

With All Deliberate Speed: School Desegregation in Buncombe County



Rosa Parks (1913 - 2005) - Library of Congress Archives

“With All Deliberate Speed” is created as a traveling exhibit for tenth grade students in North Carolina to demonstrate the many ways Americans may participate as citizens through voting, holding public office, using legal appeal, participating in public demonstrations of support or protest, and more. The very future of our pluralistic democracy relies on today’s students’ skill, vision and passion to begin to shoulder the rights and responsibilities of citizenship.

The 1954 and 1955 ruling on the Supreme Court Case Brown vs. Board of Education began the process of the desegregation of schools and public facilities all across the South and offered multiple examples of public engagement. While the wisdom of its ruling is accepted by the majority of the citizens in 2005, it was not so in 1954. Soon after the decision was delivered, a group of Southern senators and representatives launched a strong protest known as the "Southern Manifesto." In part it read:

"This unwarranted exercise of power by the Court, contrary to the Constitution, is creating chaos and confusion in the States principally affected. It is destroying the amicable relations between the white and Negro races that have been created through 90 years of patient effort by the good people of both races. It has planted hatred and suspicion where there has been heretofore friendship and understanding." (Congressional Record, 84th Congress Second Session. [Vol. 102, part 4], March 12 1956)

The following 50 years, thanks to the hard work of individuals and organizations, have creat-

ed an entirely different "friendship and understanding" between the citizens of our mountain home. Blacks and whites, along with citizens of many ethnicities, forge a common bond through sharing meals, cheering at games, marching in bands, serving as co-workers or board members, and much, much more. Still, challenges for equality and harmony remain. That is where students have the opportunity to rise and accept their rights and responsibilities as American citizens. May students discover in these eye-witness accounts a vision and a passion to work towards the dream of so many, for "liberty and justice for all".

This exhibit was created based on the research of five UNCA students **Shunikka Lyons, Jamal Mullen, Tierney Oberhamer, Paige Shy, Klanesha Thomas** along with the generous interviews of many others. Special thanks go to **Dwight Mullen** who envisioned much of the tenor of the project through his focus on the courageous work of ASCORE – Asheville Student Committee on Racial Equality. Thanks also to the life long leadership of **James Ferguson** and **Marvin Chambers**, and all the ASCORE members, who shared their memories and dedicated their life paths to continuing the lessons they learned in their youth. Thanks also to the **North Carolina Civic Education Consortium**, through **Z. Smith Reynolds Foundation**, who provided the seed money. Special thanks to the Stephens-Lee Alumni Association, the 10th Anniversary Planning Committee Chaired by **Gene Ellison** and **Jennie Eblen** along with all the sponsors of the project.

Created by the Center for Diversity Education
10th Anniversary 1995-2005



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Asheville Student Committee on Racial Equality – ASCORE

Out of the organizing structure of the Interfaith Youth Council, African American students began to understand the power they had to organize for change in the community. James “Bo Bo” Ferguson, Charles Bates, James Burton, Marvin Chambers, and Burnell Freeman, 1960 graduates of Stephens-Lee High School, were the initial founders of ASCORE – Asheville Student Committee on Racial Equality (named to reflect the national organization - CORE). Over the next several years many more students would join the effort. While most of the ASCORE members attended Stephens-Lee, there were also students from Allen and Asheville Catholic.

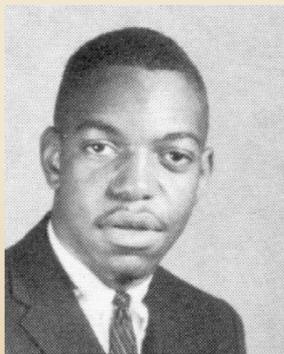
Initially, the group worked to address the inequalities between the facilities at Stephens - Lee and Lee Edwards High Schools. By researching and numerating the condition of the facilities and the educational materials (books, supplies, etc.), the students presented their case in front of the Asheville City School Board for the building of a new high school. Their work led to the building of South French Broad High School to replace Stephens-Lee. The new school opened in 1965.



William Roland, ASCORE advisor, was owner of Roland Jewelry on Market Street. Georgia Roland Collection



Marvin Chambers



Burnell Freeman



James Ferguson



Charles Bates



Sit-ins took place across the South including this photograph of students in Charlotte. Courtesy of the Charlotte Observer.

Marvin Chambers recalled “shortly after the sit-ins started in February of 1960 we wanted to get involved in a protest movement here, but we didn't have a college campus so it was left to us as high school students to do something. Through Mr. William Roland, we were put in contact with people from American Friends Service Committee [the Quakers] and they came in to give us some training.” Other adults, both black and white, mentored and supported the youth including Leah Butler, Rosetta Hill, Rev. Niolus Avery, the Franz’ and Ms. Gill. They also received the backing of the Asheville Citizen’s Organization organized by Ruben Dailey and Harold Epps.

The students all attended workshops to learn non-violent organizing strategies and began a plan to desegregate Asheville. They strategically targeted specific businesses and, over a period of several years, were instrumental in the desegregation of lunch counters, movie theatres, Pack Library and more.

Al Whitesides recalls: “We would meet at William Roland’s jewelry store after school. He and Mr. Lloyd Mc Cord were our chief supporters. They were both very involved with the NAACP. In the front was the jewelry store and in the back was an office where we met. There were maybe 10-15 of us at any time. We were very organized. There was no fooling around. We were all good students and in the top of our classes. All of us went on to college.” Al went to college at NC Central and eventually became involved in student government. While he was President in his Senior year, he was jailed for his involvement with protest movements in Durham. As with many of the ASCORE students, he credits his experience in ASCORE as guiding his commitment to equality and justice for his entire life.

Some of the main sit-ins took place in downtown Asheville at the Kress and Woolworth lunch counters as well as at Newberry’s in the Westgate Shopping Center where African

Americans were previously only served at a take-out window.

James Ferguson recalls the preparation for the sit-ins at the lunch counters. “Bill Begley was an organizer with the Quakers. He told us ‘We have a group of white people who are interested in what you’re doing, and we are going to work with you’ One of the key things was that the powers that be did not want anything [to happen] that would deter tourism. [They would tell us] ‘you guys go down and sit at the lunch counter and there we’ll be, when you sit you leave a seat between you and somebody white will come and sit there.’ The Kress, Woolworths and Newberry’s lunch counters were integrated in this fashion.

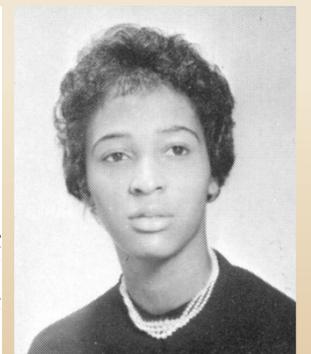
One incident involved Kenilworth Drug Store at the corner of Biltmore and Victoria. When ASCORE students explained that they intended to return the next day to be served at the soda counter, the owner replied that he was not in the position to make that decision. The next day when the students returned, the owner had removed all the seats from the soda counter and converted to a take-out service only.

4 Chain Store Lunch Counters Are Integrated

AUG 16 1960
A number of Negro patrons were served without incident at the lunch counters of four chain variety stores here Monday.

A spokesman for the Asheville Area Council on Human Relations said the limited service of Negro customers followed several weeks of negotiation between the council, the store managers and Negro community leaders.

He said the stores involved were F. W. Woolworth, S. H. Kress and Co., Fain's Thrift Store and J. J. Newberry Co.



Diane Blakely

This short article described the loan article covered in the local Asheville Citizen - Pack Memorial Library, North Carolina Collection

Asheville Student Committee on Racial Equality – ASCORE

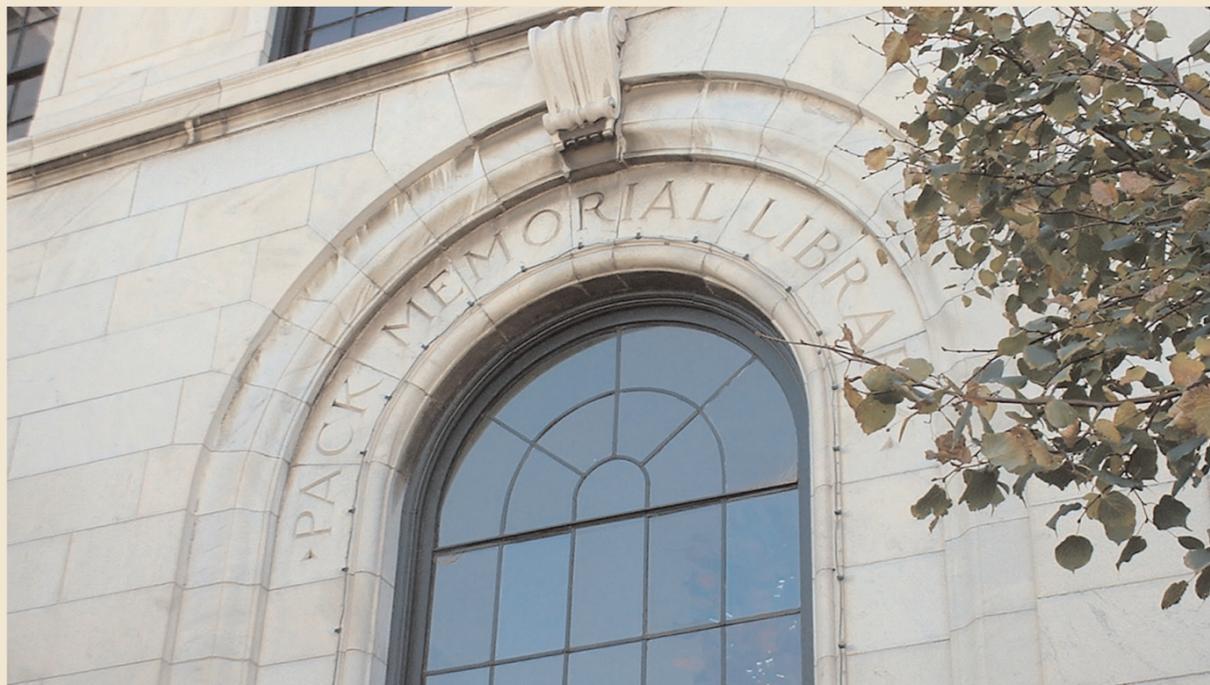
In addition to targeting the lunch counters, the students also wanted access to Pack Memorial Library. Prior to this time they could only patronize the library reserved for blacks at the YMI on Eagle Street. **Viola Jones Spells**, an Allen School graduate, recalled that she and **Oralene Graves Simmons** visited with the Director of Pack Library to discuss desegregating the facilities:

"So we made an appointment for the next meeting and we went back and he said that the board had agreed that black people should be using the library...he gave us a tour of the library ...It was very inspiring and it made a great impact on my life because...I later became a librarian." **Anita White Carter** recalled the first book she checked out at Pack Memorial Library was Great Expectations.

As each new group of ASCORE high school students would prepare to graduate, they would work to recruit, mentor and train more rising juniors and seniors. **James Ferguson** recalls, "Those of us who started this really wanted to go away to school and we wanted to make sure that there was a group there to carry it on. That's when we started bringing in others who were in the other classes...we were grooming them for leadership." That included **Barbara Turman**.

Barbara Turman Ferguson (James and Barbara later married) was president of ASCORE in 1961 when the students decided to address the unfair hiring policies of the Winn Dixie on College Street across from the Buncombe County Courthouse. The Winn Dixie only hired teenage white young men as bag boys, a position the students felt should equally go to black students. The boycott lasted several months. Ms. Ferguson recalls "We would do role plays before each action. Someone would act as the CEO and an ASCORE member would practice what they were going to say. We tried to be prepared for every response they might have."

In the beginning, blacks would cross the picket line but by the end, churches had organized to encourage the support of the students. **Al Whitesides** recalls in particular the support of **Rev. Percy Smith**, who was pastor of Hopkins Chapel who exhorted his congregation to shop somewhere else than the Winn-Dixie. Mr. Whitesides participated in walking the picket line. Everyday after school he'd walk down the hill and pick up his sign and march with 4-5 other students. He was one of the first blacks hired when they finally agreed to the demands of the students. "I was hired on Biltmore Ave.. It was while I was there that I met the man that kept me out of the fox holes in Vietnam. One of the fellow [white] bag boy's fathers was the head of the naval reserves. He advocated for me for a slot in the reserves as I was in college. That was a very hard spot for anyone to get – much less someone who was African-American. Following college, I



Pack Memorial Library - Staff

worked on a ship instead of the infantry and only served 22 months of active duty."

Virginia Dawkins Weaver also recalls the grocery store boycott. "I was working at Walton Street Park and would participate in "the line" on my day off. ...Mr. Raymond Washington, Park Manager, [informed us] that we could not partici-

pate in the "line" and work for the city. We needed the money for college. Therefore, Mr. Roland took us off the line and gave us the responsibility of making the signs in a room at his jewelry store....We were very fortunate to have wise adult leadership."

Negroes Picket Supermarket

Three Negroes sponsored by the Asheville and Buncombe County Citizens Organization Saturday picketed the Winn-Dixie Store at 190 College St., alleging anti-Negro employment policies.

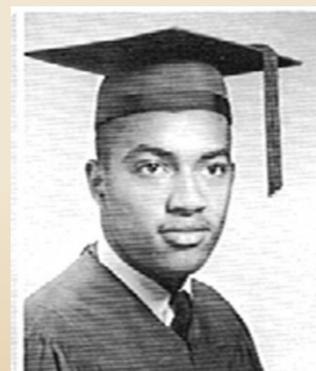
The Rev. N. M. Avery, chairman of the Negro group's employment committee, said the pickets would continue until a Winn-Dixie spokesman communicated with the group. The protest began two weeks ago with distribution of handbills.

Winn-Dixie area supervisor C. J. Benfield denied that any Negroes have been refused employment because of their race. He said one Negro is employed in the Winn-Dixie store at 487 Biltmore Ave.

The local newspapers – Asheville Citizen and the Asheville Times rarely covered the activities of ASCORE – Pack Memorial Library, North Carolina Collection



Viola Jones Spells from *Allen High School Yearbook* – Anita White Carter Collection



Al Whitesides from the *Stephens-Lee Yearbook* – Florence Green Collection



Barbara Turman Ferguson from the *Stephens-Lee Yearbook* – Florence Green Collection

Asheville Student Committee on Racial Equality – ASCORE

Another ASCORE recruit was **Annette Penland Coleman**. Of **William Roland**, the adult advisor, she recalled "I admired him so much. He was a mentor. He always reminded us to remain non-violent and under no circumstances to hit back – even if they called us a nigger. He stressed not to retaliate. He encouraged us far beyond the issue of how unfairly we were treated as citizens and reminded us that an education was about power." Annette participated in the boycott of the downtown grocery store and recalls this experience of the desegregation of a restaurant on Tunnel Road. "As soon as the manager saw us walking in the door he called the police to get us out. The police told him, 'I can't do anything about this. Just go ahead and serve them'. The funny thing is no one had any money to order anything. No one ever had any money for stuff like that! We finally scrapped something together to buy something! I would see that manager for years around town. He always had that mean look on his face."

Rosa Davis was also an adult advisor for the students. In 1963, ASCORE targeted the drive-ins for desegregation. "I would drive with maybe 3-4 ASCORE students in the car with me. We would pull up at the speaker and place our order and then sit and sit – nobody would serve us. Several times they called the police on us to escort us out of the drive-in. When we went to Buck's, this big man with a cigar came out and said 'Y'all need to leave right now'. I said 'Who are you?' 'I'm Buck!' he replied. That's when the police came to the car and told us we had to leave the premises."

Kenzil Summey recalls his activities in 1964 while he was in the 11th grade. He arranged a meeting with the manager of Sears to discuss summer employment for African Americans. He also recalls visiting white churches to explain how they could be helpful and in support of the students. "My experience in ASCORE enabled me to adapt what I had learned to events that occurred in my life as I matured. I did go through my radical period. But I had gained experience working with both blacks and whites and a sense that it was possible to make change."

Carolyn Taylor Jackson recalled that Mr. Roland had arranged for her to contact the telephone company. "I was 17 years old and the first black telephone operator for the telephone company Southern Bell. Back then there was no automated system and all long distance phone calls were placed through an operator. That was also the time when they only hired women for those positions. A few times customers would ask me if I was black but mostly it became accepted. When I was being considered, the two managers of the company came out to my house to interview me. My parents weren't home and it made me very nervous. They don't do that kind of thing anymore."



The March on Washington occurred in 1963. Library of Congress Archives



Stephens-Lee High School was named for Edward Stephens and Hester Lee. It was closed in 1965 and torn down in 1977. UNCA Ramsey Library Archives, Special Collections



Jayne Burton



Carolyn Jackson



Oralene Simmons



Annette P. Coleman

Georgia Roland, recalls the complex struggles of her husband **William**. "He worked very hard to further the job opportunities of the black community. One time he got a call from a local industry that they would be willing to hire blacks but they would

prefer they were light skinned. He said 'Sure, we've got all shades of colors of black people'. It was really hard to work within the racism of that time period but he did it."



Asheville City Schools

In the early 1960's black families began to call for admission of their children to white schools. Asheville City Schools followed a similar timeline to the Buncombe County schools. This approach kept the black and white schools open and separate while allowing for students and families to choose which schools to attend. In practicality this system maintained racially separate systems. Eventually the court system required all school systems to completely desegregate.

Dr. John Holt was the only black school board member at the time of desegregation and the first since Isaac Dickson who served in 1887. He describes the meetings to decide the timeline and methods. Dr. Holt recalls "During these discussions and arguments we'd call each other all kinds of names and Phil Sales, school board chair, changed...he went from one extreme [racist] to the other....where he decided that this is the right thing to do and we'd [the school board] had been unfair....[he] was a deeply religious man. and he grew up just believing that segregation as right, not necessarily discrimination, but he never realized that he two were involved together." Dr. Holt describes his learning of the disparity between the spending per pupil at Lee Edwards as compared to spending at Stephens-Lee as being a turning point.

As ACS became more intent on fully desegregating, the issue of "excess classrooms" arose. The school board decided to close a number of schools. A vigorous community debate arose over which schools to close. The white and black communities both organized to advocate for their neighborhood schools to remain open. The school board voted to close the black elementary schools and bus the students into the formerly white schools. A group of African American families secured attorney Ruben Dailey to appeal the decision. In a ruling handed down on September 16, 1970, the appeal was denied stating:

"We were asked to decide whether the district court, in approving the plan, unconstitutionally placed "the burden of desegregation" upon black pupils in the school system. It is urged upon us that the plan approved by the district court "places an unfair, racially discriminatory burden upon black children in grades 1 through 5 who previously attend all black Livingston and herein Elementary Schools will be required to travel as much as five or six miles in order to attend previously all-white schools.We hold that such a pattern of assignment implemented by free school bus transportation does not violate the dual protection clause of the Fourteenth Amendment....The worst that can be said of the plan is that in grades 1-5 the burden falls disproportionately on black children whereas in grades 6-12 in fall disproportionately on White children (due to the percentages of white and black students in attendance at the time."



Parents organized to keep their students out of former black schools - Asheville Citizen - August 22, 1968 - Pack Memorial Library, North Carolina Collection

Throughout the desegregation in the 1960's, Asheville City Schools saw a steady drop in enrollment with an equal rise in the Buncombe County system which continues to the present.

This trend was mirrored across the country and saw the tremendous development of suburban communities throughout the US.



Lucy Herring School is now the Central Offices for Asheville City Schools



Livingstone Street School, along with Burton Street School and Stephens-Lee Gymnasium were converted to Recreation Centers.

City School Enrollment Drops For Second Year

By LAURENS IRBY
Citizen Staff Writer

Enrollment at Asheville's 14 city schools declined for the second consecutive year Monday, with first-day class figures showing a 3.5 per cent drop.

City Supt. W. P. Griffin announced 14 at enrollment reached 9,480 a year ago.

Griffin said the decline is in keeping with a "trend" in which last year's public school enrollment decreased by a similar amount (3.5 per cent) compared to a year earlier.

The superintendent accounted for the enrollment decline by saying that "more people are moving to the suburbs" and outside the bounds served by city schools.

Also, Griffin added, "private school enrollment has increased considerably in the last three years" at the expense of public schools.

Entering its fifth year of racial integration, Asheville's school system saw a peaceful first day of class sessions Monday. The Board of Education was named defendant in a civil lawsuit

Aug. 20 which seeks to have the school reorganized into a "unitary, non-racial" system. The suit was brought by parents and guardians of 30 Negro children and one white child and is pending in U.S. District Court here.

Supt. Griffin reported that 4,160 students entered elementary schools Monday, while 2,795 attended high schools.

An additional 192 students attended "special education" classes for youngsters who have difficulty keeping up with their classmates. This brought the total city enrollment to 9,480.

The number of special education students rose from 136 last year to 182 during the current year which has just begun.

Another formerly all-Negro school was desegregated Monday as at least three white youngsters showed up for classes at Hill Street Elementary School. Negroes constituted the remainder of the 430 pupils in grades one through seven. Hill Street School also recorded 73 students in a vocational rehabilitation class about half and half white and Negro, who work part-time and attend class part-time.

Griffin did not have available a breakdown of the white-Negro enrollment at all city schools, saying this should be compiled later.

A spot check with school principals indicated the following situation.

Aycock Elementary School, about 90 Negroes out of an enrollment of 623 including "special education" pupils. The school has two Negro teachers and 24 white teachers.

Claston Elementary School, 10 to 20 per cent Negroes out of 654 students.

David Millard Junior High School, no data on Negroes among the 756 pupils. The school has two Negro teachers out of a staff of 38 including the principal.

Newton Elementary, about 34-35 Negroes out of an enrollment of 500 including 11 white instructors plus a white librarian.

William Handolph Elementary, no data on Negroes out of the 511 enrollment. The school has three Negro teachers and 17 white teachers.

Lee Edwards High, no data on Negroes among the 1,540 students. The school has three Negro teachers and 72 white teachers.

South French Broad High, its 276 students are all Negro. It has four white teachers and a white principal out of a staff of 38.

Hill Street Elementary, has about three white students among its 430 pupils. Its 18 teachers are all Negroes. The vocational rehabilitation class

at the county annual meeting, was reported to be unfriendly toward a dog owned by the Yearwood.

Newfound Wins In Roadside Improvement

Newfound Community has been selected as the county winner in the Roadside Improvement Contest.

The program is a joint effort of the Agricultural Workers in each county and is sponsored on the area basis by the Agricultural Development Council.

According to Bobby Peck, who is chairman this year, four communities were judged and all had made a number of improvements. The others were South Hominy, Homokill, and Mrs. Marion Setzer.

Newfound Community will represent Buncombe County in the area contest which will be judged the middle of September. The president of the club is Levi Hall.

7th Parent Class To Hear Dr. Shirley

Dr. John Shirley, Asheville attorney, will be the speaker Thursday night at the seventh in the series of parenthood talks being conducted at St. Mark's Lutheran Church.

The final meeting will be held Thursday night. Parents of children under three years of age have been hearing of various aspects of their relationship to the child. Dr. Shirley's talk will be on Allergies in Childhood.

The program is at 7:30 p.m.

School Population Study To Seek Cause Of Decline

Asheville public school officials expect overall pupil enrollment to decline for the next two or three years, Philip W. Sales, vice chairman of the city Board of Education, said Monday.

And the school board plans to kick off a study to learn whether desegregation is at the root of the matter.

"We're planning to get some study information together," Sales commented, "to find out the effect of desegregation." We are going to tabulate the number of children by races in various schools to see if we can't account for other reasons.

This will be a continuing evaluation over a period of available till Friday.

Newspaper article on drop in enrollment and move to suburbs - Pack Memorial Library, North Carolina Collection

Asheville High School

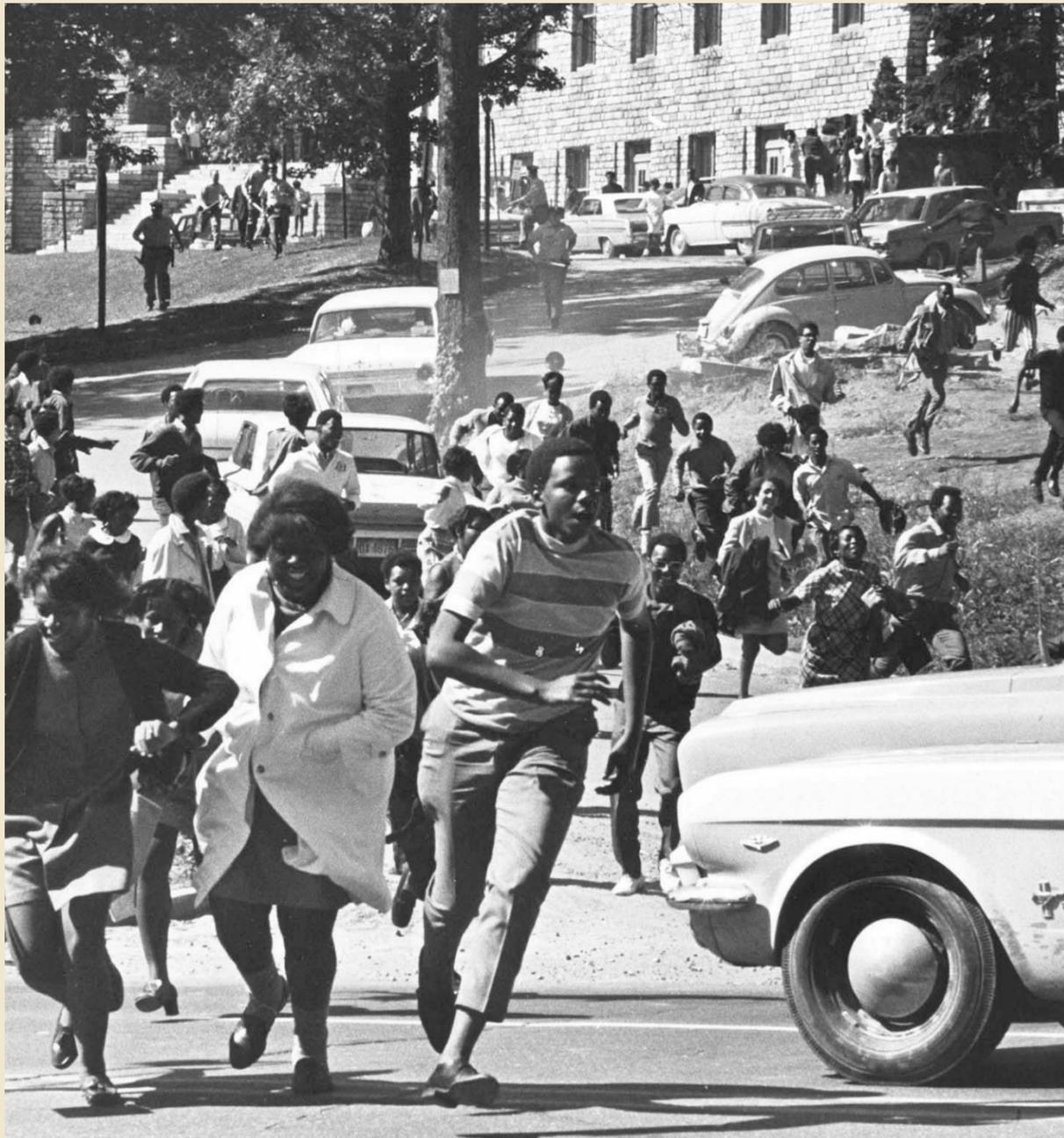
While many issues at the new Asheville High School had been addressed, others were festering. Darrel Wassin recalls the cosmetology class "You had black people in that class and you do not do black hair like you do white hair. They weren't teaching how to do black hair. There was also a problem with a rule stating that boys were supposed to wear socks to school. They would send the white boys home and tell them to get some socks and come back. They would suspend the black boys." Deborah Smith was part of a group of students who wanted the issues rectified including the addition of a Black History class. In particular, she recalled that the trophies from Lee Edwards were in place but they had not brought the trophies from Stephens-Lee or South French Broad High School over to Asheville High. "So, we met at one of the students' homes and listed our demands. Because when we were meeting that evening, ...I said, "We can't just walk out. We have got to have a list of demands. The principal is going come out and asking us what we're doing out here...He tried to make us go back to class, but we wouldn't go."

Vice Principal, O. L. Sherrill recalls "On a Monday morning [Sept. 29, 1969], we got word that we were going to have a walkout. The walk-out was that the black people were going to leave the classroom at a certain time and gather in front of the building. I would say around mid-morning, 10:00 or 10:30, that happened. Unfortunately, the new vocation building had just been completed and there were a lot of construction materials lying around. Their frustration was taken out on that building." As the windows began to break from the thrown rocks, the police were called and all the students were told to leave the building. School was closed for a week and a curfew was placed on the city with an injunction that stayed in effect for 6 months. The City Council met and agreed to many of the students' demands and school resumed.

On October 18, 1972, Asheville High School, with a student body of 2,000, was again closed and a curfew established after a fight broke out between white and blacks. This time eight people were taken to the hospital.

"It was all about a white guy dating a black girl". Sharon Kelley West recalls that they dismissed school and put all the students on the busses in the front of the school. "I remember it was raining and I saw my brother running from bus to bus to bus and he told me 'Go straight home! Go straight home!'" Yolaundra Hunting remembers

"I couldn't go home through the back parking lot because there were white guys with chains. [I went to the front] to get on the bus and saw a guy with blood laying on the front lawn. It was very scary."



Asheville High School students flee the campus during the 1969 riot. Asheville Citizen Newspaper, Sept. 30, 1969. Pack Memorial Library, North Carolina Desk

Gene Ellison recalls "I was in the 10th grade in 1972 during that riot between blacks and whites. I was a varsity basketball player when Chick Crawford was our coach. The team was half black and half white. He kept all the athletes separate from all the mess that was going on. He made sure we always felt like a team."

In December, 1975, with a student body of 1,500 the issue of the selection of members of the National Honor Society brought about a third disturbance. Over the years, the students began to work together on many of the issues that initially divided and the school came to feel as one team; one school.



Gene Ellison

In A Year of Struggle They Gave Us Their Cheers

Cheerleaders, below, from traditional "A" for Asheville High. (l.R) Kathy Ellis, Chalotte Adams, Cathy Burton, Lee Williams, Dorothy Wilkins, Ellen Baylor, Rhonda Roland, Gwen Wooten, Masont, center: Julia Derrough. Opposite page (l.-r.) Tanya Scott and Janna Thilo, head cheerleader.



The 1972 Asheville High School Year Book "Paw Prints" referred the challenges the students faced that year. Jennie Eblen Collection



Brown vs. the Topeka Board of Education – 1954 and 1955



Thurgood Marshall (center) stands with George E. C. Hayes and James Nabrit on the steps of the US Supreme Court. - Library of Congress Archive

White and black public schools were established in Buncombe County in 1886. Buncombe County operated elementary schools for blacks such as Carver (Black Mountain), while all high school aged students took a long bus ride each day to Stephens-Lee in Asheville. Until the 1950's, Stephens-Lee was the only public high school for blacks in all of WNC. Asheville City Schools also operated separate race based systems with all of the white high school students attending Lee Edwards and black students attending Stephens-Lee.

The systems may have been separate, but they were by no means equal. Black teachers received less pay for the same work as their white counterparts. Black teachers were not allowed to attend area colleges for training or certification. As was true for schools all across the South, equipment and furniture in the black schools had been through years of use in the white system before African-American students or teachers received the worn and outdated texts.

Deidre Wiggins recalls "I remember in Shiloh, the elementary school that was all black; we had textbooks ... They were ragged and so badly torn and there were names on the front cover with lines to put your name. You had to go to the back [to put your name] ... where there weren't even spaces. You'd pick these books up and the spines were just barely hanging on. I remember the day they opened up boxes of [used] books for the library. We were told that those were the books from the white high schools." In fact, the school colors at Stephens-Lee were the same as Lee-Edwards so they could use the old band uniforms of the white high school.

Plessey vs. Ferguson (1898) was the legal pillar that supported the power of whites. In 1954, Thurgood Marshall, legal counsel for the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), successfully argued the case of Brown vs. the Topeka, Kansas Board of Education which overturned the notion of the equality of separation.

Local educator, Lucy Herring, recalls the June morning in 1954, "The white principals and black principals had been meeting together [for some time]. Mr. J. W. Byers [Asheville City Schools Superintendent] brought us together, and he said that the Supreme Court Decision has been handed down! 'We in Asheville are going to abide by the law!' That was a bomb shell.... But he wasn't backed up - period... Mr. Earl Funderbunk became our Superintendent."

In follow up arguments to Brown vs. Board of Education, "when" became the stumbling block. The NAACP and Marshall argued for the phrase "forthwith". In 1955, Chief Justice Earl Warren agreed to the phrase "with all deliberate speed".

In Buncombe County and Asheville City Schools, forestalling integration became the modus operandi of both school systems. Lucy Herring recalls that it was six years later before the first black parents approached the Asheville school system to enroll their children. "They were moving with deliberate speed, but it wasn't much speed!... they [the school board] just said 'we were waiting until the black people said something. In other words 'let sleeping dogs lie'. If nobody makes any requests why we could just let the thing go on until something did happen and then proceed".



Central High School in Little Rock, Arkansas was the first school in the South to be desegregated in September, 1957. Pictured here are the students known as "The Little Rock Nine". - Library of Congress Archives



In Asheville the headlines of June 8, 1955 read "Board Pledges 'Honest Effort' to Meet Court School Order". - Pack Memorial Library



Lucy Herring was a prominent educator in Asheville City Schools. - UNCA Ramsey Library, Special Collections

Buncombe County Schools



Weaverville Colored School held its last classes in 1963. It is now a neighborhood community center and is located just off of Reems Creek Rd. Center for Diversity Education Archives

In 1963, Buncombe County Schools began a limited desegregation of grades 1-3. This allowed African American families "to apply" to have their children enrolled in the formerly all white schools. The following year, grades 4-6 were given this option. It was hoped that this method known as "Freedom of Choice" would satisfy the

Supreme Court decision of Brown vs. Board and forestall the wholesale integration of black and white schools. There were 150 black students in a system of 20,000 with only grades 1-8 available.

High School students in the county were bused to Stephens-Lee High School.

According to a lawsuit filed by African American families in Buncombe County Schools, "In 1963, 22 Negro pupils applied to the Buncombe County School Board for transfer to schools previously attended solely by white pupils.

Twelve of these applicants for transfers to the first three grades of Haw Creek Elementary School were granted; the remaining ten were denied." The School Board stated the reasons as overcrowding in the requested schools. The court ruled on April 7, 1965:

The record shows no administrative problem arising from the need to accommodate the additional handful of pupils which could not be resolved at least by the opening of the next school year. If they all sought to transfer to the same one of the

Buncombe County's six high schools, difficulties might arise which would require that some of them be relegated to other alternatives. General overcrowding in all six high schools, however, cannot justify the total exclusion of Negro pupils when the much more numerous white pupils are

all accommodated."

Deidre Wiggins recalls being in one of the first classes of integrated students at Roberson High School. Throughout her elementary and junior high school education, she had attended Shiloh Schools. "The first day we got off the bus, I remember there was the "N" word written as we got off on the sidewalk. Of course there was a lot of fighting and confusion going on because of that. That was the first day."



Carver Elementary in Black Mountain went from a black elementary school to a recreation center. - Center for Diversity education Archives

County Adopts Integration Plan

Continued From Page One

announced in the next 60 or 90 days, Supt. T. C. Roberson announced. He added that copies of the new plan are available to the public at his office, on the eighth floor of the Courthouse.

Tuesday's action marked the first time the county board had put in writing an integration timetable. Currently, however, 10 Negroes are enrolled in the first three grades at previously all-white Haw Creek School, which last September saw the first integration of a county school.

At present, the county operates two Negro elementary schools — Carver School in Black Mountain, with five teachers, and Shiloh School in Biltmore, with 10 teachers. The majority of Negro elementary students in the county, and all county Negro high school students attend Asheville city schools. Their out-of-district tuition are paid by the county.

The board accepted alternates to the base bid which will hike the general contract to \$199,820. They call for walkway covered, \$6,200; classroom cabinets, \$18,720; and kitchen equipment, \$14,800.

Rogers Plumbing and Heating Co. of Asheville was awarded the consolidated plumbing contract for its low bid of \$10,422, which includes two alternate items. The consolidated electrical contract went to Hayes and Lunsford Electric Co of Asheville, low bidder at \$17,797.

Rogers Plumbing and Heating Co. received the heating contract for Weaverville Elementary, with a low bid of \$16,850. The heating contract for the Weaverville Primary annex went to Asheville Plumbing and Heating Co., low bidder at \$2,110. No heating bids were asked for the French Broad project, which will be electrically heated.

The board passed a motion ex-

Community Involvement

Across the South, by the late 1950's, the first families of African American students were beginning to enroll their children in formerly white only schools. On September 4, 1957, **Dorothy Counts**, daughter of a Johnson C. Smith University professor, entered the doors of Harding High School in nearby Charlotte, North Carolina. She was greeted by an angry rock-throwing mob. After only a few days of attendance, Ms. Counts was sent by her family for her safety to a school in Pennsylvania. In the winter of 1961, Ms. Counts enrolled at Allen School in Asheville where she graduated that Spring.



Dorothy Counts was the May Queen at Allen High School where she graduated in May 1961. Yearbook on loan from Anita White Carter

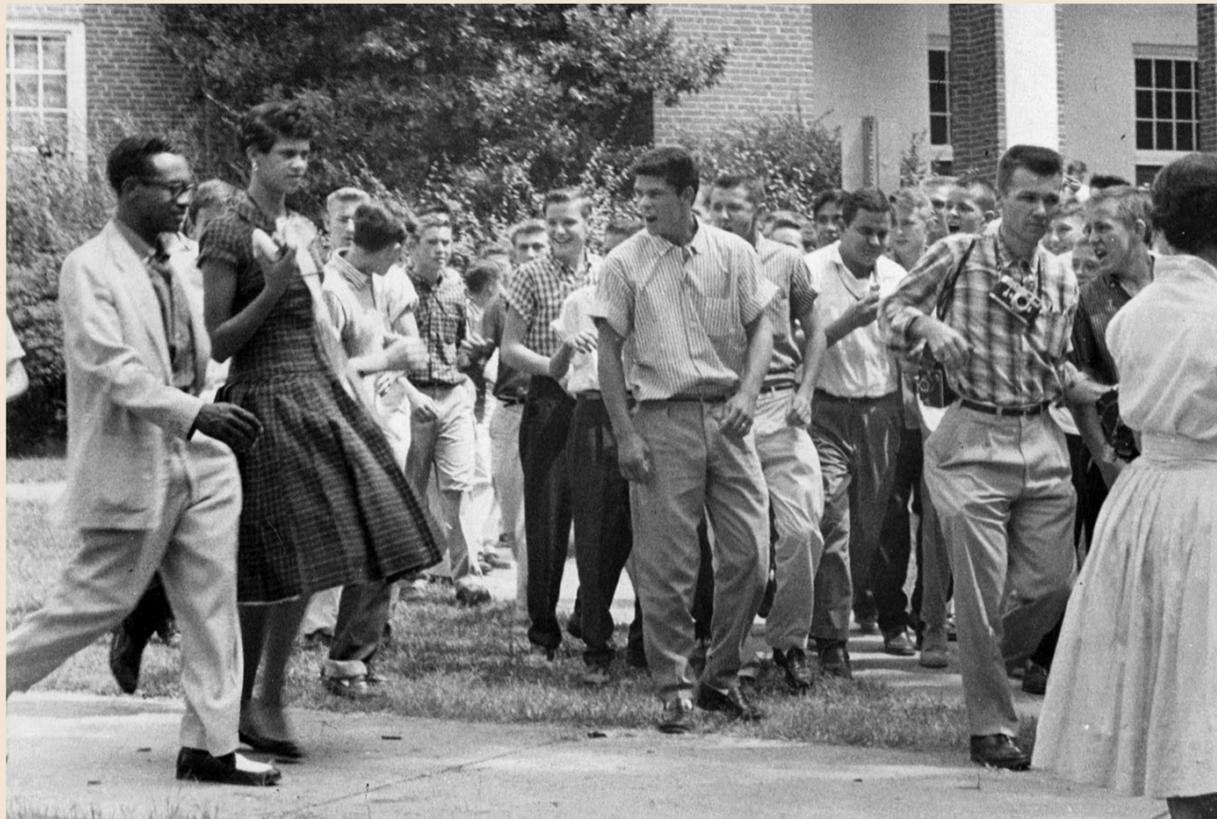


Anita White Carter Allen High School student. Yearbook on loan from Anita White Carter

Other parents looked for ways to shield their children from the experience of desegregation. **Anita White Carter** had attended elementary and junior high school in Shiloh. When it came time to enroll her at Stephens-Lee, her parents made the decision to send her as a day student to the prestigious all women's Allen School. Ms. Carter recalls her parents decision to enroll her there:

"I remember my father had a very different attitude towards integration, and he was very much afraid for his children....I think we felt a little more protected from issues related to segregation, because we were in our own little world [at Allen]. While her parents would not allow her to participate in any of the protest organizations, "the teachers at Allen were very much aware and involved us in the conversations." Ms. Carter recalled that the largely white faculty of Allen was insistent that the students not attend the movies in downtown Asheville, which required them to sit in a segregated balcony. Self-respect and dignity were very much a part of the curriculum at Allen.

In the late 1950's, the Human Relations Council, forerunner of today's Asheville-Buncombe Community Relations Council, was founded by began to advise on the process of integration on many levels. Around the same time the local chapter of the National Association of Christians and Jews began to hold annual "Brotherhood Days" where they would meet in one another's houses of worship. **Marvin Chambers** recalled that the youth were also active



Dorothy Counts enters Harding High School in Charlotte North Carolina on September 4, 1957. - Charlotte Observer Archives



Allen High School, now Asheville Office Park, was founded by the United Methodist Church in 1877 and for almost 100 years served as a premiere education facility for African American Women. Having closed its doors in 1973, it is now the Asheville Office Park on College Street. Center for Diversity Education Archives

in this organization. "Mrs. Schandler, **Joe Schandler's** mother, was the adult advisor for a group that was called the Greater Asheville Interfaith Youth Council, GAIYC, ...that met at the Old YWCA on Grove Street...They called this group together to begin black and white [relationships] across the racial lines...We held a conference at "In the Oaks" in Black Mountain and discussed various issues and conditions among the races."

Susan Gumpert Pelican, 1960 Lee Edwards graduate, recalls those meetings:

"...we met...to have more interfaith discussions between the two groups [blacks and whites / Christians and Jews] and to better understand each other's life paths. It was a real eye-opener to me. I had lived all my life in Asheville and never had any contact or conversations with [African American] kids my own age. We had led parallel

lives. For me, this was a profound social and political awakening. From Asheville, I went to Bryn Mawr College in Pennsylvania and got involved with the Civil Rights Movement. There all the janitors and maids were black and had hardly any wages and no benefits. We organized a confrontation with the administration and were threatened with expulsion. In 1963, I participated in the Mississippi Freedom Summer and was sent to Jackson, Tennessee. After that I went to Berkeley where the Free Speech Movement was just beginning, then the War Protests and later the Feminist Movement. Really, my life's path was affected by this initial experience with the African American students. I've always worked for a more just society to make the odds more even and to address the inequalities of society. From thinking about it, I can see there was a beginning to all this. Certain events in your life turn you in a direction."



Warren Wilson and Montreat Colleges



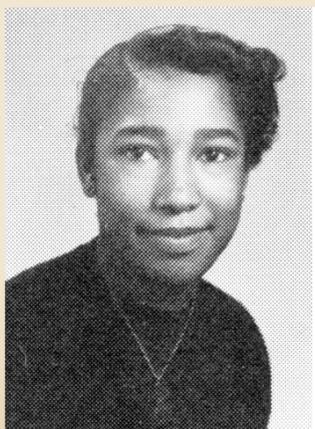
Allen School, a college preparatory high school for African American women run by the United Methodist Church located in Asheville regularly performed at Warren Wilson College.

- Warren Wilson Archives



Alma Shippey, with fellow students, was the first African American student admitted to Warren Wilson in 1952.

- Warren Wilson Archives



Georgie Powell was the first African American graduate in 1958 of Warren Wilson.

- Warren Wilson Archives



Margaret Meacham

- Warren Wilson Archives

In 1955, there were three institutions of higher learning in Buncombe County. Asheville-Biltmore College (now UNCA) and Montreat College were "Whites Only" institutions. African Americans could receive a college degree only by attending the segregated colleges that North Carolina maintained or going north to non-segregated systems, which many of them did. This segregation excluded American born black students, faculty and visitors from the college facilities. In December 9, 1951 the New York Times carried a story of Sarah Lawrence College students from Bronxville, New York on a Mason-Dixon tour which included the following incident in Buncombe County:

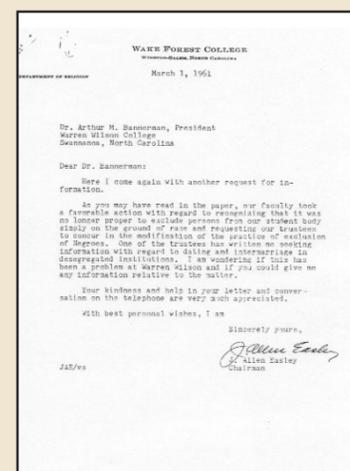
"There was the hot-chocolate incident at Asheville, NC. Half of the group was invited to stay overnight at Montreat College but Montreat, operated by the Presbyterian Church of the South, could not under its rules accommodate the Negro girls [2] in its dormitories. Montreat officials suggested that after the group bound for Warren Wilson College left for the night, a night cap of hot chocolate would be served to the remaining guests. The Sarah Lawrence advisers explained that their plan would involve a compromise of the [Sarah Lawrence] visitor's anti-discrimination principles. The [Montreat] hosts, with understanding, put their cups and saucers back on the shelf."

Unique across the region, Warren Wilson College (WWC) in Swannanoa had been the only facility in the South where blacks and whites could gather. In 1948, Warren Wilson was the only southern site where the Hazen Conference, a training institute for Christian Counselors, could hold retreats. Ina Bell Crane of Swannanoa was a white student there in 1948 and recalls "I can remember my first summer when the blacks came, and I said to Mrs. Laursen [head of the cafeteria], 'I'm not waiting on those blacks. They're supposed to be waiting on me.' She said, 'Well, you just go back to the dorm and you think about it and if you don't want to do it, then we'll find you another job.' So I got back to the dorm and I felt so terrible and I came back and said, 'Okay, I'll do it...'

This was my first lesson in human relations...I decided it if was important enough to her it must be right. ...I had been taught, you didn't do that. We had black people who came to do repair work on our house and clean it but I can remember getting a spanking because I pumped some water for a little black boy. My daddy gave me a spanking for it."

At least since the 1930's, students from Stephens-Lee High School and Allen School, both segregated schools for African Americans in downtown Asheville, had visited the Warren Wilson Campus to attend or perform at an event. Annette Penland Coleman of Asheville was 17 in 1963. She recalls "This was the only college around that we were allowed to visit. Our teachers would take us there for musical events, ball games - anything to give us a sense of college life."

Historically, Warren Wilson actively pursued the admission of black students from Africa and other countries across the globe. In 1952, they admitted the first American black student, Alma Shippey. In 1958, Georgie Powell was the first African American to graduate.



Colleges throughout the region wrote to Warren Wilson soliciting advice on the policies for integration.

- Warren Wilson Archives

During this time of Warren Wilson's courageous policy change, Dr. Arthur Bannerman, the college President, began to receive inquiries from other colleges for advice on its policies. In particular, the question of inter-racial dating was raised. In 1964, the first interracial couple at Warren Wilson, Margaret Meacham (white) and Bill Kindle (black), sparked a controversy. A committee on interracial dating was formed and the following action taken on June 8, 1964:

"Warren Wilson College reaffirms the principle that there should be no dating restrictions on its campus because of difference of race. At the same time, the college feels it must recognize the possible problems which may confront a dating couple in our community, as well as in our American Society today, when one person is white and the other Negro. For that reason, if such an interracial couple enters into a steady dating relationship while either of both are students at Warren Wilson, they are expected, as a sign of their maturity, before continuing their relationship, to consult with the Dean of Student Affairs. The Deanmay make any special regulations which he believes may be necessary to safeguard the couple themselves, as well as to safeguard the general interests of the entire college community."

Asheville-Biltmore College (UNCA)

Asheville-Biltmore College was founded in 1936 as a result of the merger of two local colleges and operated as a 2 year degree program for many years. In 1955, it received its first state apportionment, and the Board of Trustees began to plan for a permanent location for the school, having moved the college 5 times in 20 years. In 1958, a special school bond was approved by the citizens of Buncombe County to construct Asheville-Biltmore at the current site alongside Weaver Boulevard. The first students were in classes in Phillips Hall in 1961. Soon afterwards, the first black students were enrolled and attended classes.

On September 22, 1958, with the publicity of the bond issue, a group of African American citizens met as "The Citizen's Organization". According to Board of Trustee minutes:

"The negro group, led by **Ruben Dailey**, president, adopted a resolution opposing the local bond plan on grounds that the institution would be segregated. They contended that the use of taxpayers' money for a segregated unit would be in violation of the 14th Amendment and the May 17, 1954 decision of the Supreme Court. They further stated that Asheville-Biltmore College as it now exists should permit Negroes to attend in line with policies at the University of North Carolina [Chapel Hill]."

Mr. Morris Mc Gough, information director for Asheville-Biltmore College, was present at the meeting of "The Citizens Organization" along with **Mr. Byers** and **Mr. Miller**. The college representatives pointed out to the attendees that the suggested model of segregated white and black systems was already in operation in Wilmington and Charlotte.

The next day, **McGough, Byers** and **Miller** brought the resolution of opposition from "The Citizen's Organization" to the Board of Trustees. The Trustees voted unanimously to continue with the plan to build two separate colleges for blacks and whites. The minutes continue:

"Thereafter, discussion of the best way to present this matter to the newspaper ensued. Mr. Phillips read a proposed press release, a copy of which was finally agreed upon...It was then moved and seconded that the minutes reflect that it is the intention of the trustees to proceed with the establishment to the Negro unit in accordance with the said release which the Chairman, **Mr. Lipinsky**, was authorized to give to the press."

Even so, the march of integration was continuing all around the community. While records do not reveal a change in the Trustee's policies, African Americans began to attend Asheville Biltmore College in 1962, including **James Young** and **Etta Whitner**. **Ms. Patterson** recalls "I was selected by the leaders in the community to break the segregation barrier at UNCA. It was an enormous responsibility for an 18 year old. I made many friends during my time there – all the



Phillips Hall, UNCA. - Center for Diversity Education Archives



James Meredith also integrated the University of Mississippi in 1962. Oxford erupted in violence and two people were murdered. National Archives



Etta Whitner Patterson – First African American Student at Asheville Biltmore College (UNCA) – UNCA Ramsey Library, Special Collections

teachers were helpful and friendly."

In 1967, **Francine Delany** was the first African American student to graduate from what was soon to be called UNCA. Ms. Delany was a secretary with Asheville City Schools when she

decided to earn her degree at Asheville-Biltmore. She was also the mother of three young children and she worked hard to balance the demands of home and schoolwork. After earning her degree, she began to teach in the Asheville City Schools and eventually became a principal (Isaac Dickson Elementary) and Central Office Administrator.



Francine Delany – First African American graduate of Asheville Biltmore College (UNCA) graduate, 1967 – UNCA Ramsey Library, Special Collections



Integration from 1970 - 2000

In 1969, Asheville-Biltmore College became a part of the UNC system and changed its name to UNCA. In the same year, the US Department of Health Education and Welfare (HEW) began to examine the desegregation progress of ten states, including North Carolina, with historically segregated college systems. They were looking for compliance with Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 as it pertained to educational institutions receiving federal funding. Title VI read:

"No person in the United States shall, on the ground of race, color, or national origin, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any program receiving federal financial assistance."

In 1970, the UNC system received notification of non-compliance. Immediately, the Board of Governors began drafting a desegregation plan which was still on the drawing board eight years later in 1978. The central issue was the "means by which desegregation should be achieved and monitored." In 1979, HEW announced plans to withhold federal funding. In 1983, a consent decree was issued to the UNC system setting goals for black enrollment at traditionally white institutions at 10.6%, and 15% at historically black institutions. They also set goals for hiring of black faculty and staff and added graduate and undergraduate funding to historically black institutions. Finally, they worked to remove duplication of programs in a similar geographic regions.

These goals included UNC Asheville. By 1986 a directed recruitment effort had brought in the first black faculty to UNCA: **Charles and Dee James** (UNCA alumni) and **Dwight and Dolly Mullen** along with **Gwen Henderson** and **Anita White-Carter**. Over the next years, UNCA benefited from a growing black enrollment which at one point was close to 8%. Currently, the black enrollment at UNCA is under 2% including full and part time students.

In 1974, Allen High School, a private preparatory school for young black women with an almost 100 year history in Asheville, was closed. Operated by the United Methodist Church, Allen had seen a decade of decreasing enrollment as blacks had greater educational opportunities across the South. The buildings still stand as Asheville Office Park just before the tunnel on College Street.

In the 1980's, Asheville City Schools continued neighborhood based schools. While Vance, Claxton, Hall Fletcher and Asheville Alternative (Dickson) had a racial mix, Randolph Elementary was essentially all black, and Jones elementary was largely white. In 1988, local citizen **Bob Brown** filed an objection over the status of Randolph and Jones. The Asheville City School Board decided to merge the two schools making one a K-3 grade school and the other a 4-5 grade facility. They also adopted a magnet approach to themed



Asheville High School has a student body of over 1,000 students - Center for Diversity education Archives



UNCA Ramsey Library - Center for Diversity education Archives

schools with the intent to encourage further desegregation the schools.

By 2000, schools throughout Buncombe County were integrated by "de jure" – by law. Much had been accomplished. Thanks to the pioneering work of many local citizens, organizations and businesses, the opportunities for education, employment, public office, and housing see increased integration with every generation.

However, social networks, and the cultures of race, class, and religion, continue to segregate the classroom and the broader community. This is the challenge of the next generation of citizens in our pluralistic democracy. It will require each individual's intentional effort, in big and small ways, by both blacks and whites, to truly further the bonds of "friendship and understanding". Let it be, in the words of **Thurgood Marshall**, "Forthwith".



Asheville, Buncombe High Schools Desegregate



President Lyndon Johnson signs the Fair Housing Act. - Library of Congress Archive

By the late 1960's all the high schools across the county were integrated. **Rosie Palmisano** was on the Homecoming Court each year at Owen High School. She recalls that the one area of contention was the walk-out of the black students to garner support for the teaching of black history in the social studies classes. She comments "There were and still are friendships that developed out of our first years of an integrated school at Owen. Most of my classmates that are still living? We see each other at Church or at the grocery store and we talk about things like we always did."

Deidre Wiggins went to T. C. Roberson and recalls the constant work of the black students to educate their fellow white students. When the Fair Housing Act was passed in 1968, it became a part of classroom discussion. "This one student said, 'I would think more of my neighbors than to sell my house to a black person.' Of course, his statement enraged me, so I asked him what he

meant by that. ...I said to him, 'Let me just explain to you, we just want to have the same opportunities that you have. It's not that we want to live next to you so much that we have to follow you around.' So, immediately the teacher asked me to go to the office. I was the one who was sent to the office, not him, the one who brought this issue up, although the exchange of ideas was what I thought social studies was supposed to be about."

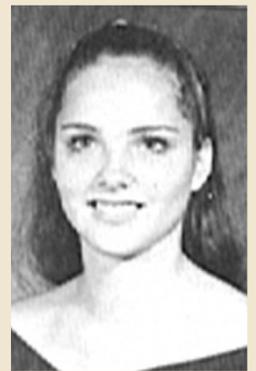
In the fall of 1969, Lee Edwards High School and South French Broad High School were brought together to form Asheville High School. In the year previous to integration, the staff of the two high schools worked on key issues of the merger. **O. L Sherrill**, co-principal at the time, recalls:

"...the student government had worked diligently to bring about what they anticipated to be some of the problems.... You must remember that never in the history of Asheville had blacks

and whites come together, so there were many things that weren't known. There were lots of fear factors. The mascots were changed. Team colors, school colors were changed....they decided they would have co-presidents for student bodies and most other clubs and activities."

Jennie Eblen recalls "During my 3 years we had an integrated cheer-leading team, not only with an almost equal amount of black/white participants, but also integrated in different styles of cheering....the cheers that were shared by our black classmates were very soulful... you can imagine

what was more fun and more popular! Our band also tried to mix different marching styles... I had my first true lessons in understanding the black community. My dearest friends, a friendship I still maintain, was with **Rhonda Roland** [daughter of **William and Georgia Roland**]. I remember very distinctly Rhonda telling me to quit calling her 'colored' - "we are all colored, Jennie. My color is black. Call me black'.... I also remember that there was a sense that these were historic times; that this merger was the right thing to do; and we, the students, needed to make it work."



Jennie Eblen



Rhonda Roland



Winter homecoming court



Jim Crow in Buncombe County



"White Only" signs were typical throughout Jim Crow South, including in Asheville – Library of Congress Archives

In 1896 a ruling by the nine member Supreme Court known as *Plessey vs. Ferguson* established a legal doctrine known as "Separate but Equal" which called for the separation of black and white people in schools, modes of transportation, businesses, and much more. In the eight to one ruling, Justice Henry Brown, wrote for the majority:

"That [the Separate Car Act] does not conflict with the Thirteenth Amendment, which abolished slavery...a statute which implies merely a legal distinction between the white and colored races... a distinction which is founded in the color of the two races and which must always exist so long as white men are distinguished from the other race by color... has no tendency to destroy the legal equality of the two races..."

In writing the minority opinion, Justice John Harlan prophetically replied "Our Constitution is color-blind, and neither knows nor tolerates classes among citizens. In respect of civil rights, all citizens are equal before the law..."

The ruling led to a series of "Jim Crow" laws and customs that restricted the movement of the black community. In Buncombe County it was felt in big and small ways:

Housing development would include restrictions in Deeds of Ownership that forbade the sell of property to African Americans. As an example, from 1920 – 1965 Norwood Park housing sales included the following phrase:

"...and that he will not build during the term of twenty years from the date hereof sell or convey said land or any part thereof, to a negro or person of any degree of Negro blood, or any person of bad character..."

The Plaza Theatre, and all other theatres, had separate entrances and seating for blacks. Georgia Roland recalls the dark alley entrance to

The Plaza off of Market St. "Our children, if they went at all, would have to go in the back and up those long steps and sit up in the balcony." Hilde Cohen Hoffman, moved to Asheville as a war bride having fled Nazi Germany. She recalled the first time she saw the separate restrooms marked "White's Only" and "Colored" in downtown. "It was just how the Holocaust started out. I wondered. 'Am I next?'"

In the 1940's, at the age of seven, Anita White-Carter recalls her first experience of Jim Crow when she and her brother were returning home to Shiloh from the downtown Christmas Parade:

"I'll never forget this. For the first time, my parents allowed me to go to the parade with my oldest brother on the bus....When we came back, ... I sat down in the first available seat. There was a white guy there and he kicked me off the seat. I will never forget that. My brother and his friends [from Shiloh], they were getting ready to attack this man. So, the bus driver pulled over, put everybody off the bus ...put all the black people off the bus. And, we had to continue to walk to Shiloh. I'll never forget that. He kicked me off the seat."

In the 1950's, while living in Washington DC, Darrel Wasin was accustomed to sitting in restaurants to eat. At five, her family moved back to Asheville and encountered "Jim Crow" for the first time at Newberry's lunch counter in the new Westgate Shopping Center. "I got in and sat down and my mother says 'No dear. If we are going to have anything to eat, we have to either stand up and eat it or take it outside or sit in the car.' I couldn't understand that." All restaurants, save those in the black business district, refused seating to blacks.

Al Whitesides recalls going to Woolworth's

in the 1940's with his grandfather and brother and drinking from the water fountain - black and white side by side. He drank from the white side and a white man said "Get away from there!" - his grandfather said "He will, when he is finished drinking water." Al remembers "As we walked away my grandfather said 'Partner, your grandkids won't have to put up with that, and I want you to make sure it doesn't happen.'"



In the 1960's The Fine Arts in Downtown Asheville was known as "The Strand". The current "2nd theatre and side entrance" is the former segregated entrance to the balcony. - Center for Diversity Education Archives

