Opening Our Future

A community history project documenting the people, places, and events that should be remembered for their part in the African American struggle for civil rights in Chapel Hill.

This work is in tribute to those who were, in the words of Harold Foster, "disobedient to those who told us to be obedient, but obedient to our own consciences."

This timeline was created in 2018 with the history makers, storytellers, educators, and other members of the Historic Civil Rights Commemorations Task Force.

To learn more about our town's living history and to add your own chapter to it, visit
CHAPELHILLHISTORY.ORG

TOWN OF CHAPEL HILL

Chapel Hill PUBLIC LIBRARY

This program was supported by grant funds from the Institute of Museum and Library Services under the provisions of the federal Library Services and Technology Act as administered by the State Library of North Carolina, a division of the Department of Natural and Cultural Resources.

1960

THE SPARK CHAPEL HILL NINE

Inspired by the Greensboro Four, nine young men from Lincoln High School enter Colonial Drug Store, sit at a booth, and seek the same service that white customers receive. They remain seated after they are refused service and told to leave. This act later leads to their arrest, trial, and conviction for criminal trespass. Their courageous step sparked a decade of civil rights demonstrations in Chapel Hill.

Young Chapel Hill Negroes Protest At Lunch Counters

THE CHAPEL HILL NINE

- WILLIAM CURETON, 18
- JOHN FARRINGTON, 17
- HAROLD FOSTER, 18
- EARL GEE, 16
- DAVE MASON JR., 17
- CLARENCE MERRITT JR., 17
- JAMES MERRITT, 16
- DOUGLAS "CLYDE" PERRY, 17
- ALBERT WILLIAMS, 16

"Man, this town is hard to crack. It's called a liberal place, but that's a mirage, man. When you go to get water, you just get a mouthful of sand."

- Harold Foster

COMMUNITY ORGANIZES

Throughout the spring, townspeople, black and white, unite behind the Chapel Hill Nine to protest segregated businesses. Community members meet and strategize at the Roberson Street Community Center and faith organizations. Harold Foster assumes his role as leader of the movement.

Dr. Martin Luther King Jr speaks at Roberson Street Community Center, University Baptist Church, and UNC.

Albert Williams, David Mason, Clyde Perry, Jim Merritt

"We were troublemakers. We *questioned* authority and *challenged* it head on. . . we were *disobedient* to that extent, disobedient to those who told us to be obedient, but obedient to our own consciences as it were."

- Harold Foster

1961

SCHOOL DESEGREGATION August, 1961

Stanley Vickers and Ted Stone integrate the junior high school, and Sheila Bynum becomes the first black student at Chapel Hill High.

1962

CIVIL DISOBEDIENCE

The first mass civil disobedience demonstration at the Merchants Association results in 34 arrests.

1963

SPRING 1963: MOVEMENT ON FIRE
KEY ORGANIZERS JOIN STRUGGLE

UNC students Pat Cusick and John Dunne re-inspire a disillusioned Harold Foster. Foster brings UNC students together with community members. Reverend Charlie Jones and organizer Quilton Baker advise and train a growing number of protesters. Together, they organize marches to protest segregated businesses.

"350 citizens of the town, about half of them white and half of them colored, began what was perhaps the first fully integrated public march in support of integration that the South had seen."

- John Ehle, *The Free Man*

MOVIE THEATERS DESEGREGATE

SUMMER 1963: PUBLIC ACCOMMODATIONS VOTE #1

Chapel Hill's Board of Aldermen vote against ending segregation in area businesses.

COMMUNITY RESPONSE

400-500 people march in the biggest community protest to date.

1964

ACCESS DENIED AGAIN

All school transfers are allowed and school district lines are redrawn to assign equal percentages of black and white students to schools.

Hundreds participate in the Freedom Walk from Durham to Chapel Hill. National leader James Farmer urges the Board of Aldermen to ban segregation in businesses. Chapel Hill's Board of Aldermen vote no again.

Chapel Hill Freedom Committee forms. John Dunne chair, Quinton Baker vice chair. Sit-ins at local restaurants become a regular occurrence.

Segregation is allowed to continue.

Protesters immediately begin a sit-in in the courtrooms of Town Hall with others blocking the front door. Some protesters remain for several days.

"If Chapel Hill is not desegregated by February 1, all the resources of the national office of CORE will be focused on the city." – James Farmer

On February 1, massive demonstrations throw Chapel Hill into chaos. Protesters shut down main streets, halt a UNC football game, and are arrested by the hundreds.

VIOLENT BACKLASH

Quinton Baker, along with other protesters, was doused with Clorox and ammonia at a protest at the Rock Pile. He was taken to the hospital with first-degree burns and had his stomach pumped. More violence occurs at Watts Motel demonstrations.

FREEDOM FOR CHRISTMAS

Coordinated protests intensify after the violence, resulting in approximately 200 arrests in the days leading up to December 25, 1963. Eleven protesters spend Christmas day in jail.

"Have I honestly and sincerely done all in my power to eliminate racial discrimination in Chapel Hill?"

- The Holy Week Fasters

8-day "Holy Week" fast is held on the post office steps to protest the nearly 30 segregated businesses in Chapel Hill. The fast is covered in *The New York Times* every day.

On the seventh day, the Ku Klux Klan holds a rally of about 700 people at the edge of town.

CIVIL RIGHTS ACT

Congress passes the Civil Rights Act. Black members of the community test civil rights law by visiting formerly segregated eateries. Denial of service and attacks at two eateries: Watts Grill and Clarence's Bar & Grill.

1965

GRADUATION DAY

FIRST AFRICAN AMERICAN GRADUATES, CHAPEL HILL HIGH

Sheila Bynum (not pictured), Brian Edwards, Clementine Fikerrington, Deborah Foushee, Eugene Hines, Brenda McMillian, and Constance LaVerla Peace graduate in Spring 1965.

KAREN PARKER

The first African American woman undergraduate at UNC and active member of the movement, graduates with a degree in journalism.

"As I travel south on North Graham Street
toward Rosemary, I see Greenbridge stretching toward the sky.
No longer do I see Mason's Grocery, the Starlight Supper Club or the Mason Motel,
where James Brown and Ella Fitzgerald stayed because they were not allowed to stay at
the Holiday Inn or the Carolina Inn. You see, we got what we wanted but we lost what we had."

- David Mason

1966

WHAT WAS LOST

LINCOLN HIGH SCHOOL

Lincoln High School closes. All students attend the newly constructed and integrated Chapel Hill High School. Black students are forced to give up their school name, their mascot, their principal, their coach, and their school trophies.

CHARLIE SCOTT

In 1966, Scott becomes UNC's first black scholarship athlete and the first to play for Dean Smith's varsity basketball team.

1967

North Carolina charged Peter Klopfer with criminal trespass for his participation in Chapel Hill's civil rights demonstrations. His case goes all the way to the US Supreme Court, which finds that the state had violated his right to a speedy trial.

KLOPFER V. NORTH CAROLINA

INTEGRATION STRUGGLES

Students stage ongoing protests at Chapel Hill High School. The student body votes to change the name of their mascot to the Tigers, the former Lincoln High School mascot.

1968 - 1969

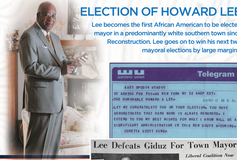
ADVANCEMENTS

UNSUNG HERO — Albert Williams, who retired Sept. 1, broke the color barrier at the Chapel Hill Fire Department when he was hired 25 years ago.

Albert Williams, among the youngest of the original Chapel Hill Nine, is hired as the first African American firefighter for the Town of Chapel Hill.

ELECTION OF HOWARD LEE

Lee becomes the first African American to be elected mayor in a predominantly white southern town since Reconstruction. Lee goes on to win his next two mayoral elections by large margins.



THE STRUGGLE CONTINUES

UNC FOOD WORKERS STRIKE

UNC food workers participated in work strikes, protesting unfair labor practices. The protests reflect the nature of present-day activism that focuses on the intersection of labor rights, women's rights, and rights for minorities.