



"Home of the Pirates"

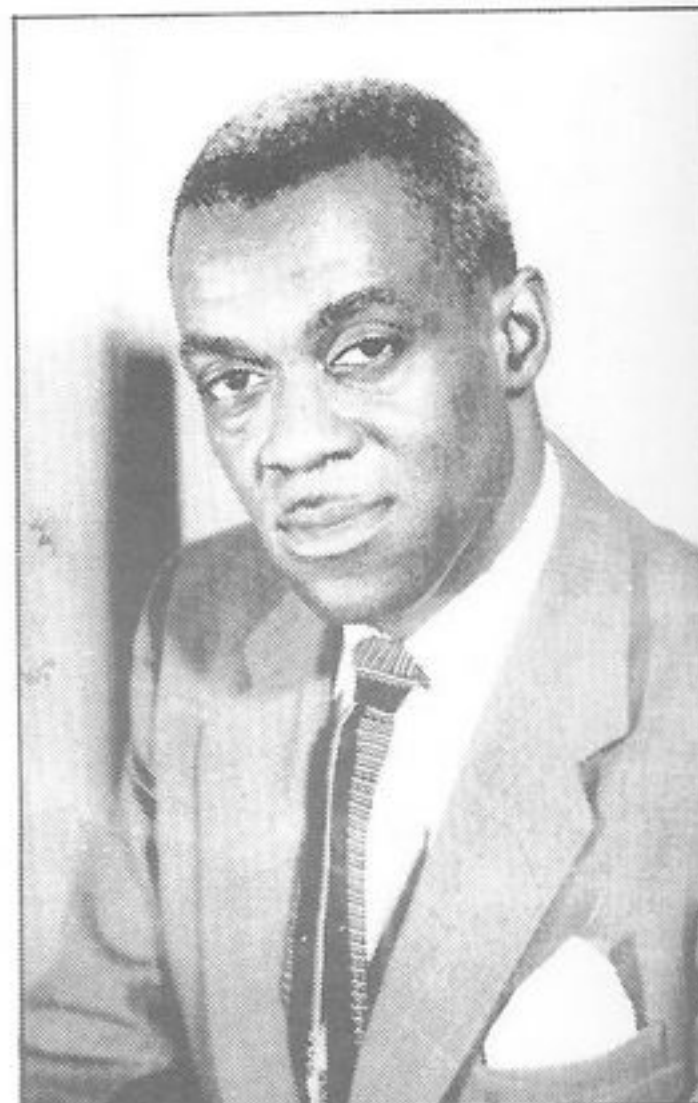
REUNION 2004



W.F. Branch
1925-1948



Curtis B. Craft, Sr.
1948-1954



N.S. Calhoun, Sr.
1954-1968

Principals 1925-1968



Shelby McCook



W. Don Shelton



Doyle Burke



James C. Carlton

Principals 1968-1970

Welcome
to the
**Ninth Biennial
W.F. Branch High School
Reunion**

Friday-Sunday, September 3-5, 2004
Newport, Arkansas 72112

Theme:
"Branch High School Remembered"
1924 – 1970

Motto:
Excelsior ("Higher Yet")

School Colors: Purple and Gold

Officers
Reunion 2004

Ollie Adams Burton, *President*
Kathleen Whitenhill Oates, *Vice President*
Lawrence Tolerson, *Treasurer*
Patricia Hatchett Mays, *Corresponding Secretary*
Speedy Brown
Leroy Mansko
Jerry Brandon
Kenneth R. Fitz, Sr.
Sergeants at arms
Emmogene Mayhan
Ollie Jackson
Co-chairpersons

Cover design by A J Burton

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From Ollie Adams Burton

Hello, Alumni!

It is a pleasure to welcome you to the Ninth Biennial W.F. Branch High School Reunion.

For some of you, this is your first reunion. I am positive you will be glad you came. Please let us know what we can do to make your stay enjoyable.

Many of you have traveled many miles to reconnect with your old surroundings, families and friends. This alumni weekend I am sure you will relive the joys, pleasures, thrills and pranks of boygone school days. Old friendships will be renewed, and long forgotten nicknames will be recalled.

It is with pride and respect we welcome our teachers. They taught us well, and our appreciation runs deep for each of them.

The committee's work was hard but enjoyable. We hope you will enjoy the reunion as much as we enjoyed planning it.

Again, we welcome you and thank you for keeping the memories of our school days alive.

Ollie Adams Burton
President
Reunion 2004

Schedule of Events

Friday, September 3:

Registration, 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.
Community Room, Willa Black Day Care, 640 Main Street

Purple/Gold or 70's Dance, 7:30 p.m.
Iron Mountain Depot, 425 Front Street
Paul Webber, DJ

Saturday, September 4:

Registration, 9:00 a.m. to 12:00 noon
Community Room, Willa Black Day Care, 640 Main Street

Alumni Memorial Service, 2:00 p.m.
Greater Morning Star Missionary Baptist Church, 410 Vine Street
Rev. Rickey J. Everett, Host Pastor
Laurine Donaldson Hayes, Speaker

Social Hour/Banquet/Dance, 6:30 p.m.
Newport Country Club, 703 Walker Drive
Allen M. Jackson, Sr., Banquet Speaker
4-Reel Band after Banquet

Sunday, September 5:

Fish Fry, 3:30 p.m.
Jacksonport State Park

Committees

Reunion 2004

PLANNING

Ollie Adams Burton, Kenneth Fitz, Beatrice Fitz, Emma J. Young, Ruth Brown, Margaret Anders, Oliver Dillingham, Lawrence Tolerson, Dwight Henderson, Jerry Brandon, Kathleen Whitenhill Oates, Mamie Jones Jenkins, Ruby Robinson, Jewel Golden

REGISTRATION

Tillie Adams Coulter, Saundra Calhoun Bracy, Kathleen Whitenhill Oates, Lawrence Tolerson, Mamie Jones Jenkins, Rachel Williams McGill, Margaret Anders, Mae Nunn Isom, Kenneth Fitz, Thelma Garr Parker, Mary Howard

BANQUET

Beatrice Fitz, Lawrence Tolerson, Margaret Anders, Emma J. Young, Ollie Adams Burton, Dwight Henderson, Leroy Manko, Jerry Brandon

FISH FRY

Leroy Manko, Jr., Oliver Dillingham, Wayman Mays, Eddie Fitz, Jerry Brandon, Leslie Mays, Lawrence Tolerson

SOUVENIR BOOKLET

Ruby Robinson, Ruth Brown, Margaret Anders, Beatrice Fitz, Emma J. Young, Ollie Adams Burton

DECORATING

Ruth Brown, Joyce Stoner, Ollie Adams Burton, Gwendolyn Pittman

SCHOLARSHIP

Ollie Burton, Searcy Denton, Darlene Black

We Salute Our Servicemen in Iraq

Nathaniel Balentine
Curtis B. Craft, Jr.
Stacy Ray Spearman
Edward Grady
Michael Alcorn
Douglas Pry
Carlos Kennedy
Darrell Jones

Thank you for your willingness to sacrifice your lives for your fellow countrymen.

2004 Reunion Committee

Expressions of Appreciation

The 2004 Reunion Committee deeply appreciates Walter Jenkins, Gwendolyn Pittman, A J Burton, Ruth Brown, Frank Pleggee and Rev. James Logan Morgan for their valuable resources and help in organizing the **Pirate** souvenir booklet.

Without their assistance, this task would have been difficult.

Ollie Adams Burton

Dedication



Norman S. Calhoun, Sr.



Melvyn Wetherspoon, Sr.



Gregory Dean Sills

It is with deep pride and admiration that the W.F. Branch High School Reunion Committee dedicates the *Pirate* souvenir booklet to the memory of Norman S. Calhoun, Sr., Melvyn Wetherspoon, Sr., and Gregory Dean Sills, as in life we salute the wisdom and dignity of each of these men which have left a mark on so many who loved and respected them.

Norman S. "Ironman" Calhoun, Sr.

Teacher, Coach, Principal

June 25, 1910 – March 9, 2003

Norman S. "Ironman" Calhoun, Sr., was an excellent teacher and principal, but he is best remembered for his coaching ability. During his twelve years as coach of the senior boys' basketball team—the Pirates—he won 389 games and lost only 69. Coach Calhoun also coached the senior girls' basketball team—the Piratettes—to 108 victories, with the team being defeated 28 times.

Mr. Calhoun, along with his wife, Dimple, and his three children, Norman, Jr., Sandra and Elizabeth Adele, moved to Newport in 1952. He taught high school science for two years.

In 1954 Mr. Calhoun was hired as principal of the Newport Colored High School. He spent endless hours working to change the high school's name to W.F. Branch High School. Finally, in 1957, Newport Colored High School was named W.F. Branch High School in honor of Professor William Franklin Branch, who had served as its principal for twenty three years. The graduating class of 1957 was the first to receive a diploma from W.F. Branch High School.

Mr. Calhoun's dedicated and successful career came to an end in 1968, when he accepted a job as principal at Kennedy Junior High School in St. Louis, Missouri. He was the last black principal of W.F. Branch High School.

Mr. Calhoun was a genuine, caring man. He greatly missed by loved ones and friends.

Melvyn Wetherspoon, Sr.
Teacher, Christian, Community Leader
May 20, 1925 – January 26, 2003

"I expected to pass through this world but once. Any good therefore that I can do or any kindness or abilities that I can show to any fellow creature, let me do it now. Let me not defer it or neglect it, for I shall not pass this way again."—William Penn

During the forty one years Mr. Wetherspoon taught school, he became a trusted friend to his students and coworkers. With a mile wide smile, he was a shining example of the best qualities we share as human beings.

Mr. Wetherspoon taught many subjects—among them, junior and senior high science, social studies and vocational agriculture, with vocational agriculture being his favorite. He was known throughout Jackson County, the state of Arkansas and surrounding states as a master agriculture teacher. His young men's club, the Future Farmers of America (FFA), won many local and state awards.

Mr. Wetherspoon was a true Christian. He loved his fellow man, forgave those who wronged him and aided those who needed his help. As a Sunday School teacher, he taught the young—and the old—how to apply principles of Christianity in their daily lives. Mr. Wetherspoon was known for his compassion to those who were incarcerated. On Sunday afternoons, one could see him walking across the parking lot to the county jail, where he discussed the Bible with the inmates and gave them words of encouragement.

Those who were fortunate to have been one of his students—or who knew him—will always remember him as a genuine, caring man and a true gentleman. He could put a smile on your face that would last for years. No, Melvyn Wetherspoon "will not pass this way again," but he will live on through our memories.

Gregory Dean Sills
Educator, Community Leader, Performer
March 2, 1950 – February 14, 2004

Gregory Dean Sills was admired by all who knew him. He was assistant principal, dean of students and a dynamic American history teacher. His students loved and respected him. The values he taught will always be remembered long after the history facts have faded.

Greg served his community with dignity. He was the first black elected to the Newport Special School District Board of Education and served as its secretary. He was president of the Professional Leaders United for Service (PLUS) and chaired that organization's scholarship committee, an advisory member of the Arkansas Educational Television Network (AETN), and a member of the "I Like Newport" Committee. He served on the W.F. Branch High School Reunion Committee from its inception in 1988 and was director of the Newport Community Choir. Those are only a few of the places where Greg left his footprints. There are many more—far too many to mention.

The Newport Community Choir, with Greg as its director and Lucille Stephenson Dillingham its pianist, made beautiful music at various churches and special events in Newport and Jackson County and in other places in Arkansas and Missouri.

Greg's musical ability was known throughout Jackson County. He enjoyed playing the piano. An accomplished soloist, he performed at weddings, funerals and other events. His renditions of "Hush! Somebody's Callin' My Name" and "The Wind Beneath My Wings" were his trademarks.

Greg lived and walked among us and spoke words of kindness, love and encouragement. He left a lasting impression of how to treat one's fellow man. He is deeply missed by all who knew him.

*To the Alumni of the W.F. Branch High School
Newport, Arkansas:*

Thank you for keeping the tradition alive. May your weekend be filled with good friends and fond memories of days gone by.

**In Loving Memory
of**



Cleveland Wesley Brown
May 18, 1938 – May 6, 2002

We cherish the memories we have shared with you.

The Cleveland Brown Family

**Ruth Brown
Regina, Robert and Jady
Michael, Vivian, Kenny, Jeremy, Michaela, & Mia
Rodney, Leslie, and Marley**

From Covered Wagons to Cadillacs:

Norman "Ironman" Calhoun

June 25, 1914 – March 9, 2003

They all had a name which indicated his love for cars. Among his car family we had Vida Blue, Gray Ghost and White Eagle (shown below).



His best car story: The time he ran out of gas, left vehicle 1 parked, walked, got vehicle 2, drove to station, got gas, drove to vehicle 1, gassed up, drove about ½ mile, walked back, got vehicle 2, drove it to vehicle 1. He did it until both vehicles reached their final destination. No towing bill, no needed assistance and plenty of exercise.

"Don't touch the threads." The Ironman owned 85 suits and he often bragged about how long it had been since he wore the same one twice. During a time when he was moving he took his 85 suits to the church in care of Pastor Cheryl. I'm sure she had to take an oath and sign her name in blood to convince him his suits would be safe.



Those Last Few Hours

Saturday, March 8th, 6:00 p.m. It was the first of the month and business as usual. I arrived with his check. He had bills to pay. I watched him as he signed his name. His instructions were: "Take my check to the bank and pay my bills." He asked me to read to him from the book of Matthew. Matthew 6:33 was his favorite scripture. He said he felt better today than he had in a long time. I left around 9:00. Sunday was his favorite day. Four hours later, God in his ultimate wisdom called Ironman Calhoun home.

Sunrise: June 25, 1914

Sunset: March 9, 2003

Saundra Calhoun Bracy

A Tribute to "The Ironman"

We've missed you since you went away.

Life has not been the same.

We will cherish the things that remind us of you.

The grass, the bird, and, especially, the rain.

Every time we cut the grass: Ironman cut his yard every week at age 92.

The birds were always present singing to remind us to stay cheerful.

The rain was a reminder that everything would be cleansed and refreshed to start where we are and rejoice.

The Calhoun Family

Those Were the Days: Life at W.F. Branch High School

All late students report to the office. Almost every week at least two or three times, after the bell rang, there would be this student who was always late—and each time Mrs. Gladys Mays would allow her to sneak by the principal's office. The student: Elizabeth Adele Calhoun.

Mr. Craft would leave the classroom, then sneak back in the room. It was like a test to see if we were studying or doing the mice thing while the big cat was away. Each time on his return his lecture would be: "OK, if you don't get your education, you will be sitting on the corner, eating onions and crying." We had this every day until we graduated.

"We're the best from A to Z,
We're the Class of '63"

We will never forget the day we turned the library into a studio band jamming room with a live session going on. Music and singing could be heard all over the building. Before we knew it, The Ironman was in the house. He took one look and said at the top of his voice: "Everybody, go home!"—that meant bus students and all.

Someone came up with the idea to continue our session at the Roddys—it was just around the corner and the parents were at work.

A first and last at W.F.Branch: First whole class sent home. That was not one of our best.

One of my favorite teachers at Branch High was Mr. Wetherspoon. I'll always remember his pleasant personality, which was the same every day. It seemed like he was a lot harder on the boys. I can now see why it was so important to teach both girls and boys how to become strong men and women and future leaders. Those strong qualities he instilled in me has helped me become the person I am today.

I know Mr. Wetherspoon and Mr. Sills (I did not know him personally), along with The Ironman, are looking down on us from heaven.

Saundra Calhoun Bracy

Tolerson and Son Funeral Home

Established 1947

"Affordable Service by Caring People"

Pre-arrangement Specialists

Ozark National Life Insurance

1110 Remmel Avenue
Newport, Arkansas 72112

(870) 523-3729

Teachers: Branch and Blacksville Schools

1962

Source: Newport **Independent**, January 7, 2004

W.F. Branch High School

Norman S. Calhoun, principal
Gladys Mays, counselor
Iona J. Oates, librarian
Cecil Buckner, music, English and Spanish
Curtis Craft, agriculture and physical education
Delma Hatchett, English
Eula Jenkins, English and physical education
Elmo Long, math and English
Bettie A. Richardson, business education
Audrey Smith, home economics
Gloria Tolerson, math and science
Melvyn Wetherspoon, science
Johnny Garner, band

Branch Elementary

Gracie Robinson, 1st grade
Annie Craft, 1st and 2nd grades
Jaimiah "Jimmie" Irving, 2nd and 3rd grades
Frannie Williams, 3rd grade
Nellie Ann Martin, 4th and 5th grades
Harol Wilson, 5th and 6th grades
Dimple Calhoun, 6th grade
Mavis Wilson, 4th and 5th grades

Blacksville Elementary

James Norman "J.N." Alcorn, principal
Irma Faye Barnes, 1st grade
Edna Johnson, 2nd grade
Searcy Denton, 3rd and 4th grades
Alice Wetherspoon, 5th grade
Ollie Burton, 6th grade
A J Burton, 7th grade
Deborah Vault, 8th grade

Jim “Bad News” Barnes

1941 – 2002



Teachers and Principals Living

Teachers:

Ray Thomas
Irene Artymowski
A J Burton
Dimple Elizabeth Calhoun
Jessie Lee Davis
Kaye Alice Walker Davis
Searcy Lee Denton
Zelma Barr Denton
Lucille Stephenson Dillingham
Charles Dorch
Clarence Fields
Minnie Rene Scott Hayes
Lizzie Mae Jenkins
Kay Wilson Kimbrough
Ila Lacy
Christine Paige
Robert Ridley
Alice Harris
Grace Kendall Robinson
Sandra Garner
Floy Tolerson Nelson
Charles Vondran
Ray Self
Alice Kenerson Wetherspoon
Hoover Williams
Teddy Bill Muller
Willie Lewis Smith Hearton
Edna Robinson Armitage
Johnny Garner
Estelle Winston Matthis

Principals:

Shelby McCook
Don Shelton
James Carlton

In Memory

of

My Mother, Ruby Kelley,

My Sister, Geraldine Kelley

and

My Brother, Norman Kelley

"You were my inspiration"

**Hinton Kelley
Chicago, Illinois**

Who's Who in 1952 at N.H.S.

by
Ruell Jackson

Source: **Pirate**, courtesy of Gwendolyn Pittman

12th Grade

Margaret Dillingham (Kelley), cutest girl; R.J. James, cutest boy; Rose M. Person, best girl athlete; Norman Kelley, best dressed boy; Lear Lee Spearman (Scott), most versatile girl; Forest Boyd, most versatile boy

11th Grade

Ruby Jewel Winters, smartest girl; George Parrott, smartest boy; Margaret Scott, best girl athlete; Walter Jenkins, best boy athlete; Amanda Reynolds, most popular girl; Leon Jackson, most popular boy; Ruby Jewel Winters, cutest girl; Joe Stephenson, cutest boy

10th Grade

Marion K. King (Foster), cutest girl; Henry Walker, cutest boy; Wiialice Person, smartest girl; James Phillips, smartest boy; Henry Cooper, class athlete; Alcorn Berry, most popular boy; Emmogene Steward, most popular girl; Verneda Conley, most versatile girl

9th Grade

Virgia Perkins, cutest girl; James Hatchett, best boy athlete; Eula R. Jenkins (Roberts), best girl athlete; Ruell Jackson, most talented girl; Emma J. Donaldson (Young), neatest girl; Estelle Winston (Matthis), smartest girl; Jesse W. Anthony, smartest boy; Corene Borders (Jones), most popular girl.

8th Grade

Georgia Hatchett (Cooper), cutest girl; Bobby Joe Winters, cutest boy; Henry Dillingham, best boy athlete; Ollie Rene Adams (Burton), best girl athlete; Theoplis Watson, smartest boy; James Foster, best dressed boy; Polly Foster, best dressed girl; Mary Ruth Hampton, smartest girl

Willa Black Daycare Center, Inc.

"Where Every Child Is Loved and Respected"

Welcome Branch High Alumni

You are a special group

**640 Main Street
Newport, Arkansas 72112**

(870) 523-8312

**Ollie Adams Burton, Director
Rev. T.W. Barnes, Chairman of the Board**

A Bit of History

by
Gladys Denson Mays

The Newport Public School District was established in 1879. The first school for black children in Newport was the Newport Grade School, which opened in 1881. Early sessions of the school were held in St. Paul A.M.E. Church on Lake Newport at the end of Fourth and Beech Streets and in St. John Missionary Baptist Church, near the corner of Fifth and Laurel Streets.

The Newport **News** reported in 1884 that the Newport Colored School would open its session on October 4 of that year and run for a full nine months. The school district purchased a lot on Main Street and built a school for black children. This building was described in the **Arkansas Gazette** in 1891: "The Colored school house in Newport is said to be the finest and best arranged building of its kind north of the Arkansas River." Rev. Samuel A. Mosley was the principal, and E.J. Wheeler was his assistant.

The school was a two-story, box-like frame building in which grades one through eight were taught. When the school proved to be too small to meet the needs of Newport's black children, the school was moved to an existing building at 201 Arrington Avenue.

The Arrington Avenue school was of frame construction, with two rooms upstairs and three rooms down. One of the lower three was a large auditorium-type room. There were board walks on Arrington Avenue to the school.

After the March 1, 1926, fire which destroyed much of Newport, several families lived in the Arrington Avenue school, which was not in use at the time. My family moved there and remained until our home was built at the location where I live today.

Early principals of the school, following Rev. Mosley, were: Ed Craigen, 1898-1904; E.J. Wheeler, 1904-1915; W.C. Howard, 1915-1918; J.D. Gilbert, 1918-1920; C.A. Gettis, 1920-1922; and, C.W. Harrison, 1922-1925.

In 1923, construction was begun for a new brick building. The first sessions were held in the new school in 1924. Tom Gregg, the president of the school board, spoke at an open house and dedication ceremony. He explained that the moving of the school facility south of the levee would allow the children room for a playground and permit the expansion of the facility in the future. This became the school complex between Jackson and Clay Streets. Principal C.W. Harrison was in charge of the new building. As a result of the establishment of the school at this site, an old pond was filled in bringing through streets (Clay and Arrington) south to the new school building.

In 1925, Prof. W.F. Branch was elected principal by the school board. He served twenty three years. During these years, the school was raised to the eighth and then to the twelfth grade, and the boys' shop and the

home economics buildings were constructed. A local citizen, Asa Pinkston, gave \$700.00 on the home economics building.

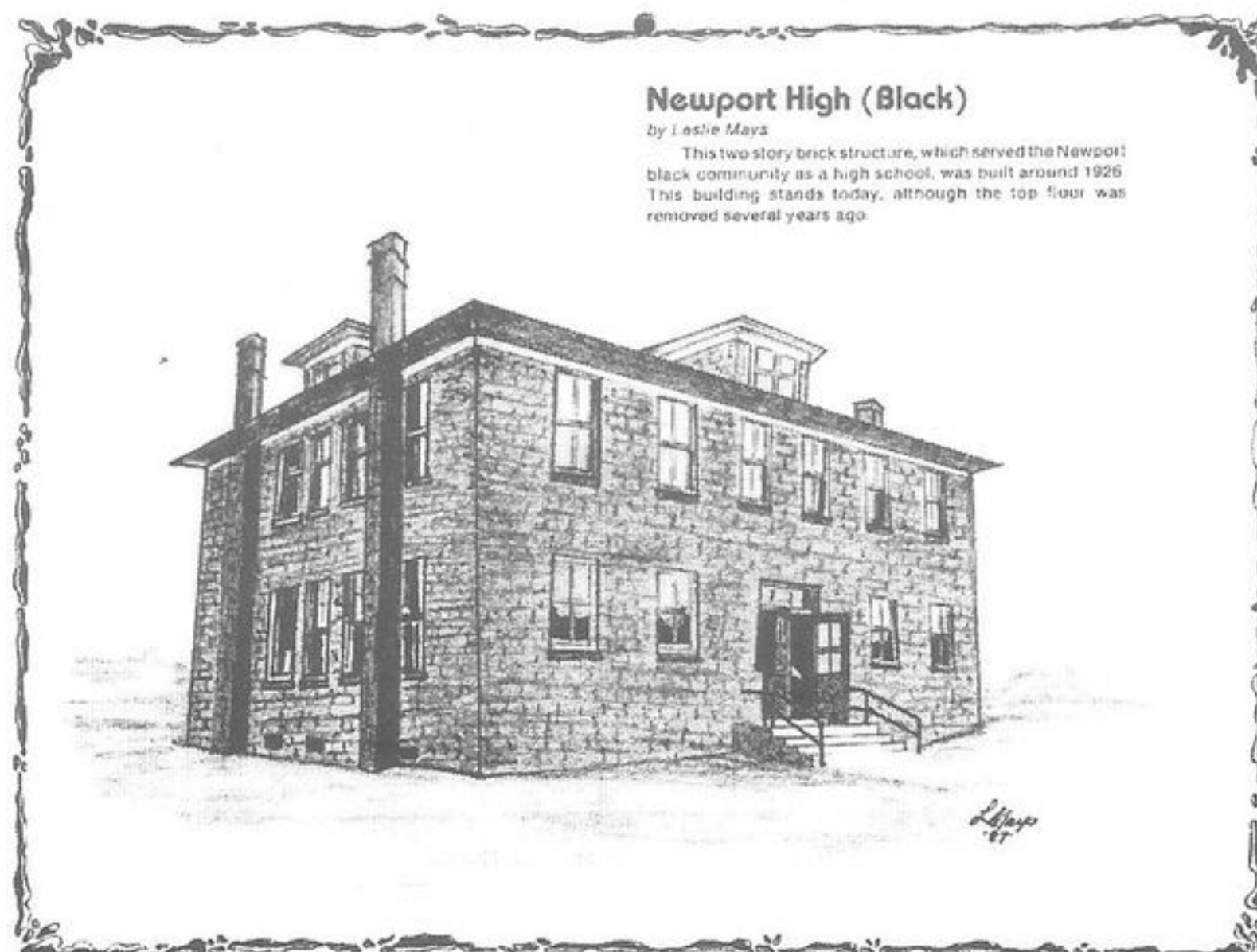
In 1948, Prof. Branch was succeeded as principal by Curtis B. Craft. Under the leadership of Mr. Craft, the building program was completed. An athletic field east of the school was purchased, an elementary school (the J.N. Hout Elementary School) was built, and audio-visual aids were added.

In 1954, Mr. Craft was succeeded by Mr. N.S. Calhoun. It was during the tenure of Mr. Calhoun that the high school was named the W.F. Branch High School, honoring the past principal—Prof. William Franklin Branch.

Mr. Calhoun was a native son. He taught science and coached basketball. He made an enviable record while working here. His basketball team, the "Pirates," won district and state honors. In twelve years of coaching, his teams won 389 games and lost 69. His girls' teams won 108 games, losing 28. For ten years he served as president of the Jackson County Teachers Association. Calhoun Circle was named in his honor in 1962. Mr. Calhoun resigned in 1968. He was the last black principal of W.F. Branch High School.

Those who were associated with Branch High point with pride to the many students who have gone forth to make a mark in life. They have chosen many fields of endeavor, and theirs is a story of progress.

The above was gleaned from many sources, including interviews, newspaper articles and the memory of the writer, who taught at Branch a number of years before the school was closed in 1970.



Our Speakers



Laurine Donaldson Hayes



Allen M. Jackson, Sr.

Laurine Donaldson Hayes is the daughter of Mrs. Mary Donaldson Ratliffe and the late George Balentine, Sr., and the granddaughter of the late Mr. and Mrs. Hilmon Donaldson, Sr. Her grandparents introduced to Laurine and her two brothers, Charles and Robert, at an early age, the importance of Christ first in their lives and getting an education. She followed her oldest brother's footsteps in teaching school, and Robert went on to become a banker.

Besides using her gifts and talents in education to help others, she started using her God-given gifts as program chairperson for her church and the United Methodist Women to put on the best programs. She's an all around girl and will do just about anything.

Mrs. Hayes has taught school for 30 years in the Little Rock and Pulaski County Special Districts—Otter Creek Elementary, Geyer Springs and College Station schools. She is a regular classroom teacher but works with a lot of special needs children. This pulls in her specialty areas.

Her own educational experiences include a B.A. degree in elementary education from Philander Smith College. She obtained a Master of Education degree from the University of Arkansas at Fayetteville in special education-learning disabilities. She has completed additional work at the Hampton Institute in Hampton, Virginia.

Mrs. Hayes is one of 19 public school teachers assigned as an adjunct faculty member at the University of Arkansas in Little Rock for their involvement in a special program of student teacher supervision.

Continued on page 26