

THIS LEGACY IS YOURS:
Celebrating the Lasting Contributions
of African American Women

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Mary Alexander

Mary Alexander was born in a small Tennessee town and came to Champaign in 1938 after college graduation. She came with the idea that employment opportunities would be plentiful, open housing was in place, but she found this was not true, so she set about the work of trying to improve the plight of the African-American populace.

She joined forces with the League of Women Voters to improve housing opportunities and to bring more programs into the schools that would serve the underprivileged children.

In 1954, she became a member of the newly organized Council for Community Integration, spearheaded by W. Ellison Chalmers and many interested faculty members. It was an interracial organization whose goal was to persuade the community to value persons and make no distinction because of race, creed or nationality.

She co-founded the Champaign-Urbana Improvement Association headed by the late Reverend Graves. Its basic purpose was to crumble the walls of segregation in employment. The first project was to picket the new J. C. Penney Store. A boycott was formed and after three weeks, J. C. Penney opened its employment to African-Americans. Several local businesses followed.

Mary Alexander has been active in many school and community organizations including P.T.A., the Urban League, the Champaign Human Relations Commission and the East Central Illinois Area Office on Aging. She is a lifetime member of the Salem Baptist Church and Church Women United.

She retired from the University of Illinois as a Food Service Administrator after more than 25 years of service. She is the mother of two daughters and two sons.



Patricia Avery

Patricia Avery, a native of Champaign County, was raised by her grandparents, David and Nannie Green. David Green was a Roofer by trade and Nannie was a Housekeeper. She is a graduate of Centennial High School and a continuing education student at Parkland College. It is to her grandmother that she gives the credit for teaching her life's most valuable lessons, i.e. hard work, respect for yourself, your elders and your neighbors. With these principles instilled in her mind and heart, Patricia's interest in philanthropic work grew as she became involved in many and varied organizations, i.e. the Y.W.C.A., study circles, Best Interest of Children, Court Advocate for Victims of Domestic Violence at a Woman's Fund.

Her work in County Government began in 1986 in the Office of the County Auditor and County Recorder. In 1996, she was the first African-American Woman ever appointed or elected to a Champaign County office. In 1998, she ran again for the Champaign County Board and won, being the first African-American to win in a district outside of District #5 in Champaign County. On December 4, 2000, she became the first woman, the first African-American and the first Democrat to chair the Champaign County Board.

Many honors have been bestowed on her through the years. Among them, are the Martin Luther King Outstanding Achievement Award, the Green Meadows Girl Scout Award for increasing opportunities for girls and women in sports and was nominated for the "Y.W.C.A's" Forgotten Achiever's Award.

She is the mother of one daughter, two sons and foster mother of two sons.



Carrie Pope Banks

Carrie Pope Banks was born in Champaign, Illinois at 808 North Prairie Street, the daughter of Cecil and Carrie Lee Pope. She attended the Gregory School, the Champaign Junior High School (now Central) and graduated from the Champaign Senior High School (now Edison Middle School) in 1940. She attended the University of Illinois for two years.



During WW II, Carrie took and passed the Civil Service Exam, entered and completed a brief training period in Chicago after which she worked until the War was over. Meanwhile she became engaged to Mr. Nathaniel Banks who was stationed in Germany as Army Personnel and upon his discharge on December 7, 1945, they planned for a wedding on June 2, 1946, in the Bethel A.M.E. Church. To this union were born three children, Nathaniel C. Banks, Deborah Banks and David Banks. Carrie was a stay-at-home Mom until 1962 until their children were at an age when she could apply for and accept employment outside the home.

Carrie Pope Banks started her career with the Illinois Power Company in 1962 and retired in 1987 after 25 years of service. Her late husband spent more than 30 years as an employee of the University of Illinois, retiring in 1984. He died in 1998. They were married for 52 years.

Carrie belonged to the Bethel A.M.E. Church where she was a member of the Choir; the Bethel African Methodist Episcopal Lay Organization and the Lou Anna Riley Missionary Society; she also was a member of the Deborah Chapter #27, Order of Eastern Star (founded by her Grandmother Louetta Smith Lee) and the Committee on African-American History in Champaign County.

Carrie Pope Banks was the proud Grandmother of three wonderful grandsons, the children of Nathaniel and Lisha Banks.

Imani Bazzell

Imani Bazzell is the founder and director of *SisterNet*, a local network of African American women committed to the physical, emotional, intellectual and spiritual health of Black women. In addition, she works as a consultant with educators, unions, nonprofit and state agencies, and community-based organizations on racial justice, gender justice, health care access and leadership development.

As the coordinator of *ACE - African Americans for Accountability in Education*, she works with parents, educators, administrators and concerned community members to correct disparities in the educational experiences of Black children and their families.

Imani's other membership and organizing activities include: Women Against Racism; Champaign County Breast Cancer Coalition; Family Services Self-help Center; Champaign Schools Equity Planning and Implementation Committee; National Racial Justice Educators and Organizers; National Coalition on Racism in Sports and Media; National Black Women's Health Project; and the Black Radical Congress.

Imani has lived in Champaign-Urbana for 17 years. She is married and the mother of three children ages 14, 11, and 4. Pictured here is Imani, along with her four-year-old daughter Aminah holding an historic Bazzell family photograph of her great-great grandmother, great grandfather and great aunts and uncle.



* Mary Haywood Benson

Mary Haywood Benson was raised in Chicago and moved to Champaign in 1970. She worked at various jobs in the community including the Commercial Bank for 5 years and Kraft Foods for 25 years. She retired on April 1, 2000. Mary has an Associate Degree in General Studies and a Bachelor of Arts Degree in Business Administrations. In addition, she is certified as a bank teller. Ms. Benson is a member of Bethel A.M.E. Church and has served in many capacities, currently as President of the Lou Anna Riley Missionary Society and Secretary for the Lay Organization. She is the mother of three children: Greta, Terence, and Boris; grandmother of five: Latrice, Zakrysha, Darrell, Delander and Eugenia; Great-Grandmother of two: Derrion and Talaysia. Her favorite hobby is surfing the Web.



Lila Bromwell Benton

Lila Bromwell Benton was born June 15, 1872, the daughter of James and Sarah Bromwell of Champaign, Illinois. She attended elementary, Junior High and graduated from Champaign Senior High School in 1891. After graduation, she was married to Luster Johnson and to this union was born two daughters, Helen and Marion. Mr. Johnson died in 1917.

Both daughters were graduates of the University of Illinois and pursued professional careers, Marian in teaching and Helen in secretarial work.

In 1918, Lila married Mr. Edward Benton. They both were staunch members of the Salem Baptist Church. She became a member in 1887. Mrs. Benton sang in the choir and served her Church faithfully in many ways. According to Church Records, Mrs. Benton was awarded a Certificate of Recognition for 50 years of service to the Salem Baptist Church in 1937.



Erma Scott Bridgewater

Erma Scott Bridgewater, a native of Champaign, was born on Tremont Street in the north part of the city in 1913. She was the daughter of Raymond Mac and Sarah Wilson Scott. She attended Champaign schools and was a 1937 graduate of the University of Illinois. In 1939, the City of Champaign created the Department of Recreation to replace the W.P.A. programs and she became Director of the program at Douglass Center. She married Cecil Bridgewater of Tuscola, Illinois. They had three children: Cecil, Ron and Cassandra.



Mrs. Bridgewater was employed as Relocation Officer for the Urban Renewal Program and later she was named Housing Specialist for the Community Development program. After twenty four years of employment with the City of Champaign, she retired in 1982. In 1991, she underwent a successful operation for breast cancer.

She has served on various boards and committees. She is a charter member of the local graduate chapter of the Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority and a charter member of the local chapter of NCNW. She has been a member of Bethel A.M.E. Church since age 12 and a member of the Bethel Choir for 70 years. Her hobby is swimming. She swims 30 laps five days a week and adds 6 more on her birthday to make a mile. Her goal is to swim a mile on her 90th birthday. Her favorite Bible verse is "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me."

Clara Bright

I was born in Edwards, Mississippi on April 29, 1933, one of nine children born to Joe and Hattie Laws. My elementary, junior high and high school education was completed in Edwards, Mississippi. In 1951, I moved to Champaign, Illinois and was married to Philip Bright. To this union were born eight children, three of whom are deceased.

My career as a beauty consultant began in 1973 when I was employed by Carson Pirie Scott and Company in Lincoln Square, Urbana, as a Counter Manager in the Cosmetics Department. I was the first Beauty Consultant for Fashion Fair Cosmetics in this area. Mr. John C. Johnson, owner and publisher of Ebony magazine, produced Fashion Fair Cosmetics and one of the job requirements was to attend his seminars and workshops on retailing the products. In 1990 when Carson Pirie Scott was taken over by Bergner's, I remained there as Counter Manager in the Cosmetics Department until my retirement.

Additionally, I did the "makeovers" for the young ladies who participated in the Cotillion; for fashion shows locally; for guests on local television stations; and for models in the Black Mom's Day Fashion Show at the University of Illinois.

I am a member of the Macedonia Baptist Church in Champaign. Presently I serve as Superintendent of the Sunday School; and Secretary of the Board of Trustees. I supervise the Usher Board consisting of 24 junior and senior ushers and fill in for other services in my church as needed.

My hobbies are cooking, fishing and sports. Early on I played with the Women's Softball team at the Douglass Recreation Center.



Willie Campbell

I was born in Earle, Arkansas in 1922, the only child of William and Rosa Mason. I started grammar school in Earle, Arkansas. My family moved to Marion, Arkansas, where I finished grammar school. My father was a School Teacher and also the Superintendent of Black Schools in the area. My mother was a housewife who also served as midwife to families both Black and White and earned a Certificate in Midwifery.

Since there was no high school in Marion, Arkansas, my parents sent me to the B. T. Washington High School in Memphis, Tennessee, some 17 miles away. Meanwhile, my father applied for and received help from the Rosenwold Foundation to build a high school in Marion and also a trade school for boys in Crawfordsville, Arkansas. I graduated from the new high school in Marion, Arkansas.



With a High School Diploma in hand, one could be a Teacher in Arkansas, so during the semester of 1938, I assisted Mrs. Shivers, the Principal of the three-room school in Marion. In the Fall of 1938, I went to the Arkansas A&M College in Pine Bluff, Arkansas for 3 years. I got married to Mr. Isadore Banks. To this union was born 4 children. Mr. Banks was killed in a car accident. I went back to school and graduated in 1942. I started teaching Home Economics at Wonder City High School in West Memphis, Arkansas and remained there for 9 years.

I later married Mr. Campbell and moved to Chicago. I taught for 4 years (1953-1957) at various schools in the Chicago area. Then I moved to Champaign, Illinois in the Fall of 1958. Not being able to get a job in my field of education, I worked as a domestic. I applied for and got a job at the University of Illinois and worked in the College of Agricultural Economics under Dr. McCullum; I took job-related courses and when Dr. McCullum passed away, I left the Department to work on a Master's Degree. I started working with the Community Outreach Worker Program through the University of Illinois and the City of Champaign, helping to get the Frances Nelson Health Center in place. My responsibilities included recruiting Doctors, Dentists and Laboratory Technicians and Nurses to staff the Center and serve as Coordinator. I worked with the State Director of D.C.F.S. and in 1972, I took and passed the Civil Service Test and was hired as a licensed Representative of D.C.F.S. I retired from that position in 1988.

Since retirement, I have been active with the Baha'i Faith; the Champaign County Section of the National Council of Negro Women and was President for two years; the Senior Citizen's Program at Douglass Center, and maintain membership in the Champaign County Urban League. My hobbies are painting, flower and vegetable gardening and I love fishing.

Bernice McKinley Chambers

Bernice McKinley Chambers was born on May 28, 1907 in Shelby, Mississippi, a daughter of Albert and Mary Jane Jackson McKinley. Her family moved to Champaign in 1917 where she completed her formal education in the Champaign School System.

She was employed by the University of Illinois as a Cook and retired some 25 years later as a Food Service Administrator. After retirement, she was in charge of the Peace Meal Program at the Douglass Senior Center, for 18 years.

Under the pastorate of Reverend R. D. Hayden, she joined the Salem Baptist Church where she sang in the choir and served as President of the Gospel Choir. She was a regular attendee at Sunday School and BYPU and served as an Assistant Church Clerk.

She was a member and past Matron of the Deborah Chapter #27, Eastern Star, the Daughters of Isis and held several offices of the Eureka Grand Chapter of Prince Hall Affiliation of Illinois.



Lucille Clark

Lucille Clark was born in Canton, Illinois, the daughter of William A. and Cora Coleman, on March 25, 1932, and the 9th of 13 children. Her mother was a Virginian born Christian woman, her father, a Mississippi born educated farmer. All of the children graduated from Canton High School. After school and on weekends, she worked as a domestic and had babysitting jobs to earn money for her education and was able to earn enough money to pay for her 3-year Nursing Courses.



She was the first woman of color to enter and graduate from Graham Hospital School of Nursing. There was a stipulation attached, that if she didn't make it, no other women of color would follow. The night she graduated, she volunteered to work the 11:00 P.M. to 7:00 A.M. shift. As it turned out, she delivered a baby. The doctor didn't make it from home that night. During her course of training, she had affiliations with Cook County Hospital of Chicago on 2 occasions. The Mendota State Hospital of Madison, Wisconsin. She took a post-graduate course in Obstetrics at the Chicago Lying-In Hospital before moving to Champaign. She had made arrangements to work at Carle Hospital prior to post-graduate completion. Her starting date at Carle was July 21, 1955.

She has worked full-time at Carle, attended many seminars, spoke at medical conventions, served as Community Consultant during the organization phase of Parkland College's School of Nursing and has held Head Nurse and Management positions for 19 ½ years. Her true love is "hands-on" patient care. Last year she received her 45 Years of Service Plaque from Carle Hospital. As of this day, she is the longest tenured employee at Carle.

On July 10, 1955, she married Jesse D. Clark, Jr., a University of Illinois Policeman and to this union were born 2 children, a son, Gregory Allen and a daughter, Cara Lynn.

Phyllis D. Clark

Phyllis was first elected to the office of City Clerk in April of 1993. She assumed her duties as City Clerk in May of 1993. Phyllis is the first African-American in the history of the City of Urbana to hold the position of City Clerk. She is now serving her third term as Urbana City Clerk.



The Clerk's position in Urbana is one that is primarily record keeping, maintaining the records of the history of the City of Urbana and keeper of the City Seal. This office works closely with all departments in the city as well as the City Council and is the central information dissemination center.

Phyllis is involved in her community, from church to civic. She is a member of Mt. Olive Baptist Church where she served as 4-H Leader for 6 years and as chairperson for the last 12 years. Phyllis has served on numerous committees and boards for the school district such as search committees for principals of elementary, middle and senior high schools, Special Education Curriculum Board and Middle School Concept Committee. Phyllis is currently a member of the Concerned Citizens for Quality Education focus group, National Council of Negro Women, Board of Directors of BIOC, and Chairperson of the Board of Directors of Champaign County Health Care Consumers. Phyllis has served as Municipal Clerks of Illinois District IV Director for two years, President of Central Illinois Municipal Clerks for two years. She also served as Vice President of the Municipal Clerks of Illinois for one year and is now in line to serve as President. When she assumes the presidency of the Municipal Clerks of Illinois, she will be the first African-American to hold this office in the State of Illinois.

Phyllis was a member of the group of elected officials to complete and graduate from the first Academy of Municipal Excellence LEAD (Leadership Enhancement and Development) class that is sponsored through Illinois Municipal League and the University of Illinois.

Phyllis was awarded the prestigious designation of Certified Municipal Clerk from the International Institute of Municipal Clerks for her continued training in municipal excellence, community involvement and leadership quality.

Phyllis is the wife of Lee Clark, the mother of three and the grandmother of four. Phyllis' hobby is cooking.

Octavia Cole

Harriet Octavia (Buckley) Cole was the loving wife of Edwards J. Cole, Sr., mother of six, grandmother of thirteen and great-grandmother to eight. Mrs. Cole relocated from Mississippi in the 1950s to Champaign, Illinois with her husband and children. She served in several different employment and community service capacities within the Champaign-Urbana area..

Mrs. Cole did not complete her high school education while in Mississippi, however, wanting to be an example for her children and others, she was not content to settle for this.



While working, Mrs. Cole enrolled in classes and received her G.E.D. from the Opportunities Industrialization Center (OIC). Mrs. Cole had worked as a domestic engineer, with White Line Laundry, Magnavox, Francis Nelson Health Center, Eisner Bakery and Sears.

Mrs. Cole's community service accomplishments included membership in Church Women United; NCNW, Urban League Guild (former President), NAACP, Champaign County Cooperative Extension Home-Makers (Mary Bethune Unit) where she had recruited and mentored many young women, 4-H Leader, Cub Scout Leader, Champaign County Election Judge, Sunday School Superintendent/Director, Sunday School teacher, Deaconess and Choir member.

She had for many years been a Mt. Olive Baptist Church delegate to the Wood River District Association, Baptist General State Congress of Illinois and National Baptist Convention. Mrs. Cole is now deceased.

Verene Cole

Verene Cole was born January 12, 1910 in Oxford, Mississippi. She completed her grade and high school education there. She met and was married to Osborne Cole, a serviceman. In 1944, her family moved to Champaign, Illinois. During Mr. Cole's tour of duty, she traveled to many places, including Europe and the South Pacific. While living in Champaign with her two children, she worked as a domestic.

Verene was a member of the St. Luke Christian Methodist Church under the pastorate of the late Reverends Bishop and Kennedy and served faithfully on the Usher Board, and in all areas of service to her Church.

She was the mother of two, a daughter, Esmus Kinard, now deceased, one son, Theodore, a granddaughter, Dorothy Kinard and a great grandchild.



Lula Conner, My Four Generations

I, Lula Connor, was born in Willis, Texas, the daughter of Oscar and Lizzie Johnson. At a very young age, my family moved to Baytowne, Texas where my father was the Funeral Director of the Collins-Johnson Funeral Home. My father is deceased, but my mother, Lizzie is still living. I lived most of my life in Texas - attended elementary and junior high and graduated from Carver High School in Baytowne, Texas. I went to Prairie View A&M College for two years.



In 1950, I married Alvin Connor and to this union was born two beautiful daughters, Beverly Connor Lewis and Alva Connor McIntyre. We moved to Champaign in 1968, where my husband, Alvin, was a Civil Service Employee at Chanute Air Force Base in Rantoul, Illinois. Alvin died in 1965.

As my mother's health declined, I brought her here from Texas to be close by. She had always attended and served in many capacities in her church - the St. Luke C.M.E., for many years. She is now 100 years old and lives in the Heritage Center Nursing Home in Champaign, Illinois.

Both my daughters are graduates of Champaign Senior High School and were very active in school as well as church activities. After high school graduation, Alva attended and graduated from the National College of Education in Evanston, Illinois. She taught at the Jefferson Middle School for 9 years, prior to moving to South Carolina where she now teaches. Beverly completed her Nurses Training at Parkland College and works as a Nurse at the Carle Arbours in Champaign.

Nettie Leona Cook

Nettie Leona Cook was born June 16, 1910 in Champaign, Illinois, the second oldest child of Fred and Elizabeth Louis. She had an older sister, Elizabeth, and a younger brother, Fred. She attended grade school, junior high and graduated from the Champaign Senior High School in 1927.

After high school, she married Ernest Cook, Co-Owner of the Cook Brothers Emporium in downtown Champaign.

She began a very active civic life in the Champaign-Urbana Community, serving as the Corresponding Secretary of the Champaign-Urbana Kindergarten Association; Co-founder and past officer of the Royalties - a civic-minded club; Worthy Matron of Deborah Chapter #27, Order of Eastern Star; Financial Secretary of the Champaign County Section of NCNW; Telecare Volunteer, and Election Judge. As a devoted member of Bethel A.M.E. Church, she served as Treasurer of the Missionary Society, and the Church Building Fund Raiser; a dedicated representative to Church Women United and she served on the Stewardess Board. For all of these activities, she received many service awards.

She retired in 1976, after 26 years of administrative service at the Chanute Air Force Base.

She was the mother of one daughter. Nettie Cook died November 22, 1996.



Ollie Watts Davis

Ollie Watts Davis is Associate Professor of Music and Conductor of the Black Chorus at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. A native of West Virginia, Dr. Davis graduated from West Virginia Institute of Technology (magna cum Laude), where she was named the 1993 Alumna of the Year. She earned the Master of Arts degree from West Virginia University at Morgantown and both the Master of Music and Doctor of Musical Arts degrees at the University of Illinois. Dr. Davis is the Founding Director of the Black Sacred Music Symposium held biennially at the U of I.



Dr. Davis has won numerous awards and honors, including membership in the Phi Kappa Phi Honorary Society; honorary membership in Sigma Alpha Iota and the National Arts and Letters Society; and the Krannert Center Debut Recital Award. In 1993, Dr. Davis received a Faculty Excellence Award from the U of I College of Fine and Applied Arts, and in 1994 was awarded the Bronze Medallion of Honor by the U of I Women's Association. Dr. Davis was recognized as a woman who "through example and/or service...has used her talents to enrich the lives of others." In 1998 Dr. Davis was selected to receive the University of Illinois at Urbana Champaign Campus Award of Excellence in Undergraduate Teaching, in 1999 she received the Gospel Music Excellence Award at the National Black Gospel College Choir Workshop and also in 1999 KJAC Publishing released her book, *Talks My Mother Never Had With Me (Helping the Young Female Transition to Womanhood)*.

Active as a performing artist, soprano Ollie Watts Davis made her New York debut at Carnegie Hall and has appeared throughout North and South America and in Europe with major orchestras and opera companies. She has also performed at the West Virginia Governor's Mansion on the Arts and Letters Series and as guest artist for the Governor's Inaugural Ceremony.

Dr. Davis is also very active in her community and in Christian ministry. She has served on the Champaign-Urbana Symphony Board of Directors; volunteered as the musical conductor for empty tomb's Christian Children's Concert; and has served on the planning committee for the Don Moyer's Boys and Girls Club Steak and Steak Dinner. Dr. Davis is also involved with the Talks Mentoring Movement. She wrote the secondary school curriculum and mentored at Edison Middle School. She currently mentors at Stratton Elementary School. Dr. Davis serves as the Youth Music Director at Canaan Missionary Baptist Church of Urbana, Illinois, where she also is a member of the Women's Discipleship Class; the S.W.A.T. (Soul-Winning Action Team); and P.A.C.E. Discipleship ministry (People Available to Contact and Encourage). Dr. Davis is in demand as an inspirational and motivational speaker. She frequently conducts retreats and seminars for women and along with her husband, Rev. Dr. Harold Davis, for married couples. Dr. Davis lives in Champaign with her husband and their four children.

Willeta Donaldson

Willeta Donaldson began employment at the University of Illinois in 1958 as a Clerk-Stenographer I in the Office of Admissions and Records. She retired as an Administrative Assistant I (Assistant to the Director of Admissions) in 1995. Her duties included handling admissions for special category applicants, serving as Affirmative Action Officer for 17 years and Assistant to the Director for Residency for incoming undergraduate and graduate students.

Willeta along with several others, was instrumental in the integration of Urbana Schools. She served as an officer at Thomas Paine Elementary School, Urbana Junior High School and Urbana Senior High School Parent Teacher Association (PTA). She and Carlos were co-presidents at the University High School Parent Teacher Organization (PTO).

Willeta received a NAACP Award and College of LAS Award (Transition Program) in the year 2000. She was Black Mom of the Year at the University of Illinois in 1982. Presently, Willeta is serving as Chair of the Urbana Human Relations Commission, City of Urbana and is a member of the University of Illinois Campus Round Table. She is a member of Bethel A.M.E. Church and is President of the Bethel Choir. Willeta is currently working part-time for the Director of Development at the University of Illinois School of Social Work.

Willeta's husband Carlos, is a University of Illinois graduate and worked at the University until his retirement in 1999. Their three children, Carlos Jr., Carletta, and Dennis also attended the University and have worked or do work in Champaign County. Carlos Jr. and his wife Mae Donaldson have two sons: Ryan and Blake.



Rosie L. Dyer

Rosie Dyer was born to the union of Samuel and Florence Johnson in Grenada, Ms. She and Louis B. Dyer have been married for 30 years and have one daughter, Rosa.

With 33 years of service, Mrs. Dyer was a graduate of Champaign Beauty School. She earned her B.S. and M.S. degrees from the National Institute of Cosmetologists. She served as president of the Twin City Cosmetologists and the Alpha Chi Sorority and has been a member of the Twin City Cosmetologists since it was founded in October 1960.



Mrs. Dyer is a member of Mount Olive Baptist Church. Presently Mrs. Dyer is serving on the Senior Usher Board. In the past, she served as Director of the Junior Ushers and Pacers and on the committee for Christian Education.

Mrs. Dyer has made many contributions to her profession and to the community. She hosted a fundraiser for the AIDS benefit for Frances Nelson Health Center and for the Adopt Douglass Park Association. She has volunteered at Covenant Medical Center for the past 18 years and she is a member of the Concerned Citizens for a Better Neighborhood. She also served on the committee for the Champaign Douglass Branch Library - Frederick Douglass Memorial. Mrs. Dyer is a member at large with the National Council of Negro Women.

Awards include: the Park District Appreciation for Volunteer Service award, the Community Service Award for Concerned Citizens for a Better Neighborhood and a Certificate of Achievement from the Institute for the Research and Development of Competency Based Teacher's Education Program, Wayne State University College of Education, Detroit.

Maudie Flake Edwards

Born in Pulaski, a small Southern Illinois town, Maudie had six brothers and sisters. Her father worked for the Illinois Central Railroad. Her mother was a homemaker, seamstress and gardener.

Maudie attended elementary school in Pulaski. She took a bus to Mounds for four years of high school and spent summers working in St. Louis, MO, earning money to buy the things needed for high school. Because her parents felt they would be unable to send her to college, Maudie promised if they would help her get into college, she would do the rest. She worked and sang in the Rolland Hayes Choir to pay her tuition.



Maudie attended southern Illinois University at Carbondale two years and received a two year teacher's certificate. She continued with summer and night classes to complete her bachelor's and master's degrees. She enjoyed going to college and although she had almost earned enough hours for a PhD, her desire to teach took her to the classroom. Her first teaching assignment was in a one room schoolhouse at Olmstead. The next assignment was to teach first and second grade in Mound City and eight years later in Ullin. In 1959, Maudie came to Champaign as a first grade teacher. She retired from the Champaign schools system in 1984 but continued to share her love for education as a volunteer.

Maudie was not only dedicated to teaching and helping young children but to learning as well. She traveled to Hawaii, Alaska, Australia, Singapore, China, Japan, Africa and every state in the United States. She had a great love for the fine arts. After church (Christian Methodist Episcopal), Krannert Center for the Performing Arts was a favorite place for Maudie.

Fannie (Peacock) Freeman

I was born in Monticello, Georgia in 1922, the daughter of Elizabeth and George Peacock, Sr. I had 4 sisters (1 deceased) and 5 brothers (2 deceased). My parents moved to Urbana, Illinois when I was 2 months old. I attended the J.W. Hayes Elementary School, Thornburn Junior High School and graduated from the Urbana Senior High School in 1940. After graduation, I attended and graduated from the Champaign Beauty School, and set up shop in my parent's home.

In the 1940's, I married Wilkin Freeman, a former U. S. Airman and to this union, one daughter was born.

I am a lifetime member of the Salem Baptist Church and have been a member of the Usher Board for more than 50 years. I attend services there regularly. I am also a member of the Twin City Cosmetologist Association and have served as President, Secretary and am supportive of other services. For more than 50 years, I operated my own shop and am now retired.

I've served as an Election Judge for more than 20 years and have received an award for services. My hobbies are bowling and flower-gardening.



Barbara Gillespie-Washington

My home as a child was a place where there was a tremendous amount of caring and sharing. My parents, even with nine children were always reaching out to help others. This is what I observed throughout childhood and it took root in my spirit. I too wanted to help somebody. I was reminded, it's not what you have, it's what you do with what you have that makes the difference. Mama and Dad didn't have a lot, but seemed to accomplish a lot. There was such joy, commitment and enthusiasm in what they did. I liked that. They did everything wholeheartedly.

I am grateful for the passion I feel. Passion is just a great love, a love that produces conviction. Passionate conviction will motivate you to do all you can for whoever you can, whenever you can, in all the ways you can.

I have taught many science classes for students and staff at Wiley School, incarcerated women at the Champaign County Correctional Center, the Don Moyer Boys and Girls Club, youth ministry groups, and worked with a team to raise money for scholarships to College-bound youth. For nine years, I have served on the Champaign County Mental Health Board. Presently, I am a member of the Board of Directors of the Orpheum Children's Science Museum, and new Chairperson of the Education Committee of the Champaign County Chapter of the NAACP. All of the above as well as my local, district and state church work give me the opportunity to share that passion.



Lucy Jess Gray

I was born in Paris, Illinois, January 2, 1914, one of six children born to Frank and Bertha Manual Blake. I attended elementary, junior high and high school in Paris and graduated with the Class of 1932. After graduation, I met Mr. Louis Gray of Champaign, Illinois and was married. To this union was born one son, Steven Frank Gray.

Through the years I have received many awards from my Church; The Urban League; the cities of Paris and Champaign; the Burnham City Library Board of Trustees; the McKinley YWCA; the Cunningham Children's Home; and the Champaign County Development Corporation.

As a member of CCDC, I was instrumental in creating the first mini-park in Champaign-Urbana located on Park Street between Fourth and Fifth Streets, the Marco-Nelson Park. Jack Marco and Earnest Nelson donated the land, CCDC provided the money.

I am an honorary member of the Antique Study Group. I joined in 1935 as my interest in antiques has been a lifelong passion, and for 18 years, I owned and operated Gray's Antiques and Collectibles. As a recent retiree from that business, I still commit my time to various community projects and my Church. I am a Charter member of the Champaign County Section of the National Council of Negro Women.



Ruth Stratton Gray

Ruth Stratton Gray was born in 1917 in Elkhville, Illinois to Christopher and Bessie Stratton. She attended grade school there and graduated from the Elkhville High School.

She met and was married to Millard Gray and to this union was born one child, a daughter, Shirley. The family moved to Urbana in 1942. Mr. Gray was employed at the University of Illinois, until his retirement. Mrs. Gray was a housewife but also worked as a domestic.

She has been a member of Bethel A.M.E. Church since 1943 and has worked in many capacities including the Missionary Society and the Willing Workers Group. She attended Church regularly, and serves as a representative to Church Women United.



In the 1950's, she was affiliated with the Republican Party and served as Committeewoman. She is also a long-time member of the Douglass Senior Citizen Group.

Lucia M. Green, The Women in my Life

Lena Jordan, my Grandmother came to Champaign, Illinois in 1914. She was a gracious lady, a homemaker, gardener and super cook. She loved entertaining her family, friends and neighbors. She passed that legacy on to my mother, Willie C. Pyles Hornbuckle. Mom too loved entertaining her family, friends and neighbors. She also enjoyed community involvement. She served on the Human Relations Commission of Champaign County for several terms; Parent Teacher Association President of Lawhead and Willard Schools and retired from the University of Illinois Snack Bars as Supervisor.



As for me, I too enjoyed many of the same involvements; entertaining family and friends, cooking, decorating and community involvement. I served on the Champaign/Urbana Parent Teacher Council, was President of Lawhead and Washington School P.T.A.; and the Champaign County Urban League Auxiliary.

While raising a family, I worked several part-time jobs. Later, I launched a 28 year career with the University of Illinois. I retired as Personnel Director of the Illini Union and Affirmative Action Officer.

The legacy of work ethics, entertaining, etc. continued with my 4 children, 3 of whom are featured in this article. Sharlyne J. Wallace of Normal, Illinois, is employed as the Assistant Director of University Communications at Illinois Wesleyan University, Bloomington, Illinois; Rhonda L. Kornegay, Administrative Aide for the Dean of the College of Communications, University of Illinois, Champaign-Urbana Campus; Cathy J. Williams, Springfield, Illinois is employed as a Secretary for the Department of School Support, Illinois State Board of Education. I must say, Champaign, Illinois has definitely proved to be a wonderful city for raising a family and preparing for a career. The love of family, friends and community has been a contributing factor in all our accomplishments.



Blanche Jameson Harris

Blanche Jamerson Harris was born August 26, 1898 in Champaign, Illinois to Mr. Andrew and Nannie Ross Jamerson. She attended schools in Champaign, graduating from the Champaign Senior High School.

She was married to Edgar Harris and became Co-Editor of the Illinois Times, a local African-American newspaper which existed for more than 30 years.

As a member of Salem Baptist Church, she attended Sunday School, BYPU and Church Services, and worked in many capacities there.

Mrs. Harris died November 15, 1997 and her graveside funeral services were conducted by the Women of the Baha'i Faith.



Zelema Harris

Dr. Zelema Harris holds a Bachelor's Degree from Prairie View A&M University in Prairie, Texas, a historically Black College and received a Master's and Ph.D. in Education from the University of Kansas in Lawrence, Kansas. She was honored with a place in the University's Women's Hall of Fame in 1988.

She was hired as President of Parkland College in Champaign, Illinois in 1990. She is the recipient of numerous awards, including President of the Year by the American Association of Women in Community Colleges; "CEO" of the year, by the American Association of Community College Trustees and the Leadership Award for Outstanding Business/Professional Woman from the Champaign County Chamber of Commerce.

Dr. Harris is very active in her community and has been a Board Member of the Champaign County Chamber of Commerce, the Urban League of Champaign County and served as Campaign Chair of the United Way of Champaign County.

Her leadership has fostered more inclusiveness at Parkland and throughout the community. Parkland hosted the State's first multi-cultural education conference in 1993. She also presented a Commitment to Diversity Resolution to Parkland's Board of Trustees which remains a part of the institution today. In February 2000, Parkland and several community partners hosted the first Black Male Symposium.

She has served on several State and National boards, including the American Association of Community Colleges, the National Council on Black American Affairs- North-Central Region, and the Illinois Human Resource Investment Council/Workforce Investment Board. She previously has served as President of the Illinois Council of Community College Presidents. In February, 2001, Dr. Harris was elected to the American Council on Education.

She is a recent graduate of the Harvard Institutes for Higher Education, Institute for Educational Management and a Visiting Scholar in the Community College Leadership Program at the University of Texas in Austin.



Betty Jean Lewis Hassell

Betty Jean Lewis Hassell was born in Greene County, Mississippi on January 30, 1941, the third of five siblings, to the union of Jasper and Lottie Lewis. The family moved to Urbana-Champaign in 1943 where she has resided ever since. Mrs. Hassell attended the Urbana Public Schools and graduated from Urbana High School in 1959. She attended Parkland College, majoring in Child Development.



In 1960, Betty was united in Holy Matrimony with Charles Edward Hassell, Sr., and they are the proud parents of three children: Charles E. Hassell, Jr., Philip L. Hassell, Sr., and Elana M. Hassell. They are also blessed with three grandchildren: Danielle, Philip Jr., and Joshua Hassell.

Betty accepted the Lord at the age of 10 and was baptized and united with Salem Baptist Church in Champaign. As a young adult, she was very active in the youth choir and served as Director and pianist. Betty also assisted and played for the Majestic and Gospel Choir at Salem Baptist Church. She has been a pianist at Salem since 1973 and was named Assistant Minister of Music in 1982.

For a brief time, Mrs. Hassell left the Urbana-Champaign area to join her husband on military assignment. Upon her return to the community, she immediately resumed her church activities and community involvement. Over the years, her activities have included: Sunday School Educator, Secretary, Sunshine Children's Choir Director, Missionary for Prison Ministry, Church Bulletin Clerk, Vacation Bible School Registrar and Superintendent, Festival for Youth Manager, Operation Excellence Volunteer, Children's Holiday Organizer, Choir Day Director, and Woman's Day Chairperson for the Salem Baptist Church; Registrar, National Baptist School of Religion; Assistant Director and Bookkeeper to Helen E. Johnson, Salem Baptist Church Pre-School; Member, National Black Child Institute; Assistant Secretary and Secretary, Wood River District Region 3; Board Member, Champaign County YWCA; Vice President, National Council of Negro Women; Muscular Dystrophy Drive Volunteer; March of Dimes Worker; "Do the Right Thing" Organizer, Urban League; and Best Interest of the Children Volunteer.

Some of Mrs. Hassell's most memorable moments have been the birth of her children and grandchildren; being nominated for "Mom of the Year" at the University of Illinois in 1988; being a recipient of the Eddie Bee Edwards Black Humanitarian Award of the Baptist General State Convention and the Outstanding Villagers Award given to her by the Ministerial Alliance of Champaign and Urbana. Mrs. Hassell has played a strong mentoring role for many young women and men, not only in her church and community, but around the world as well. She takes pleasure in seeing the children she mentors grow up meeting their educational and spiritual goals as adults.

* Doris Ruth Hendricks

Doris Hendricks was born October 17, 1908, the daughter of Zelia Taylor and John R. Hendricks in Little Rock, Arkansas. At age two, her father died. She moved to Helena, Arkansas, and while there, her mother met and married Jerry Dowling. To this union was born two daughters, Audrey and Colleen, and two sons, Jerry and Charles. Doris started elementary school in Helena, Arkansas. Her family moved to Champaign, Illinois where she was enrolled in the 5th grade at the Marquette Grade School, attended Junior High, and returned to Helena, Arkansas to complete her high school education in 1935. She returned to Champaign in 1937, met and married Frank Hendricks, the Owner and Operator of the first African-American-Owned Body Shop in Champaign. When her mother passed away, it became her responsibility to take care of her two sisters and two brothers, and her stepfather.



Doris worked as a Cook at the Sigma Chi Fraternity for 10 years. She applied to and was employed by the University of Illinois Housing Division - Food Service and retired from there as a Food Service Supervisor after 20 years of service. After retirement, she was called back to work in Customer Relations in the Residence Halls and stayed for 3 years. Then she COMPLETELY retired.

Through these efforts and dedication, she was able to support her two sisters and two brothers and assist them in completing high school. Audrey and Colleen completed high school and college degrees - Colleen from Milliken University and Audrey from the University of Illinois. Both followed working in their chosen fields, Audrey as a Professor at the University of Chicago and New York University at Albany, New York and Colleen for the City of Chicago, until retirement. Audrey is deceased.

Colleen married Bruce Hayden from Tuscola, Illinois. To this union was born one daughter, Carla - who attended school in Chicago, finished college and worked in the Libraries in Chicago. She is presently the Director of the Enoch Pratt Library in Baltimore, Maryland.

Doris was a long-time member of the Salem Baptist Church, serving in many capacities; a member of the Deborah Chapter #27, Order of Eastern Star; the Daughter of Isis and a Charter member of the Champaign County Section of the National Council of Negro Women.

* Wilda Herndon

Wilda Herndon, a long-time resident of Champaign-Urbana, was born in 1913. Her mother, three daughters and one son, Joe, came to Champaign-Urbana, Illinois in the mid-twenties. The children were enrolled in school and Wilda graduated from Champaign High School.

As a young adult, Wilda became a member of the Bethel A.M.E. Church and served in many capacities. Her love of community and the people therein, led to her involvement in many clubs and organizations whose prime objective was to serve those in need. Funds were raised and distributed to areas such as the Burnham City Hospital, the March of Dimes, Cancer Fund, and the Bethel A.M.E. Fund.



It was her desire to become a registered nurse, but due to circumstances that could not be, so through the encouragement of Dr. Max Appel, Pathologist at Burnham Hospital, she began on-the-job training for Medical Technicians. She seized the opportunity, and with this training, she was employed as a Medical Technician at the University of Illinois McKinley Hospital and the College of Vet Medicine's Small Animal Clinic where she remained for 19 years, until retirement.

She also volunteered as a "Gray Lady" for the American Red Cross and also as a Med Tech at the Frances Nelson Health Center.

* Davie Hill

I was born September 15, 1914 in Monticello, Georgia. My parents were: Sarah Clements Roberts and Jimmie Ned Roberts. I was the second of six children. My mother taught me the first grade at home because it was hard for black children to get an education at that time. We moved to Urbana when I was seven years old and I attended the Urbana schools. I graduated from Urbana High School. I graduated from Beauty School in Michigan, where I met and married my husband, Samuel H. Hill. We came back to Urbana in 1939, where I continued my education at the University of Illinois and worked as a beautician in my home. I received an associate's degree from Parkland College at the age of 52.



In 1957 Mrs. Frances Nelson became too ill to oversee the operation of The Frances Nelson Home for Children. I became the supervisor and worked in that capacity until 1963. In 1963 my husband moved us to Liberia, West Africa, where I stayed for a year. I returned home to work for the new Headstart Program as a Center Supervisor. I retired from Headstart after 13 years of lovingly educating many children who still communicate with me from time to time. For many years I was a licensed day care provider and foster parent. Retiring from that profession at the age of 81.

Having been a member of Bethel African Methodist Episcopal Church for almost eighty years, I am blessed to have held offices in the Church and its Church School. I am the proud mother of Diane Mitchell, Shirley Roberts, and James Hill. I am blessed to have many foster children who still call me Mother. I have five Grandchildren and four Great Grandchildren.

Ruthie Hillsman

Ruthie Hillsman is President of the National Council of Negro Women, Inc. for the Champaign County Section. She has held office since 1995 and has been instrumental in various fund raisers for the community. Under her auspices as Executive Officer, she has assisted in raising funds for the Martin Luther King Scholarship Fund, Women's Safe House, Concerned Citizens for a Better Neighborhood and Sister Mary Gabriel Curby Fund at The Provena Covenant Medical Center.

Ruthie is the sixth child of the late Ada Ray and Albert Williams. She was born, raised and educated in Paducah, Kentucky. She and her family moved to Champaign in the late 1950s and she became active in the community right away. She was a member of the Champaign County Assistance Association, served on the Board of A Woman's Fund, the Women's Safe House and an active member of Gamma Upsilon Society.



* Ruth Woodruff Hines

Ruth Woodruff Hines was born October 21, 1893, in Champaign, Illinois, the daughter of Benjamin J. and Mary E. Woodruff. She had 1 sister, Caroline and 1 brother, Arthur. She attended elementary, junior high and high school in Champaign, Illinois and attended the University of Illinois.

She was married to Ray E. Hines on November 2, 1920 in Champaign, Illinois, and to this union was born 9 children, 4 boys and 5 girls.

Mrs. Hines opened her doors to house the Negro (African American) students who enrolled in the University of Illinois in the early 1920s. It filled an urgent need for the students as there was no place for them to live on or near Campus. This legacy continued on for many years. She and Mr. Hines also served as Patron and Patroness for many social affairs given by and for the students.

She was a lifetime member of Bethel A.M.E. Church - singing in the Senior Choir and as a member of the Willing Workers Club. She was a member of: the Robert Earnest American Legion Post #559 serving as past president; the University of Illinois Alumni Association; the Champaign-Urbana Senior Citizen's Organization; Deborah Chapter #27, Order of Eastern Star; and Parents Council of Sharps and Flats Music Club, an affiliate of the National Association of Negro Musicians and the Park Street Block Club. She was a Charter Member of the Champaign County Section of the N.C.N.W.

She died in September of 1982 in Champaign, Illinois.



Doris Baker (Wylie) Hoskins

Mrs. Doris Baker (Wylie) Hoskins, was born October 18, 1911 in Champaign, Illinois, the daughter of Hanse E. and Stella M. Baker. Her father was a student in the College of Engineering, Theoretical and Applied Mechanics. At age 3, her family moved to Lafayette, Indiana, where her father continued his education at Purdue University. Her family returned to Urbana in 1919 and she was enrolled in the 4th grade at the J.W. Hays Grade School. She attended Lincoln School for her 6th grade, then to Thornburn Junior High and graduated from the Urbana Senior High School - Class of 1928.



She moved to Chicago to pursue her career in the Secretarial field and was employed by the Law Firm of Hall, Braden and Hooks, located in the Douglas National Bank. While in the area, she met and was married to Lorenzo P. Wylie, Sr. To this union was born 10 children, 5 boys, and 5 girls - some in the Chicago area at the Provident Hospital, some here in Urbana, Illinois. She returned to Urbana in 1939, enrolled her two oldest in the J.W. Hays School and that started her involvement in the community. She was a member of the P.T.A. there, and moved along until her last child graduated from high school (1965). She was made a life member in 1962. She was appointed a member of the Citizen's Advisory Committee to the Board of Education and the Urbana Park District Advisory Committee and served on those boards until 1974. From 1947 - 1974, she was on staff at the University of Illinois - non-teaching - and worked in the then Nonacademic Personnel Office. In addition, from 1968 - 1974, she taught the Orientation Class for all new employees, including Administrative and Professional, Clerical, Laboratory, Crafts, Janitorial and Food Service. She retired in 1974.

Mr. Wylie passed away in 1976. In 1979, she married Dr. Eugene Hoskins, retired Doctor of Chiropractic. He passed away in 1989.

Her other civic and community service included her Church, St. Mary, where she served as Trustee, Lector and Eucharistic Minister; R.S.V.P. - Tax Counseling For the Elderly; Senior Health Insurance Program, Matthew House Board Member, Provena Covenant Medical Center Auxiliary, Krannert Center Senior Volunteer Program - Usher; Champaign County Historical Society - President; the Committee on African-American History in Champaign County of the Early American Museum.

She was a member of the Champaign County Section of the National Council of Negro Women.

* Kathryn B. Humphrey

Kathryn B. Humphrey was born in Champaign, Illinois in 1923. Her parents, Jesse and Vinnie Britt moved to Champaign, Illinois from Huntington, Tennessee, in 1913, seeking a better life for themselves and their 10 children, five boys and five girls. Kathryn attended Champaign Senior High School in 1941. After graduation, she worked as a domestic. Later she was employed by the City of Champaign Recreation Department, going to different schools during outside recess time to engage the pupils in learning to play different games, and then to the Douglass Center working with the junior and senior high school students.



In 1943, she was married to John C. Humphrey, a former Airman and in February, 1946, to this union was born a son who in later years served in the U. S. Army. He is presently married and has 2 sons.

Later, she was employed by the University of Illinois College of Veterinary Medicine as a Laboratory Attendant, and enrolled in science classes at the University of Illinois relating to her job. She remained in this position until her retirement in 1987 after 32 years of service.

Kathryn served as a member of the Unit 4 Board of Education; served as Trustee of the Champaign Township Supervisor's Office; as Secretary of the Office from 1983 - 1990; A Board Member of the University of Illinois' Employees Credit Union from 1978-1995; serving on the Credit Committee and Vice-Chairman of the Board for 2 years.

As a lifetime member of Mt. Olive Baptist Church, she teaches a Sunday School Class and serves in many capacities. She is a supportive member of the Douglass Senior Center Group and is the Co-founder of the Gamma Upsilon Psi Society, which sponsors the Annual Cotillion. She just completed a second 5-year term with the MTD Board of Champaign-Urbana; in 1989, she was named "Citizen of the Month" and she has been the recipient of many other awards. Her most rewarding experience was having the honor to travel with the group to join in the Dr. Martin Luther King National March for Justice from Selma to Montgomery, Alabama.

She is a Charter Member of the Champaign County Section of the National Council of Negro Women.

Shirley Hursey

I was born in a small town (Mound City) in Southern, Illinois. My parents were Leslie W. and Mary A. Treadwell. I attended Lovejoy Grade School, Carver Junior High and graduated from Lovejoy Senior High School. I attended Illinois State University at Normal, Illinois. In August, 1955, I married Paul S. Hursey and to this union, two children were born, a son, Paul S. Hursey, Jr., and a daughter, Shirese S. Hursey.



I started my community service at an early age particularly in the area of discrimination in housing. In the political arena, I supported Kenneth Stratton in his quest for a seat on the Champaign City Council. After seven years of living in Champaign, we moved to Urbana. I became involved in the politics of the City of Urbana and was effective in getting support of the people to elect my husband to the Urbana City Council. He was elected in 1964 - the first African-American to fill that position. Together, we were involved in the effort to form the Hays Neighborhood Association to improve the educational opportunities for the children attending the neighborhood school. I was very supportive of Evelyn Underwood, the first African-American elected to the Urbana School Board.

As a member of the Bethel AME Church, I became the Youth Choir Director. I also joined the League of Women Voters, the Council for Community Integration and other organizations in the church and the community in an attempt to improve opportunities in education and employment. For the above mentioned efforts, I was honored by the State of Illinois House of Representatives in 2000, and the University of Illinois Y.W.C.A.- February 11, 2001.

I also owned and operated the Lincoln Press Bookbindery, where we put Dissertations and Professional Journals into hard cover.

Dora Flowers Jamerson

Dora Flowers Jamerson, daughter of Willie B. and Arillian Flowers, was born on December 29, 1925 in Eupora, Mississippi. She was the third of six children, five boys and one girl. Dora married the late Fred B. Jamerson and they had two daughters and two granddaughters.

Dora graduated from Webster County High School in Eupora and Mary Holms Junior College. She worked as Supervisor of the Files Department at Collegiate Cap and Gown for twenty five years, retiring in 1989.

She is a member of St. Luke Christian Methodist Episcopal Church, Past President of the Missionary Society, sings in the New Life Choir and serves as Assistant Sunday School Teacher. Dora is a member of Church Women United, NCNW and Douglass Seniors. She has been a member of the Provena Covenant Medical Center Auxiliary for more than 10 years and serves on the Patient Mail Delivery Service. In addition to visiting the sick and doing her volunteer work, Dora enjoys reading, cooking and crocheting.



Nannie Ross Jamerson

Mrs. Nannie Ross Jamerson was a lifelong resident of Champaign, Illinois. She was the mother of three children, namely Blanche Jamerson Harris, Quedella and Leslie Jamerson. The family home was at 202 West Ells Avenue, Champaign, Illinois. She was a lifelong member of Salem Baptist Church.



Helen E. Johnson

Helen E. Johnson, the daughter of Lafayette and Lena Brown Skaggs, was born May 12, 1916, in Onarga, Illinois, and moved to Urbana, Illinois, at the age of 14. She attended Urbana Senior High School and graduated in 1934. Helen married John C. Johnson and reared 6 children.



In 1947, Mrs. Johnson began working at Tot Lot Nursery School, a summer program for children ranging in ages from 3 to 5 years, who were too young to participate in the public recreation programs. The nursery school was located at 605 N. 5th Street, Champaign. She served as playground supervisor until 1951, and was then named Acting Director. The following year, she was made Director. Tot Lot was sponsored by the Twin City Community Committee and the Society of Friends (Quakers).

In 1957, Church Women United sponsored Tot Lot, and the program moved to Salem Baptist Church during the summer of 1959. In 1962, Church Women United decided to sponsor another project, and Mrs. Johnson, wishing to continue her work with children, completed the Montessori Teachers Training in Chicago, and returned to teach at the Champaign Montessori School until 1969. She also served as Director for 1 ½ years. In 1969, Salem Pre-School was founded by Mrs. Johnson. She taught a Primary Sunday School Class and she served as Director of the Pre-School until ill-health forced her to become inactive in April 1976.

Additional activities include: organizing the Eight Betas Club in 1950, and serving as the 1st President; elected as President of Lawhead-Willard Elementary Schools P.T.A in 1952; serving as an assistant Girl Scout Leader and Cub Scout Den Mother; and President of the Citizens Cooperative Association. She served as Treasurer of the Matrons Missionary Society of Salem Baptist Church and Secretary of the Esther Missionary Circle. In 1959, she was elected to serve on the Board of Directors of the Frances Nelson Children's Home, which later was named the Community Home for Children. She served as Assistant Church Clerk at Salem from December 1, 1972 until March 1976. She was elected Vice President of the Urbana Letter Carrier's Auxiliary #230, January 8, 1972 and became a member of the Board of Directors of the Frances Nelson Health Center from February 28, 1973 until March 24, 1976. She served as Treasurer, a member of the Personnel Committee, Executive Committee and Chairperson of the Medical Task Force Committee. Mrs. Johnson was a member of the East Central Illinois Association for the Young Child. In 1974, she organized the Champaign-Urbana Reunion Day.

Mrs. Johnson passed away on July 20, 1976.

Kathryn B. Jones

Kathryn B. Jones moved to the Champaign-Urbana, Illinois area with her husband Edward E. Jones in 1941, and soon after moving here, she became involved in community activities. After joining Salem Baptist Church, she began working with the young children in the Primary Sunday School Class, helped provide robes for the Sunshine Choir, assisted with the Salem Pre-School and in the recruitment of neighborhood children to come to Salem's Vacation Bible School. In the forties, she and her husband opened their doors to African-American students to live in their home because of lack of housing for them on Campus. She spearheaded a boycott against the Meadow Gold Ice Cream Parlor because of refusal to allow African-Americans to be served. Mr. Jones, an Instructor at Chanute Air Force Base, was always inviting homesick Airmen to their home for Sunday dinner.



In the early fifties, the Jones' cared for many foster children. For many years, and through the sixties and beyond, "Mother Jones" remained a community advocate and spent long hours helping to plan, organize and recruit members for organizations, i.e., Concerned Citizens Committee, The Progress Association for Economic Development, Community Advocacy Department, the Economic Opportunity Committee to help improve educational and employment opportunities for the African-American population. She worked with other Senior Citizens as an aide and advisor to classroom teachers in Champaign Schools. She had also been active with the Girl Scouts.

Kathryn Jones was and is still "Mother Dear" to all the many she had known and helped during her life time.

Kathryn B. Jones was born January 22, 1906 and died March 27, 1999.

Marion Jones

Marion Porter was born on March 14, 1925, in Republic, Pennsylvania, the daughter of Rose Davis Hess and Oliver Porter. Her parents left Republic, Pennsylvania to move to Kokomo, Indiana, where she lived until she was in the 5th grade. From Kokomo, Indiana, she moved to Champaign, Illinois, where Marion attended Gregory Grade School, Champaign Junior High and then Champaign Senior High. While in High School, she worked as a domestic and did baby sitting to earn lunch money.



In June 1942, Marion married Harry W. Anderson; a Serviceman who was stationed in California and when he was overseas, she went to Los Angeles to live with his aunt and uncle (Mr. and Mrs. Les Hite). Upon his return, she and Harry were stationed and lived in Topeka, Kansas for a while before returning to Champaign. (Harry W. Anderson was the first African-American to be hired by the Urbana Police Department to serve as a Policeman) Marion and Harry were divorced, and later she married Mr. John E. Jones, and to this union was born three children, Terry Jones, (deceased) Monica and Melanie. In addition Marion had a Goddaughter, Ruthie Harper. Marion had eight grandchildren and four great grandchildren.

As a member of the Bethel AME Church, Marion belonged to and served as a Past President of the Willing Workers Club, sending out Birthday, Get-Well and Sympathy Cards to members and serving in other capacities in her church.

Most recently Mrs Jones worked with the Concerned Citizens for a Better Neighborhood. She served as the Receptionist at the Douglass Senior Center. Marion was an Emeriti member of the Gamma Upsilon Psi Society - serving for 25 years, a member of the La Femmes Social Club which used to meet in the Original Douglass Center at Sixth Street.

Marion had a host of friends. She enjoyed traveling, bingo and crocheting. Marion Jones passed away in March 2006.

Ethel Mae Morris Kennedy

Ethel Mae Morris Kennedy was born December 7, 1920 in Bessemer, Alabama. Her parents were Gracie Lee and Alfred Morris. To this union were born five girls, three of whom are still living.

At age 12, Ethel united with the Ward Chapel A.M.E. Church in Bessemer.

In 1944, she was united in marriage with the late Reverend Earl Kennedy and spent more than 30 years sharing the ministry of the Christian Methodist Episcopal Church at many affiliate churches throughout the midwestern states of Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Michigan, Missouri and Wisconsin. She has received numerous awards recognizing her contributions to her church and community.



Even though retired, through her love and devotion to the church, she still serves as Stewardess, a representative to Church Women United and supports all programs at the St. Luke Christian Methodist Episcopal Church.

Her hobbies include bike riding, bowling, crocheting, knitting and sewing.

Haruko Kinase-Leggett

Haruko Kinase was born November 20, 1950 to Saioshi and Aiko Kinase in Kamakura, Japan. She came to the USA in late September, 1983 and has since lived in Champaign-Urbana, Illinois. She had never lived so long in any one place until then. "It has given me great pleasure to become involved in community affairs, and joining the Champaign County Section of the National Council of Negro Women in 1994 has been a very enriching experience.

Following is a brief sketch of her previous peripatetic life as well as some of the important landmarks in her life. By the time she went to college, she had been to seven schools and through four different educational systems.



In August, 1957, to October, 1960, she had lived in the Philippines, first in Manila, then in Quezon City. She gained fluency in English, thanks largely to Maryknoll, a school run mainly by American and Canadian Nuns. And from November, 1960 to November, 1965, she lived in Tokyo, Japan, then from November, 1965 to July, 1968, she lived in Bern, Switzerland. From July, 1968 to August, 1973, she lived in England, the first two years in London, then three years in Falmer, Sussex.

During those years, she completed her BA (1973) in International Relations at the University of Sussex, and passed her 'practicals' - as her friends tell her - by marrying Tony Leggett, an Englishman and a Physicist, soon after graduation.

From August, 1973 to April 1974, lived in Tokyo, Japan. Then from May, 1974 to September, 1983 the family lived in Brighton, England. A daughter, Elizabeth Asako, was born on September 28, 1978.

She gained her MA (1975) and her Master of Philosophy in Politics from the University of Sussex. In September, 1983, the family immigrated to the United States, so that her husband, Tony, could take a job offered by the Department of Physics, at the University of Illinois, Champaign-Urbana Campus.

After coming to Champaign-Urbana, I obtained my Ph.D in Anthropology from the University of Illinois, Champaign-Urbana Campus, in the Spring of 2000. Part of her research involved studying three churches in Champaign-Urbana. Becoming involved in the community in so many different ways i.e., as a parent, wife, as a researcher, and as a member of some of the community-based organizations has been very rewarding.

Ruth Latham

In 1954, after serving six years as a W.A.C. (Women's Army Corps), in the United States Army, Ruth came to Champaign with an appointment on Chanute Air Force Base as an Oral Hygienist. She was the only African American female in that position. Later, she met and married Charles Latham. After Chanute Regulation changes, Ruth left to work at Urbana High School as a Library Technician. During this time, she also performed in several plays written by local playwright, Cheryl West. Ruth later returned to Chanute, in the Real Property (Real Estate) Office until she retired in 1989. Later that year, she went to work for the Energy Assistance Program at the Urban League of Champaign County. After seven years, she officially retired to become more active in her church and the Douglass Senior Citizen program.



Luetta Smith Lee

Luetta Smith, daughter of Jethrow and Caroline Smith was born July 22, 1864 in Urbana, Illinois in Champaign County. She was raised and educated in Urbana. She married General Cass Lee on January 14, 1883 and they lived in Urbana on Main Street and Clark Street. They had two children: a daughter, Carrie Alice Lee, born January 6, 1892 and a son born in 1898 who died in infancy. In 1909, the Lees moved to Champaign, Illinois where they lived on White Street. Mrs. Lee was a beautician. She belonged to Bethel African Methodist Episcopal Church, where she was very active. She was responsible for the Deborah Chapter #27 Order of Eastern Star being formed and her name is on the Charter. Mrs. Lee died in 1911.



Patricia McKinney Lewis

My community work in the Champaign-Urbana area began over twenty years ago. As a member of Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Epsilon Epsilon Omega Chapter, I wrote a proposal for the Reading is Fundamental Project. The matching funds, received through this national program, allow the sorority to purchase books to distribute to children in the community.

I have chaired the Reading is Fundamental Project Committee for twenty-one years. During the summer months, we have provided low-income children with thousands of books since 1981. Many of the children at the Boys and Girls Club and Douglass Center Day Camp refer to me as "The Book Lady."



For a number of years, my committee distributed books at four sites: Girls Club, Don Moyers Boys and Girls Club, Douglass Branch Library, and Douglass Center. Presently, our RIF distributions continue at the Douglass Center Day Camp and the Don Moyers Boys and Girls Club serving approximately 300 children each summer. Special distributions, such as the one held in conjunction with National African American Read In Day, occur also.

I have served as president of Gamma Upsilon Psi Society, an organization comprised of community women, since 1990. Many young women have received scholarships to help pay college expenses as a result of participating in the Cotillion. The Debutantes must attend weekly rehearsals and also attend workshops involving etiquette. This year a profit of approximately \$36,000 will be awarded to the Debutantes in the form of monetary scholarships.

At St. Luke C.M.E. Church, I became the Recording Steward in 1977. I held that position for 23 years serving three pastors as the financial advisor and the keeper of financial records. I am vice chairperson of the Steward Board and I have been active in the Vacation Bible School. In 1999, I established a scholarship fund to provide children in grades three through eight money to buy school supplies. Since many of our children do not like to write, students are required to write an essay on a topic. Presently, I also serve as the church's Assistant Administrator.

As a member of Delta Kappa Gamma, I have served on the scholarship committee for several years. Memberships in other professional honor societies include Phi Delta Kappa, and Kappa Delta Pi. I served on the Champaign Human Relations Commission from 1985-1987 and I was a member of the Board of Directors at the University of Illinois YWCA from 1980-1986.

Hattie Marion

Hattie Marion was born on November 16, 1929 in Holly Springs, Mississippi, the daughter of Abron and Valeria Miller. Hattie worked on the family farm and attended rural schools until her marriage to Robert Marion in 1946. After their marriage, they both worked on the family farm until 1948 and then moved to Champaign, Illinois. They have 5 children who all attended Champaign Public Schools.

Hattie has always been very civic and community minded. She is presently a member of the NCNW and the Champaign County Home Extension Organization.

Hattie is a firm believer in lifelong learning and is presently taking computer classes where she is enhancing her computer skills. She also has many talents and skills such as her love of cooking, canning, quilting, gardening, entertaining and collecting antiques.



Barbara Jean McGee

Born Barbara Jean Algee on September 26, 1950 to William Algee (deceased) and Mazel Avant, Barbara is the second eldest of four including Linda Algee, Betty Sue Algee-Sayles and Larry Algee. In 1962, Barbara was baptized at Pilgrim Missionary Baptist Church. On December 14, 1968, Barbara married Willie George McGee and to this union three children were born; Alfonzo Tanell, Michelle Denise, and Willie George, Jr.

After graduating high school in 1969, Barbara was one of the first students to enroll in the Clerical Learning Program at the University of Illinois.

Since then she has been an employee of the following: C-U Daycare, Jonathan's Daycare, Frances Nelson Health Center and her current position as Douglass Annex Coordinator for the Champaign Park District. Barbara has received the Women's Achievement Award, Employee of the Month for the Park District and she has been featured in the children's book *Leola and the Honey Bears* (written by Melodye Benson Rosales).

Barbara has been a member of the Pilgrim Missionary Baptist Church for the past 38 years. She is a member of the Trustee Board, Chairman of the Building Fund Committee, and Past Treasurer of the Church. Barbara is also an Auxiliary member of the American Legion Post #559 and a past board member of Marilyn Queller Child Care Center. A single mother today, Barbara enjoys getting together with family and friends.



Shirley E. Melker

Shirley E. Melker was born in High Point, NC to Bishop and Mrs. Burt Rucker. She is the second oldest of seven children. She graduated from William Penn High School. She married the (late) William (Brother Billy) Melker and they became the parents of five children. She has four grandchildren. In 1965, she was instrumental in establishing The Greater Holy Temple Church in Urbana, Illinois under the pastorate of her husband where she served in all phases of its ministry. Since the death of her husband, she has served as Interim Pastor and presently as its Assistant Pastor.



She graduated from Parkland College with an Associate Degree in Secretarial Science. For the past twenty-three years, she has been employed by the University of Illinois Office of Instructional Resources as a Secretary Transcriber.

She was the first female to broadcast "black" gospel from Radio Station WKID; hosted The Gospel Caravan from WEFT; received a plaque as One of Ten Outstanding Black Women in Champaign-Urbana and received commendations from Governor James Edgar, Representative Tim Johnson and the mayors of Champaign and Urbana for her outstanding service. She is a member of the Champaign-Urbana Ministerial Alliance.

In 1998, she became an entrepreneur and opened her own business as a funeral home owner, Melker-Bluitt-Parker Mortuary, Inc., 704 North Fourth Street, Champaign, Illinois.

Mrs. Melker enjoys teaching and preaching the Gospel as an evangelist and good music.

Sister Elease Milton

Elease Milton, born on January 25, 1924 to the union of Clifford and Fannie Caldwell, was a native of Champaign, Illinois. Elease was the mother of three daughters, nine grandchildren and one great-granddaughter.

Elease was a member of the Salem Baptist Church for 63 years and during this time she taught Sunday school, assisted in the nursery, was a member of the Gospel & Majestic Choirs and an usher. She served as Chairperson for the annual Women's Day, Pastor's and Church's anniversaries on many occasions.



Elease attended the Baptist General State Convention and Workshop to obtain first-aid certification for the Nurses Guild where she was Vice-President. She was a member of the Flower Guild which decorates the church with floral arrangements on special occasions. Elease was a member of the Salem Baptist Trustee Board where she took part in the 1999 auditing of the church's belongings.

Elease's love of mankind did not stop at Salem Baptist Church by any means. She was well known at the local nursing and senior homes where she often visited the sick and shut-ins; she worked for the March of Dimes, as election Judge for the Champaign County Elections, was President of the Champaign Park District's Douglass Center Senior Program for two consecutive years, and 1999 Chairman of the Park District's Annual Douglass Center Senior Style Show which yielded \$2000+.

Two of Elease's most memorable moments that benefitted herself and the community include: (1) organizing the block club, "Attucks Place for Concerned Citizens", in 1994 for which she was a past President. (2) She attended Parkland Community College in her mid-60s and obtained an Associate Degree in Child Development. Later, she went on to teach the "Get Ready" class where she was awarded a certificate. Along with her diploma from college, Elease was awarded the "Urban League for Continuing Education" plaque and the "Seniors in Community Service Programs Outstanding Senior of the Year" certificate.

Eldress May Mullen

Mary Mullen was raised a preacher's daughter on a farm near Granada, Mississippi. She moved to Champaign, Illinois in 1947. She was in her early 20s when she came to Champaign to see an uncle, and ended up getting a job and marrying Randolph Mullen. Before she'd left Mississippi, her father's first cousin had looked in Mary's hand and said she'd not be back. The cousin also saw Mary dressed in white, talking to a crowd of people. Mary assumed that meant she'd be a nurse. After she and her husband moved to Chicago in 1948, she tried nursing school, but couldn't tolerate blood. She also tried hairdressing, but ended up enrolling in the Moody Bible Institute and becoming an ordained minister. She wore white robes. In 1951, they moved back to Champaign and she turned her attention to getting a church built. Her father was soundly against her being a minister, largely because of the old-fashioned attitudes about the proper place for women. But by the late 60s, he'd changed his mind. She was instrumental in helping raise funds to build a new church, the Church of the Living God, Pillar Ground of Truth, which now stands on the southwest corner of 4th Street and Bradley Avenue in Champaign, Illinois.



Mary started two day-care centers through the years. Primarily she served black women who couldn't afford other centers. She tried to make changes to help people improve their lives. She's still thinking of ways to help young people, especially those put into foster homes. She's a giving person. She's always out in the community doing something for someone. If there's a tragedy such as a house fire, she gets clothing and food drives organized. She visits hospitals - homes. Just mention that someone is ill and she'll be there to check them out.

Rita M. Myles

Rita attended the University of Illinois with the intent to teach fine arts to young people. As a member of "Omnimov", U of I's African-American Cultural Center's Dance Troupe, she accompanied the director of Omnimov and demonstrated various dance movements to African-American youths in the community. She was also involved in local plays, musicals and dance shows that were made up of the African-American community and the university.

While teaching physical education at the University of Illinois, Rita made a decision to pursue a career in nursing. While in nursing school, she continued to stay connected to the African American community by volunteering to do blood pressure checks and provide health education in the local housing projects.



With a focus on mental illness, alcoholism and addictions, Rita has worked in behavioral health hospitals. She was co-facilitator of an African-American, church based, support group for significant others of chemically dependent individuals. She also obtained a certification in addictions counseling during this time. In 1992, Rita became manager of "New Choice", The Carle Pavilion's Alcohol and Drug Rehabilitation Center in Champaign and she was the first African-American to hold this position. In 1995, she was hired as The Pavilion's Director of Nursing, again becoming the first African-American nurse executive in the area to hold this position. She obtained a Masters of Science degree in Hospital Services Administration from the University of St. Francis in 1999.

Rita is currently employed at Parkland College as a recruiter for the Health Professions. She serves as a senator for the Parkland College Association and was elected to serve on the Diversity Committee. She serves as a representative of Parkland's Equal Employment Opportunity Search Committee, Parkland's Marketing Committee and the Multicultural Student Advisory Committee. Rita is an advisor to the Student Nurse Association at Parkland and the Nursing Pinning Committee. She also facilitates Sister-To-Sister, a support network for African American females at Parkland College.

When not at Parkland, Rita is actively involved in her church in Urbana where she serves on the cooking committee. She is an active member of the National Council of Negro Women and involved in SisterNet, a support network for African-American women in the community. Rita was also elected to serve on the Board of Directors for the Illini Chapter American Red Cross. Rita currently lives in Champaign with her three children, Lenny, Crystal, and Brandon. She is grandmother of Tyrique, a toddler, who lives in Texas with his mother.

CharLotte Nesbitt

CharLotte Nesbitt was born on January 18, 1937, in Chicago, Illinois, the daughter of Grady and Helen Neither. She was the 3rd child of 9 born of this union. At a young age, her family moved to Danville, Illinois.

CharLotte moved to San Antonio, Texas to attend St. Mary's Catholic Academy (Boarding School) from 1st grade to 6th grades. She returned to Danville, Illinois and completed 7th and 8th grades at Washington Grade School. At Washington, she was an Honor Roll Student and a Cheerleader. She graduated from Danville High School in 1955. She attended the University of Chicago for 1 year and during that time, she met and began dating Mr. Bruce Nesbitt.



In 1956, she returned to Danville and worked at the "Three Sisters" Dress Shop. In 1957, she was married to Mr. Bruce Nesbitt and moved to Champaign, Illinois, and to this union were born 2 daughters and 2 sons. In addition, she also raised a foster son.

She has been a member of several organizations, among them being, the Y.W.C.A. where she was involved with the Black Woman's Achievement Dinner, was a member of the African-American History Committee, created the Adopt-A-Book Program, a member of the Reading Group, and member of Family Service Advisory Board.

She attended Parkland College for 1 year and during her professional career, she was employed at the Carle Clinic and the Department of Public Aid for a few years, the Champaign Public Library System for 19 years, most of which time was at the Douglass Branch Library where she was instrumental in establishing many enrichment programs involving both youth and adults and was responsible for the Oral History Interviews.

Hattie Paulk

Hattie Paulk is a native of Champaign, IL born in 1942. Her family was one of the original Black settlers in Champaign, also they established the first Church of God in Christ. Her parents, Robert Lee and Marcella Chipman Taylor are both deceased. Mr. And Mrs. Taylor had eight children, five surviving sons and two surviving daughters. Hattie is the mother of four and a former foster mother to more than 100 children of all ethnic backgrounds. Hattie stands out as an example of what perseverance and determination can mean.



She has overcome dozens of obstacles and hardships to get her education and gives all the credit to her family for inspiring her. A deeply religious woman who is an ordained minister and now an associate minister at The Church of Living God PGT. She was an assistant Pastor at the Church of the Living God PGT in Chicago, Illinois. She has an Associate in Arts Degree from Parkland College. In 2000, she was inducted into Parkland College Society. She received a Bachelor of Arts Degree from Eastern Illinois University, Charleston, IL and in 1989, received the U.S. Outstanding Adult Award.

Being very active in the community, Hattie has received numerous awards, among them being Woman of Distinction from the Green Meadows Girl Scouts. She is now Director of the Champaign Schools Family Information Center, where she and her staff initiated a Warm-A-Kid Drive. They have given away more than 600 coats to children. They have also started a Young Achievers Award Program where more than 150 children were recognized as Young Achiever. She has taught youth, and is a Co-Host on WEFT Radio on Sunday Mornings.

Sarah B. Payton

Sarah B. Payton, mother of Octavia (Buckley) Cole was born in Mississippi in 1895, the oldest of ten children born to John and Fannie Brent Buckley. She attended grade school in Mississippi.

In 1949, she came to Champaign, Illinois and worked as a domestic for many years to help support their ten children. She was a devoted member of the Mt. Olive Baptist Church, taught Sunday School, was a member of the choir and also was a member of Mt. Olive Missionary Society.



Elizabeth (Bessie) Peacock

Elizabeth (Bessie) Peacock was born in Monticello, Georgia in 1902, the daughter of Elizabeth Gorden and Paschal Showers. She attended grammar school in Monticello, Georgia.

She married George Peacock, Sr. (A widower with 5 children) in 1920 and moved to Urbana, Illinois in 1922. To this union, 10 children were born (5 boys and 5 girls).

Mr. Peacock worked a short time for the Big Four Railroad and then for many years as a construction worker for the Somers-Barr Company - a long-time construction business in Urbana. Mrs. Peacock was a housewife.



She was very active in the J.W. Hayes Parent Teacher Association and was elected its first African-American President. Her work with the PTA continued through the years.

A staunch member of the Salem Baptist Church, she served on the Mother's Board; worked with the food preparation group serving meals for families after funerals and other Church events; served as a representative to Church Women United, and worked whenever needed to serve her Church. She was also a member of the Eastern Star - Daughter of Isis. She was a faithful and loving woman.

She died in 1992.

Bernice Pope

Bernice Pope was born in Carrier Mills, Illinois, on November 18, 1920, the third daughter of Earl "Bud", a coal miner, and Ruthenia Chavous Russell, a homemaker. She attended the rural Lake View Elementary School, the same grade school her mother and brothers attended. After high school graduation, she attended the University of Illinois Champaign-Urbana Campus on a scholarship and with the help of her brothers. While there, Bernice met and married George L. Pope. During WW II, while George served in the Army, she taught at the Lake View School in Carrier Mills, Illinois. After his discharge, they moved to Boley, Oklahoma, where she taught for a few years.



They later moved back to Champaign where she now lives.

Bernice joined the teaching staff at the Willard School, then on to the Booker T. Washington School, where she taught for several years. Her last site was the Bottenfield School where she remained until retirement. Since retirement, Bernice has tutored at Douglass Center, her church and the Unit #4 School District. She is very interested in the advancement and academic achievement of children in school and church. She feels tutoring provides the possibility of greater achievements by her students.

She is the proud parent of two sons and grandparent of two granddaughters, both of whom are in education.

Bernice has been a member of the Bethel A.M.E. Church for more than fifty years. She teaches Sunday School and was Church Treasurer for 30 years. She has been on the Board of the County Blood Bank for ten years and a donor for twenty plus years.

Carrie Alice Lee Pope

Carrie Alice Lee Pope was born January 6, 1892, daughter of General Cass Lee and Luetta Smith Lee. She attended the Champaign Public and High Schools and graduated from the University of Illinois. During her early years she was a staunch member of the Bethel A.M.E Church, the Senior Choir, The Willing Workers Club, the Lou Anna Riley Women's Missionary Society and she was a Sunday School teacher. While attending the U of I, she became a member of the Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority and after graduation, began her teaching career in Lynchburg, VA; gave private music lessons in piano and taught religious education.



On September 16, 1917, she was married to Cecil Pope and to this union six children were born: George L., Cecil A., Carrie L. Pope Banks, Sarah E. Pope Potter, Esther G. Pope Scroggins and Paul L. Pope.

Her community activities included: active membership in Church Women United; The Douglass Center Senior Citizens; Past Matron, Deborah Chapter #27 Order of Eastern Star; Past President and President of District #41 Mothers of WWII. She was also a licensed Practical Nurse.

In recognition of her work, she was presented an award for "outstanding service to the community" by the Champaign-Urbana Community Recognition Committee. The officers and members of the Lou Anna Riley Missionary Society also recognized her sixteen years' presidency and described her as "a woman of love, humility and compassion; always to be remembered and loved for the legacy which continues to guide the work of the Society. Carrie Alice Lee Pope died November 26, 1978.

Gladys Rhodes Pope



Promoting literacy lies at the heart of this educator, Mrs. Pope, a teacher for over 20 years at Leal School in Urbana, Illinois. Mrs. Gladys Rhodes Pope is a 1958 graduate of Danville High School, Danville, Illinois. Mrs. Pope graduated with a Bachelor and Master Degree in Education from the University of Illinois. Mrs. Pope was married to the late Lt. Paul Lawrence Pope, and they are the parents of three children; Katherine, Elizabeth and Paul Martin.

At Leal School, Mrs. Pope put forth an extra effort to motivate and enhance basic skills of her high-risk students in Reading, Writing, and Drama. These programs improved the self-esteem of all students in her classroom. Mrs. Pope felt all students came to her classroom with a special gift.

She is a member of Bethel A.M.E. Church, A.M.E. Stewardess and Missionary, Foster Parents from 1967 to 1998; Mentored high risk students in 1997 - 2001; Y.W.C.A. Black Achievement Award Honoree 1989 - 1998; Baha'i Community Award - 1987; Martin Luther King A.M.E. Award - 1989; Bethel A.M.E. Missionary of the Year - 1999; A.M.E. Outstanding Service Award - 1997.

Mrs. Pope's hobbies are collecting plates commemorating churches, writing short plays and poetry. She published a poem, "Mrs. Lucy's Fine Lace". Her activities include gifts and support for community programs, sponsored by POPE FOR PEACE Foundation.

Louanna A. Riley

Louanna Riley was born in 1852 in Summer County, Tennessee. She moved to Champaign, Illinois, at an early age and lived at 106 E. Springfield Avenue. She had two children, a daughter Ethel, and a son George who attended the University of Illinois and played in the U of I band.

She was a member of the Deborah Chapter Order of Eastern Star and a stewardess in Bethel A.M.E. Church. She was active in the young missionary society. They met every Saturday morning at her home and meetings were strictly coordinated according to Roberts Rules of Order.

Twice a year, she gathered shoe boxes from the local shoe stores. The children filled them with fruit and candy donated by the congregation and they were delivered to shut-ins in the community and to the nursing homes. The missionary society of Bethel Church is named for her.

When it became difficult for her to continue to live alone, she moved to Chicago to be with her daughter. Local relatives included Ray Scott, a great nephew and his family.



Arnetta Collins Rodgers

I was born in Chicago, Illinois, the oldest of four girls, but grew up in South Bend, Indiana. My dad worked at the Studebaker Auto Plant, my mother as a Secretary at the Y.W.C.A. I completed elementary and high school there.

After high school graduation I enrolled in Howard University in Washington, D.C. where I earned my BA Degree in 1964. In 1966, I earned my Masters Degree in Social Work from the University of Illinois and some 12 years later in 1978 my Ph.D.

From 1966-68, I was a Social Worker with the Jewish Family Service in New York, New York, a Psychiatric Social Worker for the Virgin Islands Department of Mental Health, St. Thomas, V. I. 1968 - 1969; Social Worker in the Unit #4 School District - 1970 - 1993 (intermittently; Assistant Principal at the Edison Middle School 1992-1993 and lastly, Principal 1993-2000 at the Booker T. Washington School.

I have done a lot of research in many areas, but I feel my Master's thesis titled "Pre-Natal Care Among Champaign-Urbana Negro Mothers" was most outstanding in content and according to the late Mr. Vernon Barkstall, laid the groundwork for the establishment of the Frances Nelson Health Center.

Academic honors include: Phi Beta Kappa, Post-Doctoral Appointment 1978-1980, University of Illinois Institute on Racism.

I am the wife of Dr. Frederick Rodgers, retired from the University of Illinois College of Education. We are the parents of 4 children, 3 sons, all graduates of West Point and one daughter attending Illinois Wesleyan University.



Virginia Steward Rodgers

Virginia S. Rodgers was born in Danville, Illinois, in 1911, the daughter of Flora and John Bailey Steward. When she was just a few weeks old, her parents moved to Champaign, Illinois. She attended elementary, junior high and high school and graduated from Champaign Senior High School.

As a young adult, she worked as a stock girl in downtown Champaign, and later as a Cook in fraternity and sorority houses on Campus.

She was a loyal member of Salem Baptist Church, where she served on the Usher Board, and worked with BYPU, the Sunday School and the Missionary Society for several years.

She passed away January 25, 1998.



Benita Ann Rollins-Gay

I was born in Urbana, Illinois. My parents were MSGT. Thomas C. and Frances C. Rollins. I attended J.W. Hayes School in Urbana, Urbana Junior High School and graduated from Urbana High School. I received my B.S. degree from Central State University, Wilberforce, Ohio in Comprehensive Business Education and Business Administration. I then earned my Master's Degree from Wright State University in Fairborn, Ohio in Business Education and Business Administration. During my 19 years of teaching high school and coaching girls track at Jefferson Senior High School, I implemented many programs in the Dayton, Ohio school system. For example, I started the Career Education Program where I had professionals come to the rural Black High School and talk about their various careers.



I was also selected by the State of Ohio to write the Teacher Competency Testing for all teachers in the State of Ohio. That instrument is still being used today. I received numerous awards in the field of education and the Presidents Award from the Jefferson Township Board of Education.

I am the proud mother of three children: Jonte' Miesha Rollins, Jasmine Gay and Javarius Dunlap-Gay. My community service started after the death of my husband and my return to Champaign, Illinois: Vice President of Martin Luther King Elementary School PTA; first Black Woman President of the City of Urbana Schools PTA serving 2001-2002; and on the Board of Directors of A Woman's Fund. I am a 23 year survivor of Breast Cancer and counsel women who are currently struggling with it. Professionally I am a Family Counselor at Don Moyer Boys and Girl's Club in Champaign. Memberships include: National Council of Negro Women, Ohio Education Association, Black Social Worker, Crisis Intervention Specialist and numerous others. I currently hold the position as Area Chair Person of the research on the status of Black Women with the Southeastern Area Missionary Society and a member of the Louanna Riley Missionary Society.

Betty Taulese Nesbitt Rowell

Betty Nesbitt Rowell is a native of Champaign, Illinois. She is the daughter of the late Herbert E. Nesbitt (Inman Hotel chief cook) and Pauline Gillespie Nesbitt (homemaker). She is the youngest of ten children. She was married to the late Phillip M. Rowell, community activist, in 1979. They have one son, Phillip Maurice Lewis Owens Nesbitt Rowell, II born in 1982.

Mrs. Rowell has dedicated her life to educating students at the elementary school level. She was inspired by former educators such as Jim Casey, Maudie Edwards, Isabelle Buckner, Gerald Yaxley, Odelia Wesley, Ruth Fliegel, Ruth Calimese, Helen Johnson, Kenneth O. Stratton and Tom Pitchett.



At age 12, Betty was afflicted with a potentially life-threatening disease, consequently she was denied an opportunity to continue her education for an entire year. This contributed to her insatiable desire to learn and teach others.

Betty received her Bachelor's degree in elementary education from Illinois State University in 1971. Her first teaching position was in first grade at Carman Elementary School in Waukegan, Illinois until 1974. She earned her Master's degree in educational policies studies from the University of Wisconsin-Madison in 1976. Upon returning to Champaign, she taught at Robeson elementary School from 1976-1979. Betty worked for Ginn/Xerox Publishing Company as a copy editor in the Boston area and Motorola, Inc. in Schaumburg, Illinois as an account representative. In 1985, she returned to teaching and is proud to teach at Stratton Elementary School. The most recent honor was a WICD-TV 2001 Golden Apple Award for her commitment to excellence in teaching. Betty enjoys spending time with her family and enjoys going to church.

Miriam B. Taylor Scantlebury

Miriam B. Taylor Scantlebury was born in Panama, Republic of Panama. She graduated from the University of the West Indies, Jamaica in 1961 as a Registered Nurse.

She immigrated to the US in 1962 and married fellow Panamanian Frank Scantlebury in St. Mary's Catholic Church in Champaign. Together, they raised three children, Marie, Marcia and Michael.

Mrs. Scantlebury worked in the McKinley Health Center Administration Office as a Quality Assessor for the Patient Service Coordinator.



Her past experiences included: Burnham City Hospital from 1962 to 1970 as an ER Night Shift Supervisor and Labor and Delivery Night Shift Charge Nurse; U of I Medical Center-Chicago, Night Shift Intensive Care Unit Charge Nurse 1970; Carle Foundation Hospital from 1970-1983 as Night Shift Intensive Care Unit Charge Nurse in the Cardiology, Neurology and Surgical Departments; U of I Urbana-Champaign McKinley Health Center from 1983 to present Emergency Room Night Shift Charge Nurse, Expanded Role Nurse, Medical Clinic II Charge Nurse.

Miriam held the following membership and associations with the American Nurses Association/Illinois Nurses Association from 1964-1972; Champaign-Urbana League of Women Voters, 1970-75; Alpha Omega Honorary Scholastic Society (Parkland College) - 1974; Charter member of NCNW (Champaign County Section) - Served as Parliamentarian, Financial Secretary, Treasurer - 1981; UIUC - Alumni Association Life Member, Robert Waller Scholar; Black Alumni Association 1986; Charter member of the Champaign Exchangette - 1986-1990; Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Inc. - Epsilon Epsilon Omega Chapter, has served as Treasurer since induction - 1990; American College Health Association, 1991 -; Sigma Theta Tau - Theta Pi Chapter International Honor Society for Nurses - 1992.

Prior to the creation of the Minority International Health Program at McKinley Health Center, she assisted Dr. Jerry Ogbudimpkpa, Ph.D in data collection, planning, implementation and evaluation of pilot students and the subsequent comprehensive health needs assessments (1980-1984).

Miriam Scantlebury passed away in March, 2006.

Anna Wall Scott

Mrs. Anna Wall Scott has been a resident of this Community for many years and has also been politically and socially active for many years.

Early on, she was appointed to serve on the Charter Human Relations Commission in Urbana, as Chair of the Subcommittee on Education.

She was the first woman in the State of Illinois to be elected to the Democratic State Central Committee covering 7 counties in the East Central Illinois jurisdiction. She also served as Vice-Chair of the State Democratic Party with the late Mayor Richard J. Daley and also on the Democratic National Committee serving as a delegate to the Nominating Convention which led to the election of former President Jimmy Carter.

She has since changed politics and is now active in the Republican Party, serving as the recently elected Corresponding Secretary of the Champaign County Republican Women's Organization. Having completed a 2-year term on the Illinois Real Estate and Banking Board to which she was appointed by the former Governor Jim Edgar, she recently returned from Washington, D.C. after attending a dinner and a series of meetings with Congressional leaders. Speaker Dennis Hastert was the host.

Other community activities include: Past Matron of Deborah Chapter #27, Order of Eastern Star, member of Hadassah, member and past Board member of the League of Women Voters, past Board member of Campus Y.W.C.A., the Junior Vice-Commander of the Champaign County Council of American Legions, serving a third term as Commander of the William F. Earnest American Legion Post #559 - the first woman in Champaign County to be elected to that position, a member and class leader of Bethel African Methodist Episcopal Church.

Presently, she is a Professor of Sociology at Parkland College.



Flora Giles Scott

Flora Giles Scott was born June 16, 1892 in Chatham, Virginia, the daughter of Samuel and Mary Agnes Giles. She moved to Danville, Illinois in 1903 where she met and was married to John Bailey Steward. To this union was born three children.

In 1911, she moved to Champaign, Illinois and united with the St. Luke Christian Methodist Church where she served as Church Clerk. In 1921, she became a member of Salem Baptist Church and worked diligently with the Ladies Aide Society, Circle #3 and was a Sunday School Teacher for the Adult Women's Class.

Mrs. Scott later married Deacon Ottowa Scott. She passed away in 1981.



Sarah Wilson Scott

Sarah Scott was born in 1892 in Shawneetown, Illinois, the daughter of Marshall and Cordelia Wilson. At the death of her father she, with her mother and sister Edna, moved to Champaign, Illinois. She later married Ray Scott and had two children, Erma and Ramon. She was lovingly called "Muddie" by her children's friends.

"Muddie" was active in the community and in her church. She worked diligently on the committee to provide equipment for the new Douglass Center built in 1945. She was a charter member of the local chapter of NCNW. She was an active member of the Willing Workers Club of Bethel A.M.E. Church.

Her desire was to live to be 100 years of age in order to receive a letter from the President of the United States. She missed it by 6 months. She was still proudly living alone at her death.

"Muddie" often admonished others to "be kind to everyone because you never know who you will have to ask to give you a glass of water."



Halestine J. Session

Halestine Session received her undergraduate degree from Allen University, Columbia, South Carolina and masters degree from the University of Illinois. She is a former high school teacher in Timmonsville, South Carolina and a kindergarten teacher for 26 years at Washington School in Champaign, Illinois. Mrs. Session was recognized by Bank of Illinois and Channel 15 as Teacher of the Month in 1989.

Mrs. Session is a member of Bethel African Methodist Episcopal Church and a dedicated Sunday School teacher. She is a member of and an officer in the following Bethel Church groups: Willing Workers Club, Expansion Fund, Scholarship Committee and Benevolent Fund. She is a member of Epsilon Epsilon Omega Chapter of Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, NCNW, NAACP, Urban League, Allen University Alumni Association and the University of Illinois Alumni Association.



For several years she has prepared weekly meals for many women and men who lived alone. In addition, she visits and takes necessities and treats to nursing home residents. Halestine loves learning; she loves children and working with them.

On several occasions at Bethel A.M.E. Church, the children, with her guidance, have delivered performances in plays and public speaking. She has tutored children in her home and continues to volunteer in the schools.

Halestine is married to David H. Session and they have two sons: Kendal M. Session and Darrel R. Session (deceased). They have two granddaughters; Miesha and Courtney.

Esther Mae Baker Stoba

Esther M. Baker Stoba was born in Urbana on September 17, 1916, the daughter of Hanse E. and Stella Mae Baker. She attended Urbana elementary schools, then moved to Chicago to finish her last 2 years of high school and graduated from Englewood High School, Class of 1935. She returned to Urbana and attended the University of Illinois.

In 1943, she moved to Oakland, California where she joined the American Red Cross. She was stationed at Ft. Huachuca, Arizona from where she was shipped overseas to the southwest Pacific.



At the end of her tour of duty, she returned to the States and after completing Nurse's Training at Manhattan State Hospital in New York, she returned to Urbana and worked as Supervisor of Nurses, in the Obstetrics Department at Mercy Hospital; later worked at Carle Hospital, and then returned to Covenant (formerly Mercy) until her retirement.

For several years, Ms. Stoba served on the Community Development Commission. She spearheaded the movement to boycott what might have been an Adult Bookstore on the corner of Goodwin and University Avenue in Urbana. She and her group were successful in the effort.

Ms. Stoba's hobbies include reading and cooking.

Mary Louise Tanner

Mary Louise Tanner was born in Paducah, Kentucky, the only child of Dinella Davis and Benjamin Wilford. She attended Paducah public schools and graduated from Western Kentucky Teacher's College. She and her husband, the late Robert E. Tanner and their eight children moved to Champaign in 1958.

Mrs. Tanner became a mother figure to countless children throughout the community. For 15 years, she worked at Adler Zone Center with neglected and abused children who had moderate to severe behavioral problems and was a calming and positive influence on them. She helped these children learn to read, write and most importantly, believe they could be successful, productive citizens.



Later, after Adler closed, Mrs. Tanner started her own business and operated a day care facility that cared for almost 200 children for over 18 years. Many of the children that she cared for, still send cards, letters and gifts and many parents have come back to say "thank you."

Active in the Champaign schools, Salem Baptist Church and community for many years, Mrs. Tanner still hasn't retired. She still delivers Thanksgiving food baskets to the elderly, has served hot meals to the homeless from her own kitchen and has become a licensed foster parent.

Her own children are now grown and she's a proud grandmother of 21 and a great-grandmother of 30.

Stephanie Lynne Tatum

Stephanie Lynne Tatum is a native of Urbana, Illinois. Upon graduating from Urbana High School, she attended Texas Southern University in Houston, Texas and received her Bachelor of Arts Degree in Political Science. She returned to Urbana-Champaign and attended the University of Illinois where she earned both a Master of Arts in Educational Policy Analysis and A Doctor of Philosophy in Sociology of Education.



Currently, Dr. Tatum is the Principal of Canaan Academy, a private Christian Elementary School, located in Urbana, Illinois. In addition to the daily administrative duties that she performs at the Academy, she ensures that the partnership between the home, the school, and the community is maintained; this collegial model has proven to be a vital part in effective educational outcomes. To this end, Canaan Academy has become a resource for families, local schools, universities, and community agencies in regard to the educational attainment for all students.

In addition to the work that Dr. Tatum does at Canaan Academy, she is a WrapAround Facilitator for the Champaign School District. As a facilitator, she consults with families, community agencies, building principals, teachers and other educators within the school district on strategies that they can utilize to assist in positive educational outcomes for all students. Dr. Tatum's research experience is within the Sociology of Education and Sociology of the Family. Dr. Tatum has received many honors and awards for her commitment to children, families, schools and community agencies.

Veola (Veecy) Tinsley

Mrs. Veola Tinsley, was born in Providence, Kentucky. Upon graduating from high school, Veecy moved to Champaign where she met and married Roscoe Tinsley. They became the proud parents of three daughters: Elvena, Sharon and Rosalind. Roscoe and Veecy opened Tinsley's Cleaners during the early 1950s and remained in business until his death in 1974. Her daughters attribute their work ethic to the training received by working in the family business during school and summer breaks. They were told that hard work was a prerequisite for building good character.

Mrs. Tinsley is an active member of Salem Baptist Church. She has served as Church Clerk for more than 30 years. Also, she worked with the Willing Workers Missionary Club, the Mother's Board and volunteers in the Soup Kitchen. She is famous for her spicy cabbage.

After the death of her husband, Veecy returned to school and received her Bachelor's Degree from Eastern Illinois University on December 16, 1979. Armed with her degree, she began working as a counselor for the Champaign Consortium. Later she worked for the JPTA where she assisted many teenagers and adults in becoming gainfully employed. Veecy retired on September 16, 1995.



Evelyn Burnett Underwood

Evelyn was born in January 1943 in Hernando, Mississippi. She attended elementary school in the South until she was 10 years old. The family then moved to Champaign, Illinois. She graduated from high school and got married at a very early age. Because her children were born so close together, this cut short her life long dream of going to college and becoming a social worker or counselor. she had to go to work to help support the family while the children were very small.



Her few business courses in high school, in addition to her academic courses were helpful in acquiring a clerical position at a laundry. She started taking night courses at Adult Education and later at Commercial College through the National Secretaries Association. She became involved as a Board Member of several organizations that worked to advance society at large and exhibited a concern for the interest of all mankind. Among them were the Community Development Board of Directors, Coordinating Committee for Quality Education, NAACP, The Champaign County Urban League, Champaign County League of Women Voters, the Douglass Center Library Board and the N.C.N.W., to name a few. Evelyn was the 1st Black to be elected to the Urbana School District #116 Board of Education and served for 12 years; and, as an elected official she served in many capacities including the National Caucus of Black School Board Members. To fulfill her dream of formal training, she enrolled as a part-time student in the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences and the College of Education at the Univ. of IL. Urbana-Champaign Campus from 1971-82, while working full-time. She later received Illinois Teacher Certification in upper elementary, junior high school and high school, including Special Certification in Guidance and General Administrative. She took degrees from several universities:

B.A. Education, Sociology and Political Science, E.I.U., Charleston, IL - August, 1983

J.D. Indiana University School of Law, Bloomington, IN - May, 1987

M.S. Edu. Dept. of Ed. Psych. & Guid., E.I.U., Charleston, IL - May, 1988

Ed.S. Ed. Admn., E.I.U., Charleston, IL - May, 1993

H.L.D. Dr. Humane Ltrs. (Honorary), Grant College, Birmingham, AL - 1995

Ph.D. Ed., Curr. & Inst., U of I at U.-C. - May, 2000

As Associate Minister of her Church, the New Free Will Baptist Church, she works alongside her husband, Pastor King James Underwood, to nurture the Christian Spirit among all of the members with particular emphasis on the youth.

Dorothy Hadley Utley

Dorothy Hadley Utley was born in Mattoon, the daughter of Bertha Estell and Jesse Hadley. She attended elementary school there and 2 years at Mattoon High School.

Dorothy worked as a domestic and baby-sitter early in life. She moved to Danville where she met and married a professional musician. To this union was born one son. She moved to Champaign, Illinois with her son in 1942, was employed at the Chanute Air Force Base in Rantoul, Illinois and established a permanent home. In 1949, she married a Serviceman, Rubavent Utley. He passed away in 1984. During those years, she worked as an Elevator Operator at Robeson's Department Store for one year and for 15 years as a Waitress at Katsina's Restaurant. She retired from this position in 1984. Dorothy's career as a Volunteer began in 1962 when she served as a Nurse's Aide at Mercy Hospital for 1 year and at Burnham City Hospital for 15 years, plus serving as Assistant Supervisor in Central Supply at Burnham Hospital.



Her need and willingness to serve as a Volunteer intensified after her husband's death and proved to be good therapy for her grief. She became involved with the Retired Senior and Volunteer Program, serving on its Advisory Board. She also served on: Champaign County Health Care Consumer's Task Force, the Medicare 100 Program; The Pharmacy Watch Program; Champaign-Urbana Economic Partnership; the American Cancer Society; Campaign for Better Health; Center for Women in Transition; Children's Home and Aid Society; Head Start; Family Service; Habitat for Humanity; Stevick Senior Center; Provena Behavioral Health; and the United Way, just to name a few. She was a Life Member of the American Legion Post #559. Her hobbies were cooking, sewing and reading.

Dorothy Vickers-Shelley

Dorothy Vickers-Shelley worked as an elementary school librarian for thirty-three years. She worked daily helping, in various ways, to expand young minds. She reminded students that the most precious and powerful gift that we will ever own is the MIND. Since 1976, all library classes opened with the 'Ignorance and Fear' statement: "Life is short. Therefore, I shall be a crusader in the fight against ignorance and fear, beginning with myself." "I enjoyed very much working with 'young minds'. We helped each other to learn," she said. The statement was not a reminder just for students, but for all of us.



Dorothy Vickers-Shelley came to Urbana, Illinois from Detroit, Michigan. She majored in Elementary Education at Wayne State University in Detroit and later came to the University of Illinois where she received her degree in Library Science. She retired from her position as Librarian in the Margaret Dees Library at Yankee Ridge Elementary School in 2003.

During her many years there, she endeared herself to many of her students, some of whom became parents of her later students. As a dedicated teacher in the Library, she always commanded respect and because she cared, she gave that same respect to her students and always had time to listen to them. This has been very evident from all the letters of praise and fond memories she has received from so many of her former students.

Dorothy Vickers-Shelley had two daughters: Dana Vickers-Shelley, Baltimore, MD and Pamela-Alyse Vickers Shelley, Urbana, IL. Dorothy was a member of Canaan Missionary Baptist Church and a Charter member of the Champaign County Section of the National Council of Negro Women.

Mary Frances Varnado Walden

Champaign Unit #4 Schools, Elementary Teacher,
Cooperating Teacher with U of I, Retired.

If I have made contributions in life, I must give thanks to my parents, Ishmael and Elizabeth McKinley Varnado. At age two, I moved from rural Pike County, Mississippi to Urbana, IL with my parents and my brother, William. My parents had a mission for a better life, both educationally and economically.

I am the widow of Frederic Logan Walden, a 23-year veteran of the United States Air Force, who served as Council Member for the Third Ward and Mayor pro tem, City of Urbana. He became Director of Purchasing at Carle Foundation Hospital upon his retirement from the Air Force. We have two sons: Frederic Earle Walden, an honor student with a Bachelor's degree from the U of I in Clinical Psychology and Leslie Logan Walden who received his degree in Government from the University of Wisconsin and is currently working in San Diego, CA at the Office of the Public Defender. There are three grandchildren, Frederic Blake Walden, Maya Nicole Walden and Travis Logan Walden.



I am a product of the Urbana schools and received a Bachelor's, Master's, and Advanced Degree from the University of Illinois. It was my good fortune to have received my student teacher training under the skillful guidance of Mae Hawkins, first African-American teacher-principal at Lawhead School, Champaign. She was a person of courage, compassion and commitment - a catalyst for all young people who knew her. My concern and devotion to my students were total. They were encouraged to challenge the sometimes unfair conditions of life and to press forward toward the goals that could be theirs.

I was the co-founder of Operation Excellence at Salem Baptist Church. We are grateful to the Champaign Unit 4 schools for supplying over one thousand books and workbooks to advance our programs.

I am a charter member of Epsilon Epsilon Omega Chapter of Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority. Most recently, I have become active in the African-American Genealogical Society and the Champaign County African American History Committee of the Early American Museum.

Ruby J. McEwen Weathersby

Ruby J. McEwen Weathersby was born in rural Mississippi (Pike County) in August, 1936.

She married Walter B. Weathersby in May, 1956. She is the proud mother of 7 children and the grandmother of 9. She's traveled the world with her military husband.

They finally settled in Rantoul, Illinois in 1981. Ruby's involvement with the Girl Scouts ranged from leader to co-service unit manager. She served on the Board of the Northern Champaign County Community Service Center for 9 years and 6 years on the Fire and Police Commission.



She currently serves on the Board of Education of the Rantoul City Schools, a trustee on the Board a Greater New Light Baptist Church. Ruby has been a member of the Business and Professional Woman for 18 years, serving as President and District Director. She is committed to the betterment of life for everyone.

Vera L. Wesley

Vera L. Wesley was born in Tennessee. She moved to Champaign-Urbana in 1957. She was one of three children (two brothers). Her parents were farmers, so she grew up on a farm in the country and walked three miles to attend school. Education has always been an important part of her life. She attended schools in Jackson, Tennessee, Atlanta, Georgia, Beauty College and Modeling School.



She has been very involved in her neighborhood, and community work. She founded the "Concerned Citizens for a Better Neighborhood" and has worked hard to get drugs and violence out of her neighborhood. She also started an after-school tutoring program at the Douglass Center Annex. She has a strong love for children and a desire to see them achieve.

Mary Lucille Birden White

I was born in Sevierville, Tennessee, to a mother, who before marriage was a schoolteacher and a father, who was a Brick Mason by trade, and did farming on the side. He also raised chickens for a hotel. I was the only girl in a family of seven boys.

During my early school years, no provision was made for the education of Black (Negro at the time) children beyond the eighth grade. After graduating from the eighth grade, I stayed out of school for a year, then my parents sent me to another town, Greenville, Tennessee to live with my mother's brother to attend high school. I was active in school activities and graduated as valedictorian of the class.



I dearly loved school, but my parents could not afford to send me to college, so for one year, I worked as a clerk in my uncle's grocery store. Then my parents agreed, reluctantly, to let me go to New York, under the care of my sister-in-law, whose husband, my brother, was serving in the Army during World War II. In New York, I worked three years as a clerk in the Processing Division of the Internal Revenue Service. When the war ended, so did my job. I then worked one year as a Clerk-Typist for the National League of Nursing Education.

During World War II, I became a Pen Pal with a Navy buddy of one of my brothers. After the War and after a few visits, we were married and lived in Peoria, Illinois, where he was attending Bradley University. We had two daughters and I am proud to say that while I could not attend college, both daughters are college graduates and successful in their chosen careers. I also have three grandsons who are also college graduates.

My thirst for an education led me to take courses at various places, a business college in New York and later in Champaign. While I did not work outside the home for the first twelve years of marriage, I kept the children of friends so their mothers could work. I also did ironing for some University of Illinois students during the days of the starched shirts and blouses. I did typing for some University students. Thinking that I could go to the University of Illinois at night, I received a permit to enter the University. Only then did I learn that night courses were not offered for under-graduates. So I continued my quest for knowledge by taking a correspondence course from the University. I have taken several classes from Parkland College as well as classes in the Adult Education Programs in the Champaign and Urbana School Systems.

I worked twenty-three years in the Superintendent's Office of the Urbana School District #116 and was Payroll Clerk for twenty-one of those years. After retiring in 1983, I became affiliated with Provena Covenant Medical Center, where I have delivered Patient Mail for the past fifteen or so years. I am a member of the Salem Baptist Church.

Margot M. Williams

Margot Williams is a Civic Engagement and Public Policy Educator in Cook County for the University of Illinois Extension. She is the former Director of the Workforce Development Department of the Urban League of Champaign County and Project Director for YEP UCAN (Youth Employment Program Utilizing Communities and Neighborhoods). YEP UCAN was a grant funded by the Department of Labor through collaborations with select National Urban League affiliates. The program targets young adults 18-21 years old who have not completed high school and/or are adjudicated. The primary goals are to help YEP UCAN participants attain their GED as well as secure gainful unsubsidized employment.



Margot is also the former Director of Community Relations for Parkland College. Margot received her M.A. degree in Business Communications from Jones International University in May 2004 and holds a B.A. in Journalism with an emphasis in Advertising/Promotions from Northern Illinois University. She has over 15 years of experience in the field of public affairs, public relations, sales and marketing. Before returning to Chicago, Margot also worked for the University of Illinois' athletic department Fighting Illini Scholarship Fund, United Parcel Service, AT & T Media Services and hosted a television show, "Job Story" for Parkland College Educational Television (PCETV).

In her spare time, Margot provides promotions consulting services to various corporate, faith-based and community organizations throughout Illinois, Atlanta, California and Las Vegas. Aside from exercising and practicing meditation techniques, she has also taught Chicago Style Steppin' through park districts, fitness facilities and dance studios as well as enjoys studying Christian principles, mentoring middle school and high school-aged girls about Youth Empowerment Strategies (YES). She recently turned her love for dance, flair for fashion and interest in sewing into a business venture that includes the launching of her www.StepNStyles.com web site featuring custom made bags and pouches for dancer's shoes and accessories. She has interest in securing funds to utilize the StepNStyles business venture to develop a program to provide young people with an outlet to learn how to sew as a way to help build their self esteem and positively contribute to the economic development of their communities.

She is the daughter of Barbara and Willie Williams and the granddaughter of former National Council of Negro Women (NCNW) member, Nettie L. Cook, who is also featured in the Early American Museum chronicles. Her father, Coach Williams, is an outstanding track athlete who broke Jesse Owens' world record in the 100 meters in 1956 and retired in August 2000 from being an Associate Head Men's Track Coach (emphasis on sprinters) of the University of Illinois. She has one sister, Darla, an adult son, Thomas and a nephew, Julian.

Rebecca J. Williams

The family of Rebecca J. Williams came to Chanute Air Force base August 31, 1960. Rebecca could not get employment in the Rantoul school system and thus began teaching in Danville, Illinois. She taught there for one year before she left for Libya. Rebecca taught in the U.S.A. dependent schools before returning to Chanute in July 1968. She became Director of Headstart and served in that position for two years. During that time, she expanded the program to a church located in Rantoul. That movement expanded the program outside the city limits of Champaign-Urbana. After two years, Rebecca again applied to Rantoul High School and was hired. She taught English in the high school from September 1970 through May 1994. Her efforts in the 60s opened opportunities for employment of minorities in Rantoul.



Rebecca was active in several organizations. She was the President of the National Council of Negro Women, office holder in Alpha Kappa Alpha sorority and a member of Business and Professional Women. She was an active member in the American Association of University Women and the Parish Council of Catholic Women. She was also a member of the Illinois Retired Teachers Association.

Rebecca received a Bachelor of Science degree from Alabama State Teachers College, and a Masters degree from the University of Chicago. She did post graduate work at the University of California in Berkeley and the University of Illinois.

Winnie Wilson

Winnie Wilson was a standout teacher in the Champaign Unit 4 School District.

Winnie grew up in San Antonio, Texas, and as a child, it was always her dream to become a teacher. She attended elementary, junior high and high school there and after graduation, went to West Virginia State on scholarship and while there, she met and was married to James C. Wilson, an outstanding All-American Football Player at the College. To this union was born two children, a daughter and a son. Mr. Wilson was employed by the College's Athletic Department and served as Assistant Football Coach, Swimming Coach and Director of the Student Union and Recreation.



In 1965, he was hired as Assistant Track Coach at the University of Illinois and the family relocated to the area. While traveling with the University of Illinois Team in Texas, Spring of 1967 - he became ill and subsequently died a few days later of Viral Meningitis. This left Winnie with two children to support, a daughter 8, and a son 14. She had begun teaching full-time a year before. It was a tough time making ends meet, so she decided to return to school to earn her Master's Degree so her salary would increase. Winnie never gave up - she got her Degree in 1970.

Her teaching career covered assignments in many of the Unit #4 Schools, and her reputation as an exemplary teacher and role model spread throughout the community. She supported the education of her two children at the University of Illinois and is the proud mother of Karen, an Attorney with the United States Department of Justice, and James, who is in Communication. She is now retired, but has fond recollections of her teaching career and the rewards from former students who fondly remember her open-arms, hands-on teaching philosophy.

Crystal Womble

Crystal Womble has been employed with Krannert Center for nine years, beginning with the organization as the Assistant Manager for the Ticket Office. Currently as the Outreach Director, she is responsible for building relationships with the regional community through presentations about programs and events. In addition, she works with organizations to plan activities at the Center through the group sales program.

As the coordinator for Krannert Center's Volunteer Association, she also supervises the community volunteers who usher, assist with mailings for the Youth Series program and assist with the biannual fundraising events. A member of Krannert's Creative Intersections Committee, Crystal has worked to develop a new initiative - Jazz Immersion - which provides informal opportunities to explore jazz through lectures, narrated concerts, and live "audio tours" of the history of jazz.



Ruth Anne Wylie

Daughter of Doris K. Wylie Hoskins, was born in Urbana, Illinois on August 27, 1939, one of ten children.

She attended grade, Junior High and High School in Urbana and graduated - Class of 1957. After graduation, she accepted employment with the State Universities Retirement System and retired after more than 20 years as Secretary to the Executive Director.

She is a 25 year member of the Provena Covenant Medical Center Auxiliary and has served in many areas: as a member of R.S.V.P.; as an Usher with the Krannert Center Senior Volunteers, and has rendered volunteer services with the American Red Cross; a volunteer with the Chanute Aerospace Octave Museum, Districts #4 and 116 of the Public School Systems, as a Lector at St. Mary Roman Catholic Church, to name a few, and most recently with the Early American Museum in Mahomet.

