CELEBRATING JOHNSTOWN'S HERITAGE LEADERS

SATURDAY, JULY 26, 2014
5:30 PM

A Memorial Day Parade

Circa 1950's
Johnstown, PA
African American Ross C. Stewart VFW Members
Led by Joseph Brooks,Sr.

Heritage Leaders VII

A Salute to African Americans of the Greater Johnstown Area

Who Served in the Military

In the beginning of the year 2014, the country has been inundated with celebrations, marches, fund raisers and various activities that honor military men and their families. This initiative proposed by Mrs. Michelle Obama and Dr. Jill Biden has proven to be worthy. It includes all segments of the population: Caucasian, African American, Latino and others as long as one is classified as a citizen of the United States. The honor and aid available now, has not always been available to African Americans.

Since his inauguration in 2008, President Barack Obama has been the Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces of the United States of America. His administration has been fraught with conflicts in Afghanistan, Iraq, Middle East, Israel, and the Balkans. He (Congress and his Advisors) make daily decision about sending American Men and Women into harm's way.

Black men were always thought to be intellectually inferior to whites and for 170 years after the founding of this nation were never given position of authority and decision making in the military. Yet, Black soldiers have served in the military since the founding of this nation. They were members of the militia in Northern States during the Revolutionary war. In 1862, President Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation opened the door for African American men to enlist in the Union Army. Entire regiments of "colored" soldiers were formed, but always led by white officers. The South on the other hand refused to put guns in the hands of their slaves.

During World War I, African Americans served valiantly. But for the most part, they were the cooks, mopped the ship decks, serviced the equipment and operated the vehicles. During this period, the all Black 92 and 93 divisions of the Army known as the Buffalo Soldiers was formed.

It was in 1941-1945, during World War II in a nation that was described as Jim Crow and segregated, that one million, two hundred thousand African Americans served their country. Out of that number, 125,000 served with distinction protecting a racist country from slaughter of Germany's Adolf Hitler and the ferocious attacks of the Japanese. James Thompson of Wichita, Kansas sent a letter to the Robert Vann of the Pittsburgh Courier and asked, "Should I sacrifice my life to live as half American?" This prompted Mr. Vann to launch the Courier's Double V campaign. The newspaper campaigned against the racial treatment of African Americans and at the same time supported America's need to win WWII declaring Victory at home (end to Jim Crow) and Victory over seas!

Mabel Vann Johnson (wife of Dr. Burrell Johnson) activist and visionary of the Johnstown Community was the daughter of Robert Vann, owner of the Pittsburgh Courier.

Josh White, a blues musician, wrote song about the Black man's plight. This is one of the stanzas: Uncle Sam says "' Keep your apron on son/ you know I'm not going to let you shoot my big navy gun." Pressure on the Franklin Roosevelt White house led to the experimental training of pilots and support crew at the Tuskegee Institute in Alabama. The Tuskegee Airmen and their victories are legend.

In 1948, President Harry Truman signed executive order 9981 officially ending segregation and racial inequality in the military!

What has that to do with the NAACP'S Heritage Leaders?

All but 2 of the men honored as Heritage Leaders since 2002 have served in the military.

Have African Americans from Johnstown served in the military?

Since the Civil War, The African American Heritage Society Inc. has documented. Participation in all of the major American conflicts by Johnstown's African American Citizens

Civil War: John Brown and John Smith served in the Civil War. Their graves are located on Laurel Hill, now declared an historic site by the United States Government.

World War I: James Harrison, Sargent in the 10th Calvary Regiment during World War I, a longtime resident of East Conemaugh was a Buffalo Soldier buried in Headricks Cemetery.

World War II: Kenneth Dempsey served in the 92nd Division of the U.S. Army, ranked as a Buffalo Soldier and he too is buried in Headricks Cemetery. Hundreds of others also served, Most of the males honored by the NAACP Heritage Society since 2002 served in the military! Since 2012 a number of Heritage Leaders who served in WWII have passed that includes: Charles Mickens and Leroy Hemphill Sr. in 2013 and Dec. Joe Walls and Rev. Thomas Simms in 2014.

Aviation Cadet Ross C. Stewart died in a plane crash while training at the Tuskegee Institute in 1943. He was the first Black man from Johnstown to die in WWII. After WWII, Johnstown's retired African American Military men joined together to form the Ross C. Stewart VFW located on Bedford Street (building destroyed when the city constructed a new access into Johnstown. The men participated in a variety of ceremonies. The photo on the cover represents the members marching in a Veteran's day parade in the 1950's.

Leona Fair widow of William P. Fair of Prospect was the first woman of Johnstown to join the WAC'S (1943).

Korean Conflict: 1950 Wallace Taylor member of the US Army and a resident of Franklin Borough was captured by the North Koreans and held for more than 2 years.

The purpose of the Heritage Committee is to inform the community about the spirit of African Americans who fought bravely for our country.

Biyearly Celebration: The African American Heritage Leaders celebration is keeping in step with the old adage that states, "If we don't know from whom we came, we don't know where we are going." Today, we recognize from whom we came and we thank the Heritage Leaders for being in the village to carve our way. This celebration was established in 2002 by the Johnstown Branch of the NAACP. Dr. Clea Patrick Hollis was president. To date, the committee remains the same and personally interviews each candidate. The biyearly celebration for family and friends provides a platform for Johnstown's African American Senior Citizens over 85 to "tell their story."

Claudia B. Jones

The Heritage Committee of the Johnstown Unit NAACP

Biography of Rev. Yvette M. Madison

Yvette M. Madison is an ordained Minister of the Gospel and received her call to preach the Gospel in June 2000. She is the Associate Pastor of Praise Center Full Gospel Church of Johnstown under the tutelage of Rev. Gladys Myers and Rev. Dr. Charles A. Scales, Jr., Bishop of Praise Center Full Gospel Church Association. Yvette also serves her local assembly as the Praise & Worship Leader, Youth Minister, Sunday School Teacher, and is an instructor in the Praise Center School of Ministry.

Yvette is a native of Johnstown and a graduate of Greater Johnstown Sr. High School. She attended Seton Hill University and received a Bachelor of Arts in Psychology, and continued her studies at the University of Pittsburgh, School of Social Work receiving a Masters in Social Work (MSW).

Yvette resided in Pittsburgh for 11 years where she began her professional career as a Social Worker. She was Program Coordinator of the One Church/One Child Black Adoption Program through the Children's Home of Pittsburgh where she worked with area churches to identify parents interested in adoption. While in this position she also served as coordinator of the One Church/One Child State Conference in 1992. In 1993 Yvette accepted a position as Clinical Social Worker at Allegheny General Hospital where she provided short term counseling, crisis intervention, and discharge planning for patients and families. She worked initially in pediatrics and finished her career at AGH in the Neuro-Surgical unit.

Yvette returned to Johnstown in the summer of 2000 and began working with the Cambria County Child Development Corporation as Program Coordinator of the Cambria County Community Engagement Team. In January 2003 she began as an adjunct instructor at Pennsylvania Highlands Community College and became a full time faculty member in August 2004. Yvette has recently been promoted to Associate Professor of Human Services and also serves as Lead Faculty of the Human Services Program.

Yvette is currently a member of the Praise Center Full Gospel Church Advisory Board, the Greater Johnstown Minority Scholar's Club Advisory Board and the Changing Expectations Mission Advisory Board (CEM). She also serves as President of the Greater Johnstown High School Big J Booster Organization and President of Lady Trojan Girls Basketball Boosters.

Yvette Madison is the proud parent of Phillip Madison, Robyn Madison and is a guardian to a niece, Janay Myers. Phillip is currently a sophomore at Susquehanna University and a member of the Men's Basketball Team; Robyn attends Greater Johnstown High School and a member of the Girls Basketball Team. Her niece Janay Myers also attends Greater Johnstown High School and is a member of the Girls Basketball Team.

Look what the Lord has done!

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JESSIE MAE (HASELRIG) CRAWLEY-GRIGSBY

JUNE 15, 1928

Radiant:
Jessie Crawley-Grigsby

It's hard to believe that Jessie Crawley-Grigsby is only a year shy of her 80th birthday. Her skin has a youthful light to it that she attributes to washing her face three times a day every day throughout her school days. This Johnstown native retired from the Department of Public Welfare in 1986, and since then has been keeping her schedule full. She and her husband of seven years, Charles Grigsby, enjoy visiting the Senior Center downtown for their Tuesday night swing band dances, and she's also a member of the Senior Serenaders, a singing group that visits local nursing homes. With three children, three grandchildren and three great-grandchildren, you'd think she wouldn't have an extra second, but this remarkable lady still has found time to start taking organ lessons. "I can finally play a decent song!" she says.

There is a vitality, a life force, an energy, a quickening that is translated through you into action.

And because there is only one of you in all of time, this expression is unique.

And if you block it, it will never exist through any other medium and be lost.

It is not your business to determine how good it is, nor how valuable

Nor how it compares with other expressions

It is your business to...keep the channel open

Whether you choose to take an art class, keep a journal, record your dreams,

Dance your story, or live each day from your own creative source,

Above all else, keep the channel open!

Martha Graham

An article in the May 2007 edition of the "Johnstowner" Magazine titled: Radiant: Jessie Crawley-Grigsby described an attractive, energetic wife, mother and grandmother. Among her many activities, the author mentioned a favorite pastime of Jessie and husband Charles. They were regulars at the Tuesday night swing dances sponsored by the Senior Center. In July 2014, Jessie is still swinging!

Born Jessie Mae Haselrig on June 15, 1928, she is the 2nd daughter and the 5th child of Fannie Flagg and Burrell Monroe Haselrig. The Haselrigs were parents to 8 children; 6 boys and two girls.

Burrell Haselrig Sr. was born in Chicauga, Georgia and his wife, Fannie was a native of Enterprise, Alabama. They migrated to Johnstown in the 1920's. Burrell worked in the Coke Ovens of the Cambria iron Works in Rosedale. When the family moved into a house in the West End at 1324-26 Tennessee Avenue, they were one of the few African Americans who lived in the neighborhood. As parents of 8 children, Burrell and Fannie worked hard at housing, feeding, clothing and educating their off springs.

Jessie described her childhood as family oriented and creative. Often after supper, the children would play a game called Club Fist. Each child would hold out a clinched fist and the others would attempt to open it by pulling and pinching back the fingers. While the parents watched, the children wrestled, boxed, buck danced and jitter bugged. Because she lived in neighborhoods with few African Americans, most of her playmates were white. They included Betty Ditko and Stephen Vitko Jr., the creator of Spider man.

The family attended religious services at Bethel and Trinity AME. Rev. Ernest Swanson was the pastor. Rev. Swanson had been hired in the 1920's as a Teacher and later a Principal of the Rosedale Elementary School. As one of the few Black Educators and a well-respected Minister in Johnstown, Rev. Swanston was an influential voice for the Black Community.

Jessie attended elementary school at Morrellville and, Beam Elementary School. Students from the west end matriculated to Garfield Jr. H.S. and finally Johnstown High School. In High School she enrolled in the Commercial Course. While there, she met and became good friends with Marian Holton, Gloria Hepborn, Donald Stewart, John Jackson and James Crawley. A major pastime of the high school students was roller skating. Jessie and her friends enjoyed roller skating in the rinks on Bedford Street and Westmont. They were among the few teens at that time to own their own roller skates! During Jesse's senior year her father, Burrell Sr. passed away. She was only 17.

While attending high school, Jessie and James Crawley had developed a close relationship: they were the proverbial love struck teenagers. Jessie graduated from Johnstown High School in 1947. Immediately after graduation, they became engaged.

After graduation, Jessie was hired as a file clerk for the Cambria County Assistance Office, now known as the Department of Public Welfare. Her daily activities varied from receptionist, switch board operator and secretary. In April of 1950, Jesse's brother Burrell Jr. encouraged her to take the Civil Service Test. Passing the exam insured her of greater job stability. After 30 years of service she retired in 1986.

On March 26, 1950, Jessie and James Crawley were married at her home. From that union three children were born: Maxine, Patricia and James Daniel. Maxine graduated from Slippery Rock University in Health and Physical Education; Patricia graduated from Slippery Rock and has served as a flight attendant for TWA, American and United Airlines. James is a graduate of Penn State University in Business. Jessie is the proud grandmother of 4 (Ashton, James Bennett, Jacob and Scott).

For a number of years, the family would take vacations to the Virgin Islands. Jessie' sister Catherine owned property there.

When daughter Patricia was hired by the TWA as a Flight Attendant, the family could receive discounts on airfare. Jesse and the family not only visited the Virgin Islands but jetted to Rome, Budapest, Australia and other exotic places. James had retired from Bethlehem Steel Corp. in 1983 and Jesse retired in 1986. While on a fishing trip in St. Thomas, James was involved in a tragic boating accident and died October 26, 1986. Jessie remained in St Thomas for years. While there, she worked at a number of different jobs, one as a concierge at Stouffer Grand Beach Resort for 7 years. In 2001, Jesse won the title of Miss U.S. Virgin Islands. She made the Islands her home until she returned to Johnstown.

I am "blessed and highly favored" Jessie stated. Because in 2000, she met a former friend Charles Grigsby, in Pittsburgh. After a whirlwind courtship, the couple married. They have dedicated themselves to their families, church, and community.

Jessie is a member of the First Cambria A.M.E. Zion Church. She sang soprano in the Senior Choir and was a member of Modern Wives Club in 2007 was co-chairman of the celebration of First Cambria's 130th Anniversary Celebration. Jessie was also very active in the community, representing the church; she co-sponsored a Newcomer's Tea in 1979, for new families, relocating to Johnstown and co-sponsored Miss Teen-Age America Pageant.

Jessie is the author of two poems, "Through the Looking Glass"

In 2013, Jessie Crawley-Grigsby became the first platinum member, donating $1,000 to the African American Heritage Society, Inc. She serves as Emeritus member of the African American's Heritage Society's Board. Her life-long commitment of supporting the community was reinforced with her contribution for the establishment of an African American Heritage Study Center at Johnstown's Discovery Center.

Elder Thoughts and Elder Wisdom

Jessie Mae (Haselrig) Crawley-Grigsby

As an informed citizen, Jesse voted for Barack Obama in the last 2 elections. According to her, Obama's decision to bring the troops back from Iraq is a great achievement, but feels that a great failing is the lack of jobs.

Favorite Song; Oh I want to see him

Favorite Bible Verse: Psalm 23

Advice to young people: Honor Your parents

Laughter: During their courtship, A trip to the Senior Center, Charles parked the car . When they returned from their event, he got in the back seat, with arms outstretched as if to place them on the wheel!

ETHEL ADDELLE McLEOD DAVIS
SEPTEMBER 30, 1925

Many Joys
The idea that many people
have that life is a vale of tears
is just as false as the idea
which the great majority have,
and to which
youth, health, and wealth incline you,
that life is a place of entertainment.
Life is a place of service,
where one sometimes has occasion
to put up with a lot that is hard,
but more often
to experience many joys.
Leo Tolstoy

Ethel McLeod was born September 30, in Kings County Brooklyn, New York, the eldest of 6 children of Edith Rose and Philip Nash McCleod. Ethel's description of life in the McCleod household is one full of joy, laughter but always with goals and purpose. Her mother was an immigrant from Kingston, Jamaica. She was introduced to Philip Nash McCleod after a service of the Anglican Church (Philip's family came from Grand bay, Caricou Granada.)and after a proper courtship, they were married. The McCleods were the parents of 5 girls and 1 boy, Ethel, Helen Mae, Jen, Muriel Victoria, Louisa and Samuel.

The Mcleods lived in predominately ethnic communities. Ethel recalled that their first home was in a predominately Jewish neighborhood in downtown Brooklyn. They lived in a building consisting of 3 floors, each floor had six rooms. Ethel's parents lived on the first floor and two other families rented the upper floor. As the size of the family increased, the McLeod family relocated to an area that was largely Italian. Mr. McLeod was employed by Horowitz on Rockaway Ave. The company manufactured mattresses. During a period when Phillip lost his job, he moved to Detroit, MI where tunnels were being built for a subway. His job was to work the air compressors that prevented the tunnel from collapsing. Edith McLeod, a trained dressmaker, supplemented the family income by sewing clothes.

Ethel was surrounded by family members, and friends who influenced her to study and master her school subjects. Her Godfather was a chemist and her mother's uncle an optometrist. A black elementary teacher, Mrs. Calhoun, who came from a family of educators also was a source of inspiration for the young Ethel. Edith McCleod, an accomplished pianist taught her daughter to play classical and religious music. Ethel also took voice lessons from Mr. Lovejoy. The talented teenager used her gifts playing and singing in the Baptist church and at various school functions. Because the New York School System supplied musical instruments for any interested child, all of the McCleod children had the opportunity to take part in this initiative: Jean played violin, Muriel the Cello, Louisa the piano and Samuel the clarinet.

Ethel began her education in the New York School System where she attended PS 125 and later, PS84. She was active in school plays and often called upon to sing the National Anthem. When she entered high school, the guidance counselors insisted that she take the Industrial Courses, but her father intervened and Ethel majored in Science, graduating from Girls' High School in Brooklyn at age 15! Ethel's ambition was to become a pharmacist. She enrolled in the Brooklyn College of Pharmacy of Long Island University, but was unable to complete her studies due to lack of finances.

At age 17, Ethel met Nehemiah "Nebo" Davis at a party at his sister-in-law's home.. He had just been released from the service. They were married on June 5, 1948 and moved to Johnstown where Nehemiah was hired immediately by Bethlehem Steel. The Davis' were the parents of two sons, Nehemiah (deceased) born in 1949 and Anthony born prematurely in 1957. Ethel boasts proudly of her 8 grandchildren, 11 great grandchildren and a few great-great grandchildren.

Ethel's early introduction to the Johnstown community was through the churches. For many years, she was a member of First Cambria AME Zion Church and sang soprano under choir director, Mattie Mae (Andrews) Smith. Ethel also was a member of the Modern Wives Club and the Usher Board. Both of her sons were baptized at Cambria. Today, Ethel is affiliated with the Pleasant Hill Baptist Church of Prospect.

In 1954, Ethel became a member of the Progressive Court of Colanthe under Mary Henry.

In 1966 Ethel finally realized her dream of getting a college degree. She attended Pitt-Johnstown for 3 years, and then matriculated to the University of Pittsburgh, main campus in Pittsburgh, PA. graduating with a degree in Elementary Education in 1970. Then, in 1974 Ethel McLeod Davis fulfilled desire that she had held on to for more than 37years, she was awarded a Masters of Education from the same institution.

Hired by the Johnstown School District in 1970, Ethel Davis taught 4th graders in room 16 at Chandler school for 30 years When the school was torn down, she was moved to West Side Elementary School remaining there for 3 more years. While teaching her regular classes, Ethel also instructed homebound students for 10 plus years. During this time, Ethel was a member of the Iota Chapter of Delta Kappa Gamma, an international organization for women teachers.

Among her happiest moments, according to Mrs. Davis, was the birth of her first grand daughter, Anthony's oldest daughter: Heather Denise, and the baptism of her grandchildren at Pleasant Hill Baptist Church. Ethel also believes that traveling to Germany and visiting Anthony and his wife were very special events. Like her trips to her parents' homeland in Jamaica, she was able to experience other cultures and customs.

Perhaps the saddest moment in Ethel's life occurred when her husband Nehemiah died in the hospital while she was teaching. Hospital officials called the principal at her school to tell Ethel that her husband was in serious condition (before cell phones) the principal gave the message to Ethel but did not supply a substitute teacher in order for her to leave the class room and her students. By the time school let out, her husband had passed!

Elder Thoughts and Elder Wisdom

Ethel Addelle McLeod Davis

Favorite Scripture: Psalm 23

Advice to young people: Think for Yourself

Laughter: One of the things that cause Ethel to laugh heartily, even when she thinks of it today is the magnificence of the wind! "One does not know its origin nor can they see it. But the wind causes trees to bow and dip their heads!"

Contentment: At this stage in her life, Ethel feels very content. She can eat without getting indigestion, does not experience headaches, although arthritis in her left knee does give her some pain. Ethel is most grateful for her youngest son, Anthony. Her prayer is that God will continue to strengthen and enrich his life.

BERTHA MAE (MICKENS) HILL

FEBRUARY 3, 1929

Serenity Prayer

God grant me the serenity to accept the things
I cannot change; courage to change the things
I can; and the wisdom to know the difference.
Living one day at a time; enjoying one moment at a time
Accepting hardships as pathways to peace, Taking as He did, this
Sinful world as it is, not as I would have it
Trusting that He will make all things right
If I surrender to His will; that I may be
Reasonably happy in this life and supremely
Happy with Him forever in the next

It can happen anywhere! On a busy street in downtown Johnstown, at the Dollar General or in Mt. Sinai Institutional Baptist Church, someone calls out; "Hi, Aunt Bert"! "Hello Miss Bert"! She acknowledges the greeting with a smile, a hand wave and a "Hi Baby" or often with the individual's first name. For most of these individuals there is no family relationship. But just a personal greeting of affection for someone they have known since childhood.

Born Bertha Mae Mickens on February 3, 1929 in Lee County, Sumpter, South Carolina, Bertha is the second child of John and Annie Lee Mickens. Her siblings included older sister Mazie and younger brother, John (Bobby). In 1936 the family migrated to East Conemaugh Borough, PA after Mr. John Mickens was hired to work in the Coke Plant, a division of the Bethlehem Steel Corporation located in Franklin Borough. The family rented a row house on Lemon Court where the children attended the East Conemaugh School System. Bertha loved school, was a good student and at one time worked for Miss Eleanor Martin, the high school English teacher..

Most African Americans in East Conemaugh lived in housing that aligned or branched off of Chestnut Street. The area was home to a large black population that migrated from the South to work in the steel industry. As a result there were plenty of children. From early childhood, Bertha played, laughed, danced, fought and made up with special girlfriends, Doris Toney, Eartha Lee, Dorothy Bradley, and others. She remembers the times when they would sneak into the juke joints and later on Mac Swains to dance and flirt with the hottest "fella's" of the day or confront the girls from Franklin and Johnstown who dared to make advances on their boyfriends. The youngsters in Conemaugh engaged in a variety of sports activities. One of the

most organized sports was softball. During Bertha's teens, the borough sponsored an all-Black female team known as the Teeners. Bertha starred as an awesome 3rd baseman. The team travelled throughout the Greater Johnstown Area defeating opponents and gaining a reputation as a worthy competitor!

In her late teens, Bertha married Charles McCall. They were the parents of two children, Gail and Kelvin. The marriage was short-lived.

In 1953, Bertha married Leo Hill, a father of 5. She became a stepmother to the five Hill children: Georgia, Gladys, Ann, Margaret and Edward (nick- named, Brother). The children ranged in age from Brother who was 7 to Georgia age 17. Add to the list, Bertha's son, Kelvin who was 4 years old and the newlyweds faced and survived the numerous challenges of blended families. Leo worked in the Franklin Coke Plant and Bertha at Penn Furniture Co. They soon were able to buy their own home which allowed the couple to move the family from a rental property in Prospect and purchase a home on Menoher Blvd. As the children graduated, each left the household to marry, find a job, further their education or go to the service. In 1975, all of the girls were gone and only Bertha, Leo and the two boys, Brother and Kelvin lived in the household. It was not long before the boys would leave and the couple looked forward to growing old together. Their dreamed was not realized; Leo became ill and passed on February 8th.

Kelvin, the youngest joined the Air Force, but was discharged due to a training accident. He returned to Johnstown and worked in the Blast Furnaces. It was at that time that he met and married Betty, an American Indian (Native American) and descendant of the Black Foot Tribe of North Dakota. They became the parents of 5 children: Kelvin Jr. (KJ), Frelyn John, Avery Lewis, Sharron and De Priest. A series of tragic events occurred. In 1989, Kelvin Sr. was killed in an accident and Bertha assumed the role of major caregiver for her 5 grandchildren without receiving any help from governmental assistance programs.

One of her fondest memories was trying to support the grand children in their little league ball games. Because of the age differences, they played ball for three different teams in Roxbury Park. Bertha would position her chair on the dividing line that separated the park into smaller playing fields. This allowed her to watch two games at once! That is dedication! As the years passed, Bertha has continued her support for her grandchildren and their offspring. The role of Caregiver, even at 85 is never ending.

Bertha held a number of jobs in the community as a teenager and adult. She worked as a bus girl at Fort Stanwix Hotel, cleaned tables at the Cookie Jar, dressed the manikins and decorated the windows and pressed the clothes at the Cotton Shop, Mangels and Bretts. For 19 and ½ years, Bertha worked for the Penn Furniture Company, the last 10 and ½ years were spent as an elevator operator. Housekeeping in the Atrium was her final job.

At 16 Bertha joined the Mt. Sinai institutional Baptist Church which remains her church home. Under Rev. E.G. Williams, Bertha organized the Junior Church, out of which several present deacons matriculated. She took the youth on several trips, including Niagara Falls, and aided Hazel Britt with the Rosebud choir. Music is Bert's passion. She is one of the oldest members of the Senior Choir. Bertha was also a member of the BCI, a singing group formed under Rev, Joseph Harkless and The New World Gospel Ensemble (where she served as singer and manager). Even at 85, she continues to sing alto for the POWER OF PRAISE MINISTRY of Mt. Sinai.

In 1977, Bertha, Ethel Coleman and John Gordon organized the East Conemaugh Home Coming Event, which lasted well into the late 1990's. The event was held on Chestnut Street and in conjunction with the Mt. Sinai church park. It afforded hundreds of former residents of

East Conemaugh and Johnstown an opportunity to celebrate their own "FAMILY REUNION". During the late 80's, Bertha and John Gordon purchased the abandoned Russian Club in East Conemaugh and converted it into a restaurant and dance hall. The business closed due to lack of participation.

Elder Thoughts and Elder Wisdom

Bertha Mae (Mickens) Hill

Bertha is a registered voter who voted twice for Barack Obama as president. She believes that Obama's most important attribute is "Surviving Criticism.

Favorite Religious Song: Without God, I Could Do Nothing

Favorite Secular Song: Since I Fell For Your

Favorite Scripture: Psalm 23

Advice to young people: Listen to Your Parents
You Don't Have to Be On Drugs to Survive

Contentment: At this stage in life, Bertha is not content. She is concerned about the life choices that her grandchildren have made.

THELMA ODESSA (BRADEN) MORRIS

OCTOBER 12, 1926

This is life

Strength, understanding, wisdom, Are gained through struggle,

Adversity and defeat Can and will strengthen you

To remove doubts and fears Open your mind

To the inner spirit

With the inner spirit, the sun will be in your face

And the shadows at your back.

Faith and the power of divine guidance

Will carry you through life's challenges.

Mary Morgan

Most of us are familiar with the Kentucky Derby held the first Saturday in May since 1875. It is a sports event that captures the country's attention. Avid sports fans of football, basketball and baseball, turn their attention for one day to follow the magnificent running ability of thorough bred horses as they race around the track for 2 minutes to see which is the fastest. But many are unaware of another industry involving horses where they are trained for showmanship; roping riding and reining. This industry is widespread. Those wealthy enough to afford horses often hire trainers to prepare their equines for numerous fairs, rodeos and other events that occur yearly. Robert Morris was such a trainer. As his wife, Thelma and her children grew up in an environment very different from most of our Heritage Leaders.

Thelma Odessa Braden was born on October 12, 1926 to Lewis James and Rachel Braden in Connersville Tennessee. The Braden family consisted of 3 boys and 5 girls. The oldest son, Nathaniel was a minister. One of the older girls, Veola Mayes owned a café in Louisburg, Tennessee known as the SWEET SHOP. Thelma worked for her and recalled how teenagers flocked to the shop to purchase Veola's chocolate pie. Veola eventually moved to Johnstown and became well known as a seamstress. She was recognized as a Heritage leader.

On May 5, 1945, Thelma was joined in holy wedlock to Robert Morris in Connersville, Tennessee. For a short time, the couple lived on the countryside. Robert worked as a truck driver and Thelma took care of children of White families. Thelma was required to use the back door to enter the home. Mrs. Morris is one of only a few of the heritage honorees who disclosed being called the "N" word. Eventually Robert and Thelma became the parents of 4 children; Robert (Donnie), Debra, Jasper (deceased) and Ramona. Throughout the years the family has increased and now includes 12 grandchildren, 8 Great-Grand Children and I Great-Great Grandchild.

Throughout the interview, Mrs. Morris referred to her life as insignificant; "I was just a wife and mother". The Heritage leaders Committee disagrees. Thelma was a member of a special breed of women of her time, the homemaker: The late George Cashaw in the historic CD "We'll make the Journey", which chronicled the migration of African Americans to Johnstown in the 20's to 60's described the duties of a the Negro mother, "women were reared to take care of their husband and children, clean the house, wash the clothes, do the cooking, and be a responsible wife". According to daughter Deborah Caddell, Thelma Morris excelled at her job!

Eventually Robert Morris changed jobs and became a trainer for show horses, specifically Tennessee Walking Horses. Robert travelled all over the country with the owner to show case these horse at competitions, fairgrounds and etc. Whenever Robert found work, he and his family lived on site, with lodging provided by the owner. Thelma made extra money, babysitting their children and doing housekeeping. The Morris family moved frequently all over the country. In 1956 the family moved to Gibsonia, PA in Beaver Falls to work for the Fiskin family. Two years later, the Morris family moved to Johnstown. Robert was hired to train show horses for Pete Lovisky, the owner of Idle Acres located in Menoher Heights.

According to daughter Debra, the Morris children were often the first and only Blacks in their community. And although there were no signs of overt racism, the family was made aware that they were different. Prior to the Morris family moving to Westmont Borough, Thelma recalled that the community held a meeting, presumably to determine if they would allow the family to live in the vicinity and attend the school system. The vote was positive and the Morris children were the first known African Americans to attend the Westmont Schools. The oldest son "Donnie" graduated from Westmont. He followed in his father's vocation and trained horses at Idle Acres for 15 years. The other children completed school in Canton, Ohio.

While at Westmont, the Morris family met Joe Brooks, who operated a shoe repair shop in the Westmont Plaza. The families became friends and gradually the Morris children became part of the Black Society of Johnstown. Debra remembers attending Cambria A.M.E. Zion church when she was in the third grade.

From, Johnstown, the family moved to Cleveland. It was here that the Morris's parted ways and Thelma returned to Johnstown to live permanently. Her sister, Veola Mays resided here at the time.

Upon Thelma's return to Johnstown, she became more involved in the African American Community. She enjoyed dancing and the night club scene socializing with Rosalee Harris, Norma and Louise Jones, Wilbur Smith's wife and others. Her fondest memory was the celebration of her birthday at the Coke Plant in Conemaugh.

Elder Thoughts and Elder Wisdom

Thelma Odessa (Braden) Morris

Thelma is a registered voter. and voted for Barack Obama in both National Elections..

Favorite Song: I Can't Stop Loving You by Ray Charles

Advice to young people: Always be nice and help those who cannot help themselves.

Contentment: At this time in her life Thelma feels content some of the time. She often feels that she is a burden to her children, but she enjoys helping others.

BERNICE M. (WILLIAMS) SIMMS

SEPTEMBER 7, 1929

Patience

A gentle endurance; tranquil waiting or expectation

Composure during a long siege; tolerant understanding

Biblical; Knowing God is under control

Personal; waiting without complaint for God's perfect timing

From Words to Live By for Women

Bernice is the third child and oldest girl born to Thomas and Eva (Anthony) Williams. The Williams lived and raised their four children: Earl, Ernest, Bernice and Betty in Franklin Borough. Mr. William (born in Fayetteville, N.C.) and wife Eva Lee (born in Macon, GA.) were members of the Great Migration of African Americans from the South to the North to find jobs.

Bernice often referred to as "Winkie" attended Franklin Borough Schools, completing the 11th grade. She enjoyed the company of her best friends, Rosalee (Porcher) Gordon and Belma DuBose. She reminisced fondly about her childhood adventures; in the winter, the children would sled ride down the steep hills in Franklin on anything that would slide; going from house to house during the holidays especially during Christmas. The Festivities lasted for a week and each household would host the community. There was great food, drinks, storytelling and laughter. In those days Carl Davis, a local funeral director, would come by with his horse drawn sleigh and treat adults and children to sleigh rides.

John Anthony, Bernice's maternal grandfather was one of the original members of the Mt. Sinai Institutional Baptist Church. "Church, our entire life was about church! If you did not attend, you were not allowed to go anywhere on Sunday. There were no excuses." Therefore Bernice attended Sunday school faithfully, and was its secretary under Deacon William Charles. She also sang on the Junior Choir and later the Young Adult Chorus. Always elegantly dressed, wearing her signature hats and proverbial smile, Bernice inspires the entire congregation.

In 1958, Bernice married Paul G. Simms who passed away in 2009.

Today she speaks fondly of her children, Deacon Maurice Williams and Paul George Simms. She raised 2 grandchildren; Sean and Kevin Simms. Mrs. Simms is proud of her 7 grandchildren, 17 great grandchildren and 4 great-great grandchildren.

During her productive years, Bernice worked at Bali Bra Sewing Factory, did house work and for 14 years worked in mailing and advertising at the former Penn Furniture Store

Elder Thoughts and Elder Wisdom

Bernice M. (Williams) Simms

Bernice voted for President Obama in both elections and feel that he is unable to carry out major policies because of congress.

Favorite Scripture: Let His will, not thine be done

Favorite Song: Loves All Music

Advice to young people: None, because they don't listen to you anyway.

Contentment: Bernice loves soap operas, especially Young and the Restless and Bold and the Beautiful. She is also an avid fan of old Western Movies!

Bernice feels content, but would love to be back in Franklin. She is most grateful for her children and grandchildren and her best friends, Hazel Rozier, Liz Andrews, Belma Dubose and Rose Gordon.

ERNEST L. WILLIAMS, SR.

SEPTEMBER 29, 1927

Ernest L. Williams Sr. is the second child of Eva Anthony Williams and Thomas Williams. Thomas Williams was born in Fayetteville, N.C. and wife Eva Anthony Williams born in Macon, Georgia. Eva 's father, John Anthony was one of a small prayer group that set into motion the formation of the church known as Mt. Sinai Institutional Baptist Church.

Deacon Earl Williams and Bernice Williams Simms are two of the Williams children who have already been featured in the Heritage Leaders Journals: Earl in 2012 and Bernice in 2014. Betty Jones, is the third sibling to Ernest L. Williams.

Ernest grew up in Franklin Borough, attended and completed school up to the 12th grade, made numerous friends and looked forward to working in the Bethlehem Steel Corporation Blast Furnaces.

During World War II, he was drafted into the army. Eventually he became a member of the military police. After his discharge, Ernest returned home. Along with most men in his age category, he joined the brown paper bag brigade that worked one of 3 shifts daily to make a living at Bethlehem Steel Corporation. Franklin Borough at that time was referred to as the "richest borough" in the United States. Numerous eateries, stores and bars lined the Main Street. Street cars, later, buses made scheduled runs through the borough carrying hundreds of men, women and children back and forth into and out of the city of Johnstown. Franklin was a "Happening" Place. A variety of ethnic groups lived together, most in harmony and with respect for individuals who looked, talked and ate differently than others. It was easy to feel content in that environment.

After Ernest and Martha Sanders were married, he brought her to the borough to live. The Williams became the proud parents of 4 children: Derrick (deceased), Jacqueline, Ernest Williams Jr. and Taryn (Williams) Adams. Presently there are 11 grandchildren and 21 Great Grand Children.

Time passed quickly and in 2014, Ernest and Martha have watched the family dwindle as they became educated, moved away to find more suitable jobs and raise their grandchildren. The mills that once were a source of income for hundreds of thousands of workers are gone.

The Heritage Leaders of the Johnstown Unit of the NAACP pay homage to Ernest Williams and all who remained and grew old in the hometown.

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Frank J. Janakovic, Executive Director

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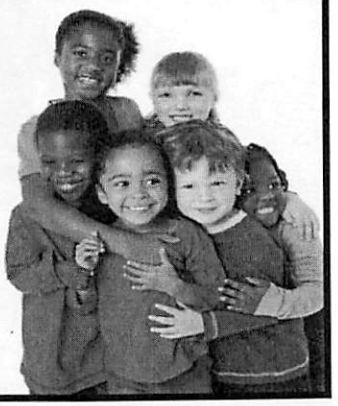

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A Christian Ministry to Youth & Families

— A HUNDRED YEARS FROM NOW —

A hundred years from now...
it will not matter what my bank account was,
the sort of house I lived in,
or the kind of car I drove...
but the world will be different
because I was important in the life of a child.

AFTER -SCHOOL PROGRAM
PROFESSIONAL COUNSELING
JAIL MINISTRY
WINDBER MINSTRY
SUMMER ACTIVITIES
PARENT PROGRAMS
NEW SONG RADIO SHOW
YOUTH MINISTRIES

JOHNSTOWN BRANCH NAACP HERITAGE LEADERS PROGRAM
{PAST HONOREES}
2002-2012 (alphabetical order)

FANNIE ANDREWS
GENEVIVE ANTHONY
EVELYN BANKS
FRANCES E. BANKS
ELOISE BARNETT
SHIRLEY R. BENNETT
GUY J. BROCK, JR.
GERALDINE CARR
CATHERINE CASHAW
GEORGE CASHAW
VIOLET (SIMMS) CLAYTON
ETHEL J. COOK
MARY L. (HOLIFIELD) COX
ANNA M. DAVIS
RUTH DAVIS
KENNETH DEMPSEY
ELIZABETH (JOHNSON) DORSEY
LORENE EDWARDS
LEAH (PRIDGEN) FLOYD
IRENE GLOVER
ANN GORDON
EDITH (SPEIGHT) GORDON
PAULINE H. L. GORDON
ESTHER GRAY
BEULAH (WHITE) GREEN
ELDER CORDY GUNBY, SR.
FRONNIE ALLEN GUNBY
ELIZABETH (RICHARDSON) HARDISON
MARTHA AGNES (BERRY) HARRIS
LEROY HEMPHILL, SR.
RAYFORD HEMPHILL
JESSE (JOHNSON) HILTON
ALBERTINE (CARRUTHERS) HOFFMAN
O'NEIL (JOY) HOLMES
BLANCHE HOPPER
RUTH JACKSON
WILLIE MAYBERRY JACKSON
LOUISE FRANCES JEFFERSON
MELVIN JEFFERSON
FRANCES M. JOHNSON
NORMAN LEVI JONES, JR.
ROY B. JONES
SARA JANE CLAYBURN-JOY
CALLIE B. KING
NEHEMIAH HENRY LEFTWICH
CARRIE E. LIGHTFOOT
JAMES S. LIGHTFOOT
VIOLA MAE MAYES
ANNIE JO MC CRAY
BISHOP JOSEPH MC GAULEY
ROBINA (ELLIS) MEADOWS
CHARLES MICKENS
BOBBIE LOU (NEAL) MILLER
LULA M. MIMS
CONSTANCE (MC SWAIN) MOORE
EMMA JANE PARKER
DOROTHY AGNES PERRY
IDA C. PRIDGEN
JACQUELINE PRIDGEN
SYNESTA PRUITT
CICERO M. RICHARDSON
JOSEPHINE (POPE) RICHARDSON
MATTIE ROBERTS
ISABEL ROBINSON
ETHEL MAE (MC NAIR) SABIR
MAGGIE (GRANT) SEGARS
WILMER J. SEGARS
RACHEL SIMMS
THOMAS SIMMS
CHARLES SIMON
VIOLA (WILLIAMS) SMITH
KATHLEEN (BROWN) STEWART
ALICE DOROTHY TAYLOR
EDGAR THOMAS
MARY E. THOMAS
GERSILEE THOMPSON
MARY ELIZABETH TROUTMAN
ELIZABETH TULLIS
JOHN TULLIS, JR.
ANNIE BELL (FARRIOR) TWYMAN
ALBERT W. VAUGHN
JOE WALLS
RUTH (WALTON) WHITEHEAD
EARL WILLIAMS
ELIZABETH WILLIAMS
ROSE (GETHERS) WILLIAMS
CHARLENE WILSON
ALVENA WRIGHT
MELDA YATES

This Booklet was compiled by:

The Johnstown Branch NAACP

Heritage Committee

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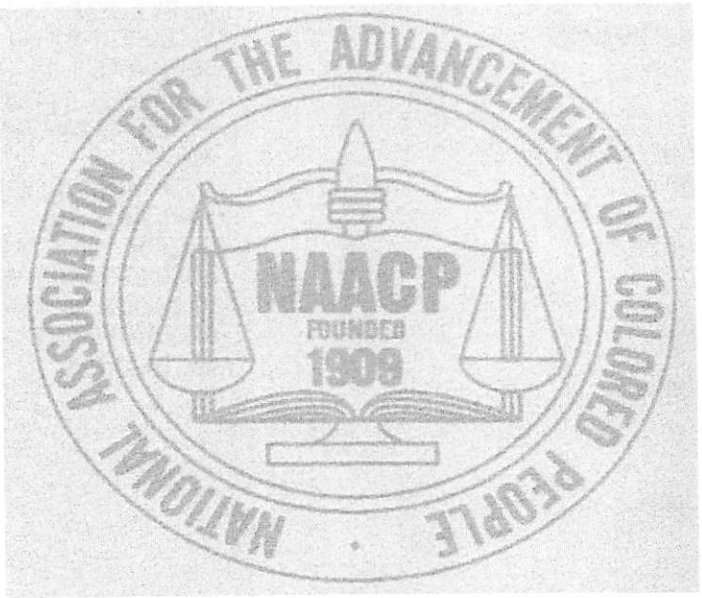
Co-Chairperson _____ Yvonne Watkins

Members _____ Bruce G. Haselrig, Sr.
Dorothy Thomas

President of Johnstown Branch NAACP _ Alan Cashaw



"LIFT ♫ EVERY ♫ VOICE ♫ and Sing"

VERSE 1:

♫ *Lift every voice and sing Till earth and heaven ring,*
Ring with the harmonies of Liberty;
Let our rejoicing rise High as the listening skies
Let it resound loud as the rolling sea.

Sing a song full of the faith that the dark past has taught us.
Sing a song full of the hope that the present has brought us.
Facing the rising sun of our new day begun
Let us march on till victory is won.

♫ *VERSE 2:*
Stony the road we trod,
Bitter the chastening rod,
Felt in the days when hope unborn has died;
Yet with a steady beat,
Have not our weary feet Come to the place for which our fathers sighed?

We have come over a way that with tears have been watered,
We have come, treading our path through the blood of the slaughtered,
Out from the gloomy past, Till now we stand at last
Where the white gleam of our bright star is cast.

♫

VERSE 3:
God of our weary years, God of our silent tears,
Thou who has brought us thus far on the way;
Thou who has by Thy might, Led us into the light.
Keep us forever in the path, we pray.

Lest our feet stray from the places, Our God, where we met Thee;
Lest, our hearts drunk with the wine of the world, we forget Thee;
Shadowed beneath Thy hand, May we forever stand.
True to our GOD, True to our native land.

WE'VE COME THIS FAR BY FAITH

REFRAIN:

We've come this far by faith, Leaning on the Lord.
Trusting in his Holy Word, He's never failed me yet.

Oh, Oh, Oh, Oh, Oh, Oh, Oh, Can't turn around,
We've come this far by faith.

Verse 1

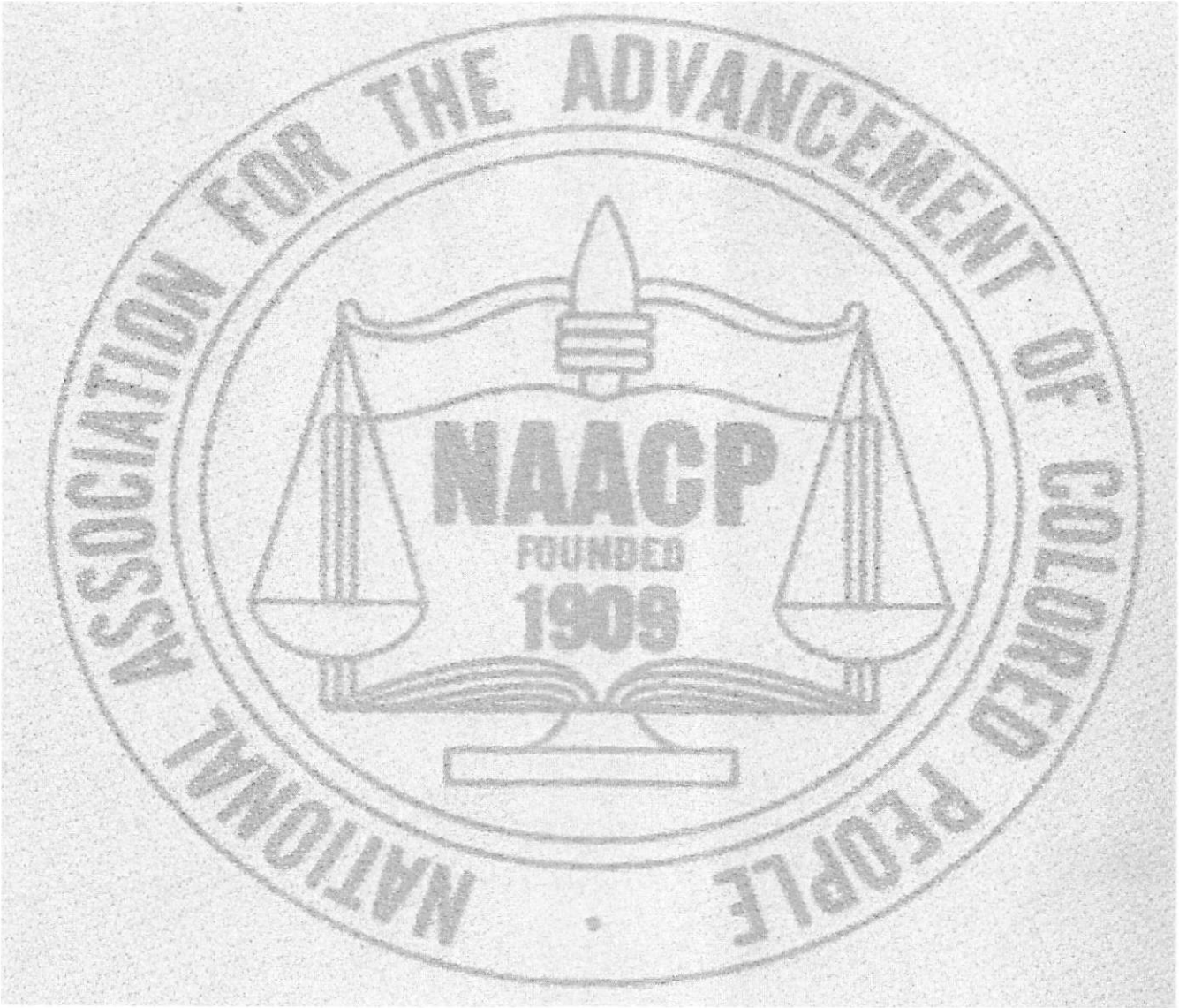
Don't be discouraged, When troubles in your life,
He'll bear your burdens, And move all misery and strife.
That why we've.....

Verse 2

Just the other day, I heard someone say, He didn't believe in God's Word.
But I can truly say that God has made a way, And he has never failed me yet.
That's why we've . . .

YOUR GRACE AND MERCY

YOUR GRACE AND MERCY, BROUGHT ME THROUGH,
I'M LIVING THIS MOMENT BECAUSE OF YOU.
I WANT TO THANK YOU, AND PRAISE YOU TOO.
YOUR GRACE AND MERCY-- BROUGHT ME THROUGH.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