



Randolph County Historic Landmark Preservation Commission

204 East Academy St. ♦ P.O. Box 771 ♦ Asheboro, North Carolina 27204

January 25, 2012

The Randolph County Historic Landmark Preservation Commission (HLPC) met in the Meeting Room of the 1909 Historic Courthouse at 145 Worth Street, Asheboro, NC, and the meeting was called to order by Chairman Hal Johnson at 2:00 p.m.

Members present were Hal Johnson, Bill Johnson, Warren Dixon, Lynne Qualls, Marsha Haithcock, Nan Kemp, Robyn Hankins, Bill Ivey and Fran Andrews. Mac Whatley was absent.

Approval of Minutes

On motion of Dixon, seconded by Andrews, the Commission voted unanimously to approve the minutes of the regular meeting of September 28, 2012, as presented.

Request and Approval of Resolution Designating Randolph High School as a Cultural Heritage Site in Randolph County.

Chairman Hal Johnson said that next on the Commission's agenda was a request for a Cultural Heritage Site designation. Such sites are recognized because they provide a tangible link to the past, with the people and events that have made significant contributions to Randolph County history, and thus shaped our present. Mr. Johnson called on Donald Matthews to present a request for Randolph High School, South Kirkman Street, Liberty Township, Liberty, NC to be designated as a Cultural Heritage Site.

Donald Matthews provided the following information while guiding the Commission through a PowerPoint presentation on the history of Randolph High School (*Note: Parts of the following material were taken from comments made by Commission member Warren Dixon during this meeting and from an article written by Mr. Dixon that was published on January 28, 2012 in The Courier Tribune newspaper.*):

According to Mr. Matthews, the history of Randolph High School begins with The Liberty School, which was established in 1870 in an old Methodist Church. Its purpose was to provide educational opportunities for black children that were not normally available. The importance of educating black youth was advocated by many Quakers of Randolph County and local black clergymen, foremost of whom was Rev. Anthony W. Welborne. Reverend Welborne was born in Randolph County on February 3, 1840. He united with the Liberty Grove Church in 1870, and was ordained in the Baptist Church of High Point prior to taking charge of Liberty Grove. He held a successful charge of eighteen churches of the Piedmont section and assisted in the ordination of twenty-one persons to the gospel ministry. He was one of the pioneers of the Rowan Association and was the Moderator of the High Point Association for many years. Rev. Welborne was comparatively illiterate; however, he was dedicated to advancing the access to education required for Negro children. His dedication helped schools such as The Liberty School, survive during difficult social and economic times.

Many of the early black schools were forerunners of the Rosenwald Schools built in the United States, seven of which were in Randolph County (Asheboro and Liberty, NC) A Rosenwald School was the name informally applied to over five thousand schools, shops, and teachers' homes in the United States which were built primarily for the education of African-Americans in the early 20th Century. The need arose from the chronic underfunding of public education for African-American children in the South, who were required to attend segregated schools. The Rosenwald Fund was founded by Sears Roebuck President Julius Rosenwald. The Rosenwald School in Liberty, NC was in operation from 1927-1928 as a Type 4 building, which reflected the number of rooms in the school.

The Liberty School had an enrollment of 25 students in 1870. The teacher for the first ten years was a white schoolmaster, whose name is undocumented. The first one-room schoolhouse was erected in 1900 and a two-room building replaced it in 1915. In 1927, the two-room school was destroyed by fire and replaced by a four-room brick school. This building was destroyed in 1947. After the fire, churches again opened their doors for the education of black children until three barracks were erected. On June 5, 1950, plans by architect J.J. Croft were approved for the new Liberty Colored School. The school reopened in the fall of 1951 as Randolph High School.

Randolph High School, for most of its existence, was the only consolidated county high school for black students in Randolph County. According to Charles Kuhn, Chairman of the Eastern Randolph County Committee for Better Schools, Randolph High School was built as a showplace to satisfy the old "separate but equal" philosophy. Randolph High School also used special funding provided by the National Defense Education Assistance Program for purchasing science and mathematics teaching equipment.

Randolph High School, built in 1951 at a cost of \$132,000, just west of what was then the city limits of Liberty, eventually had 14 classrooms, a library, home economics and science rooms, plus a combination gymnasium and cafeteria. Black students were bused to Liberty from as far away as Seagrove, some riding for two hours to get to school.

According to statistics in the March 7, 1955 edition of *The Courier-Tribune* newspaper, there were 1,548 white students enrolled in Randolph County schools in 1948-49 and 1,627 in 1953-54. But, in the 1948-49 school year, there were only 82 black students enrolled. In 1953-54, there were 128.

Randolph High School was made possible through the efforts of N.C. Governor W. Kerr Scott, who pushed through a bond referendum for school buildings and secondary roads in North Carolina during 1949. According to the historical resource book entitled Randolph County, 1779-1979 "extensive repairs were made to most school buildings; additions were built, and one new building, a high school for Negro students in Liberty, was erected. For the first time ever, over 75% of the secondary roads used as bus routes to the schools were paved in 1954."

According to the late Francis Swaim's notes, "A dedicatory service for the new high school was held in neighboring St. Stephens AME Church on 23 September 1951. The new school was the pride of the black community and most activities of the people centered around the school and/or the several churches in West Liberty."

For six years, Randolph High School students either brought their lunches from home or purchased milk and sandwiches from the school. Finally, in 1957, a gymnasium-cafeteria building was added to the campus and for the first time, students were offered hot lunches.

A March 5, 1959 article in *The Courier-Tribune* reported that “Randolph County Negro schools will be modernized into structures adequate for any future needs under present planning in the March 10 bond issue referendum. The three Randolph County schools, Randolph High, Trinity Elementary and John M. Caviness Elementary, will each boast a library, physical education building, adequate classrooms, and gymatoriums.” The article went on to say that Randolph High School had a 1957 enrollment of 236 elementary and 148 high school pupils.

In 1961, Principal F.A. Stafford, Jr., proclaimed, “We expect 437 enrollment when all the fall crops are in and our children enroll.” Of those, 155 were high school students.

The Greensboro Record newspaper noted in 1961, Randolph High School was one of two Negro high schools in Randolph County that “both are among the finest in the county.” At the time, the school had a band, glee club, basketball team, and 4-H club. An addition of four classrooms had just been added and the cafeteria stocked with all new equipment. The school, just 10 years old, was one of the most modern in the county.

Four years later, the school was closed. And it has remained closed for 47 years. Randolph High School came to an end when Title VI barred the use of federal funds for segregated education and schools. School desks were piled in corners of classrooms, books were left to mold in boxes, and pots and pans were left hanging in the cafeteria kitchen. A clock still hangs on the wall of a classroom, signaling the exact time the doors closed and the electrical power turned off.

But integration didn’t close Randolph High School, bigotry did. In a 1966 issue of the *Greensboro Daily News*, a member of the “Eastern Randolph County Committee for Better Schools” admitted that “many of the parents did not desire for their children to walk to and from school in this area.”

Over the years, many black leaders, especially the late Rev. Phillip McCleave, lobbied to no avail for some constructive use of the abandoned and deteriorating school. McCleave, a longtime beloved area minister, became the school’s biggest advocate, but his voice fell on deaf ears. In 1978, he said, “To waste a facility like that when the need is so great -- and I have gone as far as to say this to the Governor -- borders on the unpardonable sin.”

In 1980, the Randolph County School Board finally put the school up for auction and it is privately owned this day by former student Lewis H. White.

The significance of Randolph High School as a Randolph County Cultural Heritage Site can best be determined by memories of those attending the school. As part of this record, memories provided by former students Gordon E. White and Selena Shoffner-Alston are provided as part of this Historical Context and Significance:

Gordon E. White has written: “In 1946, as a young boy at the age of six years old, residing in Liberty, N.C., I attended what was then known as “Liberty Negro School.” It was located where the Paul Henry Smith Park is located today. In 1947, the school burned, and was replaced with three barracks. I can always recall when the school burned because my brand new coat was unrecovered in the fire. Shortly thereafter in 1951, Randolph High School opened. I was proud to be a student at Randolph High School. It was almost like a family affair attending with some of my older brothers and sisters who were also students, and my mother who was the school dietician. This was in a day where student lunches were a mere 35 cents, and students were allowed to eat until there was no food left to be served. I remember vividly each day being a

learning experience. I accomplished many personal goals as a student at Randolph High School. I share stories often with my grandsons about my experience there to share life lessons. One of my fondest subjects, which still holds true today, was History. Students of Randolph High School were bused as far as Seagrove, Piney Ridge, Stouts Chapel and Ramseur, though no one seemed to mind the extended ride and were anxious to attend Randolph School. Today, as I gaze just across my front yard at the building in shambles and ruin, I still reflect on fond memories of past tenure at Randolph High. In 1965, the school closed when integration began and the school was vacant for many years. Several years later, my brother Lewis White of Lafayette, CA, purchased the school. He, too, was a graduate of Randolph High and later became a successful businessman.”

Selena Shoffner-Alston has written: “I am a former graduate of Randolph High School, Liberty, N.C. As a matter of fact, my class, the Class of 1965, was the last class to graduate from that facility. Although our school was newer than the white school and fully accredited, our students were bused downtown to a white school that was not as new as Randolph School, nor was it accredited. We were never really told why our school closed. This was a sad time for everyone, students, teachers, and the black community. It was difficult graduating and leaving friends and even more difficult to leave our school that would soon be just another vacant building. I often wondered how many dreams were shattered during this time. Those were years long past but never forgotten. Our alumni still come together every two years to celebrate our years at Randolph High School. We still sing our alma mater, ‘Oh Randolph High, Oh Randolph High, to you we sing’. Our school may have been closed to the public in 1965, but it could never be closed in our hearts. Oh Randolph High, We Love You!”

The following is a listing of Principals who served at the Liberty/Randolph High School:

- white schoolmaster (name is undocumented), 1870- 1880
- E. E. Grant, 1931-1945, (laid foundation for the high school)
- Edward Jones, 1945-1956 (enrollment grew from 29 to 140 and total enrollment grew from 133 to 140)
- Joseph Bennett, 1956-1960
- F.A. Stafford, Jr. 1960-1962
- George Vincent 1962 -1965

Mr. Matthews said the building and campus have potential for a new future, possibly for sports activities or as an extension campus for Randolph Community College. He said the property will require extensive renovation and remodeling to make it usable in the 21st Century. This is why organizers asked for the designation as a Cultural Heritage Site rather than that of a historic landmark.

Mr. Matthews answered questions from Commission members.

Commission member Bill Johnson inquired if there was a book on the history of Randolph High School. Mr. Matthews responded that there was no book, but there should be, in order to capture the despair of former students who were so distraught when their school was taken away from them, and they were made to attend another school.

Commission member Lynne Qualls suggested that this might be a good topic for a high school student’s senior project.

Commission member Bill Ivey said that the Quaker Church keeps good historical records and that Guilford College might be a good source for book research.

Chairman Hal Johnson read aloud a proposed resolution designating Randolph High School as a Cultural Heritage Site and said that Randolph High School meets Cultural Heritage Site criteria as it represents identification with the cultural and historic development of Randolph County and Liberty, N.C. Designation of Randolph High School as a Cultural Heritage Site will increase public awareness and appreciation for this site that has special meaning to the history and heritage of the community and Randolph County. The unique location of Randolph High School also represents an established and visual feature in Liberty, N.C. The Randolph High School was placed on the study list for preliminary assessment of the property's eligibility for the National Register of Historic Places on June 9, 2011, by the National Register Advisory Committee (NRAC), State Historic Preservation Office.

Dixon moved that the Commission approve the proposed resolution. Qualls seconded. Ivey suggested that the resolution should specify that Randolph High School was built in 1951 and was closed in 1965. Dixon and Qualls amended their motion and second to include this information in the designation resolution. The Commission voted unanimously to approve the following resolution designating Randolph High Schools as a Cultural Heritage Site:

RESOLUTION OF RECOGNITION

WHEREAS, *The Randolph County Historic Landmark Preservation Commission desires to recognize those Cultural Heritage Sites that provide a tangible link to the past, with the people and events that have made significant contributions to Randolph County history, and thus shaped our present; and*

WHEREAS, *Cultural Heritage Site recognition helps give Randolph County individual character and our people a sense of place, pride, and historic connection; and*

WHEREAS, *the history of Randolph High School begins in 1870 when the Liberty School was established by African-American citizens and local Quakers to insure educational opportunities for black children; and*

WHEREAS, *while Randolph High School was built in 1951 and closed in 1965 under Title VI barring the use of federal funds for segregated education and schools, it will always represent identification with the cultural and historic development of Randolph County, N.C., and its location represents a unique and established visual feature in Liberty, N.C.*

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, *that official recognition as a Randolph County Cultural Heritage Site is given to:*

RANDOLPH HIGH SCHOOL

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, *that this Resolution is approved by the Historical Landmark Preservation Commission and recorded in its minutes, with appropriate history and photographs placed on the Commission's historical website, and a suitable copy of the Resolution presented to the recipient.*

Approved this 25th day of January, 2012.

Presentation of Asheboro/Randolph Public Library's Local History Program and Services

Ross Holt, Director of the Randolph County Public Library, via a PowerPoint presentation, brought the board up-to-date on the multiple resources available to researchers at the local library. He said that the Randolph Room, which is considered to be one of the best in the state among public libraries, is the county's archive of historical and genealogical information. A great deal of effort has gone into digitizing historical photographs (more than 2,000 so far), the majority of which were provided by private citizens. This project has been made possible by

grants through the NC ECHO (Exploring Cultural Heritage Online) organization. Citizens can bring in photos for scanning. Many of the photos include Randolph County's veterans. Obituaries, as well as articles, from as far back as 1903 that were published in *The Courier Tribune*, can be viewed from the library's website. Proprietary research databases, such as Heritage Quest, Ancestry.com (library edition) and Digital Sanborn Maps 1867-1970, can be accessed from the public library at no charge. Citizens can find a great deal of information on the NC ECHO's website (www.ncecho.org), as well as, the library website and Randquest.

Review of Historic Education Series: "Walk Thru the Past"

Ricky Allred said that given that the old Asheboro Cemetery was designated as a Culturally Significant Site by the HLPC, he wished to brief the Commission about the "Walk Thru the Past" series of events at the cemetery, in addition to discussing the upcoming "Hanging of Thomas Bowman" presentation. He said that tours at the old Asheboro Cemetery began in 2008, with 12 people attending the first one. The series now includes six "walks" per year (weather permitting), in April, May, June, September, October, and November, with an average attendance of about 60 people. The highest attendance has been 160, which was the tour conducted in conjunction with Confederate Memorial Day. Mr. Allred mentioned that Casey Fletcher, with the City of Asheboro Marketing Department, has done a series of videos related to the walks, which are posted on the city's promotional website.

Mr. Allred said that the "Walk" series includes one indoor presentation in the off-season; "The Hanging of Thomas Bowman" presentation is the indoor event for this year. This event will take place on Saturday, February 4, 10 a.m., in the Historic Courthouse Meeting Room on Worth St., Asheboro.

Adjournment

At 3:17 p.m., on motion of Andrews, seconded by Hankins, the Commission voted unanimously to adjourn.

Hal Johnson, Chairman

Cheryl A. Ivey, Acting Clerk to the HLPC