

HONORING OUR PAST COMMUNITY LEADERS IN HUNTSVILLE AND MADISON COUNTY

Story and photos submitted by Phyllis Jones, Speakin' Out News staff writer

JAMES AND BARBARA HUNDLEY JONES - Morticians: James and his wife Barbara are the second generation owners of the historic Royal Funeral Home. They became owners when the business was purchased from Barbara's family (Lawrence B. and Amanda Rice-Hundley) in 1967, who purchased it from the Binfords in 1946. This family business has served most black families in the Tennessee Valley for 100 years. The business is now owned and operated by the Joneses daughter Karen Jones Smith and her husband David Smith, who are now the third generation owners.



CHARLES RAY, SR. AND CHARLES RAY, JR. - Morticians: In 1970, the Rays were part of a seven member interest group, which included R.E. Nelms. The group formed Memorial Funeral Home, later changed to Nelms Memorial Funeral Home. Charles Ray, Jr. served as the funeral home's President and Managing Director of the Board of Directors for over 40 years. He is credited for the continuing success of the business.



PERRY O. WARD - Education: Ward was well known throughout the state of Alabama. He began his career for Huntsville city Schools as a teacher and was later promoted to Director of Pupil Services. He used this position to help make sure African-American students attended school. Several children received a good education because of Ward's advocacy for education.



IKE ROOKS - Education: Rooks spent 41 years as an educator for Huntsville City Schools. His first job was at West Huntsville Junior High School where he served as a teacher, basketball coach and track coach. He also taught at his alma mater William Hooper Councill High School as a Social Studies teacher before becoming the principal for West End Elementary School.



PASTOR ERIC C. WARD - Religion: In 1973, California native Eric C. Ward was asked to serve as pastor of the Oakwood College Church. This call also included building the first sanctuary since the school's inception in 1896. Ward served in this capacity as pastor for 21 years. During his lifetime, he baptized over 5,000 souls into the Seventh-day Adventist Church.



REV. HORACE P. SNODGRASS - Religion: Snodgrass arrived at First Missionary Baptist Church in 1949. He was young, gifted and provided stability. Under his leadership, the church became active on the district, state, and national levels of the Baptist organizations. As membership grew physically and spiritually, a new edifice was built. He served as pastor for 24 years.



PROFESSOR LABAN C. JAMAR - Newspaper: Jamar was the editor of the black newspaper. He served as Principal in Madison County for 44 years. Jamar was the first black to run for public office in North Alabama in 50 years, when he ran for Huntsville City council in 1952.



ERNEST JONES - Entertainer/Entrepreneur: Over the years, Jones owned night clubs located on Holmes Avenue, Posey Street and Pulaski Pike. It has been stated that he had a lighted disco floor before John Travolta made it famous in the 1970s. Other business ventures include a construction company, gas station and car repair shop. Just as people came to his establishment to be entertained, they also came to be fed. His wife (Lorene Jones) was the cook and her home cooking made people always come back for more.



HORACE G. FIELDS - Principal: Fields served as principal for the William Hooper Councill High School from 1953 until 1967. During his administration, the school became accredited by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools. He was the school's last principal. In 1973, Fields was appointed to the Central Office as Director of the Careers Opportunities Program. He later left he school system and became the Registrar for Alabama A&M University.



A.G. ADAMS - Education: Adams served as principal for Councill Training School from 1959 until 1970. This school accommodated black students who lived in the county. The school closed in 1970 as full integration took place.



CLYDE FOSTER - Government: Foster began working for the Army Ballistic Missile Agency in 1957, as a mathematician technician. In 1960, he began working for NASA (Marshall Space Flight Center). His math and physics skills were used to calculate thrusts needed to launch rockets. Foster was credited for breaking barriers of segregation to create NASA's first training program for African Americans. He retired from NASA serving as the Equal Opportunity Office Director.



SEWARD CARVERLESS O'NEAL, SR. - EDUCATION: In the fall of 1942, he became employed as Administrative Assistant to the Post Engineer at Tuskegee Army Air Field, Tuskegee, Alabama. He served in this capacity until 1947 when he accepted the position of Internal Auditor and Supervisor of Special Services at Alabama State University, Montgomery, Alabama. Five years later, he was appointed Assistant Director of Wenonah State Vocational Technical School (now Lawson State Technical College), Birmingham, Alabama. He held this position through November, 1961.



On December 1, 1961, Mr. O'Neal was appointed the first president of J.F. Drake State Technical College (the Huntsville State Vocational Technical School) by the Alabama State Board of Education. He moved his family to Huntsville in the summer of 1962. Shortly, thereafter, he enrolled in the Graduate Program at Alabama A&M University and earned the Master of Science Degree in Administration and Supervision.

BOB HARRISON - Politics: Harrison began serving District 6 as Madison County Commissioner in 2004. He was a drum major for justice and equal opportunity for all citizens. As an advocate for education, several programs were established to meet the needs of his constituents. Harrison also carried out his vision for seniors with a 20,000 square foot wellness center that bears his name.



WILLIE B. BATTLE - Business: Battle was the owner of Freeman and Battle Barber-shop, the oldest black owned barbershop in the Huntsville community. He served as a barber for 57 years. He often provided free services to the Harris Home residents and those in the community who were sick and shut in. Battle was the first African American to serve on the Madison County Barbers Examiners Board.



JOHN RICHE - Business: Riche was a founding member of the Committee of 100. In 2005, a scholarship was established in his memory, to recognize young African American leaders, who possess leadership quality, community commitment and respect for diversity.

HENRY MIMS - Lawyer: Mims is most well-known for representing Tommie Lee Hines in 1978. Hines, a mentally challenged resident of Decatur, Alabama, was accused and charged with raping a white woman. Mims was hired by the SCLC to represent him. During the trial, every objection made by Mims was overruled, even case examples of low IQ defendants who were determined not capable of waving rights, etc. This case received national attention. Hines was sentenced to 30 years in jail.

DR. JOHN CASHIN, JR. - Medicine/Political Activist: Cashin was a Huntsville native who earned his D.D.S. from Meharry Medical College. He joined his father's practice and eventually served in the Army Dental Corps in France in the 1950s. Cashin was also a political activist and was the founder of the National Democratic Party of Alabama. In 1969, his party received opposition, but won four seats on the county commission and two on the school board in Greene County. In 1964, Cashin ran for Mayor of Huntsville and in 1970, he ran for Governor against George Wallace. Both campaigns were unsuccessful.



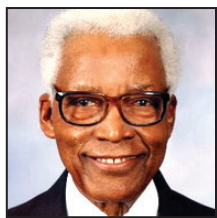
CHARLES "CHUCK" MOORE - Entertainment: Moore was well known in the entertainment industry. He was the former owner of the Ebony Club and was the owner of Celebrity's Club at the time of his passing. He was respected by band musicians, singers and all under his supervision.



DR. SONNIE HEREFORD, III - Medicine/Civil Rights Activists: Hereford was a retired physician and a civil rights pioneer, who was responsible for ending segregation of Huntsville City Schools and other businesses. In 1963, Hereford's son Sonnie Hereford, IV was denied entrance to the all-white Fifth Avenue Elementary School. Due to Hereford's perseverance, his son was admitted to the school. The former Terry Heights Elementary School has been renamed in Hereford's honor.



DR. JAMES I. DAWSON - POLITICS: Dawson represented Northwest Huntsville (District 1) on the Huntsville City School Board for nearly 20 years. He was a "spirited voice" for civil rights at every board meeting. He believed that every child deserved an equal opportunity to succeed academically. The former West Mastin Lake Elementary School has been renamed in his honor.



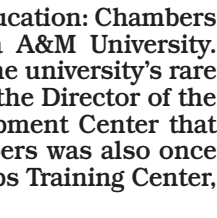
JOHNNIE LOUDEAN DENT - MEDICINE: Dent was a public healthcare nurse who came to the Huntsville area circa 1943, to help with the outbreak of tuberculosis. In 1946, she was hired by the Madison County Health Department, to improve the training of local midwives. Soon thereafter, she and Dr. Harold F. Drake organized a health clinic in Triana, Alabama. In 1973, she was the first black to receive awards on the county and state level.



CHESSIE HARRIS - SOCIAL WORK: The daughter of sharecroppers and granddaughter of slaves, Harris knew what it was like to grow up with "barely enough". At age eight, she vowed to God if He would let her get an education she would spend her life making children happy. Since opening in 1954, the Harris Home for Children has served thousands of children who have become successful adults. Harris received the 1989 President's Volunteer Action Award from President George Bush on April 11, 1989.



DR. MARY CHAMBERS - Education: Chambers was the historian for Alabama A&M University. She took pride in maintaining the university's rare documents. She also served as the Director of the Madison-Jackson Child Development Center that was located on campus. Chambers was also once the head of the Women Job Corps Training Center, in Cleveland, Ohio.



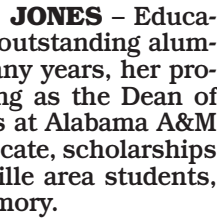
MABEL NORMAN - Education: Norman was an educator/pioneer/writer in the Adventist Women Ministries. She was the first graduate of Oakwood College to receive a Bachelor's degree in general studies. For many years, she served her alma mater as a media specialist at the Eva B. Dyes Library.



NORMA POWERS-JENKINS - BUSINESS: - She selected Cosmetology as her vocation and pursued this area of training at the Lydia Adams Beauty College, Chicago, Illinois. Norma returned to her native home in Huntsville, Alabama in 1964 to accept the position as Cosmetology Instructor at J.F. Drake State Technical College and to continue her entrepreneurship endeavors, by establishing Frau-Lyn Beauty Salon #2 and Frau-Lyn Beauty and Barber Supply, Inc., Huntsville, AL. Ms. Powers continued her educational pursuits by taking at Alabama A&M University and Oakwood College.



DR. BESSIE WASHINGTON JONES - Education: Jones was a graduate and outstanding alumnus of Spelman College. For many years, her professional career included serving as the Dean of the School of Arts and Sciences at Alabama A&M University. As an education advocate, scholarships to Spelman College, for Huntsville area students, are awarded annually in her memory.



DR. VIRGINIA CAPLES - Education: In her 40-year history with AAMU, Caples held several top positions, including interim president, provost and vice president for academic affairs, associate dean, distinguished university professor, and 1890 administrator. She became the first woman to lead the university in 1995, a position she was selected for again in 2005.



She is married to Hundley Batts, Sr. Together, they own and operate "Your Community Station" WEUP 103.1 FM; WEUZ 92.1 FM; WEUP 1700 and 94.5 FM; WEUP 1600 and WHIY 1190 AM (Delta Blues).