mr. Stiff completed the first and second grade in the Prince Edward County School system before they were closed in 1959 to avoid integration.

His parents decided to send him to live with his father’s sister in Connecticut to continue his education and be able to attend the third grade. The only thing Mr. Stiff recalls from that time of his life is “[he] didn’t like it there.”

“Without them, I am nothing; together, we work well.”

After one year, he was given the option to stay in the city in Connecticut with his aunt or to come back home. He decided to come back to the farm and his family.

When he returned to Prospect, he went to Appomattox Public Schools with his two brothers, who had not attended school the previous year. For the first year, his parents rented a house. This forced the Stiff family to pay rent in Appomattox County, while continuing to pay taxes to Prince Edward County. The second year, one of the teachers who lived in Rice would pick them up from Hicks Country Store and drop them off each day for school in Appomattox. In 1963, the Free Schools in Prince Edward opened and Mr. Stiff attended Mary E. Branch School No. 1 across the street from the old Moton High School near downtown Farmville.

Mr. Stiff remembers that it was slightly different for him than other kids before, during, and after the school closings. This was because his days always began and ended the same way—working on the farm. “You always have to take care of your animals first, before anything else. . . . You have to milk your cows, feed your hogs, and gather your eggs.” While his schooling was in disarray, his day-to-day life was still heavily structured.

Mr. Stiff realized he was more fortunate than some, since he was able to continue his education in Connecticut and Appomattox and then in the new R. R. Moton High School. Still, there was some consequence. Mr. Stiff is, to this day, well-versed in farming techniques, business management, and financial responsibility; however, he lacks confidence in being a strong reader. He is very proud of his math and business skills that later proved very valuable in running his businesses. He continued his education by attending the Southside Vocational Center in Crewe, Virginia, and completing classes in automobile mechanics.

When Mr. Stiff graduated high school from Moton in 1969, he decided to go into the military because it was so challenging to get a good job back home. He advanced through the Navy doing a variety of jobs, but after achieving the rank of E3 and completing his commitment, Mr. Stiff decided to return home. Upon his return, he followed his Uncle Charlie Jordan’s advice and became self-employed by starting up O.O. Stiff Septic Tank Service. Mr. Stiff has had several successful businesses throughout the years, but his most successful has definitely been O.O. Stiff Septic Tanks, his portable toilet and septic tank business.

“There are three things that people will always need no matter what: water, electricity, and sewage management,” he said describing his choice to start a septic tank business. This business has expanded greatly over the years and been very profitable. Mr. Stiff has owned and operated his business for forty years now and he credits his success to hard work, listening, and having a great team to help support his efforts. “Without them, I am nothing; together, we work well.”

However, things have not been easy for him. “It is hard to own your own business. . . . It has always been my goal to provide quality work at a fair price. . . . and to help others when and where I can.” If someone is in trouble, many know to call Mr. Stiff, and he will do what he can.

Whether it is giving someone a job to help build their skills and keep them out of trouble or giving advice on everything from money to the best way to accomplish something, Mr. Stiff always has an answer or knows where he can find it. “I don’t know why they always call me. I guess my mind just works differently, and I see the situation from a different angle.”

Mr. Stiff has never let anything keep him from going after what he wants, even without early formal education. He has persevered, which allowed him to grow a business and achieve the life he wants, while at the same time giving back to his community.
Mrs. Donna Browning was an only child who moved to Farmville with her parents when she was in the middle of fifth grade in 1958. “Before I moved to Farmville, there obviously had been some rumbling about the school situations. We were not here for my folks to be involved in the [school closings], and you know, that was good. They just didn’t get in on any of that.”

For the last half of her fifth grade year, she went to school in the Hiner building on Longwood’s campus, which was for elementary students. Because the public schools closed, Prince Edward Academy opened in several different buildings around Farmville to accommodate the white students whose parents paid for their children to continue their education. In 1959, she moved to the Farmville United Methodist Church for sixth grade.

“The classroom I was in was separated from the other class by a curtain, so you can imagine the noise that occurred that was not blocked out. I don’t remember [the] noise bothered us extensively. We dealt with it. I had not lived here but half a year when the schools closed, and so I hadn’t made any great attachments to any school situation or building. For me to be in a different situation probably wasn’t as mind-blowing as it might have been for some of the others.”

To continue her schooling for seventh grade, Donna was required to move to Moose Lodge 968 across town on Longwood Avenue. “The kids in town would meet every morning [in front of the Farmville Methodist Church] to catch the bus up to the Moose Hall. We were twelve-year-old kids, so we did what we were told and went where we were told to go. As long as your friends were with you, you were okay. I think we could have [gone] to school in an igloo or something, and we would have been fine if [our] friends were there.”

At the beginning of eighth grade, Donna moved to the newly constructed upper school of Prince Edward Academy, which opened in fall 1961. As Donna moved around, the discussion of closings and schooling was taken care of out of earshot for many students. “I guess we left that for our parents and the community leaders if they needed to focus on any of that. As kids in high school, we just took care of what we needed to, academically and socially, just to make ourselves seem normal. And we didn’t know any different, we really didn’t know any different.

“After graduating from [the academy], I attended Radford College as an education major and eventually ended up teaching back in Farmville. However, when I made my application – [to Prince Edward County Public Schools] – when I had to put down that I had graduated from Prince Edward Academy, I didn’t know how that would be received. Even though schools had been desegregated by this time, I didn’t know how well the school system would react to me having graduated from Prince Edward Academy.” Donna accepted a job in Prince Edward Public Schools as a fifth grade English and Social Studies teacher.

“As long as your friends were with you, you were okay. I think we could have [gone] to school in an igloo or something, and we would have been fine if [our] friends were there.”
in 1987. Because she taught Social Studies, Donna does recall teaching about the school closings in Prince Edward County, but even before standardized testing you had to cover certain material. She explained, “You answered questions, and you had to move on.

The school system at this time was still grappling with the legacy of the school closings and trying to make progress. For Donna, it was hard dealing with all of this while teaching at the same time. She started teaching at Worsham School near Hampden Sydney a few miles out of Farmville. After staying only a few months, her classes were moved back in town because an addition on the middle school was finished. After that, classes were moved to what is now the Moton Museum building in Farmville, where Donna taught for seven years. Yet again her classes were moved back to the middle school where another addition had been built. She finished her teaching career there.

Part of what made teaching rewarding were her colleagues. “At school, I was around the black teachers, the white teachers, and you know I met the best friends, the dearest friends I have to this day, in the school system . . . If it hadn’t been for those connections, it would have been hard to stay.”

All the movement between school buildings that occurred during her teaching years demonstrates the immense changes the schools were experiencing. From Donna’s own movement as a student to Donna’s movement as a teacher, the disruption others must have gone through becomes a bit more apparent. “My heart goes out to the people who were affected in such a different way than I was affected — those that were out of school for several years and then had to go back and catch up with what they had missed and those who relocated to continue their education. I have a deeper appreciation [for] the opportunity I had to continue my education.” After 29 years of teaching, with 25 years in Prince Edward County, Donna retired in 2012.
Looking Forward

“**The only thing I was concerned about was riding on the big yellow bus and it didn’t come – that I remember.**”

Theresa Clark was looking forward to starting her first year of elementary school when she heard from her mother that Prince Edward County Schools were being closed down. However, her only concern was riding on the big yellow school bus. Decades later, Dr. Clark is going into her 28th year of teaching and is the chair of the Department of Social Work and Communication Sciences and Disorders at Longwood University.

“All of these years later, my expectations exceed what I see as results. And what I mean by that is I expect a high quality; I expect the community to want the children to succeed and receive an awesome education. I expect parents to come out fighting for their children. I expect the teachers to be so involved and so concerned that they are going to mandate the best education possible.”

The importance of education to Dr. Clark was impressed upon her in her travels across the county to obtain an education. “I was taken across the county line – had to stand and wait for a school bus from that county. I had no covering or anything. I remember inclement weather . . . [Y]ou know you were standing outside until that bus came along,” explained Dr. Clark. She also hitched rides with a teacher who traveled from Hampden Sydney past her house and sometimes with her mother’s friends.

The teachers were genuinely concerned when teaching the students. It is a model that still lives with her to this day.

One consequence of wanting an education was an early lesson in doing anything necessary to stay in school. That year, one of her teachers suspected that some students in class were not living in the county. She called students up to her desk one-by-one to ask them their home address. “I got myself in trouble because I knew my address. I was proud of knowing my address. . . . I told her what my address was. And she said, ‘Well, if that’s your address, you’re in the wrong county, and you’re not supposed to be here.’” The teacher told her to go home and ask her mom. When she told her mom about the situation, her mother gave her an address to go back and tell the teacher. “I was so embarrassed in front of my classmates. I had to go back and lie, from what I knew . . . but I had to do it.”

When the Free Schools opened in 1963, Dr. Clark describes how grateful she was for the teachers and their concern. “They didn’t put us in grades – it was by abilities. We would have classes in writing and reading – there was a full-time dentist on duty, they had a clothes closet, they had food for us. Everything a child needed was taken care of in that building, and I will always remember that. And the teachers were adamant – you’re going to learn.”

Dr. Clark graduated from Prince Edward County High School at the age of 17 and went on to take a few classes at
Longwood before her father sent her off to continue school at Virginia State University. “I definitely was not going to be successful [at Longwood] because my boyfriend was right around the corner.” Once she obtained her bachelor’s degree, she went back to Longwood to get her master’s in education. It wasn’t long before she was ready to get her doctorate in social work from Virginia Commonwealth University.

In 1986, an unexpired term needed to be filled on the Board of Supervisors, and Dr. Clark was encouraged to apply. In addition, the position was in her voting precinct. After submitting her letter of interest, followed by a visit to one of the monthly Board meetings and multiple interviews by individual board members, the Board of Supervisors appointed Dr. Clark. In the next election, her name was on the ballot and voters elected her for a seat in 1988. She was the first female to be appointed and then also elected to serve on the same board that decided not to fund the schools in 1959. At the end of her service, the Board issued a Proclamation. There was a significant phrase in the Proclamation that Dr. Clark continues to hold dearly. “If we, the PEC Board of Supervisors, realized the contributions of a woman, we would have appointed one earlier.”

Dr. Clark’s connection to education remains strong in her work for the Department of Social Work. In addition, her family home is now Longwood-owned and named after the family. “That’s the house that we built. The Clark House is the first house we built for our family. It was a small, tri-level home and Longwood even still has my same floors.” She decided that it was important for her to raise her two children away from Longwood, since she was aware of the direction of growth in the plan for the university’s expansion. The sale was a mutual agreement between the university and the Clark family; Dr. Clark was ready to move because she wanted her daughters to have a home in the country to enjoy their formative years.

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“I believe in a higher power directing lives – and that higher power led me to where I believe I’m supposed to be today, and the track I took to get here. I wanted to be a role model for my children. They grew up on Longwood’s campus – traveling to campus for multiple, diverse activities with me – so it became more important for me to remain there. They just became acclimated.”

The impact that education and the school system had on Dr. Clark also left an imprint on both of her daughters. Not only were Shelly and Megan both educated in the Prince Edward County School system, all three of the women, including Dr. Clark, attended Prince Edward County Elementary School.

Megan graduated from Longwood and was accepted at the Marshall Wythe School of Law at the College of William and Mary. She later became the first African-American attorney hired in Appomattox, Virginia. In fall 2015, Megan was elected the first female and first African-American Commonwealth’s Attorney of Prince Edward County. Megan’s goal was always to return to Prince Edward County and make significant contributions to the people of the county. She ran as a Democrat in Prince Edward’s primary election and won, allowing her to run unopposed in the November 2015 election.

Shelly, the older daughter, is a third generation graduate of Virginia State University. She continued on to get her master’s at Virginia Commonwealth University and has been in education for over ten years now. She is currently an assistant principal at Prince Edward Elementary School. “College was never a foreign discussion to them,” Dr. Clark says with a smile.

Reflecting back on the Prince Edward County school closings, Dr. Clark recalls how it has made her strive to be the best educator she can be. “What happened in the county leads me to be a stronger teacher and to not let the students get away from me without knowing [the history of Prince Edward County]. So many students walk into a classroom and they don’t know anything about where, geographically [and historically] they are located – and I think that’s a shame.”

“What I’m left with today is a passion. I want to teach. I love to teach. And I don’t think that passion will ever go away, as long as I’m here.”
This production would not have been possible without the help of the following:

Doris and Everett Berryman
Warren “Ricky” Brown
Donna Browning
Dr. Theresa Clark
Nancy Fawcett
Scott Harwood, Sr.
Gregory Hicks
Beverly and John Hines
Edward “Blue” Morton
Rita Moseley
Phyllistine Mosley
Armstead D. “Chuckie” Reid
Oliver Orlando Stiff
Charles Taylor
Elise Robinson Walker

Staff and Volunteers of the Moton Museum

Dr. Jennifer Apperson, Interim Dean of the Cook Cole College of Arts and Sciences
Dr. E. Derek Taylor, Director of General Education
Dr. Wade Edwards, Chair of English & Modern Languages
Dr. David J. Coles, Chair of History, Political Science, & Philosophy
Professor Christopher Register, Chair of Theatre, Art, Graphic & Animation Design
American Democracy Project committee

Thank you.