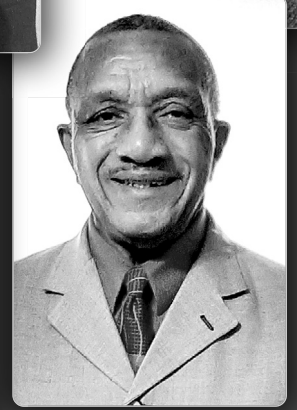


Black HISTORY

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Voices & Stories

TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 21, 2023



February is a time to recognize and pay tribute to all the contributions people of color have made to society.

It's Black History Month, but history isn't black or white and it isn't just confined to one month out of the year. History is constant, it's being made every moment of every day; and we are all a part of it. Black history is American history.

Without Black inventors from our past, we wouldn't have many of the conveniences we enjoy today. Great minds and people come in all colors, shapes and sizes.

The pursuit of equality, allowed these great minds access to the critical tools needed to advance America in technology, in the space race and into modern day.

There are several movies

and documentaries available that convey the stories of "hidden figures" from history. However, Black history is more than a list of achievements.

It's a reminder of our past and hope for the future. It's understanding that in our shared humanity we find more similarities than differences. And in our small communities, we rely on each other. Our friends, neighbors, classmates and people that smile at the grocery store are all daily reminders that life is better in full color.

The Banner interviewed local citizens for this special edition in an effort to highlight the hidden figures in our area.

Thank you to the people who shared their stories; and thank you to the local businesses and organizations that made this edition possible.

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— Booker T. Washington

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Above, Hale Elementary School, Grades 1-8, year unknown, Huntingdon. Below, Webb School Majorettes, Grades 1-6, year unknown, McKenzie. Photos courtesy of the Webb Historical Museum



WEBB ALUMNI ASSOCIATION

STRENGTHENS THE WEBB SCHOOL LEGACY

BY KAREN FORESTER features@mckenziebanner.com

Webb School maintains a long and distinguished history in Carroll County, but it's always been the people who bring its warmth and vibrancy to bear. On a recent January afternoon, five members of the Webb Alumni Association gathered on the McKenzie campus in the school's library and museum to reminisce across the years and plan for the future.

Neal Williamson and Ike Gilbert were part of the Class of 1966, the last to graduate from Webb High School before its closure after integration. Williamson was president of his graduating class and is now in his second term as the current president of the national organization. Gilbert, who attended all 12 years at Webb, served two four-year terms as national president. Both men recalled not only their time on campus, but reflected on the many ways in which their experience continues to influence them today.

"The school itself gave me a great head start on college. I knew most of the stuff they were talking about [at Tennessee State University] because Webb had already taught me well," said Williamson. Gilbert agreed, "To go to Webb was an honor and something you looked forward to. Every teacher knew every student; you weren't a number, you were a person. When people found out they were closing Webb, they cried."

The Webb Alumni Association was organized in 1969 by former students and graduates under the leadership of Obie Roscoe McKenzie to preserve the culture and heritage of Webb School. The group held its first national reunion in 1970 and within a decade chapters formed across the country representing hundreds of members. Today, there are

over 100 active members in eight chapters, Chicago and Champaign-Urbana, Illinois, Milwaukee, Nashville, Cedar Rapids, Iowa, McKenzie, Huntingdon and West Carroll.

Some of those members are second generation "Webbites" who did not attend Webb High School, but had parents, grandparents, aunts and uncles who did. Like Evangeline Hall, the current president of the West Carroll chapter, whose mother, aunts and uncles were graduates. She smiles and recounts the times "they would have these Record Hops" up here with lots of dancing and music. I used to come as a pre-teen and it was always so much fun." Her mother, Madeline H. Lumpkin, was active in the alumni group throughout her life and served as a founding member of two chapters, Cedar Rapids, Iowa, and Elkhart, Indiana.

In 1973 the Webb Alumni Association created a development group organized specifically to purchase the building and grounds from the County of Carroll. According to Webb Alumni Association historical documents, "On May 8, 1976, the Webb High School building was purchased for \$95,000. Forty members signed promissory notes pledging \$5,025 each." Additional monies were raised over the years through donations, grants, member drives, fundraisers and other gifts. "Each yearly reunion led to renewed dedication to paying off the debt on the property." By the Fall of 1999, the note had been repaid and the Webb Alumni Association owned the building and land free and clear. "As far as we know," said Gilbert, "this is the only school in the country owned by its alumni association."

John Nolen, Class of 1962 and Head Historian of the Webb Alumni Association, remembers how everyone in the communi-

ty came together to raise money. "Students, teachers, staff and graduates of Webb School along with the City of McKenzie and then-Mayor Glenn King played a role in saving and purchasing the school." The McKenzie Banking Company and other area businesses also contributed through monetary gifts or in-kind goods and services. "For example, the beautiful wrought iron sign out front was crafted and donated by a local metalworks company in 1956."

Providing educational opportunities by assisting youth through scholarship is another purpose of the Webb Alumni Association. Each year, four \$1000 scholarships are awarded to children, grandchildren, nieces and nephews of Webb alumni. "We pride ourselves on offering the Roscoe McKenzie Scholarship to students based on grade point average, merit and need," explained Williamson. "The Nashville Chapter also offers a \$200 book scholarship to help offset some of the cost of attending college."

Another important component of the association is to preserve tangible elements of Webb School. There are sewing machines, typewriters, a piano, a card catalog index cabinet, items of clothing, books, pictures, school documents and other precious pieces of the past inside the museum.

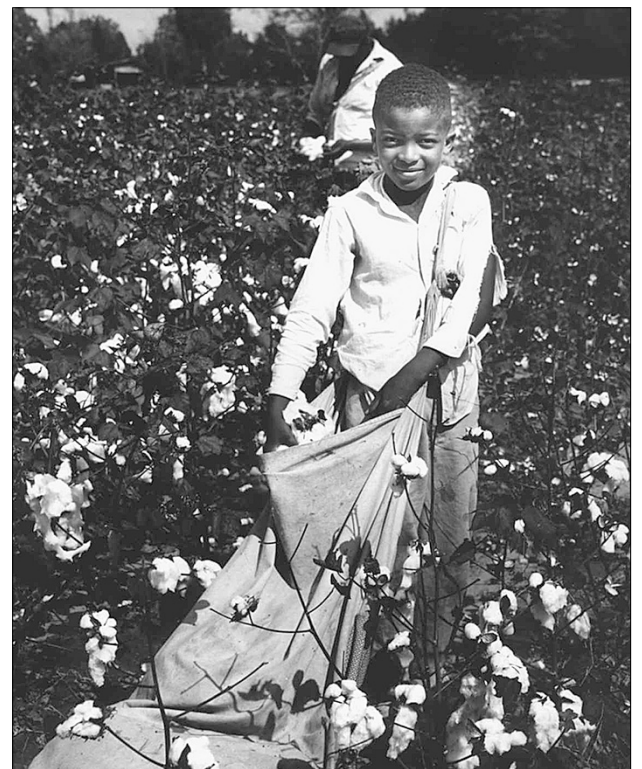
Webb High School was the next educational step for students attending Black elementary schools in Carroll County. There were 10 primary schools including Hale Elementary in Huntingdon, Dunbar Elementary in McLemoresville and Wingo Elementary from which many enrolled. For those who lived too far to commute, Webb provided dormitories for students and teachers. "It always had the look and feel of a small college campus," said Gilbert.

There was a gymnasium which also doubled as the lunchroom. It was the place where the WHS Wolverines played exciting basketball games with other area schools. During half times or between games, entertainment was usually provided by the majorettes, the Glee Club or the all-female "Webbettes" singing group. The auditorium hosted many assemblies, plays, talent shows and class awards presentations over the years and is still in use today. Across the 30 acres of land surrounding Webb School, there were gardens, small animal enclosures and other outbuildings relevant to the students' curriculum and coursework.

Looking back on her time at Webb, Priscilla Williamson remembers her performance during the annual year-end talent show when she sang a solo. "The song was called 'Sharing You' and I had two boys on both sides of me as I sang," she laughed. "I was told I had everybody in the audience crying." Williamson also learned her trade as a professional seamstress from Miss Sleita Hyder, the beloved Home Economics teacher at Webb High School. "That woman taught me how to do the best of the best. I made my own prom dress—blue brocade, flowered—I loved it."

From 1932 (with a graduating class of two) through 1966 and a class of 32, over 1900 young men and women graduated from Webb High School.

Those students took with them an excellent education, treasured memories and lifelong friendships. When asked to describe a time at Webb that still makes him smile, Neal said, "When a teacher put [me] in charge of a class while she was out of the room for a while. That was a great responsibility and I was proud of myself [for being chosen]. Still am."



A young boy harvesting cotton near Lexington, Tennessee. Photo courtesy of the Tennessee Library and Archives

IKE GILBERT

ALWAYS GETTING INTO SOMETHING

BY KAREN FORESTER features@mckenziebanner.com

Ike Gilbert is the eldest of seven children—two brothers and four sisters. He was born in the doctor's office just across the street from The McKenzie Banner and spent his early years in Hico, Tennessee, before moving to McKenzie where he grew up. Ike often helped his parents care for the younger children and said, "I tell a lot of people ever since I've been married I've never had to ask my wife to cook, wash or iron for me," laughed Ike.

All of his siblings went to Webb School as did his mother, Class of 1946, his father, Class of 1947, aunts and uncles. During his first six years of grade school, Ike attended Webb School located in what is now a field at the corner of Walnut Avenue West and Park Street. "I remember sitting in class looking up at McTyre College and saying, 'I'm going to go to school up there one day.'"

He liked the different subjects and clearly remembers his teachers, Miss Ethel Seets and Mrs. Russelle Glen in first through fourth grades. "I wasn't a mischievous kid, it just seemed I was always getting into something," said Ike. "But, it was fair, if you got a whipping, nine times out of ten, you deserved a whipping."

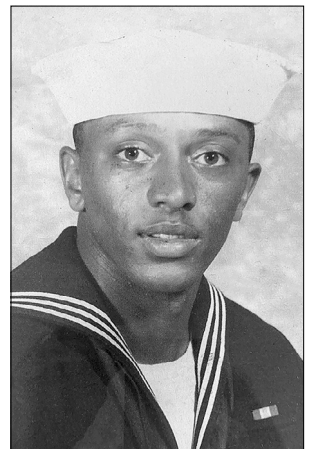
The Webb School academic year began in mid-July and paused each fall so students could earn money picking cotton. Classes were dismissed in mid-September for six weeks in an early version of Fall Break, "but it wasn't a break for us because we were actually working."

Each day, trucks would drive through the neighborhoods and stop for children hopping on with an empty sack and their lunch. "I remember the man who picked us up in his truck, Odell Pate, he's still living," said Ike. They paid us \$3 per 100 pounds of cotton picked. I used to average around 200-250 pounds and earned \$6 or \$7 a day." The money Ike made "went to buy my little brothers and sisters clothes for the fall and winter."

To earn some extra money, Ike would often help empty the sacks of cotton at the end of the day and unload it at the McKenzie Cotton Gin. "The gin was just across the railroad tracks from Enon Baptist Church and Mr. Pate would pay me a little on the side."

"When I got older, I had a paper routed delivering the Memphis Commercial Appeal." He still remembers getting up at 4:30-5 a.m. to get to the post office where he rolled and packed the newspapers onto his bicycle. "I had about 105 papers to deliver seven days a week no matter if it was raining, snowing, icing or whatever. At first, I only made \$5 a week, but after some of us threatened to quit, they raised it to \$7."

In ninth grade, Ike started playing basketball and remembered, "I was so little, so short, but Coach Harold Harrell saw me as quick and fast. I made the team as a sophomore and played guard on the varsity teams in my junior and senior years." He averaged 16 points a game even though there was no three-point shooting at the time. "We had one of the best teams in the area and averaged 80-90 points a game. Most of the people who went to school at Webb were not from McKenzie, they were from all across Carroll County and those boys were really good. I remember Harry Cooper was very good and played



Ike Gilbert, U.S. Navy 1971-75.

center, or maybe it was forward. He went on to become police chief in McKenzie."

Ike graduated from Webb High School in 1966, the last class before the school was integrated with high schools across the county. He went to Lane College in Jackson, Tennessee, on work-study programs and worked during summers at the Milan Arsenal to pay his way. Ike married Jane Jordan in 1971 and they have two children, a son, who lives in Lebanon, Tennessee, and a daughter who lives in Huntingdon.

In 1971 he decided to enlist in the United States Navy and was sent to Basic Training in Orlando, Florida. He spent the next four years based in Virginia Beach, Virginia, and going out to sea for six months at a time. Ike was assigned to an Airborne Squadron working with ammunition and loading missiles, bombs and machine guns into planes aboard the USS Kennedy and later the USS Independence. He sailed around the Mediterranean Sea and visited ports of call in Spain, Italy, Greece and Turkey.

He left the Navy in 1975 and it was shortly afterward that he began the next professional phase of his life. He tells the story, "When I got out of the Navy, I decided to take one month off and just relax. One day, I'd gone fishing in Hico with my two brothers and I kept feeling like I needed to go home, but I didn't know why. Finally, I did and my wife told me they'd called for me about a job at the phone company. I went there and had an interview that same day. Two weeks later, they called me back for a second interview and on April 14, 1975, I was hired."

For the next 35 years, Ike did everything from installing, fixing and wiring phone lines and party lines to working in the central office performing other essential services. "It took them a long time to actually send me to classes, so I was mostly self-taught. I'd read and study all the manuals and books I could to learn how to do something. The only reason they hired me was because I was Black. I was a minority hire, but it worked out."

Ike joined the National Guard in 1975 and served 18 years participating each month in weekend drills. "I retired in 2010 as a Staff Sergeant with a collective 22 years between the Navy and the Guard."

He joined the Webb Alumni Association, McKenzie Chapter, in the late seventies when his mother was president. Since then, Ike has played important roles in the growth and evolution of the organization. He was instrumental in establishing the Huntingdon and West Carroll chapters and served two four-year terms as the national president.

JOHN NOLEN

Head Historian
OF THE WEBB SCHOOL LEGACY

BY KAREN FORESTER features@mckenziebanner.com

Without realizing the importance of what he was doing, John Nolen began collecting Webb School memorabilia in 1966. "I've always loved history and had this passion to preserve as much of our Black history as I could," explained John, "and it's only grown stronger over the years."

John was born in McKenzie in 1944. He said, "I always thought I was the eldest of seven siblings, but learned from my parents many years later that they had a son who died before I came along." He had one brother and six sisters who attended Webb School as did his mother, father, aunts and uncles. His father, a WWII veteran, owned a farm outside the city for a time, then later worked for the Holland family on their farm. In 1951 the family moved to Randall Street (now Mill Avenue) and "I went from a country boy to city life," laughed John.

His mother had her hands full raising the children and managing the household, but made sure her family attended church regularly at Enon Baptist (now Greater Enon Baptist Church on Walnut Street).

John remembers many of his teachers over his twelve years at Webb School. "They always made sure you got your lessons done whether in class or on your own," said John. He was especially fond of Miss E. B. Seets, Mrs. Russelle Glenn, Mrs. Hall, Mr. Greer and Mrs. Sims. He enjoyed his schoolwork and especially studying history.

When John was nine years old, he and his brother, George, who was seven at the time, started their own business. During the summer, they mowed lawns around McKenzie neighborhoods. Recalls John, "I built a wagon that carried the lawn mower. I'd lock it in, then attach the wagon to the back of my bike. George would sit on the bike seat and I'd pull the whole thing. We covered a lot of ground like that. Sometimes we'd make as much as \$100 in a weekend."

When John entered Webb High School, he tried out for

the basketball team, "but I didn't make it because I was too short." However, he did the next best thing by becoming the team manager and working closely with Mr. T. A. Warford and Coach Harold Harrell. He was responsible for making sure all of the equipment, supplies, uniforms and first aid kits were prepared and ready to go for each game. "We used to travel all over to play other teams—Huntingdon, Lexington, Paris, Jackson, Waverly—I only missed one game in four years of managing."

John also helped Mr. J.W. Sims coach the girls' basketball team in addition to working in the school commissary and the cafeteria. "I was shy and so quiet you wouldn't even hear me if I was standing right next to you," he said.

During this time he delivered the Chicago Defender around town to earn some extra money. According to the Encyclopedia Britannica, "the Defender was an influential African American newspaper during the early and mid-20th century. [It] published in Chicago with a national editorial perspective and became a daily newspaper in 1956. It was noted for the quality of its writers, among them novelist Willard Motley, poet Gwendolyn Brooks, and Langston Hughes."

The day after he graduated from Webb High School in 1962, John went to work for James Williams at the Ben Franklin Five and Dime store on the square in McKenzie. "I was the first black clerk he had and I worked there full time stocking and receiving merchandise, taking inventory and doing some janitorial for two years," said John. He worked hard and saved his money for school and to help his sisters buy their school clothes.

In 1964 John enrolled at the Western Kentucky Vocational School (now West Kentucky Community and Technical College) in Paducah where he studied electricity. "Room and board was \$12 a month, hard to believe, isn't it?" He received his electrical certificate before coming back to McKenzie in 1966.

John took a job at the pajama factory in addition to



George Nolen, (right) brother of John Nolen, is greeted by President George W. Bush prior to departing for Central America on a school-building mission. Photo courtesy of the Webb Historical Museum

working three other jobs. "I worked from 7 a.m. until 4 p.m. at the pajama factory, then 5-9 p.m. at Ben Franklin, 10 p.m. until 2 a.m. at Bethel College and then another job at Bethel that went from 3-4 a.m." At the time, John had a wife who was sick and three small children. He chuckled, "I didn't get much sleep in those days."

John even worked for a short time in 1964-65 for The McKenzie Banner. He did

some reporting, and photography of events around town. "I remember going to a company party the pajama factory had one time in Union City. Nobody had a camera but me, so I took some pictures. The Banner printed them. My pictures were in the paper with 'photographs by John Nolen', he recalled

with pride.

He built the house he is living in now in 1972 located around Mill Avenue where he lived with his family in the early 50s. That was also the year John developed a display booth for the Carroll County Fair in Huntingdon. "Mr. Ed Perkins asked me to research, put together and

present a display on Webb School and Black history in general. I really enjoyed that."

John worked for the McKenzie Special School District from 1980 to 1993 in various capacities with increasing responsibility. When he left to work for the Milan Arsenal, he was overseeing the maintenance for all three schools.

The Milan Arsenal sat on 25 acres and had different buildings, called 'lines', for different operations. John worked on an assembly line for three months before he was assigned a job he wanted all along. Driving a pickup truck between the 'lines' making deliveries and dropping off supplies. He was there for nearly 20 years when he retired in 2012.

That is when John gave his full attention and interest to preserving the history of Webb School.

The Webb Museum opened in 2016 and is one of John's proudest accomplishments. As he looked around the room on a recent sunny day in February, he said, "Most of these things came out of my personal collection." He was instrumental in collecting, sorting, cataloging and organizing the items displayed throughout the museum. "The Gordon Browning Genealogical Museum donated these cases to us with the understanding that they only be used for display of our historical items."

John serves the Webb Alumni Association as their historian and relishes the role. "I've never been an outfront person, but always worked behind the scenes," explained John. He hopes future generations of the association will keep preserving the true history of the school, the old as well as the new. He smiles, "Webb is still making history, you know."

John has three children, Vincent, Jennifer and Anthony, along with 19 grandchildren and 29 great grandchildren. "Well, make that 30 next month. We got one little baby on the way."

"Dreams are lovely but they are just dreams. Fleeting, ephemeral, pretty. But dreams do not come true just because you dream them. It's hard work that makes things happen. It's hard work that creates change."

— Shonda Rhimes



We recognize and honor the contributions of Black men and women in our community. Thank you for your perseverance to make our world better and more inclusive.

JOSEPH G. BUTLER
CARROLL COUNTY MAYOR

A83

"He who is not courageous enough to take risks will accomplish nothing in life."

— Muhammad Ali

"Hold fast to dreams, for if dreams die, life is a broken winged bird that cannot fly."

Langston Hughes

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-HARRIET TUBMAN

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Daisy NOLEN DUDLEY

A LIFETIME OF TEACHING

BY KAREN FORESTER *features@mckenziebanner.com*

Unlike most children at age five, Daisy Nolen Dudley knew exactly what she wanted to be when she grew up, a teacher. Traveling with her aunt from McKenzie to Yuma every week, she loved being in the one-room schoolhouse with the other boys and girls. Daisy remembers, "My mother's sister would carry me to school with her. I would leave with her on Sunday and come back on Friday." Her aunt taught all the required subjects and Daisy relished sitting among the students listening, watching and learning. She treasures the memories of her time there and remarked, "I have always wanted to be a teacher and I'm sure that's where it started."



Daisy Nolen Dudley

Daisy Nolen was the youngest child in a family of two brothers and two sisters. Her mother worked for years as a cook at Bethel College (now Bethel University). When her children were grown, she took a job with the Northwest Tennessee Economic Development organization, a social services and outreach program at the time for rural residents in the area. Daisy's father was a butcher and later became a long-haul truck driver. All of her siblings attended and graduated from Webb School and, when her turn came, she was excited to join them.

Webb Elementary and Junior High schools were neat, white clapboard buildings situated in and around Walnut Avenue and Booker Street. She still remembers her third grade teacher, Mrs. Sarah Jordan, who "always taught us to do our best," Daisy paused and said, "all the teachers expected the best from us. I know that had a lot to do with the way I viewed education. I remember asking my kids, my students, when they would show me something they'd done, 'Is that your best?' If it was, then that's it."

Daisy entered Webb High School as a ninth grader and recalled, "lots of classmates and friends, teachers and Professor Seets who was the principal then. By the time I graduated, the principal was Mr. T. A. Warford." Mrs. Doris Woodard, who taught typing, Mrs. Dotson, her English teacher and Mrs. Erma Sims were also favorites.

Daisy had Miss Sleita Hyder for Home Economics, an important part of the curriculum. The girls learned how to create and maintain better homes and often worked in tandem with the Vocational Agriculture students on projects such as harvesting and processing the produce grown on campus. "I was a member of the Future Homemakers of America (FHA) club and loved all the things we did together," said Daisy.

After graduating from Webb High School in 1957, Daisy enrolled at Lane College in Jackson, Tennessee, and earned her education degree in 1961. Her first assignment was teaching third grade at MTA in Atwood. MTA represented the consolidation of three Black primary schools in the area, McLemoresville, Trezevant and Atwood, and took students through eighth grade. After two years, she was assigned to Webb School in McKenzie where she taught first and second grades until 1966 when integration was introduced. She went to Huntingdon Elementary to teach second graders and finally Huntingdon Primary from which she retired in 2001.

Reflecting on her 40 years teaching young children, she said, "Children

learn what they live. They bring what they've lived to school with them. Sometimes, you can reroute their thinking in a way that encourages learning." She considered it an honor when her students would confide in her about things that were troubling them. "Children are honest. They will tell you what has been said and what's been done. I always felt happy, though, that they were comfortable enough with me to share those things in their home lives." Daisy remembers her own mother being "her biggest cheerleader. I would come home and share with her things about some kids I wasn't getting through to or who were acting rebellious. She would always encourage me to keep trying to reach them and I always did."

She married Robert Dudley in 1963 and they will celebrate their sixtieth wedding anniversary this year on October 18. Robert, whom she met at school, was born in Trezevant, but has lived in McKenzie since he was 12. They have one son, Duvonn.

Daisy joined Webb Alumni Association shortly after its inception in 1969 and has remained involved since. "The Webb Alumni Association is a family thing and my family and I have attended many General Assemblies and Homecomings." She served as the national treasurer for a time and on various finance committees through the years. "I was just a jack-of-all-trades. Whatever [I saw] needed doing, I did," she said.

"The pride we Webbits feel for Webb is what I hope others come to know about us. Those that have come before, those that are already gone, Webb meant a lot to them," said Daisy. She applauds the efforts and dedication of the second generation of Webb alumni. "Even though they didn't attend Webb School, they had family members who did. They're doing a great job continuing the tradition and purpose of the group. I know they will keep it going for as long as it can go."

Ruby ANDERSON HILLSMAN

WOVEN INTO THE FABRIC OF WEBB SCHOOL

BY KAREN FORESTER *features@mckenziebanner.com*

Webb School has always been part of Ruby Anderson Hillsman's life. Born in June 1954 in the Trezevant home of her aunt, she grew up listening to family members recall fond memories, tall tales and lively adventures of school life at the venerable institution. So, it's no surprise Ruby entered Kindergarten as a bona fide 'Webbite' to begin her own educational career.



Ruby Anderson Hillsman

Her father graduated from Webb High School in the late forties and her mother, aunts, uncles and others close to Ruby attended as well. Growing up in McKenzie, she recalls, "the school was less than a mile from our house and I could easily walk there every day. At that time, grades K-6 were located on the ground floor and the older kids were on the top level."

She described the large, welcoming auditorium where many assemblies, talent shows, plays and performances were held. "I remember pretending to be a Supreme on that stage. Also, playing the role of Little Red Riding Hood wearing the beautiful red cape made by my grandmother and mother," laughed Ruby.

These were happy times for Ruby. She spoke at length of the ways in which the teachers, staff and administrators of Webb School all contributed to her intellectual growth and character. "It was an entire community of support," said Ruby, "everyone worked together to shape students' learning, through encouragement and discipline. They all celebrated our successes as one."

There were several teachers Ruby remembers as being especially important to her. Mrs. Moore was her kind and loving Kindergarten teacher and then, there was Mrs. Julia Smith in first and second grades. "I learned the twenty-third Psalm in her class and when I recited it, she patted me on the back and was so proud of me. She always encouraged me and I know she served as the

catalyst for me to always do my best."

Then, there was Mrs. Russelle Glen, Ruby's fifth and sixth grade teacher who saw her young pupil as one eager to complete extra work. She sometimes stayed in during recess to help Mrs. Glen with special projects or work on additional assignments. "Mrs. Glen was such an inspiration to me. She encouraged me to participate in a spelling bee that year and I won. Then, after integration, I won the seventh and eighth grade spelling bee from McKenzie Junior High. She always went the extra mile for me, encouraging, teaching and guiding. She had an enormous impact on me," said Ruby.

Mrs. Erma Sims, Mrs. Doris Woodard and Mrs. Sleita Hyder were other teachers who impacted Ruby's life. "Mrs. Hyder was a wonderful lady and taught me piano after school. I had a chance to tell Mrs. Woodard, the typing teacher, how much she meant to me. The skills she taught became part of my professional life as a nurse." As Ruby recalls these memories, her voice fills with warmth, "Mrs. Glen and the others taught me how to do my best. They laid a very strong foundation and I am very grateful and very thankful they were in my life."

By the time she was ready for seventh grade, integration was in place and Ruby entered McKenzie Junior High. She went on to graduate in 1972 from McKenzie High School. Afterward, she attended Bethel College (now Bethel University) on scholarship for a couple of years. She decided to pursue a nursing degree and hoped to attend Fisk University or Meharry Medical College in Nashville, but neither school offered the nursing degrees she sought. Ruby completed her nursing degree at the UT Medical Unit of Memphis State College (now the University of Memphis) in 1977 and went to work at the hospital in Jackson, Tennessee.

After her marriage to Kenneth Hillsman a few years later, they moved to Nashville and then to Rutherford County in middle Tennessee. In 2000 Kenneth was called to pastor his home church in McLemoresville, New Reedy Creek Baptist Church, and they returned to Carroll County.

That's when she joined the Webb Alumni Association, Huntingdon Chapter, and became active in its mission and continued growth. Her aunt's brother-in-law was Obie Rosco McKenzie who was instrumental in the creation of the association in 1969 and served as its first national president. "Webb School has always been an integral part of my life. It taught me the discipline I needed to succeed, but also served as a source of deep encouragement," reflected Ruby.

When asked what she would like others to know about Webb School, Ruby didn't hesitate, "What a good place it was and the foundation it laid in those of us who attended." She loves the fact that alumni can return to Webb School and visit the museum located in the former library on campus. "We can still see old pictures of our family members who went there. That's an important connection."

Looking back on her years at Webb, Ruby continued, "While we were there, I don't remember anything about race. None of us felt wounded. None of us felt sorry for ourselves. There were no pity parties. We recited the Pledge of Allegiance every morning and began our day with a devotional or scripture reading. The Bible was woven into every aspect of our time in school. It was our go-to book of answers and provided guidance and understanding in everything we did."

Ruby and her husband spent 22 years in Carroll County before recently moving back to Rutherford County, but her connection to the Webb Alumni Association remains strong. She takes pride in her place as an alumnus and wants to see the association flourish beyond this generation. "Webb is full of stories. All of us who were part of it experienced different things. I hope these memories will be shared with future generations so they will not only see, but feel the connections. We were taught to achieve, to strive and to make the world a better place while we were here. I hope young people will become part of this strong foundation."

"We will all, at some point, encounter hurdles to gaining access and entry, moving up and conquering self-doubt; but on the other side is the capacity to own opportunity and tell our own story."

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DONNETTA STRAYHORN BUTLER

WEBB SCHOOL PROVIDED MORE THAN JUST AN EDUCATION

BY KAREN FORESTER *features@mckenziebanner.com*

Mathematics was always Donnetta Strayhorn Butler's favorite subject as a student at Webb School. That preference would later develop into a long and distinguished career in finance and accounting. Donnetta has held executive-level positions at some of the country's finest Black universities and credits much of her success to the excellent education she received at Webb School. "My favorite subject was math and solving word problems," she said, "it was always one of my favorite things to do in school."

Donnetta was born in McKenzie and grew up less than 10 minutes from Webb School. Her mother, Class of 1941, was a homemaker when her children were small and later became director of a senior citizen program in McKenzie. Her father was a WWII veteran who worked at the Milan Arsenal for 40 years. Both of her parents were active in the community and the Greater Enon Baptist Church where the family attended. Her older brother graduated from Webb High School in 1960 as well as several aunts.

When she recalls her earliest memory of attending school, her best friend comes to mind. "I remember going to my first and second grade class with one of my best friends who, by the way, lives near me now and we are still close." She remembers playing with her friends during recess and schoolwork and her teacher, Mrs. Ethel Seets, sister to Principal J. L. Seets. "I had my aunt, Mrs. Russelle Glen, in grades three and four, Donnetta laughed, "that was both good and bad." She had Mrs. Lera Simmons in fifth and sixth grades and was also a majorette.

There were also two very special memories for Don-

netta. "I was Miss Webb on two occasions, once in the first grade in 1952, then, I was Miss Webb in 1960-61. I was very fortunate in that regard." The first time she held the title, she wore a pale yellow, floor length dress that her mother saved over the years. Donnetta donated it to the Webb Historical Museum where it is displayed today.

In high school, Donnetta loved the business courses taught by Mrs. Doris Woodard. There was typing, shorthand, bookkeeping and other topics that dovetailed with her aptitude for math. "She was wonderful and gave me an opportunity I would not have had otherwise." It would solidify Donnetta's interest in pursuing a career in finance.

In the spring of her senior year, Mrs. Woodard recommended Donnetta for a part-time job. It was a general business assignment at the Carroll County Agricultural and Stabilization Service in Huntingdon, a federal government program providing support to farmers in the area. She reported to work every weekday morning for a few hours and then returned to school for her classes in the afternoon. She explained "I did the calculations to arrive at the acreage farmers would be eligible to set aside in order to receive monthly or quarterly stipends. Then, I typed the checks and this was before calculators, so I could not make mistakes or the checks would have to be voided. It reinforced what I really loved and put me on my career path."

When Donnetta wasn't working or going to school, she played guard for the girls' basketball team and loved competing as a Wolverine against other area schools. She was an officer and served as vice president in the student government organization. She sang in the WHS Glee Club and was a member of the special girls' sing-



Donnetta Strayhorn Butler

ing group, 'The Webbettes'. They would often perform during intermission between the girls and boys basketball games, at school assemblies and at other schools. They also participated in the annual Christmas parade.

After graduating from Webb High School in 1964, Donnetta married Dr. George Butler, a WHS Class of 1962 graduate, and they moved to Nashville. She said, "I worked for the next seven years while my husband completed his

undergraduate degree at Tennessee State University (TSU) and then earned his Doctorate of Dentistry degree from Meharry Medical College." She enrolled at TSU in 1975, majoring in accounting, and earned her degree in 1979.

After college, Donnetta worked as the Assistant Bursar at TSU and then accepted a position as Accounting Supervisor with Meharry Medical College. Over the next 25 years, she earned her MBA from the Jack Massey School of

Business at Belmont University and was promoted to Senior Vice President of Finance and Administration. "I took an early retirement in 2004 to care for my mom whose health was declining and moved my parents to Nashville so we could be closer. I would not change that decision for the world."

In 2005 after passing her exams, Donnetta became a certified financial planner with Merrill Lynch and lived on Hilton Head Island in South Carolina. In 2009 she was recruited by a former colleague and accepted a position with Morehouse School of Medicine in Atlanta as their Senior Vice President of Finance and Administration. She retired in 2013. "My husband always says I retired twice and, I guess I did," she laughs. Donnetta and her husband now live in Gallatin, Tennessee, close to their son, Steven, and his family in Hendersonville.

She and her husband have been active members of the Webb Alumni Association since its creation in 1969. "I believe that Webb


laid the foundation for me, not only as an individual, but as a productive member of society. It was always more than just subjects, it was the teachers who prepared us for life beyond school and McKenzie. They went over and above what was necessary to instill in us life skills necessary to become well-rounded adults." She mentions the non-curricular elements that were part of their high school education. "The teachers, coaches, administrators and staff taught us how to dress and to carry ourselves in certain situations, how to take responsibility, how to interview for a job and other things that aren't found in a text book."

"I am hopeful Webb Alumni Association can still be an active organization in the future that contributes to McKenzie and Carroll County through activities in the building. I hope it keeps going so it can provide a positive means of community, fellowship and service to those cities in which chapters are located."

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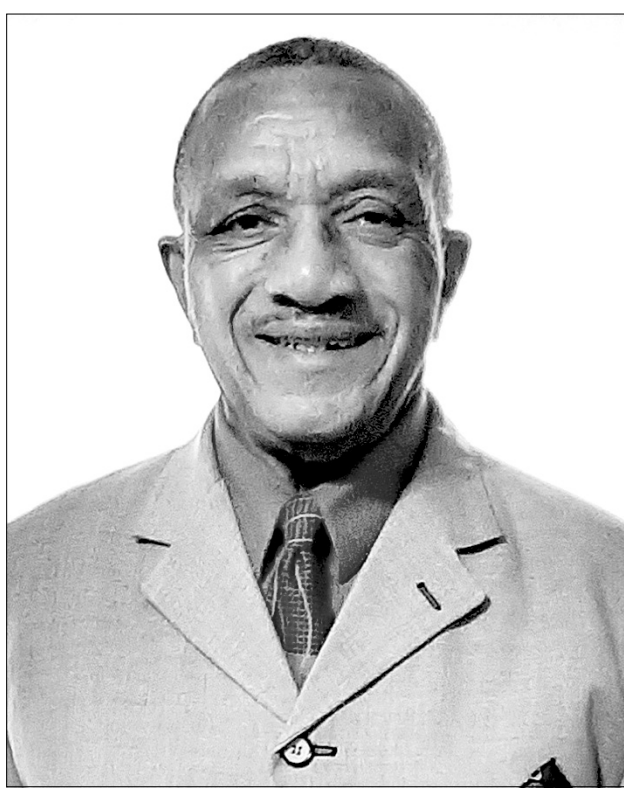
WEBB SCHOOL MEANS EVERYTHING

BY KAREN FORESTER *features@mckenziebanner.com*

Neal Williamson was born the seventh boy and the ninth child in a family of 13 not including his mother and father. All the siblings “pitched in and helped each other run” the 60-acre cotton farm their parents owned in McLemoresville. “I remember us picking cotton, gathering the corn, hauling hay, and harvesting sweet potatoes. We were always busy doing something,” said Neal. There were cattle, hogs, chickens, and mules that needed tending as part of his chores, but always Neal enjoyed school and made time for his lessons.

He attended Dunbar Elementary in McLemoresville in first and second grades. The building had two rooms with partitions to separate two grades each up to eighth grade. “I remember the family and church-oriented life surrounding my schooling. It was a good environment to grow up in,” recalls Neal.

From third through ninth grade, he attended MTA Elementary, a consolidation of smaller Black schools in McLemoresville,



Neal Williamson

Trezevant and Atwood. Neal remembers the principal, Mr. E.A. Neblett, who “kept us in line. If you did something wrong, the message would get home before

you would,” laughed Neal. “MTA prepared us to attend Webb High School. Most of the instructors either attended or graduated from Webb, so they

knew how to teach us the basics, like Home Economics or Industrial Arts.” He also remembers getting up every weekday morning between 4:30-5 a.m. so he could catch the bus at 6 a.m. to arrive at school by 8 a.m.

Neal entered Webb High School as a sophomore and followed the vocational agriculture curriculum where he received training in traditional farming, farm mechanics, livestock care and innovations in farm technology. Most of those classes were taught by Mr. James Arthur Greer, a favorite of Neal’s. “I studied agriculture all the way through school [because] I always knew that’s what I wanted to do to earn my living,” he said.

In addition to his classes, Neal became active in the Webb High School chapter of the New Farmers of America (NFA). According to New Farmers of America Records, 1929-1965, Ruth Lilly Special Collections and Archives, Indiana University Purdue University, Indianapolis, Indiana, “the NFA began as a national organization for African-American farm youth in 1935 to promote

agricultural leadership, character, thrift, scholarship, cooperation and citizenship. The organization served its members for 30 years providing experience in leadership, education and the agricultural field.”

When Neal was a junior in 1965, the NFA merged with the national Future Farmers of America (FFA) group to become one organization. At the time of the merger, NFA consisted of 1,004 chapters in 12 states and over 50,000 members.

He played a year of basketball, but then became involved in student government. He was elected president of his eleventh and twelfth grade classes. “I served as the liaison between the student body and the principal and made sure we students followed the rules and regulations,” said Neal.

After Neal graduated from Webb High School, he enrolled at Tennessee State University (TSU) in Nashville and majored in Agronomy, the science of soil management and crop production. He graduated in May 1970 and moved to Buena Vista, Iowa, where he began working for the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) in June. He was later transferred to Sioux City, Iowa.

“I was a professional soil scientist for soil conservation. I would go out with a map and a probe to test soil samples walking a 640 square mile section at a time,” said Neal. The data he gathered was collected by the USDA and published into intricately lined and annotated books detailing the various types of soil across counties. Farmers used his maps to understand which crops would work in certain sections of their acreage.

After spending ten years with the USDA, Neal was hired by the U.S. Department of the Interior, and became a federal surface coal mine inspector. He lived in Madisonville, Kentucky, for a year before settling in Knoxville, Tennessee. Describing his position, Neal said, “The job was like a policeman, when I found a violation I issued tickets to the operators. These citations came with fines for infractions not in compliance with federal land reclamation regulations. I remember

the starting fine was \$5000 and went up from there.”

For the next 18 years, he was responsible for inspecting 12-15 mountaintop mines across East Tennessee and Kentucky, rotating regions every three months. “I was the only Black inspector in the United States at the time. I would sometimes run across difficulties, but coming from Webb, I never let it bother me. I could have gotten upset from some things, but I never did. I knew my job and I was confident in myself and my faith.”

Neal retired in 1996 at age 49 and moved back to West Tennessee in 2000. “I joined the Webb Alumni Association in 2002 when Eugene Williams was president and became involved with its programs,” he said. Neal is currently in his second term as national president of the association.

“Webb School means everything to me, it served as my foundation to college, a career, how I overcome challenges and how I perceive life. Whenever I’ve had a decision to make, I always thought about Mr. Warford, our principal, the teachers and other role models at Webb. If I believed they wouldn’t approve of what I was about to do, I wouldn’t either.”

“I hope the association will still be going strong in ten years. I know times are changing and all of us are getting older.” Neal wants to offer more educational and social programs to the community at little or no cost. He hopes more young people will get involved and continue the tradition of preserving the rich heritage of Webb School.

Neal married Priscilla Tate in 1985 and between them they have three children, Renee Hobson, Warren Russell and Nicholas Williamson in addition to seven grandchildren. Six of their grandchildren were recipients of the Obie Rosco McKenzie Scholarship through the Webb Alumni Association to supplement their higher education learning. Neal serves as an elder at the McLemoresville Cumberland Presbyterian church and still maintains the homeplace on which he grew up as well as his own home in Wingo.

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