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FREE

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BARBARA JOHNS



FARMVILLE

the Magazine

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The price of seizing your moment

Movements are seldom popular in the time period in which they exist. Changing the status quo is not easy and people tend to not like rocking the boat. Even good change can be inconvenient, slow, and resisted.

We hear much about the “right way” to protest. What is the right way? Who gets to decide what the right way is and who gets to practice it in that way? The students attending Moton High School went to the meetings with decision makers, they wrote the letters to their representatives, and they advocated for themselves and their community and only resorted to a strike in desperation. Civic engagement failed them so they resorted to civil disobedience. They were still told they did not engage in the process “the right way.” They were making too much noise which the powers that be did not like.

There is power in our young people. It is important that we nurture, support, and guide them as they develop their own voices. We also need to remember that sometimes “a little child shall lead them.” The youth bring energy, but need our mentorship in equal stead.

One of Barbara Rose Johns Powell’s most famous quotes is “there wasn’t any fear I just thought this is your moment, seize it!” Barbara seized her moment. So, I ask, will you seize yours?

Please understand there is a price to seizing your moment. When Barbara Johns led the strike she probably didn’t conceive of not being able to graduate from Moton High School alongside her friends and family members. She didn’t imagine

being moved to Montgomery, Alabama to finish her education. She didn’t imagine the educational terrorism that would occur eight years later in Prince Edward County through the school closings. But still she seized her moment.

So will you seize your moment? I hope you will. Everyone is not meant to be a Barbara Johns, Rev. Griffin, Dr. King, Medgar Evers, etc. nor is that what I’m asking you to do, but I firmly believe if we seize our little moments there will be less need to seize the big ones. Change does not happen because people in power suddenly start to feel bad. Change happens because people make change happen.



**Cainan Townsend,
Moton Museum**

The Moton Story is one made of, by, and for young people. It is a story of ordinary people making extraordinary change. It is a story of what happens when civic engagement meets civil disobedience. The Moton Story is not a story of sadness, trauma, and victimization. It is a story of resilience, fortitude, courage, and grace.

Seventy years ago, when thousands in Prince Edward County and millions across the country waited for the Brown v. Board of education decision to be delivered, they had every reason to believe that a system that had failed them through Dred Scott v. Sandford and Plessy v. Ferguson would do the same again, but as we know it did not happen that way. It was a unanimous decision ruling that in the field of public education the doctrine of separate but equal has no place. They watched the world turn upside down, and now we live in their legacy.

I hope you’ll pay a visit to ground zero of the

student led civil rights movement in Farmville, Virginia, so it can inspire you like it does me. We must persist as the Moton High School Students did 73 years ago no matter how much it may seem like reaching for the moon as Barbara once said. On some of my darkest days, I look no further than the walls of the former R. R. Moton High School and that replenishes my hope.

Seizing her moment had consequences, but eventually credit does catch up to a pioneer of the civil rights movement. April 23rd is Barbara Johns Day in the Commonwealth of Virginia. In 2008 the Civil Rights Memorial was installed in Richmond, Virginia prominently featuring Barbara Johns. In 2017 the Virginia Attorney General Building formerly ground zero for many of the massive resistance policies that discriminated against so many of these African American students was renamed the Barbara Johns Building. A statue of Barbara is going to be erected in National Statuary Hall in Washington D.C. making our state representatives George Washington and Barbara Johns. Juxtaposing, in my opinion, one of the founders of our nation with one of its most important saviors.

Thurgood Marshall once said that “the legal system can force open doors and sometimes even knock down walls, but it cannot build bridges that job belongs to you and me.” Additionally an African proverb states that the wise build bridges while the foolish build barriers. We can all have a better society to live in if we can seize our little moments and work to truly find common ground.

Cainan Townsend is the executive director of the Moton Museum. He can be reached at c.townsend@motonmuseum.org.



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Barbara Rose Johns

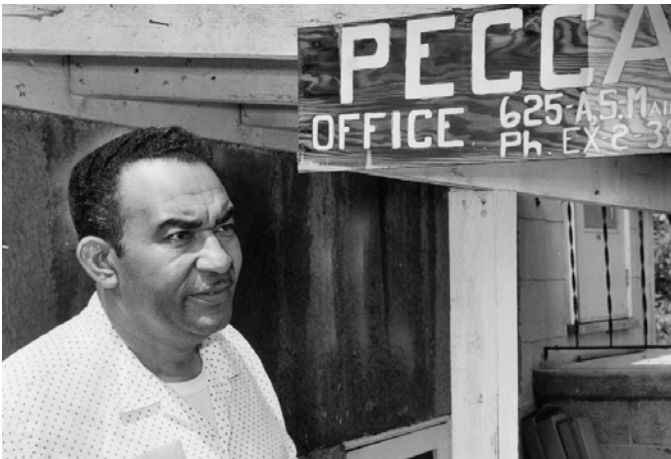
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On the cover: Barbara Rose Johns in the Civil Rights Memorial on the Capital grounds in Richmond.



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Who was

Barbara

Rose

Johns?



Barbara Rose Johns later in life, while living in Philadelphia.

Editor's note: *As we celebrate her memory and honor her courage this month, we can forget at times who Barbara Rose Johns was. With the help of Cainan Townsend, executive director of the Moton Museum, here's a look at the life and times of Barbara Rose Johns.*

Barbara Rose Johns was born in New York City on March 6, 1935, the eldest of the five children born to Robert Melvin Johns and Violet Spencer Johns. Barbara Johns was educated in the segregated public schools of Prince Edward County, enrolling in the all-black Robert Russa Moton High School in Farmville in 1949. Frustrated by the overcrowding and dilapidated conditions at the school and the refusal of the local school board to build a new high school that would be comparable to the county's school for white students, she decided to take action. On April 23, more than 450 Moton students, led by Johns, walked out of the school to protest the unequal conditions in the county schools.

Several days into the strike, the students sought legal counsel from the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). The NAACP sent civil rights lawyers Oliver Hill and Spotswood Robinson to Prince Edward County to meet with the students. Moved by the determination of Barbara Johns and her classmates, they agreed to file a lawsuit on their behalf if the suit asked for full integration of the county's public schools rather than just for a separate but equal new facility. The student leaders, supported by their parents and most of the local African American community, agreed and a month later the NAACP filed *Davis v. County School Board of Prince Edward County* in federal court. (Dorothy E. Davis, daughter of a local farmer, was the first name on the list of students wishing to file suit, hence the case bears her name instead of that of Barbara Johns.)

The court upheld the status quo in Prince Edward County, and the NAACP appealed to the United States Supreme Court. The Supreme

Court combined its ruling in the Davis case with four other similar cases in what became the landmark 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka* decision that declared segregation in the nation's public schools unconstitutional. Rather than obey a court order to integrate its schools, Prince Edward County closed all public schools in 1959. Many white students attended hastily organized private academies, but Black students were left on their own. Some went to other localities or states to continue their education, some were home-schooled, but many young African Americans went without schooling until the public schools reopened in 1964.

Fearing reprisals against their daughter for her part in the student strike, Johns's parents sent her to Montgomery, Alabama, where her uncle Vernon was serving as pastor of the Dexter Avenue Baptist Church. She lived with her uncle's family while she completed high school and then studied at Spelman College in Atlanta for two years. In 1954, she married

Johns in her graduation gown, preparing to finish high school.



William Rowland Powell, a minister. She moved with him to Philadelphia, where she raised a family of five children and worked for 24 years as a school librarian. She did not participate in the civil rights movement in Philadelphia or elsewhere and never spoke about her contributions to the movement as a teenager. Her husband and children only became aware of her involvement late in her life, when she was contacted by someone interested in making a film about the Moton student strike.

Barbara Johns Powell died of cancer in Philadelphia in 1991. When her husband retired in 1999 and was packing to move to Virginia, he discovered a manuscript account, that she had never finished, describing in her own words her decision to organize the student strike. In July 2008, the Virginia Civil Rights Memorial honoring the contributions of Barbara Johns and other citizens of Prince Edward County was unveiled in a prominent location in Capitol Square, close to the Executive Mansion. In 2010, Virginia artist Louis Briel completed a portrait of Johns, which hung for several months in the State Capitol before being permanently installed in the Robert Russa Moton Museum in Farmville.

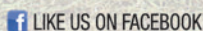


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Editor's Notebook

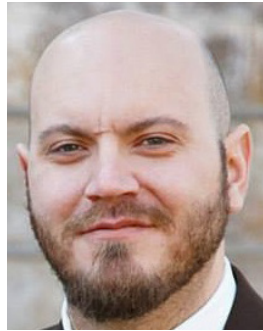
Are we acting against injustice?

Back in December, I had the privilege of covering a ceremony, as Farmville renamed Watkins Street to Williams Way. This was in honor of Rev. Samuel Williams Jr., paying tribute to his many decades of leadership in the fight against injustice. And during that ceremony, one comment in particular stuck with me.

Moton Museum Executive Director Cainan Townsend said when people think of Rev. Williams, think about what he would be doing.

"And what he would be doing is standing up for people who need it, pointing out injustice when he sees it and acting on it," Townsend said. "And that's what he would want you to do."

This is what I hope people take from the magazine. Yes, it's partly



Brian Carlton, Editor

in celebration of Barbara Rose Johns Day on April 23. Yes, it's also to mark the 70th year anniversary of Brown v. Board of Education and the critical importance that had for our community and our nation.

But it's also to honor others who marched, who filed lawsuits and fought against injustice, who were arrested for simply wanting the ability to enter the House of God and worship, regardless of skin color. This town and county's history is one with some challenges, some parts we're not proud of. But there are also examples of people doing the right thing, of following Rev. Williams to not just point out injustice but act against it.

YOU DON'T KNOW WHAT COMES TOMORROW

What have we done? Have we done or are we doing what's needed to help other members of our community? I nearly typed are we doing enough, but that's the wrong question. As long as people need help, as long as there are problems that need to be fixed, we can never do enough.

But are we doing what's needed? Are we acting to address the problems our community and members therein face? Or do we write it off as someone else's problem? In reading through this month's magazine, maybe it's easy for some of us to dismiss the real problems that existed in 1951, in 1963, in 1969 and some that still exist today. Maybe it's easy to read through these stories, to hear about young women and men who took a stand, even when it wasn't popular, who were arrested for standing up for what's right. It's easy to think 'well, that doesn't apply to me.'

My grandfather used to always add one more word, if somebody in the family was trying to get out of helping or argued they shouldn't be involved. That doesn't apply to me, they would say. Yet, he added. That doesn't apply to you yet. None of us know what tomorrow will bring. Nobody can say what changes might take place. An injustice left ignored doesn't go away. It does what any sickness does. It grows.

Yes, there are some horrible things described in some of these stories, material that people can easily shake their head and say, well that wouldn't happen today. And maybe it wouldn't. Or maybe we're thinking that way because we've never had to deal with that situation, so we can't fathom a time when it could take place.

But even if that specific incident or a particular event would not happen, we still live in an imperfect world, where injustice does take place.

And when we see these things occur, are we acting against them? We hope the stories in this magazine encourage you to do just that.

Brian Carlton is Editor of Farmville the Magazine. He can be reached at Brian.Carlton@FarmvilletheMag.com.

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Three Virginia State Parks cater to outdoor enthusiasts: High Bridge Trail State Park, spanning 31 miles and ideal for hiking, biking, and horseback riding; Twin Lakes State Park, significant in Civil Rights history and a popular spot for swimming, camping, hiking, and events; and Sailor's Creek Battlefield Historical State Park. Additionally, Bear Creek Lake and Holliday Lake State Parks are within a 30-minute drive from Farmville.



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History

R.R. Moton Museum | Civil Rights Walking Tour | Lee's Retreat

Whether your adventure is to walk the path of your ancestors on the Civil Rights Walking Tour, delve into the history preserved at the Moton Museum, or follow in the footsteps of American history along Lee's Retreat Trail, Farmville and Prince Edward County are at The Heart of Your Adventure.



Culture and Art

Prince Edward County boasts a vibrant arts scene brimming with visual and performing arts, live music, museums, murals, and galleries. Whether you're drawn to Bluegrass or Gospel music, community theatre or university productions, street murals or studio artistry, or exploring museums showcasing international art or the Civil Rights era, there's something for every taste and interest to discover and enjoy.

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I want to take this time to commend the perseverance of **Barbara Rose Johns**, her classmates and all the students that were kicked out of Robert Russa Moton High School as well as the entire school division.

I, as well as all of the students who were not allowed an education as a result of Prince Edward County refusing to abide by the U. S. Supreme Court order in the Brown vs. Board of Education decision will forever bear a scar.

I, and many of our classmates, are continuing to make great strides.



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Barbara Rose Johns isn't finished changing our country

Few Americans have made a greater impact on the lives of their fellow citizens than Prince Edward County's Barbara Johns.

Her courage was twofold. First, she led the student walkout at Robert Russa Moton High School in 1951. Soon thereafter, she and the Moton strikers put their story and effort into the service of the Brown v. Board of Education case. In doing so, they elevated the civil rights movement from a campaign for separate but equal schools into a campaign for the true equality of opportunity that could only come from school desegregation. They demanded the full rights of citizenship for all, and shaped not just American history, but our very conception of what it means to be a citizen.

"It felt like reaching for the moon," she recalled much later. Indeed, each of these steps required not just imagination, but courage. The consequences and costs were real, and that is what made her actions truly heroic. She threw herself into the arena not in the moment when it was easy and ultimate victory was certain, but when it was hard, and – as history would prove – the road would be long and difficult.

Were she alive today, I'm sure she would be proud to see that



Taylor Reveley,
Longwood University

her story has become so much more widely known, thanks in large part to the Moton Museum. Virginia and the nation now understand much more clearly what happened in Prince Edward, the good and the bad, and how it shaped us all.

I hope she would be pleased that Longwood, once regrettably an institutional bystander as history unfolded here, has apologized for its inaction then, and strives, imperfectly but with real commitment, to be better now, providing life-changing opportunity for all

Virginians.

And I'm certain she would be surprised but proud to see her statue on the grounds of Capitol Square in Richmond, and learn that another will soon be dedicated at the U.S. Capitol, as one of two Virginians so honored there, alongside George Washington.

What I think might make her most proud, however, would be the Moton Museum, and to observe how her story resonates with young people who visit there. It's something you can witness almost anytime you stop by. She was just 16 at the time of the walkout. When young people learn that, they suddenly pay much closer attention. What would they do in such a moment? Could they summon her courage? If they did, might it change history? Then, when these young visitors return to their schools and communities, they carry within them a seed. When and how these seeds might someday take root and grow is impossible to know. Whatever the answer, Barbara Johns is not yet finished changing our country for the better.

Taylor Reveley is the current president of Longwood University and helped develop the partnership between the school and the Moton Museum.

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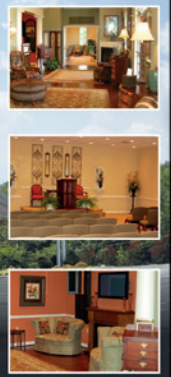
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A woman and her daughter hold up the newspaper proclaiming the ruling by the U.S. Supreme Court.

‘When day is done, greet the dawn’

By Nate Pentecost

“When day is done, greet the dawn and not the setting sun.” That was the favorite quote of Oliver Hill. Instead of focusing on what’s behind us, we need to look forward, Hill argued. And he fought for that belief, as the attorney taking on the case of Barbara Rose Johns and the other students of the Moton School. He might not have realized it at the time, but Hill’s decision to take that case led to a critical point in U.S. history. What started as Davis v. County School Board of Prince Edward County soon grew.

The case eventually went to federal court and merged with a number of others out of South Carolina, Delaware, Washington D.C. and Topeka, Kansas. Those five cases combined to form Brown v. Board of Education, using the name of Oliver Brown, who was a plaintiff in the Kansas case. But while we all may have heard the words “Brown v. Board,” what exactly did that court case do? What changed as a result? It has been 70 years since the U.S. Supreme Court issued their landmark ruling in the case. Here’s a look at what hap-

pened.

THE RULING

In Brown v. Board of Education, the Supreme Court determined U.S. state laws establishing racial segregation in public schools were unconstitutional, irrespective of if the segregated schools were otherwise equal in quality. The Court’s unanimous decision overturned the “separate but equal doctrine” and was a major victory in the Civil Rights movement, paving the way for integration.

The case of Brown v. Board of Education was heard before the Supreme Court as five combined cases, as we mentioned before, and argued on behalf of the plaintiffs by a team of esteemed attorneys at the Legal Defense Fund (LDF), aided by some of the country’s most reputable legal scholars. The group was spearheaded by Civil Rights leader and future first African-American Supreme Court justice Thurgood Marshall.

The Court ruled the “separate but equal” doctrine set forth by Plessy v. Ferguson in 1896 violated the Equal Protection Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment of the U.S. Constitution and was therefore unconstitutional. In its ruling, the Court stated separating children from others in their age group or of similar qualifications creates a feeling of inferiority and causes harm to the child that likely cannot be undone.

Striking down segregation in the nation’s public schools became a catalyst for the Civil Rights movement. Brown led to substantial progress in desegregating housing, public accommodations, and higher education for decades to come.

“That the venue for this momentous decision to end the injustice of legal segregation took place in our public school systems is not an accident,” said Chris Ford, spokesperson for the Legal Defense Fund (LDF). “Ensuring the right to an equal education is fundamentally necessary to knowing that all people receive the knowledge, skills, and resources to lead fulfilling lives.”

AS IMPORTANT TODAY AS IT WAS THEN

Even now, 70 years on, the Brown v. Board of Education ruling is critical, Ford pointed out, as we see “concerted threats to undermine this crucial pillar upholding our democracy.”



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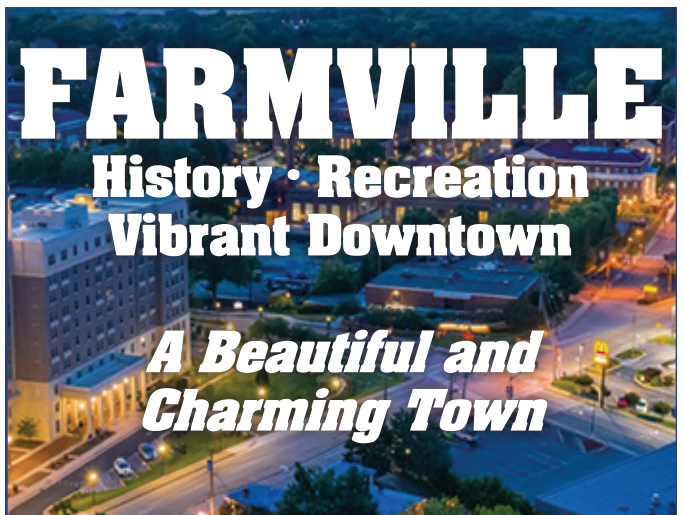
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He pointed to things like anti-DEI (diversity, equity and inclusion) rulings, which require bathrooms for people based on their biological sex. He pointed to anti-LGBTQ laws, book bans and bans on affirmative action.

“(This) shows you how significant the Brown decision remains to preventing us from falling backwards into a less equal society,” Ford said.

Brown v. Board of Education did more than ban segregation on the basis of race. It also prohibited any segregation on the basis of disability. This paved the way for a few other rulings you may have heard of, such as the Americans with Disabilities Act and the Education for All Handicapped Children Act. Both of those don’t happen, ACLU and LDF officials say, without the steps first taken by Oliver Hill.

Their argument was a pretty clear one: The Fourteenth Amendment to the Constitution guarantees equal protection of the laws, and racial segregation violates that principle. That’s it, end of story. No exclusions, no what ifs. Everyone is entitled to equal protection of the laws. The lawyers brought in expert witnesses to prove what most of us take for granted today, that state-enforced racial segregation in education “deprives (Black children) of equal status in the school community...destroys their self-respect,

denies them full opportunity for democratic social development (and)...stamps (them) with a badge of inferiority,” the case states.

STARTING FROM A SCHOOL PROTEST

Of the five combined cases heard as part of *Brown*, the only case originating from a student protest was *Davis v. County School Board of Prince Edward County*.

Davis originated from a protest organized by 16-year-old student Barbara Rose Johns who was educated in a segregated school in Prince Edward County where she went to R.R. Moton High School. Barbara Rose Johns and other R.R. Moton High School students in Farmville attended classes in an overcrowded schoolhouse with leaky ceilings and freezing winter conditions.

Parents and students pressured the school board about the unequal conditions but action was not taken. Dissatisfied with the school board’s inaction, Johns organized the protest with several classmates.

“Young people are always a driving force in social movements: it’s their vision that often illuminates the pathways that lead towards a brighter future,” Chris Ford explained. “Johns’ initiative in Prince Edward County propelled the efforts to end segregation in public schools

forward: of the consolidated *Brown* cases, *Davis v. County School Board* was the only case that was student-led and made up a majority of the plaintiffs, proving that Johns’s efforts were significant and worthy of recognition.”

As the leader of the only student protest heard as part of *Brown*, Barbara Johns in fact remains a seminal figure in the early years of the Civil Rights movement. In 2018, the Virginia state legislature made April 23 Barbara Johns Day in Virginia to honor and recognize the Prince Edward County local’s contributions.

“Johns’ actions reverberate throughout the Commonwealth and the nation to this day,” American Civil Liberties Union of Virginia Chief Programs Officer Amy Woolard added.

Both Woolard and Ford emphasized that while *Brown* and the many advances made possible by the Civil Rights movement are momentous, there remains significant work to be done. The members of the human rights advocacy groups stressed that participating in the democratic process is of the utmost importance in continuing the fight for equality.

“After all,” said Woolard. “*Brown v. Board* might not have happened without community activists and lawyers who fought for years for meaningful government action to push desegregation efforts forward.

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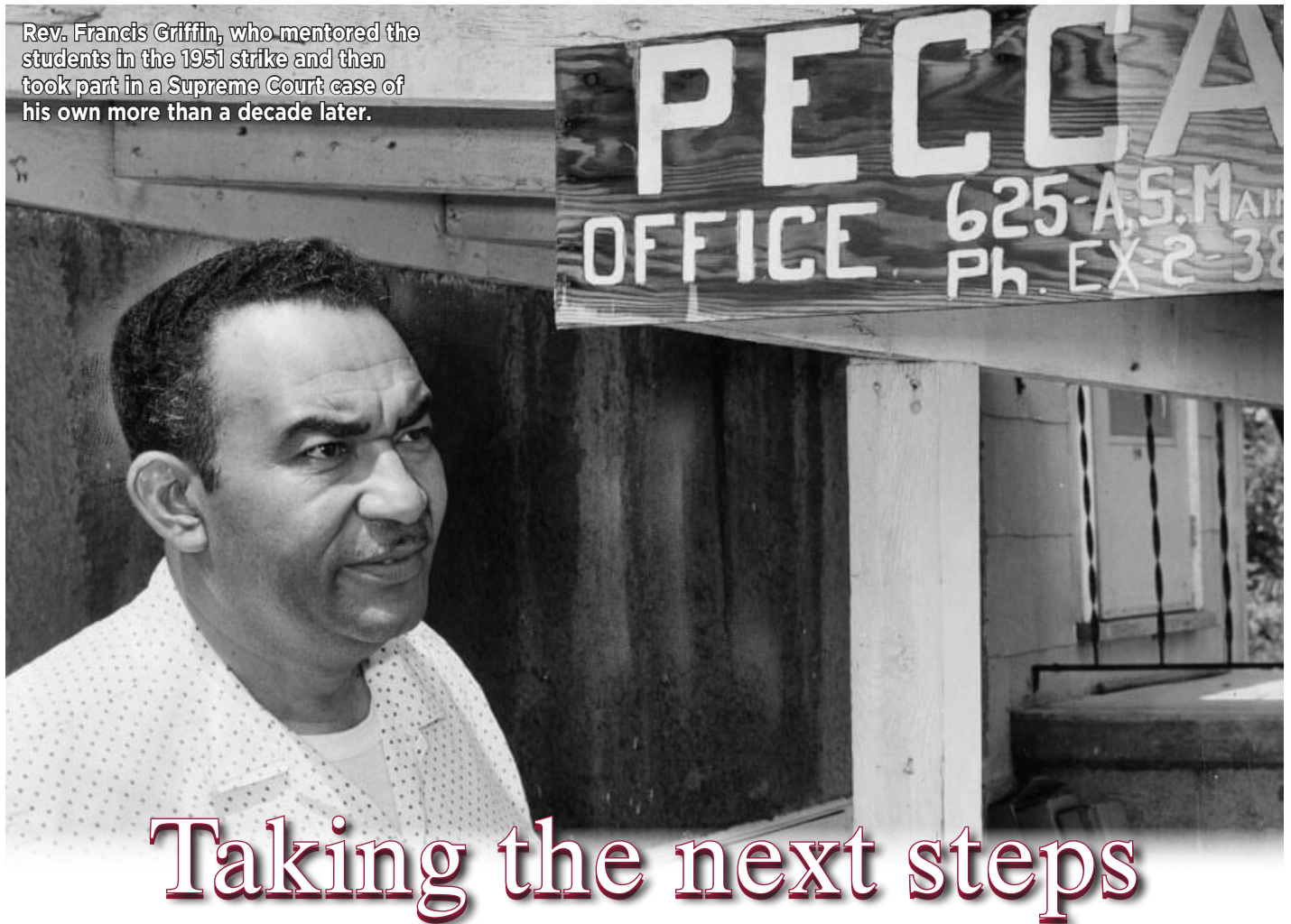


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Rev. Francis Griffin, who mentored the students in the 1951 strike and then took part in a Supreme Court case of his own more than a decade later.



Taking the next steps

By Brian Carlton

The story doesn't end with the *Brown v. Board of Education* ruling. In fact, reactions to that case sparked Civil Rights battles for more than a decade. Yes, we've heard of "massive resistance," the fight by Virginia's government against integration. But in Farmville and Prince Edward County as a whole, that took on an entirely different look.

Prince Edward County's Board of Supervisors decided in June 1959 to not appropriate any funding at all for the school system, rather than integrate. That meant all public schools in the county had to close for what eventually became a five-year period.

"We were like the lost generation," said Farmville Vice Mayor Chuckie Reid. "When they announced schools being closed, you think ok, it'll be a day, two days, a week. But your week turned into a month, your month turned into five years."

Prince Edward gave tuition grants to students, instead of opening schools, to be used at private schools. But there were no private schools in the region that allowed Black students, so from 1959 to 1963, Black children in Prince Edward County were left out.

"It was something you had to deal with," Reid said. "In the beginning, you didn't know (what was happening). You're young, so you think, oh, no school. But it became something you had to deal with."

It was something an entire community had to deal with. Children were being kept out of the only classrooms available. A 1964 study done

by Dr. Robert L. Green of Michigan State found that out of 1,700 Black school age children in the county, an estimated 1,100 had received almost no formal education during the period schools were closed. In the post-pandemic world, we discuss learning loss because students weren't able to be in class for one semester or a full year for some. More than triple that and you start to have an idea of what was taken away.

THE GRIFFIN LAWSUIT

And this is where Francis Griffin enters the conversation. That is, he enters the conversation for a second time. Rev. L. Francis Griffin was a mentor and supporter of Barbara Rose Johns and the other students in that 1951 strike at Moton High. He helped connect them with NAACP attorney Oliver Hill, which led to the legal case being filed.

People called Rev. Griffin the Martin Luther King Jr. of Farmville. He also earned a nickname as "The Fighting Preacher," both locally and nationally. Griffin was focused on the social gospel during his life, speaking out against injustice whenever he saw it. The Farmville preacher's words back that up, as he was repeatedly quoted as saying he believed "in the care of people here on Earth and in the hereafter," following what he found in the teachings of Jesus. And while his own legal case may not be as well-known nationally as *Brown v. Board of Education*, it was in many ways a followup to that situation.

Born in 1917, Griffin was both a civil rights advocate and a local minister. He served as pastor of Farmville's First Baptist Church, over on

South Main Street.

“For the time, he did not have a traditional approach to pastoring,” said Cainan Townsend, executive director at the Moton Museum. “Preachers were expected to preach a sermon, perform weddings and bury people. But, Griffin didn’t just believe and preach on individual sin but institutional sin.”

In the period after the Brown v. Board ruling, Rev. Griffin got involved in the ‘Lost Generation’s’ cause. He created the Prince Edward County Christian Association in 1959, organizing local leaders and resources to help support the students locked out of school.

But Griffin knew more was needed. And so, he went to court.

GRIFFIN V. COUNTY SCHOOL BOARD

Francis Griffin had two daughters, both of whom were not allowed to attend any private schools since they were Black. As we mentioned, public schools in Prince Edward were closed at the time and private schools were just that, able to allow or disallow whoever they wanted. He filed a lawsuit, challenging the supervisors’ decision.

And so, for the second time in a decade, Prince Edward County ended up in court. This time, it also went before the U.S. Supreme Court, in the March 1964 Griffin v. County School Board of Prince Edward County case.

After two months of discussion and debate, the justices ruled Prince Edward’s decision to close all local public schools and provide vouchers for students to attend private school was constitutionally impermissible. That’s because it violated parts of the Equal Protection Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment. Black students didn’t have the same opportunity

as others in the district, because none of the private schools would accept them.

“The District Court may, if necessary to prevent further racial discrimination, require the Supervisors to exercise the power that is theirs to levy taxes to raise funds adequate to reopen, operate, and maintain without racial discrimination a public school system in Prince Edward County like that operated in other counties in Virginia,” justices wrote in the majority opinion.

Just as Barbara Rose Johns and her fellow students set a national standard, so did Francis Griffin. His Supreme Court case set a precedent, detailing that a county can’t withdraw or give up on its obligation to provide public education for everyone.

LOST GENERATION ALSO MARCHES

Prince Edward’s Lost Generation students would soon have their own chance to take a stand. On April 23, 1969, 18 years after the student strike at Moton High, there was another strike in Prince Edward.

“My generation in 1969 did a walkout from Prince Edward to the Courthouse to the School Board because we weren’t satisfied with what was going on,” Chuckie Reid said. “We had an issue going on where they released a white teacher because he associated with a lot of his Black students at his house, he held cookouts and the like. We said, ‘you know if Barbara Johns can do it, we can do it,’ so a group of us got together and we spearheaded it and we walked out of school,” Reid said.

Pictures of that walkout made the 1969 high school yearbook. It also highlighted the fact that there’s no end to what an act of courage back in 1951 can inspire.



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The gospel of Rev. Williams

By Brian Carlton

When you look back over the Civil Rights movement, over everything from *Brown v. Board of Education* to the events 10, 15 years later in Farmville, the story is incomplete without mentioning Rev. Samuel Williams Jr.

Father. Pastor. Teacher. Historian. Activist. The words and actions of Rev. Williams has inspired generations of men and women in Farmville, from those who listened to his sermons to those who asked questions about the town's history and others who walked with and were arrested with him in the fight for civil rights.

"The word I use to describe Rev. Williams is ever present," said Moton Museum Director Cainan Townsend. "(He is) a pillar in this community. A remarkable human, a remarkable reverend, minister, an activist. You name it, no matter how bad things have been or are at present, he'd never hesitate to loudly sing the words 'We shall overcome Someday,' meaning every single word every time he sang it."

THE WORK OF REV. WILLIAMS

One word that keeps coming up in regards to Rev. Williams is history maker and if you look back over decades of Farmville's existence, past and present, you'll see that's true. Think back to July 28, 1963. Rev. J. Samuel Williams Jr. had, along with Rev. Goodwin Douglas, organized the latest in a series of student civil rights demonstrations in town, bringing almost 500 people together. The goal on that July morning was to integrate downtown churches.

Rev. Williams was standing with a group on the steps of Farmville Baptist Church, praying and singing hymns. One portion of the group made it inside of Johns Memorial Episcopal Church, where they sat with then-Longwood University Dean Dr. C.G. Gordon Moss.

Another portion of the group tried to worship at Farmville United Methodist Church and was rejected. After trying and being rejected again at Farmville Baptist Church, the group started to pray and sing hymns on the church steps. They were arrested and charged with "disturbing the public worship of God", the first time that had happened after a "kneel-in" in the South.

"I felt hurt we were being arrested, to prevent us from worshipping God," Williams said in a 2017 discussion with East Rockingham High School students. "Singing, praying, listening to the message, just like the people inside were doing. I saw that as a great contradiction there. We didn't know what to expect but it was something we had to do. You never know how it's going to end up, but you have to be brave enough to do it."

And time and again, you see Rev. Williams' own actions echoing those words. More than a decade before the protest at Farmville Baptist, Williams took part in the April 23, 1951 student strike at Robert Russa Moton High, alongside Barbara Rose Johns and other classmates.

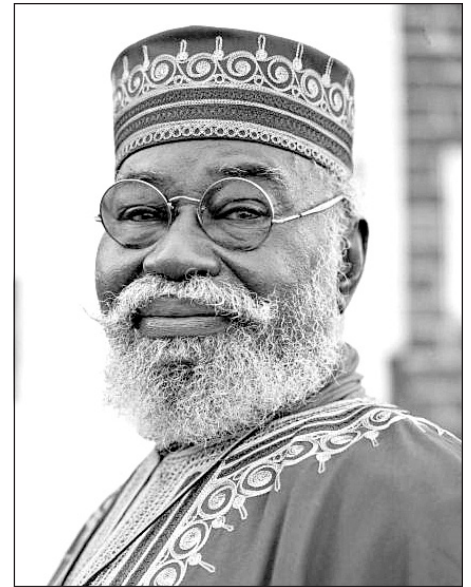
Moton High was the first free-standing segregated high school for African-American students in Prince Edward County. Originally built in 1939, its max capacity was to hold exactly 180 students, but had over 477. As such, there was overcrowding in the classrooms, along with subpar conditions and hand-me-down education materials.

In a 2016 interview with *The Herald*, Williams described his time at Moton High School as being challenging and dark.

"We were trying to find our way out of academic darkness," Williams said, adding the students wanted to "(find) a way out of stereotypes."

'THE LORD HOLDS THEM BY THE HAND'

Through the years, Rev. Williams has served in



a number of other roles in Farmville.

"We know that he was the historian of our community," said James Ghee, President of the Prince Edward County NAACP. "We know that his preaching has been outstanding throughout his career. The impact he's had on our community is unbelievable."

That impact also came as the pastor of three churches, including Levi Baptist, First Baptist and Beulah Baptist. And now, at age 90, he's been back at Levi Baptist as the church's senior pastor, although recovering right now from recent health issues.

In conversation, a biblical passage keeps popping up, in reference to Rev. Williams' work. That would be Psalm 37: 23-24, which states "The Lord directs the steps of the godly. He delights in every detail of their lives. Though they stumble, they will never fall, for the Lord holds them by the hand."

Throughout the years, the marches, the protests and calls to minister across the Farmville community, God directed Rev. Williams' steps, community members say. And now that same direction falls on the rest of the community.

Speaking back in December at the ceremony to rename Watkins Street to Williams Way in Rev. Williams' honor, Townsend pointed out the challenge that Williams would have for those in the community.

"And when you think about him, think about what he would be doing," Townsend said. "And what he would be doing is standing up for people who need it, pointing out injustice when he sees it and acting on it. And that's what he would want you to do."



Protestors stand in front of a downtown Farmville church, in support of integrated worship.



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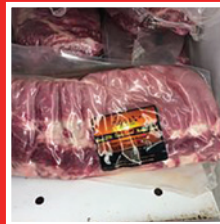
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We will continue the march

Like many students at Longwood University, I have immersed myself in the campus culture. I strive to live out the mission of citizen leadership by engulfing myself in all facets of campus life. Since transferring to Longwood about three years ago, I have participated in service projects, joined student organizations, and currently serve as the Editor-In-Chief of the University's independent student-run news organization. I have not only embraced life at Longwood but also living in the Farmville community. Barbara Rose Johns' legacy is all the more impactful for my peers and me but unlike just under 90% of my peers, I am a Black man.

Including myself, there are 329 people of color identified among the 3,222 currently enrolled undergraduate students on Longwood's campus, according to the university's reported data in October 2023 to the State Council for Higher Education for Virginia (SCHEV) in their fall 2023 headcount race trends. That is 10.2% of the student body. Although 329 students might not sound like a lot, it is another step in the right direction for a university whose administration largely stood silently during and after Barbara Rose Johns and her classmates walked out of the Robert Russa Moton High School in April 1951.

WE SEE PROGRESS THROUGH THE YEARS

Since the historic 1954 ruling of *Brown v. Board of Education*, the university leadership has worked to be a more inclusive institution of higher education. The first Black student in university history, Barbara Botts, enrolled in 1966, and N.H. "Cookie" Scott became the university's first Black graduate in 1972. The cultural change was for more than just who was admitted, but also reflected who was hired to provide expertise and support. Dr. Edna Allen Bledsoe Dean became the first full-time tenured Black academic faculty member in 1980. Her legacy is honored and remembered through Allen Hall.

Going into the turn of the century and beyond, university leadership did not forget its aim to enhance its campus's diversity, equity, and inclusion. In 2015, Longwood's governing body, the Board Of Visitors, approved a statement of profound regret for the university's action during the civil rights era. In 2020, the current iteration of the Office of Multicultural Affairs was established and the Clark Intercultural Center was established.

Clark House as it is known to students, is a space where all students can gather, and is currently the home for Longwood's four active National Pan-Hellenic Council organizations. One year later, the Title VI office was established to protect the rights of students and staff, and to combat discrimination on campus. The university also launched the University Diversity Council's

(UDC) five-year strategic diversity plan that same year. The UDC plan aims to continue the fight to combat racism discrimination that Barbara Johns started nearly 70 years ago and aims to be fully enacted by 2026.

COUNTY FACES ITS OWN PAST

At the same time as university officials were facing Longwood's problematic past, Prince Edward County and Farmville were grappling with their own place in history. In June 2020, Farmville's town council unanimously voted to take down a Confederate soldier statue that faced campus on High Street. As a Black student, it was a bit inspirational to see this happen, but like all things, this inspiration eventually faded.

In June 2022, local residents working with the Virginia Flaggers erected a 60-foot flagpole at one of Prince Edward County's US-460 entrances, and a Confederate battle flag flies there today. While it was initially a shocking change to the skyline that I fondly remembered as my welcome back to my college home, the ensuing legal battle between Prince Edward County and the landowners was a reminder that, while change does happen, it takes time. Just as it took Longwood administrative leadership 15 years after Barbara Rose Johns and her classmates marched out of their high school, and six more years till the first Black student earned her diploma.

MOVING IN THE RIGHT DIRECTION

While the Longwood campus community has much more work ahead, it is moving in the right direction. By becoming a place that celebrates not only people of color but also the cultures that make them, the staff and faculty at Longwood have shown that all people are welcome and are able to express themselves, and teach others on this campus. Student-led organizations like the Muslim Student Association (MSA) host events that allow students of different cultural and religious backgrounds to learn and experience Muslim culture through educational events like their upcoming Ramadan celebration, or the Hispanic Latino Association's (HLA) annual spring gala where students can experience and learn about Hispanic and Latino culture. MSA and HLA are just two examples of organizations advocating for the exposure and inclusivity of cultural, ethnic, or religious groups, but there are many more.

I came to Longwood looking for a place where I could make an impact larger than myself. I found that place in The Rotunda, where I am able to work with and propel the voices of organizations like MSA, HLA, the Asian Student Involvement Association (ASIA), the Black Student Association (BSA), their members, and so many other students of different races, ethnicities, and cultures. I would not be in this position without the work that was started by Barbara Rose Johns and her classmates 73 years ago.

Barbara Rose Johns exemplifies and exceeds the mission of citizen leadership that the students of Longwood University are held to and I am proud to be a member of this community. In May, hundreds of Longwood students including myself will cross Wheeler Mall to commence the next chapter of our lives. We are the next generation of movers and shakers who will continue the march started less than a mile by Barbara Rose Johns and her classmates 70 years ago at the Robert Russa Moton High School.

Anthony C. Anderson is a senior at Longwood University and editor-in-chief of their student-led paper, the Rotunda.



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Students 'embody spirit of Barbara Johns' through award

By Sharon Johnson

A leader in the Civil Rights Movement and Prince Edward County historical icon is still making an impact today. Students are following in the footsteps of Barbara Rose Johns, a civil rights activist whose actions as a teenager leading a student strike later influenced the landmark U.S. Supreme Court *Brown v Board of Education* case. This year, the Virginia Council for the Social Studies debuted its inaugural Barbara Johns Youth Change Agent Award. The award is inspired by Johns's legacy of fighting for equal educational opportunities at her high school in Farmville in 1951.

"As we went to create this new award, we really did want to highlight a heroine of Virginia, but also honor her legacy and honor how impactful this is not only for schools in Virginia but schools across the nation," said Samantha Futrell, president of the Virginia Council for the Social Studies. "Barbara Johns made all these sacrifices to essentially do what she believed was right and galvanize her fellow students into action."

WHAT IS THE AWARD?

The Youth Change Agent Award highlights a K-12 Virginia student who "contributes to their local community through service efforts, positively impacts their school climate through equity initiatives, and exhibits leadership capabilities and/or potential," according to the criteria listed on the award's website.

The student who is chosen for the award receives \$250 and recognition at the Virginia Council for Social Studies annual conference.

"Really anyone who found themselves embodying the spirit of Barbara Johns could apply for this award," said Futrell. "I was really excited not only for the opportunity for students to nominate themselves, but also for teachers and supervisors to nominate students in their community who they thought to be embodying the characteristics of Barbara Johns - her spirit of being a change agent in her community."

Futrell said they had many submissions and were excited about the high turnout for the award. The council picked two winners this year - a duo who created a documentary highlighting the desegregation of schools in Warren County and Charlottesville.

"I found the documentary to be incredibly impactful. It is something that I plan to use with the students in my classes," said Futrell.

CHOOSING THE INAUGURAL WINNERS

The inaugural Youth Change Agent Award winners were Spotswood High School seniors Elizabeth Kidd and Pria Dua. It took the team more than a year to research, interview, film, and edit the documentary. The students pulled from library archives and interviewed former students who were a part of integrating Warren County and Charlottesville schools. One of their subjects was Charles Alexander, one of the "Charlot-

tesville Twelve" who first attended the all-white Venable Elementary School in September 1959.

"It is the work of true historians. They were able to take a topic within history, understand that there was a void, talk to people who had been victims and overcame active resistance, and they were able to allow space for those people to tell their stories," said Futrell. "They were able to synthesize all that into a documentary that was not only well-produced, but fact-based with primary sourcing, while also giving tons of space to the actual people who were involved in all this. This is what historians in the field aspire to do, and these were students in high school."

Futrell said they also formed friendships with the former students and historical figures - going above and beyond the award's original criteria.

"The friendships that were developed personally gave them a fire to make sure their stories were told," said Futrell.

Kidd and Dua's documentary, titled "Knocking Down Walls: The Deliberate Speed of Harrisonburg's Federal Court" highlighted school desegregation cases decided in Harrisonburg. The students showcased a mini version of the documentary at the Virginia Council for the Social Studies conference. They presented at their own session, showing teachers how they can do similar projects in their own classrooms. Nearly 400 educators registered for this year's conference.

The two students also got the opportunity



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This year's Change Agent award winners include, from left, Cameron Patterson from Longwood, Maggie Creech from Virginia Council for Social Sciences and Moton Museum executive director Cainan Townsend.

to meet Barbara Johns sister, Joan Johns Cobbs. She spoke after Dua and Kidd received their award, sharing her experiences in the school strike and how her sister impacted her as a family member and as a changemaker in the pivotal moment in history.

"She did so much not only for Prince Edward County, but for Virginia, but also for our nation as a whole, and we really wanted to honor her and her legacy. I think having her sister come to the conference this year was a huge part of that as well," said Futrell.

Johns statue heads to D.C.



Everyone who visits the U.S. Capitol from 2025 on will see a familiar site. The image of Barbara Rose Johns is almost ready to take her place in Statuary Hall. It's been a lengthy process. In December 2020, the Commission for Historical Statues in the United States Capitol voted to replace a statue of Robert E. Lee, deciding one of the Farmville civil rights leader should represent Virginia. Two statues represent each state in the Statuary Hall of the Capitol. Virginia's other statue is of George Washington. As for when that will happen, it's still up in the air. The statue still needs to be approved by the Architect of the U.S. Capitol and then the Speaker of the House decides when it will be placed.




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